

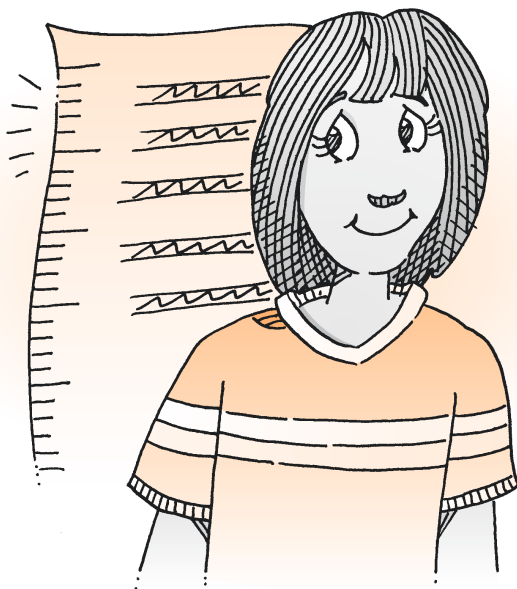
Skills *for* School Success

Ways Parents Can
Help Their Children
Do Better in School

EXPRESSING IDEAS IN SPEECH & WRITING



One of a Series of Booklets for Parents



The ability to express ideas is a basic skill. It's critical to a child's success in school and later in life.

Nearly every school assignment requires some form of writing or speaking. Your child will be measured in school—and beyond school—on what she* writes and says. The right words at the right time can earn an A, land a job, stop a fight or mend a heart.

The best way to learn to write and speak is just to practice. The more your child practices these skills, the better she will get at them.

Most students need more practice writing and speaking than they get in school alone. Your involvement can make a big difference in your child's progress.

Use the ideas in this booklet to help your child develop the confidence and skills she needs to put her ideas onto paper and into words.



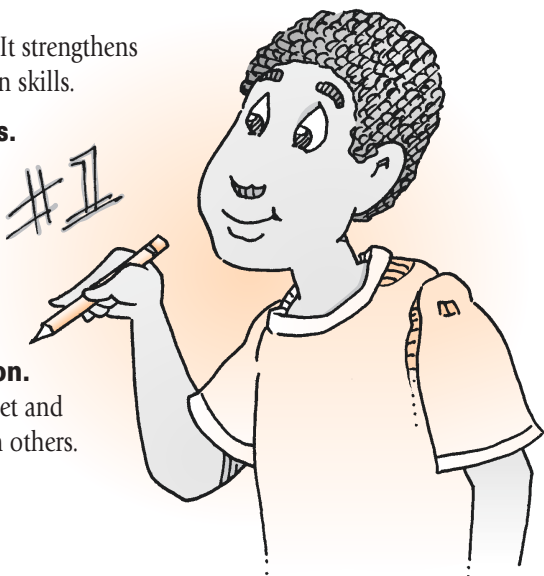
** Every child is unique, so we often use the singular pronoun.*

We'll alternate using "he/him" and "she/her" throughout this booklet.

Expressing Ideas in Writing

Strong writing skills are key to your child's success in school. Writing:

- **Builds critical thinking.** It strengthens analytical and communication skills.
- **Reinforces reading skills.**
- **Boosts self-confidence.**
As your child shares his writing with others, his enthusiasm for learning will grow.
- **Promotes communication.**
It provides an emotional outlet and helps your child connect with others.



Getting Started: The Hardest Step

As the saying goes, "The longest journey begins with but a single step."

In writing, taking that first step is often the hardest—even for professional writers. So providing support as your child gets started is one of the best ways for you to help.

Remember, actually writing your child's assignment for him is not a way to help.

The following pages are full of ideas you can use to help your child get started—and keep going—as he moves through the writing process.

Share a Step-by-Step Writing Process

Most writers use a basic process like this as they write:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Select a topic | 2. Prewrite | 3. Organize |
| 4. Draft | 5. Revise | 6. Publish |



Step 1: Select a Topic

Finding a topic can be a challenge. Your child may say in frustration, "I've got to write a paper, but I can't think of anything to write about." You can help. To get the ball rolling:

- **Strike up a conversation.** Ask your child about the topics that interest her most. Ask what concerns or bothers her and why. Listening for her to mention a topic she could write about.
- **Try brainstorming.** Have your child quickly write down all the things she sees or all the ideas that come into her mind. Tell her to let her ideas flow. She can be creative and crazy! She shouldn't stop to think about whether the ideas are good or bad.

As she looks over what she has written, she may find something of interest. And she's off and inspired to write!

