

Writing First: Strategies for Struggling Writers

The Writing Process

1. Getting Started: Prewriting
2. Sloppy Copy: First Draft
3. Hamming it Up: Revision
4. Tuning It Up: Editing
5. Neat Sheet: Final Copy
6. Publishing: Sharing and Celebrating

“There is not another academic skill that demands that a child bring together as many different neurodevelopmental functions as are required for writing.”

~Dr. Mel Levine

<http://www.allkindsofminds.org/>

Graphomotor

Graphomotor function refers to the ability to use muscles in the fingers and hands to form letters easily and legibly and to maintain a comfortable grip on a writing instrument. This function plays an important role in maneuvering a pen or pencil and allowing the fingers to keep pace with the flow of ideas.

- Coordinating small muscles of the fingers needed to form letters
- Signs of writing problems:
 - Finds it hard to form letters
 - Has difficulty manipulating a pencil
 - Grips a pencil uncomfortably tightly
 - Holds a pencil in an awkward manner
 - Struggles to coordinate small muscles to keep up with the flow of ideas

Possible Solutions

- Pens & Pencil Grips
- Raised Paper
- Slant Boards
- Templates
- Labels
- Magnetic Letters
- Fonts
- Dictation
- Portable Word Processors
- Onscreen Keyboards
- Speech Recognition

Attention

Attention plays an important role in all stages of writing. This task often demands considerable mental energy and focus over long periods of time. Writers must not only preview what they want to convey as they put their ideas on paper, but also continually self-monitor to stay on track.

- Maintaining concentration and self-monitoring work
- Signs of writing problems:
 - Is distracted or fidgety during writing tasks
 - Loses one's place while writing
 - Appears mentally fatigued or overly tired while writing
 - Doesn't exert effort if topic is not personally interesting
 - Is unable to get started on writing assignments

Possible Solutions

- Emphasize Key Information
- Preview, Plan & Monitor
- Edit - Talking Word Processors
- Talking Word Processors
- Microsoft Word Report Wizard, Templates

Language Production

Language is an essential ingredient of writing. The ability to recognize letter sounds, comprehend words and their meanings, understand word order and grammar to construct sentences, and describe or explain ideas all contribute to a child's ability to write clearly.

- Using words and forming sentences correctly
- Signs of writing problems:
 - Has difficulty with word sounds or meaning
 - Cannot easily spell words so they reflect the way they are pronounced
 - Finds oral expression difficult
 - Struggles with sentence structure and proper word order
 - Has trouble reading back what is written

Possible Solutions

- Dictionaries
- Inspiration
- Spell Checkers
- Microsoft Word
- Word Prediction
- TextHelp
- Kurzweil ~ WYNN
- Earobics
- Ultimate Phonics
- Simon SIO
- SOLO
- Clicker 5
- Write:OnLine
- E-pals

Memory

Memory ability has a significant impact on writing. The rate at which children generate ideas must coincide with their retrieval of necessary vocabulary, spelling, and prior knowledge. When organizing essays, writers must be able to think about a topic, draw upon facts and concepts, and sequence ideas and facts in the right order.

- Recalling letters, rules and ideas
- Signs of writing problems:
 - Cannot easily recall letter formation.
 - Cannot easily recall rules of spelling, grammar, punctuation
 - Presents ideas out of sequence
 - Has trouble accessing prior knowledge while writing
 - Struggles to organize ideas while writing

Possible Solutions

- Desktop Helpers
- Concept maps or mapping software
- Strategies
 - Break Processes into steps
- Speaking Homework Wiz
- Mnemonic strategies

POWER

P...Plan the paper
O...Organize your ideas
W...Write the draft
E...Edit your work
R...Revise

COPS

Capitalization
Omissions
Punctuation
Spelling

Higher Order Cognition

In the upper grades, writing relies on higher-order cognitive functions. Assignments often require students to generate original and creative ideas while integrating spelling, grammar, and punctuation rules. By early adolescence, many written assignments demand critical thinking skills and conceptual ability such as evaluating opposing arguments and drawing conclusions.

- Generating ideas and taking a stepwise approach to plan/revise
- Signs of writing problems:
 - Cannot easily generate ideas or elaborate on them in writing

- Has difficulty with writing tasks requiring creativity and/or critical thinking
- Finds organizing writing tasks difficult

Higher Order Cognition involves (*allkindsofminds.org*)

Concept Formation/Transformation – Integrating ideas that go together
 Critical Thinking – evaluating ideas and opinions
 Creativity – independent thinking and self-generated thoughts
 Problem Solving – applying a strategic approach to complex questions
 Rule Use – Learning, developing, and applying rules and principles
 Logical thinking/Reasoning – generating answers to complex issues
 Mental Representation – portraying new ideas so they are meaningful and lasting

Helpful hints

Create an environment for risk taking and promotes innovative thinking
 Encourage areas of focused interest
 Allow students to select materials, projects, reading texts, writing topics, spelling words
 Use high interest subject matter for creative activities
 Allow students to create products using different formats
 Comics, TV scripts, magazine articles, song lyrics

Develop activities that help the students' ability to think ahead, or predict possible outcomes
 Collaborative activities, working in teams
 Write using story starters
 In social studies, students have students make predictions about historical events
 Have students estimate answers to science experiments
 Provide a strategy sheet for problem solving with
 estimation, prediction and outcome comparison

Possible Solutions

Note Taking (Is difficult, be able to listen and writing at the same time, fine motor speed, Saliency determination required, recall, and sequencing)

Note Taking – Outline/Web www.learningthroughlistening.org

Graphic Organizers

Web Resources:

Design and print different graphic organizers. You don't have to be an artist to do it!
http://teachers.teach-nology.com/web_tools/graphic_org/
http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/6_8/graphorg/

Brainstorm Ideas/Lists

Generate ideas apart from writing
 Record ideas in list form
 Record ideas into a tape recorder

Kidspiration/Inspiration: Super Grouper - Rapid fire mode for brainstorming and listing ideas

Writer's Companion – Systematically walks students through the writing process.

