



A Beginner's Blueprint to Language Arts

THE NO-STRESS GUIDE TO TEACHING LANGUAGE ARTS WITH PURPOSE



The H family, Sonlighters
from Kalispell, MT

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Language Arts

As you think about teaching Language Arts, you might feel intimidated. There are so many things to share, and your own education might have left you a little uncertain of your ability to teach Language Arts adequately.

But here's all that Language Arts is: the ability to think well and write those thoughts clearly, so that others can understand your thoughts.

“Language Arts is simply learning to communicate well, through writing and speaking.”

In order to communicate well, your children do need to learn several skills, which can feel overwhelming when just lumped together under the umbrella of Language Arts.

We'll look at each of these skills more closely in a moment, but first, one additional consideration.

Spelling

We recommend you use the methods **Rule and Write**, **Write, Pre-Test, Check, and Post-Test** to teach your children to spell. If your children are quick memorizers, don't follow our pattern. If you have a better way—or a way that works—use it!

These daily exercises should take absolutely no more than 15 minutes.

We offer spelling activity suggestions each week to strengthen spelling practice. If your children spell easily, feel free to skip. In copywork exercises, notice words your children misspell and then use those words to reinforce or review a rule they have already learned. However, don't feel that your children have to remember everything perfectly all at once. They will get extensive review as they practice.

Compound Words

Can you think of any words that are made up of two other words? What two smaller words make up that word? (Ex. basketball, bedtime)

This week, you will learn to spell several compound words. Read the rule for compound words above.

Have your children write "inside" on a large whiteboard or chalkboard as you spell it to them.

What two smaller words make up this word?

Ask your children to draw a line to divide the compound word into two smaller words. Repeat with the other words on this week's list.

Index Cards

Index cards you prepared words on this week's list. It is optional if your children

Hf, sandbox, bedtime, take

slowly and distinctly, enough time to write each

he written word back to your children immediately

rd, make sure your child d words correctly five times. (spelled words), that is word, talk it through; is is there a pattern they can the word correctly in the

elled words later during mind. This is not to "punish" remember.

Hf, sandbox, bedtime, take

Language Arts 2

Days 1–5: Date: _____ to _____

Week Overview

	1	2	3	4	5
Spelling	Rule & Write	Pre-Test	Check	Post-Test	Write a Sentence
Activity	Index Cards				
Optional: Explode the Code 4	pp. 1–2	pp. 3–4	pp. 5–6	pp. 7–8	
Handwriting Without Tears: Printing Power	pp. 4–7		pp. 8–9		
The Beginner's Bible	"The Beginning" pp. 7–13	"Adam and Eve" pp. 14–17	"The Sneaky Snake" pp. 18–25	"Noah's Ark" pp. 26–33	"The Tall Tower" pp. 34–38
Optional: Wordly Wise A				Word List 1 pp. 2–3	
Copywork 1		Copywork Application	Descriptive Words	Describe an Animal	Copywork 2

Other Notes

Optional books are sold separately, and are not part of the LA package.

Weekly Overview

Spelling/Phonics:	Creative Expression:
Skill: Compound words	Copywork Application: Sentence structure; punctuation; nouns—proper and common nouns
Index Cards: Compound words	Descriptive Words: Adjectives
	Describe an Animal: Descriptive writing; adjectives; spelling; sentence structure

Parental Notes

Language Arts 2 | 6-Day | Section Two | Week 1 | 1

Sonlight Language Arts 2 Instructor's Guide

When to Begin

In the United States, many courses of instruction begin in kindergarten (or before), so that a child who has not already made significant progress in reading by the start of first grade is considered “behind.”

The United States is not ranked very high in education—in many cases, not even in the top 25 worldwide.¹ Many countries with higher ranking take child development more into account. Recognizing that eye development isn’t finished until around age 7, high-ranked countries delay reading instruction, emphasizing more creative play in the earlier years.

