

# ADVICE for PARENTS of YOUNG WRITERS ~ by Jean MacLeod

## *Sentence Fluency, Conventions & Presentation*



### **Sentence Fluency**

Many of us parents went through school diagramming sentences, and learning the many rules for the formally ‘correct’ way to write. Sentence fluency goes beyond correctness to encourage students to build meaningful, lyrical writing.

Writing isn’t about the rules—it is taking an idea, making the words and their actions fit that idea, and imparting the story to others. A well-built sentence, according to Ruth Culham, incorporates the following:

- ~ Variety
- ~ Creativity
- ~ Naturalness
- ~ Construction that enhances the meaning of the sentence overall

Sentence fluency is a “listening” trait. Students learn to build sentences by listening to writing that is read aloud, both by themselves and by others. They develop an ear for the musical sentence...one that uses the “right word, in the right place, to create the right image”.

Parents can help their children become aware of sentences that work by reading aloud together. POETRY especially demonstrates the impact of flexible, fluid, creative sentences. It is important that we don’t focus on the “correct” mechanics of our children’s writing; encouraging students to read their *own* work aloud helps them to self-correct. They will eventually hear, understand, and produce sentence fluency, without parents appearing to be over-critical.

### **Conventions**

Conventions help the writer to convey meaning, and the reader to visualize the action. Technically, conventions are all about *spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization and paragraphing*. It is terrifically boring stuff to learn...but it doesn’t have to be!

Young writers can be taught that conventions are the tricks to use to get the readers to *understand* how their story should be read. Conventions can be experimented with: how does a sentence sound with a comma, or with a semi-colon? How does a paragraph sound when read without any punctuation at all?

Fun computer programs can help a child who has difficulty with spelling, and parents can initiate a Word-a-Day game at home to help. Convention accuracy is NOT the most important component of a child’s story...we can be parent proof-readers of our children’s writing, while also encouraging their IDEAS, personal VOICE and creative energy!

### **Presentation**

Presentation is the *Feng Shui* of a story or report. The cover page, spacing, handwriting or typing, and the illustrations, all contribute to the author’s writing and create interest for the reader. Presentation is the packaging of a student’s work and an important component of making a good, first impression. It should reflect the writing: creative or professional, personal or factual? A student’s presentation can represent the material, and become another facet of good 6 + 1 writing.