“I HATE TO WRITE!”

Rescuing Our Reluctant Writers
Strategies for Elementary Students

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The many labels of Executive Function Disorder

Students with executive function challenges are often labeled:

- Lazy
- Disorganized
- Hyperactive
- Learning disabled
- Autistic
- Behavior problems
Why is the writing process so hard for our reluctant writers?

Let’s look at a few of the skills needed for writing:
• Now let’s look at a few of the skills that are hard for kids with Executive Function Differences like Learning Disabilities, ADD, ADHD, ASD, and more:
Skills that students with Executive Functioning challenges have difficulty performing and which are also needed for successful writing.
Brain Research and writing: it’s all about connections
Writing skill: ability to imitate motor movements. “Make your letters like this.”

The brains of individuals with ASD show differences in the mirror neurons of the parietal lobe. These are often referred to as the ‘monkey see / monkey do’ neurons – controlling a person’s ability to imitate motor movements.

Manzar Ashtari, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, J. Lindner Center for Autism, North Shore Long Island Jewish Health System in Bethpage, NY, 2007
Writing skill: ability to remember how to form letters “What do you mean you don’t remember how to make a ‘W’?

The brains of individuals with ASD have fewer neural connections between the cortex (new information) and the cerebellum (automatic, long term memory)

Stewart H. Mostofsky, Stephanie K. Powell, Daniel J. Simmonds, Melissa C. Goldberg, Brian Caffo, James J. Pekar, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, 2009
Sensory Motor Regions Become Over Connected

• 4/15 Journal *Biological Psychiatry*, “Cognitive neuroscientists at San Diego State University found that in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorder, the connections between the cerebral cortex and the cerebellum appear to be overdeveloped in sensorimotor regions of the brain.”

“The imaging results revealed that the participants with autism had far stronger neuronal connectivity between sensorimotor regions of the cerebellum and cerebral cortex than did their counterparts without autism. *Conversely, the participants with autism had less connectivity between regions involved in higher-order cognitive functions such as decision-making, attention and language.*”

Writing skill: ability to organize letters into words, words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, etc. “This doesn’t make sense!”

The brains of individuals with ASD have more white matter, but far fewer connections between sections of the brain, i.e., less organization.

Dr. Martha Herbert, Harvard Medical School, Pediatric Neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, TRANSCEND Research Program
Writing skill: ability to process language "Why didn’t you write down my directions for the assignment?"

- The brains of individuals with high functioning ASD have more activation in Wernicke’s area and less activation in Broca’s area – the two primary language areas of the brain, resulting in poor information integration, even in those with strong language skills.

“BUT……as a teacher, I’m required to help students meet academic standards in writing – whether they have a label or not. HELP!!!
Research: Writing can increase achievement in all areas:

1. Writing about material that has been read increases comprehension
2. Teaching students how to write increases reading comprehension, fluency, and word reading.
3. Increasing amount of student writing increases reading comprehension

“Writing to Read”, Graham and Hebert, Harvard Educational Review, 2010
Writing challenges can be grouped into four main categories:

• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motor

As teachers, we can help!
GETTING STARTED

Teacher Concern: “When I give him a writing assignment, he just sits there. Even when it’s an easy task, well within his ability, he seems to freeze.”

National Common Core Standard for Writing: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Getting started…

why it happens, and what a teacher can do to help

Consider the four main areas of difficulty:

• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motor
‘Getting started’…might be due to sensory issues.

There is a strong link between the vestibular system and the language areas of the brain. To help a student with autism activate his language system and break the cycle of inertia, we need to help him

WAKE UP HIS SYSTEM.

• Try this...
**Getting started** – Wake Up Exercises

**Before** writing:
Have the student ‘quickly!’ deliver a message to a teacher down the hall. When the student returns, have him do 30 wall pushups before he sits to write.

Have the student erase the whiteboard. (make sure there is something high up on the board so he has to stretch.)
‘Getting started’…might be due to difficulty with motor planning.

“Even when I am highly motivated, and know what to do and how, I still don't do it. Instead, I sit and think about it or plan exactly what I am going to do in minute detail. I am stuck in inertia.”

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 difficult in these two areas, the result is often a tendency to stay still.

• Try this...
For younger student, provide hand over hand support for the first written word of the assignment. With each letter of the word, keep your hand in place, but 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 own.
‘Getting started’...might be due to difficulty with language.

