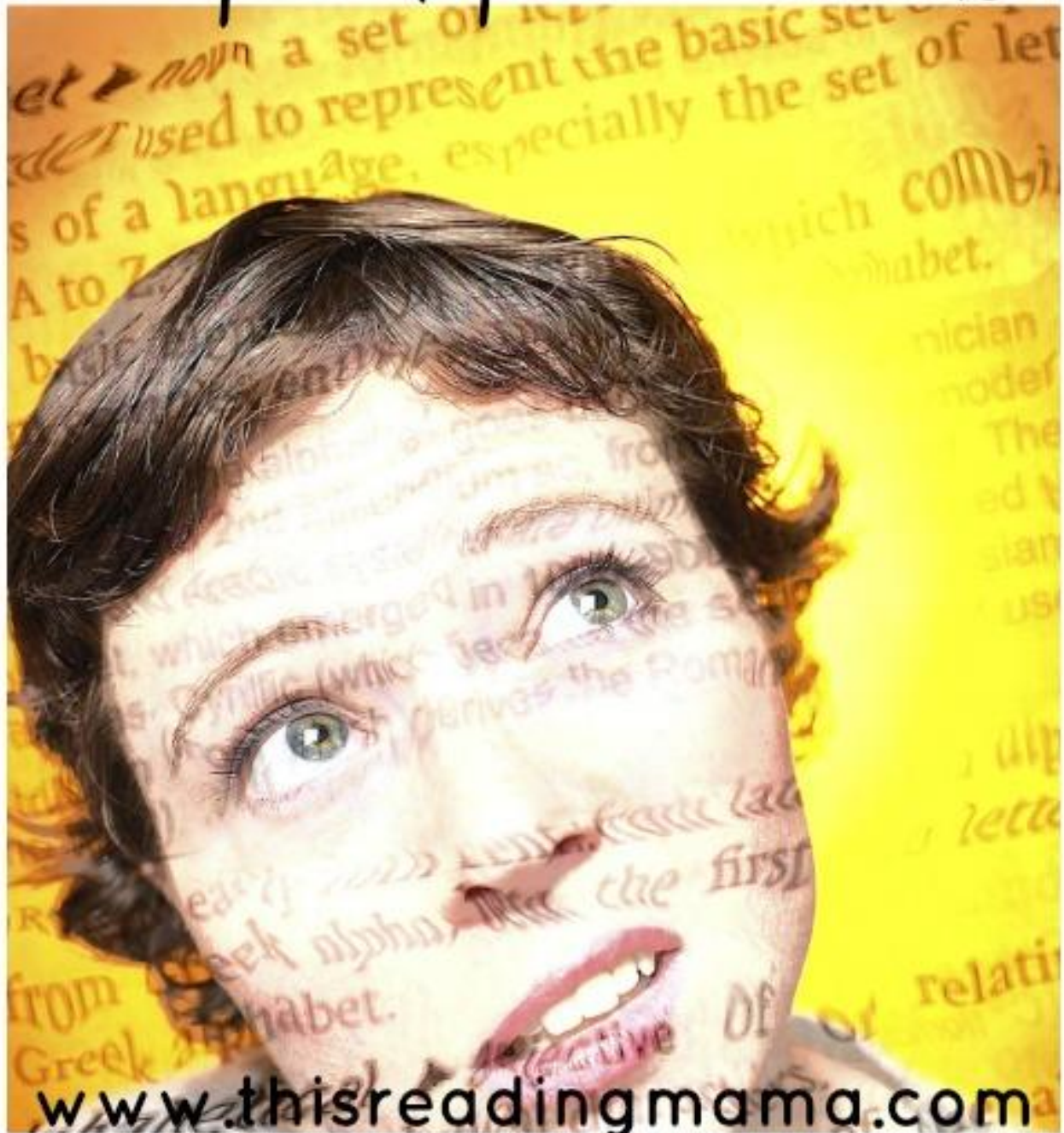


Literacy Terms

Defined for Parents



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Do you ever find yourself a bit confused at all the literacy terms there are out there for reading and writing? I know I totally did when I was first introduced to them. Today, I hope to shed a little light on many of the literacy terms you may find in your curriculum or while searching on a website/blog. I'm organizing them by category and then each term will be listed and defined in alphabetical order. If I have an example, I'll provide the URL to that specific post as well (to prevent this from getting too long). Hang on because here we go!

