

Want to help your child write better?

SEVEN STEPS WRITING TIPS

Don't just check the spelling! Authors use seven main techniques to make their writing interesting. So do join us for the Seven Steps 'quick tips' and fun writing ideas, for you to try at home.

How easy are the Seven Steps techniques?
Try our quiz on 'The Bear Story'.

Step 2:

Which story start is more interesting?

- a) I woke up that morning, got dressed and ate breakfast.
- b) The lock on the bear's cage looked old, and the bear looked cross.

Step 4:

Which is the better dialogue?

- a) The teacher told us to stand back from the cage as the bear was growling loudly, but Jeremy didn't listen.
- b) 'Stand back,' said the teacher, but Jeremy didn't listen. Suddenly the bear growled loudly. 'Jeremy!' cried the teacher, 'get away from the bear. NOW!'

Step 5:

Which sentence 'tells' and which 'shows'?

- a) I was really scared.
- b) My heart was thudding loudly in my chest and brain.

See, simple isn't it?

(Hint, answers are all (b)!!)

What ARE the Seven Steps?

1. Plan for Success
2. Sizzling Starts
3. Tightening Tension
4. Dynamic Dialogue
5. Show, Don't Tell
6. Ban the Boring Bits
7. Exciting Endings

Wishing you all creativity, confidence and success in writing.

Jen McVeity



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Step 1: Plan for Success

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If you got a dollar for every time you told your kids to plan their work, you'd be living on a tropical island now, right???

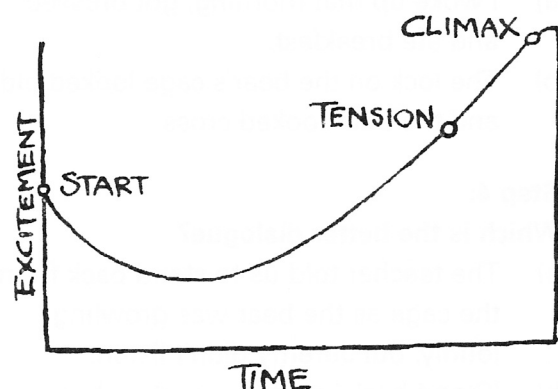
It's hard to show people HOW to plan, so here's a quick method. Good stories (like movies, books, poems and even jokes) are all planned - and they all have a similar structure. This is what it looks like.

1. Start with a bang - this usually has the main character in an action scene.
2. Back fill - the Who, What, Why is filled in while the action unfolds
3. The main problem is introduced
4. Complications and more problems. Things get very bad indeed
5. Tension scene where hero/heroine fights against incredible odds
6. Climax - incredibly, wonderfully they win!

Once writers know these basics, they have a **SYSTEM** to their planning - and this really improves their writing.

TOP TIP:

Think first, write second.
Draw yourself a graph like this one and plot your stories out **BEFORE** you start writing.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Watch TV ads - you know the ones that 'tell a story.' In 30 seconds, some ads can create a start, tension scene and great ending, exactly like the story graph.

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Step 2: Sizzling Starts

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When writing, kids always want to start their stories at the beginning of the day, or the start of the week or even the first day of the school holidays.

Before:

I leapt out of bed that morning and hurried to get dressed because today Dad was taking us to the zoo. I was really excited because they have this big monkey enclosure there and I was mad about monkeys. I also needed to get some really good photos for my Science project.

After:

'Here,' I told my sister, 'hold my rucksack. I'm just going to get a bit closer to the monkey's cage.'
A bit closer meant over the fence, past the sign that said 'No Entry' and right up to the wire.
'You're monkey mad,' said my sister. Well, maybe I was. But I was also desperate for an 'A' in my latest Science project. A picture of a cute monkey, smiling right at the camera, would make all the difference, right?

TOP TIP:

Start stories right where the action begins. Not in the morning, but at the zoo as the person sneaks up to the monkey's cage, shiny earrings dangling in the sun, just waiting to be grabbed by a quick sharp paw. Far more interesting!



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Next time you are watching a movie with your kids, see how the movie begins with lots of action to grab your attention. Adventure movies (e.g. James Bond) are especially good at this.

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Step 3: Tightening Tension

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The tension scene comes just before the big climax ending. In movies this is the scene of the soccer final, the exciting car chase or the heroine fighting for her life in a raging river.

We all know Little Red Riding Hood's classic tension scene. Red RH arrives at the cottage and the wolf is in bed in granny's clothes. Red RH, (who obviously needs glasses!) says:
'Oh, grandmother, what big ears you have!'
'All the better to hear you with.'
'Oh, grandmother, what big eyes you have!'
'All the better to see you with.'
'Oh, grandmother, what big hands you have!'
'All the better to hold you with!'
'Oh, grandmother, what big teeth you have!'
'All the better to eat you with!'

See how the scene slowly builds up to be more and more dangerous - and thus frightening? We don't start with the teeth, we start with the ears - and the wolf trying to coax Red RH to come nearer and nearer.

TOP TIP:

Emotion always takes time to build up. So in tension scenes, show kids how to start small and 'escalate' to a powerful climax.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Read picture books with your kids and look for the tension scenes. Picture books are short, so it's easy to find where the all-important tension builds before the ending.