Many of our students, even those with very high abilities, have trouble understanding abstract concepts. They have difficulty with instructions such as, “Take out your journal and write about anything you are interested in,” or “Write about your favorite season.” In order to understand what you want them to write about, they need for the instructions to be very concrete.

Try this:
GETTING STARTED - Language
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 about your favorite season. Use these words to help you. Make your story seven sentences long.
Provide a Timeline

(Teacher prompts: “Tell me about our trip to the apple orchard. What did we do first?” For each experience that the child relates, the teacher draws a very simple picture on the timeline. After the child has related enough items for a sequential story, the teacher numbers her pictures. Then, in paragraph form, the child writes a sentence for each numbered picture.)
‘Getting started’…might be due to difficulty with organization.

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

Try this:
**GETTING STARTED - Organization**

*Kidspiration* is a software tool that helps students to create, organize and explain their ideas visually. The visual webs and maps help students organize and expand their thoughts and ideas.
• SOLO is a literacy suite of the most popular assistive technology
• Including a text reader, graphic organizer, talking word processor, and word prediction.
Getting started – try technology

SOLO Software: Draft Builder

Graphic organizer, built on brainmapping. Brainstorm ideas, then organize them.
Beginning Writers/Struggling Writers

- Try a software program like Pix Writer
- Suncastletechnology.com
- Picture/word choices help create sentences.
- http://www.suncastletech.com – Lots of visuals already created
Pix Writer Teaches

- Sentence Structure
- Expressive language
- Conventions
- Spelling/Can use Co:writer
- Adverbs and more
REFUSING TO WRITE

Teacher Concern: “When it’s time to write, he won’t even try!

National Common Core Standard for Writing: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Refusing to write…

why it happens, and what a teacher can do to help

Consider the four main areas of difficulty:

• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motor

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SET THE STUDENT UP FOR SUCCESS!!
‘Refusing to write’…might be due to difficulty with 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), and proprioceptive (awareness of body’s position in space).
Sensory Processing

Central Nervous System

Smell
Vision
Hearing
Taste

Touch (Tactile)

Movement (Vestibular)

Body Awareness (Proprioception)

Balance
Awareness of two sides of body

Body Scheme
Reflex Maturity
Ability to screen input

Eye-Hand Coordination
Precise control of eye movements

Postural Adjustment

Language

Attention

Visual Spatial Relationship

Daily Living Skills

Behaviour

Academic Learning
A writing experiment for teachers

1. Hold your pencil in your non-dominant hand.
2. Write two sentences about what you did last night.
3. Reactions?
Tactile/Touch

- Our first sensory system to function
- We are first nourished, calmed and become attached to others through our sense of touch
- Tactile receptors are found throughout the skin
- Protective-fright/flight response
- Discriminative-quality
Proprioception

• Housed along muscle fibers and tendons that connect muscle to bone

• Gives us our awareness of body position/where are body is in space

• Automatic adjustments of body position

• Postural stability
Signs of Poor Proprioception

• Stiff and poor coordination
• Clumsy
• Frequent falls
• Runs into furniture, walls, people, etc.
• Falls out of chair
• Easily frustrated
• Easily fatigued

• Squirms, especially when seated
• Slow to established handedness
• Often breaks pencil and / or pencil lead
• Difficulty with stairs
• Foot slap when walking
• Toe Walking
Vestibular

- Receptors within the inner ear
- Affects our gravitational security
- Coordinates the movement of eyes/visual spatial, head and body position
- Enables a child to hold his head up against gravity
- Has an effect on being able to print and write
- Strong relationship with auditory system/language
1. Start with big muscle movement: push, pull, lift or carry: carry a crate of books to library.

2. Identify a pacing area in the back of the room

3. Let the student choose and try out his writing tool: pencil, pen, gel marker, crayon.

4. To reduce postural fatigue, give student a variety of seating options – desk chair, ball, beanbag seat, chair with arms.
REFUSING TO WRITE - Sensory

Change the writing environment

- Establish a ‘private office’ area within the classroom where the student can write with reduced distractions.

Give the student a clipboard and have him start his writing assignment while sitting in a beanbag chair.
Why Do We Write

Does the student understand why we write? Why someone needs to be able to read it?

- To tell something to someone
- To ask something
- To invite (party)
- To thank
- To persuade or convince
- To request (snack list)
Name: [redacted]

Date: 2-3-14
Time: 2:08 pm

What did I do to earn a time-out?

