

ADVICE for PARENTS of YOUNG WRITERS by Jean MacLeod
IDEAS: 6 Traits and 5 Senses



"I don't know what to write..." may be a familiar phrase to adults asking a child to write a paragraph, an essay for school, or a thank you note, but you can help your child learn to be a better writer by using the new 6 +1 Traits writing model at home and in the classroom. The traits are: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions *plus* Presentation, with the emphasis here on "Ideas".

How can you help turn "I don't know what to write" into a creative bonfire both at home and at school? To help cultivate ideas, parents can easily:

1) Use storybooks as examples of good and poor writing. Ask your child to *listen* to a story, and then ask for their feedback. Children who become reflective listeners and readers become reflective writers-- able to discern and produce high-quality levels of writing. Make this a fun activity; ask a few leading questions about an aspect of a book, or have your child assign 1-5 stars for story quality (with verbal comments required). What is the story's main idea? Did the author carry out the idea successfully?

2) Help your child make an Idea List of everything (large or small) that he or she is interested in. This could include specific pets, stuffed animals, sports, friends, or hobbies. The ideas can be silly or serious, real or imagined.

3) Ask your child to choose an item from their Idea List, and to talk about it in detail. Descriptions from the 5 senses can help jumpstart an idea. Perhaps your child chose "playing soccer". What is it she or he is hearing on the Soccer Field? Seeing, smelling, tasting, touching/feeling? Add "saying" and "thinking" to the senses questions for even more in-depth response. The simple answers to these "senses questions" are the beginning of a real story, and practice makes it easy!

There are no right or wrong ideas, so encourage your son or daughter to be open and imaginative. Writing about an idea or an interest that your child is passionate about, will motivate them to communicate with the written word. A good IDEA is the basis of GREAT WRITING!

The 6 + 1 Traits: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions + Presentation