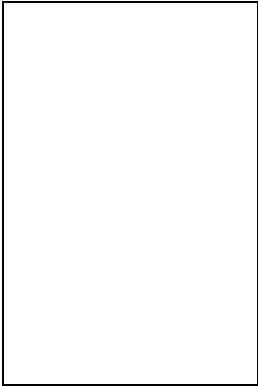


## GETTING PAST WORD-PHOBIA

By Mary Marsh



I am a writer. I love to communicate with words so much that I try to make my living at it. I think that's why it is so difficult for me to accept the fact that my children don't *love* writing. I've really tried to do all the things that helped me get started, but, as we all know, everyone has their own

learning style and just because I thrive on journals and daily freewriting tasks doesn't mean my children will. As my son is ever willing to remind me, "Just because you like this stuff, doesn't mean I have to!"

Of course he is right, but I know how important the ability to communicate with written language is. I firmly believe if I can get my children past the hurdle of writing avoidance, that other issues like spelling, grammar, and punctuation will be relatively easy to deal with. Over the last couple of years I have been searching for ways to get my children to change their attitudes about writing. Some of the ideas have definitely worked out well and are worth sharing.

### A Broader Definition

Showing children how often we need to write things down helps them to see how valuable it is to be able to write. If the only writing they do is the typical story, report, or essay, they are missing an important point. The simple act of putting a pen to paper to get a clear written statement is a skill worth developing, and one children should learn to appreciate. With this in mind, I ask my kids to write

things other than stories and they are often much more willing. Here are a few ideas:

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| Definitions   | News Reports   |
| Grocery Lists | Instructions   |
| Recipes       | Greeting Cards |
| Jokes         | Scripts        |
| Poems         | Lists          |
| Letters       | Notes          |
| Silly Sayings | Songs          |

E-mail - don't forget to include this if you have the ability. Whole conversations are held with just the written word; it is a wonderful tool if you can get your children an e-mail pal.

### Filling Their Senses

If the best writing comes from "writing what we know" or from within, then we had best take a little time to be sure that there is something inside. As an adult, I can refill my muse with a few inspirational poems or even just a few quiet moments spent gazing at a calming view. Children aren't quite so abstract. They need to experience something fully---using all 5 senses.

Before asking your children to write, do something interesting first. While they are engaged, solicit descriptions and jot them down. I have done this with bread-making with fantastic results. As words like, "sticky," "gooey" and "dusty flour" spring forth, you can record them for future writing sessions. To me the best writing evokes my senses, makes me smell, feel, see and taste. If you wake up their senses, and point out to them all the things they see, smell, hear, taste and feel and then sit down with them to write, it will be exciting work!

## **Making It Fun**

Make sure your children learn how fun writing can be. Make up games that you can play that encourage creative writing skills. The following is one we play with some very interesting results:

*Story Dice* - Using one or two dice, and paper and pencil you can play a great story writing game with as many people as you have. Even non-writers can play if someone is willing to take dictation.

First player rolls the dice and writes a corresponding number of words. Sentences do not have to be completed. The next player rolls and adds words to the story. The game goes on and on until the story is finished. If you want to put a limit on it, add up the totals and write to 50 or 100 words each.

My children say it is a lot more fun than writing alone, and we've come up with some very funny stories this way.

## **New Tools**

Sometimes the physical aspect of writing needs a little spice. I was pleasantly surprised to find that an old used typewriter was such a novelty that my children spent hours using it to write stories. With three computers and all the state-of-the-art word processing software, I had never considered a simple, archaic beast like a typewriter would hold such appeal. They banged away for hours, arguing over whose turn it was, while the computer sat idle in the corner.

My daughter found inspiration in an old fashioned calligraphy pen. The act of dipping the tip in ink and carefully letting the words dry seemed to enchant her, and she used it to practice handwriting as well as for poetry. Don't underestimate the value of a novel approach to the physical aspect of writing. Sometimes the tool itself will be all the inspiration required.

## **A Word About Mechanics**

Whatever you do, remember that your ultimate goal is to get past the fear of writing. Don't use your children's attempts at writing as an opportunity to teach grammar, spelling or punctuation. This will only defeat your attempts at instilling a positive attitude about the process.

When you and your child make a decision that a particular piece of writing is good enough to warrant further work, then you can start the polishing process. It is in the second draft stage when you can start to look for errors. Many efforts won't make it to this stage and that is fine. It just means that the work that does make it, is all the more special. When the final draft is completed find a way to "publish" it, either by making it into a handbound book or by typing it up and printing out a finished copy.

Writing is a wonderful skill and something that children can love if it is presented in the right way. Happy writing and may stories and poems fill the pages of your lives.

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