

# WRITE ON

The Kid-Friendly  
Mother-Pleasing  
Gentle Way To Learn  
to Write

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## WRITE ON

Put away your red marking pen, roll up your sleeves, and get ready to become a writing coach. This book is not about assigning and grading students' writing. It is about getting students and parents interacting with writing.

Before going further, take a moment to look at how the writing pages are laid out. Each page is called a Write On and has its own number. The title of each Write On and its corresponding number can be found in the upper right hand corner.

The most prominent feature of each Write On is the sample writing done by a student. Before beginning the writing process, sit down and read the writing sample with your young writer. The writing samples are non-intimidating so your student can feel, "I can do *that*."

On top of the page, in the center, is the objective box. This lets the student and parent know the purpose of the Write On. In some cases, it will state that this is an introduction to the next Write On. In these cases, the student's written work for this first Write On will become the basis for the next. It also indicates to the writing coach that both should be done before proceeding to the next writing level. The writing levels are described in detail on the next pages.

You will also notice there is a direction box, shaped like an arrow, in the upper left hand corner. This gives the writing coach the steps to proceed through the writing process.

At the bottom of the page, you may see one or more idea clouds. These may include optional ideas, alternatives, or writing starters.

And finally, on the back side there is space to keep track of your

students' writing as they progress through the different levels.

The table of contents lists the 100 Write On lessons. You will notice that every fifth Write On is bolded. These are the Progressive Structured Reports that gradually lead the student from writing sentences, to paragraphs, to essays, then compositions, and finally preparing a thesis.

Notice I said "gradually." One can do the math and realize that if a student did one Write On per day, it would take three and a half months to complete the book. But it is not realistic to think that in less than four months a third or fourth grader will be writing a thesis.

Instead, the progression one will see over several months will not be numerically, from one end of the book to the next. The progression will be in depth, as the student progresses through the four levels of writing for each Write On.

## WHAT WE WISH TO AVOID

Before discussing the writing in each level, let's examine what we don't want our students to do. Consider these scenarios:

After being told to write a one page paper describing a recent field trip, Alicia is sitting at the table staring out the window chewing on her pencil. There is nothing on her paper.

Nick has been given an assignment to write a two to three page paper on one of the founding fathers. After several days, he turns in a 1 ½ page paper with large writing. It is obvious he was trying to make it seem like he has written more. There is no organization to the content.

Samantha has been told to write a paragraph using descriptive writing. Her paragraph has very little descriptive language.

In these scenarios, the students are told to do an assignment, but don't have the skills to do them. It would be like handing a beginning piano student a complex piece of music and expecting him to sit down and play it.

In contrast, students can be taught writing skills by having someone coach them on how to apply their own ideas to the written page. To do that, we need to differentiate between Learning to Write (the first three levels) and Writing to Learn (the fourth level.)

LEARNING TO WRITE or  
WRITING TO LEARN

How does a student learn to write, play the piano, ride a bike, do a math problem, cook a holiday meal, or any other skill? He or she needs to be shown how to do it, and given the opportunity to practice. The skill level will increase with practice.

With Write On, the student is shown a writing skill, and given three opportunities to practice it. With each practice level, the amount of independence and complexity increases. This is what is meant by Learning to Write.

When a student is Writing to Learn, she uses a skill she has already mastered to explore content in another subject area. She can concentrate on the content, confident in her ability to use the writing skills she has already learned and practiced.

For example, when a student is first introduced to the concept of writing a paragraph, he will write paragraphs about things he is familiar with. His

concentration and focus is on this new skill of developing paragraphs.

If the student is introduced to the concept of paragraphs and expected to write a paragraph on a subject that is he is now just learning - for example, the atomic theory - he has two new areas of focus and can be overwhelmed.

First, he learns to write paragraphs, and once he has advanced through to the level of mastery, he can write a paragraph about atomic theory, concentrating his efforts on understanding and explaining these new scientific ideas.

In the first three levels, then, students are learning to write. In the fourth level, they are writing to learn. The process can be summed up in this table.

