

Process Writing: An Overview for Parents

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Process writing is a way of breaking down the task of writing into its smaller component parts. By completing each step sequentially, writing becomes a less threatening and less daunting task. Children learn that writing doesn't just happen; it is planned and it evolves, taking shape as it develops. The steps in process writing can be divided into two major phases: the prewriting phase and the writing phase. Both are necessary to the writing process and are interdependent. Prewriting is needed to organize, sequence, and elaborate on ideas prior to writing. The writing phase turns this organization of ideas into a composition.

The Prewriting Phase

The prewriting phase is essential to helping your child generate and organize his thoughts prior to writing. It establishes the road map of the writing piece and allows him to see where he is going with his ideas and how he will get there. Writing without working through the steps of the prewriting phase is like sending your child to an unknown destination without a map or directions. He will most likely veer off course, perhaps go in circles and get lost. He may even forget where he was going in the first place. With no direction in which to go, he may be unable to start at all. Similarly, without generating and organizing ideas first, your child's writing often loses direction. Although he may start with a solid idea for a composition, without a "road map," his writing often strays from the topic, fading out or winding up at a different destination than originally intended.

There are two steps in the prewriting phase:

1. **Select a topic and brainstorm** by jotting down all ideas on the topic as they come to mind.
2. **Organize** the ideas by putting them into categories of main ideas and corresponding details. This organization can take various forms, depending on your child's style or preference (outline, notes, graphic organizer, semantic map).

Many children benefit from oral discussion of concepts before they put their ideas into writing. In addition, seeing all their ideas on paper often helps them see how material might be grouped together or recognize the connections between ideas.

The Writing Phase

Once the prewriting phase has been completed and a method for organizing ideas is ready, the most difficult part of the process is over. Your child merely needs to follow the structure he has created to write the paragraph, composition or essay without worrying about the topic, supports, and direction of his writing.

The steps in the writing phase are:

1. **Write the rough draft**, adhering to the organization created in the prewriting phase and turning each note into a sentence, adding transitional words or phrases to connect ideas, etc.
2. **Proofread and edit** the rough draft for both content and mechanics.
3. **Write a second draft** (and possibly more) including all corrections and changes made.

During the writing phase it is important that your child apply his knowledge of specific composition skills in order to turn his ideas from the “road map” (outline/notes/graphic organizer/semantic map) into full sentences which connect and form cohesive, unified paragraphs. Paragraph templates ([click here to print](#)) may be helpful for some children as a visual reminder to implement all components of a paragraph. Children may also find it helpful to have a list of transitional words and phrases to choose from.

During the proofreading step, encourage your child to read his composition out loud to someone, or have someone read it to him. This often makes it easier to identify errors. When we read our own writing to ourselves, we often read it the way we *intended* it to be, not the way it is actually written on the page. In addition, individualized proofreading checklists are often helpful to guide them in the proofreading process. These could include specific skills which your child is currently studying and should have the child interact with his writing in some way (circle all the capital letters, highlight the topic sentence, underline transitional words and phrases, etc.). As your child becomes more aware of his own writing skills, he should be encouraged to develop his own proofreading goals.

Finally, depending on the purpose and length of the writing, more than one draft may be written before a final draft is produced. A single paragraph may only require one rough draft with revisions, followed by a final draft. A longer composition, however, many require several drafts before a final, more polished product is created.

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