This concept is also known as “better late than early.”

With this method, your children are allowed to learn when their bodies and minds are ready. One analogy is like digging a hole in the Arctic Tundra. You could go out in January and start chipping away at the rock-solid icy soil. A quarter inch a day, with much toil, and by summer you might have a fence post hole. Or you could wait until the summer thaw, and dig the hole in a day.

With either method, you get the same end result; with better late than early, you can take advantage of your children’s natural readiness.

For many, waiting to “dig a hole” at the perfect time sounds great. If you’re fairly confident you’ll be homeschooling until middle school at least, you might consider this method. Middle school is a good rule of thumb for when the intentionally delayed students catch up to their early starting peers.

Reasons you might not want to start later?

If you are expecting to integrate your children back into public school before middle school, you should probably seek to keep your children on grade level as much as possible, even if there might be a few more tears and some extra frustration.

Or if you wonder if you’re dealing with some sort of learning disability. In that case, better to get started on therapy as soon as possible.

Or if you have an eager child who begged to write at age three, and »

1. <http://www.businessinsider.com/pisa-worldwide-ranking-of-math-science-reading-skills-2016-12>

was sounding out words at age four. No need to hold that child back!

Or if you find it exhausting to go against society's norms. There's no shame in this.

- You might have relatives who quiz your children or otherwise second guess your abilities.
- You might be required by your state to test your children annually, and you know it will distress you if your children have a poor showing (even

though you know rationally that you're not trying to go by Common Core expectations).

- You might not be confident in your own abilities, and want to give yourself as much time as possible.

So, when to start? At some point between the ages of 4 and 8, depending on your family's needs.

Having said that, let's look at the skills in Language Arts.



The W family, Sonlighters from Hattiesburg, MS

Thinking and Speaking

With the goal of being able to communicate well, these are the earliest skills required, and you can wait on the rest until your children can speak what they are thinking about.



*The S family, Sonlighters
from Winnabow, NC*

Vocabulary

The easiest way to expand vocabulary is to talk to, and read with, your children. They learned to speak from listening; they will learn additional words from listening, too.

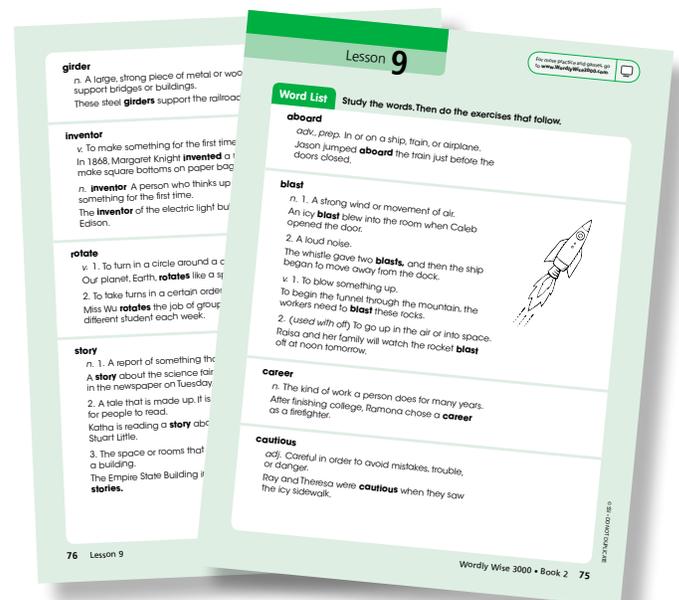
But here's the rub—listening to words on a television or smartphone does not count.

Vocabulary words need to come from a person—screen words do not expand vocabulary.²

But what if you want more than just the words you use in your day to day communication and any additional books you might read? [You can find various workbooks that help increase vocabulary.](#) None of these might be necessary for a well-read child, but if you have children who enjoy workbooks, these are fun.

