

Golden Rules

Getting the balance right between making writing fun AND keeping up regular short bursts of writing practice can be tricky at times. Here are some do's and don'ts to help you out.

DO encourage your child to draw and paint by providing crayons, felt-tips and paints and a table where they can do these activities whenever they want! The more they are doing this type of activity, the more they will want to write.

DO involve your child with writing that you do. Encourage them to contribute to making a list, even if they only write the first letter of some items.

DON'T point out every mistake your child makes when they write. Children need encouragement and positive reinforcement to be confident, and a confident child makes a better learner.

DO praise your child's efforts, even if you think she's not trying her best! Learning to write is a tiring and lengthy business. It is really important to keep your child motivated.

DO stop to look at any pictures your child produces and talk about them. Encourage them to sign their pictures (all great artists do this!) and perhaps to write a caption.



Calverton Primary School

How to help your infant child with writing

A big ask

Anyone who has ever taught their six year old to cycle a bike knows that it's a skill which involves a number of smaller skills. Not only does your child need to learn to balance, but they need to master steering, starting, stopping and of course paying attention to where they are going.

Writing is very like this! It might appear to be one but in fact it is many!

having an idea,

planning how to organise the idea on the page,

choosing the best words to describe that idea,

knowing which letters are needed to represent or make up those words

then finally putting pen to paper and scribing it.

It takes most of us our whole school-life to fully master writing because it is such a complex skill, and we should try not to underestimate this as we help our children get started in learning to write.

Keeping it real

If children can see that writing has a purpose in real life they are far more likely to be interested in mastering it. Involve children in writing birthday card messages, even if they only sign their name. Ask your child to make a 'don't-forget' note to stick on the front door before school tomorrow. Ask them to mark important dates on the calendar. Make it your 6 year old's job to write down when you run out of yoghurt or biscuits and it needs to be put on the shopping list. And although there aren't many letters written by hand today, many children see their parents regularly sending emails or text messages. Even though your child can't type yet, involve him in composing those messages. 'Grandad wants to know if we've found his hat yet. What shall I say?' One of the most important things you are showing here is that it's good to think our ideas or sentences through in our heads BEFORE we write them down. This is a very useful lesson



skill

Simple advice on helping an infant child with writing

Writing is a very complex skill. In fact it takes most of us our whole school-life to fully master it and we should try not to underestimate this as we help our young school-going children get started with learning to write.

Start with talking: Believe it or not, learning to form letters is the easy part of writing. Thinking clearly and expressing their ideas is far more important for young writers and much harder to achieve. The best way to get there is to talk to your child and, crucially, listen when they speak!

Provide opportunities for writing: Try to provide a small writing and drawing area (an upturned box?) for your child somewhere in your home. Ideally they are able to sit at this whenever they want, and have access to scrap paper, pencils, crayons, felt-tips, scissors, sellotape™ or glue.

Reluctant writers: Even the most reluctant writers enjoy new kinds of writing such as drawing on the ground outside with chalk, or on windows with special window-crayons, or even using bath crayons. Likewise, make it possible for your child to engage in writing or drawing in his play - after all pirates often need treasure maps, footballers need results tables and every astronaut could use a well kitted out cardboard rocket.

The idea's the thing: When you look at some of your child's writing, try not to focus first on the handwriting. The message this communicates is that you value how her writing looks far more than what it says. Now of course presentation and legible handwriting are VERY important but they are not as important as having a good idea and phrasing it well!

A helping hand: 'You do it for me!' Every child lacks confidence at some point as they start out learning to write. There isn't any harm in showing your child how to write or draw something every now and then but ask them to help you as you do so. 'What sounds can you hear at the end of the word?'

Keeping it real: If children can see that writing has a real purpose they are far more likely to be interested in mastering it. Involve your child in writing birthday card messages, ask him to make a don't-forget note to stick on the front door, get him to mark important dates on the calendar.

Provide opportunity

Try to provide a small writing and drawing area for your child to play at somewhere in your home. This can be a small table or a large strong cardboard box turned upside-down. Ideally here your child keeps scrap paper, pencils, crayons, felt-tips, scissors, sellotape or glue. Your child should be able to access this whenever they want to draw or write. It is surprising how often children will go to the cutting, drawing and sticking table if it is there! Have a wall, board or washing line somewhere nearby as well to hang up your child's creations so that everyone can see how wonderful they are!

The idea's the thing

When your child does show you some writing, whether it's done at school or at home, do your best to focus on the meaning first and foremost. This isn't easy! For most parents, our initial instinct is to praise or criticise the handwriting. The message this communicates to our child is that we value how your writing looks far more than what it says. Now of course presentation and legible handwriting are VERY important but they are not as important as having a good idea and phrasing it well. The parent who says - 'I can see you've really tried your best and I love the way you've used the word 'sparkly'' gives much more encouragement than the parent who simply comments 'Well done love, what neat writing'. Of course it is great to praise neat handwriting, but what the writing says should be recognised first!

A helping hand

Inevitably as children start school, if not before, it dawns on them that there is a 'proper' way to write things. One sad day they realise that their random string of adorable marks or letters doesn't actually say 'To Mummy I love you'. With this realisation children can lose confidence - that their own writing or drawing isn't 'proper' or good enough. Tackling this can be tricky - on the one hand we want to keep up our children's confidence and encourage them to follow their own creative impulses but on the other hand, it is true that they haven't written what they intended. Getting your child through this stage does require sensitivity. There isn't any harm in showing your child how to write or draw something every now and then, but in the long run you want them to feel confident about trying things independently and to have a go themselves. Involve your child in your own writing process by sharing the decision-making:

'What sounds can you hear in the word?', 'Should I start by drawing the top or the bottom of the flower?' and let them see you making mistakes or improvements: 'Hmm, I think my elephant's trunk is a bit too short ... I might try to make it longer by adding on a bit' or 'Oh dear I've only got 3 legs on my dog - where should I put the fourth?'