

Figure 6.18: Suggestions for Parents or Guardians in Assisting Student Writers

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am invested in helping students become better writers. To this end, I gauge each student's writing ability and build on his or her strengths and address weaknesses. Many parents choose to partner with teachers to help in this endeavor. Following are suggestions to assist with improving your child's writing skills. Please refrain from writing on your child's paper; instead, offer feedback using these pointers as a guide. In doing so, you empower your student writer to find ideas for revision, which contributes to achievement. Feel free to attach a note with any specific comments or questions that your child can address in class during peer or teacher conferences.

Focus on the assignment task and expectations. Ask to see the assignment sheet, checklist, or rubric. Review the task and criteria with your child to clarify a particular assignment's expectations. Encourage him or her to ensure the paper addresses all parts of the writing assignment and criteria.

Recognize proper organization. Ask for evidence of proper organization of the whole paper and within paragraphs based on the genre of the piece. Look at the checklist or rubric to guide this discussion, and ask questions such as the following.

- "Are you writing a story? If so, is there a logical sequence? Have you included plot elements, such as a central conflict, rising action, a climax, and so forth?"
- "Is this an argumentation essay? If so, can you show me your thesis statement that stakes a claim? Are your reasons in a logical order? Do your reasons and evidence support your thesis? Are there counterarguments? If so, are they well placed to support your argument?"
- "Are your paragraphs for expository text structured appropriately? Is there a topic sentence, supporting details or evidence, and an ending? Do the details connect to the topic sentence?"
- "Do you include text features—such as charts, graphs, a table of contents, subheadings, a glossary, and so on? Let's reread the paper to be sure that these text features help organize the piece."

Consider the development. Is the paper complete? If it's a story, are characters, setting, and events fully developed? Are narrative techniques included to enhance it (like dialogue and description)? If it is an argument, are there enough reasons, and is there sufficient evidence and elaboration to support each reason? Are counterarguments acknowledged and addressed? Refer to the checklist and rubric to ensure all items have been thoroughly met.

Look at word choice. Ask your child to do the following. Review the paper and circle words that he or she feels are strong and reflect the best choice. Reread the paper and assist your child to replace any words that could be more precise or descriptive using a print or digital resource (www.merriam-webster.com, www.vocabulary.com, www.collinsdictionary.com, or www.thesaurus.com), classroom textbook, or other resource, as needed.

- Ensure that the word choice or language is appropriate for the audience.
- Make sure your child uses words accurately, including subject-matter terms related to topics or content areas. If he or she does not, refer your child to an appropriate resource.

Examine sentence beginnings and structure. Ask your child to read the first three words of each sentence. Ask these questions: "What do you notice about the beginnings of sentences? Are the words and parts of speech different? Do they sound too repetitive?" Ask him or her to revise sentence beginnings, as appropriate, so there is variety. Additionally, discuss sentence structure, and ask if he or she has varied the types of sentences (for example, simple, compound, and complex sentences) so there is a natural rhythm to the writing.

Conduct oral reading to detect convention errors. Ask your child to read the paper aloud and self-assess by doing the following.

- Listen for clarity—If a sentence is hard to read, it could reflect a grammatical error. Ask him or her to find and correct any grammatical errors.
- Listen for natural stops or pauses—When there is a natural stop, ask if there is proper end punctuation (a period, exclamation mark, or question mark). This will also help to detect run-on sentences or fragments that need fixing. If there is a pause, inquire whether a comma or end punctuation mark is needed and what rule might apply.

Source: Glass, K. T. (2017a). The fundamentals of (re)designing writing units (p. 26). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.