

# THE 5 CAUSES OF WRITING CHALLENGES

HOW TO SUPPORT TWICE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS  
AND OTHER RELUCTANT WRITERS

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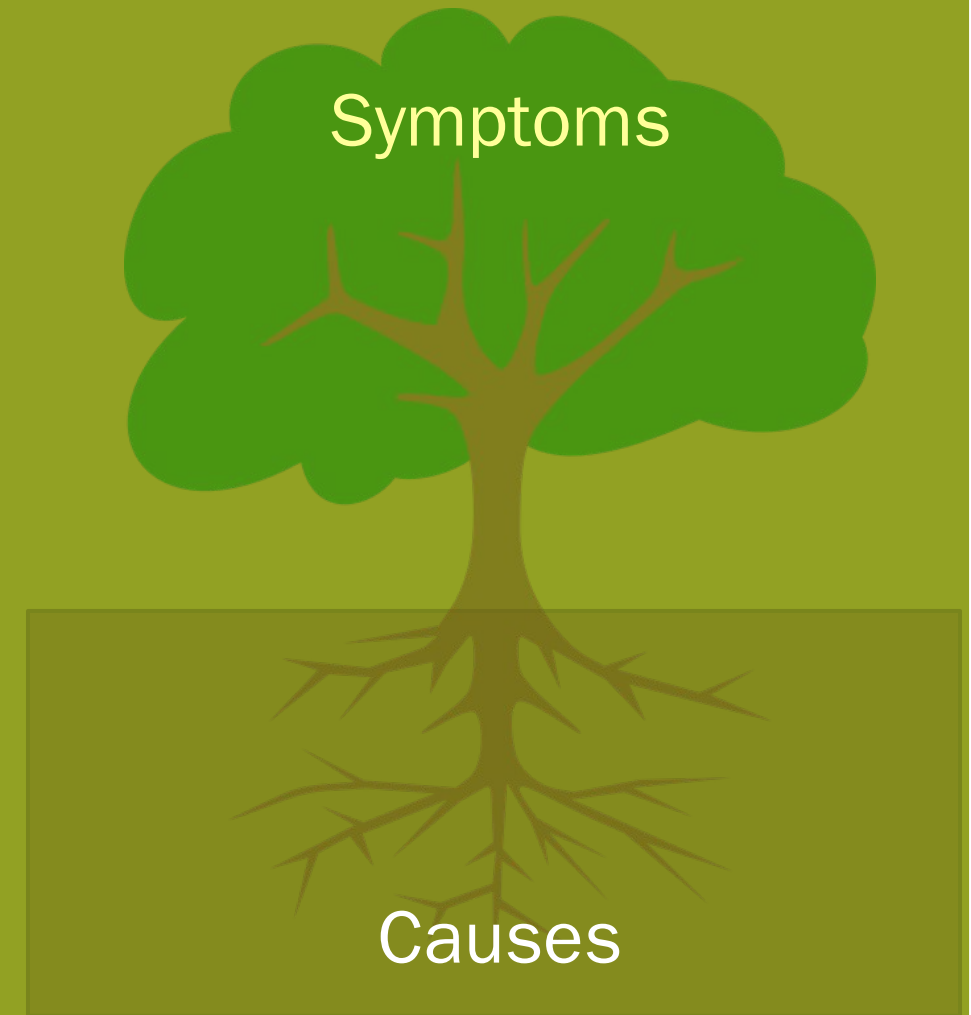
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# Look for the Root Cause

- ◆ Several possible causes of writing challenges
- ◆ Supports and strategies are **DIFFERENT** depending on the cause
- ◆ Applying an ineffective support causes frustration
  - ◆ OT only helps with **ONE** of the 5 main causes of writing trouble



Avoids writing  
 Trouble with grammar, punctuation, capitalization  
 Hand hurts when writing  
 Inconsistent letter formation  
 Run-on sentences  
 Poor spelling  
 Hard to get ideas out  
 Poor pencil grip  
 Slow (but very neat) handwriting  
 Illegible handwriting  
 Trouble organizing ideas  
 Errors when copying  
 Low written output  
 "Drawing" letters one stroke at a time



