

Get Your Autistic Students Writing

By Melanie K Milicevic, BA

Help your ASD child write more proficiently with these three strategies.

Let's start with this: Yes, students with autism can write well! But what is writing? Is it just the physical act of holding up the pencil and jotting down thoughts, or is it the ability to think, express, and generate ideas? As we enter this next era of AI, these questions come to the forefront. Autism and writing can coexist and do so in a beautiful way.

I am a former educator and the mother of two neurodiverse learners. Writing was my favorite subject to teach my third through fifth-grade students. Perhaps it's because I was always most enthusiastic about seeing progress. I loved watching them learn to craft a powerful writing piece and then witness the pride of expressing that work.

Teaching writing is challenging, as it is with neurotypical students. I was extensively trained in literacy and worked with English speakers and second-language learners. Some similar strategies cross between [teaching writing](#) to second-language learners and students with autism.

When students have a tangible piece they have crafted all on their own or primarily on their own, for some reason, a deep sense of accomplishment follows. I witnessed it this year when my eighth grader brought home a piece he wrote on Macbeth.



Though I know he receives support with writing, it doesn't matter. When he reads that piece aloud and shows me his final copy, he stands a little taller.

All kids can write with the proper support and explicit instruction. I have seen tremendous growth firsthand from neurodiverse learners.

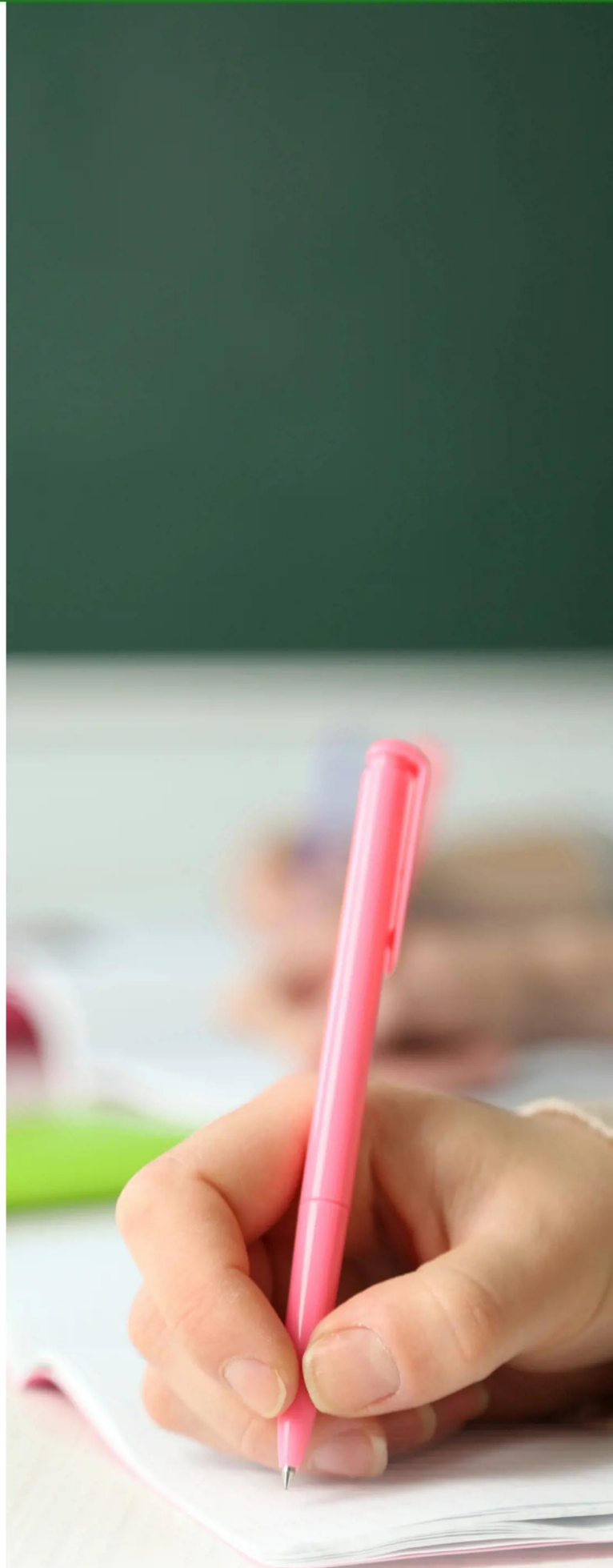
As expected, there are numerous ways to teach writing, but I will share just three of my most successful strategies, which I have tried both in my classroom and at home with my own neurodiverse learners. You may already recognize these strategies, but I want to direct you back to using them explicitly and fine-tuning them. Put on your teaching hat, and let's get to work!

