



Help your children to learn



A Guide to Supporting Writing at Home



Writing is an essential skill that can benefit students for the rest of their lives. Although we may not realise it, most of us write every day, whether it be a text message, an email, an updated status on a social networking site, a letter, note or diary entry. Practising this skill at home can improve confidence, competence and help to foster a lifelong love of writing.

Writing helps us to express ourselves; it is how much of the world communicates. If you don't write, you cut yourself off from a large community.

Writing can also be a great tool to help us to know more about the *way* that we think. It can help to solidify ideas and thoughts, and allow us to reflect on them better than if the ideas remained evolving in our heads.

Writing is also one of the ways that we translate our thoughts for other people. Some people are better at expressing themselves in writing than any other way, and we thus get a better translation when we read what they have to say, rather than hearing them speak. The more we practise writing, the better we get at expressing complex thoughts.

Examinations in most subjects, at GCSE and A Level, now award marks to students for the quality of their written communication. Students are assessed on the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar as well as the content of their writing. It is therefore vital that writing skills are practised across the curriculum and at home.

There are many ways that you can support your child with his/her writing skills. This booklet offers some suggestions, along with explanations of key concepts relating to spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, sentence construction and paragraphing.

Instant ideas for encouraging writing at home...



- Encourage your child to help you to write shopping lists;
- Encourage your child to keep a diary;
- Encourage your child to write letters to family members or friends. You could write letters together;
- If your child has an interest in computers, encourage them to write emails to friends and family. They could even write their own online blog as an alternative to a diary;
- Encourage your child to write postcards to friends and family when on holiday;
- Play writing games with your child at home, such as countdown (making words out of a random assortment of letters), scrabble and hangman (guessing the word one letter at a time);
- If your child is a fan of creative writing, encourage them to enter competitions, sharing their work with a wider audience;
- Play story writing games with your child and other siblings. You start by writing the first sentence of a story, setting the scene. Then pass it on. The next person writes the next line, introducing a character and so on. You can make your story funny or serious. If you want to challenge your child, you could specify a particular genre such as horror, myth, legend or adventure etc.
- Make writing a part of everyday activities by encouraging your child to keep a calendar, to write post-it note reminders or to take written messages when they answer the telephone at home.

Lead by example...

Let your child see you writing at home – even if it's just writing a shopping list or typing an email. Write with your child. You could write letters or postcards to family and friends.



Useful Organisations and Websites



www.youngwriters.co.uk

Young Writers organise writing competitions that any young person can enter, free of charge. These are frequently advertised by our English Department who

encourage pupils to submit their creative work (poetry and short stories), supporting them through the writing and redrafting process. We are proud to say that many of our pupils have been successful and had their work published. The website contains information on upcoming competitions that you could encourage your child to enter, along with literacy based games, book reviews (with an opportunity for children to submit their own) and lists of recommended reads for young people.

DailyWritingTips

www.dailywritingtips.com

This is a website with a wealth of information about different styles of writing, grammar, vocabulary (including the meanings and origins of particular words), spelling and top tips on becoming a successful writer. They also have a 'word of the day', an interesting word accompanied by a definition and examples of that word in use, which is perfect for broadening vocabularies.

www.englishclub.com

This website offers a wealth of information and resources (including games and quizzes) to help your child to learn and practise spelling and grammatical rules, new vocabulary and styles (forms) of writing. This site also provides resources that are suitable for those new to learning English.

EnglishClub

www.literacytrust.org.uk



Words for life

The National Literacy Trust website contains advice for parents on how to support literacy at home. They provide helpful tips for parents on encouraging reading and writing, with practical activities that you can do at home.

KS3

Bitesize



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/ks3/english/writing/>

The BBC Bitesize website provides guidance on how to write in different styles (forms) such as writing to argue, persuade and advise, and for different audiences and purposes. Log on to read about the features of different styles of writing, complete activities and to test your understanding.

Spelling Strategies

You can support your child as they learn new spellings at home by using the following strategies:

Mnemonics

Mnemonic means 'memory trick'. We can use mnemonics to help us to remember the spellings of difficult words.

Some people use the mnemonic 'one collar, two sleeves' to remember how to spell the word necessary. This is because the word 'necessary' contains one 'c' and two of the letter 's'.



We might remember that 'accommodation' always comes in '**double**' beds. This is because the consonants 'c' and 'm' are doubled in this word.

