Writing Avoidance

It's common for students with anxiety, emotional/behavioral disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and ADHD to struggle with writing. Some students may avoid, retreat, or straight out refuse to complete writing assignments. Why does this happen?
Simultaneous Brain Processing

First, it's important to understand how the brain works when processing is affected by environmental stress and/or anxiety-related disabilities and disorders. As I noted in ADHD and Anxiety: The Vicious Circle, anxiety related disabilities and ADHD can impair brain processing. Impaired processing causes anxiety. Anxiety further impairs processing. Further impaired processing causes more anxiety. The cycle will often go on as long as the student is presented with the anxiety-producing task-- which often is paper-pencil or writing.

Writing is such an interactive, challenging task, because writers must process so many things at once. They must process the prompt or task, establish a purpose, brainstorm and convey ideas, organize, choose effective vocabulary, establish a rhythm and flow, write with voice, and use proper mechanics and presentation. Writers with ADHD and anxiety related disabilities often struggle with applying and maintaining multiple thought processes simultaneously. Writers with ADHD may also "hyper-focus," or over-focus on one particular part of the writing. Similarly, writers with autism spectrum disorders may perseverate, or "get stuck" on one component of the writing. Many writers may feel overwhelmed with the number of thoughts that pop into their heads at once.

Imagine doing all of these things under stress and with a disability or disorder that impairs processing, while trying to cope and write. Hiding under a desk might not seem like such a bad idea, right?
So How Can We Help?

Fortunately, with patience and understanding we can help students to manage writing-- and even enjoy it. It all starts with breaking down the process into simple, manageable segments. Here are some ideas to try.

- Provide extended time and a workplace with limited distractions. Privacy folders and noise-blocking headphones can help with this. Ask teachers and librarians in your school to donate old headphones that don't work anymore. Simply cut off the wires and use them for noise blocking.
- Allow students to verbalize their answers to you, an aide, a partner, or into a voice recorder.
- Allow students to use text-to-speech, word processing, or word prediction software. Many of these are available as iPad apps.
- Scribe or transcribe for the student.
- Scaffold with a sentence starter. For example, take a question like, "What is a community?" and turn it into, "A community is _____________."
- Use "fancy pens for fancy words." Have students edit writing for word choice after they have finished writing. Have them erase 1-4 words and re-write a "fancier" synonym using a pen.
- Start small. Look for quality over quantity. Keep in mind that writing one sentence is as much work for some students as writing a paragraph. Sometimes when quality and effort are present, less is more.
- Use graphic organizers, such as Four Square paragraph writing and the ACE strategy for answer writing. These are designed to break the multiple steps into manageable bits. Many students find them easier to use than outline writing.
- Provide specific praise and encouragement-- not only for the writing, but also for the effort.
- Talk to the student. Get feedback, and have the student self-monitor his or her feelings toward writing. Brainstorm ideas together. What works? What doesn't? What can be improved or simplified?
- Make writing fun. Help the student by scribing or transcribing on assessments, but also provide fun writing practice where the student can write independently. Have them write to create books, menus, posters, letters to friends or favorite celebrities, postcards, newspapers, magazines, television show or movie scripts, video game or DVD/CD covers, banners, classroom labels, or double entry journals with friends, family, or teachers.

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Fall 2015 Conference
The Autism Society of Michigan

Monday, October 19th
Grand Valley State University
L.V. Eberhard Center,
301 Fulton Street, Room 210
Grand Rapids, MI
616-331-6620
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Paula Kluth
Morning Workshop - “You’re Going to Love This Kid!”
Afternoon Workshop: “Just Give Him the Whale”

Registration Fees:
Member: $70
Non-Member $80
Student-$50
Person w/ASD-$25
Please register at: www.autism-mi.org or by calling 517-882-2800

Hotel Discounted Rates at:
Holiday Inn Downtown Grand Rapids
310 Pearl Street
616-235-7611

*Limited Scholarships available upon request, please call 517-882-2800
*Vendors and Book Store on-site
*Continental Breakfast & Lunch Provided
*Please make checks payable to: Autism Society of Michigan
*SCECH Available (Pending)
**Jitter Glitter**

The night before school is exciting and fun,  
With so many things that just have to be done.

