



Queen Eleanor's CofE Junior School

**Writing at Home
A Guide For Parents**

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How can I help with writing at home?

The basis of all good writing is good talk. Writing depends on knowing lots of words and being able to join them together in interesting ways.

- Provide a place for your child to write. The area should be an area that is quiet and well lit. Stock the "writing centre" with supplies such as paper, pencils and crayons. You can also gather family photos and magazines in the centre that can be used as story starters.
- Have an exciting selection of writing materials available e.g. a range of pencils, pens, coloured crayons, writing icing and writing soaps for bath time.
- Read, read, read! The best activity to improve writing is reading. If your child reads good books, they will be a better writer. Reading exposes children to general vocabulary, word study and content-specific vocabulary. Through reading, children see a variety of authors' techniques that they can use in their own writing.
- Encourage your child to keep a reflective journal at special times such as holidays or during difficult periods in their lives. This is excellent writing practice, as well as a good outlet for venting feelings. Encourage your child to write about things that happen at home and school. This reflective journal can be used to develop the "senses" of writing. Have your child write about what he saw, heard or felt on a trip or adventure. Provide experiences in your community that will interest your child and spark her writing. Especially encourage your child to write about personal feelings — pleasures as well as disappointments. When reading your child's journal (only if your child invites you to, of course), share your own feelings and ideas paired with positive feedback about your child's writing.
- Provide authentic writing opportunities for your child. Have your child write his own thank-you notes, party invitations and letters to family. Let your child make the grocery list. Finding a pen pal for your child would make writing "real." Helping children make the connection between writing and the "real" world will increase an interest in writing.
- Be a writing role model. Make sure your child sees you as a writer. Point out times that you use writing to communicate with others. Discuss authentic writing in the community such as articles and letters in the newspaper, on billboards or in written advertisements. Discuss the purpose of the writing and the target audience. When your child writes, you should write. You can schedule a day of the week that you will turn off the television and share your writing.
- Praise your child for trying and don't dwell on mistakes. Focus on content and enjoyment of writing for fun and for purpose.

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How can I help with Creative Writing?

Creative Writing Homework encourages children to use the skills they have learnt in class, this could be punctuation, grammar or the style of writing. Discussing the task is always a great start. It is common for children to find the ideas the hardest part of this homework. Often giving them a starting point or idea will get them interested in what they are doing. Making the work fun is important. Discuss what could be written together – create a short plan or simple plot it out together, then allow your child time to write it independently. What they produce does not have to be perfect or finished. Many children spend far too long striving for perfection – it is about quality not quantity. Your child's teacher knows what they can produce in the time they are given and knows what to expect. Your child should also be aware of what is expected of them from their time working in class. Encourage your child to read through what they have written to check it all makes sense, and that they have not made unnecessary spelling errors. Often reading it aloud, will make a huge difference to the quality of your child's writing. When they are finished, praise them for their hard work and point out the parts that you liked the best. If there is something you think they need to improve, point this out and work together to improve it, but don't exceed the time limit given by the teacher.

There are many ways to help with writing and each child is working at a different stage throughout their time at QE. Here are some helpful tips, whatever level or ability your child is working at:

Less Confident Writers

- Encourage children to look at print on road signs, food packets, in books, magazines and catalogues.
- Go to the library and read favourite books over and over again. Enjoy them.
- Try fun activities that strengthen your child's hand e.g. cutting, painting, squeezing playdough, picking up small things with tweezers and pegs.
- Use magnetic letters and make small words together. Leave a message on the fridge door and encourage your child to reply.
- Make up a story together about one of their toys. You write the story as they say the words. Make up a little booklet.
- Take photos and use the pictures in the book.
- Buy stickers of a favourite TV programme or book. Make your own little book about it.
- Let your child write their own Christmas cards, thank you letters, cards or emails to friends or relatives, invitations to a party, or a list of things they need to take on holiday.
- Cut up letters from magazines for children to make their names and short sentences.

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- Make handwriting interesting – practise drawing letters in sand, water, or paint, use whiteboards, playdough, pastry or shaving foam.

More Confident Writers

- Continue talking about experiences. This remains the key to good writing. Talk about what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched with as many details as possible.
- Play word-building games to develop descriptive vocabulary such as Boggle, Scrabble, Guess Who, 'What am I?' (one person thinks of something to describe. They give clues by describing it, without saying its name. Other players have to guess what it is with as few clues as possible.)
- Create silly sentences or tongue twisters using alliteration (a group of words that all begin with the same sound) e.g. Sad Sid slipped on Sam's salad sandwich. Encourage your child to rehearse their sentence out loud before they write it down. Also encourage children to punctuate their sentences with a full-stop and capital letter.
- Celebrate what the writing says first of all rather than focusing on errors. If a tricky word has been used in an interesting way, this should be praised even if it is spelled wrongly. Remember, it is difficult to get everything right when you are learning!
- Let children write part of shopping lists and then let them be responsible for carrying the list and finding certain items.
- After making a cake, doing a craft activity or playing a game, challenge children to write instructions for someone else to follow.
- Make up fun ways to remember how to spell difficult words e.g. Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants = because, what has a hat, when has a hen. Play 'I Spy' and 'Hangman' which encourage use of sounds and spellings.
- Encourage your child to learn weekly spellings and phonic group spellings. Write the spelling in sentences with accurate punctuation and practise high frequency words and handwriting.
- Also ensure your child completes homework on time, take an interest in what they are doing, and praise effort.

