I Hate to Write!

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GCLI19
Handwriting vs. the Writing Process

Writing does not always involve handwriting!
Why is the writing process so hard for our kids?
Skills needed for writing:

• Language skills
• Imitation skills
• Organization
• Problem solving
• Auditory and visual memory
• Sensory regulation
• Balance and proprioception
• Gross motor control
• Fine motor control
Our students who struggle with processing have deficits in . . . .

• Language skills
• Imitation skills
• Organization
• Problem solving
• Auditory and visual memory
• Sensory regulation
• Balance and proprioception
• Gross motor control
• Fine motor control
THE PLIGHT OF THE STRUGGLING WRITER: IT'S A JUGGLING ACT!
(HANSEN, 1998)
Brain Research and Autism

It’s all about connections
Writing Skills:

• Imitate: “Watch me, make your letters like this. . .”

• Memory: “I don’t remember how to make a W.”

• Organize: letters to words, words to sentences, sentences to paragraphs. “This doesn’t make sense!”

• Process language: “Why didn’t you write down my directions for the assignment?”
“BUT... As a teacher, I’m required to help students meet academic standards in writing – whether or not they have ASD or not. HELP!!!?”
Writing Challenges:

- Language
- Organization
- Sensory
- Motors

As teachers, we can help!
Getting Started . . .

Sometimes our Learners with processing deficits struggle to get started. The assignment is given and he/she just sits at their desk staring at the assignment or blank page.

Why does this happen and what can we as educators do to help the student?
Consider the four main areas of difficulty!

- Language
- Organization
- Sensory
- Motors
Is it sensory issues?

To help the student break the cycle of inertia, we need to help him/her “WAKE UP THEIR SYSTEM”.

Before writing:

• Have the student quickly deliver a message to a teacher down the hall.
• 30 wall pushups before he/she sits to write.
• Have the student erase the white board (stretch high)
• Whole class take a brain break
Is it motor planning?

Scientifically, inertia appears to be a function of the neurological processes that control a person’s ability to shift attention and plan voluntary motor movements. When a person has difficulty in these two areas, the result is often a tendency to stay still.
Try this for younger students:

Provide hand under hand support for the first written word of the assignment. Slowly fade the pressure of your hand on the student’s hand. When you feel that the student has begun to write, slowly fade the presence of your hand. Often, this minimal physical prompt will be enough to break the cycle of inertia and allow the student to proceed with the assignment on his/her own.
Is it difficulty with language?

Even high functioning students with ASD or processing difficulties have trouble understanding abstract concepts.

In order to understand what you want them to write about, they need for the instructions to be concrete.
Try this. . .

Assignment: Write a story about your favorite season.

Fill in these blanks:

1. My favorite season is ________. (title)
2. In _____ the air feels _______.
3. In ________ the weather is _________.
4. In ________ I like to _________.
5. That is fun because _________________.
6. Another thing I do in the ______ is ___________.
7. I really like the season of _________________.

On a different sheet of paper write your favorite season. Use these words to help you. Make your story seven sentences long.
Helping the older students get started:

Assignment: Write about someone who made a significant impact on scientific thought.

Galileo  DaVinici  Einstein  Newton

Fill in these blanks:

1. __________ made a very significant impact on scientific thought.(title)
2. __________ changed the way people thought about ________________.
3. Previously, people had thought __________________________________________________________________.
4. But this scientist had a different idea. It was ____________________________________________________________.

Write at least 4 paragraphs about this scientist on a separate sheet of paper. Use these sentences for your first sentence in each paragraph.
Is it difficulty in organization?

A simple graphic organizer can be a powerful tool to engage the student by visually guiding him/her through the writing process, helping him/her to break the ‘inertia’ pattern.
Try this. . .

To help young students learn to perceive words as separate units, use your fingers as a visual organizer. Have the child tell you a sentence using the keyword. Keep holding your fingers up, ask the child how many words you said. Repeat the sentence again as you hold up a finger for each word. This repetition reinforces the number of words and word order. Ask him/her again to tell you how many words you said. Then ask him to write ________ words.
REFUSAL!

Why does this happen?
What can a teacher do to help?
Consider the four main areas of difficulty!

- Language
- Organization
- Sensory
- Motors

Let’s make sure we set the student up for success!
DO THIS!!

• Hold your pencil in your non dominant hand.

• Write two sentences about what you did last night?
Reflections!

Wow.
Refusal might be due to sensory motor issues:

All of our senses are involved in the writing process, but three sensory systems are crucial for writing.