To see this post in its entirety, visit this link:

<http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/11/14/literacy-terms-defined-for-parents/>

General Literacy Terms

- **balanced literacy**- A term used to describe a reading program that integrates several reading methods so that you're not leaning too heavily on one side of teaching. For example, a balanced program integrates reading AND writing as well as phonics AND sight words. It's not an either/or. All are included.
- **book awareness**- An awareness of how books "work". Where is the cover? Where is the title? How should he hold the book while reading? <http://thisreadingmama.com/2012/03/20/book-print-awareness-getting-ready-to-read/>
- **developmental literacy**- A method of teaching that looks at the child's level of development and teaches at that level versus just saying, "Well, he's in 4th grade. I should work with him on 4th grade skills." A child might be in 4th grade, yet working on a 2nd grade level developmentally. <http://www.1plus1plus1equals1.net/2013/04/developmentally-appropriate-practice-homeschooling/>
- **dyslexia**- A language processing issue that can make it difficult for the student to: 1) Hear sounds in words {see phonological awareness below}, 2) recognize "known" words quickly, affecting fluency, 3) figure out unknown words, 4) spell, and 5) comprehend text. <http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/11/01/dyslexia-what-it-is-what-it-isnt/> or visit <http://www.pinterest.com/thisreadingmama/struggling-readers/> for multiple articles about dyslexia.
- **emergent reader**- A child who has learned the basics, like letters and their sounds and is ready to begin the early stages of reading. My *Reading the Alphabet* curriculum (<http://thisreadingmama.com/free-reading-curriculum/reading-the-alphabet-prek-curriculum/>) was created for my early emergent reader.
- **multi-sensory teaching**- Using as many of the five senses to teach a concept. The goal is to help learning become meaningful for that particular student and that the learner will connect with the literacy skill or text in a meaningful way. <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/06/09/multi-sensory-activities-teaching-reading/>
- **phonics**- Understanding the relationship between *written* letters and the sound(s) that they make
- **pre-reader**- A child that does not fully understand that print has meaning. For example, a pre-reader does not fully understand the relationship between the written letter and that it makes a sound (phonics)
- **print awareness**- the awareness of how print works. For example, moving from left to right as the child writes or knowing the difference between an upper case and lower case letter <http://thisreadingmama.com/2012/03/20/book-print-awareness-getting-ready-to-read/>
- **reading level**- In my opinion, kids need to be able to read the words AND comprehend the text in order for you to say that they are indeed reading on a particular level. For example, if Suzy can read the words on a 4th grade level, but cannot remember what she has read (this is a re-occurring thing), I would not say that Suzy is reading on a 4th grade level. Reading equals thinking and if the child isn't getting any meaning from the text, she is simply barking the words. In January of 2014, I have an e-book coming out to help parents find that "just right" level for their child! I can't wait to share it with you! For now,

you can read more a little about this in my post on struggling readers.

<http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/06/28/struggling-readers-need-part-2/> Although it refers to struggling readers, it applies to all readers.

- **reversals**- Reading SAW for *was* or spelling with a *b* instead of a *d*. Reversals are VERY common in early literacy {K-2nd grade} and do not necessarily mean the child is dyslexic.
<http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/05/24/tuesdays-teaching-tip-11/>
- **sight words**- A sight word is any word that a child has learned by sight. While the most common sight words can be found in Fry's list as well as the Dolch word list, a child's name could also be considered a sight word for that particular child. {Read more: <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/05/15/the-teaching-of-sight-words-part-1/> and <http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/08/11/sight-words-when-they-just-dont-stick/>}