Model and then build confidence

The first tip is to model everything and build confidence. When we teach a particular genre of writing (Narrative, Expository, or Persuasive), we must [model](#) writing a piece of our own from start to finish. Yes, a good writing teacher must write with their students. You have to demonstrate explicitly what the writing process looks like from start to finish. Where does writing begin?

We begin by thinking deeply about a prompt or a topic. Teachers must be explicit with every step when modeling a new genre. You must provide multiple examples for all students but many more for your more challenged writers. You want your students to see you modeling writing so many times that they beg you to stop talking and teaching so they can start [writing](#). This will happen if you bring enthusiasm and competency to the subject.

Before learning any task, especially with neurodiverse learners, we start small. When making accommodations for students who are emerging writers and even some nonspeakers, begin with a simple goal. Write one sentence together and maybe even a few words.



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Once you have mastered that, keep moving towards the writing standards' goal and support that child in whatever way they may need. Model, model, and model whatever strategies you teach until they are completely sick of you. Then, they are ready and will confidently head into the task alone or partially alone.

Always use the writing process and utilize and share graphic organizers

The second tip is focused on prewriting and the writing process. You must remind students to always use the writing process. Provide lots of time for [thinking](#), discussing, and prewriting. This is when you bring out the big visuals, graphics, and posters.

Your room should be covered with writing posters, depending on the genre. If you are teaching persuasive writing, you have techniques with persuasive writing all over your room. You should see persuasive language lists everywhere as well.

Students need to recognize these posters, know what they mean, and be able to access them independently.

If you used one graphic organizer to model your own piece, make sure the students use that same graphic organizer. Your students should have access to and be familiar with these identical visuals. Graphic organizers are a useful tool even until high school. Organized writers who have thought extensively about a subject can write with better proficiency.

Always allow students to select their topics

Finally, let students, especially those with autism, write about whatever they want. If they love Mario and [video games](#), let Mario be the hero. If they love dinosaurs, cats, Taylor Swift, or slime, let them share their expert knowledge with their readers. It doesn't matter what our kids write about, especially in the beginning, as we are helping them develop confidence in their craft.

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Allowing children and teens to write about whatever they love or are enthusiastic about keeps them engaged in this task. Writing can be difficult, and if we give our students an element of joy and excitement in a task, we will see more significant effort from them. Giving them choices about the writing topic will help engage them in their assignments.

I can't tell you how many SpongeBob projects we've done in this house and how many times he's been the star. I have embraced him and all he brings to our life. Usually, I need laughter.

Once your students master the writing process, have better organizational skills, and are more comfortable expressing themselves using written language, they will be able to tackle more challenging writing tasks.

We have to teach our students to love a subject first, though. We have to [empower](#) them to see themselves as writers already. We have to believe that all students with autism are capable of being writers, even the nonspeakers. They are just waiting to write and to tell their own stories.

If you write, they will write

Be a strong facilitator, showing them that you believe in their abilities and will help them find a way to express themselves.

Our kids will only become writers if we are writers. We, as educators, must become whatever we want our students to become.



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You will have to learn to love writing, too. Once you do and model that frequently and confidently, you will see great changes in how your students write. When students with autism find their voices and can express them in meaningful ways, they will become more proficient as speakers and readers. Our kids' fantastic brains are different, but never less.

References:

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Melanie K Milicevic, BA, is a graduate of UCLA and a former 5th-grade teacher for the Los Angeles Unified School District. She worked primarily with second language learners and collaborated with special needs families to meet the unique needs of her students. She now advocates for her own special needs children and keeps her book-writing dream alive by typing notes on her iPhone. Melanie is a passionate writer and has been published in *Autism Parenting Magazine*, *Exceptional Needs Today*, *Parenting Special Needs Magazine*, and *Special Needs Resource Foundation of San Diego*. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two children.