In middle school or high school you can use books that emphasize the Greek and Latin roots of words (like [Word Power Made Easy](#)), to expand vocabulary efficiently.

But overall, the biggest gains in vocabulary come from reading and hearing words in context ... like the rich stories found in Sonlight's extensive book list.



Wordly Wise 3000 3rd Edition Example

2. <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/books/how-to-raise-a-reader>

Reading

Learning to read is often done in tandem with handwriting and spelling and true fluency usually takes several years to achieve.

The first step is for your children to recognize that letters are symbols of sounds, and that these sound-symbols combine to make words.

While reading is part of Language Arts, learning to read is often taught separately. There are several complete programs or sequences to help teach your children to read, and, again, you can start at some point between ages 4 and 8 [Take a Reading Evaluation](#).

Please keep in mind that reading is a complex skill. If your children are

not “on grade level,” do not despair. The founder of Sonlight, Sarita Holzmann, had one son who didn’t learn to read fluently until middle school. He graduated valedictorian of his class in public high school.

It doesn’t matter *when* your children learn to read, just whether they *do*.

“No employer cares about when you learned to read—only that you can.”

Handwriting

Handwriting includes printing and cursive and, later, typing. Most handwriting programs begin their progression in early elementary school, with typing beginning closer to middle school.

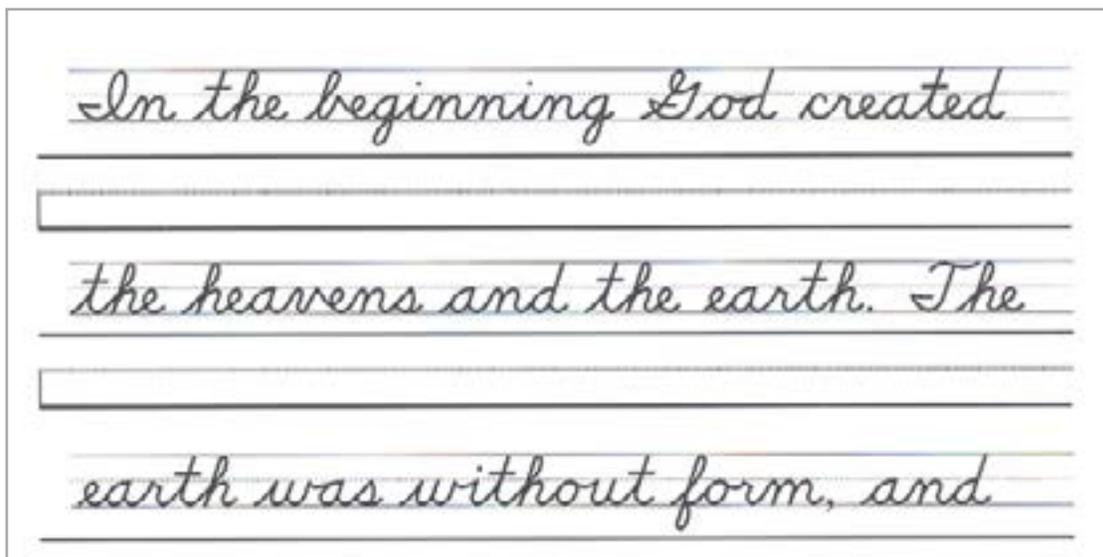
Traditional handwriting programs start with printing and progress to cursive around third grade.

Other handwriting programs begin with cursive, arguing that the rounded letters are easier to manage for 5-year-old motor coordination, among other benefits.

Of course, since we live in the computer age, many school districts no longer bother with cursive at all.

Along these lines, John Holt, in *Learning All the Time*, writes about an experiment he did. He had always heard that cursive writing was faster, so he timed himself writing the same passage using either printing or cursive. He was faster printing, every time. He noted that few people opt for cursive as their default writing method, and so he recommends skipping cursive altogether and spending the time you would have spent teaching cursive on something more enjoyable and useful.

