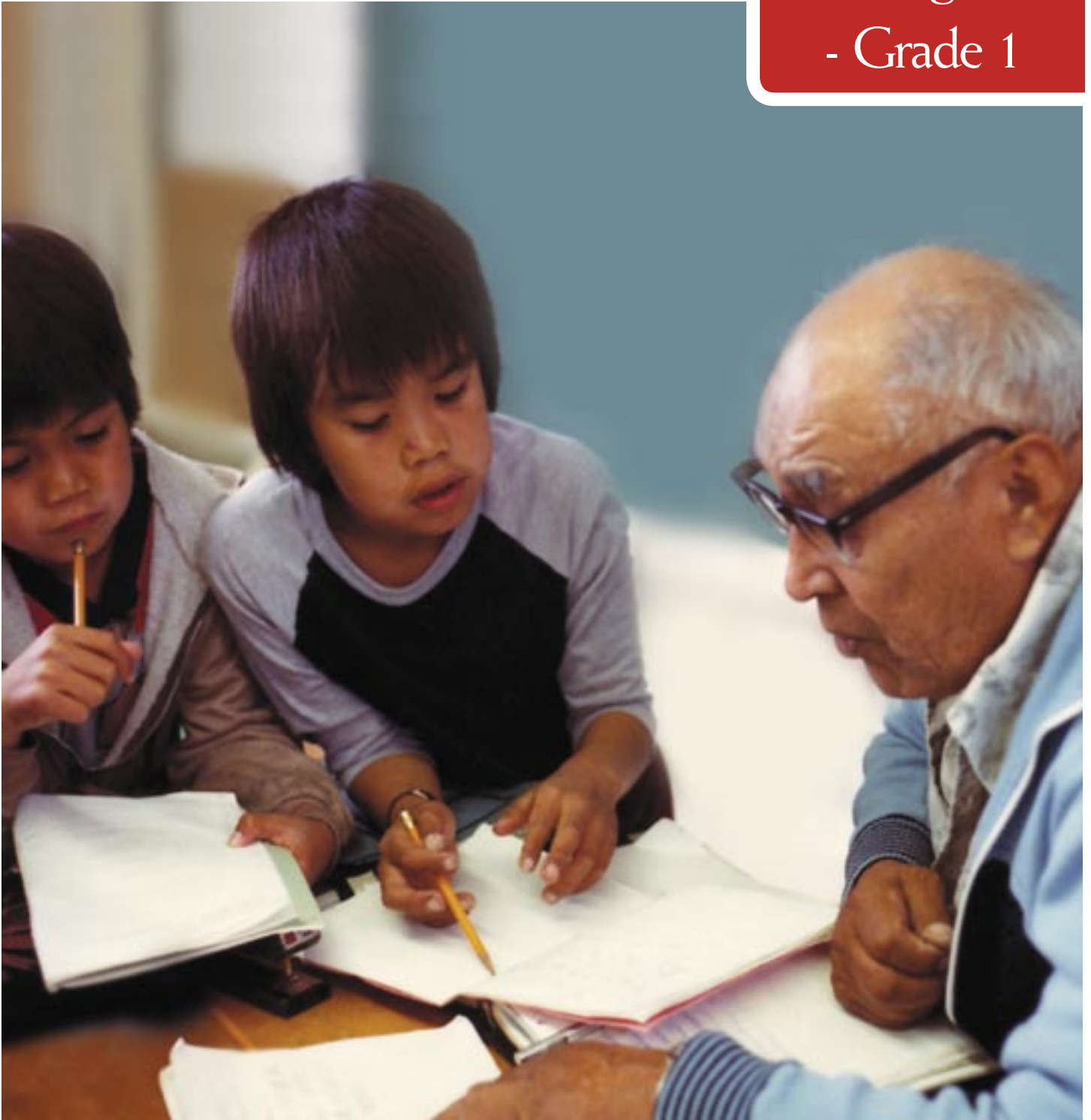


Writing For Families

Helping your child with
writing at home

Kindergarten
- Grade 1



AchieveBC

Writing for Families: Helping Your Child Learn

Writing, like reading, opens the door to lifelong learning. It is an essential skill that allows children and adults to express themselves, perform daily tasks and communicate ideas at school and in the workplace. Parents and guardians are a child's first and most important teachers. You can help your child learn to write well, and you can show them that writing can be fun. Set aside time after school and on weekends for reading, drawing and writing. Children's early writing often consists of drawings, letters and the occasional word. Encourage your child to scribble and draw, and copy shapes and letters. Make sure you have plenty of paper, crayons, pencils and markers on hand. Talk with your child about what they read, draw and write. Play word games, use buttons or macaroni to create letters and spell words, and ask your child to help you write a birthday card or thank-you note. Be creative, and have fun!

