

How can I support my child in English Language Arts?

Junior grades in high school are the years in which children can either create a solid foundation upon which they build more skills and abilities, or where they begin to pile on incomplete understandings of concepts and consequently struggle throughout high school. In English, the focus is literacy and the ability to express one's understanding through reading, writing, and speaking.

The following are suggestions for how your child can build a solid foundation in English:

1. Read English novels at least 20 minutes at day, uninterrupted and without distractions

While students do read for at least 15 minutes in silent reading at the start of each class, they should also be doing the same at home without music in their ears, the TV or games in the background, or other people talking to them. Reading will expand their vocabulary, help them understand the human condition, and allow them to gain exposure to a variety of sentence structures. This will ultimately help them become better writers and communicators.

2. Develop vocabulary

English teachers find that students often resort to the “easiest” words when they need to write. Sometimes, simple is best, but not if they need to describe an item in detail or write a narrative that is supposed to be emotionally moving. Students are encouraged to annotate their texts whenever possible, meaning that they highlight, underline, or mark up their papers in some way so that they interact with the text – this is called “active reading” and is encouraged at all times when reading. They should be looking up words and creating word banks for themselves.

3. Practice writing outside of English class.

Some students love to write and will do so at every opportunity. Others struggle to get even one simple sentence onto paper. Please encourage your child to consider keeping a diary or a daily journal or a blog. He or she can write in it for 10 minutes before going to bed, or you can even share a journal with them where you give them the question of the day and they write their answer. They can write poems, song lyrics, and even short stories.

4. Prepare for class

English is skills-based, and we continuously use the same terms and devices every single year as well as across multiple units. Homework is assigned as valuable practice and sometimes it will not be marked, but that does not mean students can opt not to do it. If there are presentations, quizzes, tests, or in-class writing, students should be preparing by reviewing, rehearsing, and asking questions.

5. Speak English as much as possible each day

Many students already do this as English may be their first or only language, but for those who only use “classroom English”, their skills definitely do not improve, and they are often the ones who learn to feel embarrassment while speaking in English, too. Students can rest assured that the classroom is a space for them to speak and try, but they need to take the initiative to do so.