Phonological Awareness Terms

- **phoneme (a.k.a. phonogram)**- The smallest *sounds* (not necessarily letters) in a word. For example, the word *cat* has three phonemes: /k/-/a/-/t/. But, *sheep* also has three phonemes /sh/-/ee/-/p/. Keep in mind you are only counting *sounds*, not visual letters.
- **phoneme blending**- The ability to take the small sounds (phonemes) in a word and blend them together to make a word. For example, if you said, "/k/-/a/-/t/", with the three sounds separated a bit, can you your child say or blend them together a little quicker to know it is the word *cat*?
- **phoneme isolation**- The ability to isolate a certain sound in a word. For example, I can ask my child, "What sound do you hear at the beginning of *mop*? This requires the child to isolate one sound and pull it out from the word: /m/.
- **phoneme manipulation**- The ability to "play" with sounds in a word by blending, isolating, and/or segmenting them. For example: "If you take the /m/ off of *man* and put a /p/ on the front, what word would it make?" (answer: *pan*). Doing this requires the child to isolate the *m* sound, separated it from the word, add the /p/ and then blend the word back together. The easiest stage of phoneme manipulation is with the initial or first sound of the word (like the example I just gave). Harder examples include: asking the child to change *man* into *mat* (take off the last sound, add a different sound) or *man* into *mutt* (take off the middle sound, add a different vowel sound).
- **phoneme segmentation**- The ability to take the entire word and break it into separate phonemes (or small sounds). For example, if the child wants to spell *frog*, can he separate the sounds /f/-/r/-/o/-/g/ and write a letter to represent each one? Beginning spellers typically hear and spell the first and/or last sounds before moving to the middle sounds. This is a normal part of spelling development.
- **phonemic awareness**- The ability to hear the small sounds (or phonemes) in a word. Phonemic awareness plays a HUGE role in reading and writing!
<http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/05/30/phonological-phonemic-awareness/>
- **phonological awareness**- The ability to hear sounds within a word. This is the larger umbrella under which phonemic awareness falls. Phonological awareness deals with the bigger sounds in words (like syllables and rhyming words, which phonemic awareness deals more with the smaller sounds (phonemes) in words. My *Reading the Alphabet* curriculum (<http://thisreadingmama.com/free-reading-curriculum/reading-the-alphabet-prek-curriculum/>) focuses a lot with phonological awareness and beginning phonemic awareness, as these are the building blocks for reading.
<http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/05/30/phonological-phonemic-awareness/>

- **rhyming words**- A part of phonological awareness. Two words that begin differently, but have a similar sound at the end. For example: *play, day, sleigh, weigh, stay*, etc. Note: rhyming words are not always spelled the same.
- **syllables**- a part of phonological awareness. I call these the "big parts" of a word with younger kids. For example, words like *cat, mop, and fun* only have one big part (or syllable), while words like *button, able, and under* have two. <http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/06/01/playing-with-syllables/>

Phonics Terms

- **ambiguous vowels**- These are vowel combinations that can make more than one sound, like the *oo* in *book* and *moon* OR sounds that can be represented by more than one vowel combination, like the sound of /ah/ in *tall, caught, or cost*.
- **blend (consonant)**- A blend is when you take two letters, put them together (side-by-side) in a word, and you hear both sounds. A few examples include: *bl, gr, st, or nd*. Set 4 of my BOB Book printables has a lot of work with blends <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/10/29/bob-book-set-4-round-up-plus-freebie/>. I also have a FREE Blend BINGO game I created to help kids play with blends <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/10/28/free-blend-bingo-word-game/>.
- **consonant**- Consonants include the letters: *b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, and z* (although some of these letters can act as vowels, too). Consonants are frequently referred to just with the letter C in curriculum and on sites.
- **decode**- The ability to look at letters and figure out the "code" of the letters so that it makes a word.
- **digraph (consonant)**- A consonant digraph is when you take two letters, put them together (side-by-side) in a word, and you hear only one sound. Examples include: *ch, gn* (less common), *sh, th, wh, wr*.
- **digraph (vowel)**- Two vowels found side-by-side in a word that make one sound (unless you are from the south and you can make these vowel digraphs into 3 or 4 sounds). Examples include: *ai, ee, oa, or, aw*.
- **inflected endings**- Endings put on the end of base words such as: *-s, -es, -ed, or -ing*.
- **long vowel**- A vowel that makes it's sound of its letter name. For example, in the word *cat*, the *a* does not make the letter name sound, but in the word *name*, it does. In spelling instruction, long vowels are typically taught after short vowels because, although its easier to hear the vowel sounds, the spelling patterns are less predictable than short vowel patterns.
- **nonsense words (pseudo-words)**- A word that resembles a real word in English, but it isn't real. Examples include: *gake, frot, or shup* but NOT *braj, xog, or chiv*. Nonsense words are used to see if the child can apply the "rules" of phonics without giving the child the crutch of a real word. (Sometimes kids are very good at knowing words by sight, but you want to purely assess if they can decode unknown words. Nonsense words can help you do that.)
- **onset**- The first part of a word before the vowel. Examples include: *b* in *bat, sk* in *skate, or t* in *toy*.
- **phonogram**- See phoneme in the section above
- **prefix**- A group of letters *before* a (base) word that changes the word's meaning. Some common examples are: *un-, de-, in-, non-, or ex-*. Prefixes have meanings themselves, too. For example, *un-* means not. If the meaning of the word doesn't change, it is not considered a prefix. For example, in the word *uncle*, the *un-* is not a prefix, but a part of the word itself.

