

Helping Children Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



March 2025

Help your elementary schooler develop skills for writing well

Writing involves more than putting words down on paper. Effective writing includes everything from understanding a subject to knowing how to organize ideas to checking spelling and punctuation.

To support your child's progress on writing assignments:

- **Encourage your child** to discuss topic ideas with you. Ask follow-up questions to help your student think ideas through.
- **Recommend that your child** list points to make and create an outline before starting to write. Taking time to organize helps writers present a narrative or a case in an order that makes sense.
- **Explain that first drafts** aren't supposed to be ready to hand in. Students should focus on what they want to say. Editing and proofreading can wait until after your child has the basic content written down.
- **Offer more positive** than negative feedback. Be specific: "Your description of what led up to the event is really clear." It's OK to suggest ways to strengthen the writing, but don't make it seem like you only care about mistakes—or your child will be less likely to ask for help in the future.
- **Give it time.** Learning to write well doesn't happen overnight. Your patience and support over years of writing assignments can help your child develop into a clear thinker and skilled writer.



Work together at family meetings

Holding family meetings is a meaningful way to teach your child about communication, negotiation and cooperation—and make life at home run more smoothly. To make family meetings productive:

- **Establish a regular time** to meet, once every week or two. Plan to meet for 15 minutes or so.
- **Create an agenda.** Before you meet, ask family members to suggest topics to discuss—problems, purchases, decisions, etc.
- **Appoint a leader.** The leader must make sure everyone gets a fair, uninterrupted say. At first, the leader should be an adult. After a few times, give your child a turn.
- **Brainstorm solutions** for concerns, then choose an idea to try, with adults having the final say. Plan to revisit solutions at future meetings to discuss whether they are working.
- **Discuss expectations** for the upcoming week and review goals.

Start conversation flowing

When you want to find out about the school day or how your child is feeling, sharing something about your own day first can get the conversation started. Another way to learn what your child is thinking is to ask a "question of the day" at dinner. Go around the table and have each person answer.



Read about famous women

Matching a well-known person with your child's interests can boost motivation to read a biography. March is Women's History Month, so if your child likes:

- **Sports,** suggest a biography of Simone Biles, the 11-time Olympic medalist known as the greatest gymnast of all time.
- **Adventure,** try a book about Nellie Bly, the investigative journalist who went around the world in a record-setting 72 days in 1889.
- **Space,** read about Sally Ride, who was the first American woman in space, and who dedicated her life to helping girls excel in STEM fields.
- **Animals,** look for a biography of Jane Goodall, who studied and lived among chimpanzees and promotes conservation.

Effective study takes time

Studying something repeatedly over time is more effective than trying to learn it in one night. Maintain a regular study time at home, and encourage your child to use it to:

- **Review** handouts or notes about the day's lessons.
- **Correct** wrong answers on quizzes, tests and classwork.
- **Read ahead.**
- **Practice** solving sample problems.





How should I handle a reluctance to go to school?

Q: My fourth grader is always coming up with excuses to stay home from school. What should I do?

A: Children who start off the morning saying, "I don't want to go to school!" may offer lists of excuses. But the real problem is more likely that they don't feel ready to handle what they must face when they go out the door.

To turn the situation around:

- **Say that you are happy to help** your child cope with any issues at school—but that you still expect your student to attend school today.
- **Find out what's behind the excuses.** Ask why your child doesn't want to go to school (but continue with your morning readiness routine as you do so). Listen carefully, then talk about your child's fears or problems with schoolwork, the teacher or friends.
- **Acknowledge your child's distress.** Say something like, "I know you're upset, but we all have to do things sometimes that we wish we didn't. It usually feels better once you have a plan and get started."
- **Brainstorm ways** your child might handle the situation.
- **Talk with your child's teacher** or the school counselor if the reluctance to go to school or the reason behind it continues.



Are you fostering reading fluency?

Fluent readers read aloud smoothly, accurately and with expression. They are also more likely to understand what they read. Are you helping your child increase reading fluency? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you ask** your child to read aloud to you regularly, in addition to the time you spend reading aloud?
2. **Do you let** your child choose what to read aloud? Choosing the same book repeatedly is OK. Familiarity boosts fluency.
3. **Do you avoid** interrupting while your child is reading? Correct misread words after your child finishes.
4. **Do you supply** a pronunciation if your child asks, then encourage continued reading?

5. **Do you discuss** the book when the reading is finished?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child practice reading fluently. For each no, try that idea.

"Fluent reading opens the door to engaged, confident readers who can focus their energies on comprehension."
—Julia B. Lindsey

Celebrate to motivate

The good feelings that come from reaching a challenging goal are great motivators. Help your child celebrate achievements that result from hard work with one of these encouraging ideas:

- **Balloon bonus.** On one side of a piece of paper, write your child's goal. On the other side, write a small reward. Roll up the paper, put it into a balloon and blow up the balloon. Upon reaching the goal, your child can pop the balloon and claim the reward.
- **"I did it" dinner.** Set a "fancy" table and serve your child's favorite foods. Ask your child to say a few words about how awesome it feels to reach a goal.



Go on a symmetry hunt

Things that have two matching sides when they are divided in half are *symmetrical*. The dividing line is the *line of symmetry*. Going on a symmetry hunt outside is a fun way to give your elementary schooler a new way of looking at nature. Help your child:

- **Look for items** that are symmetrical, such as leaves, pinecones or feathers, and take photos of them.
- **Print the photos** and predict where the line of symmetry will be.
- **Fold the photos** along that line to see if the two sides match up.

Take the hurry out of math

When students are in a rush, they sometimes forget that solving a complex math problem involves taking things step by step.

If your elementary schooler is stuck on a problem, ask, "Can you talk me through it one step at a time?" If your child still can't figure out the problem and others like it, let the teacher know. Your child may need to review that material.

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