Adding Details to Writing

Background Information
Children in Grade 1 are at various stages in their writing development. Many children are in the early stage of writing. At this stage, they have a better understanding of the concepts of print compared to their understanding during the emergent stage. Concepts of print include: knowledge that one reads and writes from left to right, recognition that print carries a consistent message, understanding of the purpose of spacing between words, differentiation between letters and words, association of sounds with letters, beginning use of punctuation, and recognition of the distinction between upper and lower case letters. Children begin to understand what a sentence is and they begin to use capitalization at the beginning of a sentence and punctuation at the end of a sentence. They use invented spelling. For invented spelling, children use letters to represent the dominant sounds they hear when they say a word aloud. For example, they might write “purple” as “prpl.” Over time, children will begin to use high-frequency words in their writing (e.g., with, of, here) and they will increase their use of conventional spelling.

(You may wish to look at Week 2 postings on this site for activities that focus on high-frequency words.)
Purpose
These activities will help children learn to expand their writing by adding details. Adding details in writing helps to paint a clearer mental picture of what the writer is describing for the reader. Children will use a capital letter at the beginning of each sentence and a period or exclamation mark at the end of each sentence that they write.

Activities
Get Ready to Add Details to Writing
1. Hide an object in a bag. Do not tell children what the object is. Describe the object to the children. You might place an orange in the bag and provide clues such as, **It is something to eat. It is very sweet. It is juicy. It is round. It has a peel.** (Do not tell them the colour or they will guess too quickly.) Have them listen to all the clues you give and then tell you what they think the mystery object is. Ask, **What clues, or details, helped you to guess the hidden object?** (You said it was juicy. You said it has a peel.) **Would you have guessed the object if the only clue I said was that it is round?** (no) **Why not?** (because lots of things are round; you didn’t tell us enough about the hidden object)
2. Tell children that writers give their readers lots of details, too, when they are writing. Say, **Details help readers to form a picture in their minds, just like you formed a picture in your mind when I was giving you clues, or details, about the orange.**
3. Tell children that they are going to learn about how to add details in their writing.
4. Show the photo of the kitten to children. Provide time for children to talk about what they see in the photo.
5. Model how to add details to writing. You will need three or four strips of paper for writing sentences.
6. On the first strip of paper, write a simple sentence about the kitten. Have children suggest the sentence. (e.g., The kitten is outside.) Ask children, **How does a sentence begin?** (with a capital letter) **How does a sentence often end?** (with a period)
7. Then ask, **What does the kitten look like?** (It is fluffy. It has stripes.) Write a new sentence on the second strip of paper (e.g., The kitten is fluffy and has stripes.)
8. Continue to ask questions to elicit details, such as, **How do you think the kitten is feeling?** (She is happy. She is excited to be outdoors.) **Why does she seem to be laughing?** (The grass is tickling her paws.) Record the sentences on separate strips of paper.
9. After you have written three or four sentences, put the sentences together and read them aloud. Talk about how adding details about the kitten will help paint a clear picture in the reader’s mind.
10. You may wish to write and display the words **who, when, where, what,** and **why** to use as reminders to help children provide details in their writing. You can tell children that these are the “W” words that will help them to add details in their writing.
Write to Add Details

1. Select a photo that children can describe by adding details. You might choose a photo of themselves engaged in something they love to do, or you might select a photo from a magazine or an online source. You could snap a photo of something children can see out the window or something in their house. Keep the visual simple so children can focus easily on the details.

2. Have children write one sentence about an object or event in the photo on a strip of paper. Remind them to start the sentence with a capital letter and to end the sentence with a period.

3. Then ask them to use the list of “W” words to help them expand their ideas by adding details. You can also prompt them by asking questions such as, What does [the object in the photo] look like? Where is it? Why are the people in the photo [performing a certain action]?

4. Provide children with several strips of paper and have them write one sentence on each paper strip. You may scribe for the children, as necessary. Then have them put the strips of paper together.

5. Have children read what they have written aloud. Give them feedback on the details that they wrote that really helped you to form a mental picture of the object or event that they described in their writing.