*Learning to Write*

	<b>Level</b>	<b>Parents' Role</b>	<b>Usual Subject Matter</b>
<b>Level One</b>	Beginner	Writes with student	Familiar to the student
<b>Level Two</b>	Intermediate	Gives prompts, cues	Common
<b>Level Three</b>	Advanced	Suggests improvements	Less Common

*Writing to Learn*

	<b>Level</b>	<b>Parent's Role</b>	<b>Usual Subject Matter</b>
<b>Level Four</b>	Mastery	Supports ideas	Academic

LEVEL ONE

WORKING TOGETHER

The first time a student does a Write On, she will do it at Level One - Writing Together. The writing coach looks at the Write On with the student and together they read and discuss the sample writing. The student chooses a topic she would like to write about. It is

usually most effective if she chooses something familiar and interesting to her. This is particularly important if the writing skill is new or challenging for her.

The student and coach can then discuss how the topic can be approached. Through the entire assignment, the student and coach are working together.

As an example, let's listen as one coach/student team develops a written report for Write On #15. For our purposes here, it may help if you examine Write On 15 and Write On 16 (which builds on 15) to better understand this process.

#### **Sample Dialogue: Level One**

Coach: Now that we have read this sample, it's time for you to do one. Is there an animal you would like to write a Three Sentence Report on?

Student: I want to write about my rabbit.

(Notice he chose something familiar. If he were to choose an animal he knows very little about, it may be better to guide him to something familiar at this level.)

Coach: A rabbit is a good choice. What three things can you tell me about rabbits?

Student: They are furry.

Coach: Good point. What should we write, "Rabbits are.....?"

Student: Rabbits are covered with fur.

(The first sentence is written down.)

Coach: Okay, what else can you write about rabbits?

Student: They eat plants.

Coach: That's important as well. How should we write that?

Student: Rabbits are plant eaters.

(This is also written down.)

Coach: You have a good start on your report. Now we need only one more.

Student: Rabbits are soft.

(The coach realizes that soft and furry are closely connected and it will be difficult to develop two distinct paragraphs for Write On 16. Therefore, the student will be guided away from this point.)

Coach: Soft is related to the rabbits' fur which you already described. Can you tell me something completely different about them?

Student: They have long ears.

Coach: Why do they have long ears?

Student: Because they need good hearing to get away from their enemies.

Coach: You have a choice here. You could write about their ears, and say something like, "Rabbits have long ears" or you could tell about their hearing and say something like, "Rabbits need sharp hearing to survive."

Student: I'd like to write about their hearing.

Step by step, the student and coach are interacting with the material. The student is succeeding in applying his ideas to the written structure without struggling to understand what is expected of him. At this level, it is even acceptable for the coach to do the actual physical work of writing down the sentences the student develops orally. When the coach does the writing by the student's dictation, however, the student may benefit from copying the sentences in his own handwriting. Regardless of how the physical writing is done, the student should be affirmed

for developing his own ideas and sentences.

## LEVEL TWO USING PROMPTS AND CUES

After creating a written work with the coach, and being affirmed for successfully writing about their chosen topic, the student will have more confidence in his or her ability to do the writing presented in that Write On. In the second level, the coach discusses the ideas with the student before the actual writing is done. The coach may give prompts. She may write down on a card some of the ideas discussed as a cues for the student to use. It may help to write down the spelling of words that may be unfamiliar.

When two Write On lessons are paired together, the first one will state in the objective box that it is an introduction to the second. For instance, Write On 15 is an introduction to Write On 16. In these situations, the student will do both lessons at the first level before proceeding to the second level with the earlier assignment. In our example, the student completed Write On 16 and developed her three sentences into three paragraphs about rabbits with the coach's guidance. Now she is going to tackle Write On 15 again, but this time at Level Two.

### Sample Dialogue for Level Two

Coach: You did a great job doing the Three Sentence Report about rabbits. Let's choose another animal, and you will write a different report. Is there an animal you are interested in?

Student: Alligators

Coach: Okay, alligators would make a fun report to read about. What can you tell me about them?

Student: They live in swamps.