Your clothes are all ready, your backpack is, too.  
And your classroom is waiting with fun things to do.

There are so many questions that go through your mind,  
All types of thoughts, some of every kind.

The day before school, we all get the jitters down deep,  
Making it really hard for us to fall fast asleep.

So here is some jitter glitter: it's really quite cool. It’s something to help you be rested and ready for school.

Just sprinkle the glitter under your pillow in bed,  
The night before school starts, when you lay down your head.

The glitter will help you to sleep through the night,  
Letting you wake up feeling fresh and bright.

I’ll sprinkle the glitter under my pillow, too,  
And remember I can’t wait for school, so I can see you!

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**Lunch Box & Snack Ideas**

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<tr>
<th>Fruits</th>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Main</th>
<th>Snacks</th>
<th>Misc</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Bagels &amp; Cream Cheese</td>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td>Water Bottle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bananas</td>
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<td>Pita Sandwich</td>
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<td>Juice Box</td>
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<td>Oranges</td>
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<td>Meat Slices</td>
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<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Snap Peas</td>
<td>Peanut Butter &amp; Jelly</td>
<td>Cheese Sticks/Slices</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries</td>
<td>Cherry Tomatoes</td>
<td>Tacos</td>
<td>Granola Bars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watermelon</td>
<td>Sliced Peppers</td>
<td>Cottage Cheese</td>
<td>Trail Mix</td>
<td>Popcorn</td>
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OUR DAILY ROUTINE

AM

Bathroom:
- Potty
- Wash hands & face
- Brush teeth
- Comb hair
- Sunscreen

Make bed

Get dressed

Put dirty PJs in hamper

Eat breakfast

Take vitamins

Goodbye hugs

PM

Pick up toys & tidy room

Pack backpack

Put on PJs

Put dirty clothes in hamper

Bathroom:
- Tub time
- Potty
- Wash hands & face
- Brush teeth

Read for 15 minutes

Lights out
Apple Cookie Recipe

Ingredients:
- 1 apple
- 2 Tablespoons Peanut Butter
- Pecans
- Coconut Shreds
- Chocolate Chips

Instructions:
1. Slice Apple into thin rings and remove core
2. Spread peanut butter over one side of apple ring.
3. Top with pecans, coconut shreds and chocolate chips
As more and more teens on the autism spectrum go online to social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, they are faced with a potential wealth of social possibilities. They also endure a potential minefield, as the rules for being online and relating IRL (In Real Life) are different. Kids with ASD are often concrete in their thinking they need specific guidelines on how to behave online in a safe and comfortable way. This is where The Secret Rules of Social Networking comes in. The authors present a set of simple, yet clear guidelines for using social networking sites. Topics include getting started and creating a profile, making “friends” online such as on Facebook where a “friend” is someone you contact, the difference between a message and a comment with the comment being public, online etiquette and being aware of dangers such as online scams and being sucked into spending more money on Amazon than one should!

In addition, sensitive subjects such as meeting romantic partners online, flirting and sexual behavior are covered-this is crucially important stuff for teens to know! Each chapter covers a special aspect of online behavior and is accompanied by delightful black and white illustrations with lovely artwork gracing each chapter heading. The writing is simple and direct, but not preachy. This is a great roadmap for all middle school aged children who are introduced to online social networks at seeming younger and younger ages, but who need help with the navigation of these choppy waters. This information is even more important for kids with ASD who have more difficulty with social nuances which are part and parcel of social networks. All parents of kids in middle school, whether or not on the autism spectrum, need this book NOW.
APP REVIEW: SnapType for iPad

Anne Carpenter

For students with ASD and other disabilities, filling in homework worksheets is an uphill battle because of difficulties with handwriting including holding a pen or pencil and being able to write legibly. I know I had that problem! An OT student, Amberlynn Gifford noticed during her OT fieldwork that one her students, Steven, was having a terrible time with filling in his homework papers because of this and so she tried scanning the forms, but that took too much time. She thought that there must be a better way to do this. Suddenly, she had an idea—why not let one take a photo of the paper on one’s iPad and then type in the answers right on the screen? She sketched her idea on a napkin and worked with Brendan Kirchner, an app developer, to bring the project to fruition and SnapType was born!