- **r-controlled vowels**- Vowels followed by an *r* that "control" them. They are often referred to as *bossy r vowels*. The five most common r-controlled vowel combinations are *ar, er, ir, or, and ur*.
- **rime**- The part of the word that comes after the onset. Many rimes are predictable, meaning they are usually spelled the same. The words *play, day, jay, and gray* all share the same rime: *ay*. For this reason, I love to have kids spell and read using word families (or rimes). Read my recent guest post on BOB Books' blog- <http://bobbooks.com/blog/guest-post-teaching-young-readers-to-find-patterns-in-words-by-this-reading-mama>
- **schwa**- A sound in the English language that sounds like the short *u* sound /uh/, but it is made during a syllable that is not stressed or emphasized. For example, in the words *away, another, and again*, the schwa sound is found at the beginning of the word. Schwa is usually represented with an upside down e.
- **short vowel**- Short vowels do *not* make their letter name sounds like long vowels. Vowels are typically pronounced with their short sound when *there is only one vowel in the word or syllable and it is followed by one or more consonants*. While there are some exceptions to this (like *told* or *truth*), most words do follow this generalization. Examples of short vowel words include: *well, hot, sand, or six*.
- **suffix**- Letters put on the end of a (base) word that changes its meaning. Examples include, but are not limited to *-ed, -ly, -ful, or -less*.
- **syllable juncture**- The point at which two syllables come together in a word. Studying various kinds of syllable junctures helps readers understand how to decode/read words. For example, *sample* is divided between the *m* and *p* while *robot* is divided between the first *o* and the *b*. The division of the syllables affects vowel sounds within the syllables.
- **vowel**- Vowels include the letters: *a, e, i, o, u* and sometimes *y* (my) and *w* (flew). Vowels can be long, short, or make ambiguous sounds (like *oo*). Vowels are typically represented by the letter *V* in curriculum or on websites, like here: CVC.
- **word families**- Words that rhyme and have rimes that are spelled the same. They have different onsets (beginning letters), but the *same* rime (word chunks). An example of this are the words *dog, frog, log, clog*, etc. Emergent readers are prime candidates for learning phonics by way of word families! <http://thisreadingmama.com/2012/01/11/using-word-families-chunks-to-read-new-words/>
- **word study**- The study of word patterns in the English language. Instead of teaching phonics as a list of isolated rules (that are so often broken), phonics is taught by looking at and analyzing words that are spelled similarly and coming up with generalizations that apply to that group of similar words. For example, why don't *give, love* and *have* contain long vowels? These words aren't rule breakers! When studied as a group, students realize there's a generalization for them. Read more about word study- <http://thisreadingmama.com/2012/10/15/what-is-word-study/>

Fluency Terms

- **accuracy (word)**- The ability to read the word *correctly* the first time. Word accuracy is important for fluency and comprehension.
- **automatic**- When a reader can look at a word and read it within one second of seeing it. Word automaticity is important for fluency and comprehension.
- **echo reading**- The adult reads a portion of the text with fluency first, then the child copies the adult
- **expression**- Another term used for prosody { see below }

