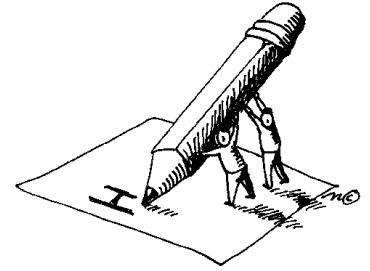
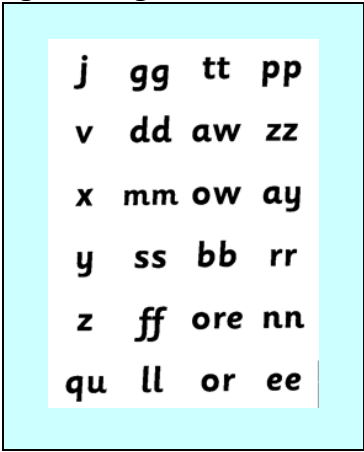


# Support your junior child in writing



## Writing's not easy!

Writing well is not easy! It requires a complex mix of creative thinking, good organisational skills, a wide vocabulary, accurate spelling and legible handwriting. No child can develop these quickly and that is why we all spend so many years at school learning this crucial and complicated skill. The important things for parents to remember are that the time we spend helping our children learn to write is very valuable AND that we need to be patient. Children will sometimes make very slow or erratic progress. How tired or motivated they are feeling on any given day will have a big impact on how their writing turns out.



## It's good to talk AND listen!

Nice handwriting or correct spellings are not what writing is all about. At its heart lies the ability to communicate clearly with others. And of course communication starts with talking. How well your child writes is directly linked to how well she can express her ideas as she speaks. Engage your child in conversations about anything and everything on a daily basis, as you go to school, as you share meals, as you go on journeys, as you wait together. Try not to confuse conversation with interrogation (How was school? Did you eat your lunch? Did you give Mr Glossop that note? Have you found your jumper yet?).



Perhaps you could start by telling your child something that happened to you today. This way, they are more likely to reciprocate with their own story. It is essential to talk, talk, talk and of course to listen, listen, listen. Writing is communicating and that all starts with talking.

## Opportunities to write

'My son hates writing, he'll do anything to avoid it' - which of us hasn't said something like this at one time or another? And it is understandable that after a day at school doing lots of writing, most children are inclined to do something else afterwards. However there are home activities many children enjoy which happen to have a bit of writing as part of them, such as keeping photo albums or scrapbooks about a favourite hobby or a special holiday, writing out favourite song lyrics, or perhaps making little picture books or comic stories for a younger brother or sister. Other children love keeping a diary, secret or otherwise. It's really important that we continue to praise our children's efforts and ideas, and hold back on the urge to criticise the state of their spelling.



We want them to feel that paper is a safe place to explore their ideas, whether in pictures or in writing and that every time they decide to write something, it isn't going to be 'marked' and expected to be perfect. When they were younger did you display their imperfect pictures on the fridge for everyone to admire? Why not do the same with a piece of their writing now? It will show how much you value their efforts and ideas. This kind of independent creative writing, however flawed, is all helping to make his writing perfect!

## Emails

These days, writing doesn't have to involve pencil and paper. More and more of us do most of our writing on a keyboard with a computer screen. This will be true for our children as well of course. Perhaps they could write to a friend or relative who lives far away via email? The beauty of an email is that it can be very short and replies can be received very quickly. Attaching photos or website links can also be a good incentive to write an email - and encourages the respondent to reply!

## Homework

Of course writing at home is often going to happen in the form of homework. At this age, many children will be expected not only to learn spellings by heart but also to complete pieces of writing at home. The important thing here is to be clear what the



purpose of the homework is. Is it about how their sentences are punctuated or is it about how to structure their piece of writing? Do your best to make the purpose your main focus for that piece of work. So try not to express horror at the state of their spelling but DO pay attention to what good 'describing-words' they are choosing, if that is what the homework is about. Afterwards, if you just can't help yourself, ask them to revisit a couple of glaring spelling mistakes and make improvements. This is not easy, but expressing more criticism than praise of your child's efforts is only going to put them off and discourage them further.

## Reading



The development of good writing skills is closely linked to how much a child reads and also to the variety of reading material he enjoys. A child who reads a lot will inevitably start to become familiar with a wider range of vocabulary and more complicated sentence structures than a child who does not. Your child does not have to be reading classic novels to get this benefit - more popular books and magazines will also help him. A reading diet that consists only of football magazines isn't perfect of course, so do try to encourage a bit of variety but **SOME** reading is infinitely better for his writing skills than none. Remember that no matter how old a child is, he still likes to be read **to**! Listening to a novel is another way of helping your child benefit from immersion in written language - and there are many excellent story CDs which can be played as they relax before sleep.

## Meaningful writing

Does your child see writing as something that only takes place at school? Perhaps she could be involved in practical writing tasks that are needed in the home. Could she be in charge of making the shopping list? Of writing important dates or 'don't forget' notes on the calendar? At some point she might enjoy being in charge of answering the phone and writing down messages for the family. Perhaps she could even make little instruction posters for places in the house (pictures of 'Please get a new roll of toilet paper when the old one runs out', 'Keep out, I'm busy', 'Have you got your key?!' etc.) Let your child see you writing and involve her in some tasks in a meaningful way so that she can see she is of use.

## Handwriting

Although so much of today's writing is done on a keyboard, the ability to handwrite clearly and easily is still very important. At this stage your child should know how to form each letter and do so automatically. However, it is easy for children to slip into bad habits. A basic requirement of handwriting is that it can be read without difficulty. Another is that it can be written with ease, without causing physical pain or cramp to the writer.

Help your child to maintain good hand muscle development by providing them with opportunities which they enjoy to do so - using lego, knitting, making models using ready-made kits, show them how to use simple tools such as screw drivers, teach them to chop vegetables safely using a knife. Any of these activities will help him to develop the fine motor skills required for legible pain-free handwriting.