WRITING FOR FAMILIES: HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH WRITING AT HOME

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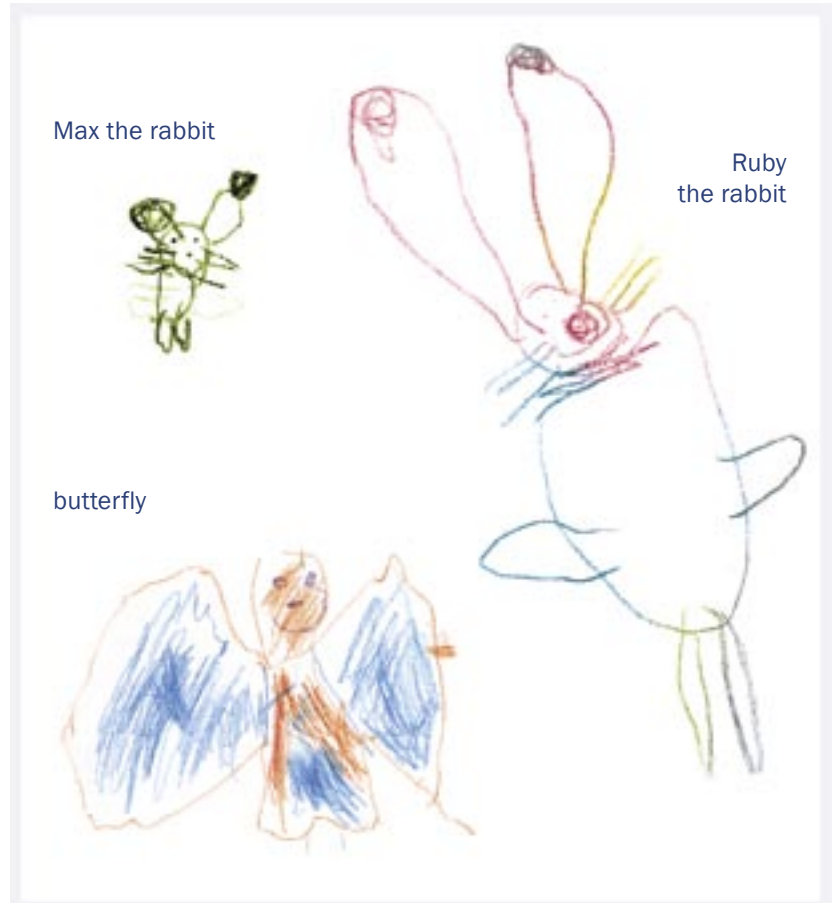
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1 Talking, Reading and Drawing

Children get ready to write by reading on their own or with an adult, retelling stories and talking about their own experiences. They also learn new words through singing and rhyming, and use drawings to express themselves. Here are some suggestions to help your child get ready to write:

- > Read to your child and ask your child to read aloud. Take turns reading pages or using different voices for different characters.
- > After you read a story together, ask your child to tell you what the story was about. Ask your child what they remember about the characters and the story events. For example, ask *What were the characters' names? Where did they go? What did they do and say? Why did they do or say that?*
- > Talk to your children. Ask them questions about their day and things that they see, hear, taste, touch and smell. What did they like or not like? Why? What would they like to know more about? Point out store and street signs as you are walking or driving and read them.
- > Make up silly songs about everyday activities, like baking cookies, folding laundry or brushing your teeth. Or choose a word such as *rock*, and ask your child to think of words that rhyme (sound the same, like *sock, clock, block, knock*).
- > After a day out together, ask your child to draw some of the things you saw. For example, if you went to a petting zoo, ask your child to draw some of the animals. Show your child a picture of the letter that each word starts with, such as *g* for goat, or *r* for rabbit.



