

Today's Parent USA

VP of Learner Development Neil MacGregor was recently featured in an expert tip sheet by TodaysParentUSA.com.

How to Know if Your Child is Struggling With Writing

Writing is the new social currency. If you total up all the time we spend writing assignments and reports, and that we spend online on social media like Facebook, e-mailing and texting friends, it becomes very clear that — more than ever — writing is a vital part of our daily lives.

Millions of Americans struggle with writing, and in this new economy they are disadvantaged in almost every part of life. They simply can't contribute, interact and perform as well as others.

Writing isn't a natural skill. Many mental and physical processes need to work in perfect harmony. Any difficulty can be a bottleneck to the process, and negatively affect the finished product.

Interestingly, while there are many different possible causes for writing difficulties, there are a few common symptoms to look for.

Common Symptoms of People Struggling With Writing

1. A disconnect (between knowledge and ability to write about it).

They can talk about and otherwise demonstrate what they know, but it doesn't get expressed in their writing. Students lose grade points due to their writing, not their subject knowledge. Adults lose face, suffer embarrassment, and it undermines their capability.

2. Writing is unreasonably slow and careful.

Two to three sentences are written in the time that others can write 20 to 30. They know the answer, but it never gets fully expressed because there isn't enough time. Or, they spend lots of time writing and rewriting a single sentence, striving for perfection. They try to cram a paragraph of meaning into a single sentence.

3. They can only write for short periods of time before they seem to get distracted.

For some individuals it can take a HUGE amount of mental effort and concentration to spell, read, or write. It's no wonder they need frequent breaks, but from the outside they seem easily distracted.

4. They avoid writing.

Procrastination and avoidance is rarely a result of mere laziness. This can be a symptom of how it may be unreasonably hard and challenging, given the results. It is not surprising they dread it, and try to find easier and more gratifying things to do.

5. They unknowingly leave spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.

It is possible they are reading what they think is on the page, not what is actually there. (Most of us don't read every single letter. We read in 'chunks', i.e., entire words and groups of words: This increases speed, saving time and mental energy.) This is even more common when reading their own work, because they think they know what is there. Unfortunately, they sometimes presume to see letters and words that aren't actually there.

It's important to remember that these problems have little or nothing to do with ability, or understanding subject material. Most strugglers are waiting for a means through which their creativity can be unleashed. Nevertheless, these problems are affecting students' grades, their college and employment prospects, the careers of adults, and social relationships.