

Teaching writing

Guide for Years 4–7

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In the middle years, writing provides 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, reflect and learn how to communicate for specific purposes and audiences. Teachers recognise that students' school writing experiences differ from the everyday writing experiences of most people. School writing tasks often require longer, more complex print, multimodal and electronic texts. Making connections between community texts and the more formal texts of school and learning is essential in motivating students and fostering a productive writing classroom.

Building a supportive writing community

The quality of writing is enhanced when students see the topic as worthwhile and relevant to their lives and the writer has:

- an interest in the topic
- a depth of knowledge and understanding about the subject matter
- experience with the text type
- confidence as a writer
- motivation to write.

As in the early years, a key factor in motivating students to write and enjoy writing is the nature of the learning community. In a supportive writing community, teachers:

- model the writing process by producing and sharing their own writing with students
- think aloud about the decisions and language choices they make in producing texts
- establish routines and structures for disciplined interactions in which students talk about their texts, and share, conference and respond to texts with the teacher or peers
- build knowledge about language and literacy through shared, guided and independent reading activities that focus on the craft of the writer
- provide specific constructive feedback on drafts using a common terminology to talk about language
- model reflective strategies as texts are drafted, crafted and edited
- share and celebrate students' writing.

The teaching focus

Expectations for Years 4–7 focus on students' ability to use their language knowledge effectively and appropriately in producing a wide range of text types, in writing to learn and in writing to demonstrate learning. Teachers continue to embed writing activities in holistic units of work.

Teaching focuses on:

- the writing process and students' understandings of themselves as writers
- active writing strategies required to achieve particular purposes, such as writing to learn or writing to demonstrate learning
- features of a wide range of text types that entertain, evoke emotion, persuade, take a personal stance, explain, seek and give information or evaluate messages and information
- features of narratives, reports and expositions that have embedded recounts, descriptions and explanations
- patterns of language features (vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, thematisation, nominalisation) and literary devices across whole texts
- variations in language use across different contexts and in different roles and relationships
- how language choices can include or exclude different audiences
- vocabulary and general knowledge about people, places, things and concepts
- strategies for selecting information and crafting language to produce print, electronic and multimodal texts
- strategic spelling of multisyllabic words based on visual patterning, morphology and etymological knowledge
- editing and proofreading strategies
- skills in constructively responding to texts written by peers.

Planning modelled writing lessons

In Years 4–7, teachers and students collaboratively explore the way texts are crafted during read-aloud, shared and guided reading activities. Teachers draw on this shared knowledge during modelled writing lessons as they:

- demonstrate the production of more complex narrative and information texts using print and electronic media
- model the use of different text structures, grammatical patterns and vocabulary to engage, inform, persuade and influence different audiences
- think aloud about the writing process to focus attention on specific things
- demonstrate the reasoning behind choices that writers make.

Modelled writing lessons may occur at any stage of a unit of work and may focus on any stage of the writing process. Teachers may choose to model the whole process during one lesson by writing and revising a short text or may return several times to the same text and model the process of rethinking and revising their text over time.

Before writing

Step 1: Identifying or negotiating the writing task in context and

Step 2: Accessing prior knowledge

Establish or review students' knowledge of the topic and the text type.

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

Talk about the social purpose, and reader–writer relationships.

Discuss, compare and contrast model texts:

- print
- images
- generic structure
- vocabulary (denotative and connotative)
- grammatical choices
- literary devices.

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 students; 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 decisions you make as the text is produced.

Model choices made in writing, e.g.:

- subject matter
- vocabulary to suit author voice
- vocabulary to suit the topic
- text structure
- grammar
- spelling strategies.

Briefly review and edit the text yourself:

- does it make sense?
- does your voice as author come through?

Think aloud about the possible need for images to support the text.

Consider where the images could be placed.

Step 5: Rethinking and revising

Invite students to provide constructive feedback on the draft (focus on meaning):

- Is the meaning clear?
- Is the message communicated effectively?
- What changes (in vocabulary, grammar, generic structure) 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; correct spelling and punctuation.

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 students to respond.

OR

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

- medium for publication
- print/electronic format
- scanning images
- borders
- font (style, size and colour).

Scaffolding for independent writing

Scaffolding is the process of developing students' abilities to approach a writing task independently by:

- providing a supportive environment
- providing guided task support through directed activities and frameworks
- teaching the language and processes to approach the writing task.

Before writing

Scaffolding process	Teaching focus
<p>Before writing, teachers provide learning activities in which students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talk about the topic and texts • explore subject matter • develop an understanding of the writing task and activate prior knowledge • make decisions about planning and designing their texts • identify active writing strategies • set personal writing goals. 	<p>Strategies for planning and composing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active writing strategies • Task demands • Goal-setting • Designing a writing plan <p>Metacognition</p> <p>Text, purpose and audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject matter • Reader–writer relationships <p>Textual features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text types • Stages of a text • Organisational patterns • Sentence structure • Vocabulary • Grammar • Cohesion • Word structure • Punctuation

Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
<p>Step 1: Identifying or negotiating the writing task in context</p> <p>Step 2: Accessing prior knowledge</p>	
<p>Generating ideas (prior knowledge)</p> <p>Researching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening, reading and viewing texts • Sharing prior knowledge • Experimenting • Field trips or excursions <p>Developing vocabulary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word sorts and word bingo • Speaking games and activities • Reading <p>Classifying ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept maps/webs, T-charts <p>Shared writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared events or activities • Description of people, places, things 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I know ... need to know ... have I learnt (KWL)? • What is my main topic? • What sort of text is best suited to my purpose? <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are you going to write about? • How do you generate your ideas for writing? • How does listening or viewing different texts help you with your writing? • How did you choose the resources you used? • How were they helpful? • What strategy did you use to organise your information before you began writing?

