

When Writing Doesn't Come Easily

By Kathy Kuhl

Five possible areas of struggle: handwriting; spelling, mechanics & grammar; composing good, varied sentences; writing a paragraph, story, or essay; and attitude.

For each area the goals are to: _____ and _____

1. Handwriting troubles could come from _____ more slowly, a vision problem, a visual _____ problem or other _____ or a _____ -- problem.

A pediatric _____ therapist (OT) can help.

Special pencils or _____ can help.

Software games such as _____.

Make sure games and other supplements are compatible with handwriting method you or your child's academic therapist are using.

Accommodations for handwriting:

2. Spelling, vocabulary, grammar-all requiring memorization of facts, rules, exceptions.
3. Composing good, varied, sentences.
4. Composition
 - a. Remediation: daily uncorrected _____.
Freewriting. Reading. Copywork. Limiting your corrections.
 - b. Teaching organization methods for composition:
5. Attitude boosters.

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Resources

Understanding Causes of Writing Problems

- Drs. Brock and Fernette Eide. *The Mislabeled Child*. New York: Hyperion, 2006.
- At Understood.org, search “dysgraphia causes.” Several good articles and a chart contrasting dysgraphia and dyspraxia.
- William Van Cleave developed many excellent resources. wvced.com/
- LDonline www.ldonline.org/indepth/writing

Prewriting skills

- If a child cannot or will not write, a pediatric occupational therapist (OT) can help determine if there is problem and/or recommend activities to develop fine motor skills. You can talk to one or request a screening and ask for advice.
- According to one OT, a child is ready to write if they can 1) twiddle their thumbs and 2) turn over a row of pennies. To strengthen fine motor skills, let children use play dough, tweezers, tongs, eyedroppers and a hole punch. Let them string beads, paint, and cut with scissors. (Make sure the scissors work.) Don't forget coloring, which doesn't have to be perfect. Coloring in requires skill and the ability to notice gaps.
- Large crayons, markers, and pencils are easier to use. Occupational therapy tool sites like therapyshoppe.com and Amazon sell many different kinds of pencil grips that slide onto the pencil and may make writing easier. I also like the Twist N Write pencil.

Handwriting Curricula

- Mary D. Benbow, MS, OTR/L. *Loops and Other Groups: A Kinesthetic Writing System*. San Antonio: Therapy Skill Builders (Pearson).
- Jan Olsen. *Handwriting Without Tears* programs for teaching print and cursive, two versions for children, other versions for adults and teens. HWT also provides training workshops in teaching handwriting; see www.LWtears.com
- Diana Hanbury King wrote several excellent books on writing, including *Writing Skills* series.
- iPad apps, such as *Letter School* and *I Write Words*, provide excellent practice, forcing writers to form letters correctly, and making it fun, too. When an occupational or speech therapist prescribes an iPad, some insurance will cover it.

Spelling, Vocabulary, Grammar and Mechanics

- SpellingCity.com You enter your spelling words, and the site creates sentences, games, and drills using them to master spelling and vocabulary. Free!
- Beverly Adams-Gordon. *Spelling Power*. Lynnwood, Washington: Castle-Moyle Books. One book covers all grades. Efficient: 5 minutes or less a day for parent, 10 for student. Multisensory.
- Two curricula that are Orton-Gillingham based (multisensory programs that incorporate the science of reading and teach phonemic awareness, so helpful for many learners), that also produce companion sources in teaching reading:
 - AllAboutSpelling.com from All About Learning Press.
 - *A Reason for Spelling* from aReasonFor.com

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- Sam Burchers, Max Burchers, and Bryan Burchers. *Vocabulary Cartoons: SAT Word Power*. Punta Gorda, Florida: New Monic Books, 1997.
- *Editor in Chief* series (books or software) from Critical Thinking Books and Software
- Kenneth Hodkinson, et. al. *Wordly Wise* vocabulary series. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Visit eps.schoolspecialty.com/ for details.
- Paul R. Erwin. *Winston Grammar*. Battleground, Washington: Precious Memories Educational Resources, 1992. You will need one complete kit, plus a card set and a workbook for each student. www.WinstonGrammar.com or ChristianBook.com
- Don McCabe. Sequential Spelling series.

Writing Programs

- Andrew Pudewa. Institute for Excellence in Writing. www.excellenceinwriting.com
- William Van Cleave, wvced.com created great tools and ideas for teachers, including his masterful *Writing Matters*, great instruction on improving sentence and paragraph skills. Also available on Amazon.
- Julie Bogart. Bravewriter.com offers help to parents teaching writing.
- Two books by the brilliant Diana Hanbury King: *Writing Skills* and the simple but powerful *A Guide to Helping Your Child at Home: Developing Foundational Skills in Reading and Writing*. wvced.com
- Frode Jensen. *Jensen's Format Writing*. Master Book Publishers, 2006. Don't get 1st edition; later editions have examples. DVD supplement of 12 lectures also available.

Writer's Workshop Resources

Ralph Fletcher. *A Writers Notebook: Unlocking the Writer in You*. See also his other books, *How Writers Work: Finding a Process That Works For You* and also *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*. Note this approach develops writing and revising skills—does not address structure, composition, grammar, etc.

Accommodations

First, get help learning what accessibility tools are already on your computer or tablet. Joan Green has lots of free help at her site, innovativespeech.com WordQ software. As you type, WordQ predicts your next word and lets you choose from a list. It reads each word aloud as you finish it, then reads the whole sentence when you type a period. It also helps you choose among homophones and helps with proofreading. Designed for folks with learning disabilities. WordQ is easier to train to your student's voice than Dragon, below, but more expensive. Free 30 day trial from quillsoft.ca/ Dragon Naturally Speaking also takes dictation from you or your student. Nuance.com. Spelling dictionaries are available from many publishers, such as *My Word Book*, *Words I Use When I Write*, etc. (A spelling dictionary has no definitions, just word lists.)

Miscellaneous

Good writer handbooks to keep on your student's desk: www.thewritesource.com Mannix, Darlene. *Writing Skills Activities for Special Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. For those with more severe needs.