- 1 Fine Motor/Muscular
- 2 Automaticity
- 3 Vision Processing
- 4 (Stealth) Dyslexia
- 5 ADHD/Executive Function

Avoids

writing

Trouble with grammar, punctuation,  
capitalization

Hard to get ideas out

Illegible  
handwriting

Hand hurts when  
writing

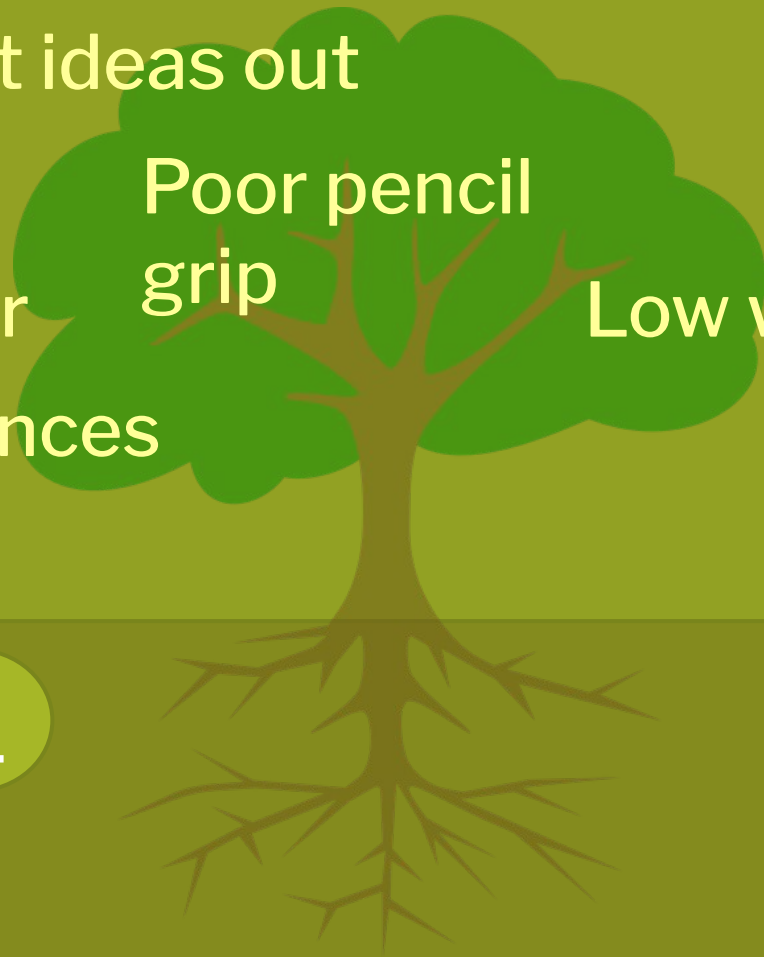
Poor pencil  
grip

Errors when copying

Inconsistent letter  
formation

Low written output

Run-on sentences



Fine  
Motor/Muscular

1

# 1 Fine Motor/Muscular – Root Cause

- ◆ Small muscles
- ◆ Big muscles
- ◆ Core/trunk muscles
- ◆ Stamina
- ◆ Coordination
- ◆ Proprioception

## Clues

“My hand hurts”

Unusual pencil grip

Posture/wriggling

Very dark/light marks

ALSO trouble with  
drawing and crafts

# 1 Fine Motor/Muscular – How to Help

- ◆ Occupational therapy
- ◆ Tiny crayons/chalk
- ◆ Playdoh/clay
- ◆ Pencil grip devices
- ◆ Perler beads

