

Challenges for Struggling Writers

Jan Kurtz, MS, OTR/L

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“Written Language is the most
complex aspect of the language
arts.”

Morris and Crump 1982

Writing Involves Many Skills

- Handwriting: the physical act of getting words on paper.
- Generation of ideas
- Organization of ideas
- Word Retrieval
- Grammatical structures
- Sentence construction
- Knowledge of the reader's perspective
- Editing

Struggling Writers

- Vary in their strengths and challenges.
- Need to be thoroughly evaluated to identify where support is needed.
- Often are aware of their problems and become discouraged reluctant writers.

Challenges For Struggling Writers in Composition

- Have more difficulty with composition.
- Distort word order, omit words.
- Use incorrect verbs, pronouns, and word endings.
- Have more difficulty with expository writing.
- Have deficits in working memory.

Composition Challenges (Cont.)

- Sentences are shorter and the number of sentences are fewer.
- Have more difficulty with organization and planning and spend less time on these activities.
- Are often the first one done and do not spend time editing.
- Work strays from topic.

Challenges in Mechanics

- Spelling.
 - Choose words that are safe and easy to spell.
 - Difficulty applying spelling rules.
 - Problems with spell checkers.
 - Student cannot recognize the correctly spelled word in the list.
 - Word is so poorly spelled that the spell checker cannot identify the desired word.
- Capitalization and punctuation errors are frequent.
- Little variety in sentence structure.

Use of a Word Processor

Studies Have Shown That:

- Word processing does **not** impede the writing process.
- It does **not** interfere with idea generation.
- Students are more interested in the writing process.
- Editing becomes less painful because there is no recopying to be done.
- Students take more risks with words and length of composition when the revisions are easier.

Important Points

- Technology will not solve the problems alone.
- Good teaching strategies must also be included.
- Students must be taught the skills to use technology.
- Sitting a child in front of a word processor does not make them instantly competent.

Current Demands

- Increased writing in very early years.
- More time spent on composing and copying.
- Less time spent on handwriting.
- Increased writing demands at all grade levels.
- High stakes testing.
- Writing competencies to graduate from high school.

Assessments Must Evaluate:

- Handwriting
 - Speed
 - Legibility
 - Endurance
- Keyboarding
 - Speed
 - Accuracy
 - Endurance
- Spelling
- Writing traits
 - Ideas
 - Organization
 - Voice
 - Word choice
 - Sentence fluency
 - Comparison to typical performance

Handwriting Issues

Not a problems when:

- It is legible to an unfamiliar reader.
- The student can keep up with the pace of the peers in the classroom.
- The student can keep pace with his/her expression of ideas.

Is a problem when:

- It is illegible to an unfamiliar reader.
- The student cannot keep pace with peers.
- The student is unable to keep pace with his/her expression of ideas.
- When student has difficulty with endurance for longer assignments.

Keyboarding Issues

- If handwriting speeds are considerably faster than typing then the keyboard is not an efficient tool.
- Regular daily practice in keyboarding with a structured program can yield good results.
- It is most effective if the student is practicing both at home and school.

Keyboarding Issues (Cont.)

- A composition speed of 6-10 words per minute is sufficient for an elementary school student. Studies have shown that the average adult composition speed is 18 words per minute.
- Using a keyboard to take notes is a different skill than using a keyboard to compose.
- Learning to compose on the computer versus paper is a new skill and must be given time to develop.

Tools and Techniques That Can Help With Spelling

- Personal Dictionary
- Word Wall
- Franklin Spell Checker
- Word Spell Check
- Talking Word Processor
- Word Prediction Software

Tools and Techniques That Can Help With Organization and Composition

- Graphic organizers
- Inspiration/Kidspiration
- Draft builder
- Features on Microsoft word- reading level, find and replace, thesaurus

Tools and Techniques That Can Help With Sentence Structure

- Draft Builder
- Microsoft word grammar check
- Talking word processors
- Intellitalk 3 or Clicker 4 with word pallets
- Intellikeys with structured overlays

Tools and Techniques That Can Help With the Physical Act of Writing

- Slant board
- Pencil grips
- Vertical surface
- Trackball
- Intellikeys
- Keyboarding devices
- Computers

Tools and Techniques That Can Help With Keyboarding

- Computer keyboarding programs
- Keyboarding programs on devices such as the writer and neo.
- Typing books

Summary

- There are many challenges for struggling writers.
- It is important to identify what the issues are for a particular student.
- There are many low tech and high tech tools to help these students.