However, cursive is valuable even if it doesn't allow your children to be able to write more quickly. The National Association of State Boards of Education reported on 



numerous, bigger picture benefits of learning cursive--cognitive and motor skills development, literacy development, brain development, improved memory, more creative compositions. And, especially for students with learning challenges, cursive can be a valuable tool for improving both brain connections and fine motor skills.

Many educators believe that best practices for students include cursive instruction. (Some believe it best to begin handwriting practice with cursive.)

But, since you are the teacher, you get to choose what's best for your student.

AS A NOTE: *if you opt to skip cursive, you might want to have your children quickly work through a cursive book to learn how to sign their names. If you do this around 5th grade, your children can learn to sign their name in just a few hours of practice.*

And as for typing? Computer keyboards are not ergonomically designed for small hands. *The Child and the Machine* suggests that, to give your children's hands the best opportunity to avoid Carpal tunnel syndrome, delay typing instruction until fifth grade or so. [Look at Sonlight's typing Instructor.](#)



The M family, Sonlighters from Louisville, KY

Spelling

All About Spelling, one of the most popular and effective spelling programs on the market, has seven books total. Think about that—you need to get through seven books by graduation. Even if you feel “behind,” you probably have plenty of time.

Here’s one of the secrets about spelling: until your children are fairly strong readers, spelling will take longer than it needs to. Why? Because as your children read, they grow their visual memory. That’s why you can write “speach,” which is a reasonable guess (ee and ea are two different symbols for the same sound), and know that it doesn’t look right. “Speech” looks right.

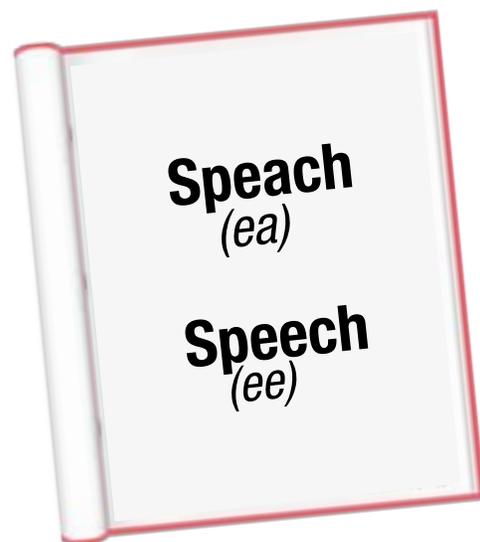
So if you follow the better late than early model and go through the first book of spelling after your children are strong readers, that book might take a week, and the second book might take another week or two. They are still valuable to go through, to get the spelling rules and have a solid foundation. But to get through

two books in a month, without frustration, is pretty appealing.

So you can have your children memorize list after list, or you can wait a bit until your children are fairly comfortable reading, and then work through a spelling program at a rapid pace.

One more note while we’re talking about spelling. Are you a perfect speller? Probably not, even if you have the mnemonic “there’s ‘a rat’ in separate” and other memory tricks.

Most of us need spell check at times. And that’s okay.



Grammar

A professional writer hadn't studied grammar intensively, despite graduating with an English degree. Over the course of a couple of weeks, she read through multiple elementary and middle school grammar books and came away with a firm grasp of grammar. (Really, just about any one of those books would have been sufficient.)

If you're stressed about grammar, remember this story. Your children could read one or two grammar books, as an adult, and learn all they need to know. So even if you covered nothing but the basics, your children would be doing well. (Some examples of the basics: capitalize proper nouns; sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a period, question mark, or exclamation point; use commas in between thoughts and between elements in a list.) You can start to cover these as soon as a child begins to write, and you'll

probably remind your children of some of these basics for quite a few years.

Most likely, though, you will cover some grammar beyond the basics.

Will additional information about semicolons and adjectives help them? On some level, sure. Are those important enough to steal your joy if you aren't getting to them right now? No.

