

Expressive Writing

How do we get our children motivated to write? Here are some ideas:

1. Write a report, or a piece of information, on a fact-based topic.
2. Re-tell a story, usually fiction.
3. Write some instructions on 'how to do something'.
4. Write a letter.
5. Write an original piece of fiction.
6. Write a poem or a play.

1. Reporting information

The first step is to find out what the students are interested in. The higher the interest level, the longer we will spend writing on the topic. Some of the most successful topics have been whales, elephants, Antarctica, Tasmanian tigers and dinosaurs. Find library books on the topic, beautifully illustrated where possible. Read the books with the children, being careful not to present too much information at one session. Then encourage discussion, and say, "Let's write a piece of information about Tasmanian tigers, (for example). What can you tell me about them?"

Then proceed to write a draft of ideas. At this stage ideas can be written in point form.

Example:

Tasmanian Tigers

- many think they are extinct.
- Some people say they have seen them
- Brown with black stripes
- Killed farmers sheep and chickens
- People shot them
- can run long distances
- not fast runners

Now the student's task is to take the points and present them in a logical order. They must use complete sentences and must be reminded that the points above are not all full sentences. It may be good to go through and pick out the points that are not full sentences. For some students, you may have to do some preliminary exercise such as: How would we make 'can run long distances into a full sentence?'

The student should be encouraged to write some of their own ideas, their opinions and feelings as well. For example, "Do you think the farmers should have killed the Tasmanian tigers?" "How do you feel about the fact there are few or maybe no Tasmanian tigers left?"

Students should also be encouraged to find their own information, in books, encyclopedias or the internet. Whenever information is found, students must be encouraged to read it through, (with an adult if the reading level is difficult), and retell the information in their own words. They should not copy whole sentences from the original text, but can be encouraged to copy the spelling of words.

After writing their piece of information, students should be encouraged to read it through carefully, listening to their own sentences. Are they complete? Do they all start with capital letters? Once the first copy has been corrected, then the piece of writing can be published, presented as a poster or stuck in a special book. Illustrations can be added.

Reports can also be written in the same way on real life experiences, excursions and holidays.

2. Retelling a story

Children are very motivated by story books. Once you have read the story, say, "Now we are going to make our own book about ... e.g., the Little Red Hen. How could we start our story?" Often they will choose to start a story with "Once upon a time". Later on, they may graduate to "One day" or other familiar starting phrases.

Try to encourage sequencing by asking, "What happened first in the story? What happened next?" If a child gives the ending too early, say, "That's a good sentence, but that happened later. Let's put in at the bottom of the page".

Encourage reading by pausing every so often to say, "Let's read what we have written so far."

3. Writing instructions

This is best done following an activity. Cooking is a good example. Make the dish first. You can either read the recipe to the student as you go, or else just tell them what to do, step by step. Once the dish is made, say, "Now let's write the recipe."

Firstly, write a list of ingredients. Explain that a list goes down the page. Secondly, write the method. Explain that this is a description of 'how to make it' but it does not need to be detailed. You can write things in short. You don't even need whole sentences in this case, e.g., 'beat eggs', 'add flour' are permissible.

Another excellent writing activity is to write the instructions for playing a game. First you will need to play the game. Old-fashioned games make good activities. You can talk about the difference between games 100 years ago, compared to today. Examples of games: hopscotch, marbles, knuckle bones, spinning tops, dominoes, skittles, stilts, skipping games, and cat's cradle.

After playing the game, write a set of instructions. Begin by asking, "If you were going to tell someone how to play this game, what would you tell them first. Then number the steps as you write them.

Other ideas for writing a list of instructions could come from seed packets. Write instructions on 'how to grow carrots', for example. You could also follow instructions on how to put something together, such as a toy glider.

For children who are not confident, a list of steps may be presented out of order, and the children can be asked to sequence the steps.

4. Writing a letter

A home-made letter box can be a source of motivation for this. The letter box can be checked regularly and 'mail' delivered. Children can choose who they would like to write to and place it in the letter box. General conventions of writing letters can be discussed. Posted letters require an address at the top, while e-mail letters do not. Look at conventions for starting and finishing letters.

5. Fiction

Children usually do not respond so well when they are forced to write on a particular topic. For example, "The amazing time machine." While it may interest some, it will not motivate everyone. The writing of fiction is best kept as a free choice activity, *within certain boundaries!* A good way to create the boundaries is to provide a free choice topic box. Collect interesting picture and make 'story starter' cards. These cards may contain the beginning of a story, or just a title. The student can select from the box, a picture to write about, or a story starter.

There are certain grammatical rules that should be discussed for general writing. For example, children must first know what a sentence is, and must write in complete sentences. It can be explained that a sentence is an idea. Each idea must start with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Sentences should not be joined by too many 'ands'. Discuss how to use speech marks and interesting alternatives to 'said'. You can make a list of interesting words to use instead of 'said'. For example. 'answered', 'replied', 'shouted' etc.

6. Play writing

Before writing, read some plays to see the convention for writing. Children *love* to read plays, taking different parts. You could start by converting a favourite story into play format. The play can be performed once written, with family members taking parts. Puppets can also be used.