Coach: Fine, I'll write "swamp" on this card. What else?

Student: They are reptiles.

Coach: I'll write "reptiles" here as well. What else?

Student: I can't think of anything else.

Coach: You've told me what kind of animal they are and where they live. Can you tell me about their diet, or how they produce young, or about their personalities?

Student: They eat swamp animals and fish.

Coach: That's true. Do you want to say they are carnivores or that they eat animals?

At this level the coach is giving prompts before the writing begins. If she finds the student is getting bogged down during the writing process, she may intervene with suggestions to help get a sentence started.

## LEVEL THREE WRITING WITH INDEPENDENCE

At the third level, the student demonstrates greater independence. The coach discusses his ideas with him but doesn't write the words down for the report. She may encourage him to write down his ideas in outline form during their pre-writing discussion.

### Sample Dialogue

Coach: You wrote two reports on animals: rabbits and alligators. You are going to finish this project by writing a third report on a different animal. Do you have any ideas?

Student: How about fish?

Coach: Let's be more specific. Is there a particular fish you can tell others about?

Student: Maybe sword fish.

Coach: That's a good idea and would make an interesting report. Would you like to tell me your ideas, or would you rather work on it alone?

If the student has difficulty coming up with ideas, the coach can ask them questions to draw ideas out of them.

#### LEVEL FOUR MASTERY

At this point, the student has written three reports using the same writing skills. He should have developed a comfort level with this skill. Now, instead of Learning to Write with this skill, he can use it in order to Write to Learn.

#### Sample Dialogue Level Four

Coach: Remember when you did the Three Sentence Report about animals? You are going to use that for your science unit study. Today I want you to read your book about planets, and write a Three Sentence Report about any of the planets.

The writing coach should keep a list of all the Write On lessons the student has successfully achieved independence and mastery. This list can be consulted when assigning written work for the student's writing for other subjects.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITE ON

##### **Does the student have to do all four levels with each Write On?**

No. Some students may demonstrate sufficient skill after doing it only one time. In this case, you may want to put it in your list of Write On lessons that have been mastered.

On the other hand, some students may be more challenged by a particular skill,

or by writing in general. There is nothing magical about the number four. It may take seven or eight times for them to achieve the level of mastery. With the student who struggles with the writing process, it is even more important to focus on writing about topics of their interest and affirming small successes.

##### **How long should it take to complete all one hundred Write On lessons?**

The length of time depends on the student's writing ability and his or her proficiency of writing when the course is begun. The goal is to develop writing proficiency over a course of several years, not in one or two written assignments.

##### **How are the Progressive Structured Reports different from the other Write On lessons?**

Every fifth Write On (all of the numbers divisible by five) are Progressive Structured Reports (PSR's). This is academic writing that is structured and progresses in difficulty to the writing of paragraphs, essays, longer compositions, and finally a thesis. Again, you should not expect that many students can progress to writing a thesis the same year they learn how to construct a paragraph. The student should have multiple opportunities to succeed at each skill before proceeding to the next PSR.

##### **Do we start at Write On 1?**

It is not necessary to start at the beginning. Look at the Progressive Structured Reports (those divisible by five) and determine your student's current writing skill. For some students, it may be helpful to give a review by starting at the skill level one step easier than their current skill. But certainly a

student who has been writing essays does not need to start with the construction of sentences, unless that is an area of weakness that should be reviewed.

**How much attention should be given to the creative writing skills between the Progressive Structured Reports?**

The amount of attention you give to the lessons that focus on creative skills will depend on your student. There are two different types of students that often enjoy the creative writing more than others. One is the natural writer. This is the student with a natural writing ability who enjoys using a variety of styles. These students often enjoy playing with words and phrases and are quite creative in their writing.

Another student who may enjoy the creative writing comes from the other end of the writing spectrum. The reluctant writer who dreads holding a pencil long enough to construct a paragraph may enjoy the success of these lessons, which are usually shorter and more entertaining. One goal of a creative Write On is to give such students a taste of success and take away the aversion to writing.

