



“Volunteering can be a noble or an ignoble thing, depending on the circumstances.”

Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.

Raising Readers, Writers, and Spellers

An expert guide for parents

by J. Richard Gentry

5 Ways to Motivate Young Writers and Readers

Research supports what successful parents and teachers do.

Published on October 10, 2013 by J. Richard Gentry, Ph.D. in Raising Readers, Writers, and Spellers

97 Like 28 Tweet 3 Share 1 email



NAME	DATE	CLASS	TEACHER	ARTIST
NAME (Student)	DATE	CLASS (Grade)	TEACHER (Name)	ARTIST (Name)
NAME (Student)	DATE	CLASS (Grade)	TEACHER (Name)	ARTIST (Name)
NAME (Student)	DATE	CLASS (Grade)	TEACHER (Name)	ARTIST (Name)

Little kids want to write. What can parents and preschool teachers do to capture this intrinsic motivation? Here are five fun, everyday writing activities you don't want to miss along with educational and scientific research to back them up.

In this post, education-writer Steve Peha and I share the types of activities you can do at home to motivate very young children to write and read along with some of the research that supports these everyday practices.

5 Ways to Motivate Young Writers and Readers

By Richard Gentry and Steve Peha

Parents can use the same kinds of successful techniques that savvy preschool teachers use at school to get going with everyday writing. These tried and true motivational activities will

turn your pencil-and-paper kid into a writer and reader. We follow the activities with the evidence base that explains why these activities work as motivators and how they increase your child's sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose as a writer and reader.

Related Articles

- [The Power of Secrets](#)
- [NIMH: A Requiem for DSM - and its Critics](#)
- [Inspiration: Fifth-Grader with No Arms Wins Trophy in 2011's National Handwriting Contest](#)
- [License to ill: When are we at greatest risk for being prejudiced?](#)
- [Ways the Reward and Planning System Can Go Wrong - Part 1](#)

Find a Therapist

Search for a mental health professional near you.

Story-Time Writing

Most parents read stories to their kids. But how many parents write them? It's not hard. Invite your child to write with you. Grab some paper and something to write with. And then make up a little story, writing it down, page by page as you go. Keep the stories simple. Make a sketch to illustrate each page or have your child do the illustration. Try to make stories that look like the ones you read with your child in easy books. Kids love Mom-or-Dad-When-They-Were-Kids stories or When-You-Were-A-Baby stories.

Another way to engage your child is in shared story creation where both of you contribute simultaneously. As you create the story together you serve as a model of how exactly to go about it. Over time in this gradual release learning model—I do it; we do it; you do it—your child will be writing stories on his or her own.

Listomania

Our lives are full of lists: "to do" lists, shopping lists, lists of people, list of favorite things, etc. Many of these lists are things we write down. List



J. Richard Gentry, Ph.D., an expert on childhood literacy, reading, and spelling, is the author of *Raising Confident Readers: How to Teach Your Child to Read and Write—Baby to Age 7*. [more...](#)

Subscribe to Raising Readers, Writers, and Spellers
[Subscribe via RSS](#)

Raising Readers, Writers, and Spellers

Recent Posts

- [Research supports what successful parents and teachers do.](#)
- [This expert shares important reflections on early learning.](#)
- [Writing is one of the best ways to teach beginners how to read.](#)
- [Find out why Back to School Night turned into a nightmare.](#)
- [What does knowing how to sound out words do for the brain?](#)

[More of Raising Readers, Writers, and Spellers blog](#)

Most Popular

Most Read Most Emailed

1

Find Local:

Acupuncturists
Chiropractors
Massage Therapists
Dentists
and more!

writing is pretty easy. So it's often one of the first forms of writing kids can be involved in.

The next time you make a grocery list, ask your child to help you with it. Even if you do all the writing, they'll feel included in the process. Gradually, they'll want to do it, too. Don't be surprised when one day they present you with their own list of things they'd like you pick up at the store.

Revive a Long Lost Tradition

Kids love to get gifts. But the tradition of "Thank You" notes seems to have fallen by the wayside. Whether you are a parent, a grandparent, an uncle or an aunt, a child's thank you note—dictated or written in their own hand—is a treasure.

Three reasons for using this technique as a motivator for writing and reading are that it teaches kids cultural values, social interaction, and it's a wonderful way for kids to write to a real audience. From a teaching and cognitive perspective there's the added value of repetition: many of the notes use the same words (like "thank you" or "I like the _____ you sent me," and so on).

Map It Out

Draw—Label—Caption writing is a simple form that can be used by preschoolers. [1] In the following variation taken from a case study in *Raising Confident Readers: How to Teach Your Child to Read and Write: From Baby to Age 7* [2], Danielle, (four years, eight months of age) drew a map of the aisles in the Publix grocery store and put in labels to show where here favorite foods could be found.