When your children start to write complex enough sentences that you realize additional punctuation training would help clarify their meaning, then teach them grammar. At that point, they will be excited to learn that they can change their entire sentence with two extra commas: "Eats, shoots, and leaves" is far different from "eats shoots and leaves." The former is a bar fight, the latter a panda's diet. That's fun! But wait until your children are ready to appreciate this.

Starting to Put These Skills Together

Once a child can read, write, spell, and has a bit of grammar knowledge, you can introduce copywork. Give your elementary child a sentence to copy (something from the book of Proverbs, for example), and let the child have some practice combining all the separate skills of handwriting, reading, spelling, and grammar into one task: writing.

Again, the timeline for your children can vary according to how they are progressing with all the other tasks. This isn't simple! So many new skills are needed.

After several years of practice, you can introduce dictation. This means that after your children have reviewed a sentence, you read it aloud to them and have them write it, using all their

knowledge of handwriting, spelling, and grammar.

This is a challenging task! Expect your children to make some mistakes! That means they are learning.

A NOTE ABOUT LEARNING:

A good rule of thumb for life is that learning happens when you're succeeding more than half the time, but not getting 100%. So if your children make mistakes on even three out of ten words or punctuations, that means they're getting seven right, and their brains are working at peak efficiency for learning. If your children are making no errors, clearly their work is too easy, and if they are succeeding only rarely, the work is too difficult.

Public Speaking

Most of us will not end up as motivational speakers for our careers, so public speaking might seem like a bit of an afterthought. But whether your children's speaking will involve addressing thousands or just their nuclear family, public speaking is good to practice.

For an easy entry point, you might ask questions at the dinner table, either your own or one of the many "Table Talk" kinds of questions you can find online.

- If you were a superhero, what kind of superpower would you have?
- What's your favorite holiday? ("The 4th of July? Really? Tell me more about that!")
- What was the most thoughtful gift you've been given?

And so on. This requires your children to think of something creative about an assigned topic,

but you're all just sitting around talking and listening. A really easy place to start. This can begin as soon as they are able to think and speak and can continue for years.

Many schools also have recitations, where each member of the class memorizes a poem and then recites it to the assembled parents and students. You might do this with a poem, or with one of the Bible passages you've learned, starting in early elementary school.

Some states require public speaking in high school. Whether you outsource this to a community college, or opt for a course at home (like [Thinkwell](#)), here, too, you have options.

Creative Writing

This is, perhaps, the main goal of all Language Arts instruction—the ability to put original thoughts down on paper.

But even here, different writing programs have opposite ideas about what makes for good writing. Some programs emphasize simplicity and clarity. Other programs emphasize flowery, dressed up speech with lots of adjectives. And although this is not normally a technique professional editors recommend, many families delight to see their children’s work filled with impressive words.

So even before you begin teaching writing, how do you decide on even a basic direction to go?

Well, what kind of writing do you enjoy reading? Go with your intuition.

A huge part of good writing involves listening to good books. If your children have heard quality sentences for years, you’ll find those quality speech patterns naturally inside them. Not impressed yet with the complexity of the sentences your 5-year-old produces? She is so young yet! Give her more years of listening to good books, and her prose will naturally improve.

“Creative Writing” in itself, though, covers such a wide range of disciplines.

- **Interpersonal communication:** business letters, emails, social media posts.
- **Nonfiction reports:** everything from a paragraph describing one’s understanding of the latest news report to a doctoral dissertation, the ability to research and synthesize your findings.
- **Creative endeavors:** novels, poetry, plays.

Over the course of a life, creative writing might also include memoirs and other autobiographical writing (“What I Did Last Summer”), news reports from sports to society, business writing from proposals to PowerPoint, note-taking during lectures and sermons, and so on.