After middle elementary,  
switch to keyboarding or  
dictation



Avoids  
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Trouble with grammar, punctuation,  
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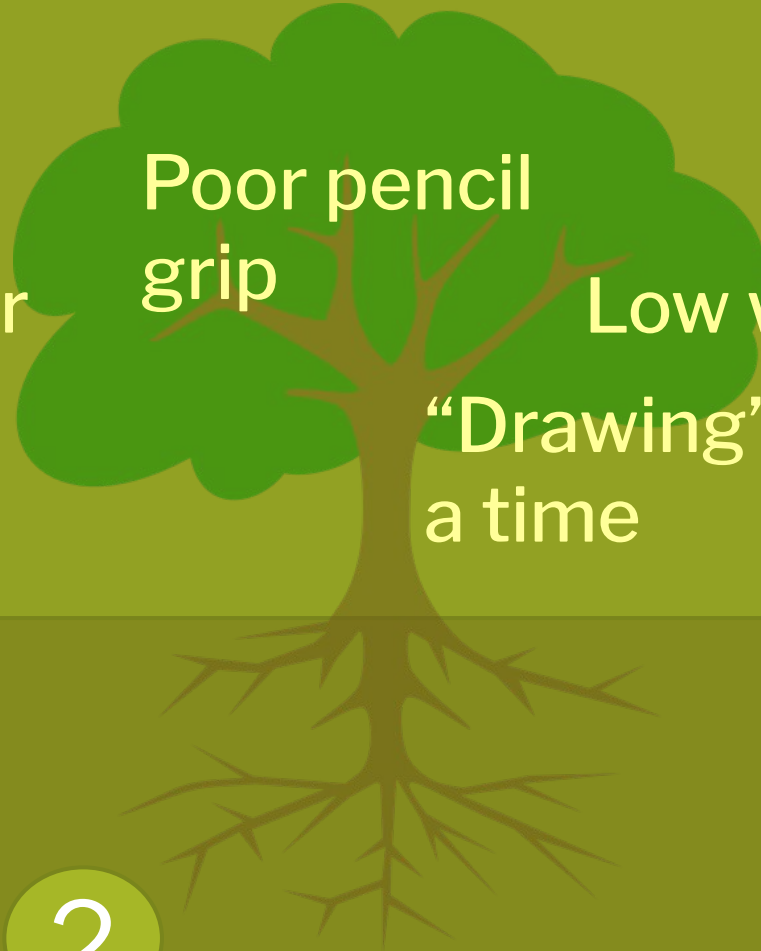
Poor spelling

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Automaticity

2

## 2 Automaticity – Root Cause

- ◆ Brain-based automaticity of letter formation

- ◆ “Muscle memory” for letters and numbers

- ◆ Should be automatic by 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

### Clues

Unusual letter strokes

Letters on the same page look different

Messy handwriting

OR Very neat (but very slow)

“Drawing” each letter



## 2 Automaticity – How to Help

◆ Lazy 8 Exercise [Video](#)



◆ Arrowsmith Program  
“Word & Tracing”

Need a LOT of repetition

After middle elementary, switch to keyboarding or dictation

# Assistive Technology

- ◆ Enable higher order thinking without getting bogged down in the mechanics

**Snaptypesapp.com**

iPad, iPhone  
Android, Chromebook

- ◆ Keyboarding
- ◆ Dictation/Scribe
- ◆ Spellcheck
- ◆ Grammar tools/grammarly

**What Has the Superhero Done Lately?**  
Regular Past Tense Verbs

Directions: The superhero has been busy! Fill in each blank with a verb from the word bank.  
Don't forget to change it to past tense!

