



# Valley Collaborative

## Literacy Blog

April 7, 2020

### “How can I support my student’s writing development at home?”

Writing supports your student’s learning across all subjects. In the early grades, we consider children as “learning to write,” while in the later grades, students are “writing to learn.” Writing is important through all grades K-12, and especially in post-secondary schooling and the working world. In response to the National Association of Colleges and Employers 2019 Job Outlook Survey, [82% of respondents](#) said they wanted to see written



communication skills on a candidate’s resume. Strong skills in writing will not only benefit your student’s creativity, empathy, executive functioning, emotional development and self-identity, but also their career and job security.

Writing is completed in a process that can look as different as the individuals writing. It is important to stress to students that writers do not sit down and complete a piece start to finish; a completed piece of writing is the result of a process of steps. While many of the steps in the process of writing instruction are tackled in the classroom, the home is a terrific place to practice some essential early steps of writing. Try to help your student with engagement and generating ideas through collaborative activities in the home. These goals will help students take independence over their writing, increase their writing volume, and develop an identity as a writer<sup>1</sup>. Here are some recommended activities based on grade levels, but feel free to use any of these activities regardless of the grade.

#### **Elementary**

**Composing with Pictures-** In the early grades, the motor act of writing can be a barrier for younger students to create content. Composing with pictures can be a good way to engage young writers without worrying about handwriting. Ask your student to tell you a story using pictures. Talk to them as they are drawing. Ask questions: *What happened first? Then what? How did he/she/they react!* Get your student talking as they create a story with pictures. If

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<sup>1</sup> Serravallo, J. (2017). *The writing strategies book: Your everything guide to developing skilled writers with 300 strategies*.

possible, ask your student to retell the story to someone else in the house to reinforce the activity. You may even scribe the story they tell you and ask them to read it back.

**Important People-** List all the people in your life with whom you have important memories. You can include a drawing or a picture of that person. List the memories you have with each person. Choose the clearest memory in your mind and try writing it.<sup>2</sup>

**Letters-** Writing letters during this time may be therapeutic as much as it is good practice. Think of those who you regularly see and miss, then write and send a friendly letter to check-in and share what they have been up to. This could be a teacher at school, dance teacher, basketball coach, mentor, family member, etc.

**Story Starters/Writing Prompts-** With a quick Google search, you can find ample resources for writing ideas. These can be really fun and easily adaptable towards students' interests (i.e. *What would you do if you got trapped in your Minecraft world?*). If the opportunity is there to participate in the writing prompts with your child, definitely do this and share your thought process and writing piece--this makes writing that much more meaningful and powerful!

**Writing new endings/next story or chapter of a book-** Connect what your student is reading (this can be a read-aloud or something independent) and take on the creative challenge to either write a new ending, or the next story or chapter. Help them to keep the same perspective and writing craft of the author: do this by reminding them to observe, think and then write using *thoughts, actions, dialogue, and feelings* in a similar way that the author did.

## **Middle School**

**Territories-** Often writers are told to "write what you know." In middle school, students start to form an identity. They have preferences, passions, dislikes, hobbies, memories -- all potential writing material. Brainstorm topics with your student. These can be anything: food, music, movies, memories, fears, accomplishments, quirks, beloved things...anything. Underneath the topic, have your student list specific things (example: fears, *spiders, heights, hang nails*; accomplishments, *Fortnite win, scoring a goal in hockey, gymnastics medal*). Reinforce to your student that these territories remind them who they are, and provide material when they say, "I don't know what to write about."

**Journaling-** Middle school is an important time to help your student realize and strengthen their self-identity. Encouraging your student to keep a journal is a great way for your student to track their emotions, notice changes, identify personality trends, and reflect. One strategy for writing a journal is to summarize the day. Your student can summarize their day by using sensory language: *sight, taste, hear, smell, feel*. What did you see, smell, hear, and taste today? Maybe

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<sup>2</sup> Serravallo, J. (2017). *The writing strategies book: Your everything guide to developing skilled writers with 300 strategies*.

you tried making mac and cheese for the first time and the noodles were a little too hard. Maybe you noticed a new crack in the ceiling while on quarantine. Reinforce to your student that *feel* can be an internal and external emotion. You felt the sun's heat for the first time in days, and you felt hope for the first time in a while. After a few weeks of journaling, encourage your student to read back and reflect. What do they think of their past self? How did they change? What caused the change?

### **High School**

Next Line- This is a social writing activity that is done in a group. Sit around a table. The leader of the group starts off with a sentence, for example: *John didn't feel different when he stepped off the train that morning*. Set a goal for the group with a set number of turns, for example: *In 12 turns, John will save the President's life*. The leader writes the first sentence on a piece of paper, explains the goal, and passes the paper to his right. That person writes the next sentence in the story. Repeat until you are on the last turn. Do not read the story out loud until the end. Try to give an even amount of turns so the paper ends up with the leader, who will read the full story to the group and evaluate if the group reached the goal.

Things- This is another group writing activity with a game format. Everyone in the group should have multiple small strips of paper. To start, have everyone write 3-5 categories starting with the word "Things..." For example, *Things you shouldn't say at a wedding*, *Things that will get you a promotion*, *Things to do at the end of the world*. Throw all these categories into a hat. Pick a reader, everyone else is a player. Rotate the reader for each game. The reader picks a category out of a hat. Everyone, including the reader, writes one response, puts her initials on the response, and places it in the hat. These can be funny, serious, or misleading responses. The reader reads all the responses. The group takes turns guessing, one at a time, who wrote what response. Players can ask the reader to read all the responses again before making a guess. If your response is guessed correctly, you are out. The reader submits a response, but players cannot guess the reader's response. When the game is down to 2 players, there should be 3 responses left (two players and the reader's). The sole player remaining wins.

Writing is a vital component to your student's education. Development in writing can be supported at home through games, encouraging creativity, or organizing thinking. Writing is beneficial to the student's academic and personal success. Your student's ELA teacher can support the more technical components of writing instruction. Helping your student engage in writing and generate ideas is a fantastic way to enrich their education at home!

Stay safe and healthy!

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