

Help your child write with confidence

For parents of students in the middle and senior grades

The transition from primary to junior, junior to intermediate, and intermediate to senior grades are exciting times for students. They are growing up and discovering new interests and new friends. As our students move from grade to grade, they are also encounter many new demands and an increasingly challenging curriculum. The transition from middle school to secondary school is an important one and can be a time when your child will need extra support and encouragement.

Boys are even more likely than girls to begin to feel that they do not want to write or that they are not good at writing. Self-confidence is extremely important for your child and you can provide support by praising his or her efforts and by making reading and writing a fun, routine part of your daily family life.

What if our family speaks a language or languages other than English?

Being able to speak more than one language is a wonderful gift that will provide your child with many opportunities as they grow older. You should continue to have your children speak, read and write in your family's first language at home.

- If children are able to read and write well in one language, they will be able to use those skills when they are reading and writing in English.
- For children who are learning English as an additional language, they may need extra support with the specialized vocabulary they will use in their writing. Again, having your child use his or her first language can help him or her to learn and understand more challenging English words.
- Have your child create a bilingual picture dictionary to assist in writing.
- Before beginning a writing task, children may want to make a list of ideas in the first language, before writing in English
- Work together to write a simple story in your family's first language and English. Then, have your child share that story with a younger sibling or other family member.

Will reading help my child to be a better writer?

Children in the all grades should read every day.

- Encourage your child to read a variety of reading materials: magazines, the Internet, newspapers, email, novels, short stories, etc.
- Allow your child to have a say in what he or she chooses to read. Many boys prefer non-fiction over fiction and that is okay; children do not need to read novels to be good readers. Boys may also find graphic novels to be engaging.

- The more your child reads, or is read to, the better writer he or she will become because children learn about the craft of writing by reading. They also develop a richer vocabulary.
- Allowing children choice in what they write and what they write about is very important.

Get them talking

Talk with your child! Children are able to communicate more through talking, and with more detail and accuracy, than they can through their writing. Talking about what he or she wants to write about first will help your child think of ideas, help him or her get started and improve the flow of the writing.

Use the computer

Kids love their computers so use that as a tool to motivate them to write. The computer takes some of the physical work out of writing and allows your child to focus more on the ideas that he or she wants to communicate. Using the computer also makes going back and making changes later much easier. Your child will need to complete longer assignments as he or she progresses in school, so developing good word processing skills is very important.

Spelling and punctuation

Trying to correct every spelling or punctuation error that your child makes is not practical or appropriate. Children at every stage of development are managing many new tasks when they write. They are learning new text forms (report writing, persuasive writing, etc.), many new concepts and a lot of new vocabulary. Managing all of this when they write is challenging and, often, they forget punctuation and make spelling errors as they are writing. This is normal and trying to correct every error will take all of the fun out of writing.

Getting ready to write

- Start by asking your child, "How Can I Help You?" Listen carefully to what your child says and act as a supportive coach.
- Make sure your child understands the assignment and what is expected of him or her. If possible, get the assignment sheet from the teacher or a friend. If in doubt about what your child is supposed to write, check with the teacher yourself.
- Help your child to draw from his or her own experiences when choosing what to write about. He or she will be more motivated and have more to say if it is a topic of personal interest.

Visit "Parents Boost Learning" at www.peelschools.org for more *Parent Tip Sheets*.

- Help your child brainstorm ideas. If your child is having trouble getting started, have them talk about the topic and generate some ideas orally.
- Be aware that fears of doing a less-than-perfect job might be interfering with your child's willingness to start assignments on his or her own. Assure your child that you are there to help and that all writers go back and change things after they have finished writing.
- As your child is writing, encourage him or her to just focus on getting the ideas on paper. Spelling and punctuation will be the focus AFTER writing.

After writing

- Start with the positive by pointing out the strengths in your child's writing. Remember, children may need a lot of encouragement, especially those who are struggling with writing. Point out specific things that you like. For example, "I love the way you described the rocket booster!" or, "You chose the perfect word to tell about the character in your story!"
- Help your child make sure that the writing flows well and that the ideas are organized by having him or her read the writing out loud. Are there any ideas missing that your child wants to add? Are the ideas presented in a logical order?
- If something is unclear, ask for more information. Ask questions about what your child is trying to communicate. Tell him or her if there's something you'd like to know more about or an idea that's not fully expressed. Don't criticize or give the answers, but guide your child to work through any problems.
- If the writing is for fun or to a friend, don't worry about spelling and punctuation. If the writing is an assignment that needs to be handed in at school, then help your child to correct basic punctuation and the spelling of frequently used words. Ask your child to read his or her writing out loud and identify errors as he or she reads. If your child makes a consistent mistake in spelling or punctuation, see if he or she knows how to correct it. If not, give him or her the correct form. Resist the temptation to make the paper "perfect" from your point of view.
- Provide a special writing folder or notebook for your child and encourage him or her to save writing pieces in it. Nothing can replace the good feeling of reading something we wrote months ago and rediscovering how good it is or looking back and seeing how much progress has been made.

Why do some children really dislike writing?

- They feel overwhelmed by the task and don't know how to start.
- They struggle to organize their ideas and manage the mechanics of writing.
- They have to concentrate on letter formation, punctuation and spelling as well as generating ideas and this may be too much for some children.
- They struggle to keep track of their thoughts while also getting them down on paper
- They feel that the process of writing on paper is slow and tedious.
- They realize that the writing may still be sloppy even if they work very hard.

How you can help

- Use the computer. This will take away some of the physical effort required to write and allow your child to focus on the content of the writing. It also makes changing the writing and checking for spelling and punctuation errors much less tiresome. For a child who struggles with printing or cursive writing, this will also make the final product look more attractive.
- Have your child pick one aspect of his or her writing that he or she would like to work on and just focus on that. If your child struggles to generate even a few ideas, putting too much stress on organization and spelling and grammar will be too overwhelming.
- Talk to your child's teacher. If your child is feeling overwhelmed by the writing being assigned, negotiate a reduction in the amount of writing or ask that your child be allowed to write about something that interests him or her rather than the topic assigned.
- Make sure your child has all of the tools he or she needs to write as well as a comfortable place to work.
- Make language fun. Play word games like Scrabble and point out interesting words you see in the newspaper.
- Encourage your child to write for real purposes that will be motivating like emails to friends or a post card to a relative. Girls may be interested in journaling.
- Let your child see you write so that they see writing is an enjoyable part of life.

*Tip Sheet prepared by Maureen Murphy, Resource Teacher. Adapted by and workshop presented by Susan Goodman-O'Brien, Teacher, Heart Lake Secondary School
April 18, 2015*