



# Structured Shared Writing

A planning guide to support shared  
writing experiences in the home

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## About the Author

Dr. Leslie Laud has taught students how to write for nearly 20 years as a classroom teacher, has researched and developed writing instruction methodology, and now serves as a nationally recognized writing-staff instructor and consultant to hundreds of schools. She uses an approach to writing instruction that is based on evidence-based research (particularly that on Self-Regulated Strategy Development) proven to drive results, described in her book “Releasing Writers: Evidence-Based

Strategies for Developing Self-Regulated Writers.” She has supported teachers in over 50,000 classrooms throughout public and private schools across the U.S. In addition, she published “Using Formative Assessment to Differentiate Middle School Literacy Instruction.”

Leslie holds a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from Columbia University. She also adjuncts at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she teaches a course on evidence-based writing instruction. She conducts empirical research studies on the most effective ways to teach writing, publishing findings in peer-reviewed journals.

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# ***Structured Shared Writing***

## ***A Planning Guide to Support Shared Writing Experiences in the Home***

Since the beginning of time, people have felt called on to write ideas – even if just on walls in caves. All children have a natural desire to communicate their ideas. In school, students regularly use writing as a tool for learning and as a way to show what they have learned. In life, they will use writing to communicate their positions and ideas, on social media and in almost all professions. With targeted support, children can learn to do this as easily and effectively as they do when speaking.



Making time to practice writing in enjoyable and structured ways has immense benefits. Children benefit from practice in any area, particularly writing. This guide offers playful, engaging ways to support building strong writing skills. To help you in these efforts, we highlight four steps that you can follow to help a child with the writing process.

## ***Using this planning guide***

This guide is an introduction to some of the things that you can do to support and reinforce good writing skills and processes with a child. It does so by highlighting how you can help children practice writing using four guiding principles.

**Principle 1 – Offer Structure**

**Principle 2 – Establish Clear Goals**

**Principle 3 – Model and Enjoy the Writing Process**

**Principle 4 – Support Positive Thinking**

## ***Writing skills versus the writing process***

As you strive to support a child with writing, it is helpful to have a solid understanding of what goes into writing. In particular, it is important to appreciate that there is a difference between *writing skills* (handwriting, spelling) and the *writing process* (a set of steps to follow when creating a written piece).

Some children struggle with writing skills, such as how to hold a pencil, writing well-spaced, clear letters, or spelling. Writing skills are the mechanics of good writing that allow a child to get words on the page. When writing skills are in place, a child can focus their energy on getting their thoughts on the page – not on how to spell words or write legibly.

<b>Writing Skills</b>	<b>Writing Process</b>
Handwriting Spelling Grammar	Steps for writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan</li><li>• Outline</li><li>• Revise</li><li>• Edit</li></ul>

It is hard to focus on the writing process when a child struggles with the mechanics of writing. On the next page, we provide some basic pointers to help you in your efforts to support a child with the mechanics of writing if the need should arise.

# Tips for Supporting Writing Skills

Some children struggle with *writing skills*. Writing skills are the mechanics of writing and include holding a pencil with a proper grip, writing well-spaced letters, and writing legibly. Spelling is also an important writing skill that children need. To support handwriting and spelling, use the same daily routine outlined in this guide, but spend 5-10 minutes in warm-up activities that develop handwriting and spelling. Here are some helpful tips to aid you in your efforts.

## TO PRACTICE HANDWRITING

- *Sit upright in chairs.*
- *Hold the pencil carefully.*  
Use this link to find out more about pencil grip: [www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com](http://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com). Also, you can find videos of proper pencil grip on YouTube.
- *Consider a physical grip if a child needs support gripping a pencil.*  
A child may need support gripping a pencil with a proper grip, and a physical grip may help them to do so. If a physical grip is needed, see [www.therapro.com](http://www.therapro.com).
- *Trace large letters and use words to direct oneself when forming each letter.*  
You can find guidelines for handwriting instruction in the document found using the following link: [www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/eecd\\_printcurk6.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/eecd_printcurk6.pdf).
- *Keep it fun!*  
Daily practice with repetition is needed, but keep this practice as entertaining as possible. For example, you can make sandpaper letters to trace with fingers. Or, make letters in shaving cream.