Words Within Words

One way to help us to remember how to spell difficult words is to look for words within words. The only rules are that the letters must be next to one another and the words must make sense. For example, the word 'conscience' contains the word 'science'; the word 'business' contains the words 'bus' and 'sin'.

Certain words can be linked to words within them by way of mnemonics. Look at these examples: to believe a **lie**; business is a **sin**; the **gem** is in the engagement ring.

Have fun finding words within words and making up your own mnemonics!

Using Pictures

We can use images to help us to remember particular spellings. This works particularly well with words called 'homophones'. Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. Some common homophones are words like: their, there, they're; bee, be; see and sea etc. We can use pictures to help us to remember the different spellings and definitions of the words. Look at these examples:

Knot
NOt

site
sight

threw
through

Look, Cover, Write, Check

One way to learn new a spelling is to look at the word first, then cover it up. While it is covered, try to write it out correctly. After checking, if the word is spelt incorrectly, the process should be repeated. The repetition of 'look, cover, write, check' can help your child to retain the spellings of new words. However, it is also important to use those words in context. Once they have mastered the spelling, ask your son/daughter to use the word in a sentence or sentences of their own.

Spelling: Common Homophones

Homophones are words that sound the same but have different meanings and spellings. Below is a short list of just a few of the most common homophones.

There	Their	They're
To	Too	Two
Buy	By	Bye
Hear	Here	
Wait	Weight	
Knight	Night	
See	Sea	
Wear	Where	



It is important to learn the spellings and definitions of common homophones to avoid confusions when writing. Children seem to struggle most with the following:

There	We use this to point out a place or to make a statement. For example: <i>My bag is over there.</i> <i>There are ten boys in my class.</i>
Their	We use this to show that something belongs to somebody. For example: <i>The children picked up their coats and bags.</i> <i>The teachers drank their coffee in the staffroom.</i>
They're	We use this when we mean 'they are'. For example: <i>They're beautiful flowers.</i> <i>I don't like those shoes. They're hideous!</i>
Two	We use this when we mean the number '2'. For example: <i>I have two cats.</i> <i>There are two biscuits left in the tin.</i>
To	We use this as a preposition. For example: <i>I want to go to the park.</i> <i>I am going to eat my dinner in the kitchen.</i>
Too	We use this when we mean that there is a lot of something and also when we mean 'as well'. For example: <i>This bag is too heavy.</i> <i>I want to go to the park too.</i>
Your	We use this when we want to show that something belongs to someone. For example: <i>Is this your pen?</i> <i>Your coat is over there.</i>
You're	We use this when we mean 'you are'. For example: <i>You're beautiful.</i> <i>When you're feeling sad, I will cheer you up.</i>

Encourage your child to use these homophones in sentences of their own. You could challenge them to write a sentence correctly using as many homophones as possible. For example: **Their** coats are over **there** just in case **they're** cold.

Vocabulary

Good writers have a wide and varied vocabulary. Children can broaden their vocabulary by reading more widely. They can also use thesauruses when writing to find adventurous synonyms (words with similar meanings) for the words that they would normally use.



Encourage your child to use a thesaurus at home. If you don't have a paper copy, they could use an online thesaurus. Please find links to useful online thesauruses below.

<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/english-thesaurus>

<http://thesaurus.com/>

Look up the word that you want to replace. It will be in bold and will be in alphabetical order, like it would be in a dictionary.

How do we use a thesaurus?



In italics, after the word, you are given the word class (whether the word is a noun – a naming word; an adjective – a word that describes a noun; a verb – a doing or being word; an adverb – a word that describes how an action takes place).

You are given a range of synonyms (words with similar meanings) to the one in bold.

Sometimes, you are given non-standard English synonyms like this one. E.g. the word 'scuzzy' is a slang word, meaning the same as abhorrent. In brackets, you are told that this word is slang, indicating that it should not be used in formal writing.

It is important to remember that synonyms are words with *similar*, and not *the same*, meanings. When you substitute one word for another, the meaning of your sentence may change slightly. For example:

James **walked** to school.

James **trudged** to school.

The word 'trudged' implies that James found it difficult to walk to school, or that he did not really want to go to school and so walked slowly.

Vocabulary

Encourage your child to broaden their vocabulary by using some of these words in sentences of their own.

