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Things Writing Workshop Teachers Want Parents to Know

by Libby Duggan

Perfect spelling is not the goal of writing. Young writers should include words in their writing that they don't know how to spell—that's how they grow their vocabularies. If we send the message that every word needs to be spelled perfectly, students will feel that they must rely on someone else to produce "good" writing. If your child asks you to spell a word, give him strategies to try his best guess at the spelling instead. You might ask questions such as:

- What sounds do you hear when you say the word

slowly? Stretch it out and get all the sounds that you hear onto your paper.

- Have you seen the word on something you've read before? Locate it and copy it.
- Can you think of other words that look or sound like what you're trying to say? How are those words spelled?
- Have you tried writing it a couple of different ways? Which one looks best to you?

In time your child will become familiar with more words and spelling patterns and will grow to correctly spell words that were once too difficult for him.

We learn to write by looking at what other writers have done. If you are helping your child on a particular type of writing, the first step might be to



help her find some things that are like what she's trying to create. For example, when adults are asked to write a job resume, they often look at examples of resumes that belong to others in their field, to get a vision for what a "good" resume looks like. The same is true for any genre of writing at any age.

We write best when we choose our own topic and write about things that matter to us. Writing is easier and more enjoyable for both the writer and his readers when the subject is important to the author. Children may choose to write about the same



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subject across genres, and this should be encouraged. If you have a child who likes dinosaurs, for instance, he may want to write a personal narrative about the time he went to a dinosaur exhibit at a museum, a feature article about Triceratops and a poem that uses dinosaur as a metaphor for something old or outgrown. Many authors return to the same subject over and over again because it is meaningful to them.

Writing is a collaborative process that involves talking. One of the best ways to help someone with a piece of writing is to talk to her about what she is doing. Answering questions often helps writers clarify their goals and flesh out what they want to say about the topic. You can ask your child questions such as:

- What are you working on as a writer? What is going well for you? What are you struggling with?
- What do you want readers to know after they have read this piece of writing? What do you want readers to feel as they read?
- What is the most important thing in this piece of writing? How do other writers show readers what is most important?

Sometimes writers need help hearing themselves think, so to

speak, so you might also ask, “What are you trying to say?” And then repeat back to your child in your own words what you have heard him say. You might respond with, “So if I understand correctly, it sounds like you’re saying...Is that what you’d want a reader to know?”

Sharing our writing is an important part of the process.

Children need many opportunities to share their writing in a public way. This makes their work important and meaningful.

“Publishing” a piece of writing doesn’t *only* mean seeing it in a formal book or magazine. Simply *sharing* it is valuable, too. If your child has written a story about a grandparent, for example, you can help him share it with that grandparent, perhaps by reading it

aloud or even wrapping it up and presenting a copy of the story as a gift. Making your child’s writing visible to others—and hearing how much the writing affects others—can help your child become more motivated to write.

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The Partnership for Inquiry Learning, a program of Butler University College of Education, provides ongoing and in-depth professional development in reading, writing, and math for grades preK-8. For more information, including free resources for teachers, visit

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