We should mention that there is another young writer who may not appreciate the creative lessons. This is the down to earth, pragmatic student who wants no bells and whistles. "Give me my work and let me do it and be done with it," may be his approach to his studies and such writing may seem unnecessary and even foolish to him. Each writing coach should evaluate the needs, interests, and skills of their students when choosing how to incorporate Write On into the students' studies.

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Obviously, no two students are going to progress through Write On at the same pace. While each student is different, it may help to give a general guideline on how to proceed.

Assuming that the student is doing the Progressive Structured Reports at his or her current writing ability, it may take six to eight weeks to progress to the next PSR. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, it should be emphasized that some will progress this far in a week or two, and others may take even longer.

Start by looking ahead for the next five Write On lessons. Which of these may take longer?

You may find it helpful to do the PSR one time at the first level. Then, before proceeding to the second level, the student may enjoy being introduced to one of the creative Write On lessons in between. It may be easiest for the writing coach to do these lessons in the order they come in, just to keep track of where they are in the program. But that certainly is not necessary, and one may find it beneficial to pick and choose the order.

After doing the creative writing, the student may return and do the PSR at the second level. In this case, the student would do each of the creative lessons between the PSR, and by the time he has reached the level of mastery, he is ready to progress to the next set of five lessons. That may look like this:

- PSR Write On 10 - Level One  
Write On 11
- PSR Write On 10 - Level Two  
Write On 12
- PSR Write On 10 - Level Three  
Write On 13
- PSR Write On 10 - Level Four  
Write On 14

Also, it is possible for the student to do the shorter, creative lessons through the four levels as well. In many cases, it may be redundant to do it four times, but again the coach will assess the ability of that Write On to meet the needs of the student.

Keep in mind that during this period of time the student will not only be Learning to Write, but also Writing to Learn. The more unfamiliar the material he is writing about for his other subjects of study, the easier the Write On skill that should be chosen. There is no need to stay within the five Write On lessons for his Writing to Learn assignments. Instead, feel free to go back to any Write On that gives the student tools for reporting in written form what he is studying.

#### EVALUATING YOUR STUDENTS WRITING

Evaluating and grading students' written work is part of the learning process. The writing coach should focus the evaluation on rewarding strengths and improving areas of weakness.

Below is a simple but efficient way to grade writing. Choose ten criteria that will be used to evaluate the writing. For each criteria, the student can achieve up to ten points.

Some of the criteria you may wish to use for grading are listed here. Any ten that are most applicable to the lesson can be chosen. It may be helpful to the student if a grading criteria sheet is devised before she begins writing. That gives the student the opportunity of knowing what she should focus on. In this case, the grading criteria becomes part of the learning process.

##### **Content**

Ideas communicated clearly

Explanations are logical  
Originality of ideas  
Gets the readers attention  
Paragraph development  
Outline is well organized  
Introduction  
Conclusion  
Bibliography  
Neatness of paper  
Art work  
Directions were followed  
Paper completed on time  
Accomplishes the stated purpose (state what the purpose is)  
Improvement in area of previous weakness (state what that area is)

##### **Mechanics**

Spelling  
Grammar  
Punctuation

There is a simple strategy for grading the criteria for the students' content. If it is clear that the student has put forth effort in developing her paper and satisfactorily done the lesson, you may want to give nine out of ten points as the basic grade for each criteria. If there is something specific for any criteria that is stronger, give ten points and tell the student what she did that was exceptional. For any weak areas, deduct one point, or in some cases two or more points, and again give a specific explanation.

If it is apparent that the students' effort is lacking, eight points for each criteria may be more appropriate. With nine points, the average grade would be a 90%, which is a reasonable grade for a good paper with a grade of B, and gives a starting point for him to earn the additional points towards an A. If an eight point scale is used as the basic grade, an average of 80% is indicated. The coach can use whatever base points that are appropriate, as long as the reasoning is consistent.

Grading the mechanics is a little more objective, but the basic standard will be dependent on the writing coach. To begin with, consider deducting one point per paragraph per error. For instance, if the student wrote five paragraphs and has ten spelling errors, then two points out of ten is deducted.

