

On Teaching Writing

I know that my boys can get downright teary at the thought of having to write a story or report. I've had to really work to get them comfortable with more simple writing tasks in order to build their confidence.

One of the best things I ever did with my oldest son was to have him write in a journal for 10 or 15 minutes a day. He could write about whatever he wanted--maybe it was what he did the day before, something he was looking forward to, or just a topic that he felt strongly about. Every few days I would read through his entries and respond to them. I wasn't grading him, but just replying back to what he had written. Sometimes I would also leave him a reminder to remember to capitalize or punctuate something, but really my main concern was just to keep him writing.

Another approach that works with many kids is blogging. Now, I would only recommend allowing your child to blog if you are willing to closely supervise his blogging and are willing to learn about the blog format so that you can ensure that he is blogging safely, but blogging truly is a wonderful way to get kids writing. Some simply post Q & A type entries, others use it as a journal or a way to keep in touch with grandparents, some have fun making "online" friends, while others post more in-depth writings or photos. If you're interested in learning more about kids and blogging, check out [this entry](#) on the Homeschool Blogger Front Porch.

Writing will play a different role in each person's life. For some it might be a way to earn a living, for others it might be a skill they need to manage their tasks at work or home, and for some it might mostly be for pleasure, but obviously we want to equip our children to be able to handle whatever life throws their way.

Enjoy every minute!

~Nancy Carter

In my house, writing assignments induced complaints, bad attitudes, and even tears. I almost killed the love of learning in the very craft I am most comfortable in myself. So things had to change. I had to get creative and try new things, and some of those really worked. I have found over the years that the most effective have been three things: dictation, contests, and other people.

Dictation: For younger elementary ages, even if they could actually form letters on paper proficiently, they had a hard time getting ideas from their head, down their arm, and out their pencils onto the paper. So instead, I had them dictate to me whatever it was they were to write about, and I'd ask appropriate questions along the way, such as, "How did you feel? What did you see? What happened next?" I would then write or type it as they spoke and at the end they would read back to me (or if very young, I would read back to them) their masterpiece. This not only freed up their mind to think, they enjoyed doing it, increased their vocabulary, and were proud of their finished product. To answer your unasked question, yes, I still had them physically write. But I would separate the writing process from penmanship. Requiring both at a young age

will tend to frustrate both of you. So, for penmanship, we would copy Bible verses or complete a daily workbook page, and for writing, they would dictate to me until they were old enough to get a few paragraphs down by themselves without much difficulty. Hang on moms, it does come to pass.

Contests: Another great way to inspire children to write is to give them a purpose for writing. Contests seemed to do the trick. They entered local library poetry contests, newspaper sponsored Father's Day contests, local bookstore writing contests. Anything to get them to write with a reward attached to it seemed to inspire greatness from them. Look in your community for such opportunities. You will both be proud of the effort, and of course, they love the prizes!

Other People: When the children were young, we met with other homeschool friends for writing class and allowed the children play time after class. Play can be a good motivator. As the children have gotten older, it has been helpful occasionally having them under the tutelage or requirement of other teachers (homeschool co-op classes, presentation days, etc.). They seem to write better with less pain (on your part) when it is done for someone else.

Don't be afraid to try new things, or even scale down a bit on your requirements. Pray continually, and God will be faithful to show you the "write" way for each child.

~Deborah Wuehler

It helps to think of writing in two categories: 1) mechanics of writing, and 2) original writing.

Mechanics of writing are the techniques you use for writing but not for speaking. That means skills like punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, spelling, proofing, and readable penmanship. You give practice on those with copying and dictation lessons, and through reading. With younger children these mechanics lessons should dominate. But don't squelch original writing when children want to do it. Accept and enjoy their writing without correcting the mechanics at that time.

Later, when children are fairly good at the mechanics, you can work more on original writing. This includes a wide range of types. Don't set children down with an empty head and empty paper and ask for an original story. Those writing assignments with your science and history lessons work better. Children have had the lesson and something is in their heads. Then they can explain, describe, summarize, or whatever they are asked to do--maybe one sentence or maybe a two-page essay, depending on age and ability. You don't need a separate "writing" class if children write in their other studies. With Bible learning, children have written the good Samaritan story from the viewpoint of the donkey and the Flood story from the viewpoint of Shem's wife. They first have something in their head, then the writing is doable.

Some curricula try to inspire with a picture to write about or the beginning of a story to finish, or other techniques. You can use what works, and you can use them sporadically. You don't need full courses in these. Full courses in a content subject are more valuable. View writing as a skill, and use it in all content subjects.

(At advanced levels and college, writing can be a content subject for learning fiction writing, research writing, or any good writing techniques.)

~Ruth Beechick

Actually, my thoughts on inspiring kids to write are pretty simple:

1. *Don't use writing as a punishment.*
"If you don't clean your room, you'll have to write a paper on why cleanliness is next to Godliness."
You don't want to associate writing with punishment.
2. *Make writing fun.* Have them write about things that interest them. Let boys write about wars, sword fights, and bloodshed. Have your girls write skits about dolls, tea parties, and feelings.
3. *If they cry while writing . . . take a break for a while.*

Don't believe the lie that says everyone needs to be able to write poetry and novel-length papers or they won't lead productive lives. Some people never learn to write super well . . . and that's OK.

I never learned to write well . . . and I'm a writer.

There's just too much pressure on parents that all our kids have to master everything. The truth is they won't. And like I often say, that's OK.

Thar she blows!!! Gotta run.

Be Real,
Todd Wilson, The Familyman

PS -My wife wanted me to let you know that Andrew Pudewa's writing stuff (www.writing-edu.com) has worked great for us. Tell him Todd, the Familyman, sent you!

Biographical Information

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Nancy Carter is happy to call herself a relaxed homeschooler. After years of teaching in the public school system, she cherishes being able to learn together with her own children. She and her husband Tony have three sons and are learning all kinds of new things together on their farm. You can read more of her family's Lessons Learned on the Farm at www.HomeschoolBlogger.com/tn3jcarter or you can email her at tn3jcarter@wildblue.net.

Dr. Ruth Beechick is a lifelong educator who now writes mostly for homeschoolers, whom she sees as bright lights in these days before Christ returns. Dr. Ruth Beechick has taught hundreds of people to read, Her own newest books are World History Made Simple: Matching History with the Bible (www.HomeschoolingBooks.com or 1-800-421-6645. and A Biblical Home Education.

Todd Wilson, “The Familyman,” author of Lies Homeschooling Moms Believe, Help! I’m Married to a Homeschooling Mom, and The Official Book of Homeschooling Cartoons, is a dad, writer, conference speaker, and former pastor. Todd’s humor and gut-honest realness have made him a favorite speaker at homeschool conventions across the country and a guest on Focus on the Family. Todd and his wife Debbie homeschool their eight children in northern Indiana when they’re not traveling around the country encouraging moms and dads. You can visit Familyman Ministries at www.familymanweb.com.

Deborah Wuehler is the senior editor for The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine. She resides in Roseville, California, with her husband Richard. They are the parents of eight children: three teenagers, three elementary, a preschooler and a baby. They have been homeschooling since the birth of their firstborn who is now graduated from high school. Many of her articles can be found on www.Crosswalk.com, and many other homeschooling sites. She is a group leader in her local homeschooling support organization and she loves digging for buried treasure in the Word, reading, writing, homeschooling, and dark chocolate! Email her at senioreditor@TheHomeschoolMagazine.com.