

The Write Way To Have Fun



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(Available FREE at www.TimeForBedlam.com)

Introduction

When it comes to writing, many parents focus too much on the end product. They want to see a perfect polished piece. However, writing is a multi-step process so the key to making writing fun is to nurture a playful attitude about the process itself.

Playing with writing is similar to playing with toy blocks. Just as the first step to building a wooden city is piling the blocks on the floor, the first step in any writing project is collecting words on paper. Words are the raw material, the building blocks of writing.

This book will help you focus on collecting that raw material and explore fun ways to get words on paper.* Playing with words is the essence of the writing process and the ideas in this book are focused more on nurturing creativity rather than the nuts and bolts, or “rules” of writing. Formal structure and rules have their place but they have little meaning until the writer is interested in building something out of the raw material he first gathers by playing with words.

You can start by playing with these ideas on your own and discover for yourself how to have fun collecting words on paper. After all, if you can't genuinely have fun writing, how can you expect your child to enjoy the writing process?

Please don't try to force your child to write. That will defeat the purpose of making writing fun. Invite your child to join you in playing with words as you would invite him to join you in playing with blocks. Show him something you wrote based on the suggestions in this book. It's very likely that he'll join in at some point because it's hard to resist watching someone else having fun.

Writing is a useful tool and your child will find real reasons to write and real reasons to create a finished polished piece. So don't worry about it. Just offer up these ideas, relax and focus on making writing fun.

** NOTE: Don't be afraid of letting young children dictate their ideas until they can physically write (or type) well enough to put the words on paper themselves.*

If you find it difficult to relax about your child and writing, don't feel bad. You can use that to create another writing opportunity. Sit down and write about those anxieties. Express your emotions, your worries, and your fears about your child's ability to communicate through the written word.

Writing about your concerns will help you work through the issue and explore possible solutions, which of course is another useful reason for writing. An extra bonus to keeping yourself busy writing when those anxieties bubble up inside is that you will be less likely to push those same writing anxieties onto your kids. And I know that's the last thing you want to do!

I used to have anxiety and concerns about my kids and their writing development when they were young and I sat down and wrote about my worries. Gradually, I learned more about the writing process. I searched and found many ideas and offered those ideas to my kids. I learned the "write way to have fun." You can too.

Throughout this book I have inserted examples from our family's writing, mostly while my two children were elementary school age. I've copied these samples "as is" so you can see the actual results of their early explorations in playing with the written word.

So for now, don't concern yourself with the end product. Learn to have fun playing with words and focus on creating the raw material in an atmosphere of fun and relaxation. Use the following ideas to develop a playful attitude so you can show your kids the "write way to have fun."

Pictures

If a picture really is worth 1,000 words then using photos, cartoons, paintings and other images should be an excellent way to help writers get words on the page. Paying attention and observing the details of the world around you is an important part of many types of writing.

Any picture, photo or image will work. At first, your child may simply describe what he sees in a very factual and sparse manner. "I see a car. It is red." As you play you can develop more specific description by using more

specific words. “I see an automobile. It is a Ford Taurus. It is a shiny bright cherry red.” Keep a dictionary and thesaurus on hand.

You might want to turn this into a game and let your child use a picture that you do not see until after you’ve read his written description. You can talk about what you imagined through his written description and how it matches and differs from the actual picture. Then switch sides. You write a description for him to read and imagine before he sees the actual picture.

Try creating an entire story based on a picture. Or develop humor by creating funny captions.

These are a Few of my Favorite Things: Objects

Of course, observation and attention to detail can also be developed by writing descriptions of real objects, particularly something that is meaningful to your child, like a favorite toy. There are several advantages to using real objects.

- Objects change through the natural wear and tear of human interaction.
- A favorite object encourages the expression of feeling and emotion. Why do you like this toy so much? What is special about it?
- Describing objects is a good place to begin experimenting with using all of the senses in describing detail. How does it feel? Does it have a smell? A taste? What does it sound like when you tap on it with your fingernail?