## TO PRACTICE SPELLING

- *Find out which types of words a child needs to practice.*  
Use the results of an informal assessment to choose which phonics patterns to practice. You can find an example of an informal spelling assessment using the following link: [wordstheirway842.weebly.com/assessments.html](http://wordstheirway842.weebly.com/assessments.html).
- *Find a simple progression of word lists to practice.*  
Use resources such as “Recipe for Reading” as a guide for which spelling patterns to practice. When practicing with a child, show a spelling pattern from your resource. Then dictate three to five words that follow that pattern each day. Write these patterns in different colors or scented markers. Keep it fun!
- *Dictate words that had been misspelled in their actual writing.*
- *When dictating, emphasize breaking the words into each sound and syllable.*  
Placing a slash mark between each syllable can help a child break the word into smaller parts to make spelling it easier.
- *Track the percentage of words a child spells correctly in their writing.*  
Be sure to count longer, more complex vocabulary words attempted separately. Show excitement as a child reaches for these, even if not spelling them correctly yet.
- *Celebrate a child's efforts and highlight the gains made!*

## Principle 1: Offer Structure

Set a regular routine **time of day and place** to enjoy writing together. This might be just after school ends, during snack time, after dinner, or at bedtime. The space can be relaxed such as on a favorite cozy sofa, outdoors, or in bed before going to sleep.

Establish and follow a **routine**. Every day, at the same time of day, take out a basket of fun books to choose from, and a special writer's notebook. Read these books together, noticing how the author makes them inviting and engaging to read. Then practice using the writing process together in ways shown in Step 2 & 3.

Ensure the **place** to write every day is quiet and free from distractions. Keep supplies in this place all within reach. These would include: a writer's notebook with lined paper, decorated pencils, sticky notes, and different color highlighters for marking up great features in written pieces.

## Principle 2: Establish Clear Goals

### **Collect an initial writing sample**

Once you are ready to go, you'll want to set a focus or goal. You can do this by collecting a pre-assessment or any initial writing piece already written. This can be a piece that was written in school or done at home. It could be about a favorite story read together such as: "Describe the traits of the mouse in the *The Lion and the Mouse*."

### **Compare a child's writing to a writing model**

Once you have a writing sample, compare it to strong models written by children at the same grade level. You can find such models at most state assessment sites. You can use those from any state.

- **New York: EngageNY**  
<https://www.engageny.org/resource/released-2019-3-8-ela-and-mathematics-state-test-questions>
- **Massachusetts: MCAS**  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/2019/>
- **National: Achieve the Core**  
<https://achievethecore.org/category/330/student-writing-samples>

# Analyzing Informative Paragraphs and Essays

For informative paragraphs or essays, you can use TIDE to guide how you look at each section of a child's writing.

**T** = **T**opic clearly stated?

**I** = **I**nformation (evidence from the text) supports your points?

**D** = **D**etails or detailed analysis (ideas from your own mind) are strong?

**E** = **E**nd wraps up the piece, and is it impactful and interesting?

Read the annotations on whichever student samples you choose, so you can see what makes it strong. Then put this piece side by side with the pre-assessment to decide what goals to set. Look over each section, section by section, to see what is working and what could be stronger based on the student models you reviewed.

## **Keep writing and look for areas of improvement**

After writing several more pieces, you can review them all against the initial models you found and look for growth from the first piece the child wrote.

For example, you might notice a model starts with a clear topic sentence or has well selected evidence that supports claims made. If these are not yet there in the child's pre-assessment, they can all become goals.

You will also see areas where the child is clearly improving. These improvements hearten and encourage you and the child because you will start to see clear growth. Point them out to the child.

## **Make the goals manageable**

Begin with one or two manageable goals. Once they are met, you can add more. You can move to stronger vocabulary or better sentence structure over time.





## Principle 3: Model and Enjoy the Writing Process

### **Read with the child and point out strong writing**

To support meeting the goals you set for a child's writing, begin by examining the writing in books you both enjoy. Notice strong features when you read, write those down, and mimic them when you write together. If you read a book about sharks, note how the author opened the book and set a focus before diving in to give information about sharks. Keep a list of what you admire in various books in a *writer's notebook*. Make this exciting, like discovering treasures. Notice one or two features each time you read, using guiding questions to do so.