2 Starting to Write

Holding a Pencil

We use fine motor skills (small muscle movements in our fingers and hands) to grab hold of and use things like pencils, pens, forks, knives, scissors and other tools. You can help your child develop these skills, which are necessary for drawing, printing and handwriting. Here are some activities you can try:

- > Make a collage with small items (e.g. dried beans or uncooked pasta shapes). Use tweezers to pick up the items and place them on the paper.
- > Have your child turn over as many pennies as possible in one minute, or fold small pieces of paper to make airplanes or snowflakes.



- > To help your child hold a pencil properly, say *These are the pinching fingers* (thumb, first and second finger). Then say *Careful – the other ones are going to fly away, so tuck them underneath*.
- > Watch your child holding a pencil. If they have trouble keeping the last two fingers tucked underneath and still, place a small object (e.g. an eraser) inside these fingers and ask your child to hold it there.

Sounds and Letters

Just as babies learn to speak by imitating adults, beginning writers scribble, draw letter-like shapes, write single letters, string unrelated letters together, and use invented, or temporary, spellings. Over time, children learn to write and spell as adults do. Here are some things you can do to help your child learn to write:

- > Pick out interesting words with your child when reading. Help your child to notice what sounds the words start and end with, and how many other letters are needed to spell the word correctly.
- > Have your child go on a word hunt around your house. As they notice objects, have them sound out the object's name and write down the sounds they hear in the word (e.g. *stove* might be *s-t-o-v*).
- > Have your child help you write the grocery list. They can draw a small picture and then label it by writing the sounds they hear in the object.
- > Put cornmeal on a cookie sheet and help your child trace letters with their finger. Say the words that describe the movement of their finger, such as down, up or round.
- > Practise spelling basic words on a cookie sheet or wax paper with plastic or wooden letters, shaving cream, popcorn, macaroni or pipe cleaners.

Capitals, Question Marks and More

As children learn to read and write, talk to them about the difference between capital and small letters, and the use of periods, question marks and exclamation marks (punctuation). Beginning writers aren't expected to use punctuation consistently, but you can help them to recognize and understand its purpose. Here are some tips to get you started:

- > When reading familiar books to your child, point out how every sentence starts with a capital letter. Point out how some other words start with capital letters, like characters' names and the names of cities and towns.
- > When reading with your child, help your child to notice that each sentence ends with a period, question mark or exclamation mark. Explain the difference between punctuation marks: *A period is like a stop sign on the street – when you see it, you come to a full stop; a question mark means the speaker wants information from another person; an exclamation mark is used to communicate a strong emotion like excitement, joy, surprise, disbelief, anger or fear.*
- > Play with sentences by saying them in different ways that show various forms of punctuation. Ask your child if they can hear the difference. For example, you could start by saying "*This soup is hot,*" in a normal voice, followed by "*This soup is hot!*" in a louder voice and "*Is the soup too hot?*" in a 'question' voice.
- > Help your child to change sentences into questions, e.g. *I saw a bird. Did you see a bird? I'm hungry. Are you hungry?*

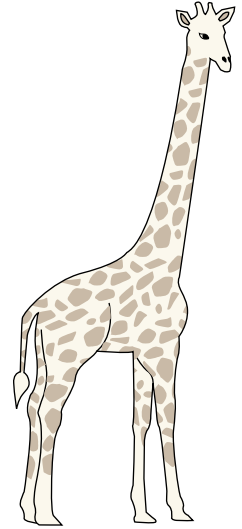


3 Forming Sentences

Simple Sentences

Beginning writers string unrelated letters together. With time and experience, words and simple sentences take shape. You can help your child with this important transition. Here are some suggestions:

- > Encourage your child to 'pretend write' (scribble) notes to you or make up lists of grocery items or things found in different rooms around the house. Help them to think about the letter sounds they hear in the word. Can they write any of the letters they hear?
- > Provide your child with some simple, unfinished sentences so they can fill in the blanks. For example, *I can see a _____, or The dog was _____*. Children can write a number of these sentences, adding a different word each time to form a simple story.
- > Have your child create an alphabet book by drawing or cutting out pictures of objects that begin with each letter of the alphabet. Underneath each picture, write the letter and a simple sentence describing the picture. For example, *A is for _____ (e.g. apple). Apples are _____ (e.g. red).*



