

# How to Help Your Child Break Up a Writing Assignment Into Chunks

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At a Glance

- Breaking down writing assignments can help kids manage the work.
- Kids with learning and attention issues may not know how to break an assignment into chunks.
- The smaller the “chunks,” the more manageable they may be for your child.

Writing assignments can be overwhelming for students with certain learning and attention issues. Your child may have an overall plan for how to manage big projects. But when he sits down to start a writing assignment, he may not know how to break it down into smaller tasks.

The key is to identify specific chunks that will make the work manageable for your child. The chunks may vary from one assignment to the next. But the ones listed here can serve as a guide.

## Chunk #1: Review the type of writing.

Examine the assignment carefully. What type of writing is involved? Is it a research paper, a personal story or an analysis of something your child has read? Look for keywords in the assignment, such as “compare,” “discuss” or “share.” Make sure your child understands what he needs to do for that type of writing.

Graphic organizers can be helpful at various stages of a writing assignment. Find a graphic organizer that works for your child.

## Chunk #2: List the tasks and create a timeline.

Before he can start the writing process, your child will need to know all the tasks involved. These will make up the chunks of the assignment. Depending on the type of assignment, some of the tasks might include:

- Gather information.
- Do research and/or read.
- Take notes (a graphic organizer may help).
- Decide on a thesis statement or theme.
- Create an outline (a graphic organizer may help).
- Write a first draft.
- Revise.
- Review.

Once he's decided on the tasks, he can develop a timeline for getting them done. Help him figure out the time required for each one. Work backwards through the tasks to come up with a timeline for producing the assignment. (Build in extra time for tasks that may be especially hard for your child.)

Also, plan to check in with him after each task at first. Once he gets going, you can check in after a few tasks.

### **Chunk #3: Gather resources.**

Discuss what your child needs to know and where that information needs to come from. If it's a book report, make sure he has his own copy of the book. (If he needs an audiobook, make sure he has that, too.) If it's a research paper, help him find reliable resources at the library or online.

### **Chunk #4: Read and highlight information.**

Encourage your child to find information that he feels is crucial or that interests him. This is a two-part task: reading and highlighting. If your child doesn't know how to highlight information, work with him to develop this skill.

You can start by asking him to tell you what he thinks is important after he reads each page. Then you can highlight that information for him.

### **Chunk #5: Decide on a thesis statement.**

The thesis statement is the argument or the main point your child's writing assignment will be making. Help your child explore and sift through his thoughts and ideas. Be sure to ask him to tell you a few of the details that led him to make that particular argument or point. Depending on his learning and attention issues, you may want to build in extra time for this chunk.

### **Chunk #6: Create an outline.**

Many graphic organizers create outlines for different types of papers. But if your child is using one that doesn't, he can arrange his notes to make one. He can even copy each note onto an index card and arrange them that way. The outline should tell the story (or make his case) from the beginning to the middle to the end.

### **Chunk: #7: Review the paragraphs needed.**

If your child is using a graphic organizer, it may include a template for this. You can also help your child do it on his own. (Be sure to ask if the teacher has given him a rubric or a handout that describes the assignment.)

For instance, there's a common form that research papers take. The first paragraph contains a thesis statement, followed by an explanation of what's coming next.

The next three paragraphs support the statement by going into more detail and using quotes or facts. The last paragraph sums up the thesis and recaps the supporting details.

### Chunk #8: Write the draft.

Certain learning and attention issues may make this chunk difficult to do all at once. These include dysgraphia, ADHD and executive functioning issues, and slow processing speed.

It can help to decide how your child will tackle the actual production of the paragraphs. Set a schedule where he can successfully get through the writing. For instance, he could write in half-hour increments with breaks in between. Or he could write one or two paragraphs at a time.

### Chunk #9: Review, revise and re-read.

Go over the paper together to make sure it meets the criteria of the writing assignment. Help your child mark where he needs to make changes, add details or correct errors.

This is actually a three-part process, so you may choose to break it down into separate steps. If so, return to the overall timeline and factor that in.

## More Tools and Strategies to Help With Writing

Breaking assignments into chunks can help make them doable for your child. But there are other ways you can help make the writing process easier. Look into graphic organizers that can help your child organize his thoughts, notes and outline for writing. Explore strategies for helping reluctant writers. And visit Tech Finder to find recommendations on apps that help with writing.

## Key Takeaways

- Make sure your child understands the assignment and the type of writing involved.
- Creating a timeline can help you build in extra time for chunks that may be harder for your child.
- Graphic organizers can help kids break down assignments and keep track of ideas.

## About the Author



Amanda Morin is a parent advocate, a former teacher and the author of *The Everything Parent's Guide to Special Education*.