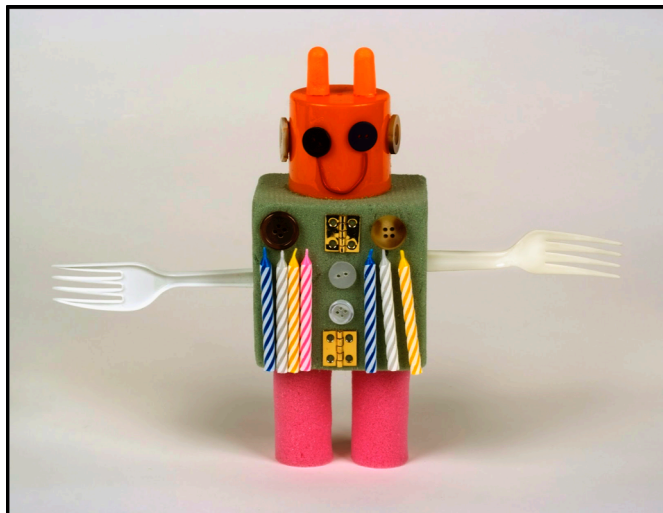


# THE RELUCTANT WRITER



## CRAFTING CONFIDENCE

Over the summer, I ran a series of classes for kids. Instead of writing our ideas down, we built them, each student making a miniature museum filled with displays. The results were great: the kids jumped right in with clay, paint, hot glue, and string to depict the topics they wanted to show off. There were miniature movie projectors, miniature horses, miniature time machines. Even the shyest kids would not hesitate to start creating something. This really caught my attention, because these same kids, when asked to write their ideas down, would resist or get completely stuck. Why is it so much easier for us to make something with our hands than with words?

Of course, words are harder because they're more abstract, and they require more complex analytical processes to use. But beyond this, I think there's an additional pressure with words to be "perfect." We know from years of having our grammar and spelling corrected that if we make a mistake, it'll be embarrassing. We also know that whatever we write is going to represent us, as if we were talking. So if it sounds "off" or awkward, people will think we're awkward. And there's always some expectation that good writing is a form of art. It's pretty easy to fall short of that goal. With crafts, on the other hand, we don't feel any of those expectations. We know that we're experimenting with materials, trying new techniques, and not necessarily being incredibly serious or important.

But the best thing about crafts, which I discovered during this class, is the feeling that you can always go back and fix what you've made. Does your turtle have a wonky leg? Make a new one! Did you drip pink paint on his shell? Turn it into polka dots. Hey, it looks even better that way!

Of course, all of this applies to writing, too. You can experiment; you don't have to be perfect; you can go back and fix whatever didn't come out right. It doesn't have to be fine art. But sometimes we need to work in a different, less formal medium to prove that to ourselves. If you or your kids are too perfectionistic or feel like you're not good at writing, I recommend spending a few hours at the kitchen table with some paper-clay and tempera paint.

## CONSULTING

*I'm currently scheduling new clients for the Fall session!*

**Creative projects** like book publishing and diorama-building teach conceptual writing skills in the context of personal interests and goals.

**Homework support** can take the form of weekly planning sessions, detailed draft feedback, or skill-building for specific challenges.

**Learning profile assessments** identify where writing challenges are coming from. Written recommendations can be shared with parents, teachers, and service providers.

I also offer **individual consultation for adults**, to help you get unstuck on your dissertation or book project, focus your website or report content, or communicate your child's learning profile and needs to school staff.

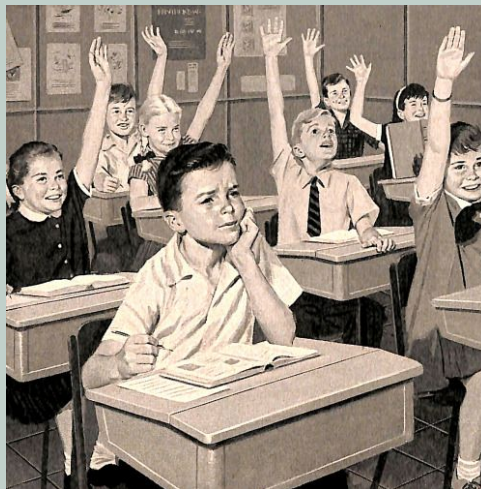
*Sessions take place at my Temescal office:  
510 49<sup>th</sup> St. (@Telegraph), #209  
Oakland, CA 94609*

## GETTING OTHERS TO GET YOUR KID



For many parents, the beginning of the school year means the return of a familiar dread: What if the new teachers don't "get" your quirky kid? After spending the previous year trying to get everyone on the same page, it can feel like starting over again at square one. If you'd like help articulating your child's learning profile to school staff, I will be offering individual sessions throughout the year, and hope to add a class on this important topic in the Spring. Sometimes the most effective intervention is to pass around a short "tip sheet," explaining what motivates your child, and what s/he needs to stay regulated, organized, and engaged.

# WHAT'S THE POINT OF WRITING?



When we have to do something ambiguous, difficult, or confusing, we have a natural tendency to question the validity of the entire enterprise. “When am I ever going to use calculus in real life?” “Why do we have to memorize state capitals?” “What’s the point of running in circles around a track?”

This wariness comes up a lot around writing, too. “Why do I need to learn perfect grammar and essay structure, if I’m not planning to be a professional writer?” The complaint is compounded by the fact that writing can take so much time and effort — is it really worth it?— and that it typically involves being berated by a cruel inner voice. It’s no wonder that people think of writing as something you just have to force yourself to do, until school is over.

My perspective is that you don’t work on writing so that you can become a writer; you do it so that you can learn how to *think*. It requires so much effort because it involves so many coordinated skills. You’re practicing time management, organization, comprehension, inference, assertiveness, creativity, self-awareness, and critical analysis...all in addition to social communication. Writing forces you to think more deeply and purposefully than you otherwise would.

People who feel that writing “isn’t worth it” may need to be reminded, in a concrete way, of what they’re getting out of it. For example, some people are reassured by the idea that it’s like a puzzle that exercises your brain, regardless of the outcome. Others may be compelled by the idea that if you can articulate yourself precisely, you can persuade others to think the way you do, and be more likely to get what you want.

Frustrated writers may also need a better way of connecting to the writing task, by finding a facet or question that they care about, *within* an otherwise boring subject.

Finally, they may need help with anxiety and self-consciousness. It’s intimidating to try something you don’t feel good at. It can help to use a private notebook or “scratch file” to record your incomplete ideas and awkward phrases before starting a draft, or to start with bite-sized goals, like writing a single paragraph.

The pleasure in writing is usually the *secondary* one of working through a problem, communicating an idea with accuracy, or discovering a new perspective hidden in ambiguous information. When I work with people on their writing challenges, the goal is never just to produce a good document. It’s to process information; to see and respond to the world with more nuance. This in turn helps you to navigate relationship conflicts, understand politics, work under stress, have more fun at the movies, save money, and bluff your way through awkward parties. It’s important to be aware of the connection, because if we give in to the idea of “just not being writers,” we give up on a huge network of interests and tools.