Solo - Students learn the "Process of Writing"

1. Outlining and Mapping
2. Add notes and expand outline
3. Synthesize outline and notes into a draft

Provides auditory feedback

Students can work in outline view, diagram view or both.

<h3>Resources</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapman, C., & King, R. (2003). Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Writing in the Content Areas. Corwin Press, Inc. <p><i>S. Marfilius marfilius@mac.com 2011 www.scottmarfilius.com page 3</i></p>
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Resource List for Toolkit

Graphomotor

Pens & Pencil Grips - Raised Paper	Beacon Ridge Pro Ed Pocket Full of Therapy	www.beacon-ridge.com www.proedinc.com www.pfot.com
Literacy Lined Paper Magnetic Letters School Fonts	Beacon Ridge Magnetic Poetry School Fonts	www.beacon-ridge.com www.magneticpoetry.com www.schoolfonts.com
Alphasmart, Neo, Dana Quickpad Laser PC 6	Renaissance Learning QuickPad Perfect Solutions	www.alphasmart.com www.quickpad.com www.perfectsolutions.com
The Writer OnScreen Keyboards	Advanced Keyboard Technologies	www.keyboardinstructor.com
Reach Keyboard PixWriter Intellitalk	Applied Human Factors Slater Software, Inc Intellitools	www.ahf-net.com www.slatersoftware.com www.intellitools.com
Dragon Naturally Speaking Speak Q	Nuance QuillSoft	www.nuance.com www.wordq.com

Attention

Templates/Wizards Highlighter Tape	Microsoft Onion Mountain Technology	www.microsoft.com www.onionmountaintech.com
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Web Highlighting	Beacon Ridge	www.beacon-ridge.com
Kidspiration, Inspiration	i-Lighter	www.i-lighter.com
Read Please	Inspiration Software	www.inspiration.com
AspireReader	ReadPlease	www.readplease.com
Intellitalk III	Aequus Technologies	www.aequusdps.com
Write:Outloud	Intellitools, Inc.	www.intellitools.com
	Don Johnston, Inc.	www.donjohnston.com

Language Production

Word Finder	Pilot Light Books.	
	www.phonicsspeller.com/WordFinder.html	
Sound-It-Out Speller	Don Johnston, Inc.	www.donjohnston.com
Bad Spellers Dictionary	Random House	www.randomhouse.com
Speaking Homework Wiz	Franklin Learning Resources	www.franklin.com
Quicktionary Reading Pen II	WizCom Technologies Inc.	www.wizcomtech.com
Co:Writer	Don Johnston, Inc.	www.donjohnston.com
Word Q, Speak Q	Quillsoft	www.st4learning.com
Read and Write Gold	TextHelp	www.texthelp.com
WYNN	Freedom Scientific Learning Group	
	www.freedomscientific.com/LSG	
Kurzweil 3000	Kurzweil Education Systems Inc.	www.kurzweiledu.com
Scan and Read Pro	Premier Assistive Technology	www.readingmadeeasy.com
Phonics Companion	Visions Technology in Education	www.toolsforteachers.com
Phonics Alive	Advanced Software	www.phonicsalive.com
Ultimate Phonics	Spencer Learning	www.spencerlearning.com
Earobics	Cognitive Concepts	www.earobics.com
Lexia	Lexia Learning System	www.lexialearning.com
Simon SIO, WordMaker	Don Johnston, Inc.	www.donjohnston.com
ePals	ePals	www.epals.com

Memory

Desktop Helpers	Really Good Stuff	www.reallygoodstuff.org
Kidspiration, Inspiration	Inspiration Software, Inc.	www.inspiration.com
Homework Wiz	Franklin Learning Resources	www.franklin.com

Higher Order Thinking

Carbonless Notebook	Beacon Ridge	www.beacon-ridge.com
Graphic Organizers	teAchnology	http://teachers.teach-nology.com/web_tools/graphic_org
	Houghton Mifflin	www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/6_8/graphorg
Kidspiration, Inspiration	Inspiration Software, Inc.	www.inspiration.com
SOLO	Don Johnston, Inc.	www.donjohnston.com
Writer's Companion	Visions Technology in Education	www.writerscomp.com
Write:OnLine	Crick Software	www.cricksoft.com/uk/writeonline

Freeware Text to Speech Software

WordTalk – Free plug in for Microsoft Word –	www.wordtalk.org.uk
Microsoft Reader PC Free - Screen Reader - Windows	www.microsoft.com/reader
Read Please Free - Text-to-Speech Reader - Win 95+	www.readplease.com
ClipTalk Reads anything copied to the clipboard	www.fullmeasure.co.uk