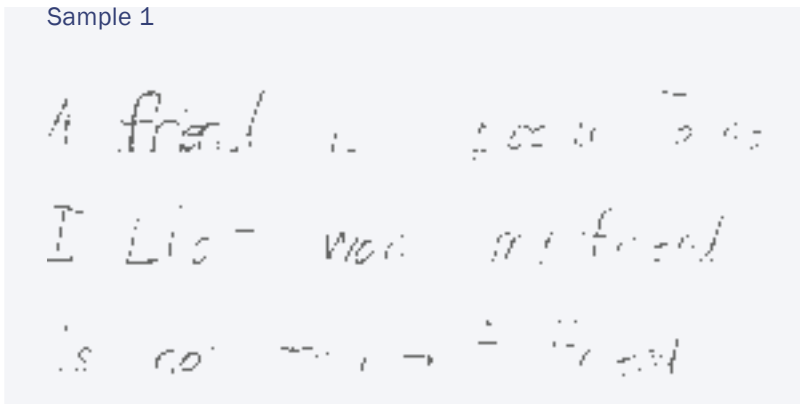
G is for Giraffe.
Giraffes are tall.

Connecting Ideas

Beginning writers create simple sentences that contain one main idea (e.g., *I like dogs*). The sentences or ideas are often related to each other (e.g., *dogs bark, they have soft fur, dogs are nice*), but are not connected with 'connecting' words like *and* or *but*. You can help your child learn how to connect their thoughts. Here are some things you can do when you are reading and writing with your child:

- > Use a highlighter to mark 'connecting' words in storybooks, newspapers or magazines. This will give your child new ideas for connecting the events in their writing.
- > Look at familiar stories. Point out the different words the author uses to indicate the passage of time. You will see phrases like *a few days later, the next day, after she woke up, one day, finally*, etc. Encourage your child to use these kinds of 'connecting' words in their own stories.
- > Ask your child to write a few sentences or a short story about something they like, such as a favourite teddy bear, a family pet or a friend. Help your child go through the story and connect related ideas with words like *and, but* or *then*. Next, help your child to add variety to their writing by thinking of other words that could connect related ideas.

Sample 1



4 | Using Words to Create Pictures

Adding Details

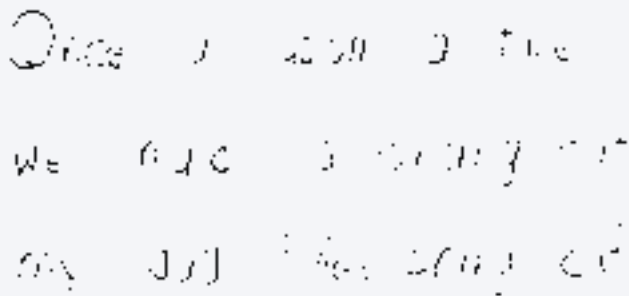
Beginning writers use drawings and pictures to tell their stories. Over time, they will increase the number of written words in their stories and begin to add details. Descriptive words can make a story easier to understand and more interesting to read. You can help your child use words to create pictures and make their stories come alive. Here are some tips to get you started:

- > When you read with your child, talk about the details the writer has used to make the story more interesting. Point out the words that tell the reader more about the character, the setting, the place and the time (e.g., a *shy* elephant, a *small* town).
- > Ask your child to tell a story using drawings and words. Ask your child how the drawings relate to the words they have written. If the story does not match the pictures, ask specific questions about the pictures to pull out details. Help your child add these details to the story.
- > To encourage your child to add descriptive words to their writing, ask them to pretend they are looking at a photograph. Ask questions about what they see in their mind's eye. Ask about what they can see, hear, touch, taste, smell and feel. What colour is the object they are writing about? What is their main character wearing? What is the weather like?