Here’s a sample description that my son Keith wrote about a souvenir he purchased. Notice how he describes the changes in the object as a result of human interaction:

“My bell of louisville mesering tape is one meter long. If I look at the front I can see all kinds of scatches. When I pull it out and look at the botom I can see all kinds of scatches! On the front it has a picsure of the belle of luisville! It has a chain on it that ataches to it that leads to a hook that I put on my pants. There is a key that I put on it and it go’s to my room.”

Here's one he wrote that expresses an emotional reason why this object is special:

"I have a big stuffed buffalo. It is so big I can ride it. I call it big buff and he is white. He has two white horns and I hold on to them when I ride. But sometimes I hold on to his front hairs. My uncle Gary gave it to me when I was a baby. I sleep with him sometimes."

Melissa wrote this one which describes how the object has been changed through human interaction:

"Mom's green and white thermos cup has the markings of someone who has been chewing on the edge. Inside the chewings are brown tea stains. The green has faded from being washed and sitting out in the sun. On the edge there is a dent from when it got too close to some heat and melted. It feels ridged on the outside and bumpy on the inside but with some smooth part. It smells of stale water mixed with tea."

Objects can be anything at all. Here's an example Melissa wrote:

"The sucker stick is white at the bottom third of it and on the little circle at the bottom there is a silver coloring from a pencil. The middle third is pink and puffed up because of the sucker getting wet and having the juice leak down. The top half has little bits of gum and cherry flavored candy on it. Some parts of the top are still white! It feels wrinkle like."

Dreams

Some people have vivid dreams and remember them well and if your child is one of them, take advantage of this. Many writers use their dreams as raw material. Dreams can be a great way to nurture writing since they often don't make sense. It encourages that playful attitude.

Here's an example of a dream Melissa wrote about:

“I had a dream once that I made Keith mad and we were in a bus. He was driving it and then he ran after me to the back of the bus. We started to go off a cliff. We were falling into a river that had a shark in it. Then I woke up.”

Shopping Lists

I can hear you now, “Oh, come on Debbie, a grocery list is writing?” Well sure it is. You are writing words on paper to communicate, right? Shopping lists can develop the ability to organize writing since grocery store merchandise is generally displayed and arranged into categories.

While at the store, your child can notice how the items are organized and create a sheet with aisle headings. Then he can list items according to store location. As a matter of fact, it’s possible and fun to organize a grocery list in such a way that someone can take the sheet and follow along and collect all the items in the exact walking order. I remember the first time I did this for my husband when he went to buy groceries right after Melissa was born. He came home and said it was awesome because every time he stopped to look around for something, it was only a few steps away.

Organizing a list like this is no different than using an outline or a graphic organizer when working on a writing piece. Many writers organize and map out their projects so working with shopping lists is a fun and useful way to help your child learn to organize written information.

In addition, grocery stores occasionally change their locations, so rearranging the list helps demonstrate the idea that there is not necessarily one “right” way to organize information. It can change depending on the focus of your writing topic and your intended audience.

Group Stories

A group story is just what it sounds like: a story written by a group. It’s perfect for families because each member of the family takes turns writing and adding to a story but there is no pressure to add a specific amount or to

do it in a specific way. Each person is in control of the story when it's his turn to write

I also call this "coffee table writing" because you just leave the notebook out on the coffee table and let family members participate as desired. Like someone might pick up a coffee table book and browse, a member of your family can pick up the notebook, browse through the story and add a few lines to the narrative. I'm going to throw out another guarantee here, this is guaranteed fun! Here's an example of one our family did. This is my favorite and it was written in 1994 when our kids were 10 and 11.

Peter's Surprise

Tonight would be the first time Peter Piccolo would conduct a major concert. He wanted everything to be perfect. But he didn't know that the mother mouse and her ten babies were napping comfortably under the bass drum.

Peter knew that some very important ladies were coming. Just then the ladies entered. They included: Barbara Bush, Hilary Clinton, Julia Roberts, Whitney Houston, and Oprah. They took front row seats beside the bass drum. The orchestra started with the bass drum. It didn't wake the mice yet but the second time it did. They crept out and Julia Roberts screamed!

After she screamed the mice scurried up a trombone opening. No one else saw the mice so they just thought Julia was going crazy.

