

## **Accommodations for Written Output**

One of the most challenging areas for children with attention difficulties or learning disabilities or self-control problems is getting written work done at school.

It's common for children to struggle to get thoughts on paper. There are a number of reasons why this might be true.

Remember that for young children, writing is a form of multitasking. They must think about what they're going to say, they then have to put those words down on paper, sometimes having to work to learn or know how to form the letters, then they have to think about how to incorporate all of the conventions, all the expectations in their written work. Be very careful about combining challenging learning activities with the practice of writing. In fact, when I was young, and I think this is the best way to do it, most of our handwriting writing practice was done repetitively, it wasn't as we were writing a new story. Because if you're trying to create a story, you don't have to worry and put your attention on to how to get that story down on paper.

When we talk with teachers about alternatives to written work, there are so many. Most schools and teachers are well versed in this. You can give an oral presentation. You can type or dictate. You can use voice to text functions. You can use slide presentations. Multimedia. Working with a buddy. There are so many ways to reduce the writing pressures so that children can convey what they know more easily. I'm a big fan of spending some time with students just talking with them about what they've learned, and it doesn't have to be a teacher assessing a child's knowledge or skill. Parents can be helpful in this regard. The simple activity of talking with your child about what they've learned about the water cycle can be done at home and the parent can share with the teacher what their son or daughter knows about the water cycle.

I think there's also an overemphasis on completing written assignments. I'm more interested in getting started with written assignments, more interested in story starters because if our goal is always to finish, we're not going to recognize the successes involved in marching towards the goal.

I'm also very concerned about the tendency to put written work up on the walls or public displays because I can tell you that many children are embarrassed by the quality of their written work, and they avoid doing it because they don't want anyone to see it. Also, as I've mentioned before, I want to add motivating factors to why we're writing. I can't tell you how many times I got in trouble in school by complaining about the age old assignment of writing what we did on our summer vacation. I spent a lot of time in the principal's office for making the wrong comments about different writing activities. To me, reading a book and having to write about it, it's like why are we doing that? Let me just read another book.

If you are going to have writing activities, it's not just writing skills that you want to work on, you want to work on writing motivations. You want to have children understand why it is important to learn to write. How it helps them. As you think about writing in school, remember that this is a challenging activity for children, and you want to be careful not to turn them off to writing because of the various barriers that I've discussed. Another thing that I should point out is that some ADHD children have trouble because of the motor skill involved in writing. That's why we emphasize things such as typing or voice to text. I don't really understand the connection here. I think it has to do with how the thinking brain, the pre-frontal cortex, directs information or commands to the fine motor region. I'm not really sure. I might have made that up, actually. But here's one thing I know. I see a number of children who respond to medication therapy whose writing improves as well.