



How to Help Your Child Write

This handout is designed to give you an understanding of the key skills your child needs to develop to become a competent writer and provide you with practical activities you can try at home to help them progress.

Early Learning Goal (to be achieved by the end of the Reception Year)

- Children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds.
- Children also write some irregular common words.
- Children write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others.
- Children spell some words correctly and others are phonetically plausible.



Learning to write can be quite a challenge! Your child has to use several skills all at once. This means that children progress at different rates and it is important to remember this.

There are several aspects to writing that your child will have to master during their education;

- Knowledge of sounds (phonics), words and sentence structure.
- Knowledge of punctuation.
- Knowledge of different forms of writing.
- Handwriting- letter formation.

Developmental Stages of Writing

Firstly, when your child is asked to write something they have to think of the idea, or sentence. For some children this is a challenge in it's self as they have only a few years experience of language. You can help your child develop this skill by encouraging your child to speak in full, correct sentences.



If your child does say an incorrect word make sure it doesn't go un-noticed. Repeat the sentence correctly for them so they hear the correct phrasing. Don't labour the point though - eventually they'll acquire the correct grammar and sentence structure, but, remember that you and your family are the role model!

Once your child has thought of a sentence or idea they need to try and write it. To do this they need to know the difference between the terms "word" and "sound". This is a main focus of learning in the Reception year. You can help with this skill by counting the words on your fingers to show how many words and how many spaces there are. Make sure you say the sentence several times so your child doesn't forget the word order!

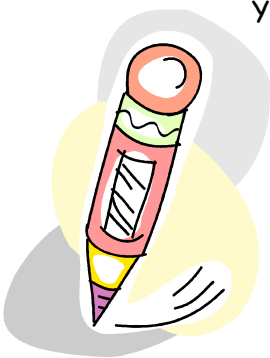
Then, your child needs to start writing each word. To do this your child needs to break the words into their individual sounds (segmenting). For some children this takes a long time to master and again, much of their Reception year will focus on this. This task is made so difficult because there are so many sounds. Not only does your child need to learn the individual sounds of the alphabet (in their phonics lessons), they also need to remember that the vowels make two sounds (their phonetic sounds and their letter name) and that more than two letters can go together to make one sound. Your child needs to be able to read these sounds before you have any hope of writing them. In school we play lots of practical games to help develop this understanding as well as using flash cards. You can also play games with these sounds, such as snap (instead of saying snap though, say the sound on the card!) and bingo type games. There are so many sounds, try to make it fun and achievable for your child by focusing on the sounds covered each week in school.



In the early stages of writing it's not important for your child to write every word correctly. It's far more useful for them to hear as many sounds as they can and write those. Please don't get hung up on the correct spelling, it won't really help your child in the early stages.

Alongside learning a mountain of sounds it's important for your child to know the correct spelling of some key words. These words don't usually follow the conventions of the sounds your child will know, e.g. want has an 'o' sound! In school and with your help your child will be taught to read these words and "trained" to locate these words from a 'Word Mat' and then copy them into their writing. At home you can point out these words to your child as they say them and refer them to the sheet to copy! Practise words will come home in balloons for your child to learn. Again, Bingo and Snap games will help your child to remember these words and magnetic letters on the fridge are priceless!

You can help at home by providing some enticing resources for your child to write with. The "Pound Shop" is a great place to pick up flashing pens, colourful note books and interesting paper and card! Children love to feel independent and grown up so give them the opportunity!



Handwriting

Once your child can segment sounds in a words they need to know how to write the individual letter shapes. **Correct letter formation is so important.** As your child moves through the school they will be required to join their handwriting. In Reception class we learn to print letters first, as seen in books. If they are forming letters incorrectly they will find joining very difficult.



Please take some time to assess how your child forms each letter when activities are sent home each week, then practice, practice, practice. Always try to provide lines for your child to practice on so they know which letters go below the line and which letters are tall! The size of the lines can be judged by the current size of the letters your child is forming.

Once your child can write simple sentences they need to consider the audience for the writing. This will help them to be more ambitious with their word choice and sentence structure. For example, if your child writes a letter to their grandma they may use different language than a letter to Father Christmas!

Suggested Activities

Here is a list of different projects you might like to try at home. Remember; bring writing into school so the teacher can celebrate it with the class or vисти the head teacher for a Gold award.

Lists - These are so easy, because your child only needs to think about one word at a time, not a whole sentence! Write shopping lists (or part of one!), a list of friend's names, a list of words beginning with one sound, a list of colours, the list is endless!



Letters - Your child may need some help with the format of a letter, depending upon their experience, e.g. Dear or To at the beginning and From at the end. Thank you letters can be written after an event, e.g. a trip out, birthdays, Christmas, Easter! You child's class teacher could receive a letter about a fun weekend you've had. At Christmas time write or email Father Christmas, if you get the address from the Post Office your child will get a reply!

Stories - This has huge scope. A story can be as short or as long as your child can manage. The characters can be made up or be based on real people. The setting can be a real place, like the park or at home or be imagined, such as the moon or another country! Don't forget, every story should have an opening, where the characters and setting are described. After the opening a problem will need to be explained, which the characters need to try to solve. Then a resolution to the problem needs to be shared!



Poems - Despite what you might think, poems are easy for children to write. The best way to tackle this is to get an anthology of children's poems from the library, read and discuss them, then choose a favourite. Copy the same format and change the words. Remember, poems don't have to rhyme!

Non-fiction - You may notice that your child is particularly interested in a certain topic. If so, try to make a small book of information about that area of interest. Include a front cover, contents page, headings and a blurb on the back cover! This is a project you can both get your teeth stuck into!

The best way to help your child develop writing skills is to spend time reading with them! As you have already seen, reading sounds and words comes before writing them. Teachers invest a huge amount of time into phonics teaching because we know it will help develop so many literacy skills. No matter how proficient your child is at reading, please make sure you read to them as well as hearing them read. In this way children develop a love for language and their imagination is expanded!



Happy Writing!