Mechanics should count if the paper was assigned and several days given to write it, because the student had time to improve the mechanics after the content was produced. For writing that is done in one sitting and handed in, mechanics should not be emphasized, and primarily the content evaluated. In other words, the mechanics can account for 50% of the grade, for 0% of the grade, or anywhere in between.

Just as the athletic coach is not the judge for an athlete's competitive performance, some writing coaches do not grade the final report. You may want to consider having another parent, teacher, or other individual do the grading. The writing coach should still select the criteria by which the paper is graded.

#### TIPS FROM THE TRENCHES

Each family will develop their own way of incorporating Write On into their educational program. Here are some ideas that have been used:

Keep a file folder for each number of Write On, and put all the written assignments a student completes for that Write On in the correct folder.

The student may choose one of their written works for each Write On as the one they wish to submit for a grade. Those assignments go through the complete proofing and editing process. Use art work, stickers, colored stationary for the printer, or scrap

booking supplies to give selected written works a flare.

While going through the Learning to Write process, the teacher assigns the Write On for the student to do. When the student uses the Writing to Learn process to report on information they are learning in a unit study, the student chooses which Write On they wish to develop.

Some students find correcting the mechanics to be drudgery, and dread the writing process because of it. It helps to separate the writing from the editing process. In your writing lessons, focus entirely on the development of content. Later, use their unedited writings as the basis for grammar lessons.

Students often appreciate clues as they do the detective work of finding their mechanical errors (or "crimes".) Give them a list of things to find. For example:

- spelling errors - 3
- run on sentences - 2
- omitted apostrophe - 2
- incorrect homonyms - 1

The student needs to read the writing one time while hunting for each type of error.

#### FINALLY

As parents, we watch our children grow as they learn to walk, and talk, and read, and numerous other skills. Writing is one of the more complex tasks your child will learn, and as such it is a slow process. Enjoy the process with them. Encourage their ideas and guide their use of proper mechanics. At the end of each year you both will be rewarded with a portfolio of their writing progress.

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(🕒 Introduces the next Write On)

(Bolded—Progressive Structured Reports)

Attached  
are 2 sample pages.



# Write On #15 THREE SENTENCE REPORT

## Objectives

1. Write an outline
2. Introduce Write On #16

### DIRECTIONS

1. Choose an animal.
2. Write three sentences about that animal.

The sentences should be independent of each other. (One would not write, "Bees are insects" and "Bees have six legs" because all insects have six legs. Those two sentences are not independent of each other.)

*Write 3 different facts.*

- BEES**
1. Bees are insects.
  2. They live in hives.
  3. Bees make honey.

- Tyrannosaurus Rex**
1. Tyrannosaurus Rex was large.
  2. He was a meat eater.
  3. T. Rex had weak front legs.

- Penguins**
1. Penguins are found in Antarctica.
  2. Penguins live in groups.
  3. Both parents take care of the young.

Use 3 index cards and cut out the shape of your animal. Write one sentence on each index card.

Make a mobile.

### Objectives

1. Use topic sentences
2. Develop paragraphs
3. Indent paragraphs

#### DIRECTIONS

The sentences from the "Three Sentence Report" will be used.

1. Indent five spaces on your paper. Then write the first sentence from your three sentence report.
2. Write two to five more sentences telling more about the first sentence.
3. Indent the next paragraph and write the second sentence from your "Three Sentence Report."
4. Continue the process with the second and third paragraphs.

Each fact becomes a topic sentence.

Tyrannosaurus Rex was a large dinosaur. He was about twenty feet high and his claws were eight inches long. He might have opened his mouth four feet. Tyrannosaurus' head was at least as long as a man.

Tyrannosaurus was a meat eater. His teeth were like daggers. Tyrannosaurus fossils have been found near duck-billed dinosaur fossils. He may have snacked on the duck-bills. He could have eaten other large dinosaurs such as the Apatosaurus.

Tyrannosaurus had weak front legs. They were so short he was not even able to touch his chin. He might have used his front legs as arms to push himself up after a nap. Perhaps Tyrannosaurus used his legs to kill his prey.