- **fluency**- Fluency includes reading rate (or speed/word automaticity), word accuracy, and prosody. Being able to read with fluency has a direct impact on comprehension!
<http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/05/10/tuesdays-teaching-tip-9-2/>
- **intonation**- Using the sound of your voice to convey meaning. For example, your voice inflects up a bit at the end of asking a question {a part of prosody}.
- **miscues**- Miscues are mistakes kids make while reading. Miscues include, but are not limited to, substituting other words for the word in the text or omitting words that in the text. What do you do when a child miscues? You may want to read <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/05/04/what-to-do-when-a-child-misreads-a-word/> .
- **prosody**- using your voice to express the meaning of the text. Prosody includes things like: intonation, grouping words together in meaningful phrases, or using the punctuation to group words together. When someone reads with prosody, it sounds more like they are talking rather than reading.
- **reading rate (words per minute)**- How quickly did the child read the passage? A simple way to calculate words per minute is to take the number of words in the passage and multiply it by 60. Divide that number by the actual time *in seconds* it took for the child to read that passage. So if the passage was 200 words long, and Samantha read it in 2 minutes, her words per minute would be 100 words per minute. And just a side note: reading quickly isn't always a good thing if kids are more focused on how fast they can read versus the meaning of the text.
- **re-reading**- Going back and reading a text again that you've already read. There are several reasons to re-read. Reads might go back and re-reading for meaning (like if it didn't make sense the first time). I ask readers to re-read entire (shorter) texts or passages sometimes just to work on fluency. {Read more about re-reading <http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/05/10/tuesdays-teaching-tip-9-2/> }
- **self-corrections**- When a child goes back and corrects a mistake in her reading.
- **silent reading**- When a child reads silently to himself. Younger children tend to whisper read instead of reading in complete silence. Silent reading is a part of balanced literacy. Books that the child reads during silent reading should primarily be books that he can read with independence (for example, books that the child has already read with you).

Comprehension Terms

- **Bloom's Taxonomy**- A way to classify different kinds of thinking. Bloom's starts out at the basic level (knowledge) and moves up into higher order thinking, like synthesis and evaluation.
- **comprehension strategies**- The strategies proficient readers use as they are reading. Some examples of comprehension strategies include: asking questions, making predictions or creating mental images. For a complete list and description of each, read <http://thisreadingmama.com/comprehension/comprehension-strategies/> }
- **context (in context)**- When reading is done in context, it is done within the text. Words are kept in their context. Instead of pulling individual words out for study, words are figured out by using the context of the sentence or passage.
- **explicit questions**- Questions that directly come from the text, the reader can go back and find the answer word-for-word. These kinds of questions would be on the lowest level of Bloom's Taxonomy.
- **fiction**- A story or text that is made up. Fiction can be realistic or fantasy. (I hesitate to say that fiction is "not true", because lots of fiction does include facts, like historical fiction.)

- **implicit questions (higher order thinking questions)**- Questions that require the reader to read between the lines, the answer is not in black and white, but rather implied. These kinds of questions invoke the child to dig a little deeper and for that reason, I like to use them more than explicit questions. {Read more about asking questions to check comprehension in this post- [HERE](#)}
- **main idea**- The way I always describe main idea to kids is: What is the story ALL about? Main idea does not include small details, but the big picture and can usually be summed up in one or two sentences.
- **non-fiction**- Text that is not made up and is based on facts. Non-fiction includes more than a science or history book. A recipe is non-fiction. The ingredients on the cereal box are non-fiction. The rules to a card game are non-fiction.
- **out of context**- Pulling words out of context means that you take the word (or words) from the text and study them separately, apart from the text itself. There are several reasons it is good to do this, but here are my top 5 <http://teachmama.com/5-great-reasons-read-words-context/> .
- **picture walk (preview)**- This is an activity done before reading takes place. The reader looks through the pictures of the text and predicts what he or she thinks is happening. This is a great way to activate prior knowledge and to give the child a purpose in reading. Students using non-fiction texts can preview the text by looking at the table of contents, charts, or photographs to predict what the text will be about.
- **plot**- The rise and fall in action from a story. Scholastic has a plot diagram to demonstrate plot in a fiction text. You can find it here- http://www.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/1/lessonplans_graphicorg_pdfs_plotdiagram.pdf .
- **prior knowledge (background knowledge)**- Also known as schema. What does the reader already know about the subject *before* reading the text? Comprehension is much easier if the reader has prior knowledge of the subject before reading. You can read more about that here- <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/05/29/before-they-read-part-1/>. If the child does not have the prior knowledge, the adult can build prior knowledge by making learning hands-on and tangible- <http://thisreadingmama.com/comprehension/prior-knowledge/making-it-tangible/>
- **retell/summarize**- When a child retells what happened in the story, she is including only the important parts of the story. Retelling requires the reader to determine what's important/not important from the text and retell it in a way that makes sense to the listener. {Read more about Teaching Young Readers How to Summarize <http://www.hsclassroom.net/teaching-young-readers-how-to-summarize/> or Using Fiction Text Structure to Retell <http://thisreadingmama.com/2011/04/27/fiction-text-structure-mini-series/> } . Summarizing non-fiction can get even trickier {refer to text features/text structure below}
- **story elements**- Story elements are the basic features that make a story be a story such as characters, setting, problem, and solution. These story elements work together to form the plot.
- **text features and text structure**- Text features and text structures go hand-in-hand in helping young readers know what is important and not so important to the text. There is A LOT of meat with text features and text structure, so you may want to read my two articles: Fiction Story Elements and Text Structure (<http://thisreadingmama.com/comprehension/text-structure/fiction-text-structure/>) & Non-Fiction Text Features and Text Structures (<http://thisreadingmama.com/comprehension/non-fiction/non-fiction-text-structure/>).
- **theme**- The theme is what the author wants you to walk away with from the text. Often the author wants readers to learn a lesson for life such as be kind or act responsibly. Fables are a great medium for teaching theme, as fables all have a moral or lesson to be learned.