Note: write (because its my least favorite thing to do EVER.)
Refusing to Write - might be due to difficulty with language and imaginative thought.

Set your student up for success by giving him visual choices.

Show the student 3 engaging pictures. Ask him to verbally tell you about each picture. Praise him for his ideas, then ask him which one he chooses to write about. Review what he has said about the picture. Then remove the other pics.
Refusing to Write – might be due to language and working memory

WIRC: Writing Intensive Reading Comprehension – federal grant 2005

• 3 year study of 4th and 5th graders in urban settings
• Taught Reading and Writing concurrently – as opposed to ‘read first, write later’
• ‘Two Handed Reading’ with ‘thinksheets’: one hand on the text and the other hand ready to write on the ‘thinksheet’

Increased achievement in reading and writing
Refusing to Write - 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 Sox baseball team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains</td>
<td>I rode a train to my grandma’s house.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Concern: “He gets stuck on an idea when he is writing. He likes to write about the same thing over and over. Sometimes he gets stuck on one little detail and can’t make himself move on.”

National Common Core Standard for Writing: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
Getting stuck...

why it happens, and what a teacher can do to help

Consider the four main areas of difficulty:

• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motor
‘Getting stuck’…might be due to difficulty with language

• **Language / Concrete thinking:** Many of our reluctant writers 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.

• **Try this...**
GETTING ‘STUCK’ - Language
Provide a visual support to spark imagination.
Directions: Use the numbers on the picture to help you think of ideas for your story.
“Getting stuck”…might be due to difficulty with organization.

- **Organization / Perseverative thought:** Perseveration, or the tendency to repeat an idea or action over and over, is one of the common traits of students with executive functioning differences. In the writing process, this tendency makes it a challenge to transition from one idea or sentence to the next.

- **Try this:**
Provide a Story Frame – to help students transition from one idea to the next.

STORY FRAME

In this story the problem began when ________________________________.

After that, ________________________________________________________.

Next, _____________________________________________________________.

Then, ____________________________________________________________.

The problem is finally solved when ________________________________.

The story ends ________________________________________________.
“Getting stuck”...might be due to difficulty with sensory issues.

- Sensory / Perfectionism: Some of our reluctant writers are perfectionists. They may spend lots of time erasing or correcting work that isn’t perfect to their way of thinking. They often becomes anxious or angry if their work doesn’t look right to them.

- Try this:
Getting stuck - Sensory

Before writing sensory motor exercises

1. Rub My Hands On My Legs-10 times.
3. Open and close Fingers 10 times.
4. Place my hands on the chair seat, then raise my bottom off the seat 10 times.
5. Deep Breathe in slowly through my nose, then blow out through my lips. Repeat 5 times. (Mindfulness activities)
‘Getting stuck’…might be due to difficulty with motor skills.

• Gross and fine motor skills: Holding a pencil can actually be painful for a person with sensory sensitivity. When that discomfort is added to the challenge of coordinating all the muscle groups needed to write, students often give up or melt down.

• Try this...
“Getting Stuck” might be due to challenges with Motor Skills

- A pencil grip may help. Try practicing for short periods in order for the student to “give it a try” and avoid frustration
- Offer a variety of tools
- Try taking turns with the physical component of writing, you write a sentence and then he writes a sentence
- Dictation/ After dictation the student copies or types what he has dictated to you
- Computer
- Try using a portable word processor, if less ‘bells and whistles’ are needed
Use Technology

- Reduce the motor requirement of writing by using a **word prediction** program. The student types the first three letters of a word, then selects the correct word from a drop-down menu. The computer reads the word out loud, so the student can hear what he has written. The student only needs to make a few keystrokes to produce the word he wants, thus enabling faster task completion, less frustration, and better sentences.
SnapType App
For Occupational Therapy

- Take pictures of worksheets
- Tap to add text

Available on the
App Store

Correlative Conjunctions Worksheet (Part 1 / L.5.1a)

Name: Beck Date: September 23

Correlative conjunctions connect two equal grammatical items. Example: (either/or), (neither/nor).

Directions: Read each sentence below. Fill in each sentence with the correct correlative conjunctions.

Example: A ______ wants to play ______ not.
Answer: She ______ wants to play ______ not.