Words to use instead of 'said':

Acknowledged Added Advised Admitted Agreed
Announced Answered Approved Argued
Asked Babbled Began Bragged Called
Commanded Commented Complained Demanded
Denied Dictated Emphasised Exclaimed Expressed
Giggled Grinned Indicated Instructed

Words to use instead of 'walk':

Tread Skulk Race Shuffle
Scuttle Limp Lurch Amble
Prance Ramble Stagger Stomp
Trot Wander Tiptoe Step
Toddle Trot Parade
Traipse Trudge
Stride

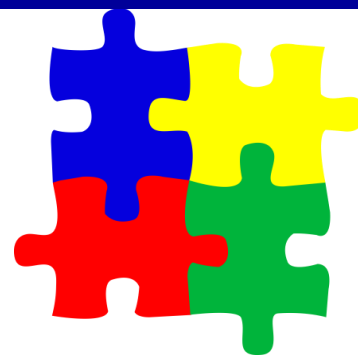
Words to use instead of 'looked':

Peered Glanced Stared
Admired Gawked Gaped
Ogled Inspected Studied Watched
Focused Scanned Viewed
Contemplated Glared
Gazed Glowered Observed
Watched Perceived Peeped Peeked
Glimpsed Sought Squinted Spied



Connectives

Connectives are words and phrases that join parts of a sentence and whole texts together. There are a range of connectives used for different purposes. Below are some examples.



Listing

Firstly
Secondly
First of all
Finally
Lastly
For one thing
For another
In the first place
To begin with
Next
Then
In turn
To conclude
And

Addition

Also	As
Too	And
Similarly	Like
In addition	Let alone
Indeed	Even
Furthermore	Moreover

Explaining

For example
For instance
In other words
That is to say
In that
To illustrate this

Reinforcing

Besides
Anyway
After all
Indeed
Certainly
Doubtlessly

Time

Then
Later
Before
When
Until
While
Once
Meanwhile
Afterwards
Since
Since then
When
As
Whenever

Opposition

However	Nevertheless
On the other hand	In contrast
Though	Alternatively
Anyway	Yet
In fact	Even so
But	Whereas
While	Despite
Although	Nonetheless

Indicating Results

Therefore	Consequently
As a result	Unless
Now that	Whether
In order	Since
If	Because

Sentence Starters

To add interest and variety to our writing, it is important to begin our sentences in different ways. Children find it easy to begin sentences with names or with words such as 'I' and 'The'. However, they need to practise beginning their sentences in some of the following ways...

Start with an adjective...

An **adjective** is a word used to describe people, places and objects. For example:

Firm but **fair**, Mr Jones was one of the most well-respected teachers at the school.

Crisp autumn leaves fell from the trees that flanked each side of the road.

Strange, unearthly noises could be heard coming from the locked room at the top of the house.

Exhausted soldiers marched row upon row towards the battlefield.

Beautiful, brightly coloured flowers were beginning to spring up from the earth.

Start with an adverb...

An **adverb** is a word that describes how an action (a verb) happens. For example:

Quickly, the boy ran home to his parents.

Apprehensively, Jane crept up the dark staircase towards the attic.

Furiously, the king bellowed at his disobedient subjects.

Solemnly, the vicar addressed his congregation.

Fortunately, no one was hurt.

Start with a time...

At three o'clock it was time to go home.

Before dawn, James was dressed and ready to leave the house.

At midnight, the stars could be seen clearly.

Suddenly, the alarm bell began to ring, creating an almighty commotion.

After dinner, Rakib and Tasnim washed the dishes.

As the music played, George tapped his foot to the rhythm.

Now is the time for vengeance!

Start with a place...

In the dark cellar, the wooden chest lay waiting to be opened.

Inside the wooden chest was the forgotten treasure map.

Outside in the garden, birds chirped happily.

At the gate, the postman cowered, scanning the garden for any sign of the dog.

Beneath the surface of the murky water, I could just make out what appeared to be a fin.

On top of the cupboard, hidden inside an old teapot, sat the old lady's life savings.

At Blue Coat Academy, students are well supported by staff.

Using Technology

Modern technology has had a heavy influence on the language that we use. Many of us use text messaging and social networking sites where it is acceptable to use non-standard English.

Avoiding Text Speak



Children often use text speak when communicating with their friends via text message or on social networking sites. They may use numbers instead of words or shorten words to consonants only, i.e. using 'pls' instead of 'please'. They may even combine numbers and letters, i.e. using 'l8r' instead of 'later'. Whilst this is considered an acceptable form of informal communication, they must be reminded that they should not use this sort of language when writing. One of the most common errors that pupils make when writing is to use symbols instead of words. They often use the '&' symbol instead of writing the word 'and'. The use of formal Standard English should be encouraged at home. If you leave notes for your child, avoid the temptation to use text speak or to substitute words such as 'and' with symbols.

