
READY for SCHOOL Parent News:
Building Young Writers

Do you remember the excitement of first learning that the marks you made on paper communicated a thought that someone else could read? Learning to write can be thrilling. It can also become a chore if presented as an expectation rather than as a fun, purposeful activity. The goal of encouraging children to write at home is to keep it interesting and fun in order to build a love of writing.

Initially children may tell you they are writing, but their marks won't look like much like the letters you know. They may show you a series of small lines and say "That says 'puppy!'" Later they will try to copy letters. You can give a model that they can copy from. As they become more competent, they will want to create letters without first seeing a model. Invented spelling, where children write the word as they think it sounds, is a developmental stage which later leads to more adult writing. It is appropriate and something to encourage. Children who use invented spelling will transition to standard spelling and writing as they are ready.

Here are a few thoughts for suggested activities at home to encourage writing:

- Have your child create invitations for their own birthday party or a sibling's party, a family gathering, etc. Your child can write the "master" and then you can photocopy the rest. The original can be copied letters or original writing.
- Give your child a disposable camera, show her how to use it and let her take photographs. When the film is developed, let her write a few words about each picture. An alternative is that your child dictates a description of each picture and you write it down. Either way, your child's words are recorded. Mount the pictures and descriptions in a photo album.
- Have your child write signs for your home, such as "Brush your teeth" or "Don't walk in the garden" which can be posted in appropriate places.
- Your child can help you write the weekly grocery list. Offer a grocery circular and have him copy favorite item names onto the list.
- Some children prefer writing on the computer. Their skills with the mouse may be stronger than their fine motor skills needed to manipulate a pencil. Offer both opportunities.

There is a huge feeling of pride in creating your own writing and having it be used in a purposeful way. Offering your child lots of fun opportunities to write and to feel successful can help build a lifelong interest in the written word.

Resource:

Neuman, S. B.; Copple, C.; & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.