

You Can... Encourage children to finish their writing

Like reading stamina, writing stamina is something that builds up gradually. But where reading is largely a passive activity (unless making notes, discussing or following instructions from non-fiction texts), writing is active. As the human condition tends towards laziness, this can be an uphill struggle, especially for children who are not predisposed to sitting still and thinking.

Thinking points

- Although you may be a lover of writing yourself, it is worth remembering that to many children writing is a chore akin to tidying their bedroom or drying up. Chores are more easily done if there is a reward. These come in many guises.
- Define what you consider to be completion of work at the start of an activity so that children understand each target before they start. There may be several goals within one session – just as there are plateaux before climbing to a mountain top!
- While it is important to have high expectations of your children, try not to expect everything to come right at once – decide what are the priorities of any one lesson or exercise.

Tips, ideas and activities

- There is an old engineering maxim when quoting for work: they can produce the end result better, faster or cheaper! Select any two of these three choices for the children's writing ('cheaper' can translate as 'quantity'). That is to say, do you want the children to write more and better (but take longer over it) or more and faster (at the expense of quality – of say, spelling or vocabulary) or better and faster (more accurate, but perhaps only a sentence or two)? Expecting several pages of speedy, erudite perfection (all three) is perhaps too much!
- What will be the reward for work completed on target? Consider the following:
 - Successfully completed work is often reward in itself – the look, the sound, the feel of the thing. Ask how the applauded children feel about their achievement. Let others hear and see how it feels to be pleased with one's effort. Make your classroom a gallery to their success.
 - Champion any progress among slower children by public praise.
 - Keep individual completion bar charts for children to measure their own success. On a ten-square-high chart, the child may colour the five squares you have dotted for them, when they half-complete their task. A 100% column may earn a reward.
 - Last but not least: bribery! This can range from house points, lots of praise and a smiley sticker to an extra five minutes' play for whole class effort or a mention in assembly, highlighting the work's merit and applauding the author.
- Doing something extra with finished work adds an incentive to complete tasks. Make this a separate session to avoid children rushing to do 'the fun bit' – adding their contribution to a display; turning their long thin poem into a bookmark, and so on.