1. (either/or), (neither/nor)
   We ______ are going to the park ______ are going home.
   ______

2. (either/or), (neither/nor)
   Neither ______ nor ______ expressed their thoughts.
   ______

3. (either/or), (neither/nor)
   Either ______ the couple ______ Sharon told the truth.
   ______

4. (either/or), (neither/nor)
   At night ______ the cats ______ the dogs woke us up.
   ______

5. (either/or), (neither/nor)
   John will ______ start today ______ start tomorrow.
   ______
Read & Write Gold

• Read & Write literacy
• Word prediction
• Text to speech (will read on line)
• Speech to text
• Vocabulary builder
• Reading practice
• Ipad version is free

https://rw.texthelp.com/drive/Support/Home
IPAD Ginger Keyboard App

- Ginger Keyboard
- Word prediction
- Ability to proofread for spelling based on context.
- Corrects misspellings that standard writing apps and autocorrect easily miss, such as homonyms.
- It can also help a user improve a piece of writing with its rephrasing, synonym, and grammar-checking tools.
- 3.99
Dragon Dictate 4

• PV and Ipad

• Dragon approved for speech to text for standardized testing accommodation

• You can dictate into almost any application, but Dragon Dictate works best when you dictate into its own Note Pad; it also works very well with Microsoft Word or Pages ‘09.
MISUNDERSTANDING THE DIRECTIONS

Teacher Concern: “He seems to be listening, but sometimes he completely misunderstands the assignment.”

National Common Core Standard for Writing: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
Misunderstanding the directions might be due to difficulty with language

Students with Executive Functioning differences often have trouble processing language. Temple Grandin tells us that “...after about three sentences, your voice goes into ‘blah blah blah’, and I just tune you out!”

And talking louder just makes it worse!

• Try this...
Why is that important?

Lots of words just turn into gibberish:

Temple Grandin: “After three sentences, I just tune you out!”

False confessions: the Yes / No problem

Think about how we teach children…
So, does that mean that my talking can actually be triggering the behavior???

YOU GOT IT!

One of the most common triggers for behavior in kids with Autism is too much talking by the teacher. Imagine listening to someone give you instructions in a foreign language. After awhile, your brain would shut down, and you would find something more interesting to do.
Prompting increases learning...and writing skills

- Prompting keeps students engaged
- Prompting reduces frustration
- Prompting increases rate of learning

**Prompting is an Evidence Based Practice!**

(.......but how do I do it?)
EBP: **Prompting**

**How do I do it?**

If the child doesn’t respond within **2 – 3 seconds**, use a prompt.

- **Full Physical Prompt:**

- **Hand over Hand Prompt:**

- **Partial Prompt:**

- **Visual Prompt / Cue:**

- **Verbal Prompt:**
What we say / What they hear

“Do you understand?”

The teacher means: Do you understand what I just presented?
The student with ASD hears: Are you paying attention?
More effective: Tell me what I said, using your own words.

“This is important.”

The teacher means: This will probably be on the test.
The student with ASD hears: This is important to my teacher, but not necessarily to me.
More effective: Write this down. It will be on the test.

“Are there any questions?”

The teacher means: Tell me what you do not understand.
The student with ASD hears: The teacher is finished talking.
More effective: Tell me what I said, using your own words.
‘Misunderstanding the directions’ might be due to sensory issues

It is more difficult for students with language processing challenges to process language when they are in a large group setting. The student may go into survival mode as he works to filter out the sensory stimuli in the room. He may not be fully ‘tuned in’ to the teacher’s voice, and may then miss important parts of the instructions.

• Try this...
MISUNDERSTANDING THE DIRECTIONS - Sensory

‘Preferential Seating’ is not enough!!

• Is he ready to ‘tune in’? Move!

• Personalize Instructions: Say his name, tap desk, ask for him to be your assistant

• Evidenced based practice: VISUALS  Provide written directions on the screen, overhead, Smartboard: clearly written (universal design) (pictures)

Make sure you have the student’s attention **BEFORE** you give the directions.
KNOWING WHAT TO WRITE

Teacher Concern: “He has good ideas, but when it is time to write he can’t think of anything to say.”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing:
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
Difficulty knowing what to write...

why it happens, and what a teacher can do to help

Consider the four main areas of difficulty:
• Language
• Organization
• Sensory
• Motor
Difficulty **knowing what to write** might be due to difficulty with organization.

Sequential thought is often a big challenge for many of our reluctant writers. Just as they have difficulty organizing their supplies, they also have trouble organizing thoughts into logical sequence and order.

- **Try this...**
Provide a Framework: Make a Timeline

Assignment: Write a report on Martin Luther King.