Writing Terms

- **conventional spelling**- Spelling words the correct way.
- **copy work**- Asking a child to copy words, phrases, or sentences to practice grammar, handwriting, and/or phonics skills. Many people will select passages from a text that the adult and child just read together as copy work. Once the child copies the work, he is supposed to read it aloud to practice fluency as well.
- **developmental spelling**- Understanding that spelling is a process. A preschooler's spellings will look much different than the spellings of an older child. You can find links explaining what spelling looks like in each stage here- <http://thisreadingmama.com/literacy-development/reading-and-spelling-development/>
- **dictation**- Used mainly with children in the pre-writing stage or when a child wants to write something for which he is not developmentally ready. The child tells the adult what he wants his sentence(s) to say and the adult writes the words in front of the child. The adult then reads it back to the child.
- **fine motor**- In order to hold a pencil and write, the muscles in the hand need to develop strength. Fine motor activities such as tweezer work, beading, playing with playdough, building with Lego bricks, or scissor practice can help to strengthen those muscles. You can find all kinds of fine motor work activities on my Fine Motor Pinterest board (<http://www.pinterest.com/thisreadingmama/fine-motor/>).
- **handwriting**- Letter formation or writing. All young writers should begin writing their letters from the top down instead of the bottom up when making vertical strokes. Right-handed children should also pull their pencil from left to writing when making horizontal strokes while left-handed children should pull their pencil from right to left. Forming letters this way facilitates pulling the pencil versus pushing the pencil to write.
- **invented spelling**- When a child does not spell the word conventionally, but makes up a spelling of the word instead. I love invented spellings because they tell you so much about what a writer understands about how words work. <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/09/11/use-invented-spelling-a-simple-writing-strategy/>
- **pencil grip**- The way a child holds his or her pencil while writing. Correct pencil grip may not be used right away when kids first start writing and that's okay! For more about correct pencil grip, read <http://thisreadingmama.com/2012/02/25/in-search-of-the-perfect-pencil-grip/>.
- **shared writing (interactive writing)**- This is a highly effective writing strategy, especially for struggling writers, in which the adult and the child share the pencil. The adult writes most parts (maybe the parts that are too difficult for the child) and the child writes what he can. For example, if a child knows a few basic sight words, the parent would let the child write those words if they come up in the writing as they work together. While the adult is writing, she is modeling what good writers do. It might sound like, "I am going to put some space between this word and this one so my reader knows these are two different words." (More info to come on this later this spring!)
- **writing process**- This is my favorite way to teach writing: as a process. This approach encourages kids to engage with writing like real authors do. It includes brainstorming ideas, writing rough drafts, revising, editing, publishing, and sharing work. If you have a primary-age student, you will WANT to read all the simple lesson ideas shared by The Measured Mom and I during a 12-week writing series called, Simple Writing Lessons. Here is the introduction page and links for all 12 weeks- <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/07/31/simple-writing-lessons-for-primary-grades-series/>
- **writing prompts**- Any time an adult gives the child his subject for writing. Writing prompts can be effective for giving young writers a springboard for more writing. They can also be effective for controlling vocabulary. For example, if your child was working on the sight word *like*, you might give him a prompt to practice that new word, such as "I like...", and he completes the sentence. If you'd like

some creative writing prompts for each month of the year, you can purchase the bundle pack here- <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/10/26/creative-writing-prompts-for-each-month/>



For more FAQ, please feel free to visit this post- <http://thisreadingmama.com/2013/07/18/faq-literacy-resources-for-parents/>.

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