How do you prepare your children for all of this? ➤

Happily, you don't have to create assignments from scratch. Various programs, including Sonlight, have assignments by grade and ability. [\[View Sonlight's Language Arts Instructor's Guides\]](#)

But a general progression might look something like this:

In early elementary, your children come up with creative storylines in their play, or re-enact a story they've heard or seen. If you are willing to act as scribe, have them tell you the story and you record it.

Fiction creative writing can continue as long as the children enjoy it. Not all children will. Some are matter-of-fact engineers and scientists who don't want to get in touch with their feelings or write about lost puppies. That's fine. Most of the writing in the world is not fiction.

You can start teaching your children how to write nonfiction in later elementary. You could begin by assigning a short research reports. In Sonlight F, the study of Non-Western Cultures, students write mini-reports on things such as endangered species in China. Let them learn about red-crowned cranes, translating a few paragraphs of description online into a paragraph or two.

That's research!

Then you can teach your children how to do more advanced research. If they want to know about elephants, you can provide paper and sticky notes, and look online and in books (either from your personal collection or at the local library). When they find the answer to the questions they want to know, they record the answers and cite the sources.

In high school, they may find something they really want to know about. Perhaps something prompted from their own life, or something they read about that captures their interest. So they spend more time learning about it.

That's really all a research paper is—investigating something that you find interesting. ➤

“If there is one skill with incredible potential to reward any student who pursues it, it's the art of writing.”

Sarita’s daughter Amy thought she hated research papers, and was surprised, in her 20s, when someone said, “You love research!”

And it was true—when there was a topic that Amy liked, she pursued it wholeheartedly, and enjoyed summarizing what she learned to all who would listen. But having learned about “research” in her years before homeschooling, she had grown up thinking “research” was somehow related to post-it notes and specifically formatted attributions; that it required painful trips to the library and late nights of tears.

Happily, no! Research is looking things up until you have the knowledge you want.

Who would have thought it could be that easy?

Also in high school, your children get to experiment with various forms of creative writing. Though they might not be thrilled to write a sonnet, it’s not a bad assignment to try once in a lifetime. Same with a movie review, or an essay analyzing a work of literature.

All of this is good, and also part of education—exposing a child to something they haven’t tried before.

Sarita’s grandson Abraham loves to draw. He does cartoons with colored pencils. When he is given an assignment from [*ARTistic Pursuits*](#), initially he balks. But then he invariably says, “Oh! This is more fun than I thought it would be!”

It’s good to be exposed to new things, to be stretched to write in new ways.

In Conclusion

In an ideal world, children would be enthusiastic to practice writing every day. Parents would have clarity on the most efficient and enjoyable way to get their children writing.

