

Legos Don't Build Themselves, You Know!

Kim Kautzer

Recently, when a missionary friend was visiting from Japan, I offered to keep his son for a day to free him up for some appointments. Since Rees was alone, I invited my grandson Eli over as a playmate, hauled out a huge crate of Legos, and set the boys loose. I could barely pull them away to eat a hasty lunch before Rees declared, "Can I go back upstairs now? Legos don't build themselves, you know!"

So what does this little anecdote have to do with writing? Simply put, just as a Lego vehicle can't take shape without the intentional efforts of a builder, your child cannot learn to write without intentional effort from you.

At conferences and conventions, we often hear parents ask, "How much time does this writing program require of ME?"

We're a busy bunch, so believe me when I tell you I understand what it's like to homeschool while trying to juggle laundry, meal preparation, ministry obligations, and a social calendar. But I also learned during my 15 years of homeschooling that certain subjects just don't teach themselves, and writing is one of them.

Wisdom from Cathy Duffy

In an article for the *Home Educating Family*, Cathy Duffy, author of *100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum* says, "Many of us have an unfortunate tendency to rely on the textbook to teach the subject." She adds:

Don't rely on workbook exercises to teach young people how to write effectively, or you are likely to be disappointed. Writing needs to be an interactive, shared process. That will not happen unless we make development of writing skills a priority in junior and senior high children. This means that we take extra time and seek out the resources and assistance we need to make that happen.¹

Much as we wish it weren't so, kids don't learn to write by osmosis. They need your instruction, your guidance, and your feedback. Along with that, be consistent. Just as they can't learn to write unless they are taught, they won't learn to write if you only give a writing assignment now and then.

Tips for Teaching Writing

- Choose a writing program that offers strong parent support through lesson plans, schedules, teaching and editing tools, checklists, and objective grading forms. When you feel equipped, it's so much easier to explain a new concept or offer suggestions!
- Make teaching writing a regular part of your school week. With littler ones, this may mean a daily investment of sitting together to practice new skills. Older students may not

need you to sit with them through every stroke of the pen, but definitely set aside time to teach or review concepts and give constructive input.

- Offer helpful and consistent feedback. An arbitrary grade based on feelings (“This *feels* like a B+”) won’t help your child become a better writer. Instead, use objective checklists to help you pinpoint specific areas to improve.
- Praise the things they do well. An approving tone and encouraging words can go a long way toward soothing the sting of a critical comment. Make sure you’re noting things such as strong topic sentences, well-developed arguments, and concrete word choices and not simply commenting on mistakes.

Though we’re not all strong or confident writers, we can’t let that keep us from investing in our children’s writing. Remember: writing doesn’t teach itself. Our kids need us. Really! And today, more than ever, there are tools at our fingertips to help each of us teach successfully!

Biographical Information

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Kim Kautzer, veteran homeschooler and author, loves to help parents feel more confident about teaching writing. She is the co-author of [WriteShop](#), honored as one of Cathy Duffy’s 100 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum. After 15 years of homeschooling, Kim and her husband Jim graduated all three of their children. The couple makes their home in Southern California, where they enjoy their empty nest and their six amazing grandchildren. You may reach Kim at kim@writeshop.com.

¹ Duffy, Cathy. “Write Now!” *The Home Educating Family* Fall 2007: 4-6.