

## Your Kids CAN Write!

By Karen Lange

Teaching writing can be intimidating, especially if you don't feel like you are a good writer. Here are some tips you can use to encourage your kids to write. Grade school, high school--age doesn't matter; it's never too late to develop good writing habits. A seventy-year-old gentleman I know took some writing courses and got published. You're never too old to learn!

# 1. Read to your kids. Make family reading time a priority, if only once a week. It's a great way to share quality time together. It provides opportunities for discussion. The benefits of exposure to literature are endless. It broadens perspectives and lends to a sense of adventure. We read the Little House series, biographies, carefully chosen classics, and more. I looked for books that were interesting and had relevance to my kids' lives and studies.

I've observed kids for years and can usually tell which ones have been read to and/or are readers. Among other things, they often have imaginations that are more vivid. They have a good sense of what sounds right when writing, because they have been exposed to good literature. Reading, and being read to, opens up a world for kids that they might not experience otherwise.

# 2. Set a good example; let your kids see you writing. Even if the only things you write are letters, lesson plans, and grocery lists, you are still writing! It's important to remember that no matter what we do in life, it is necessary to write and communicate. The better we write, the better we will communicate and vice versa.

Keep writing! The more you do it, the more you improve. My husband is a prime example (and a good sport). When we started in business twenty-some years ago, writing a business letter was not his thing. With practice and a little advice, he now writes a professional letter with very little assistance from the editing department (me!).

# 3. Find writing projects to do together. Writing activities in a curriculum are great, but sometimes they don't spark a student's creativity. How many of us plodded through the required "What I did on my summer vacation"? A group project can be more fun. When it comes to writing, especially for the reluctant writers, fun is the key. Engage kids by finding short, interesting activities to start. Projects can be expanded as their skills develop. Try writing a continuing story, silly poetry, or a family newspaper together. For ideas, I recommend *If You're Trying to Teach Kids to Write, You've Gotta Have This Book!* by Marjorie Frank.

# 4. Illustrate it! Sometimes kids like to draw but don't like to write. Jumpstart imaginations by combining the two. Write a story together, if only a short paragraph, and then let them illustrate it. Find a funny picture, or remove captions from cartoons and have the kids write about it.

# 5. Just let them write. Let the grammar go while they get their ideas on paper. It's hard; I know! But it's important to let them be creative and realize that they can write. Don't hover over them pointing out errors. Keep a balance with the grammar. Yes, it is important, and it has its place in a student's learning plan. Concentrate on the good things they've done first, and then address issues that need work down the road. A gentle and balanced approach will reap big results.

We used to choose a few things that my kids had written to revise and polish. That way, they didn't feel like they had to produce a perfectly penned product every time. My middle son kept notebooks of stories. Most of the stories were composed of one long run-on sentence. Punctuation was non-existent; the spelling was terrible. The stories were good but I cringed when I read them. However, if I had corrected everything, he would not have written at all. So I let him have his writing space, and we worked on things over time. The approach worked; he's an adult now who writes and communicates very well.

Writing is a necessary skill for life. It dovetails with good communication--and you need to communicate in every walk of life. Your kids may not become famous novelists, and that's okay. Be patient, they are works in progress! Help them stretch their writing skills; you'll give them an edge for their future.

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### **Biographical Information**

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