Peter Piccolo was fuming. Why did she have to go crazy at HIS concert? He finally got everyone settled down, apologized to the crowd for the interruption, turned towards the orchestra and raised his baton. First the strings played. Then there was a blast from the trombone. The eleven mice came flying out. one landed right on Barbara Bush's nose! She put it down on the ground and kicked it and screamed.

The poor little mouse went flying again, bounced off the kettle drum and slid down the front of Whitney Houston's sequined gown. Everyone stared in amazement as she wriggled and twisted around.

Then Oprah said, “Oh, she’s doing that new funky hip-hop dance. The group MOJO showed it to me on my show last week.”

She started following Whitney around and imitating her moves. Hilary and Barbara looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders and joined in. Peter Piccolo’s name should have been Peter Puzzled. He just stood there and watched dumbfounded. It seemed Oprah was having the time of her life.

And finally the mouse dropped off and crept out of the place. The other ten went under Oprah’s legs. Finally, Peter saw the mice and scooped them up with his music book and let them go out the back door.

When he came back in, the orchestra was on their feet playing wildly and everyone in the audience was dancing in their chairs. After it was all over, the people gave the orchestra a standing ovation. A newspaper critic took Peter’s picture and wrote an article about the whole episode called: “Piccolo’s People Performed Perfectly.” Peter read it and smiled, thinking, “Thank you, mice.”

Conversation

As the members of your family communicate with each other, you speak thousands of words every day. So another fun writing suggestion to get words on paper is to declare a day, or a part of a day as “dialogue day,” which means all the conversation is written, not spoken.

This will give your child a sense of dialogue and also help to demonstrate that most writing is really just talking on paper.

I wanted to make sure most of my suggestions focus on ways to write without the need for anything other than pencil and paper but I do want to point out there that there are some wonderful fun websites to play with writing dialogue. One of my favorites is xtranormal.com, a free site that lets you choose various cartoon characters and settings. You create the dialogue and then the software creates a video of your work.

Directions and How-To's

Writing directions is another writing idea that naturally includes organization. Directions also have the added advantage of making the editing process more interesting because your child can have fun testing for accuracy by giving the directions to someone and see if they work. If the reader makes a mistake, then the writer knows there's a glitch in the directions and can figure out how to edit it for better understanding.

Here's an example of a how-to writing project our kids did that arose naturally. One rainy day they were bored and one of them crumpled up a piece of paper into a ball, threw it up in the air and slapped it towards the other. Before long, they created quite an elaborate game, all from a crumpled piece of paper.

Melissa thought it would be fun to share it with friends so she wrote up the rules to the game. She pulled out the directions from a few store-bought games to see how they were formatted and followed a similar format:

Slapball

The Object

The object is to hit the other player or the target with the ball to earn points.

Equipment

- *A ball, made out of crunched up piece of scrap paper.*
- *Two targets, made out of anything you want, paper, socks, anything.*
- *Boundary markers, string, sticks, pillows.*

Set up

Make a field like this:



You must play outside or if you play indoors there has to be plenty of room and nothing that can hurt you or that you can break.

Begin

The youngest gets the ball first to start the game.

Stay Out!

- 1. Player 1 cannot cross into Player 2's field and Player 2 cannot cross into Player 1's field.*
- 2. When the ball lands in any player's field it is their ball.*
- 3. If a player tries to steal the ball from the other player's field then the player the ball was being stole from gets a point, the ball and an extra turn.*

War!

- 1. If the ball lands in the War Area then both players are allowed to try to get the ball.*
- 2. Once a player has the ball, the other player can't steal it.*

Score!

- 1. If you hit the other player with the ball you get a point.*
- 2. If you hit the target in the other player's field you get a point and an extra turn.*

Target

- 1. You can place the target the other player is going to try to hit anywhere in your field as long as the other player can hit as easily as you can hit theirs and it is in plain sight.*
- 2. You can try to deflect the ball from hitting the target but if it hits you anywhere but the hand the other player gets a point.*

Play

1. *You can hit the ball anyway you want as long as you use your body (hands, feet) to hit it.*
2. **YOU CANNOT THROW THE BALL.** *You have to hit it.*

The End

The game ends when a player gets 15 points.

Persuasion

Much of our communication is focused on getting other people to agree with us or to take some specific action and a very large part of all the writing out in the world involves the art of persuasion. Strong opinions and strong desires motivate many people to sit down and write.

