

Dear Parents,

I've been looking for good ideas to help students who use AAC in learning to write. I wanted to share some information that I've found. Here are a few ideas.

**Expectations:** many of the articles talk about the importance of expectations - that means that we need to expect that ALL of our students will become writers . . . and help them have that personal expectation. Remember that many children who cannot hold a crayon or a pencil can become writers by using a communication device and/ or a computer. Talk to your child about writing from early childhood.

**Modeling:** it's very important for children to see adults writing, and know how fun and helpful writing is for adults. Children with disabilities, especially children who don't walk independently, often miss out on everyday models of writing. For example, when Maria gets home from school, she needs to get out of her wheelchair. Today she is lying in a beanbag chair in the living room watching a video. Here are some of the literacy models she is missing, that her 4 year old brother sees:

- Mom taking down a phone number for her big sister
- Mom writing checks to pay a bill
- Dad writing a note for the postal carrier
- big sister writing an e-mail to her friend

Some of those models could easily be shared with Maria. For example, Mom could sit on the floor next to Maria to write those bills. The main point is to make sure that your child sees family members writing for real purposes every day! This will help your child see many reasons for writing, and will make him or her want to write, just like everyone else in the family.

**Scribbling:** have you ever had to clean scribbles off your books, your furniture, even your walls?? Scribbling is a normal part of the development of writing. We need to help AAC users 'scribble' using whatever materials are best for them. Try these suggestions:



- For students who have good use of their hands, let them use crayons and markers, with adaptations if necessary (talk to your special ed teacher or occupational therapist for ideas on adapting writing materials for your child). Start this early - some studies show that children with disabilities may not get a chance to scribble using markers and crayons until they are eight years old - don't wait that long!

- For students who AAC, let them scribble using their devices. Their exploration and selection of words, even when they don't make a lot of sense, is the equivalent to other children using a crayon to fill a page with marks. Encourage your child to write using the device. For example, "let's write a letter to grandma!" Then write down everything the child says, even if it makes no sense to you, and don't forget to actually send it to grandma! Another idea: after your child finishes an art project (using SpinArt, fingerpaint, or whatever), offer them the communication device to write what they've drawn. Children can also scribble their names on projects.



- For students who use computers, or students whose devices include the alphabet, be sure to give them an alphabet page to scribble with way before you think they're 'ready.' Use a talking word processor such as *IntelliTalk II* ([www.intellitools.com](http://www.intellitools.com)), *AllWrite* ([info@zygo-usa.com](mailto:info@zygo-usa.com)), or *Write OutLoud* ([www.donjohnston.com](http://www.donjohnston.com)). If you set the talking word processor to speak letters and words, it will speak out the scribbling, which is highly motivating. For example, Roger scribbled:

**zzfpln tbbbbbb rrod kky**

Each time he activated the space bar, it spoke the 'word' such as "zzfpln". After your child spends some time just exploring the keyboard, point out to him or her that the space makes a word, and the computer will speak the word when s/he chooses space.

I hope these ideas are helpful! Folk wisdom tells us that we should:

Conceive . . . believe . . . achieve! Here's how that can work for our students:

**Conceive:** think of a way to help your student access lots of words and - if possible - the alphabet

**Believe:** have high expectations for your students, and be sure that others around them also believe in them

**Achieve:** working together, we can make it happen!