

The Writing Process: How Can Parents Help?

Adapted from **Sharpen Your Child's Writing Skills: A Guidebook for Kentucky Parents**

One of the most frequent and important questions parents ask teachers is, "How can I help my child do better in your class?" Below is a list of techniques and practices that can help writers of any age write better. We believe using these strategies at home will help your child become a more successful writer and English student.

The writing process may be defined as a series of stages (processes) that writers engage in to produce a final product (finished writing). During this writing process, writers explore and rethink their work continuously.

STAGES	ACTIVITIES
PREWRITING	getting ready to write, generating ideas, planning
DRAFTING	putting words on paper
REVISING	making it clear and complete
EDITING	correcting, making it right
PUBLISHING	sharing with others

While the majority of your child's writing takes place in a school setting, writing begins at home. Long before children have mastered the skill of putting pen to paper, they write because it is fun. Parents can help keep this interest alive without taking over ownership of the child's writing.

Writers also require feedback at all stages of the writing process. One type of feedback occurs when writers talk with others about their writing. This conversation, known as conferencing, is essential to improving writing skills.

How Do I Conference?

-  question rather than dictate
-  coach rather than correct

PREWRITING

The first stage in the writing process includes the activities, experiences and exercises which motivate writers to begin the first draft. During this time writers consider the purpose (real reason) for writing and the audience (the intended reader/listener) for whom

they are writing. If prewriting is successful, writers will have a clear sense of direction for their writing and many ideas for supporting the purpose. This planning stage is vital for producing effective writing.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide opportunities for observation and critical thinking (cultural experiences, outdoor activities, trips, films, educational television programs, etc.).
- Provide access to books, newspapers, and magazines (at home and/or in the community library).
- Encourage your child to be curious about what is going on in the world.
- Help your child find a real reason to write
 - to inform (e.g., create a family letter to friends and relatives)
 - to persuade (e.g., convince parents to allow a privilege)
 - to entertain (e.g., create a play for others to perform)
- Help your child identify topics/subjects of interest.
- Invite discussion topics.
- Encourage listing, note taking, jotting down ideas, brainstorming, etc.
- Be an active listener. Ask questions to clarify and make helpful comments.
- Suggest possible audiences (relatives, other children, public officials, community leaders, school officials, etc.)
- Discuss and use different forms of writing (letter, poem, article, story, play, etc.)

DRAFTING

During the drafting stage, the writer produces the first draft (written copy). The most important emphasis here is getting the thinking on paper.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide a quiet work place for your child to write and a variety of resource tools.
- Ask and answer questions regarding content
 - What is your purpose?
 - Who is your audience?

- Why are you writing this?
- What is the assignment?
- Respect your child's ability to make the appropriate choices and resist the temptation to take over the project.
- Encourage your child to return to prewriting when "writer's block" occurs.
- Make sure your child schedules enough time to do a good job.

REVISING

During the revision stage the writer revisits and shares with others a piece of writing in order to determine what needs to be added, removed, and/or rearranged. Revision is not recopying an assignment neatly in ink or correcting grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Instead, the writer focuses on strengthening content and meeting the needs of the audience.

How Can Parents Help?

- Listen while your child reads the piece aloud and respond in some of the following ways:
 - "The sentence or word that stands out for me is _____."
 - "The part that is most interesting to me is _____."
 - "I'd like to know more about _____."
- Offer praise about parts of the writing which work well. Ask questions about the purpose, meaning, content, ideas, and organization.
 - "Does the writing say what you want it to say?"
 - "What changes do you think you need to make?"
 - "Can you tell me more about _____?"
 - "Can you give me an example of _____?"
- Tell your child what you heard the piece of writing say.
- Encourage talk about the changes and the reasons for them.
- Ask questions about any part of the writing you find unclear.
- Make sure your child has the final say in all revisions of the writing.

EDITING

Editing is the job of cleaning up the writing and eliminating errors (mistakes in grammar, punctuation, usage, capitalization, and spelling). Writers may need assistance from others during this process to strengthen writing skills. Correctness is important; however, editing is a developmental (growth) process. Correcting every error can be overwhelming to the writer. As writers become more proficient, they will make fewer mistakes.

How Can Parents Help?

- Ask your child to read the piece aloud while you both look at the writing. Focus attention on correctness of sentences, wording, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.
- Concentrate on only one or two types of errors at a time.
- Encourage the use of a dictionary, thesaurus, spell checker, and/or computer writing program.
- Allow your child to make the actual corrections on the writing.
- Do not at any time actually do your child's writing or make direct corrections on the work. You might decide to circle or place a check beside words or phrases which appear to be incorrect. Your child can look up the word and make the final decision.

PUBLISHING

Publishing is the process of making a piece of writing public. Writers recognize the value of their writing when they share it with an audience in a variety of ways.

How Can Parents Help?

- Provide publishing opportunities.
- Mail a letter.
- Post on a bulletin board or your refrigerator.
- Submit to a magazine or newspaper.
- Read aloud at family gatherings, like the dinner table.
- Provide necessary materials (pens and pencils, stamps, envelopes, different kinds of paper, etc.).
- Encourage your child to make the writing neat and legible.
- Share your writing with your child.
- Allow your child to decide when to share pieces with others.

