

# FACTSHEET: Ideas for parents ...

## supporting writing

### How to do it... supporting the writing process

The advice given is divided into four aspects of the writing process: planning; structure; writing and proofreading. These strategies are all relevant whether your child is writing on paper or typing onscreen.

Make writing as real and as relevant to your child as possible. There are many opportunities at home to practise writing in real-life contexts: making signs and labels, writing messages inside greetings cards, sending postcards, making shopping or 'to-do' lists, leaving messages for other family members, writing captions in a scrapbook or photograph album, handwriting party invitations, writing out menus for special meals, keeping a diary or even keeping score sheets for sporting events. There are also many opportunities to use technology to practise the writing process: writing text messages or e-mails to family and relatives, typing up signs and labels, making posters, or creating a storybook to read to a younger sibling.

#### **Planning**

As many of us know, sometimes the hardest part of writing is simply getting started. Staring at that blank piece of paper can be daunting. Your child may be reluctant to begin writing tasks set by school and be expert at avoidance tactics. Or perhaps they sit for a long time not knowing how to start. Lacking ideas, not understanding what to do or attempting to avoid the task can be frustrating – for both the child and the adults trying to persuade them to make a start! So, how can you help your child to plan their writing?

**Start with a discussion.** Does your child understand what he has to do? What can he tell you about the topic?

**Try making a spider diagram or filling an ideas sheet** – encourage your child to write or draw as many words or phrases to do with the topic as possible. There is computer software available to create spider diagrams and ideas sheets, but pencil and paper is often quicker. Remember that the focus should be on generating ideas for the writing, not on creating a colourful and detailed plan.

**Refresh your child's memory.** Read through a relevant book or website on the topic (the BBC Schools page is often a good place to start and includes videos). This will cue your child in to the topic and remind them of what they have covered in class.

**Find examples to show your child.** If, for example, pupils have been asked to make a leaflet about their school, show them examples of leaflets and flyers and discuss common features to include.

**Have fun!** Encourage your child to talk about their ideas, draw them or act them out! It can all help them to create a better idea of what they want to include in their work.

### **Structure**

Structure means telling things in an appropriate order which makes sense to the reader – so a story needs a beginning, middle and end, and a recipe begins with the ingredient list followed by the method. Structure can be difficult for many children. Here's how to help:

- Make a storyboard. If your child is writing a story, creating a storyboard can be helpful. Simply divide a sheet of paper into six boxes and quickly draw the events of the story as your child tells you verbally (stick figures are fine). Your child can then use the storyboard to refer back to as a prompt when she is writing the story.
- For other tasks, try supporting your child to make a bullet list of points they want to make in their writing. Number these points in the order that would be most sensible to appear and then show your child how to tick off each one once they have expanded on that point.
- Alternatively write each main point on a sticky note and then move these sticky notes around the page to decide on the best order to describe the events.
- A simple essay planning sheet can also be helpful. Make some sub-headings (introduction, arguments for, arguments against, conclusions) and encourage your child to make notes of what to include in each section before they begin writing. As with all strategies, begin by showing and supporting your child; over time, encourage him or her to use these techniques more independently.
- Some children find it difficult to recognise the difference between 'notes' and 'writing'. Show them how notes are usually key words or phrases used to help you remember. They do not have to be complete sentences and can be a mix of words and drawings if that is helpful. When writing, however, these need to be expanded into full sentences or paragraphs, with more detail added.

### **Writing**

**Verbal rehearsal.** If your child struggles to get their sentences on to paper or screen, encourage them to say the sentence aloud first. This verbal rehearsal can help some children to structure and remember their sentences.

**Try it out.** Some children who worry about spelling or neatness may benefit from having a piece of scrap paper or a wipe-clean board available to practise a spelling before committing it to paper.

**Use planning sheets.** Remind your child to refer back to their planning sheets throughout the writing process; this is why they created them!

**Provide helpful resources to support your child.** Depending on the topic this may be their exercise books from class, a text book or helpful worksheets. Many children also find a list of keywords useful – this can be a list of words related to the topic, with small pictures to help them to remember the meaning of each word. Having this visual reminder can encourage children to use this topic-specific vocabulary, as well as providing spellings – meaning that they can focus on the content rather than worrying about spelling.

**Structure each paragraph.** For older children writing in paragraphs, remind them of the PEE structure (Point, Evidence, Explain). Help them to start each paragraph by making a point or statement. They then give the evidence that backs up this point, and go on to explain the point and evidence in more detail.

### **Proofreading**

Proofreading is an important aspect of the writing process, but one which many children and young people find boring; once they have finished, they do not want to have to spend even more time looking at their work! However, it can be a useful habit to get in to, so try to encourage your child to see the writing process as complete only once they have finished proofreading.

- Onscreen proofreading tools do not pick up every error, so encourage your child not to rely on these alone, but to use them for an initial proofread before using another method in addition.
- Make a checklist for your child to use when proofreading their work. Some children may find it easier to check for one thing at a time. A sample checklist may look like this:
  - Have I checked spellings?
  - Have I used capital letters at the beginning of sentences and for the names of people and places?
  - Have I ended each sentence with a full stop?
  - Have I used commas to separate items in lists?
  - Have I ended questions with question marks and exclamations with exclamation marks?
  - Does each one of my sentences make sense when I read them aloud?
  - Have I used interesting words, instead of using the same word all of the time?
- Some children find it easier to identify errors when they hear their writing read aloud. They could read it aloud themselves, or ask an adult to read it slowly back to them. Others may like to use a screenreader. These are now inbuilt on most digital devices and read aloud the text onscreen. Show children how to use this technology if it appeals to them and how to change the voice and speed. Many children will find it most useful to listen back to just one sentence at a time.