The student tells the teacher what he knows about the subject. For each fact that the student relates, the teacher writes a keyword on the timeline. When the student has related enough items for a sequential report, the teacher numbers the keywords. Then, in paragraph form, the student writes a sentence for each keyword.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Atlanta</th>
<th>Michael</th>
<th>Pastor</th>
<th>Civil Rights</th>
<th>Nonviolence</th>
<th>Montgomery</th>
<th>Dream</th>
<th>Memphis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Pastor
Civil Rights
Nonviolence
Montgomery
Dream
Memphis
Quote from a third grade student:

- “I have so much going on in my brain, it is so tired”
- Provide an opportunity for all students to experience a “fresh start” for engaged academics including writing, learning, socializing, attitude, mood and more.
- Please include aerobic exercise at an individual’s target heart rate to improve the following:
Move To Learn

Aerobic exercise at target heart rate:

- Improves concentration
- Improves impulse control
- Improves attention
- Increases Motivation
- Helps Mood and Anxiety Regulation
- Combats depression/Increase self esteem
- Reverses learned helplessness
- Combats toxic effects of stress hormones
- Decreases fatigue
Dr. John Ratey Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School

• “Exercise is like taking a little bit of Prozac and a little bit of Ritalin because, like the drugs, exercise elevates these neurotransmitters.”

• “When you exercise, at the cellular level the brain is drenched with serotonin, glutamate, norepinephrine, dopamine and growth hormones, all wielding a powerful influence, like Miracle-Gro for the brain,.”
Exercise Greatly Impacts Learning

- Prefrontal Cortex: Major Role In Executive Functioning
- The CEO
- Planning
- Organizing
- Learning from mistakes
- Maintaining focus
- Working Memory
- Initiating or delay response
The Research is Impressive: British Journal of Sports Med

• 19 studies 586 kids, teens and young adults found short 10 to 40 minute bursts of exercise led to an immediate boost in concentration and mental focus, improving blood flow to brain.

• Further evidence 20 min before taking a test
20 Minute Walk

• On the left: Brain before a 20 minute walk
• On the right: Brain after a 20 minute walk
Exercise and Learning

• Walking 20 min. on a treadmill or just walking scored 15% better with an improved ability to take test

• Behavior-in first four months-all kids are moving 45 min a day- discipline plunged 63% and 85% dropped in another district

• Attention all improved

• Aggression decreased

• Move to Learn videos

www.movetolearnms.org
Teacher Concern: “He can’t organize his words into a logical sentence. His sentences just don’t make sense!”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing:
Produce, expand, and rearrange complete simple and compound sentences
“Difficulty writing complete sentences might be due to difficulty with organization.

Reluctant writers, especially those with executive function differences, often have trouble perceiving words as separate units. To these students, a sentence sounds like one long, continuous word. The person may have a good understanding of each word in the sentence, but when the words are put together into sentences, the meaning may be lost.

• 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. You repeat his sentence slowly, holding up a finger for each word. Keep holding your fingers up, and 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 again to tell you how many words you said. Then ask him to write those ___(9)___ words.
Writing Complete Sentences May Be Supported With Sensory

- Remember movement may stimulate language
- Try a two minute jumping break on a mini trampoline, sharing writing ideas
- Provide a physical job prior to writing: push breakfast cart back to cafeteria
- Class 10 minute brisk walk before writing starts
- Pretend jump rope (it works!)
WRITING ILLEGIBLY

Teacher Concern: “His writing is horrible! I can’t read it. The words are large, and they all run together. It’s just not legible.”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
“Writing Illegibly”
Why it may be difficult and what a teacher can do to help.

Consider all the sensory motor requirements of writing:

Sensory processing, neuromuscular: muscle tone, strength, postural control, motor skills involving being able to cross the midline, bilateral integration and motor planning, poor fine motor coordination, poor visual perception as well as cognitive components.

No wonder writing is often illegible!
“Writing Illegibly”
May be due to poor visual motor skills

• Mayer and Calhoun (2003) found that graphomotor problems were significantly higher for students with an ASD regardless of age or IQ and that this had a serious impact on their written expression.

• Myles and colleagues (2003) compared the written expression of 16 students with Asperger syndrome with students without disabilities. They found that those with an ASD demonstrated a decrease in legibility, complexity and number of words used during handwriting tasks.