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
Step 3: Designing a writing plan	
<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five Ws: who, what, when, where, why <p>Organising main ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storyboard/story ladder • Sequencing chart • Paragraph frame • Top-level structuring <p>Describing feelings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literary sociograms • Plot profiles <p>Sharing writing plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With peers • With teacher <p>Reviewing plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to elaborate, clarify ideas <p>Developing metacognitive awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may contribute to a class journal to record writing and reading connections, and/or maintain a writer's reflective notebook 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I plan to do with this text, e.g. entertain, inform? • What point do I want to make? • Who will be my audience? • How do I want my audience to react? • What would an audience like this respond to, for example, humour, emotive appeals, shock tactics? • What ideas should I include? • What point do I want to get across? • What organisational pattern will I use? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – list or description – comparison or contrast – cause and effect – problem and solution – question and answer <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you generate your ideas for writing? • What helps you get organised for writing?

During writing

Scaffolding process	Teaching focus
<p>During shared writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers and students collaboratively produce various texts, for example, recounts of shared experiences, reports, stories, instructions and explanations • students contribute ideas and information; teachers scaffold the learning experience so that students participate in selecting and organising ideas, and in making appropriate language choices based on purpose, subject matter and audience • teachers introduce new vocabulary (sight words and topic words) in meaningful contexts • teachers focus on aspects of language (vocabulary, text structure, cohesion, grammar and punctuation) that need to be explicitly taught to the whole class, groups of students or individuals • teachers encourage students to ask themselves reflective questions as they write • teachers engage in formative assessment as they talk with students about their developing drafts • students participate in drafting, revising, editing and publishing writing • students maintain a writer's reflective notebook to record new knowledge and understandings. 	<p>Strategies for planning and composing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active writing strategies. <p>Metacognition</p> <p>Knowledge about contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader–writer relationships • Subject matter • Appropriateness of texts • Effectiveness of texts <p>Textual features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stages of a text • Organisational patterns and paragraphing • Sentence structure • Vocabulary • Grammar • Cohesion • Word structure • Punctuation. <p>Knowledge about collaborative learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routines for conferencing • Group work procedures • Conferencing strategies and formats. <p>Knowledge about publishing elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handwriting • Layout • Graphics

Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
Step 4: Composing the first draft	
<p>Encoding meaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a draft based on an individual or shared writing plan • Using vocabulary charts and other resources when making word choices • Using try-out pads for spelling attempts • Using class spelling charts • Reading and rereading drafts to check meaning. <p>Developing metacognitive awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may contribute to a class journal to record writing and reading connections, and/or maintain a writer's reflective notebook 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my writing sound like speech or written language? • Will my reader understand these ideas? • Will this have the desired effect on my audience? Will they think, for example, that I'm a person like them, an authoritative expert, a trustworthy source, inspiring? • Have I used a suitable organisation pattern to share my ideas clearly and logically? <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways does talking before writing helping you? • What strategy did you find most helpful for organising information? • How has exploring different authors' perspectives on an issue helped you prepare for writing?
Step 5: Rethinking and revising	
<p>Crafting and editing meaning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and rereading draft to check meaning • Using "author's chair" to share own draft and respond to others' drafts • Conferencing in pairs to identify parts that don't make sense or seem to have information missing • Using an editing checklist and codes to note breakdowns in meaning • Editing the draft for clarity and accuracy of meaning. <p>Developing metacognitive awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students contribute to a personal or class grammar notebook. 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have I used suitable words and sentence patterns? • Do I sound like I want to sound in this situation? • Will my reader understand my message, e.g. laugh at the funny parts, believe what I write? • Is there anything that I need to change to make the meaning clearer and be more interesting to my readers? <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have enough information to support your ideas? • How did you know what words were missing? • How does talking with your peers help you to express your opinion when you are writing? • Explain how you used a thesaurus to help with your revisions • How does it help you to listen to someone else read your writing?

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
Step 6: Editing and proofreading:	
<p>Editing meaning and print</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting appropriate medium for publication or sharing, with teacher support • Reading and rereading draft for correctness and accuracy of the print (spelling, grammar, punctuation) • Using an editing checklist and codes to proofread and edit print <p>Developing metacognitive awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may maintain a writer's reflective notebook 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is my text grammatically correct? • Are the words spelt correctly? • Have I used correct punctuation? • Does my presentation allow the audience to focus on important parts of the text and my real meaning? <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies did you find useful during writing? • What do you know about different media texts that could help you when you are writing? • What editing strategies helped you? • What words or grammar did you use specifically to achieve your aims, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – include your audience – persuade your audience • sound like an expert.

After writing

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

Effective teaching strategies

Examples of activities	Reflection/conferencing questions
Step 7: Sharing writing or publishing	
<p>Evaluating texts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflecting on and evaluating own writing and the writing of peers using criteria sheets • Identifying strengths and new personal writing goals • Using a class or personal journal to record ideas that can be used again, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ideas for writing – new and interesting words – useful graphic organisers – strategies that work. <p>Developing metacognitive awareness</p> <p>Students use a reflective journal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened during writing? • How do I feel about it? • What did I learn? 	<p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have I done? • What can I do to improve my writing? • How can I use what I have learnt? • Do I enjoy writing? Why? • Was my message effective? • Did the audience respond as I expected? <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does what you know about reading different books help you when you are writing? • What is good writing like? • How do you use your writer's notebook to help you during the writing process?