

Writing

What is writing (written communication)?



Writing is often thought of as the physical performance of handwriting in order to put pencil to paper to record words, but in its broader context is used to mean the output of pencil skills (that is, written communication on paper or more recently in an IT format). The components involved in written communication are the physical performance of handwriting or typing, *as well as* the cognitive (thinking skills) of spelling, grammar and story planning.

Written communication involves the complex and concurrent integration of many skills, coupled with the thought processing of *what* to write (content) and *how* (spelling, grammar). Thus, taking the commonly held view that helping a child with poor handwriting to type will solve all their written communication problems is far from the truth. In fact, the foundation skills required to typed are much the *same* as though required to hand write. Until these foundations skills are adequately developed, it is likely that written communication will not progress easily.

Early writing skills are the skills that develop finger strength, pencil manipulation, awareness of letter sounds and names, and then blending these sound together. The physical performance of producing written communication (be that writing or typing) can not be considered in isolation, but must always simultaneously consider the spelling, grammar, sentence construction and story planning skills.

Why is writing (written communication) important?

The extent to which a student is able to demonstrate their academic ability is significantly reliant upon their ability to capture their thoughts in written communication. For each year level and academic task that a student attempts, there is usually a prescribed (known) or even an unwritten expectation of how much should be written, by what means (typed, handwritten using pencil or later pen) and how the information should be structured. By the time students reach high school, there are usually word limit guidelines. However, the early years of schooling are more flexible, though there are some key expectations and abilities that students need to meet.

With the increasing shift to keyboard or IPAD use, it must be acknowledged that keyboards are not the answer that we often expect them to be. This is because they only remove *some* of the written communication pre-requisite skills that might challenge a student. Students who have difficulty with the physical production of handwriting are often assumed to find this the only or largest challenge to written communication. It is important to note that the underlying physical skills to perform handwriting are *much the same* for keyboard skills. Nonetheless while the physical demands may be an issue for some, in many cases it is only *part* of the issue and it is often the other more cognitive based skills that need further development (e.g. story planning, spelling) which contribute to slow speed or avoidance.

What are the building blocks necessary to develop writing (written communication) at a glance?

- **Physical Skills:** Core body strength to maintain an upright posture at the

table and finger and hand strength to hold and manipulate the pencil for writing or fingers for typing.

- **Concept understanding:** Which helps a child to understand about direction, location, position, number, quantity, sequence, attributes, dimension, size and similarities and differences. This allows a child to become more specific in their use of language.
- **Language:** Receptive (understanding) language for comprehension and Expressive (using) language which is the ability to express themselves verbally.
- **Literacy skills:** Understanding of sentence structure, grammar and spelling rules.

How can I tell my child has writing or written communication difficulties?

Children with writing difficulties commonly display:

- Avoidance of pencil based activities or written communication in general
- Interest in verbally telling stories but being unable/disinterested in recording this on paper or computer
- Write the *most concise* and least detailed written communication despite giving very expansive verbal descriptions
- Academic under-performance despite having known high intellectual capacity
- Awkward looking pencil or typing skills
- Rapid fatigue when writing
- Reading skills that are much better than their writing or written communication skills

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