Her brainstorming list might look like this:

- ☐ Trees
- ☐ Flowers
- ☒ Dog
- ☐ Ballerina
- ☐ Dinosaur
- ☐ Ice Cream
- ☐ Sunshine

- **Suggest freewriting.** Give your child a pen and paper. For five minutes, have her write everything that comes to mind. If she can't think of anything to write, have her write, "I can't think of anything to write," until another thought comes.

Have your child read her freewriting out loud. She might pick up a pattern or idea that she hadn't noticed while she was writing. Or she can ask you or a friend to read it to her. She might hear something that leads to a brilliant idea.



- **Encourage drawing.** Tell your child to draw a picture of anything that comes to mind. Drawing uses different parts of the brain than writing and can often free the brain to think of new ideas.
- **Give your child a notepad.** Tell her to list all the people she speaks to during each hour—both in person and on the telephone. Beside their names, have her write down what they spoke about. When she reads the list at the end of the day, she will discover lots of topics.

Step 2: Prewrite

Prewriting activities include thinking, reading and talking. The goal is to develop ideas and details about the topic. To help, you can:

- **Be an idea sounding board.** Listen as your child raises questions about his subject and tries to answer them.
- **Ask questions to help him** narrow the topic and provide specific details to support his ideas. Remember to be positive. If you're enthusiastic, he will be too.
- **Suggest free association.** Ask your child to write down everything that comes to mind about the subject.
- **Try the library or other sources.** Finding out what others have said on the topic will spur your child's ideas.



Step 3: Organize

It's not enough to have many ideas. They need to be put into some kind of order. To organize his thoughts before he begins writing, your child can:

- **Use index cards.** Have him put each idea or fact on a separate index card. Then he can arrange them in a logical way.
- **Make an outline.** An outline makes a writer's job easier. Have your child number main facts and ideas.
A good outline puts information in a logical order. Your child can do this by:
 - **Time.** Put a series of events in the order they happened.
 - **Difficulty.** Start with the simplest points. Build up to the harder ones.
 - **Cause and effect.** Show how one event leads to another.

Try an Outline

An outline is a time-tested way to organize ideas before writing a composition. Outlines often use Roman numerals, letters and numbers. An outline for a composition organized according to a series of events might look like this:

My topic: Scruffy is a great dog

I. Introduction

- A. The first moment I saw Scruffy
 - 1) He was a cute ball of fur
 - 2) He came right to me
- B. I fell in love at once

II. When Scruffy was a puppy

- A. He kept us up all night
- B. He ate everyone's shoes

III. How I taught Scruffy tricks

- A. Shaking his paw
- B. Rolling over

IV. Conclusion

- A. Taking care of Scruffy is hard work, but he's worth it
 - 1) Love and companionship
 - 2) My friend for life



Step 4: Draft

A draft is a work in progress. It's another step in the journey to a final product. Tell your child:

- **Most writers create several** versions.
- **Don't worry now** about spelling, punctuation or "getting it right." Just write. Let your ideas flow.
- **Think like a reporter.** Include *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*.
- **Skip lines** so information can be added later.
- **Add the introduction** and conclusion later.

Step 5: Revise

Experts often say, *There's no such thing as good writing. There's only good rewriting.*

Here's how you can help your child revise her writing:

- **Ask your child to read** what she's written aloud. Don't interrupt.
- **Praise it!** Find something specific that you like.
- **Ask questions about content.** "Can you add more details or description?"
- **Ask questions about word choices.** "Can you think of a better word for 'thing'?"
- **Don't make corrections** or add any details yourself.
- **Be enthusiastic.** Don't show any disappointment about poor writing.

Use the Revision Checklist:

☐ **Meaning**

Does the writing make sense? Are the facts correct? Does it have an introduction and a conclusion?

☐ **Paragraph**

Are all paragraphs indented? Is each paragraph made of sentences related to one idea? Are the paragraphs connected logically with paragraphs that come before and after?

☐ **Sentence**

Does each sentence have a subject and verb? Are the sentences punctuated correctly?

☐ **Word**

Are all the words spelled correctly? Is each word the best word for the situation? Are any words overused?

☐ **Neatness**

*Is the final draft neat and easy to read?
Does it follow the required format?*

☐ **Directions**

Did you follow all the teacher's instructions?



Step 6: Publish

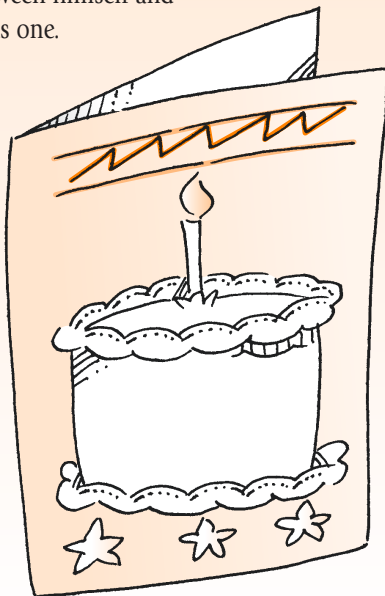
Finally, your child should create a clean copy of the revised draft and “publish” it, or deliver it to the person for whom it was written. Often it means simply handing it in to the teacher.

