

Resource: Adapting Writing Instruction

Students with learning difficulties may need more individualized support than their peers to work independently, as shown in the writing classes presented in this mini-module. When writing, many children with special needs are likely to have particular difficulty with:

- Generating ideas
- Organizing ideas related to a specific topic
- Coming up with the right words to express or expand their ideas about a topic
- Applying the mechanics of writing (e.g., spelling, punctuation)

Some suggestions for assisting students are listed below.

Focus Area	Suggestions
Generating Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a Writer’s Notebook for every student. After students personalize these, divide them into three sections. Dedicate one section to listing ideas for stories and displaying pictures that will serve as “seeds” for developing stories. The second section can be used to write down words students can use as they write their stories. The third section is the place for them to write and revise their drafts. • Distribute old magazines and pictures and ask the students to look through these and select three to five pictures that show something they would like to write about. Have them mount these in their Writer’s Notebooks. • Pair students to share the pictures they select to stimulate writing and to brainstorm additional topics with a partner. Remind students to write these ideas in their Writer’s Notebooks. • Conduct a brainstorming session with the whole class. Note their ideas on chart paper and post it in a visible place. • Ask students to select an idea or picture from their Writer’s Notebooks and describe to a partner what they might say about it. If they are having trouble selecting an idea, set up a pre-writing conference with students to talk about the writing ideas in their Writer’s Notebook.
Organizing Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a brainstorming sheet to provide students with a framework for idea generation. • Jot down brainstormed ideas on individual colored Post-its, and then have students work with a partner to group ideas that go together (e.g., ideas that go with description of the setting, information about main characters, important points about the problem or conflict).

Focus Area	Suggestions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students rehearse orally with a partner to get feedback on organization and development of their ideas before they begin to write them down. • Focus the students on communicating meaning, not mechanics. • Give students a chart outlining the critical things they should think about (e.g., information about main characters, important points about the problem or conflict).
Expressing Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post words on subjects that interest students on charts around the room. • Develop a list of synonyms for words that students commonly use in their writing (e.g., for the word <i>said</i> they may collect, with your help, <i>stated, declared, announced, added, whispered, shouted</i>). Post this list in a place where all students can see and refer to it as they write.
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate the mechanics from the writing process. Tell students to think of dividing the tasks of writing into two distinct parts: author and secretary. The author focuses only on generating and organizing ideas and content. The secretary “cleans it up” at the end, checking for spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and overall appearance. • Encourage early writers to spell what they want to say as well as they can. Remind them that they can fix spelling as part of their revision process. • Encourage older writers to underline spellings they think may be wrong. They will check the spelling of these words later during final proofreading. • Have each student keep a personal spelling dictionary that includes words they like to use in their writing, as well as basic high-frequency words and words they frequently misspell. Have students check their questionable spellings against this dictionary before handing in their final draft. • When appropriate, have students keep track of the kinds of errors they make in rule-governed spelling (e.g., dropping the <i>e</i> before adding an ending that begins with a vowel, as in <i>bite + ing = biting</i>). Tell them to note the rules they must remember (including example applications of those rules) under the heading “Spelling Rules” in their notebooks/folders.