



ARDENT WORKSHOP

AN ARDENT WORKSHOP KEEPSAKE

The First-Day Interview

Seven questions to ask your child at the start of the school year.

[Free printable](#) · [one year](#) · [US Letter](#)

A keepsake book — not developmental or educational advice.



START HERE

Twenty minutes, once a year

Print this, sit down with your child on the first day or in the first week of the school year, and write down what they say. Then do it again next September — in the same words, so the two answers can be read side by side.

WHAT TO PRINT

Pages 3 and 4 are the form. Print those two each year; the rest of this file is to read once. Print single-sided, at 100% rather than “fit to page” — the ruled lines are spaced for an adult hand taking dictation.

The five rules

Almost all of the difference between a page you treasure and a page you skim is in how the answers get written down. Most of it is restraint.

- 1 Write it exactly as they say it.** The grammar, the invented words, the wrong facts and all. Every instinct you have will be to tidy it, and tidying it removes the only thing on the page that could not have been written by anybody else.
- 2 Do not correct the answer.** Not the pronunciation, not the history, not the claim that their uncle is the strongest man alive. You are not teaching. You are taking a record.
- 3 Ask, then stop talking.** The first answer is usually the polite one. The second, which arrives after a silence you did not fill, is the one worth having.
- 4 Never ask a follow-up that contains the answer.** “Was it because of the move?” gets you your own theory back in their handwriting. “What happened?” gets you theirs.
- 5 Date it.** A page with no date on it is a story with the timestamps cut off — and the date is the whole reason next year's answer will mean anything.

THE ONE THAT MATTERS MOST

If you only keep one: **write it exactly as they say it.** Every parent who has done this and regretted something regrets smoothing out a five-year-old's sentence. Nobody has ever regretted keeping the grammar wrong.

THE FIRST-DAY INTERVIEW

One year, seven questions

Fill this in during the first weeks of the school year. Twenty minutes. You write, they talk — and you write down what they actually said, not what you would have said for them.

THEIR NAME

TODAY'S DATE

GRADE

HOW OLD THEY ARE

SCHOOL

TEACHER

1 What is your favorite thing right now?

Anything at all — a food, a show, a place, a person, a stuffed animal.

2 Who is your best friend, and what do you do together?

You can name more than one.

3 What do you want to be when you grow up?

It can change every year. That is allowed.

4 What was the hardest thing about this year?

School, home, friends, anything.

THE FIRST-DAY INTERVIEW

Seven questions, continued

5 What is the funniest thing that happened this year?

The one you still laugh about.

6 What are you proud of?

It does not have to be a prize. It can be something only you know about.

7 What do you wish grown-ups understood?

Say it however you want. Nobody is going to argue with the answer.

First-day photo

4 x 6, trimmed

HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT THIS YEAR STARTING

HOW TALL THEY ARE

MEASURED AGAINST (USE THE SAME WALL NEXT YEAR)

WHAT A FILLED ONE LOOKS LIKE

How much to write

The same seven questions, answered by an eight-year-old and written down by a parent who followed the five rules. The answer under each question — the amber line — is the child's own words, transcribed exactly. Nora Vance and Bell Creek Elementary are invented, and so is every name, date and detail on this page.

THE TELL OF A GOOD ONE

Notice what the parent did **not** do below. The grammar is not fixed and "like two weeks" is left in. The friend answer names two people and what they actually do together rather than one name. And the funniest-thing answer is a whole small story with a second day in it, because somebody asked "what happened?" instead of writing down "the smoke alarm."

Grade 3 — the first-day interview

Nora Vance · age 8 · Bell Creek Elementary · Mr. Ferriday · September 4, 2026

1. What is your favorite thing right now?

The trampoline at Aunt Del's. And crunchy tacos but only the ones Dad makes because he puts too much cheese on and doesn't say anything about it.

2. Who is your best friend, and what do you do together?

Priya and also Marcus. Me and Priya have a club at recess for finding good sticks. Marcus is in it but he doesn't come every day.

3. What do you want to be when you grow up?

A vet, but only for big animals. Not hamsters. Or the person who names the paint colors.

4. What was the hardest thing about this year?

When Priya was friends with Cass for a while and I didn't have anybody at lunch. That was like two weeks. Also cursive.

5. What is the funniest thing that happened this year?

Dad said the smoke alarm was broken and it wasn't, he just made the toast wrong, and then it went off again the next day and he did the same face.

6. What are you proud of?

I read the whole chapter book by myself with no help even the hard part in the middle. Nobody knows how long it took me.

7. What do you wish grown-ups understood?

That when we say we're not tired we're actually not tired. And that being quiet doesn't mean something is wrong.

ONE YEAR IS A NICE PAGE. FOURTEEN IS SOMETHING ELSE.

What this page is a slice of

This free sheet gives you one year. What it cannot give you is the payoff the frozen wording exists for, which only arrives once there is more than one year to line up.

Ask the same seven questions in the same words every September, copy each answer onto one page, and this is what you get. One question, five years of the same invented child's answers, read straight down:

Grade	Year	What do you want to be when you grow up?
Pre-K	2022	A dinosaur. A nice one.
Kindergarten	2023	A dinosaur doctor
Grade 1	2024	Vet. Or the person who drives the little train at the zoo.
Grade 2	2025	A vet
Grade 3	2026	A vet, but only for big animals. Not hamsters. Or the person who names the paint colors.
Grade 4		
Grade 5		
...		
Grade 12		

THE FULL BOOK

The **School-Years Keepsake Interview Book** is fourteen matching year-sets of this page, pre-K through grade twelve — plus 84 more questions written for one grade each and no other, 42 alternates, a note on what to expect at every age, a World This Year page, milestones, a parent's note, a last-day page, two closing letters for the spring of senior year, and the Read-Across Ledger above with all fourteen rows. 205 pages in four PDFs, with the Interview Book and the Read-Across Ledger also supplied in A4, bought once and printed again for every child you have.

BEFORE YOU START

The boundary, and where the rest lives

One page to read once. Nothing here needs printing again — the form you reprint each year is pages 3 and 4.

The full **School-Years Keepsake Interview Book** is at ardentworkshop.com/products/school-years-keepsake-interview-book, and this free page has a home of its own at ardentworkshop.com/resources/first-day-interview-page if you ever need to print it again.

WHAT THIS IS AND IS NOT

A keepsake — a page of questions and blank lines for recording a child's own answers. Not developmental, educational, psychological or medical advice, and nothing here measures how a child is doing. Children differ enormously and none of them are behind. If something about your child's development, mood or schooling concerns you, that is a conversation for a pediatrician, a teacher or a counselor.

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