

Should I engage my child in writing at home? If so, how?

Question 17 from *Helping Your Child Become a Reader*
(Scanlon, Anderson, Barnes, Morse, & Yurkewecz-Stellato, 2024¹)

Yes. Writing is an important way to help children understand that print is a form of communication and to help them learn how the writing system works. Scribbling and drawing are the starting points for learning to write. With experience and some guidance from others, children generally begin to produce more mature forms of writing and, over time, they develop better understandings of how writing can be used. You can encourage this development by:

Providing access to writing and drawing materials: Make sure that paper, pencils, dry erase boards, markers, etc. are available in multiple locations such as the child's room, the kitchen, and the car.

Suggesting and supporting writing projects: Sometimes children enjoy keeping journals or writing stories and illustrating them. Some children like to write and illustrate books that can then be bound by simply sewing or stapling the edges of the pages together. There are also several apps that enable these kinds of writing and illustrating activities².



Early on, these projects will be quite different from the conventional forms of writing that children will ultimately produce. Think of early attempts at writing as being a bit like the babbling that babies do before they learn to speak. We encourage babies' babbling and, through our enthusiasm and guidance, help them to gradually become better at communicating. Similarly, with experience and a bit of guidance, children's early writing/printing efforts will become more

and more like conventional writing – although it will be some time before most children routinely spell in conventional ways.

Encouraging the use of writing for various purposes: Some children will not want to write stories or other lengthy pieces. However, they might be happy to write things on a shopping list, make signs or labels, address and sign their artwork, etc.



Writing to children and inviting answers: When writing notes to beginning readers, use mostly words that children can already read. You might add pictures above a word that children do not yet know. Keep the notes short and leave them in interesting places (lunchbox, breakfast table, mirror, refrigerator, etc.). When possible, invite simple responses.

Note

Once children begin to use letters in writing attempts, do not expect perfect letter formation nor perfect spelling. Let children experiment with writing and spelling and provide spelling assistance when asked. Once children know something about letter names and sounds, it is useful to encourage beginning writers to think about the sounds in the words they want to write and then choose letters that can represent those sounds.

¹ The complete 23 question booklet can be accessed at: eltep.org/isa-parent-booklet

All individual questions and the complete booklet can be shared for non-commercial purposes.

² We do not name specific apps as their characteristics and quality can change over time and we do not choose to endorse commercial resources.