

## Supporting writing

Reading and writing are linked; you can help your child improve their writing skills by making sure they read a variety of books, comics and magazines.

Writing is tricky because it involves several elements (thinking about content, handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar). To help your child, you may need to work out which part of the writing process they find difficult. Again, talk to his/her class teacher as they will be able to give suggestions of useful approaches and activities.

Many children get alarmed when faced with a blank page. Sometimes it helps to give them paper that has a picture border around it. This can spark children's interest and make the writing space more manageable.

### Supporting with ideas

Some children need support with ideas for writing. You can help by playing language games and telling stories. These oral activities help children develop their vocabulary, which in turn enriches their writing.

It's also important to encourage your child to talk through their ideas before writing them down. This gives them an opportunity to organise their thinking and sequence their ideas.

It's not uncommon for children to be reluctant to put pencil to paper for fear of making mistakes. They may worry about getting the words 'right'. You need to teach them that it is fine to make mistakes. Explain that the spelling is not the important part and that you're more interested in their ideas. You can free them to write in several ways:

- Ensure the activity is fun — write shopping lists, write messages on the fridge with letter magnets, make cards (Thank you, Birthday, etc).
- Make simple books together (you could use photos, pictures from magazines or your child could draw his/her own pictures). You could make a book about when they were a baby, about a family holiday or you could write a short story together.
- Make the writing task more manageable, e.g. you write one line and he/she writes the next. Over time your child should increase in confidence and be able to take over more of the writing.
- Magic line — if your child gets stuck with a word and will not have a go, encourage them to use their phonic knowledge to put down any letters they think might be in the word. This might just be the first letter. Get them to put a short magic line for the rest of the word. For example: 'I w... to the p...!' ('I went to the park.')
- Make sure your child knows that crossings out don't matter. You want your child to have the confidence to write, so it is not about getting the word 'correct'.

### Helping with stories

When helping young children to write a story, get them to draw three pictures: beginning, middle and end. They can then tell you the story and you can help them to extend it by asking them questions.

For example: Who is the main character? Where do they live? What happens to the character? How do they feel?

Older children could draw a storyboard. This is similar to a comic strip and can be used to talk through their ideas.

Some questions you can ask are: Where is the story set? What's the place like? What's the main event? How are the problems sorted out? What have the characters learned at the end?

The process for non-fiction writing is very similar, i.e. it is vital children have an opportunity to talk through their ideas. You could ask them what facts they know or you could do a 'Tell me' activity. For example:

- If children are working on writing instructions - 'Tell me how to make a...'
- Recount writing - 'Tell me what happened first, next, last', etc.
- For explanatory writing - 'Tell me how a... works'
- For persuasive writing - 'Tell me why you think... is a good idea.'

# Boys' writing

Some boys are reluctant writers and unenthusiastic when it comes to reading.

Boys can find it difficult to get going when asked to complete a written task, and some try to avoid reading books and writing.

If this sounds like your son, he's not alone. Both nationally and internationally, girls are outperforming boys.

Boys who have a poor self-image as a writer can sometimes cover this up with negative behaviour based on a lack of confidence.

## Why is writing hard?

Writing is a multidisciplinary task: you have to think of something to say, plan how you're going to say it and then go through the physical process of writing, using a keyboard or by putting pen to paper. So, lots to think about at once: it's no wonder many children struggle.

## Why do boys seem to find writing tricky?

- Young boys use less language in their play than girls – so when it comes to putting pen to paper they have had less practice and may not have as much to say
- Boys like to be active and writing demands that they sit still for a period of time
- Boys develop the fine motor skills needed for handwriting more slowly than girls

### Boys like:

- Short 'bite-sized' tasks
- Being active - drama can be really helpful
- Knowing what's expected of them, with clear targets
- Using ICT
- Using visual prompts e.g. films, pictures, comics
- Lots of praise and rewards

## How can you help your son with writing?

Don't forget that all aspects of the English primary curriculum are linked. Keen readers absorb language patterns from their reading, which they reproduce in their writing. Talk underpins both reading and writing.

Talking through a writing task with your son gives him the chance to get his thoughts in order before he starts writing. Having some pictures handy can help, too.

## Free writing - journals

Many schools encourage children to keep a writing journal. These are personal logs of anything they wish to write, such as comments about their day or a few thoughts on a subject of interest. No-one has to see the writing and, because it's completely personal and nobody's judging the content, somehow they seem more willing to write adventurously.

## Warm up for writing

A good warm-up activity helps to get writing going. And it can help your son if you have a go, too.

- Pick a topic that interests your son
- Set a timer for two minutes
- Then write - this can be in complete sentences or just word association
- He/you can choose to share what he/you have written (or not)