*What juicy words do you notice? What kinds of sentences do you see? Do they all begin the same way? What patterns does the writer use? How are the ideas structured or set up?*

### **Write with the child**

Then, also in the writer's notebook, begin a new writing piece together. It is fine to do the physical writing yourself, while ideas are shared, to make writing less of a chore for the child. This can take some of the pressure off of the child and make writing feel more like a creative adventure in word play and exploring ideas. You can even call this *snuggle writing* as you sit close together.

### **Bring POWeR to writing with the child**

During snuggle writing, practice using the writing process together in simple step by step ways. An easy to remember way to understand and follow the writing process is **POWeR**:

**Pick ideas:** To pick ideas, you can make a list together. What are all the qualities of the mouse in "The Lion and the Mouse"? List them, and go on a treasure hunt to find examples for each in the story.

**Organize:** Now turn your ideas into an outline. Include in your outline:

- T - topic (trait of the mouse)
- I - information (examples of the mouse's traits)
- D - details (explain how those examples show the trait)
- E - ending (wrap up your ideas)

**Write:** Now use your outline to write up a paragraph or essay draft.

**edit:** edit is spelled with a lowercase 'e' because it is more important to revise before editing. Editing is where you fix mistakes and check for punctuation. It is not the same as revision.

**Revise:** Take another look at your ideas to see if you can revise any parts. Are they clear? Can you add anything to make the ideas clearer or more fun to read?

In this way, **POWeR** provides a guide to follow for the steps in the writing process.

## Guided release of the writing process

In order to really practice using the writing process, you can model each step by thinking aloud how you would do each part, and then write collaboratively. For example, you can say aloud, "I'll write a paragraph about the traits of the mouse in 'The Lion and the Mouse.' Hmm, well, the mouse is brave. He speaks up and gives ideas and a promise to the lion instead of being so scared he could not speak. Yes, I'll write that down. I can do this!"

You can write collaboratively when you actually hold the pencil and write down ideas as these are generated. This can be playful and informal. If a child says "woof" while writing about dogs, write that down! Then use it as a hook at the opening of the piece.

When finished with the piece you wrote together in your writer's notebook, you can type up the ideas into an Amazon book review or read them aloud to a relative. This creates an audience and makes writing even more fun.

## The Writing Process

When supporting writing in the home, you would not "teach" this process, but just support it. Schools already teach and use it, so you can support it at home in playful, informal, pleasant shared writing experiences.

