Get outside and write!

Writing doesn’t have to happen at a desk or table. As the weather warms up and the flowers bloom, let your youngster take writing outside with these suggestions.

“Paint” with water
Encourage your child to dip a paintbrush in water and use it to write letters or words on a sidewalk, driveway, or fence. She could even leave a message for passersby. (“Happy Friday!”)

Make rock sentences
Have your youngster use a fine-tipped marker to write sentences on rocks—one word per rock. Then, she can mix up the rocks, and you try to put the words in the correct order. Switch roles by writing a rock sentence for her to unscramble.

Play nature bingo
Let your child make a bingo card filled with things to find on a walk, such as a yellow flower, a tree with fruit, a pond, and a turtle. Head out and see how many items she can cross off her card.

Write stories and letters
Suggest that your youngster use nature as inspiration for a story or a friendly letter. She might write a story from the point of view of a squirrel or cactus. Or she could write a letter to the sun or sky.

List outdoor activities
Sit outside together, and help your child write a list of activities to try. If she spots a bird feeder in a neighbor’s tree, she might write, “Make a bird feeder and watch birds.”

My book cover
Designing a book cover is a fun way to build reading comprehension. Ask your child to pick a book and follow these steps.

1. Talk about what the book cover includes (title, author’s name, picture). Then, read the story together.
2. Have him fold a piece of construction paper in half to make a new jacket for the book. On the front, he can write the title and author, then illustrate something from the story. He might draw his favorite part, for instance.
3. On the back, help him write a summary. He could describe the main character and tell what happens to him. Tip: If he isn’t writing yet, he can dictate his summary to you.
4. Let your youngster hang his cover near his bookshelf. Then, suggest that he make covers for other stories to display with it.
Celebrate poetry

April is National Poetry Month. Make the most of it by checking out books of children’s poetry from the library and enjoying these ideas together.

Poetry picnic. Pack food and poems for a picnic! For instance, put peanut butter sandwiches and pickles in your picnic basket in honor of “Peanut-Butter Sandwich” and “Ickle Me, Pickle Me, Tickle Me Too” (Shel Silverstein). Enjoy reading the poetry along with your food! You might even make up your own food poems as you eat.

Poetry charades. Take turns secretly choosing a poem and acting it out. Everyone else looks through the book and tries to figure out which poem you picked. For “I Am Growing a Glorious Garden” (Jack Prelutsky), your child might pretend to weed, plant, and water. To make it more entertaining—and easier for others to guess the poem, he could use props. He might wear a sun hat, pretend to dig with a shovel, and “sprinkle” from an empty watering can.

Syllable sort

What do the words teacher and pizza have in common? Each has two syllables! This sorting activity helps your child hear syllables, which can make her a better reader and speller.

Ask your youngster to choose a book, perhaps Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse (Kevin Henkes). Read it together, then go back through and let her pick out a dozen words (purple, purse, chocolate, porridge). She can write each word on a separate slip of paper.

Now encourage your child to say the words aloud and sort them into piles according to the number of syllables. For example, purple and plastic go in a pile of two-syllable words, and chocolate and artistic belong in the three-syllable pile. When they’re all sorted, she could look for more words in the book to add to each pile.

Q&A

Build listening skills

My daughter’s attention seems to trail off mid-sentence when I’m talking to her. What can I do to help her become a better listener?

Playing games is an excellent way for your child to practice listening skills. For example, try a classic game of Telephone. Have family members sit in a circle. One person whispers a sentence to the person next to her. Pass it on around the circle, and the last person says the sentence aloud. Is it the original sentence? If not, try again!

Or ask your youngster to cover her eyes as you make noises like flicking a light switch, running water from the tap, or turning the pages of a book. How many sounds can she identify?

Note: If your daughter continues to have difficulty paying attention or listening, mention your concerns to her teacher so the two of you can work together to help her.