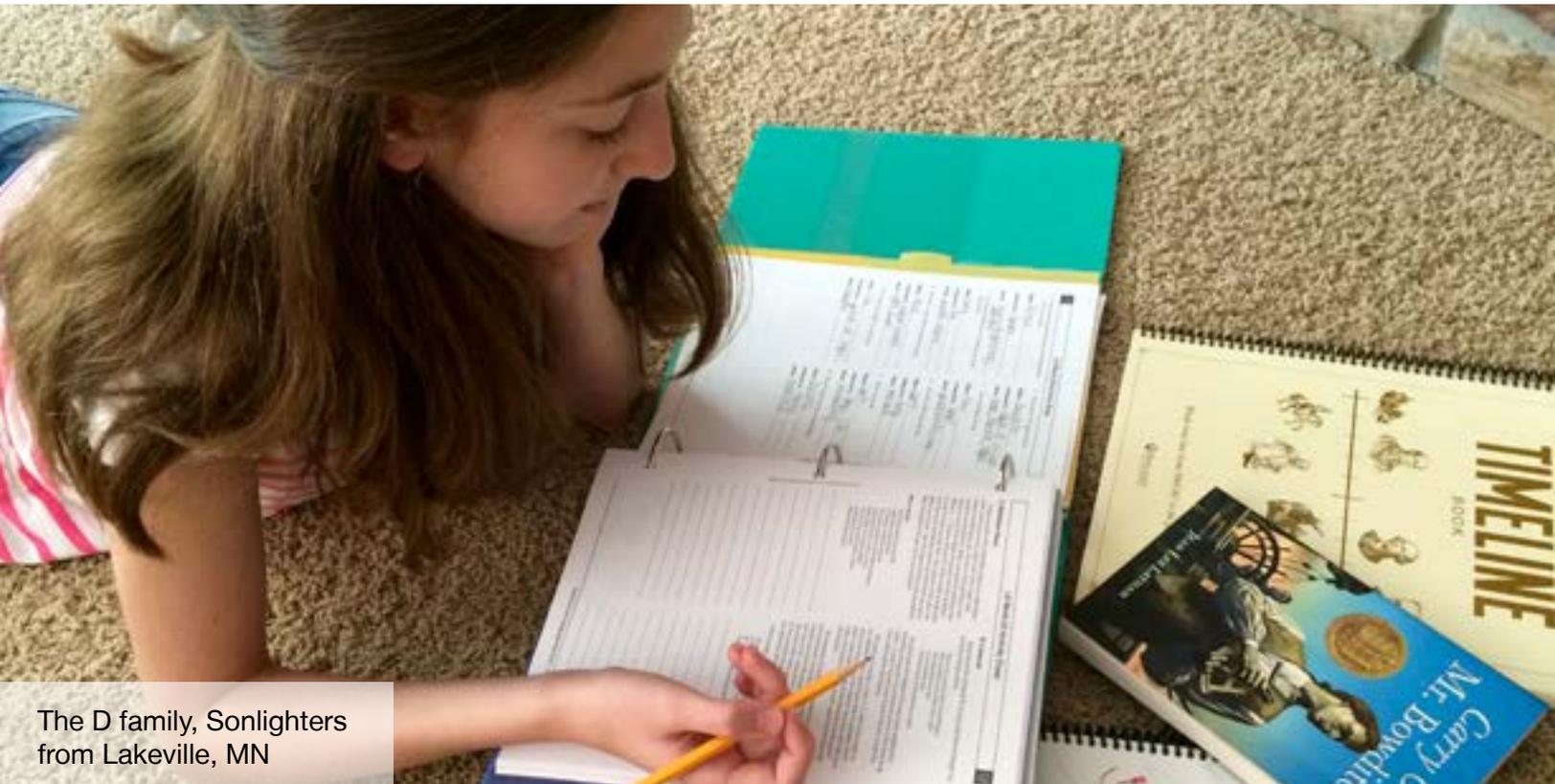
And we would all communicate perfectly, without any misinformation or confusion.

Since we don't live in the ideal world, though, you do the best you can with what you have. You recognize that the world's best writers write every day because they love it, and often because they are compelled to. You

have peace that if your children don't learn absolutely everything before they graduate, all is not lost.

And you strive to encourage your children to be the best communicators they can be during these precious years that you have them.

Sonlight offers all you need for a complete Language Arts education. [Learn more.](#)



The D family, Sonlighters from Lakeville, MN

Completely Revised and Updated Language Arts Instructor's Guides

Levels K through W

Weekly Overviews summaries for each week. What are you covering? Know at a glance.

Weekly Overview

Spelling: short *a* words; the

Phonics:
Demonstrate: practice reading; anticipating punctuation; capitalization; memorizing sounds
Italicized Text: word emphasis

Creative Expression:
Capitalization: capital letters; write your name
Pat the Rat: brainstorm; imaginative writing
Match Initial Letter Sounds: letter sound recognition

Day 1 Introduce the Words

We pull all spelling words from the stories your children read to facilitate learning.

Use magnetic letters or letter cards to show each word, sound out each letter, then pronounce the word. Switch places so children practice building, sounding each letter and practice reading the word.