Confident Writers

- Help your child write a letter to their favourite author. Details can be found on the internet.
- As with early writers be aware of occasions when children can be involved in writing – shopping lists, cards, phone messages, notes to friends, invitations to family occasions, emailing friends, blogging, texting (be aware of e-safety).
- Write information pages or booklets about a hobby or something they find interesting e.g. dinosaurs, class topics, sports stars etc. Illustrate and label. Encourage use of paragraphs for blocks of information. Write postcards from

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holidays and record holiday events in a diary that can be shared with friends or family.

- Provide your child with a comfortable place to work and exciting writing materials. A dictionary or spell check on a computer would also be useful.
- Let your child see you being a model writer but also let them see that you are not perfect! Checking, making changes and editing what you write are a natural part of writing.
- After your child has produced written homework ask them to proof read their work for accuracy. After they have done this, have a look at the piece yourself. Ask your child what his/her writing targets are from time to time and help them work specifically on these.
- Read books to, and with, them that are at a higher level than their own reading to expose them to ambitious vocabulary and complex sentence structure.

Encouraging Reluctant Writers

If your child has barriers towards writing, or low self-esteem as a writer, praising and valuing your child's writing is very important. Your child may need support when they write and may need you to talk through their ideas first and help with composing and structure. All children may need help with ideas to write-give them a starting point or a character/setting when story writing and challenge them to come up with an idea around this. Often it's not having an idea which is daunting – or looking at a blank page. Making the page smaller or setting a target point can help as well.

Help your child go over problem spellings. It is extremely frustrating for children to have to battle with spelling and handwriting when they want to get their ideas down on paper. Knowing high frequency spellings will aid the flow of writing and enable the use of a vocabulary rich language. (Consider being trapped into writing 'big' when you really wanted to write 'enormous'). Encourage children to sound out and have a go at more tricky words before giving them the spellings – checking spellings is a good editing process which can be encouraged after the child has put their ideas onto paper.

Remember that writing does not have to be lengthy or boring! Writing for real purposes is more meaningful and rewarding for children and creates a fun and interesting way for children to develop their writing skills. Quality is always better than quantity. Most importantly: have fun learning together! Writing should be fun and interesting, not a weekly chore.

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Editing and Improving

- This is an essential part of writing. There are several aspects to this that are taught in class and can be used at home to improve writing, or simply as a check for Creative Writing homework.

1. Step one: PRAISE

Adult and child re-read the writing aloud which can help the child spot errors such as when things don't sound right or words/phrases are repeat. This helps the child to spot where ideas could be expressed more creatively or where different choices could be made - the child must see themselves as a writer with an audience.

The adult will then praise specific elements explaining why they work well using general terms (not teacher speak), it is good to explain WHY these elements are good and what you liked about them. Lots of this is needed so the child does not become discouraged.

2. Step two: IMPROVE

One or two elements of the writing are then focussed on, discussed and improved. This could be done using a computer, writing on the actual work, in the book or writing on a copy. It is essential that the CHILD writes and suggests the improvements, although there can be adult input, so they take ownership of their work.

When working on improvements, it could be simply to add in more adjectives, change a specific word that has been repeated or could be improved, adding a wider variety of punctuation, addressing a confusion in meaning, shortening or lengthening a sentence or just changing the order of words. The adult needs to prompt the child to consider HOW they can improve their work – use the success criteria from the homework as a guide. The child can then rewrite the improved sentence and reread the passage including the improvements to see the effect it has made on the whole text.

EXAMPLE:

He scrated his head hardly as he decided to flood the local school thinking what terrorr the chilren are going to be ing.

What I would do:

- I would praise the attempt at an adverb, choice of adverb.
- Then ask child how it could be improved - is there anything that doesn't make sense?
- Would probably identify 'ing' but other spellings would not be a focus.
- Would look at the adverb choice - improve this and rewrite.
- Then look at the 'are' and discuss this.
- I would ask the child to rewrite the sentence in either past or present tense, changing the adverb choice discussed earlier.

It may not look like a lot of improvement but it's the discussion that makes the difference!

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3. Step three: PLAN

This is a step normally taken in school, but could be completed at home as well. The adult and child work together to plan the next stage of the writing/what they would look closely at when writing independently again.

When working on this in class children are often given one focus area to look at rather than looking at their work as a whole – although this increases as they move up the school. Spelling is not normally a focus unless there is a specific rule (which has been learnt) that they are consistently making mistakes with. Generally, as long as the children are attempting to apply rules or phonics knowledge for unfamiliar words we would not expect children to correct spellings. Words the children should know or words where they have learnt the rule could be underlined and you could ask the child to check it using their spelling knowledge.