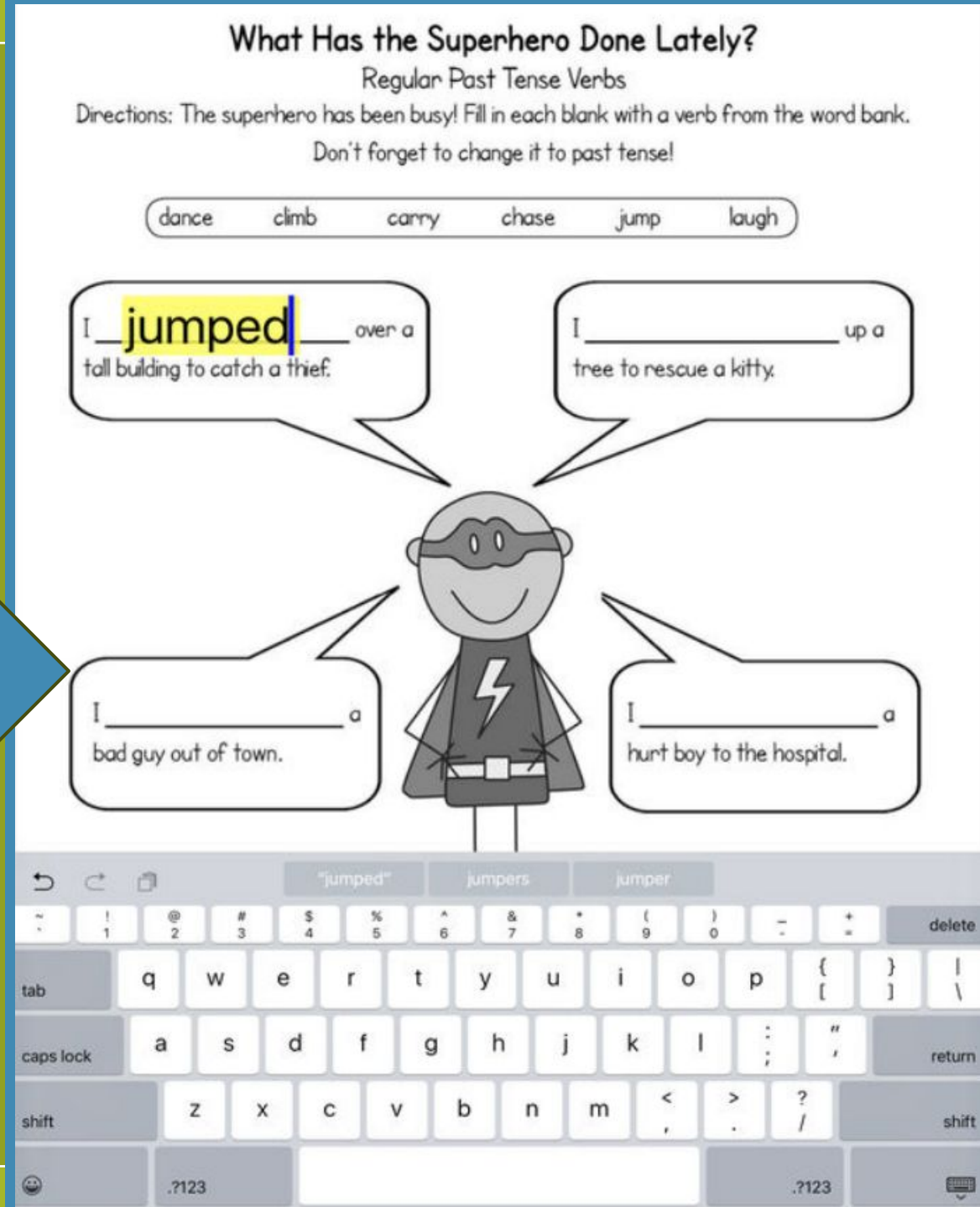
dance   climb   carry   chase   jump   laugh

I jumped over a tall building to catch a thief.

I \_\_\_\_\_ up a tree to rescue a kitty.

I \_\_\_\_\_ a bad guy out of town.

I \_\_\_\_\_ a hurt boy to the hospital.



# Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- ◆ Make all learning accessible to all students
- ◆ Provide accommodations & supports to ALL students
  - ◆ Keyboarding, dictation, spellcheck, ...
  - ◆ Just like a pencil
- ◆ 2e students think accommodations are “cheating” if they are the only ones allowed to use them
- ◆ Many other students will also benefit