Rule: Vowels surrounded by consonants or followed by one or more consonants are usually short: map, bet, hit, toss, bun.

Regular Words for the week: bat, cat, fat, hat, mat, pat, rat, sat, vat

Sight Word for the week: the

Together

Read the script below to your children.

Vowels Surrounded by Consonants

Spelling is all about using the letters of the alphabet to form words, so let's take a minute to review what we know about the alphabet. How many letters are in the alphabet? (26)

The first letter of the alphabet is ...? (A) The last letter is ...? (Z)

Now remember, some letters are called **vowels**, and some are called **consonants**. Can you name the vowels for me? Hint: There are 5, or sometimes 6, vowels. (*a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes y*)

So if those are the vowels, what are the consonants? Name one for me. (*All of the other letters of the alpha-*

Did you know that rules are really handy? Rules work like secret codes. So say you want to spell a word you've probably read, but haven't had to spell for a spelling word before. Well, if you know some rules about how the letters of the alphabet fit together to form words, you can probably figure out how to spell the word correctly the first time!

So this week's rule comes in two parts. Here's the whole rule; we'll break it down to understand it in a minute:

Vowels surrounded by consonants or followed by one or more consonants are usually short.

Wow. Let's look at the meaning of the first part:

Vowels surrounded by consonants are usually short.

Here are a few words that follow this rule:

Write on the board: map

Name the vowel in this word. (*a*) Name the consonants. (*m, p*).

Do you see how the vowel is surrounded by consonants? So that means we say "map" with a short *a* sound, instead of "mape" with a long *a* sound. Let's try another one.

Write on the board: hit

As before, ask your children to point out the vowel and consonants, and then pronounce the word. Continue with other words from this week's list if they need more practice. If they don't, feel free to move on.

Okay, let's look at the meaning of the second part of our rule:

Vowels followed by one or more consonants are usually short.

Let's look at some words that follow this rule:

Write on the board: toss

(Other words to introduce: mutt, hiss, hall, less, etc.)

Again, ask your children to identify the vowels and consonants, and then pronounce the word.

Good work! Let's practice writing the words on this week's spelling list together.

Activity

Use your remaining time to make a practice list of words with your children.

1. Say the first word aloud and have your children write

Explanatory comments for you, so you understand why we approach teaching this way and you know what your goals are.

Teaching scripts in the early grades to read to your children. Easily introduce new ideas, concepts, and assignments. If you're just starting to homeschool, this will help you.

Capital You

Look at the first word of the sentence in Monday's copywork. *i.e. "The fat rat is Pat."*

Is the **T** a lower case or capital letter? (*capital*) It should be a capital letter, because when we write we use a capital letter at the beginning of every sentence.

Are there any other capital letters in the sentence? (*the "p" in "Pat" is also capitalized*) You should see the letter **P** is capitalized for the name *Pat*. We always use a capital letter for a person's name.

When we write, we capitalize the first word of each sentence, and the first letter of all names.

Sometimes you will write a sentence about yourself. When you use the word *I* to talk about yourself, always use a capital letter. For example:

The dog barks when I sing.

Have your children follow the directions found on "Capitalization" on the **Week 1 Activity Sheet**.

1. Write your name with a beginning capital letter.
2. Underline the names in your copywork. (*Pat*)
3. Put a box around the capital letters at the beginning of each sentence. (*T, I*)

Sample Rubric for Narrate (Family Portrait)

Key: Exceeded: ✓+ Met Expectation: ✓ In Progress: →

Content	
_____	Participated in the brainstorming activity; contributed ideas to the list
_____	Remembered the "story" of this family activity in the order events usually take place
_____	Included enough details so that someone who wasn't there could understand the story
Mechanics	
_____	Worked with Mom or Dad to "edit" the assignment

Evaluative rubrics to help you know what to look for so you can assess with assurance.

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