

# Teaching writing

Guide for Years 1–3

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Writing provides young learners with powerful opportunities to learn about themselves and their connections to the world. Through writing, they organise their thoughts, remember important information, solve problems and reflect. They learn how to communicate for specific purposes and audiences. Many children engage in roleplay and experimental writing before Year 1; they write using both a pencil and the voice. Drawings, symbols, letters and numerals are produced to communicate a message. Talk surrounds their written graphics.

Some young writers may begin by selecting an idea, an experience or a thought to be put into print and discovering some strategy, such as drawings, for making that thought visible. Others may begin by forming the print and using spoken language to explain the meaning of their graphics. Teachers listen, help children select some item that is significant to them, then help them write. Children observe and listen as teachers scribe dictated text that accompanies art work and class displays. Children develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle as they begin to incorporate names, lists, labels and notes into their writing/drawing.

As children gain knowledge about written language through shared reading and writing activities, they begin to use spelling approximations to write words; they also copy words from resources such as books, charts and other print resources. They produce texts which are structured according to the patterns of spoken language, for example:

- contextual information is omitted, so texts may seem disjointed
- information is linked by adding on to existing information (and ... and ...).

## Building a supportive writing community

In Years 1–3, children write daily. Teachers demonstrate how to capture experiences in written language and create a permanent record of what happened. This record, a text, remains constant and can be read over and over again by those involved in the experience and shared with others who were not. Through shared, collaborative writing teachers model the process of:

- capturing an experience in written language
- communicating personal thoughts, ideas and opinions in written language
- discovering words to represent people, places, things, ideas and concepts
- constructing texts according to purpose, for example, recounts, descriptions and explanations
- engaging audience interest
- editing texts to clarify meaning through choice of vocabulary, the sequence of ideas, the order of words and punctuation
- responding to ideas and information in the text
- talking about the craft of the writer.

Teachers foster children's development of positive attitudes towards writing by creating a mutually supportive community of learners where efforts are valued and celebrated.

## The teaching focus

In Years 1–3, teachers establish meaningful contexts in which children can be explicitly taught about writing and the ways in which written language works to effectively and appropriately communicate meaning.

Through daily writing activities, teachers:

- promote positive attitudes towards writing
- develop children’s concepts about writing and about themselves as writers
- foster the development of each child’s personal voice
- establish routines and procedures for talking about children’s own writing
- develop an understanding that purpose and audience influence language choices (contextual factors)
- build subject matter and vocabulary knowledge
- develop active writing strategies:
  - the concept of a sentence
  - how ideas cohere and cluster
  - ways of indicating sentence boundaries
  - grammatical patterns within and across sentences
- explicitly teach textual features of foundational text types such as recount, description and explanation, through shared writing and reading experiences
- provide opportunities for children to practise describing and explaining experiences and information by producing written, visual and electronic texts (emails)
- teach children to apply knowledge of foundational text types in writing reports, simple persuasive texts and, in Year 3, using the stages of a simple narrative
- teach strategic spelling of single words based on phonology, visual patterning and simple morphemes
- teach editing and proofreading skills
- model ways of thinking about and responding to texts written by peers
- teach prewriting, conferencing and celebration routines.

Children gradually develop control over the writing process and some technical aspects of written language (spelling, grammar, punctuation). Teachers have a wide tolerance for children’s technical errors in writing. They focus on meaning, and recognise that writers need a period of time to get their ideas down, test them out and develop confidence in their personal voice.

# Planning modelled writing lessons

Modelled writing lessons may occur at any stage of a unit of work and may focus on any stage of the writing process. During modelled writing lessons teachers think aloud about the writing process to draw attention to specific points and help novice writers gain insights into the decisions of experienced writers.

Children watch and listen as the teacher produces a text on a chart, a whiteboard or an OHT, accompanied by a spoken commentary that supports the writing and makes visible the reasoning behind language choices. Teachers think aloud about how they produce a text, for example, concepts of print, text structure, vocabulary, grammar and cohesion, as they produce a text for a specific purpose and audience. Modelled writing lessons are carefully planned with a specific focus before, during and after writing.

