

# How to get kids reading and writing over the summer

By Anindita Basu Sempere

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The summer reading lists provided by schools and libraries have two purposes: to foster a love of reading and to keep students intellectually engaged over summer. These book lists span genres and styles, from classics to nonfiction and from poetry to paranormal fiction. Given the variety, students can usually find a book that at least sounds interesting to them.

Unfortunately most students fall out of the habit of writing during summer vacation unless they are given assignments. Students become better writers through practice, and summer provides an opportunity for them to write without the external pressure of grades and testing. One option is to enroll students in a camp or enrichment program with a writing component. Another possibility is to create writing exercises to accompany assigned summer reading.

The following set of exercises builds the critical reading and writing skills that students develop in school by encouraging them to write for themselves. As with a summer reading list, students have options so that they can find an entry point into writing that appeals to them.

## **Reviews and Opinion**

As both parents and educators know, children and adolescents have strong opinions on everything from when to get a cell phone or Facebook account to national politics. Articulating and defending an opinion forms the heart of analytical and persuasive writing. As an exercise, ask your child to write an opinion advocating one side of an argument. This can take the form of an essay or letter to an editor. Alternately, ask your child to write a review of a game, movie, or book. What are the positives and negatives? Why? For variation and a challenge, change the parameters. For example, write a one-paragraph blurb that could appear on the back of a book cover and then a 500-word review that could be in a magazine or newspaper.

## **Change Your Perspective**

Retell a story or a scene from the perspective of another character. Consider this character's personal story and motivations both on- and off-screen. For example, what was Peeta's experience when his name was chosen in "The Hunger Games"? How does Luna Lovegood of the "Harry Potter" series spend her summers?

## **Journals**

A prime example of writing for oneself, journals let children and adolescents record their thoughts and experiences privately. Encourage your child to write at least one page per day. The content could include personal experience, poems, stories, or songs. The journal could be set ten years in the future or in another galaxy.

## **Blogging**

For students who would like to write for publication, blogging provides a way to participate in a community through writing, responding to posts, and linking to other online content. Students can create blogs dedicated to a personal interest, such as a sports team or photography or the imagined adventures of a family pet.

## **Moving Off the Page**

Write a play or screenplay and perform it. This exercise lets students collaborate and use multiple modes of creativity, so they write and then interpret their text through acting, costumes, music, and any other elements they would like to bring to their performance. They can write an original piece or adapt a story.

## **Descriptions**

For a shorter exercise that focuses on showing and not telling, describe an object in the room without stating what it is. Alternately, pretend that this is a first encounter with this object, so the writer doesn't know the object's use. What does the object appear to do? Can a reader guess the object based on the description?

## **Monologues**

Write a monologue in which a character works through a problem. This character could come from a book, history, current events, or the imagination. Write this monologue as a speech or poem and have the character make a decision by the end of the piece.

## **Adaptations**

Students can make stories their own by modifying them. A story set in the past can be retold in a contemporary setting or vice versa. Characters can change from human to animal. Stories can cross cultures or genres. For example, write the story of Snow White as a Western or set "Jane Eyre" in the contemporary United States.

These exercises serve as a starting point and can be modified to fit your child's age, specific interests, and goals. Whether creative or academic, writing gives individuals the chance to voice their thoughts, opinions, and emotions. Through writing, children and adolescents can develop their unique voices while working through questions that interest them.

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