Try This:
**Writing Illegibly**: Positioning

- Time on tummy for upper body strengthening

- Consider desk and chair size for pencil/paper and computer positioning
Writing Illegibly: Poor Pencil Grasp

• For younger students try practicing just holding the pencil correctly (not yet on paper), drawing shapes or letters in the air. (Mom and Dad in the front seat, I'm in the back seat.

• Then the student can practice printing his name with correct positioning.

• Then try practicing with small pieces of crayon or chalk. Use primary crayons, pencils, golf pencils or markers. (for young students use a tool that fits the size of their hand.)

• Allow daily opportunity to practice at a large vertical chalkboard to develop the skill side of the hand.
Writing Illegibly: Positioning
Writing Illegibly: Teaching letter formation

- Direct teaching and modeling
- Auditory script
- Repeated practice
- Pencil paper last
- Develop motor memory
- Automatic retrieval
“Writing Legibly” Visual motor

• If the student is printing too small then your student may be holding his pencil very close to the tip of the pencil. A small visual/tactile cue may help. Wrap a small rubber band or piece of masking tape on the end of the yellow of the pencil to help to see where his fingers and thumb should be.

• When writing is too large your student may be using “big muscles” to form letters instead of smaller muscles intended for writing: Look at positioning
Writing Legibly Visual Perception

• Visual perception is a cognitive skill: not a learned skill

• Brain’s ability to interpret, analyze and give meaning to what is seen

• If perception is incorrect it effects writing, reading, math, comprehension, social and more

• Some Individuals with autism may experience severe perceptual problems. Stress from lighting, colors, patterns and contrast bombard the system

• 80% of what is learned is visual
“Writing Legibly” Visual Perceptual Strategies to support writing

- Reduce fluorescent lighting
- Highlight or darken lines
- Raised lined paper
- Use of an index card or blank paper to cover extra lines
- Use of colored pencils
- Slant board/three ring binder
Writing Illegibly: Support

- Color overlays (little research but enough reported positive to consider) perceptually blurred, doubling of words, shadows
- Green dot line down the left side of paper
- Red dot or line down right side of the paper
- Graph paper- one letter in each box and spacing box
- Spacing tools
- When modeling, model big spaces
“Writing Illegibly”: Letter size and placement

Give visual cues to assist: provide yellow lines or boxes the size of the words and letters. He forms the words on the yellow line or box.
Dani's Notes

5/18/15

Shop Attendant: Have you been to Hollywood Homecoming before?

Have you?
This year for Christmas I had a truck. My brother Jack got a call. My brother Joseph got an airplane. My sister, Margaret.
Writing Illegibly: Crossing Midline
Writing is Better With Two Hands

- If the student is not stabilizing his paper
- Struggling with reversing letters/numbers
- Switching handedness when younger/hand dominance
- Visual spatial (writing near line, lining up math did not transfer to automatic brain hemisphere)
- Difficulty visually tracking across midline
- Difficulty coordinating gross motor patterns
- Difficulty with reading, writing, drawing, cutting
- Difficulty with self help skills
Crossing Midline

• Dance
• Windmill movement
• Brain Gym: Standing then raise one knee and touch knee to opposite elbow then alternate movement 10 times +
• Ball play, bean bags, ribbon dance, twister,
• Provide extra practice at activities that require two hands
Writing Illegibly: Bilateral Skills
Hold the paper against a wall while writing for short periods.
Writing Illegibly: Time for Technology

- Reduce frustration
- Provide keyboarding instruction
- Computer, Ipad, tablet
Handwriting vs keyboarding

“Our current research shows value in combining writing by pen and computers in implementing evidence-based writing instruction for letter production, spelling, and composing.”

Dr. Virginia Berninger, University of Washington, 2014
“What’s Lost as Handwriting Fades”

USE BOTH
Teacher Concern: “When I ask him to edit and revise his work, he just looks at it, but he doesn’t make any changes.”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing: With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
Reluctant writers are often ‘one track thinkers’. Their brains tend to focus intensely on one thing at a time. When we ask a student to edit his work, we are asking him to consider MANY things – content as well as structure. Students will be much more successful if we give them a scaffold.