Using Computers

Spelling and grammar checks on a computer can be useful. However, they can also be problematic and hinder our meaning when they are not used properly.

Programs like Microsoft Word often autocorrect words such as 'familiarise' to 'familiarize'. In English, we use the letter 's' whereas in American English, the letter 'z' is used. Therefore by not proof reading our work and allowing the program to autocorrect our spelling, we could be making mistakes.

Furthermore, when we allow a computer to *replace* certain words for us, we cannot always be certain that our meaning remains the same. Proof reading is essential.



Paragraphing

A paragraph is a group of sentences that are based around the same idea or topic. We use paragraphs to structure our writing clearly, making it easier for the reader to understand.

When we begin a new paragraph, we start a new line. We can indent the first line of our paragraph.

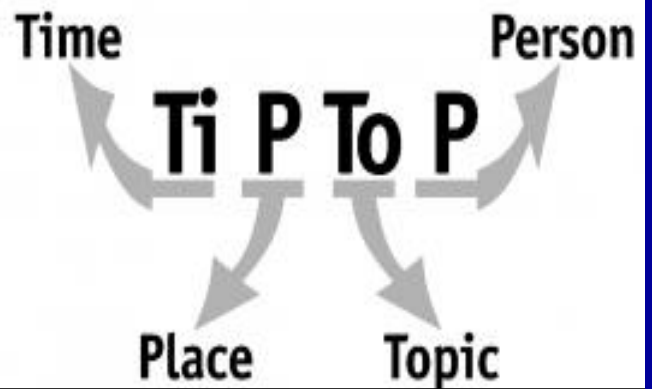
We begin a new paragraph for a change of time, place, topic or person (speaker). One way to help children to remember this is 'TiPToP'.

Ti = Time

P = Place

To = Topic

P = Person (speaker)



Look at these examples:

We begin a new paragraph for a change of place. Look at this example:

I walked slowly along the corridor towards room seven. I was not looking forward to an afternoon of English. It had been a long day and I was very tired, but as the door got closer, I knew that I had to go in.

I opened the door and entered the hot, sweaty classroom. I just wanted to get to my seat and get the lesson over with. Surprisingly, it went quicker than I expected. They say time flies when you're having fun!

Before I knew it, I was back in the corridor with a huge smile on my face, heading towards home.

We begin a new paragraph when someone new speaks.

Look at this example:

"Be home by eight o'clock," said mum.

"Not one minute later," interrupted dad, "or there'll be trouble young man."

"That's not fair!" whined Daniel.

We begin a new paragraph for a change of time. Look at this example:

It was 2 o'clock when the trouble began. Jim could feel the tension in the air as he sat in the stadium. The group of supporters behind him had started to get rowdy. The stewards watched them closely, waiting to escort them out.

A few minutes later, and the match had started. Both teams got off to a good start, racing across the pitch. The crowd roared each time one of the teams got possession of the ball, including the group of lads behind Jim, who shouted and swore at the opposing team.

By quarter past two, the stewards began to close in. They had alerted security, who arrived wearing their bright yellow jackets. The three burly security guards removed the louts from the stadium, allowing Jim to enjoy the rest of the match.

Topic Sentences

A topic sentence is the first sentence of a paragraph. It sets out the main idea that will be explored further in the rest of your paragraph. For example, if you were writing a paragraph about your family, your topic sentence might be: **Although my family is large, we are all surprisingly close.** The rest of your paragraph would then go on to develop this point.

Basic Punctuation

Capital letters should be used:

- at the start of every sentence (The children smiled.);
- at the start of days of the week (Monday, Tuesday);
- at the start of months of the year (January, February);
- for the letter I on its own (I am a pupil at Blue Coat.);
- at the start of names of people (Jenny, Anish, Marcus);
- at the start of place names (Walsall, England, Alton Towers);
- at the start of titles (Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban).



The full stop is the strongest mark of punctuation. It tells us we need a definite pause at the end of a sentence, giving us time to gather our breath or our thoughts, before moving on to the next sentence. Ignore the pause and sentences run together; meaning becomes confused. Full stops are also used in some abbreviations.