Persuasive writing is one of my favorite ideas because it develops critical thinking. One of the ways my kids found a natural motivation and reason to write was when they wanted to convince and persuade me to let them do something:

“Dear Mom, I want to take out my pocet knife. Here is reasons why you should let me: so when I need it I don’t have to track dirt all over the house, so I don’t have to take off my shoes, so I don’t have to ask you, So you don’t have to hear it (Ecspeshly when your on the phone), so we don’t get shredings all over the back porch, so we can have it right when we need it, so that we can cut sticks quick, so Aaron won’t have to ask. And that my reasons. Love Melissa”

When she was a bit older, she wrote this. Notice how she naturally used a light tone and humor as she worked to persuade:

“Melissa’s Compost Proposal

Mom,

Here are the reasons I should have a compost bin:

- 1) *It is absolutly essencial to organic gardening. It is the alternitive to synthetic fertilizers.*
- 2) *It will be totally cool to turn garbage into plant food.*

3) Less Garbage in the landfill

Here are your worries and my answers:

1) What about the SMELL!?

Ahh, the garbage myth strikes again! Actually you can get a stink. BUT there shouldn't be any. I have so many troubleshooting guides I'm drowning in them! Also, NOBODY I know has any problems.

2) What about the animals?

Wouldn't you like some cute, cuddly, animals in our very own back yard? Just kidding. Basic rule – no smell = no animals. And even if they did catch a wiff they would soon find out they couldn't get to it.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. If you have any questions, call toll free Mel-issa.”

I don't remember the genesis of this piece but here's one Keith wrote:

“I Think that Kix are healthier than Cookie Crisp because Cookie Crisp has artificial flavors and you can see them in milk. And because I compared them and Cookie Crisp has 13 grams of sugar regularly and 19 grams with milk. And Kix has 3 grams of sugar regularly and 9 grams with milk!

And Kix first 5 ingredients are corn meal, oat flour, wheat starch, salt and corn syrup. Cookie Crisps are corn, rice, wheat and oat flour, sugar, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. I'm proving that Cookie Crisp is worse than Kix because Cookie Crisp has more sugars and fat.”

Here's an example of persuasive writing that went out in the “real world.” In 1997, when Melissa was 13 and her friend Anna was 11, they had a strong opinion about something they read in the paper. This letter to the editor was published in *The Courier-Journal*:

“Dear Editor:

On February 16th Wendell Berry wrote an interesting article on homeschooling. We are writing this because we were very

disappointed in the letter the school administrator wrote criticizing Mr. Berry's article.

Mr. Thornton declared teachers "experts" on what was best taught to kids. If the teachers are experts, our parents should have learned everything they needed to know and had the capability to remember it.

Our parents know how we learn and what we need or want to learn much better than any teacher could, because they are with us more. So why should our parents send us to school if they have the time to teach us themselves?

Mr. Thornton said that Mr. Berry didn't spend enough time in public school classrooms. When has Mr. Thornton been with a homeschooler in his or her "classroom"? He doesn't even know what most of us do! Most homeschoolers went to public school for a period of time, or at least their parents did, so they have a view from both sides.

The great thing about homeschooling is that it can be tailored to each family's needs."

It's Your Turn

I could write so much more about "the write way to have fun," but it's time for you to write instead of reading what I write. So go. Write. Experiment. Explore. Play with words. Have fun.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me. I'm happy to help as you and your family explore "the write way to have fun." I plan to post more writing ideas and inspiration on my website, so if you would like to be notified when I do, go to www.DebbieHarbeson.com and sign up for email updates.

Finally, if you or your child would like to partner with a non-family member to work on writing projects, I'm available for coaching. Just contact me at debbie@debbieharbeson.com.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE \$100 GUARANTEE

Thank you for downloading this free e-book. I am very confident this book will motivate at least one family member to write. That's why I am offering \$100.00 to anyone who claims this book did not work for their family.

So if at least one person in your family did not complete a finished piece of writing as a result of reading this book, all you need to do to collect the \$100.00 is to have a family member write me a letter explaining in detail why the book did not work.

So far, I have not paid out one penny yet and if you don't understand why, you should by the time you finish your letter.