Try this:
**WRITING AND EDITING – Organization**

**FOLD THE PAPER SO ONLY ONE NUMBER SHOWS AT A TIME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Check for capital letters.</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• First words in sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proper nouns – people, places, dates, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Check for punctuation (. ? ! , “”)</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>• At the ends of sentences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• After abbreviations like Mr. and Dr.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Check for spelling.</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>• If you aren’t sure, check the dictionary or Word Wall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Check for grammar.</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>• Make sure you didn’t leave out little words like ‘a’, ‘an’, ‘the’, ‘as’, ‘but’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Check to make sure your writing makes sense.</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>• Touch each word as you read it. Does it make sense?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My teacher also wants me to check</th>
<th>I did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Concern: “His sentences are so brief! He doesn’t develop his ideas.”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing:

- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
‘Writing the bare minimum might be due to challenges with organization.

All students, especially those with executive function differences, will do much better both behaviorally and with written output if they know EXACTLY what the teacher wants them to do. Provide the student with a visual support that lists: What do I do, how much do I do, and what do I do when I am finished. Be very precise.

• Try this...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT DO I DO?</th>
<th>Write a paragraph about littering.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| HOW MUCH DO I HAVE TO DO? | Write 6 sentences.  
| | Use capitals and punctuation.  
| | Each sentence must have at least one adjective. |
| WHAT DO I DO WHEN I AM FINISHED? | Give finished paragraph to teacher.  
| | Then you can read a pleasure book. |
Writing the bare minimum might be due to challenges with language.

Many of our most reluctant writers have restricted areas of intense interest. USE THESE INTERESTS as topics for writing assignments.

• Try this...
**WRITING THE BARE MINIMUM** – Language

Write a movie script about your favorite *Yu-Gi-Oh* character.
“Writing the bare minimum” might be due to sensory challenges

• If a student is challenged with sensory regulation it will be very difficult for the student to focus and produce their personal best work

• Play detective what does his behavior tell you?
  • Does he appear tired, lethargic?
  • Or is he having difficulty calming his mind and body?

• Try this
If your student is writing the bare minimum he might actually need to wake up his sensory system.

• For the tired friend rev up his system with a wake up walk
• Whole class U Tube Dance Video-”Just Dance Kids” search or “Move To Learn”
• Follow with a big muscle push, pull, lift or carry job
• Seat on an air cushion, ball or bubble wrap
• Chewing gum is great for sensory regulation
• Fidget object
To help your student regulate his sensory system:

- Position in a deep bean bag chair or lying on his stomach.
- Try turning his chair around and letting him straddle his legs on each side with the chair back providing calming pressure.
- Stretchy band on Chair legs.
- Remember a reinforcer (Evidenced Based Practice for ASD)!
ORGANIZING A PARAGRAPH OR A REPORT

Teacher Concern: “There is no ‘flow’ to his paragraphs. They either look like one long, run-on sentence, or they look like a laundry list of facts.”

National Common Core Academic Standards for Writing:
Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons or to connect ideas within categories of information (e.g., also, another, and, more, but)
“Organizing a Paragraph or a Report”
Why it is difficult and what a teacher can do to help

• Students with executive function challenges often have difficulty with organization at all levels.

• The act of writing requires organization at many levels even before the student begins to attack the assignment of writing a paragraph.

• First he must organize the tools needed for writing. Next he must organize his ideas into a cohesive thought. Then he must organize sounds into words, and words into sentences.
“Organizing a paragraph” might be due to language / organization needs

Break the task into two parts:

1. **Content**: First, give the student several blank strips of paper. Have him write one complete sentence about the topic on each strip.

   THEN

2. **Organization**: Help him number the strips, putting them into a logical order.
“Organizing a paragraph” might be more challenged due to motor needs

- Think about what you are trying to teach the student. If your goal is to teach organizing sentences into paragraphs, you may need to reduce the motor demands.
- Writing the sentences may be so frustrating for reluctant writers that they give up before they ever reach the organization stage. Have someone else type the sentences.
- Then have the student cut and paste (either by hand or using a keyboard) the sentences into an organized paragraph.
“Organizing a paragraph” may be more challenged due to sensory needs

- **SET THE STUDENT UP FOR SUCCESS:**

- Set up an area that can be used as a quiet ‘office’ space for the student. A writing desk placed against a blank wall, away from commotion.

- Headphones or earplugs may be offered to reduce auditory stimuli.

- Use natural lighting/table lamps.

- Consider adapting the paper/color coding.
If it’s not working, ask yourself:

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

• **Seating (motor):** Is he uncomfortable? 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’s not working, continued:

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

- **Directions (language):** Was there too much talking? Does he need a prompt?

- **Attention (sensory):** Did you get his attention before giving the task?