Repetition, Repetition, Repetition

Repetition is not a single activity, but a reminder that you should write and read with your child every day. Your child is often motivated to mimic and repeat what you do even without any prompting. Repetition is its own built-in motivator. When you do fun and engaging side-by-side writing and reading activities over time your beginner reorganizes and integrates new information such as higher-order print concepts and piles on new knowledge about sounds, letters, and literacy. Reading aloud is crucial. But don't forget that among 3- to 6-year-olds, pencil and paper kids are often the first readers.[2]

Why These Activities Work

The late Donald Graves who founded the Process Writing Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire in 1976 led a world-wide revolution in teaching writing. In doing so, he discovered three keys to motivate writers: choice of topic, giving the child ownership, and writing for a real audience. [3] Each of these motivational keys will open the doors for your child's success in each of the five recommended activities listed above. In each activity your child's self-direction in choosing a topic, favorite story, list to make, or person to write leads to engagement. In each the repeated practice fulfills your child's urge to write and leads toward mastery. Each activity has an authentic audience or purpose.

A Science-Based Case for Achieving Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose

In *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, best-selling author Dan Pink makes a strong science-based case for essentially the same three motivational factors that Graves listed above. Pink calls them (1) Autonomy, (2) Mastery, and (3) Purpose, and says they lead to "better performance and personal satisfaction."

1. Choice of Topic or Pink's "Autonomy." Pink says autonomy is our desire to be self-directed which leads to engagement. Giving your child a choice in writing fits the need to be self-directed.



Avoid the Fatal Attraction Effect in Your Relationship
by Susan Krauss Whitbourne, Ph.D.

2 Eternal Curves
by Will Lassek, Steve Gaulin, Hara Estroff Marano



3 The Key to Happiness in One Easy Step
by Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.



4 10 Habits of Happy Couples
by Mark Goulston, M.D., F.A.P.A.

5 The Wittiest Halloween Jokes, Riddles, and Puns

Current Issue

When Virtue Becomes Vice
The nature of a virtue is that a vice is almost always hidden inside.

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

ISSUE ARCHIVES

SUBSCRIBE

Join the conversation...

A **LIVE CHAT** WITH
Psychology Today
November 12th at Noon EST

LOVE & AUTISM
Intimacy in the Family

Parents and siblings of autistic children face unique challenges, including nurturing their own relationships.

Psychology Today invites you to join a LIVE discussion and call-in session with our top experts.

Register Now

Limited availability



2. Ownership or "Mastery." Ownership and mastery are two peas in the same pod. Graves famously pointed out that "Kids want to write!" They want to *own* the ability to write and the ability to read back what they have written. As you engage with your young child in writing he or she begins to master the fundamentals, and feel successful. This mastery, in Pink's words, creates the "urge to get better."

3. Writing for a Real Audience is a good fit with Pink's "Purpose." Kids engage in the purpose motive when they help you make a grocery list, become a part of the family "story telling" tradition, or make a contribution when they send a "Thank You" note to a real person. All five of the activities listed above feed the child's purpose motive. [4]

Engage in activities with your child such as writing stories, making lists, writing thank you notes, and drawing and labeling, and watch your child's motivation to write and read grow. Keep in mind that writing and reading are one and the same, almost, in beginners and help build the same brain circuitry.[5] In the final analysis, the question you should ask isn't "How do I motivate my child to write and read?" It's "How do I increase my child's sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose as a writer and reader?"

Steve Peha is the founder of Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc., an education consultancy in Carrboro, NC specializing in literacy and instructional leadership. In addition to providing teacher training for schools and districts throughout the US and Canada, he writes regularly on education practice and policy. His work has been featured on *The Washington Post*, *The National Journal*, *Edutopia*, and many others.

Dr. J. Richard Gentry is the author of ***Raising Confident Readers, How to Teach Your Child to Read and Write—From Baby to Age 7***. Follow him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#) and find out more information about his work on his [website](#).

[1] Peha, Steve, (2013) "Draw, Label, Caption" © Copyright 1995-2013 by Teaching That Makes Sense, Inc. Some rights reserved. For information, contact us at info@ttms.org

[2] Gentry, R. (2010) *Raising confident readers: How to teach your child to read and write—from baby to age 7*. New York: Da Capo/Lifelong.

[3]<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising-readers-writers-and-spellers/201305/will-common-core-wreck-writing-in-schools>

[4] Pink, D. H. (2009) *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. New York: Riverhead Books.

[5] Gentry, R. (2010) *Raising confident readers: How to teach your child to read and write—from baby to age 7*. New York: Da Capo/Lifelong.

[Subscribe to Psychology Today](#) now and get a free issue!

Have a comment? [Start the discussion here!](#)

Follow Psychology Today: [Twitter](#) [FaceBook](#)

**LOVE &
AUTISM**
Intimacy in the Family

November 12th at Noon EST



A LIVE CHAT WITH
Psychology Today

Register Now

Psychology Today

© Copyright 1991-2013
Sussex Publishers, LLC

The Therapy Directory [HealthPros.com](#) [BuildingPros.com](#)

© Copyright 2002-2013 Sussex Directories, Inc.

About/Contact
Privacy Policy
Site Help/Customer
Service
Terms of Use

Therapy Directory Index
Healthpros Index
Buildingpros Index

