

Supporting your child's learning in... English



It is always a wonder when you hear students proclaim, “**you can’t prepare for an English exam,**” as there are so many activities that students could be working on at home that would be of great benefit! I do hope that students are reading this article too as I want them to also hear the message that study undertaken at home will be all the more powerful and effective if students are supported by their parents. I also hope that it will help parents know how they can support their child’s English skills at home whether they are in Year 7, Year 11 or anywhere in between.



Reading

In theory, simple but in practice, sometimes hard! Nonetheless, whichever study you turn to, and there are hundreds about reading, they all tell you the same thing: **children who read benefit from it enormously**. Even if your child doesn’t enjoy reading, they need to understand that it is good for them. If you wanted to read an article about the benefits of reading follow the link here: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/89938.html>

How do you go about encouraging reluctant readers?

There is not one answer but some of the points below may help:

- **Trial different books.** Go to a library to find a selection of different books to find a book they may be happy to read. Do challenge your child if they say they don’t like the book. Ask them to explain why.
- **Try different written formats.** Look for short stories or books with shorter chapters.
- **Read the same book.** If you read the same book as your child you can share experiences and talk about it together.
- **Be persistent.** Try, try and try again!

Discuss reading with your child...

Even if you are not reading the same book as your child, discussing their reading with some general questions is important. Try these questions:

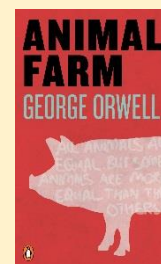
- Can you summarise what has happened so far?
- Who is the main character? How do you feel about the main character and why? (like, dislike, ambivalent)
- What is the setting for this book? What was the world like at this time?
- What you would predict for later on in the book?
- Are there any words that you haven’t come across before?
- Which is your favourite line in chapter.....?
- Do you like this book? Why/why not? (if the answer is, “It’s boring!” probe why and if they were writing it, what would they change?)
- What do you think the writer was trying to say to readers/make readers think and feel?
- How do you think/feel about.....?

If nothing seems to work, then agree with your child that they will **read news articles instead**. Reading a newspaper is probably better than reading news articles on line as there is no temptation to wonder from the website of a newspaper. If you can read the newspaper as well and **have some discussion** with your child about the news stories then the benefit of reading the articles will be all the greater.

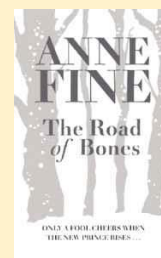
Which Book?

Finally, out of the millions of books that exist it is very hard to pick three but these three have always received positive feedback from students when they have committed to reading them:

For all: George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* – it can be read on many different levels; for less able and younger readers it is simply a fairytale with an interesting idea, for older readers parallels to Communist Russia can be drawn.



For Key Stage 3: *The Road of Bones* by Anne Fine is a story about a young boy who lives a society full of fear; a society where a few careless words make you an ‘enemy of the state’. Set in Russia, there are parallels that more able readers can make with any knowledge they have of European history.



For Key Stage 4: *The House of Silk* by Anthony Horowitz Horowitz was given the honour of being allowed to write a new Sherlock Holmes story. He not only captures a style that befits a Sherlock Holmes story but he create the most brilliant intrigue and excitement.



Happy reading and discussion!



Writing

Writing is such a crucial skill; in the new GCSE English Language, 20% of a student’s final mark is determined by their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. It is not only English where a significant number of marks are awarded based upon these skills. There is no need to panic if your child finds these skills difficult as practice will see them make great improvements with their literacy skills.

Spelling

Test your child on a weekly or fortnightly basis on a set of words. The words to try and learn are those that either you notice your child spelling incorrectly or the ones teachers have identified in students’ work as incorrect.

Some **commonly misspelt words** that you might want to use in a spelling test are: **necessary; commitment; accommodate; exhilarate; embarrass; conscientious**. There are many different lists of words that you can find on the internet.

There are different ways to learn the spelling of words and different methods work for different people. Try out a range of these methods to see which one works best for your child:

- **Mnemonics:** a memory technique to learn a spelling pattern. For example, ‘**business** people *bus in* to work’.
- **Acronyms:** treat the spelling as a word formed from the initial letters of other words: **Never Eat Cress Eat Salad Sandwiches And Remain Young** (necessary).
- **Rote learning:** spelling out the word aloud over and over again until you have firmly remembered it.
- **Visual recognition:** writing the word out over and over until you are sure that you know what it ‘looks like’.
- **Phonetic pronunciation:** saying the word, aloud initially, in the way that is spelt: sep-a-rate.

Punctuation

There are many punctuation games available on the internet but for some students they can seem a bit like the punctuation games they played at Primary School.

Try this website: www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/topic/punctuation This is designed for adults who wish to improve their punctuation skills but it is entirely suitable for secondary aged students. There are explanations about how to use punctuation and activities to try and put your skills into practice.

Within ‘Resources for Students’, found in elockers, there are also videos created by English department staff on how to use a variety of different punctuation which we hope will help students to understand how to use the punctuation featured.