It is easy to do once you get the hang of it; I took a picture of one of our Information and Referral forms and then I tapped the screen. VOILA! A split keyboard on board lower corners of the screen popped up along with a large, flashing blue cursor on a yellow patch. I started to type my name and then was able to move my name on the yellow background to the appropriate space on the form much like moving a physical object. I filled in the rest of the form and it then looked like a patchwork of yellow blobs with each one having the appropriate entry such as name, age, telephone number, length of call, date called and date responded. One can move each entry around the screen so that it is in the desired place and position and then you can move the slider to make the text LARGER or smaller and even change the color to red, blue, green or black. I liked being able to move the text boxes around, so that they would fit into the appropriate spaces on the form and I loved being able to change the size and the color of the text with the slider and the palette at the top of the screen. Then, you can save your creation! While there are a few limitations such as a limited number of colors for the text, this seems to really do the job and this will be a lifesaver for students who have difficulty with handwriting and for adults with disabilities who need to fill out forms for insurance, employment applications, driver’s licenses, etc. There’s no end to the practical applications for this! I had more fun than is humanly possible with filling in the text boxes, resizing text, moving it around and changing the color. I also loved the idea of being able to save what one did and then go back to it later, to work on it some more as I did with the I and R form. This is the free version of the app and the paid version has a whiteboard function, but the free version is more than adequate for most purposes. I would recommend this for every classroom that has an iPad, but I wish there was an Android version for tablets and for big screen phones such as the Galaxy Note 4. Boy, wouldn’t that be something!! This app gets an A+.
WEBSITE REVIEW: Paula Kluth

http://www.paulakluth.com

By: Anne Carpenter

Several years ago, I reviewed Paula Kluth’s book You’re Going to Love This Kid! and I was so impressed by her philosophy and practical, yet creative ideas for including students with ASD in the regular classroom that I was hooked! I also love Just Give Him the Whale! because it gives a person permission to enjoy a special interest by channeling it into the regular learning environment.

So, I went to Paula Kluth’s website and found more treasures. The site is divided into several sections including a Blog that is a combination of profiles of recent presentations and classroom ideas such as having children dress up as their special interest for Halloween or taking brain breaks via a neat website called GoNoodle that has ideas for taking breaks that refresh the mind and that help kids feel less restless and antsy. Each blog post has a nifty idea and many of them are taken from Kluth’s books on teaching so that the reader will want to explore these books for themselves. Readings in another section of the site are devoted to excerpts from Paula’s books and they are arranged by topic under four main headings: Autism, Differentiated Instruction, Inclusive Schooling and Literacy. Some of these are excerpts from her books but other of these are Kluth’s own ideas.

The layout of the site is colorful and fun with each section being represented by a pencil of a specific color with an arrow pointing to the name of that section in lettering with that same color making this a useful color coding tool for teachers and parents. There is also a section listing the author’s upcoming events including ASM’s Fall Conference: “You’re Going to Love This Kid!” This site is a wonderful tool for teachers and I found the blogs so interesting and helpful. This one’s a real winner.
Special Thanks To:

**In Dedication of Jerry Carter:**
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Kris Plouff
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Bruce Warren

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Katie Drye
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**Conference Vendors**
Crawl, Walk, Jump, Run Therapy Clinic
Discovery Toys
Easter Seals Michigan

Please note: 100% of Donations made to ASM, stay here in Michigan to support individuals & their families with ASD.
Our Mission
The mission of the Autism Society of Michigan (ASM) is to assure full participation and self-determination in every aspect of life for each individual. We will realize this vision by opening avenues of self-advocacy and advocating on behalf of others in a way that values equity, respect, dignity and diversity in all communities.

Your “Fall Horizons” Has Arrived!

At a Glance in This Issue….
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