**P**ull apart task &  
Pick ideas



**P**ick ideas (from the text)

**O**rganize ideas

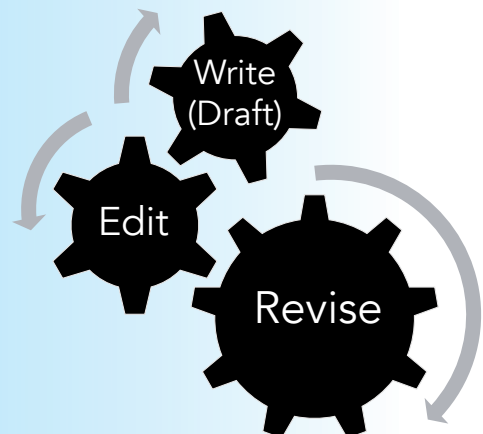


**T**opic Introduction  
**I**mportant Evidence  
**D**etailed Examination  
**E**nd

**W**rite (draft),  
and say more

**e**dit

**R**evise



## Principle 4: Support Positive Thinking

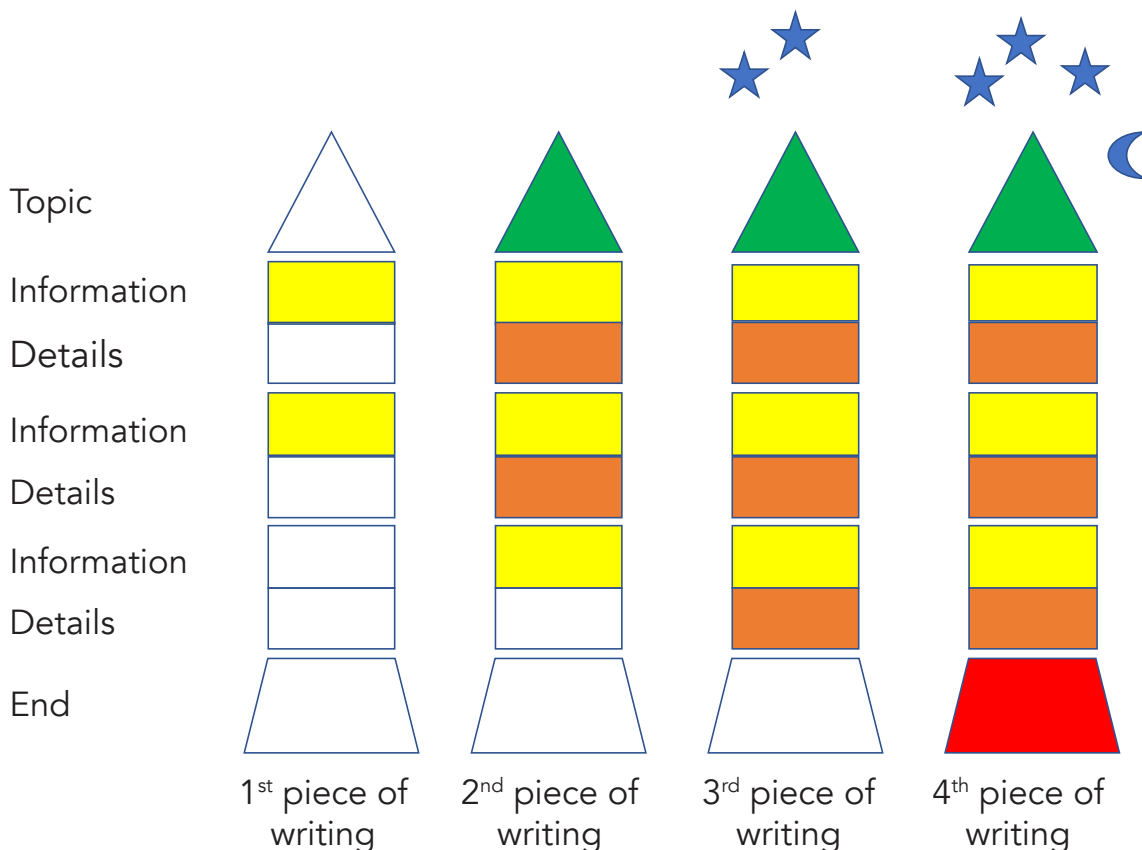
A critical piece of writing well is having the self-confidence that one can write well. Self-confidence can be developed over time through self-talk and seeing growth. You can make lists of self-talk phrases to use whenever you begin writing, such as "I got this!" or "I'm becoming a terrific writer with all these tools and strategies!" Every day when you begin writing together, you can both write down positive self-talk.

To build confidence grounded in seeing oneself improve as a writer, keep track of how many elements of TIDE you include when you write. If the child had a topic, three pieces of information, three details and an end, the piece would get all eight points. If not, those can become goals to work toward each time the child writes.

You can use simple graphics (e.g., a rocket ship) to provide a fun way to track the details provided in a child's writing. You can give extra stars above a rocket for each juicy vocabulary word, and moons for words that link together ideas and paragraphs (first, next, because) and make the writing flow more clearly.

It is encouraging to see oneself getting more and more points as the writing gets stronger and meets goals. When the writing process is made clear and practiced daily, writing can become a fun pastime for a child.

### Blast off with Writing



## ***In Summary***

Supporting writing can appear challenging and complicated. It doesn't need to be. Keep in mind that a little support with easy-to-use tools can go a long way! Build writing into your daily routine so it becomes a habit, like brushing one's teeth. Keep it fun and motivating. Be sure to start by talking about the child's writing goals, listing positive self-talk to help meet these, and then writing about topics that are exciting for the child. The tools (TIDE) and steps for the writing process (POWeR) may seem small, but if you can put in the effort to practice with them a little bit every day, a child will grow by leaps and bounds. Structured practice and good tools are the keys to a child growing to love writing.

## **References**

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