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Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue

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Don't tell anyone but authors 'cheat' when we write – especially when we write dialogue.

Normal conversations go like this:

'Hi.'

'Hi. How are you?'

'Good. And you?'

'Good.'

'I was thinking of going shopping.'

'Oh. What for?'

'My mother gave me some money for my birthday and I need a new jumper.'

'Sounds great. Count me in.'

In real life conversations we often talk in clichés and ramble a lot. However, reading takes effort, so to keep things moving fast, writers cut straight to the action.

'Hey, my mum gave me some money for my birthday. Want to go shopping?'

'Sounds great. Count me in.'

TOP TIP:

Give kids a starting line to help them avoid the boring parts. Are they writing a conversation between a ghost and a flying pig? Suggest where to begin: *'Hey! Watch where you're going!'*



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Tape a conversation at home. Listen to all the rambling, half finished sentences and 'umms' and 'er's.' This is great proof that strong writing does not have to be based on real life!

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Step 5: Show, Don't Tell

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Our job as writers is to create pictures in the brains of our readers. That's what 'Show, Don't Tell' is all about.

For instance:-

Tell: *My brother is lazy.*

Show: *'Your turn for the dishes Tank,' said Mum.*

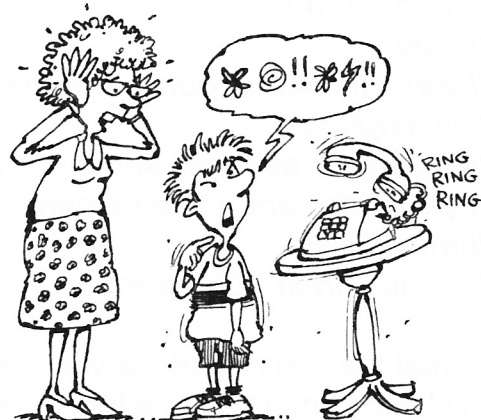
'Yeah, later,' he said yawning and turned the TV louder.

'No, now,' said Mum. She stood in the doorway, arms crossed. She knew later in Tank's mind meant somewhere between the year 2012 and infinity. Once, as punishment, Mum put all the dishes and saucepans Tank had forgotten on top of his bed. He just dumped them on the floor. A week later they were still there, a shoe in the spaghetti sauce, sweaty socks on the plates and a really bad smell wafting out the door.

Ah, now we 'see' it. It takes much longer to write, but our readers are far more convinced.

TOP TIP:

Ask kids to 'prove' important things. e.g. What tells you Jake is a great friend? Answer: He ate the biscuits I cooked that tasted like wet cement. Write that scene to really convince your reader.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Test with your kids how words form pictures in our minds. Slowly read these:-

- Red flowers stand tall and cheerful in a vase.
- There's a baby elephant under the tree in our garden.

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Step 6: Ban the Boring Bits

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Why do kids always fill their stories with the boring details of their day? How many of these have you seen?

• **Food Fetishes:**

We were at Disneyworld and we got to eat hamburgers with chips and a big thick milkshake. I had two whole bottles of Coke and my sister had...

• **Bedroom boredom:**

I woke up that morning and leapt out of bed and put on my best jeans and a jumper and then cleaned my teeth and put on my shoes...

• **Trapped in travel:**

In the bus on the way to the swimming sports we waved at the cars and Mark made us sing really boring songs and then we put our streamers through the windows and...

It's called 'warm-up' writing because people start with the safe and familiar. Professional authors know this - some authors even cut out the first few chapters when editing, so their book jumps straight into the action.

TOP TIP:

We often learn more about what kids ate going to the zoo than what happened when the lion escaped. So simply tell children to cut out the boring bits: no beds, no bus trips, no boring lists of friends or food. (See also Step 1: Sizzling Starts)



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Watch movies and see how little of the 'boring bits' they use. They rarely show people using the bathroom, brushing their teeth or blow drying their hair. Even stranger, notice how people never seem to travel, they just 'arrive'.

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Step 7: Exciting Endings

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A common problem with kids' stories is they end on an anticlimax

Take this sports story: Belinda begs to join the volleyball team, but she isn't very good. Jackie the captain helps her and gradually a friendship forms. In the final game, Jackie is injured but now it's Belinda's turn to help. At match point, she sets a perfect ball to Jackie. Here's the last sentence.

Jackie jumped high, hope giving her strength and she hit the ball hard. It landed right in the corner. They'd won! Then they all went home to bed.

Why has the writer tacked on that last line? The answer is kids feel something is missing, but they don't know what. We need to show young writers that there are often two parts to ending a story - the action climax and the 'inner' story.

This story is not just about volleyball, it needs a celebration of the friendship that has grown between the two girls.

'We did it! We won!' Everyone was yelling and hugging each other. But Jackie just turned and looked at Belinda. 'Great set,' she said. Belinda laughed. 'Great hit' she said. At last she really was part of the team.

TOP TIP:

Solve the action part of the story (like winning the final game) but also allow for the characters and their inner journey to be celebrated too.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Many authors actually get their ending first - and then figure out the story working backwards. Here's a fun ending: 'Crocodiles don't like fly spray.'

Try brainstorming with your kids what the story could be. You can be as crazy as you like!

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