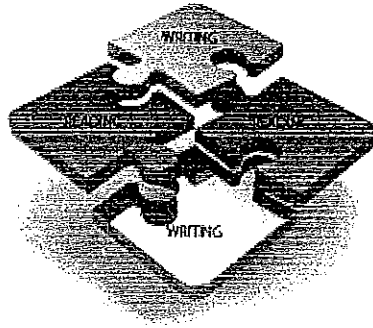


# The Relationship between Reading and Writing



For many years reading and writing were (and sometimes still are) taught separately. Though the two have almost always been taught by the same person (the English/Language Arts teacher) during the Language Arts period or block, educators rarely made explicit connections between the two for their students. Over the last ten years research has shown that reading and writing are more interdependent than we thought. The relationship between reading and writing is a bit like that of the chicken and egg. Which came first is not as important as the fact that without one the other cannot exist. A child's literacy development is dependent on this interconnection between reading and writing.

## The Relationship between Reading and Writing

Basically put: reading affects writing and writing affects reading. According to recommendations from the major English/Language Arts professional organizations, reading instruction is most effective when intertwined with writing instruction and vice versa. Research has found that when children read extensively they become better writers. Reading a variety of genres helps children learn text structures and language that they can then transfer to their own writing. In addition, reading provides young people with prior knowledge that they can use in their stories. One of the primary reasons that we read is to learn. Especially while we are still in school, a major portion of what we know comes from the texts we read. Since writing is the act of transmitting knowledge in print, we must have information to share before we can write it. Therefore reading plays a major role in writing.

At the same time practice in writing helps children build their reading skills. This is especially true for younger children who are working to develop phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Phonemic awareness (the understanding that words are developed from sound "chunks") develops as children read and write new words. Similarly, phonics skills or the ability to link sounds together to construct words are reinforced when children read and write the same words. For older children practice in the process of writing their own texts helps them analyze the pieces that they read. They can apply their knowledge about the ways that they chose to use particular language, text structure or content to better understand a professional author's construction of his or her texts.

## **Harnessing the Reading-Writing Relationship to Help Children Learn**

Simply knowing that reading and writing are intimately connected processes isn't enough. In order to help children develop these two essential skills, parents and teachers need to apply this knowledge when working with them. Here are a few strategies for using reading and writing to reinforce development of literacy skills.

### **Genre Study**

One of the most effective ways to use the relationship between reading and writing to foster literacy development is by immersing children in a specific genre. Parents and teachers should identify a genre that is essential to a grade level's curriculum or is of particular interest to a child or group of children. They should then study this genre with the child(ren) from the reading and writing perspectives. Children should read and discuss with adults high quality examples of works written in the genre focusing on its structure and language as well as other basic reading skills including phonics and comprehension. Once children have studied the genre to identify its essential elements, they should be given opportunities to write in the genre. As they are writing, adults should help them apply what they have learned from reading genre specific texts to guide their composition. This process should be recursive to allow children to repeatedly move between reading and writing in the genre. In the end children will not only have a solid and rich knowledge of the genre, but will also have strengthened their general reading and writing skills.

### **Reading to Develop Specific Writing Skills**

Parents and teachers do not have to engage in an extensive genre study to foster their children's reading and writing abilities. Texts can be used on limited basis to help children learn and strengthen specific writing skills. Parents and teachers should first identify writing skills that a particular child or group of children needs support in developing. For example, many students in a seventh grade class might have difficulty writing attention getting introductions in their essays. One of the most effective ways to help children build specific writing skills is to show and discuss with them models that successfully demonstrate the skill. Adults should select a number of texts where the authors "nail" the area that they want to help their children grow in. For our sample seventh graders we'd want to find several pieces of writing with strong, engaging introductions and read and analyze these with the students. Once children have explored effective models of the skill, they should be given opportunities to practice it. They can either write new pieces or revise previous pieces of writing emulating the authors' techniques.

### **Integrating "Sound" Instruction in Reading and Writing**

Phonemic awareness and phonics are two of the pillars of reading. Without understanding the connection between sounds and letters, a person cannot read. The connection between reading and writing can help solidify these skills in young readers. Parents and teachers should help children "sound out" words in both

their reading and writing. When a child comes to a word in their reading that is unfamiliar, the adult(s) working with her can model or guide her in sounding out the word using knowledge of phonemes (sound “chunks”). Similarly, if a child wants to write a new word the adult(s) can use the same technique to help her choose which letters to write. If the child is younger, accurate spelling is not as important as an understanding of the connection between particular sounds and letters. Therefore helping the child pick letters that approximate the spelling is more appropriate than providing him with the actual spelling. If the child is older and has an understanding of some of the unique variations in the English language (such as silent “e”), the parent or teacher should encourage him to use that knowledge to come up with the spelling of the word.

### **Choice in Reading and Writing**

Another effective method for using the relationship between reading and writing to foster literacy development is simply giving children the choice in their reading and writing experiences. We learn best when we are motivated. If children are always told exactly what to read and what to write, they will eventually either come to see reading and writing as impersonal events or will “shut down”. Often in classrooms, teachers allow children to select their own books to read during independent reading time, but they rarely give them the opportunity to pick their own writing topics. In order to encourage ownership over their reading and writing, children should be given chances to read and write what is interesting and important to them.

### **Talk About It!**

While it may seem like common sense to adults that reading and writing have a lot to do with each other, the connection is not always as apparent to young people. Parents and teachers should explain how the two skills reinforce and strengthen each other. Young people (especially adolescents) often ask their parents and teachers, “Why do I have to learn this?” Here is a perfect opportunity to show the relationship between two essential academic and life skills.