



# Supporting Early Learners

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**Partners in Learning**

**Partners in Learning** believes that children have the best possible chance to reach their full potential when educators and parents work in partnership to provide supportive learning environments.



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## Issue Four: Writing: Making It Better

The literacy topic for this issue is: **Writing: Making It Better**. That is, what can parents do to support the growth and improvement of their child's writing. On page four you will find our sections: Parents Ask, Recommended Resource, and Numeracy.

The writing process is the same for writers young and old. We start with thinking about a topic and gathering ideas and information. Next, we decide how to organize our thoughts and present our writing. It might be a list, diagram, paragraph, chart, label or a sentence to go with a picture or drawing. Then we start getting our thoughts down on paper as a first copy or draft. Often this is as far as early learners go with their writing. As children develop and mature they can be encouraged to improve their writing by revising, editing, and proofreading. Early learners grow as writers when they have many opportunities, much encouragement, and one on one support. In this way children become better writers every time they write. We believe this is best done through 'gentle guidance.' We use the term 'gentle guidance' to remind ourselves that it is important to set realistic expectations and acknowledge that writing is hard work and improvement is made in small steps. We need to be mindful that children at this age can only stay with a difficult task for a short period of time. Don't try to correct everything all at once as this usually overwhelms and discourages children from wanting to write. More importantly, help them to see themselves as authors and adopt an attitude that learning to write is a work in progress. Two of the most powerful tools to support 'gentle guidance' are:

- making reading and writing connections; that is, pointing out to your child what authors do in books
- talking and writing together throughout the writing process

## Making Reading and Writing Connections:

The reading and writing connection is powerful for young children as they become increasingly aware of what good writers do. For instance, parents can draw attention to effective sentence and story structures, the use of punctuation, and how words can be used to make writing more interesting.

- Beginning readers will notice that words are separated by white spaces. When parents discuss this with their child they can remind them about spacing between words when they start to write.
- You can point out punctuation marks and demonstrate how they are used to help read with fluency and expression. Beginning writers are quick to start using capitals at the beginning of sentences, capitals for names of places and people, and a period, exclamation mark, or question mark at the end of sentences.
- Children who hear and read well written stories with correct grammar and interesting sentence and story structures develop a sense of what sounds right. They naturally incorporate this into their own writing. When reading their stories out loud to you, they will recognize that something is wrong. You can support this by discussing what change would make it sound even better.
- You can help your child develop a sense of story structure by reviewing what happened at the beginning of the story, in the middle, and the end. Talk about what the problem was in the story and how it was solved, the characters and how they interacted, and the setting. When your child is writing their own story remind them of these elements.
- The process from invented spelling to conventional spelling is often a concern for parents. The best way to encourage conventional or correct spelling of words is through reading. Every time a child sees a word spelled correctly the visual image of that word is imprinted in their memory. This leads to either being able to spell the word correctly or recognition that their spelling needs correcting.
- Reading to children allows them to hear and learn sophisticated vocabulary that they can use in their writing. Children respond well to searching for new words when it is approached in a game like manner. We have had success with a game we call, 'Going on a Word Hunt.' Start with a basic word such as *walking* and hunt for related words or phrases such as: *hobbling, stomping, marching, parading, and skipping*. Each time you play the game, choose a new word. Over time you will be amazed at how your child's vocabulary expands.
- Read a descriptive passage to your child and have them close their eyes and try making a picture in their mind. Explain to your child that adding details and interesting words are tools that authors use to help readers create better mind pictures. You can encourage your child to add colour, size, shape, or feeling words so that their sentences are more descriptive and make better mind pictures. For example: "See my house." might become "See my blue house with the pretty flowers in the garden."

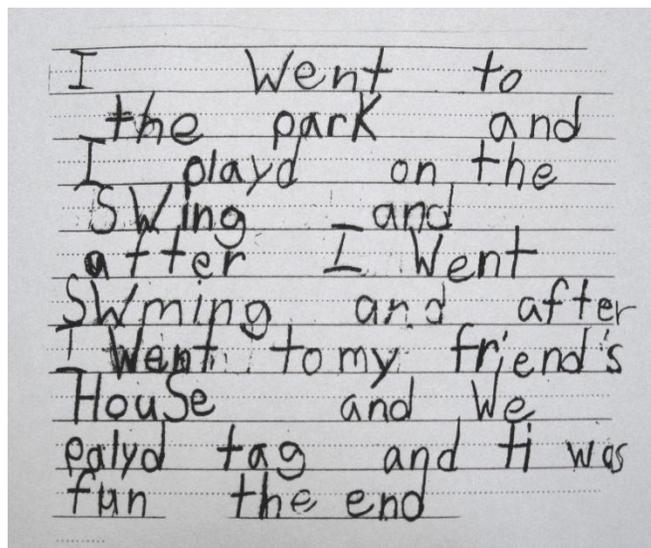
## Talking and Writing Together Throughout the Writing Process