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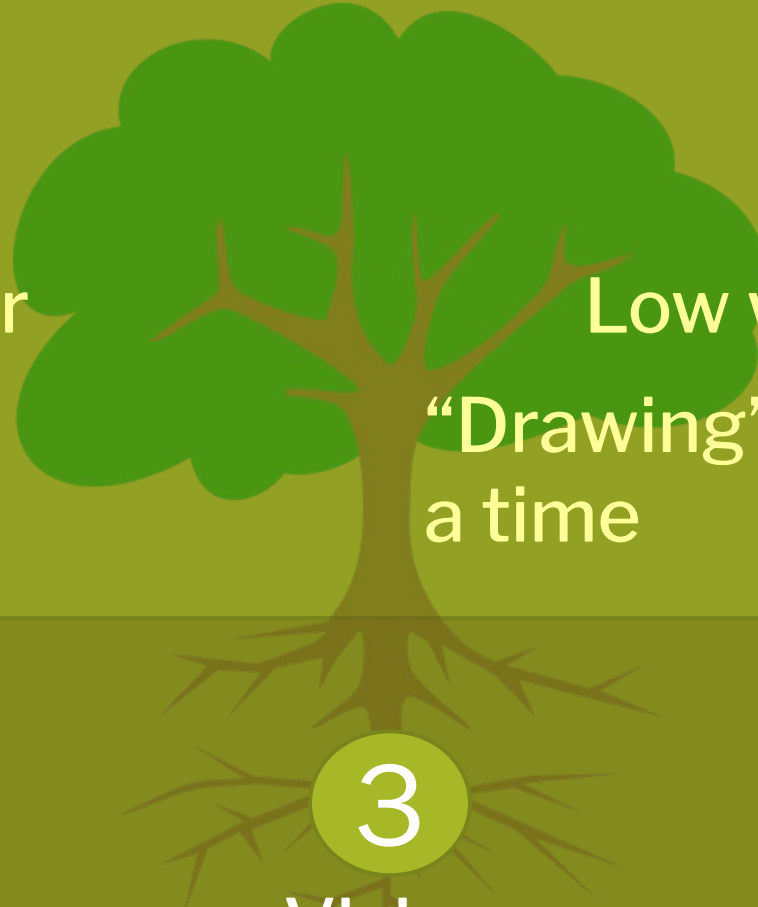
Slow (but very neat)  
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Illegible  
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Inconsistent letter  
formation

Errors when copying

Low written output

“Drawing” letters one stroke at  
a time



Vision  
Processing

### 3 Vision Processing Disorders – Root Cause

- ◆ Brain-based
- ◆ Eyes working together
- ◆ Focusing and refocusing
- ◆ Trouble with 3D perception
- ◆ Intermittent blurriness
- ◆ Letters/words can move/flip
  - ◆ b, d, p, q

#### Clues

Mistakes when copying

Capital letters in wrong place

Missing punctuation

Silly mistakes in math (+ – x)

Inconsistent scores on tests

Resists smaller fonts

Clumsy/sports

### 3 Vision Processing Disorders – How to Help

- ◆ Vision Therapy, [www.covd.org](http://www.covd.org) (look for FCOVD or FOVDR)
- ◆ Large fonts
  - ◆ eReaders
  - ◆ Photocopy onto 11x17
- ◆ Preferential seating
- ◆ Slant board
- ◆ Reading guide strips
- ◆ Math: 1/2" graph paper, turn notebook sideways,



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## 4 (Stealth) Dyslexia

## 4 Stealth Dyslexia – Root Cause

- ◆ Phonological awareness
- ◆ Reads everything as a sight word
- ◆ Word -> sounds -> spelling
- ◆ Orthographic rules don't stick
- ◆ Despite this, excellent comprehension with elementary texts

### Clues

SPELLING

Rhyming/Wordplay

Can't sound out words

Skips or substitutes words

Inconsistent scores on standardized tests



## 4 Stealth Dyslexia – Root Cause

◆ Phonological awareness

Clues

◆ Reads everything as a sight word

SPELLING

◆ Word → sounds → spelling

Rhyming/Wordplay

◆ Orthographic

Confuses similar words

◆ Despite comprehension elements

Substitutes words

Low scores on

tests

### How to screen?

[www.thepasttest.com](http://www.thepasttest.com)

Oral manipulation of sounds

Reading nonsense words

Trouble rhyming “harder” words

(School screenings may not catch it)

## 4 Stealth Dyslexia– How to Help

- ◆ Structured literacy in schools
  - ◆ Phonics & phonological awareness
  - ◆ Wilson, Heggerty, Souday, 95 Group,

Tutor Referral Lists

- ◆ Dyslexia tutoring
  - ◆ Orton-Gillingham
  - ◆ All about Reading
  - ◆ Wired for Reading
  - ◆ Lindamood-Bell
- ◆ Online reinforcement
  - ◆ treasurehunt.prenda.co, nesy.com

