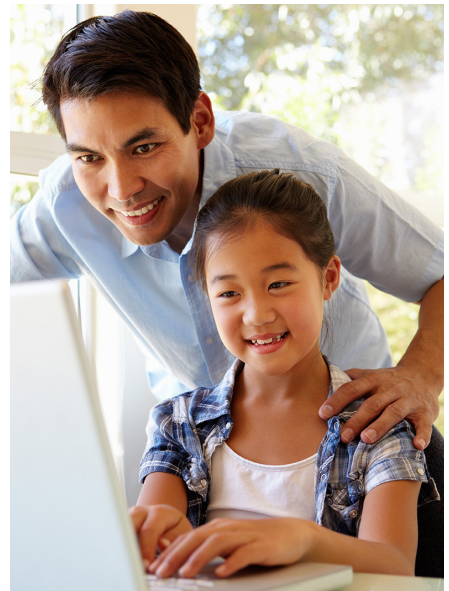


# Tips for Supporting Elementary Writing Skills at Home

Regional Educational  
Laboratory Mid-Atlantic

*From the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES*

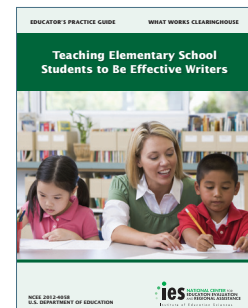


## Three tips for supporting writing skills at home

1. Help children use the writing process for a variety of purposes.
2. Help children practice handwriting, spelling, typing, and word processing.
3. Provide a supportive environment that encourages children to write daily.

This guide helps families and caregivers carry out recommended practices described in the What Works Clearinghouse educator's practice guide, *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers*.<sup>i</sup>

Download a free copy of the practice guide at:  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/17>



<sup>i</sup>The WWC develops Practice Guides with an expert panel, combining the panel's expertise with the findings of rigorous research to produce specific recommendations. The evidence supporting the practice guide recommendations comes from studies examining interventions in school-based settings. Therefore, although the practices described in the tips might be effective in home settings, the studies did not involve parents or caregivers using these practices at home.

Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide* (NCEE 2012-4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

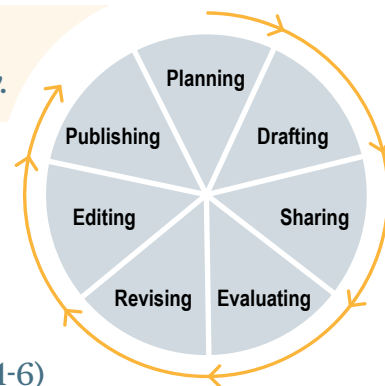
## 1. Help children use the writing process for a variety of purposes.

*Writers need to think carefully about the purpose for writing, plan what to say, plan how to say it, and understand what the reader needs to know.*





Help children use appropriate strategies during the writing process. You can help them figure out where they are in the writing process and choose a strategy for that stage.<sup>1</sup>

For example, you might encourage them to. . .

- **Plan** by picking something to write about and brainstorming. (Grades 1-6)
- **Share** by reading their writing to family members at home. (Grades K-6)
- **Edit** by checking for proper capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. (Grades 2-6)



Help children understand the different purposes of writing and how to write effectively for those purposes. Ask them what they are trying to accomplish with their writing (see examples). Before they begin to write, you can use the tips below to help guide their writing.

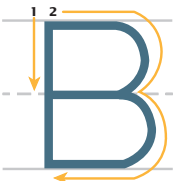


Examples of writing purposes		Tips to share with children	
<b>Describe</b> something in vivid detail			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• descriptions of people, places, or events</li><li>• nature writing</li></ul>	Prompt them to use the five senses, as applicable, to describe something.	
<b>Narrate</b> a story of an experience or event while holding the reader's interest			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• diaries</li><li>• short stories</li><li>• eyewitness accounts</li></ul>	Consider asking them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When and where does the story take place?</li><li>• Who are the main characters and what do they want?</li><li>• What happens when the main characters try to do it?</li><li>• How does the story end?</li></ul>	
<b>Inform</b> to share previously learned information or provide new information			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• instructions or directions</li><li>• letters</li><li>• newspaper articles</li></ul>	Help them organize their thinking around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What they know</li><li>• What they want to know</li><li>• What they learned</li></ul>	
<b>Persuade</b> the reader to take a specific action or believe a point of view is valid			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• persuasive essays</li><li>• book or movie reviews</li></ul>	Encourage them to do the following as they write: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell what they believe in a topic sentence</li><li>• Provide three or more reasons</li><li>• End with a strong conclusion</li><li>• Examine to make sure they have all three parts</li></ul>	

<sup>1</sup> See Table 3 on [page 16 of the full practice guide](#) for more examples of writing strategies at different stages of the writing process.

## 2. Help children practice handwriting, spelling, typing, and word processing.

*Handwriting and spelling are basic writing skills that children must draw upon to translate their ideas into writing. Children also use typing and word processing skills when composing electronically.*

- Support very young writers to hold a pencil correctly and form letters.
- Help children to spell words correctly, such as words from children's spelling lists.
- Support children to learn to type and use a word processor.

Skill	Suggested activities	Change it up
<b>Handwriting</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Very young writers can practice writing letters from memory or by copying handwriting-practice diagrams.</li><li>• Children should also apply their handwriting skills in sentences.</li></ul>	Children can practice writing letters with sidewalk chalk outside, on a whiteboard, or using watercolor or finger paints
<b>Spelling<sup>2</sup></b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make flashcards from current or old spelling lists to reinforce learning.</li><li>• Have children spell words orally and on paper.</li><li>• Help children learn to use a dictionary (book or online).</li></ul>	<p>Children can bounce a ball or jump for each letter they say as they spell a word.</p> <p>You can help children make personal dictionaries with words they have previously misspelled. They can add to their dictionary as they write and use new words.</p>
<b>Typing and Word Processing</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you have a computer available, show children how to use a typing instructional tool or word processing software. Practice opening and saving files, adding, moving, and deleting text.</li><li>• Older children can also learn to use the thesaurus function.</li></ul>	Children can practice typing using an online typing game.

<sup>2</sup> See Table 6 on [page 29 of the full practice guide](#) for examples of grade-specific ways to help children develop their spelling skills.





### 3. Provide a supportive environment that encourages children to write daily.

*Conveying the message that writing is valued can help children become more engaged and motivated to write. Having dedicated time to practice writing can help children gain confidence in their writing abilities and help them practice their skills.*

You can help children be engaged in writing and excited about what they write.

Tips for engaging children in writing		Activities
	Allow children to choose what to write about.	Encourage children to keep a notebook to record potential topics, such as memories, pets, or favorite games or foods.
	Write and share examples of your writing.	Write something together, such as a letter to a friend, an email, a birthday greeting or get well message, or a thank you note.  Write a review for a restaurant from where you ordered takeout and ask your child to add something they liked or disliked.
	Display or share children's writing.	Hang children's writing on the fridge or a wall at home or share it with friends and family through social media, email, or the mail.

You can provide daily opportunities for children to practice writing in lots of ways at home.

Examples of ways children can practice writing		Skill emphasized
	Create grocery lists or weekly meal plans	Planning and organizing; spelling
	Write letters to friends, a relative, a teacher, or the local newspaper	Sharing writing; writing for a specific audience
	Describe their artwork with a caption or story	Describing or narrating a thing or event
	Review a book, movie, or game	Persuading or expressing an opinion