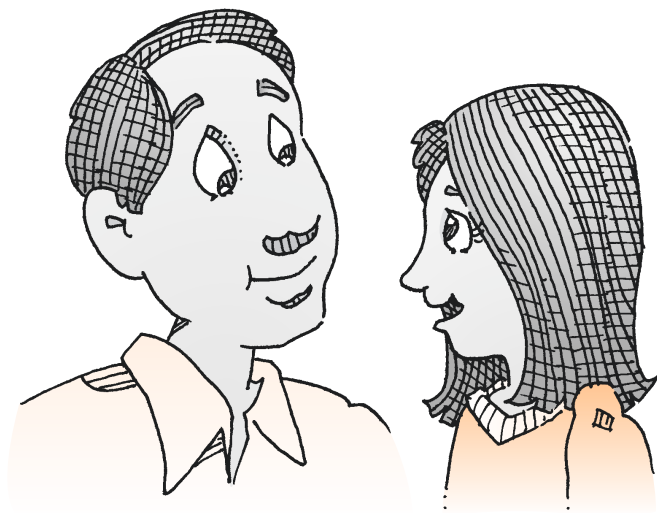
For home practice projects, staple your child’s final work together. Add a cover and you’ve got a “book” that can be shared with everyone in the family.

Help Your Child Practice Writing at Home

Have him write:

- **The words** to a favorite song.
- **A short paper** on how he would spend \$100.
- **An imaginary** conversation between himself and another person—perhaps a famous one.
- **A story starring himself** as a superhero.
- **A brief summary** of a book he’s read.
- **A message** for a homemade greeting card.
- **His own party** invitations.
- **A family trip** diary.
- **Letters and thank-you** notes to friends and family.
- **Captions for photos** in a family album.





Expressing Ideas in Speech

As important as writing is to your child's school success, she will probably spend much more time *speaking* than writing—both in and out of school. And, like any skill, practice is the way to improve her ability to express her ideas out loud.

Encouraging your child at home in normal conversation is very important. Look over the ideas on the following pages and try them with your child. Your encouragement can make a big difference.

Promote Conversation by Spending Time Together

The best conversations happen when *your child* is ready to talk—not when *you* are. When kids and parents are both busy, finding time together can be a challenge.

Spend time *alone* with your child. During this time, do whatever your child enjoys. Play games, take a walk or prepare a favorite food. Don't turn on the television—it turns *off* conversation.

Turn Meal Time Into Family Time

One way to spend more time with your child is by eating at least one meal a day together as a family. If after-school activities and work make it difficult for you to eat dinner together, try regular family breakfasts.

Remember, most of the time spent on meals is devoted to preparation and clean-up. By getting your child involved, you'll gain precious minutes for conversation.

Use Silence to Get Your Child to Talk

Take a tip from top TV interviewers: Use silence to get your child to talk.

Choose a quiet time when you are alone with your child. Ask a question like: "Is there anything you want to talk about?" And then just listen. Don't say a word, even if there is a long silence. Just listen. Look at your child. Let the silence work for you. If you are patient, pretty soon he may take the opportunity to talk about something that's important to him.

Make Appointments With Your Child

Some parents actually make appointments with their children. They get out a calendar and write in a time when they'll spend time together. This kind of appointment will help reassure your child that he is your most important priority. That, in turn, makes it easier for him to tell you what's on his mind.



Talk With Your Child About School

Spend some time each day talking with your child about school. Since the answer to the question, "What did you do in school?" is likely to be, "Nothing," try to ask specific questions. Here are some examples:

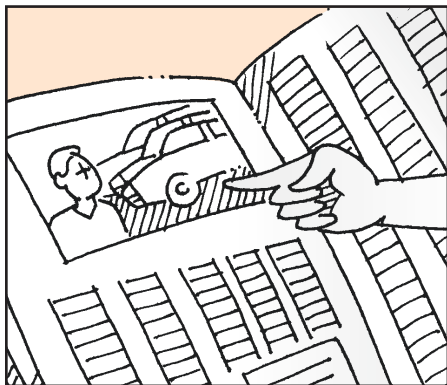
- **"What was the hardest** (or most interesting) thing you did today?"
- **"What was on your math** test?"
- **"Who did you sit with** at lunch?"