Use a full stop at the end of a sentence:

The man arrived. He sat down.

Use full stops with abbreviations (in an abbreviation the last letter of the word and of the abbreviation are not the same):

Co. (Company)

etc. (et cetera)

M.P. (Member of Parliament)

Do not use full stops with contractions (in a contraction the last letter of the word and of the contraction are the same):

Ltd (Limited)

Dr (Doctor)

St (Saint)



An exclamation mark usually shows strong feeling, such as surprise, anger or joy. Using an exclamation mark when writing is rather like shouting or raising your voice when speaking. Exclamation marks are most commonly used in writing quoted speech. You should avoid using exclamation marks in formal writing, unless absolutely necessary.

Use an exclamation mark to indicate strong feelings or a raised voice in speech:

- She shouted at him, "Go away! I hate you!"
- He exclaimed: "What a fantastic house you have!"
- "Good heavens!" he said, "Is that true?"
- "Help!"
- "Shut up!"
- "Stop!"

Many interjections need an exclamation mark:

- "Hi! What's new?"
- "Oh! When are you going?"
- "Ouch! That hurt."

A non-question sentence beginning with "what" or "how" is often an exclamation and requires an exclamation mark:

- What idiots we are! (We are such idiots.)
- How pretty she looked in that dress! (She looked very pretty in that dress.)



The main function of a question mark is to indicate a question or query.

Use a question mark at the end of all direct questions:

- What is your name?
- How much money did you transfer?

Use a question mark after a tag question:

- You're French, aren't you?
- He should go and see a doctor, shouldn't he?

Don't forget to use a question mark at the end of a sentence that really is a direct question:

- How else would I get there, after all?
- What if I said to you, "I don't love you any more"?

Do not use a question mark after an indirect or reported question:

- The teacher asked them what their names were. (What are your names?)
- John asked Mary if she loved him. (Do you love me?)



When there are more than two items in a list, they should be separated using commas. The last item is usually preceded with 'and', 'or' or 'but'. (These are called 'conjunctions'.) There is normally no need to put a comma before the conjunction.

For example:

The old vicar, the new vicar, the pub landlord, the mayor and the chairman were at the meeting.

(no comma before 'and')



A man loves his sweetheart the most, his wife the best, but his mother the longest.

(There is no need for the comma before 'but')



There are some exceptions to the rule. On occasion, it is appropriate to place a comma before the conjunction to avoid ambiguity or to assist your reader.

The news will be shown after Danger Mouse, and Rug Rats.



(Without the comma, readers could think that 'Danger Mouse and Rug Rats' is one programme.)



Complex sentences contain a **main clause** (a piece of information that makes sense on its own) and a subordinate clause (a piece of information that does not make sense on its own and relies on the main clause for its meaning). For example:

Although it was cold outside, **the classroom was warm.**

Subordinate clauses can be placed at the beginning, the end and even in the middle of a sentence. When they are placed at the beginning of a sentence (before the main clause), the general rule is to use a comma to separate them from the main clause, as in the example above.

When we embed or place a subordinate clause in the middle of a sentence (in the middle of a **main clause**) we use commas around it. For example:

Charlie Chaplin, who was a famous comedian, **died many years ago.**



The Writing Environment



DO

- Ensure that your child has a calm, quiet place to write in.
- Try to write with your child.
- Encourage your child to talk through/plan their writing before they begin.
- Let your child see you writing.
- Praise all writing that your child does.
- Encourage your child to write messages, notes, shopping lists, diary entries etc.
- Find a topic that your child is interested in and encourage them to write about that topic.
- Encourage your child to find their favourite genre (type of writing e.g. science fiction, horror, myth) and help them to write short stories in that genre.
- Encourage your child to proof read their writing, particularly when using 'autocorrect' and 'spellchecker' on a computer.
- Encourage your child to read widely as a means of expanding their vocabulary, which, in turn, will improve their writing.

DON'T

- Make writing times negative.
- Use writing as a punishment.
- Force your child to write.
- Make your child write for any longer than 20 minutes, at any one time, unless they want to.
- Scold your child if they make mistakes.
- Get frustrated if your child is having difficulties.



DO ask us for advice on how you can further support your child's writing at home. If you are worried that your child is struggling with writing, please contact their form tutor or their English teacher to discuss any problems and to request further support.

We hope that you have found this guide useful and informative.





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We are proud to be part of the Blue Coat Family