



Parent Help Guide for Virtual Writing Assignments

Don't try to replace the teacher unless your child asks you to. Being a parent is hard enough. So, what can you do? Here are some ideas.

1. **Create a writing space.** Have supplies such as a charged device (with a charger handy), paper, pens, and pencils, etc. all in one space with limited distractions. Because writing is hard work, every writer is looking for a way to avoid it, and getting up to find supplies is always a great way to avoid the task. If distractibility is a concern, consider head phones, ear plugs, or a quiet time designated for writing.
2. **Create a deadline or a few deadlines.** There is an old saying that the hardest part of writing is getting your butt in the chair. It's true! The way to overcome this is with a deadline ... or a series of deadlines. "At 2:00 when you are finished a first draft, written so many lines, or answered so many questions, we'll watch a movie, play a game, take a walk, etc."

The two Ps are the biggest problems writers face: perfectionism (or fear of failure) and procrastination. Perfectionism causes students to feel they have to know exactly what they want to say before they can begin writing. Rather, writing will actually help them find out what they have to say. And we all know procrastination. "I'm going to stop putting things off ... starting tomorrow."

3. **Turn longer assignments into shorter ones.** If your child has 10 questions to answer, break it into parts such as 3, 3, and 4. Or, if it's an essay or longer writing, do it by paragraph. But remember to create a deadline for each part.
4. **Start with a conversation.** Ask, "What do you think you have to do to be successful with this assignment?" Make a list, and then help your student select two to four priorities to focus on. When written work is read out loud by the writer and then the parent, look at the focus points you have selected and ask, "How do you think you did?" Then let it go. Many children will return to improve the work after they have had a break. The goal is getting something written down now. The French philosopher Voltaire said, "The best is the enemy of the good." Let's shoot for good.
5. **Don't become your child's editor.** Have your child slowly read the paper in a soft voice and listen to how it sounds. Most students can hear their mistakes. Then, sitting side-by-side, read the piece to your child—without comment. Your child will probably hear more things to fix. Finally, give cheers! When I was asked to create suggestions for families, I followed the above guidelines. Then I asked my wife to read what I wrote to me and she said, "These are great! Send them out." I love my wife—we all need cheers!

But remember, children are not professional writers. They will make mistakes or write something you don't like. Try to resist giving too many corrections unless they ask for more suggestions. Rather, look for a sentence or a well-chosen word or phrase that you can cheer about.