Young children want to be writers. Witness their enthusiasm as they make marks on paper, frosty car windows, and any other surface available to them. Rejoice in their excitement and deep satisfaction as they experience the power of making their first written signs and symbols.

Keeping that excitement and confidence alive while at the same time introducing young children to the way written language works is a primary focus for Prep Teachers.

When your child engages in writing tasks, not only are they learning to be capable young writers, they are also practicing many of the important skills needed to become a successful reader – giving attention to letter detail, letter order, sound sequences, letter sequences and the links between messages in oral language and messages in print.

‘The writing knowledge serves as a resource of information that can help the reader.’ (Clay)

As partners in your child’s learning, you have your part to play. Let your child know that writing is a part of everyday life. And above all – let your child feel that ‘When I write, other people are interested in it!’
What is my role as a parent?

1. **Talk with your child.** Conversation is one of the best ways to instill a sense of story-telling in your child. Engage your child in rich conversation about the little and big things that make up their lives.

2. **Tell Stories.** Tell your child stories and ask your child to tell you stories. Help your child recall the stories, events and holidays your family has enjoyed. Encourage your child to use lots of details and to describe the sights, smells, tastes, sounds and feelings of the event.

3. **Expand your child’s ideas.** Help your child to flesh out their ideas and add details to their sentences using ‘when-who-what’ and ‘how’ as an organizational structure.

4. **Encourage your child to write letters and some high-frequency words correctly.** The more control they have over writing letters and words the freer they are to be creative in their stories.

5. **Be an author yourself.** Have your child work alongside you as you write. Write your child little messages.

So your role as a parent is to:
- Provide opportunities for exploration
- Provide materials
- Be in touch with your child’s attempts
- Notice change when it occurs

And to marvel!

Most of all, you need to be
- Available
- Attentive to your child’s intention
- Able to follow the child’s line of enquiry
- Able to supply help in his/her terms

And you have to feel comfortable about letting the child lead.

‘Writing provides extra opportunities for the child to gain control of literacy concepts’

Marie Clay
TOP TEN most frequently used words in writing... (NZCER)

a, and, I, in, it, my, the, to, was, we

The intricacies of becoming a writer...

The first step for any writer is to come up with ideas based on experiences and knowledge- in other words, our thoughts.

The next step – that of finding the right words to express the idea is a more challenging task.

Then, for the beginning writer, expressing the idea in just the right way while simultaneously dealing with the mechanics of letter formation, spelling, word spacing, page layout – makes the writing task even more complex!

Invented spelling can lead to a control over writing that frees your child to write the messages they want to write. Otherwise they may only ever write the stilted messages that are made up of the words they already know. Be patient with your child’s early efforts in spelling. Celebrate their growing awareness of letters and sounds and how words work!

When teaching writing to young children, teachers strive to create a balance between composing (the ideas) and transcribing skills (the mechanics).

Where a child is focused only on the message but lacking mechanical skill, the writing can be impossible to read. However, for a child who carefully writes the same story day after day using the same known words, the writing lacks depth and inspiration.

It’s an intricate process and finding balance is the key!
HOW TO HELP

WHEN YOUR CHILD ASKS HOW TO SPELL A WORD

1. In the beginning:

SAY “You say the word slowly. What can you hear?”

This transfers the initiative for the activity to the child and helps build independence. Let the child record any sounds for which they know the letters.

At first accept what the child can hear in any order, do not insist on a beginning to end approach. This will come later, as the child gains control of the task.

Some children may be able to hear sounds but not record them. Celebrate this, its progress! Praise them for the sounds heard then tell them the letter.

2. Later:

As the child gains control of writing a bank of high frequency words the emphasis can shift.

When the word is already known...

SAY “You know how to write ‘went’.”

When the word is new, make a link to a known word...

SAY “You know how to write ‘day’. Think – How would you write ‘play’?”

3. And for multi-syllabic words:

A good step is to ask your child to clap the parts first, then record each part in turn, listening to the sounds, and/or making links to what they already know.

Example: hol-i-day

Compiled by Hoek & Provost-Boyle (2013)