## Before writing

### Step 1: Identifying the writing task in context and

### Step 2: Accessing prior knowledge

Identify/negotiate the writing task.

Establish or review children's knowledge of the topic.

Record ideas and information in a systematic summary of shared knowledge.

Talk about the social purpose and audience for the writing.

Introduce or review an exemplar of a text type appropriate to the purpose.

Introduce unfamiliar vocabulary.

Discuss the model text:

- print
- images
- generic structure (stages of the text)
- language choices.

Provide opportunities for talk about the topic.

### Step 3: Designing a writing plan

Use the summary of knowledge to plan the parts of the whole text.

Group and sequence ideas to be included in different stages of the text.

Think aloud to make the decision-making process available to children; provide explanations and reasons as information is sorted and organised.

# During writing

## Step 4: Composing the first draft

Use a whiteboard or chart to write a first draft. As you write, think aloud about the grammatical choices you make in capturing the information in a text.

Model spelling approximation and other spelling strategies.

Briefly review and edit the text yourself:

- Does it make sense?
- Is the text like the model?

Think aloud about the possible need for images to support the text. Decide where the images could be placed.

## Step 5: Rethinking and revising

Invite another adult to provide constructive feedback on the draft (focus on meaning).

Seek feedback from the children:

- Is the meaning clear?
- Is the message communicated effectively?
- What grammatical changes might improve the effectiveness of the writing?

Rethink and revise the draft based on feedback.

## Step 6: Editing and proofreading

Use an editing checklist to proofread, then correct spelling and punctuation errors. Think aloud about the reasons for your editorial changes.

After writing

## Step 7: Sharing writing or publishing

Share your writing with the group by reading the piece and inviting children to respond.

OR

Discuss publishing options for your writing and establish a publishing plan, which might include:

- print/electronic format
- scanned images
- borders
- font
- colour.

# Scaffolding the learning

Young writers are explicitly taught about language through integrated listening, speaking reading, viewing and writing activities, and learning is scaffolded in daily writing activities. Teachers begin by demonstrating effective strategies for writing through shared and modelled writing accompanied by a think-aloud commentary. As children gain some proficiency, teachers move to coaching and guiding. Daily writing is embedded in learning activities across the curriculum so that children have opportunities to practise writing for real audiences, writing to learn and writing to demonstrate learning.

Teachers scaffold children’s learning during formal and informal conferences and by modelling ways of reflecting on developing drafts during and after writing.

## Before writing

Scaffolding process	Teaching focus
<p>Before writing, teachers provide learning activities in which children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage in purposeful talk about the topic and texts</li> <li>• explore relevant subject matter</li> <li>• develop an understanding of the writing task.</li> <li>• talk about the writing process and active writing strategies (identify a task, set writing goals, design a writing plan, compose a first draft, conference, revise, edit and proofread)</li> <li>• identify personal writing goals</li> <li>• generate ideas</li> <li>• develop a writing plan:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– in Year 1, teachers model the use of simple planning formats</li> <li>– in Years 2 and 3 children are guided to complete their own planning formats.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies for planning and composing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active writing strategies</li> <li>• Task demands</li> <li>• Goal-setting</li> <li>• Designing a writing plan</li> </ul> <p><b>Metacognition</b></p> <p><b>Text, purpose and audience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject matter</li> <li>• Reader–writer relationships</li> </ul> <p><b>Textual features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text types</li> <li>• Stages of a text</li> <li>• Organisational patterns</li> <li>• Sentence structure</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Grammar</li> <li>• Cohesion</li> <li>• Word structure</li> <li>• Punctuation</li> </ul>

## Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
<b>Step 1: Identifying the writing task in context and Step 2: Accessing prior knowledge</b>	
<p><b>Generating ideas (prior knowledge)</b></p> <p><b>Researching</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening, reading and viewing texts</li> <li>• Sharing prior knowledge</li> <li>• Experimenting</li> <li>• Field trips/excursions</li> </ul> <p><b>Developing vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word sorts and word bingo</li> <li>• Speaking games and activities</li> <li>• Reading</li> </ul> <p><b>Classifying ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concept maps/webs, T-charts</li> </ul> <p><b>Writing collaboratively</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared events or activities</li> <li>• Description of people, places, things</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I know ... need to know ... have I learnt (KWL)?</li> <li>• What is my main topic?</li> <li>• What sort of text is best suited to my purpose?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are you going to write about?</li> <li>• How do you generate your ideas for writing?</li> <li>• How does listening or viewing different texts help you with your writing?</li> <li>• How did you choose the resources you used? (Year 3)</li> <li>• How were they helpful? (Year 3)</li> <li>• What strategy did you use to organise your information before you began writing? (Year 3)</li> </ul>
<b>Step 3: Designing a writing plan</b>	
<p><b>Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five Ws: who, what, when, where, why</li> </ul> <p><b>Organising main ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storyboard or story ladder</li> <li>• Sequencing chart</li> <li>• Paragraph frame</li> <li>• Top-level structuring</li> </ul> <p><b>Describing feelings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literary sociograms</li> <li>• Plot profiles</li> </ul> <p><b>Sharing writing plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With peers</li> <li>• With teacher</li> </ul> <p><b>Reviewing plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking to elaborate, clarify ideas</li> </ul> <p><b>Developing metacognitive awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher and children negotiate an entry about planning for the class writers notebook</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do I plan to do with this text, e.g. entertain, inform?</li> <li>• What point do I want to make?</li> <li>• Who will be my audience?</li> <li>• How do I want my audience to react?</li> <li>• What ideas should I include?</li> <li>• What organisational pattern will I use: list/description comparison/contrast cause/effect question/answer problem/solution</li> </ul> <p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you generate your ideas for writing?</li> <li>• What helps you get organised for writing?</li> </ul>

## During writing

Scaffolding process	Teaching focus
<p>During writing, teachers establish routines that provide opportunities for children to think through their ideas and put thoughts into words. In the early years, shared writing is an effective teaching strategy. It holds children's attention because they are involved in the joint production of the text, while at the same time allowing teachers to model different aspects of the writing process. Teachers also model the process of reflection as part of explicit teaching and conferencing.</p> <p>During shared writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers and children produce texts collaboratively, for example, recounts of shared experiences, reports, stories, instructions and explanations</li> <li>• children participate in contributing, selecting and organising ideas, and in making appropriate language choices based on purpose, subject matter and audience</li> <li>• teachers introduce new vocabulary (sight words and topic words) in meaningful contexts</li> <li>• teachers explicitly teach aspects of language (vocabulary, text structure, cohesion, grammar and punctuation)</li> <li>• children participate in drafting, revising, editing and publishing writing</li> <li>• teachers and children negotiate entries in class reflection books, for example, writers' notebooks.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies for planning and composing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active writing strategies</li> </ul> <p><b>Metacognition</b></p> <p><b>Text, purpose and audience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reader–writer relationships</li> <li>• Subject matter</li> <li>• Appropriateness of texts</li> <li>• Effectiveness of texts</li> </ul> <p><b>Textual features</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stages of a text</li> <li>• Organisational patterns</li> <li>• Paragraphing</li> <li>• Sentence structure</li> <li>• Vocabulary</li> <li>• Grammar</li> <li>• Cohesion</li> <li>• Word structure</li> <li>• Punctuation</li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge about collaborative learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routines for conferencing</li> <li>• Group work procedures</li> <li>• Conferencing strategies and formats</li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge about publishing elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handwriting</li> <li>• Layout</li> <li>• Graphics</li> </ul>

## Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
<b>Step 4: Composing the first draft</b>	
<p><b>Encoding meaning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing a draft based on an individual or shared writing plan</li> <li>• Using vocabulary charts and other resources</li> <li>• Using try-out pads for spelling attempts</li> <li>• Using class spelling charts</li> <li>• Reading and rereading to check meaning</li> <li>• Developing metacognitive awareness</li> <li>• Teacher and children negotiate an entry for the class writers' notebook</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children</li> <li>• Does my writing sound like speech or written language?</li> <li>• Will my reader understand these ideas?</li> <li>• Does my writing make sense?</li> <li>• Are my sentences in a suitable order?</li> <li>• Have I used a suitable organisation pattern to share my ideas clearly and logically?</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• How does what you know about reading help with writing?</li> <li>• What strategy helped you organise your ideas?</li> <li>• How might the TV programs you watch help you as a writer?</li> </ul>

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
<b>Step 5: Rethinking and revising</b>	
<p><b>Crafting and editing meaning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading and rereading draft to check meaning</li> <li>• Using author’s chair to share own draft and respond to drafts of others</li> <li>• Conferencing in pairs to identify parts that don’t make sense or seem to have information missing</li> <li>• Using an editing checklist to identify breakdowns in meaning</li> <li>• Editing the draft for clarity and accuracy of meaning</li> </ul> <p><b>Developing metacognitive awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher and children negotiate an entry for the class grammar notebook</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have I used suitable words and sentence patterns?</li> <li>• Do I sound like I want to sound in this situation?</li> <li>• Will my reader understand my message, laugh at the funny parts, believe what I write?</li> <li>• Is there anything that I need to change to make my meaning clearer or to be more interesting to my readers?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What helped you know what to do when you finished your draft?</li> <li>• Do you have enough information to support your ideas?</li> <li>• How did you know what words were missing?</li> <li>• Is there anything new that you know about words, sentences or whole texts?</li> <li>• In what ways do you think listening to someone else’s ideas helps you with your writing?</li> </ul>
<b>Step 6: Editing and proofreading</b>	
<p><b>Editing meaning and print</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking and adjusting meaning, with teacher support</li> <li>• Reading and rereading draft for correctness and accuracy of print (spelling, grammar, punctuation)</li> <li>• Using an editing checklist</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do my sentences make sense?</li> <li>• Are the words spelt correctly?</li> <li>• Have I used correct punctuation?</li> <li>• Does my presentation make the important parts of my writing obvious?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which strategies helped you during writing?</li> <li>• How does listening to stories help with your writing?</li> </ul>

## After writing

Scaffolding process	Teaching focus
<p>After writing children share their written work. Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• value and celebrate children's efforts</li> <li>• provide opportunities for further reflective thinking about the writing process and the writing</li> <li>• collaborate with children to select pieces of writing for their folios that children believe reflect their growth and competence as writers.</li> <li>• encourage children to explain their selections using appropriate terminology.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Metacognition</b>  <b>Strategies for planning and composing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active writing strategies</li> <li>• Criteria for evaluating writing</li> <li>• Texts and textual features</li> </ul>

## Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
<b>Step 6: Sharing writing or publishing</b>	
<p><b>Evaluating texts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on and evaluating own writing and the writing of peers using a simple criteria sheet</li> <li>• Identifying strengths and new personal writing goals</li> <li>• Using a class (or personal in Yr 3) journal to record ideas that can be used again, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ideas for writing</li> <li>– new and interesting words</li> <li>– useful graphic organisers</li> <li>– strategies that work</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Developing metacognitive awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers and children negotiate an entry into the class writers notebook based on discussions around texts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What have I done?</li> <li>• What can I do to improve my writing?</li> <li>• How can I use what I have learnt?</li> <li>• Do I enjoy writing? Why?</li> </ul> <p><b>Teachers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does what you know about reading different books help you when you are writing?</li> <li>• What is good writing like?</li> </ul>