

The Write Start: A Guide to Nurturing Writing at Every Stage, from Scribbling to Forming Letters and Writing Stories

Jennifer Hallissy

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Jennifer Hallissy's *The Write Start* is an enthusiastic guide that empowers parents and those who work with children to help young learners develop great writing skills. A pediatric occupational therapist and mother, Hallissy explains the fundamentals of writing development in straightforward and fascinating prose before getting to the really exciting stuff—fifty-two simple, kid-tested activities that anyone, no matter how pressed for time, can squeeze into their daily routines with children.

The first section of the book provides parents and caregivers with the essential background needed to ensure that their young ones don't rush through crucial developmental milestones on their way to learning to be efficient writers. Hallissy divides young writers into the categories Scribblers, Spellers, Storytellers, and Scholars to help users of the book understand each child's particular stage. Using careful definitions based on the child's writing, she indicates what actions should be taken as signs of readiness for movement to the next category of development.

In addition to helpful information on child development, the first section also addresses basic preparation to help children ease into writing. From exercises to help strengthen muscles and refine small motor skills to tools, materials, and spaces to promote writing, Hallissy shows parents that simple steps can often yield big results. Moreover, she helps readers see that incorporating writing into one's daily life as an adult—and drawing attention to that writing, whether it be grocery lists, a thank you note, or just jotting a thought before it is forgotten—helps young writers see that writing situations abound.

Equipped with that knowledge, readers are both prepared and eager to dive into the activities presented in the rest of the book. Each of the fifty-two activities is clearly laid out with an introduction, a list of needed materials, directions, and variations for each category of writer. Hallissy presents activities that are both inventive, such as skywriting and creating messages in invisible ink, and stunningly uncomplicated, such as taking messages during a game of telephone. To simplify the activities further, the author provides easy-to-use templates at the end of the book that can be copied for repeated use. A list of writing resources is also included.

Hallissy brings great passion to this topic and shows readers that writing development—whether children are just getting started or struggling with their skills—is necessary for productive and creative lives. And perhaps most importantly, she shows readers that all of it can be fun, not only for the child, but for the adult as well.

JENNIFER FANDEL (January / February 2011)

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