

Written Communication (Writing)

What is written communication (writing)?

Written communication or writing is often thought of as the physical performance of handwriting. However, we know that efficient writing may occur either by hand or typing and involves the complex and concurrent integration of many skills.

No matter which method of generation, written communication also involves spelling, grammar and story planning.

Why is written communication (writing) important?

The extent to which a student is able to demonstrate their academic ability is significantly reliant on 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 unwritten (but loosely hinted at) expectation of how much should be written, by what means and how to structure that information. 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 are required to meet.

With the increasing shift to keyboard 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 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 the other more cognitive based skills that need further development (e.g. story planning or spelling) that add to slow speed or avoidance.

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

- **Bilateral integration:** Using two hands together with one hand leading (e.g. holding and moving the pencil while the other hand helps by holding the writing paper. Note: Equal use of hands in typing).
- **Object manipulation:** The skillful manipulation of tools (such as holding and moving pencils and scissors) and the controlled use of everyday tools (such as a toothbrush, hairbrush, cutlery).
- **Hand and finger strength:** An ability to exert force against resistance using the hands and fingers.
- **Postural control:** The ability to stabilize the trunk and neck to enable coordination of other limbs such as the arm (and hand) for handwriting.
- **Concept understanding:** Helps a child to understand about direction, location, position, number, quantity, sequence, attributes, dimension, size and similarities and differences. This then allows them to become more specific in their use of language.
- **Receptive (understanding) language** for comprehension.
- **Expressive (using) language:** such as the ability to express themselves verbally which then serves as the thinking for written communication.
- **Literacy skills:** Understanding of sentence structure, grammar and spelling rules. When children make grammatical errors in their verbal language, it is common that these same errors are reflected in their written communication also.

How can I if my child has problems with written communication (writing)?

If a child has difficulties with written communication they might:

- Be slow to complete written tasks or tires rapidly when writing.
- Be able to explain their ideas verbally, but struggles to write them down.
- Avoid written communication, or writes the most concise answers possible despite providing verbal answers which are lengthy and articulate.
- Have difficulty generating ideas for stories, and often writes the same story each time.
- Have difficulty formulating, organising and structuring ideas appropriately on paper.
- Struggle to start writing as they “don’t know where to start”
- Have difficulty retaining and using the spelling rules.
- Be inconsistent with their use of grammar.
- Fail to meet accepted standards of written communication expectations such as:

Year Level	Content
Start of Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Basic shapes (-, ,O)• Knows letters in their own name.• Begins to recognise numbers 1-5.
End of Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete mastery of pre-writing shapes (,—,O,+,/,square,\,X, Δ).• Able to write name.• Knows letters beyond their own name.• Recognises and able to write numbers 1-5.
Reception (First year of school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All letters of the alphabet and all numbers.• Able to write basic words that are recognisable.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begins to put sentences together.• Able to write regular words, by listening for the sounds, using the 42 letter sounds.
Year 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writes complete sentences, with punctuation.• Begins to use alternative spellings in writing.

Year 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost mastered use of capitals. • Writing at least 2 sentences consecutively with appropriate grammar and punctuation. • Able to use spelling rules to correctly spell words.
Year 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competent use of upper and lower case. • Writing using appropriate grammar and punctuation. • Able to use spelling rules to correctly spell words. • Able to plan a story.

What other problems can occur when a child has difficulties with written communication?

When a child has written communication difficulties, they might also have difficulties with:

- **Learning** such as mastering letter and number formation appropriately.
- **Planning and organisation of the performance** (such as how to hold the pencil, or cognitively to plan the story content and flow).
- **Speed of handwriting:** The ability to maintain age appropriate speed of writing in order to complete tasks in a timely manner, while maintaining legibility.
- **Sentence construction:** Putting sentences together coherently and with appropriate structure.
- **Spelling and grammar:** Age appropriate use and understanding of grammar and spelling rules.
- **Expressive (Using) Language:** The use of language through speech, sign or alternative forms of communication to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas.
- **Executive functioning:** Higher order reasoning and thinking skills.

What can be done to improve written communication?

- **Phonological (sound) awareness:** Ensuring the ability to rhyme, segment words into syllables and single sounds, blend sounds together, identify sounds in different positions in words and manipulate sounds

within words.

- **Sentence structure:** Ensure the child understands how to write a sentence with simple punctuation (e.g. capital letter at the start and full stop at the end).
- **Grammar:** Ensure the child understands grammar rules (e.g. the way we order words to create phrases and the way words are structured to make plurals and different tenses).
- **Equipment:** Ensure the child has well matched equipment to their physical needs (e.g. enlarged mouse or colour coded keyboard).
- **Practice:** Using software programs to teach typing skills, or physical performance as outlined in the *Handwriting Performance* page of this website.
- **Story mapping:** Planning out the story content/sequence to aid the efficient planning and subsequent production of the story (be it by hand or computer).

What activities can help improve written communication?

- **Time** the child writing words or sentences to see if they can improve their speed over a number of trials (make sure they still focus on writing neatly).
- **Use flash cards** consisting of the 42 letter sounds to assist the child to be able to recognise and say each sound.
- **Sound out words** on their fingers before writing them down (e.g. 'd-o-g', 'Sh- oe-s').
- **Brainstorm ideas** before commencing writing tasks to assist them in generating ideas as well as to develop some structure around those ideas.
- **Plan and write stories:** Use visual aids (e.g. table, poster, chart) which outline the key areas that need to be included in the story (e.g. Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?).
- **Correct the spelling** of deliberately and incorrectly spelt words or incorrect use of grammar for the child to identify the errors and correct them - it's often easier to correct someone else's mistakes!
- **Typing program:** Use one of the many specific typing programs to enhance the ease and speed of typing.
- **Dictation:** Consider use of a voice activated software programs where

other methods have failed.

Why should I seek therapy if I notice difficulties with written communication?

Therapeutic intervention to help a child with written communication difficulties is important as:

- Written communication difficulties can greatly impact on their academic performance due to difficulties getting their ideas down on paper in a timely manner.
- Children are likely to have trouble keeping up with their peers in class.
- Frustration can arise from the child, parents and teachers when the child is not demonstrating their true academic ability.

If left untreated what can difficulties with written communication lead to?

When children have difficulties with written communication, they are might also have difficulties with:

- Performing well in timed assessment situations (e.g. exams).
- Poor persistence to tasks requiring extended amounts of written communication such as specific and lengthy 'projects'.
- Children becoming disengaged in the academic environment.
- Students may develop greater interest in reading (if it comes easier), then further exacerbating the poor written communication skills (and even less interest in them).
- As children get further through their schooling, the gap between themselves and their peers often widens. Sadly, the longer writing difficulties are left unaddressed, the harder it will be to catch up to peers.

What type of therapy is recommended for written

communication difficulties?

If your child has difficulties with written expectations, it is recommended they consult an Occupational Therapist.

Contact us today to make an initial enquiry or book an assessment for your child
on 1800 KID SENSE (1800 543 736)

