

E Z English

(Does Writing Have to Be Complicated?)

“I can’t write well.” Ever heard anyone say that? I tend to think that the reason may be simply because people, in general, tend to think of writing as something complex. I think writing can be shaved down to a simple basic outline. All the rest of the stuff can be learned in a fun manner when you don’t even realize you are learning.

Here’s my idea of a basic outline for any type of paper.

- I. Introduction
 - a. Something interesting and then
 - b. Thesis statement includes 3 points
- II. Point number 1
 - a. Explanation and then
 - b. Details
- III. Point number 2
 - a. Explanation and then
 - b. Details
- IV. Point number 3
 - a. Explanation and then
 - b. Details
- V. Conclusion
 - a. Recap 3 points
 - b. Refer back to the interesting part of your intro

You’ve probably seen similar outlines before. But, really, can’t all papers be written in pretty much the same fashion? It doesn’t matter if it is a descriptive, persuasive, informative, or any particular kind of paper. Even a business letter can follow that pattern.

The pattern in and of itself is boring. I know this. The pattern is just a place to start. What makes a paper interesting is the personality put into it. These things can be integrated naturally by getting kids thinking using fun, easy learning games.

For example, have you ever played Mad Libs with your kids? You can buy a book of Mad Libs, you can download templates from the internet, or you can make up your own. Mad Libs simply give you a story that is incomplete. One person asks for adjectives, adverbs, nouns, etc. Others in the group provide what the asker is seeking. After all the blanks have been filled in, the asker reads aloud the story that was created. If the words that have been given are “boring” words, like “good”, “bad”, “nice”, etc. the story itself may or may not be funny. If you think of outrageous words like “thunderous”, “charmingly”, “martian”, etc. the story is usually quite hilarious and the participants want to do more. Mad Libs gives kids a wonderful opportunity to think of colorful adjectives, inventive nouns and exhilarating adverbs.

Then, when they are writing an actual school paper, they can be reminded of how well they know how to play the Mad Lib game. They can be encouraged to use similar types of words in their writings.

Another game that we play frequently at the dinner table is the Add-a-Word game. One person throws out a word, such as “Elephants”. That word is the start of the sentence. The person sitting next in line adds one word, such as, “devour”. The next person adds an additional word, perhaps “delectable”. Then the next person might choose to end the sentence by saying, “ants.” Thus, the sentence created is, “Elephants devour delectable ants.” See what wonderful word choices can come out of this game? We encourage our kids to spout off the first word that comes to mind. We love for our sentences to be silly. Vocabulary is increased, fun is had. Even very young children can join in the fun. Often they give the best words. Go back to the example sentence for a moment. The person that chose the word “delectable” could just as easily have chosen the word “carriages” to end the sentence. This would give a sentence of “Elephants devour carriages.” However, perhaps the next person in line decides to be tricky and wants the sentence to go on longer. They can then add the word, “while”. Then you are left with, “Elephants devour carriages while...” But of course, the fun of the game allows the person whose turn it is to decide whether the sentence ends or begins. They might decide that they like the idea of starting the next sentence with the word, “While”, so they add the word “television” to start a new sentence of “While television...” The only requirement to cutting off the sentence is that it actually has to be a sentence—you know, it must have a subject and a verb, it can’t be a phrase, etc. Lots of learning can be addressed using this simple game and the kids are not aware of this sneaky tactic.

We also play a game I invented that I call “Storyoni”. This game is also fun for the whole family. But, I am not going to give away all my trade secrets for “nuttin”! (You can get “Storyoni” for yourself at www.youpublish.com/completelee. It is \$3.99 for the whole game or \$1.00 for sampler packets.) Let me just say that it is a game in which we create fabulous, creative, imaginative stories together as a group. The kids always beg to do “just one more” when we play. We frequently give in to their pleadings, because we like it too. And, it is hard to say no when your kids are writing without realizing they are “doing school”.

So, are all my kids excited about writing? Do they all write wonderfully well? Well, some enjoy writing more than others. Some write better than others. But, they have the basics down. I am glad I reminded myself to remember some ways to encourage my children as they become better writers. They just need to stick to the basic simple outline and remember to add a dose of fun! Be creative and imaginative--sneak in writing skills at odd intervals and they’ll never know what hit them!

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