

## **HELPING A RELUCTANT CHILD TO WRITE A REPORT/STORY/ESSAY.**

Do you find that you know your children are doing a lot of valuable learning activities; but you can't seem to get them to *produce* anything. Trying to get an essay or report, or even a paragraph of writing out of them, is like trying to extract blood from a stone. The thought of having to create a piece of writing, can seem to a child, as though they are standing at the bottom of a huge mountain. You know they have the ability; but they freeze up at the thought of so awesome a task.

After working through this issue with a few of our children now, I decided to write these guidelines to help you if you find yourself facing the same struggle.

The first thing to realise is that every child is different, and so you have to start at their level & extend them by training them to think logically & to communicate their thoughts. Long before your child ever attempts to write an essay or report, you should be reading to them, discussing things with them and especially having them re-tell what you have read to them. Ask them to tell you about the story.

This '*tell & re-tell*' activity is a beginning of the real original 3Rs (which was not 'reading', 'writing' and 'arithmetic' as most people believe). The ancient meaning of 3Rs was 'Reading', 'Reasoning' and 'Rhetoric'.

- 'Reading' originally meant to study & research (ie. to take in information). They used to say that a person '*is reading Science at Cambridge University*' meaning that he was doing a Science degree or he was 'studying Science'.
- 'Reasoning': to think about and process the information.
- 'Rhetoric': (derived from the word 'orate'): to speak or communicate.

When a child re-tells a story in their own words, it shows that they have a) listened & taken in the info.; then b) taken it apart in their mind & thought about it & then c) pieced it together into a logical sequence in order to speak it out in their own words.

So, the first step is to get the children used to talking and telling you things.

Then you need to capture that process on paper for them so that they can see that they have created something with their thoughts & speech. They begin to see that it is not so difficult to write a report or letter or essay. You might want to begin with an audio-recording of their story, if that makes it easier; and then you write it down from the recording. We didn't use an audio recorder with our children; but it seems like a good idea.

As well as reading stories to the children and having them re-tell the story, you can also have them dictate to you a letter that you will send to Grandpa & Grandma etc.

The main thing to remember is that learning & home-training is a long distance run; not a sprint. It is not so important to ‘produce’ something now; but rather to gradually train them to be life-long learners, have good character and to be well prepared to fulfill the calling/plan/destiny that God has purposed for them.

After doing all of the above (ie. reading to them; discussing books/news/life/God/people & places etc; child retelling a story; child dictating a letter to Mum; writing what the child says from an audio-recorder), you might be ready for a more detailed process such as the following lesson that I engaged in with two of my children on Sept. 12, 2001.

### LESSON Sept 12, 2001: Dad with Rachel & Samuel McNeice

1. On 3 pages, make 6 boxes (each ½ page deep).
2. Write in the corner of each box, the five W’s and an H.

<u>WHO</u>	<u>WHERE</u>	<u>HOW</u>
<u>WHAT</u>	<u>WHEN</u>	<u>WHY</u>

3. Ask the student to tell you about these 6 questions (one at a time); and write their answers in the boxes for example:

WHO are the main people in your story?

WHAT were/are they doing?

WHERE are they doing it?

WHEN were they doing it? Was it a certain year or long ago when Grandma was young, or hundreds of years ago or yesterday? Was it a certain time of the day or in a certain season?

HOW did they do what they were doing? ...or... How did they get themselves into that situation?

WHY were they doing these things?

Towards the end, you may also find it relevant to ask more evaluation questions eg... WHAT were the consequences of their actions? HOW could you avoid falling into the same mistake yourself?

If the child is mature enough, they may need only a few prompting questions to start their story. When writing what the child is telling you, try to keep up with the child’s story or write key points; & then expand into sentences later. Some children may need lots of prompting questions & may give you only brief facts.

That's OK. The learning process is just as important as what they produce.

4. As they are answering a WHAT question, you may find that there is an overlap so that the child is also giving you information for the WHERE, WHEN & HOW boxes. It will help the composition process later on, if you keep some thoughts linked together. There will also be some thoughts you will want to separate into the correct box. This is a process of classifying or categorising information. Briefly explain to the child how you are classifying & categorising the information they are giving you.

The following comes from a report I asked my two primary aged children to write after they had viewed the fall of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001.

WHO: If you were to tell me all about what happened, who would be the key people in this news report?

Terrorists – tried to destroy the town  
 People in the building  
 News reporters  
 People in the plane  
 Lots of people affected in the community  
 Police  
 Fire fighters

5. Next: Prioritise the contents of each of the boxes e.g. Number the events in chronological order or in an appropriate sequence.

WHO: If you were to tell me all about what happened, who would be the key people in this event?

1. Terrorists – tried to destroy the town  
 3. People in the building  
 6. News reporters  
 2. People in the plane  
 7. Lots of people affected in the community  
 5. Police  
 4. Fire fighters

6. The following is the detailed notes that I wrote from the children's answers about each question (who, what, where, when, how & why). The facts in the

following section may not be completely accurate; but this is what the children remembered.