- Thinking about a topic and gathering ideas and information:
  - prewriting talk stimulates and provides what your child needs to draw on so they can come up with something to write about
  - talk about the topic, learn about the subject, make a list of ideas, use a picture as a springboard for discussing what your child will write, draw a web or diagram of ideas or facts
- Organization:
  - a paragraph that tells a story needs a beginning, middle, and end
  - a paragraph that shares information needs a main idea and supporting detail sentences
  - lists, diagrams, charts, poems, drawings with labels, or sentences are possibilities

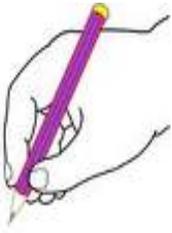
- Drafting and some tips if you and your child are both doing the writing:
  - add a dot where a detail or descriptive word could be added. You or your child can do this as another way of writing together
  - use words such as *and*, *but*, *then*, *now*, and *so* to teach your child how to take two very short sentences and make them into a longer and more interesting sentence
  - after a simple sentence suggest adding a second sentence to provide further explanation or information
- Revising and editing
  - young learners have the mindset that a first copy or draft is a final copy and may or may not be willing to consider changes
  - computers can make this stage easier and be an opportunity to learn keyboarding skills and options such as a spellchecker
  - encourage your child to ask themselves the following types of questions: Is this a good sentence? Do I want to leave anything out? Do I want to add anything? Do I want to change the order of my sentences? Could I use a more interesting word?
- Proofreading
  - this means checking for spelling, punctuation and grammar
  - this step is usually a final step but efficient writers proofread as they write and then again after making a final copy for sharing
- Publishing or Sharing
  - family sharing is an opportunity to have your child's writing honoured and celebrated
  - writing can be illustrated and collected in booklets for rereading and sharing
  - consider creating a desktop folder just for your child's collection of writing
  - see our recommended resource on the next page

This is an example of early learner writing. Using 'gentle guidance' and word processing a finished copy might end up looking like:

**I went to the park and played on the swing. After I went swimming and then I went to my friend's house. We played tag and it was fun.**



## Parents Ask: Is pencil grip important?



We feel it is just as easy to learn the right way as the wrong way. So, why not do it the right way from the beginning. This traditional 'pinch' grip has a number of advantages. It allows for the most flexibility, agility, and coordination of the fingers. This, in turn, improves the quality of your child's drawing and printing efforts. It is also a grip that helps prevent finger fatigue which becomes important as they need to print or write more. Once your child has established and used a particular grip over a long period of time it is virtually impossible to change their grip.

### Recommended Resource: [www.meddybemps.com](http://www.meddybemps.com)

There is a wealth of information on this website for parents. Starting with the **Home** page click on **Parents Guide** and then click on **Writing**. Sites that are interesting for children who want to publish and share to a wide audience can check out [www.ccira.org](http://www.ccira.org) and [www.cla.us](http://www.cla.us) which are sites that offer young writer contests and sharing opportunities.

### Numeracy: Patterns

Shapes, colours, designs, and groups of numbers that repeat over and over are called patterns. The shortest string of elements that repeat is called a core pattern. It is from a core pattern that we are able to predict the sequence and continue the pattern. Patterns are everywhere in every day life. As children learn to observe patterns and have opportunities to play or experiment with patterns they develop strategies to make logical predictions and generalizations. This is a skill that is foundational to discovering and seeing patterns within our number system.

- The first step is to **point out** patterns to your child.
- After a while see if your child can **recognize or identify** patterns on the wallpaper, in the tiles on the floor, on the rug, on material and clothing, and in nature.
- Talk to your child about what the pattern is so they can begin to **verbalize or describe** the particular traits of a pattern:

*big, big, small* and then repeated  
*yellow, brown, green* and then repeated  
*circle, square, rectangle, triangle* and then repeated

- Next have your child **create** a pattern and describe what the pattern is.
- Ask your child to **recreate** the same pattern again using different items or recreate a pattern you have made.
- Have your child **extend** a pattern. For instance:

*yellow, brown, green* might become *yellow brown, green red* and then repeated

### Other ways to promote thinking about patterns are to ask your child:

- Can you make a pattern using: your crayons, blocks, toothpicks, coins?
- Can you sing a pattern, clap a pattern, snap and clap a pattern, dance a pattern, use a musical instrument and make a pattern?
- Can you make a pattern using smarties to decorate these cookies?
- Can you identify patterns in repeating events such as the days of the week, hours on a clock, mealtimes?