Be sure you set a good example by giving complete answers when your child asks you questions.

Read to Your Child

No matter how old she is, read aloud to your child. This will help her develop the skill of expressing opinions. Set aside 10 to 15 minutes each day, and be sure to choose a book you both enjoy. Occasionally, stop your reading and ask questions: "Why do you think this is so funny?" "Does this remind you of anything else you have read?" This teaches your child to *draw conclusions* based on what she's hearing.

Use Pictures to Get Your Child Talking



Look through a newspaper for an interesting photograph. Without showing your child the caption for the picture, spend a few minutes having her tell you what *she* thinks the caption would say. After you have had a chance to hear your child's ideas, show her the caption for the photograph. (You may decide you like her version better.)

Give Your Child Opportunities to Express Ideas

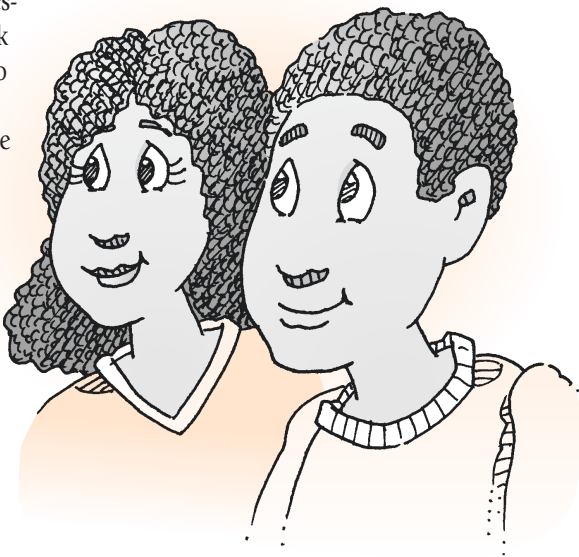
Family meetings can provide great opportunities for children to express ideas clearly.

Start by asking your family what they would like to do together. They should also tell you *why* they think their suggestions would be good. Some of the ideas may be things you can act on right away: "I think we should rent a movie for Friday night." "I think we should take a walk to look at the leaves next Sunday." Others will be things you need to think about. ("I think we should take a trip to Disney World," for example.)

Family councils can also be an appropriate time for family members to air grievances. Set some ground rules: One person talks at a time; everyone must show respect for other people in the family; voices must not be raised.

As your child makes suggestions or offers complaints, ask him to explain *why*. ("Why do you think we should get a dog?") Expect him to organize his ideas and present them clearly.

Speaking at family meetings can prepare your child to learn to speak in public. That's a skill he will need in class every day—and one he'll use on the job for the rest of his life.



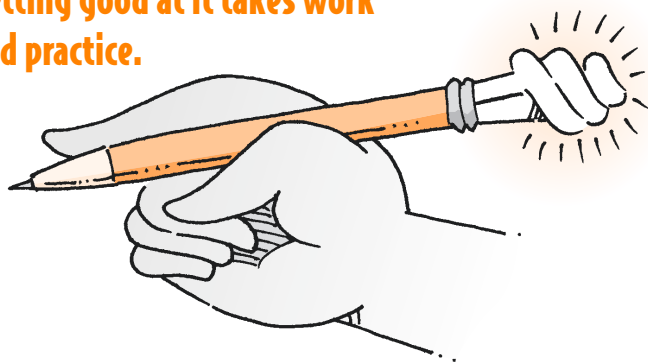
You Can Help With Oral Presentations

Making a formal presentation, or speech, is yet another skill that promotes success in school—and on the job. Here are some tips from the experts. Have your child:

- **Follow the same process used for writing** when preparing a speech. Use the steps on pages two through seven of this booklet. The basic difference is that in the final “publishing” step, the material will be spoken rather than handed in to the teacher.
- **Talk about something she really cares about.** That’s one secret to making an effective presentation. A student who cares about a topic is likely to spend more time doing research. She’ll become more confident and excited about sharing information with her classmates.
- **Remember that being nervous is natural** and healthy. Even professional speakers are nervous. The trick is to focus that adrenaline or “nervous energy” on projecting enthusiasm. The best way to learn how is through practice.
- **Imagine herself** making a successful speech. As successful speakers get ready to speak, they “see” themselves confidently getting up to speak, “see” people interested and paying attention, and “see” people congratulating them afterwards. If your child *expects* to succeed, chances are she *will* succeed!
- **Make eye contact** as she speaks. She will probably find this is easier to do when speaking from cards with key phrases than when reading her entire speech word for word. Help her practice at home.



You can help your child express ideas in speech and writing. The process is simple. Getting good at it takes work and practice.



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