• Tactile – touch
• Vestibular – balance
• Proprioceptive – awareness of body’s position in space
Set your students up for success

- Structured movement activities
- Push, Pull, Lift and Carry activities built into the school day
- Reduce postural fatigue by offering a variety of seating options: chair, ball, beanbag seat, chair with arms, lying on the floor, or standing.
- Let the student choose his writing tool: pencil, pen, gel marker, crayon, various pencil grips.
Refusal might be due to Sensory Regulation Needs

- For the tired friend – rev up the system with a brisk walk
- Whole Class – “Just dance videos”
- Follow up with a big muscle push, pull, lift, or carry job
- Sit on a air cushion or bubble wrap
- Chewing gum is great for sensory regulation
Refusal might be due to difficulty with language and imaginative thought

GIVE VISUAL CHOICES

Show the student 3 engaging pictures. Ask him/her to verbally tell you about each picture. Praise him/her for their ideas, then ask him/her which one he chooses to write about. Review what they said about the picture. Then remove the other pictures.
Refusal might be due to difficulty with organization

Set your student up for success by building a topic library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>First Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>I know how to do lots of things on the computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td>This summer I played on the Orioles baseball team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airplanes</td>
<td>I rode on an airplane to see my grandmother for Thanksgiving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogs</td>
<td>My dogs’ names are Rex and Ripken.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Refusing to write

• Let him/her type
• Dictation
• Check out some technology
• Is the task appropriate for the student?
Sometimes they get stuck!

When a student becomes stuck and they tend to write about the same thing over and over we need to remember...

• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motors
Are they stuck because they are struggling with language?

Most of our students with ASD are very concrete in their thinking. Imagination and creative thought are areas of weakness. This difficulty with imagination makes it hard to come up with new ideas.
Provide a visual support to spark the imagination!

Directions: Use the numbers on the picture to help you think of ideas for your story.
Are they stuck because they are having difficulty with organization?

Organization/Perseveration thought:

Perseveration or the tendency to repeat an idea or action over and over, is one of the common traits of autism. In the writing process, this tendency makes it a challenge to transition from one idea or sentence to the next.
Are they stuck because they are unorganized?

*Provide a Story Frame to help students transition from one idea to the next.*

In this story the problem began when ___________.

After that, ________________________________ .

Next, ________________________________ .

Then, ________________________________ .

The problem is finally solved when ________________________________ .

The story ends ________________________________ .
Are they stuck because of sensory issues:

Sensory/perfectionism: Students with ASD are often perfectionists. They may spend lots of time erasing or correcting work that isn't perfect to their way of thinking. They often become anxious or angry if their work doesn’t look right to them or it doesn’t meet their standards.
For sensory issues try:

- Rub my hands on my legs – 10 times.
- Push my hands together and release – 10 times
- Open and close fingers - 10 times
- Place my hands on the chair seat, then raise my bottom off the seat - 10 times
- Deep breathe in slowly through my nose, then blow out through my lips – repeat 5 times.
Are they stuck because of difficulty with motor skills:

Holding a pencil can actually be painful for a person with autism. When that discomfort is added to the challenge of coordinating all the muscle groups needed to write, students often give up or melt down.
Getting stuck – try this:

- Pencil grips/writing tools
- Take turns – you write then he/she writes
- Dictation/after dictation the student re-copies or types what he/she has dictated to you.
- Chunk down the task
- Use keyboarding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I do?</th>
<th>Write a paragraph about your Spring Break.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much do I have to do?</td>
<td>Write 6 sentences. Use capitals and punctuation. Each sentence must have at least one adjective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I do when I am finished?</td>
<td>Give finished paragraph to teacher. Then you can work on computer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Establish a “private office” area within the classroom where the student can write with reduced distractions (a desk facing the wall).

• Give the student a clipboard and have him start his writing assignment while sitting on a beanbag or rocker.
• Turn the student’s chair around and let him/her straddle his/her legs on each side with the chair back providing calming pressure and support to the front.

• Use a stretch band around the legs of a chair.
If it is not working, ask yourself:

- **Setting (sensory):** Is the room noisy? Is there clutter in his workspace?

- **Seating (motor):** Is he comfortable? Does he need a different place to write?

- **Task (organization):** Is the task too big? Do you need to break it down into smaller chunks?
If it is not working, ask yourself:

• Timing (organization): Is the wait time too long between directive / writing / reinforcement?

• Directions (language): Was there too much talking? Does he need a prompt? Are the instructions written down and clear?

• Attention (sensory): Did you get his/her attention before giving the task?