

BASIC CONCEPTS & “KEY WORD” OUTLINES

1. Most children who dislike writing have difficulty partly because they “don’t know what to write about.”
2. Being able to think of something to write about should not be a prerequisite for learning how to write.
3. Writing is a complicated process; spelling, handwriting and composition are entirely different neurological functions. For a child who has difficulty with writing, this complexity must be broken into small manageable pieces.
4. Imitation, as a critical part of learning anything, it is not only OK, but is actually the best way to begin learning to write.
5. If the child doesn’t have to worry about WHAT to write, he can learn HOW to write. As the child gradually gains confidence and competence, he becomes more comfortable with the task of determining “what to write.”
6. Using a “source text” allows the student to “get content” for writing, while reviewing content from subjects such as history, science, Bible, literature, geography, etc. Writing should be *a part of the* study of these subjects rather than a “subject” unto itself.
7. Just as Benjamin Franklin took “short hints of the sentiment of each sentence,” to teach himself to write, our students can use “key word outlines” to help them get started with writing from simple source texts.
8. Source text can be fiction or non-fiction. Aesop’s fables work well. Material should be at or below the reading level of the child. Selections of 4-7 sentences are ideal. Try one from a short Aesop’s fable:

The Fox and the Goat

By an unlucky chance, a Fox fell into a deep well from which he could not escape. A Goat passed by, and asked the Fox what he was doing down there. "Oh, have you not heard?" said the Fox, "there is going to be a great drought, so I came down here in order to be sure to have water by me. Why don't you come down too?" The Goat thought this a good idea, and jumped down into the well. But the Fox immediately sprang on to her back, and by putting his foot on her long horns, managed to hop up to the edge of the well. "Good-bye, friend," said the Fox, "remember, be careful of the advice of one who is in trouble."

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1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
 6. _____
 7. _____

USE OF THE KEY WORD OUTLINE

Step 1: Verbal Summary

Tell back the information verbally, making complete sentences from the key words. Exact duplication is neither expected nor required.

Note: For many children it may best to do several “key word outlines” from short, easy to read paragraphs and practice choosing words and telling back content, until the process becomes fairly easy.

Step 2: Written Summary - first draft

Using a key word outline, have the student first verbally tell back the content and then proceed to write down on paper the sentences he said. As the child writes, remember:

- **Don’t** expect great handwriting; **do** wait until the clean copy to say anything
- **Don’t** expect perfect spelling; do be his “human dictionary” (Never say: “go look it up”)
- **Don’t** worry about neatness; **do** encourage “no erasing.”
- **Don’t** over correct or lecture; **do** praise the child’s efforts.
- **Don’t** frown, grimace or look serious; **do** smile as much as possible.

Step 3: Clean copy

After he is finished, the parent edits to correct spelling, syntax and punctuation. Then the student must neatly copy (or type) a final version. There is no such thing as a “first and only” draft.

Note: These steps should be repeated numerous times until the process has become relatively easy (or at least less painful). Don’t hesitate to help, give suggestions, and even dictate sentences if necessary. When you feel the child has confidence and understands the process, proceed onto step four:

Step 4: Beginning “Dress-up”, Creating a checklist

Introduce the idea of “dressing-up” the compositions to make them sound a little more professional. Teach them to add an “ly word” and give them a nice list of adverbs to choose from. Do many assignments requiring just one “ly” word. When that is easy, add a “who/which” clause, and when that is easy, add a “because clause.”

1. **who/which** The clever fox convinced the goat, who jumped into the well.
2. **-ly word** The fox effortlessly jumped up on the goat’s back and escaped the well.
3. **because** Because of the Fox’s sincerity, the goat believed him.
4. **strong verb** The fox spun a tale of impending drought.

Create a “style” checklist for your student, being very specific, and provide “word lists” to ensure success:

<u>General</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Title and name on paper
<input type="checkbox"/>	Composition double-spaced
<input type="checkbox"/>	Checked for spelling errors
<u>“Dress-up” Techniques</u>	
“who/which” clause	<input type="checkbox"/>
- ly word (adverb)	<input type="checkbox"/>
“because”	<input type="checkbox"/>
strong verb	<input type="checkbox"/>

