

How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer at Home

1. Go places and see things with your child, then talk about what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched. The basis of good writing is good talk.
2. Let children see you write often. If children never see adults write, they gain an impression that writing occurs only at school. Have children see you writing notes to friends, letters to business firms, perhaps stories to share with the children. From time to time, read aloud what you have written and if it's not perfect, so much the better. Making changes in what you write confirms for the child that revision is a natural part of writing -- which it is.
3. Be as helpful as you can in helping children write. Talk through their ideas with them; help them discover what they want to say. When they ask for help with spelling, punctuation, and usage, supply that help. Your most effective role is not as a critic but as a helper. Rejoice in effort, delight in ideas, and resist the temptation to be critical.
4. Provide a suitable place for children to write. A quiet corner is best, the child's own place, if possible. If not, any flat surface with elbow room, a comfortable chair, and a good light will do.
5. Give the child, and encourage others to give, the gifts associated with writing:
 - pens of several kinds
 - pencils of appropriate size and hardness
 - a desk lamp
 - pads of paper, stationery, envelopes -- even stamps
 - a booklet for a diary or daily journal
 - a dictionary appropriate to the child's age and needs.
 - a thesaurus for older children. This will help in the search for the "right" word.
 - erasers or "white-out" liquid for correcting errors that the child wants to repair without rewriting.
6. Encourage (but do not demand) frequent writing. Be patient with reluctance to write. "I have nothing to say" is a perfect excuse. Recognize that the desire to write is a sometime thing.
7. Praise the child's efforts at writing. Forget what happened to you in school and resist the tendency to focus on errors of spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical aspects of writing. Emphasize the child's successes. For every error the child makes, there are dozens of things he or she has done well.
8. Share letters from friends and relatives. Treat such letters as special events. Urge relatives and friends to write notes and letters to the child, no matter how brief.
9. Encourage the child to write for information, free samples, and travel brochures.
10. Be alert to occasions when the child can be involved in writing, for example, helping with grocery lists, adding notes at the end of parents' letters, sending holiday and birthday cards, taking down telephone messages, writing thank you notes, helping plan trips by writing for information, drafting notes to school for parental signature, writing notes to letter carriers and other service persons, and preparing invitations to family get-togethers.

Modified from National Council of English Teachers