Building Your Child's Vocabulary

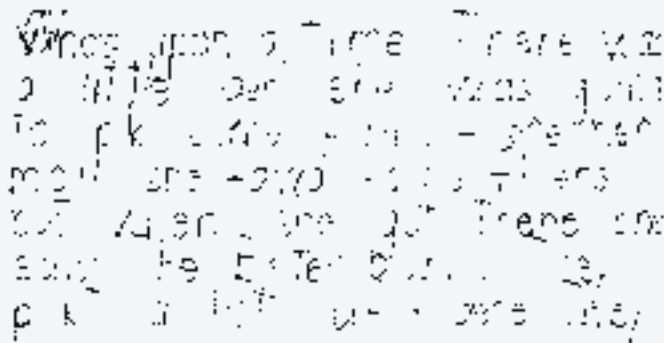
A child who hears and uses a wide variety of words will have an easier time learning to read and write. Reading to your child is one of the best ways to expose them to new words and ideas, and you can help them to make use of their growing vocabulary in their writing. Here are some suggestions:

Sample 1



Once I was in the
we had a party at
my dad's house at

Sample 2



When you are in the car
a little boy was just
to pick up his friends
mom and dad and they
out when they got there one
said he had a dog
pick up his friends

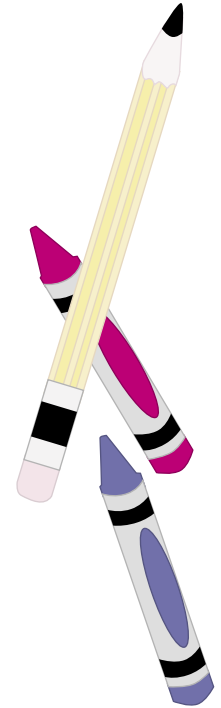
- > Help your child to “label” details in their drawings. This will provide them with a bank of words to use in their writing. For example, if your child has drawn a picture of their trip to a farm, help them label the buildings, people and animals. Also label any actions that are shown, like *milking the cows*, *feeding the chickens* or *driving the truck*.
- > Use magnetic letters or words on the fridge (or cut words out of newspapers and magazines) to collect other ways of saying words that are used too often or are not specific (e.g., *went*, *nice*). Ask your child to find words that provide more detail.
- > To show your child how to add interesting words to their stories, reread a familiar story together and help your child figure out where descriptive words could fit. For example, *The dog played with the kitten* could become *The big dog played with the grey kitten*.

- > Ask your child to write a few sentences or a short story about a particular topic. Before your child starts to write, help them to think of as many words as possible that relate to the topic. For example, the topic *petting zoo* might make you and your child think of words like *goat, chicken, rabbit, baby, playing, barn, sleeping, eating, smelly, soft* and *hairy*. Encourage your child to use these words in their writing.

5 Creating a Rich Writing Environment

Just like reading, writing should be a natural part of daily life, and there are many things you can do to encourage your child to write at home. Here are some ideas for making writing easier, and fun:

- > Make sure you have drawing and writing materials around the house – crayons, pencils, markers, paper, envelopes, labels, dry erase boards. Make sure you have reading materials in your home, because reading (on their own or with your help) will help your child learn new words.
- > Set aside regular time for family drawing and writing. Sit with your child and draw or write with them. Help your child understand that writing has a purpose. Ask them to help you write a thank-you note, a birthday card or a grocery list.
- > Talk to your child about what they are drawing or writing. Ask them why the characters are doing or saying certain things and how they feel. Ask them questions that will pull out details about the characters, the place and the events in the story.
- > Make sure your child sees you writing. Children are naturally curious and will want to do what you are doing.
- > Create a special place, in the child's room if possible, where reading, drawing and writing materials can be stored. Use a bookshelf, a dresser or desk drawer, a basket or a wooden or plastic box.



6 What is Literacy?

Literacy is the ability to read, write and communicate, and to understand and use information. It is an essential skill that can help your child to succeed at school and accomplish daily tasks throughout life. Literate people can:

- > Read for enjoyment and to obtain information.
- > Use their reading and problem-solving skills to make sense of unfamiliar words and ideas.
- > Explain what they read to others.
- > Write to express themselves.
- > Communicate their thoughts and feelings to others.





Literacy Websites

There are a variety of websites that offer useful tips, ideas and activities for parents and guardians who want to help their children with reading and writing. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/earlyreading/

www.earlyliterature.ecsd.net/

www.starfall.com

www.kinderart.com/littles/litles.html



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