[socal.dyslexiaida.org](http://socal.dyslexiaida.org)

[norcal.dyslexiaida.org](http://norcal.dyslexiaida.org)

[central.dyslexiaida.org](http://central.dyslexiaida.org)

[wabida.org](http://wabida.org)

- ◆ Audiobooks - LearningAlly, Bookshare, Speechify
- ◆ Typing with spellcheck, or dictation

### Don't Wait

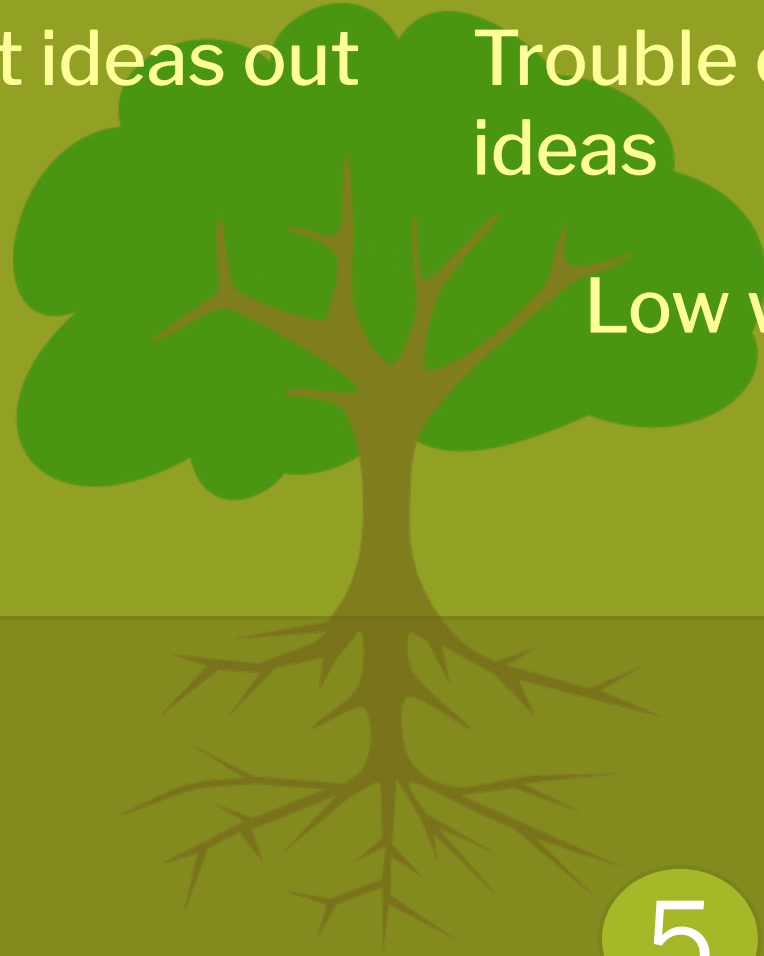
Intervention in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade is twice as effective as intervention in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (Lovett et al., 2017)

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Trouble with grammar, punctuation,  
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5

ADHD/Executive  
Function

**SMART** ≠ easy

## 5 ADHD/Exec. Function – Root Cause

- ◆ Not a lack of attention, but trouble regulating attention
- ◆ Can focus when **INCUP**:
  - ◆ Interesting
  - ◆ Novel
  - ◆ Challenging
  - ◆ Urgent/Pressure(Dodson, 2018)
- ◆ **NOT**: rote, boring, easy, even if very important
- ◆ Perfectionism makes it harder

### Clues

Trouble getting started  
Trouble staying on task  
Time management  
Breaking down big projects  
Can produce when interested in the topic

## 5 ADHD/Exec. Function – How to Help

### INCUP:

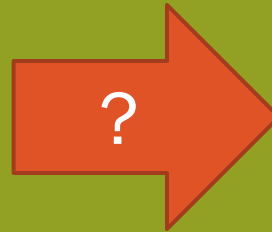
### Interesting-Novel-Challenging-Urgent-Pressure