<u>WHO</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- News Reporters</li> <li>- Doctors tried to save people</li> <li>- Fire fighters went into the buildings and tried to save people but they could not and some died Quite a few policemen were missing.</li> <li>- Police</li> <li>- Paris Plane</li> <li>- Terrorists: Tried to destroy town</li> </ul> <p>Lots of people affected</p>	<u>HOW</u> <p>Terrorism by blowing up the buildings</p> <p>4 men took over the plane and forced the pilot to fly into the office buildings</p>	<u>WHEN</u> <p>Yesterday 11-09-01</p>
<u>WHAT</u> <p>The planes went straight through the high-rise buildings and blew it up. The plane came and then it went right through the building, which went on fire and then gradually burnt down.</p>	<u>WHERE</u> <p>New York America St Vincent's' Hospital</p>	<u>WHY</u> <p>It happened because of a war.</p>

7. In order to start writing a draft of our essay/report, the next task is to link thoughts (facts and events etc) into a logical sequence. The prioritising that we did in step 5 may help us here.

The sequence of the story might involve a series of who did what plus how, when and where they did it; followed by who did the next thing plus how, when and where they did it; followed by the next event etc.; or you might keep the whole story within the general plan of telling about the people involved. Start with WHO; then a section on WHAT they did, then go into separate sections of the essay-based on WHERE, WHEN, HOW. Then finish off with your theories about WHY (i.e. the motivations of the people).

8. I then explained to the children that: When a report or story writer introduces a new concept or term or a special name of something, the audience/readers may not know the meaning of the new term; so you could do further research in a dictionary or encyclopaedia in order to give a few more details for further understanding about that thing. Example: The children heard the word “terrorists”; but Rachel

(8yrs) did not know what a terrorist was. We looked up the meaning of the word for Rachel; however, even though Sam (11yrs) knew what it meant, I explained that, as a writer, he might also consider that his readers may not know what a terrorist is. So: as well as looking it up for a clearer understanding ourselves, Sam could put an explanation in his report to educate others like Rachel. Instead of just saying ...

*“The aeroplane was hijacked by a terrorist”, he read the definition of a terrorist and then thought about what he had seen on the news, and so, after mentioning the hijack, he went on to say in his report... “A terrorist, risks his life to do terrifying things such as plant bombs and kill people. They do this to make people afraid; slow down the economy or to oppose the government.”*

## **AMERICA UNDER ATTACK**

By Rachel Mc Neice (8yrs old) as told to Dad who wrote it down for her.

Yesterday, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001, in New York, America, terrorists tried to destroy the town by blowing up the buildings.

They used aeroplanes to blow up the buildings. One of the planes was from Paris. Four men took over the plane and forced the pilot to fly into the office buildings. The terrorists meant to crash the plane into the buildings. The plane went into the building and blew itself up & blew up the building as well. After burning for a few minutes, it all collapsed.

There were lots of people who were injured and some were killed. Fire-fighters went into the buildings and tried to save people but they could not and some died. 250 fire-fighters died and others were injured or burnt. Quite a few policemen were missing. Doctors at St. Vincent’s Hospital, worked hard to save people.

## **AMERICA UNDER ATTACK**

By Samuel Mc Neice (11yrs old).

America is under attack by terrorists. Today the news reported that there were four aeroplanes, which were hijacked by terrorists. A terrorist, risks his life to do terrifying things such as plant bombs and kill people. They do this to make people afraid, slow down the economy or to oppose the government.

The terrorists (which the government thinks were Muslim) sneaked onto the aeroplanes and probably had knives with them. They knocked out the pilots and drove the aeroplane and smashed into the buildings. Two planes hit the two buildings of the World Trade Centre in New York – One plane hit one side tower and one hit the other.

After the crashes, the buildings collapsed. 200 fire-fighters died because the tower

fell on them while they were trying to rescue people. Some people in the street died from so much dust & smoke & the force of the building coming down.

Why?

I think it is possible that the attack was a plan to destroy America, take over the country and set up a world government.

.....

The children (Rachel & Sam) were reluctant writers. When asked to write a report on what had happened; it seemed like an enormous mountain to climb for them. However, by taking them step by step through the process of ordering their thoughts & planning their writing, then getting it onto paper; they've been encouraged that they can create a piece of writing, a report or story. Now, less than a year later, they are both writing reports by themselves. It's not 'cheating' for you to help them to create their pieces of writing. The teaching procedure is:

1. You do it for them. Show them.
2. You do it with them. They are helping you do it.
3. They do it with you. You are helping them to do it.
4. They do it for you. You are only advising & correcting.

Remember: This lesson is one step in a long process. (Rome wasn't built in a day.) In this lesson, I have written down exactly what the children have dictated to me. I did not alter it to make the sentences grammatically correct. I simply tried to accurately reflect what they were telling me; but none of their words were changed.

What we have produced here may be like a 'first draft'. We could have worked on this same report in a future lesson, to find a more correct or more expressive way of saying each thought, or to simplify a sentence etc.

I hope this has been helpful for you in your journey.

God bless you in your home-training  
Keep up the good work.  
Bruce