

Helping Children Learn®

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School

La Mesa - Spring Valley School District
Extended School Services Program



December 2020

Offer your child different ways to practice writing every day

Just like reading and math, writing is a skill that takes practice to learn. That's why experts recommend that elementary schoolers spend time writing every day, for a variety of purposes.

Encouraging your child to write at home for at least 15 minutes each day will build his writing skills and ability to express himself. And research shows that writing by hand, rather than on a keyboard, can also improve his reading fluency.

To add writing time to your child's day, ask him to:

- **Help you write.** When you write a letter, make a grocery list or decide on the dinner menu, dictate it to your child and have him write it down.
- **Copy.** Encourage your child to write down the words to favorite songs, or copy down quotations or poems he likes.
- **Record.** When you take your child out, ask him to bring a notebook. In it, he can describe what he sees and experiences. Views from the car window or the sights and sounds of a walk in nature are great places to start.
- **Keep a journal.** Suggest that your child write about things that happen to him and how he feels about them.

Source: B. MacKenzie, "How to Teach Handwriting—and Why It Matters," Edutopia, [niswc.com/hand-write](https://www.edutopia.org/hand-write).



A buddy system can enrich study time

In a class, your child can learn a lot by listening to other students. At home, having a study buddy can be an effective way for her to master challenging material and learn about working with others.

A study buddy can be a classmate, friend or sibling your child meets with in person, over the phone or via video chat. Your child and her buddy can help each other practice math facts or prepare for presentations. They can test each other to see what they know—and don't know.

To make sure your child gets the most out of studying with a buddy, help her:

- **Choose someone** responsible who is focused on learning.
- **Understand the purpose.** Both kids should agree that studying is the goal—not socializing or playing games.
- **Create a schedule** of meetings.
- **Decide what** the buddies will cover in each study session—and stick to it!

Take stock of your child's school participation

The halfway point of the school year is approaching, so it's a good time to check on your child's engagement and schoolwork. How many in-person or remote classes has he missed this year? How many assignments? If you're not sure, contact the school to find out. It's not too late to get your child back on track for a successful year.

Help your child discover the pleasure of giving

Will your family be exchanging gifts this month? Giving will have more meaning for your child if she puts her time and love into the gifts she gives. Your child could:

- **Draw a picture** or write a poem about a special person.
- **Create a playlist** with a bunch of her favorite songs to share.
- **Record herself** reading a book for a younger sibling to listen to.
- **Decorate a homemade frame** for a photo of herself with a loved one.



Be specific about cheating

Elementary schoolers are often confused about cheating. Although they believe it is wrong, they also think it might be OK in some situations. Talk to your child about cheating. Tell him that:

- **Cheating** is lying and it's *always* wrong.
- **You care** more that he is working hard and being honest than you do about his grades.
- **It's never OK** to cheat because a friend asks him to. Role-play ways your child can say *no* in those situations.





My child is better at starting than finishing. What helps?

Q: My daughter is always enthusiastic about starting a new project. But she usually loses interest half-way through. Then she wants to switch gears and start on something else. What should I do?

A: Some children are always on the lookout for variety and excitement. For them, starting is always more fun than finishing. But in school—and life—there are many things that have to be done even when they aren't exciting.

The key is to channel your child's energy productively without dampening her enthusiasm. Help her organize her efforts. When she starts a project:

- **Help her think** about everything she'll need to do. Be sure to remind her of details that tend to slip her mind. When are you available to help her get the supplies she needs? Will anything need time to grow or dry?
- **Show her how** to break the project down into parts. Since your child's attention span is short, seeing a long project as a series of small ones can help. Set a deadline for each step and write it on the calendar.
- **Sustain her interest** by having her plan little rewards she can give herself when she completes a "boring" part of the assignment. "When I finish my bibliography, I can take 10 minutes and call my friend."



Are you showing that math counts?

Research shows that parents' attitudes about math affect how well their children do in the subject. Are you modeling a positive attitude about math for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you tell** your child you know he can do well in math, and encourage him to give it his best effort?
2. **Do you avoid** saying negative things like "I never liked math when I was in school"?
3. **Do you play** games for fun with your child that involve math skills like keeping score?
4. **Do you talk** about the math skills you use in your life? "I'm calculating the room's area to figure out how much carpet we need."

5. **Do you create** opportunities for your child to use "grown-up" math, such as doubling a recipe?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching your child to value math. For each no, try that idea.

"A good example has twice the value of good advice."
—attributed to Albert Schweitzer

Use summaries to boost reading comprehension

One way to make sure your child has understood a reading assignment is to have her summarize it. Choose a summary format that fits the content. You might ask her to:

- **Summarize the three** most important points in her own words.
- **Describe the people** or characters and what's important about each.
- **Explain what happened** and why.

It's OK if she needs to reread the material. Knowing she'll have to summarize it will make her read it more carefully. Over time, she'll get the knack of summarizing—and a better understanding of what she reads.

Cheer your student on!

What can you do when your child is trying to learn something and you aren't sure how to help? Be a cheerleader! Encourage your child with phrases like:



- *You're making great progress! Keep at it, I know you will get it.*
- *It will get better when you get the hang of it.*
- *If it doesn't work that way, try another way.*

Character is built, not born

Your child's character is a work in progress. Help him strengthen the traits that support school success. Here are four to focus on:

1. **Responsibility.** Teach him that he has control over his choices and actions.
2. **Flexibility.** Model listening, negotiation and compromise for your child.
3. **Empathy.** Ask your child to imagine how others might feel.
4. **Respect.** Discuss what respectful behavior looks like, at home and in class.

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1013