- ◆ Align with interests
- ◆ Give choice in topics, formats
- ◆ Something unusual to spark excitement
- ◆ Authentic projects for real audiences
- ◆ Make it more complex or more challenging
- ◆ Create time pressure (sometimes)
  - ◆ “Extra time” accommodation for ADHD?
- ◆ Social pressure & teacher relationships matter

# This is a tough transition



Lots of interconnected ideas in brain



First, ●. Then ●, ●, and ●  
●. ● ● because ●

Linear writing, one word at a time

# How to Help

1. Get ideas out of brain **in a messy way**
2. **THEN** organize **where you can see**

## How?

- ◆ Sticky notes
- ◆ Mind map
- ◆ Drawing
- ◆ Dictation to a computer
- ◆ Human scribe
- ◆ Walk & talk

Topic/paragraph  
graphic organizers  
**WON'T HELP**

Why? They impose  
order too soon

Help each student find what works for them

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# Other Strategies That Can Help - Generating

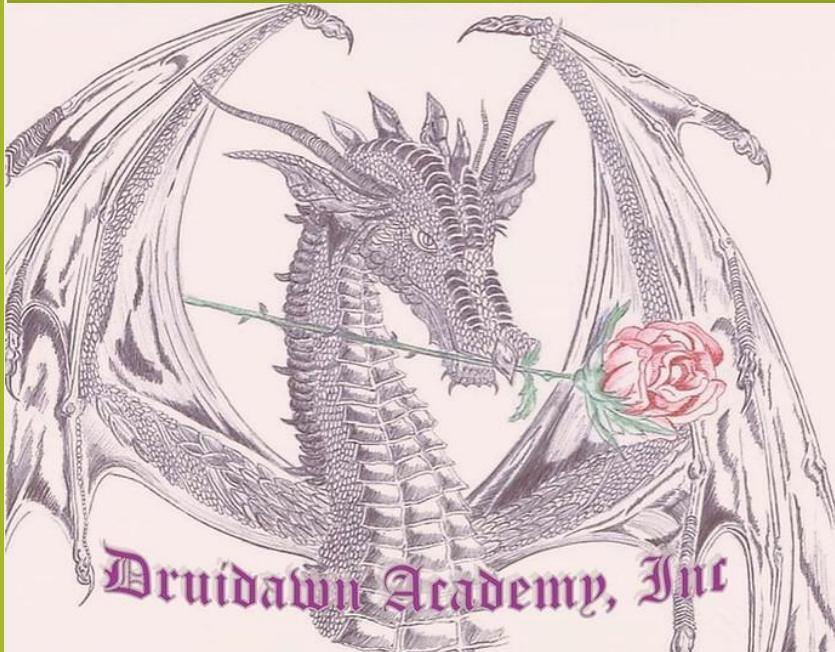
- ◆ Don't push writing until 5<sup>th</sup> grade
- ◆ Start with inspiration
  - ◆ Pick a high-interest topic
  - ◆ Do an authentic project for a real audience
  - ◆ e.g. Write a persuasive letter and send it
- ◆ Offer sentence starters
- ◆ Get them talking (an adult types, then kid edits/elaborates)
- ◆ The first draft will not be perfect
  - ◆ "It's faster to write a quick draft and edit"
- ◆ When in doubt, provide more SUPPORT
  - ◆ Not pressure

# Other Strategies That Can Help - Editing

- ◆ Have student read it out loud
  - ◆ Or have the computer read it
- ◆ Learn how to use tools
  - ◆ Spellcheck, grammar check, thesaurus, e.g. Grammarly
  - ◆ Text-to-speech, speech-to-text/dictation
- ◆ Offer feedback, don't insist
  - ◆ "You're the author." "Listen first, decide later."
- ◆ It doesn't have to be perfect
  - ◆ Don't feed the perfectionism monster

# Writing programs to try

- ◆ Druidawn.org – collaborative fantasy writing (middle)
- ◆ Writtenoutloud.org (grade 3-8)
- ◆ Nightzookeeper.com (elementary, middle)
- ◆ 1:1 tutoring



**SMART** ≠ easy

Full Slides

[tinyurl.com/2ereluctantwriters](https://tinyurl.com/2ereluctantwriters)

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