

## Writing at KS1

Writing is an amazingly complex activity. The writer has to deal with many skills simultaneously:

- thinking what to write about
- selecting appropriate content, supporting information and detail
- linking it all together
- layout of the text
- grammar
- spelling
- punctuation
- letter formation and legibility

**Even skilled and talented writers find it impossible to control all these aspects simultaneously. Children cannot manage all the demands of writing at the same time.**

To make writing more accessible we need to

- reduce the complexity of the task
- reduce the demands on working memory
- focus on one or two aspects at a time until new skills are learned
- provide time to practise skills with support and independently

### What do writers at the earliest stages need?

- many opportunities to write freely
- to see demonstrations of how people write
- to see teachers and other adults using writing in a variety of ways
- to see their spoken language changed into written form
- many opportunities to work with the teacher, individually or in a small group, on different aspects of writing
- opportunities to choose their own topics based on their experiences and interests
- a supportive climate for writing where efforts and approximations are accepted and praised
- comments which focus first on the message, rather than spelling, handwriting etc

### What do developing writers need?

Writers who are developing control of the process still need the help outlined for the earliest stages, and in addition:

- to see demonstrations of, and learn to use, an ongoing revision process i.e. to write, read, reread and rewrite as they go along

- to use a range of different text forms, based on models which they have analysed
- to share, reflect on and discuss their work in supportive situations
- to write for a range of audiences as well as the teacher, even if they have to be contrived at times e.g. a letter from Goldilocks to the Three Bears
- to understand who they are writing for and why

**REMEMBER: PURPOSE + AUDIENCE = FORM**

A balanced writing programme includes **Modelled Writing** where the teacher shows the children how writers work (e.g. thinking aloud; stopping and starting; having a go; making mistakes; changing things; reading and rereading)

**Model** writing by 'thinking aloud' about:

- what to write
- how to start
- how to choose and link relevant information
- how to present information and ideas
- how to make writing more interesting for the reader
- how to write a new text form
- how to 'have a go' (e.g. an idea, a spelling)
- how to use classroom resources e.g. word banks, wall displays, prompt cards
- how to revise and edit

After modelling, always go over the main teaching points to give children a clear reference point for their own writing

**Shared writing** is a joint construction of the text between the teacher and the children, either in the whole class session or in small group work. As the teacher acts as scribe, the children are freed to concentrate on the compositional aspects of the work and to contribute a wide range of ideas.

**Guided writing** is an interim step before the children write independently. Aspects of the writing process can be targeted according to ability or need. The teacher's role is to guide, support and encourage the children to try out ideas and skills they have seen demonstrated.

Children need many opportunities for **independent writing** in a variety of forms based on both teacher guidance and their own choice of topic. The purpose of independent writing is to put into practice the ideas, structures and skills they have seen demonstrated in **modelled** and **shared writing** and tried with support in **guided writing**.

Independent need not always mean **individual** writing - it is often a good idea to let children write **collaboratively**, in pairs or small groups, without adult support.

### Supporting children with writing difficulties

- **Teacher modelling** is very helpful for all children, but particularly for those having difficulties, as they sometimes think they are the only ones in the class (or the world!) who can't write. Seeing an adult thinking things out, struggling with ideas, 'having a go', can give children confidence to try for themselves. Remember to limit the focus and the number of objectives in any session - it is often best to concentrate on either the composing or the secretarial aspects, rather than tackling the two together.
- **New forms of writing or text types** need to be introduced in modelled/shared sessions for the whole class and groups before children work independently. The focus is on the content, language and layout with the teacher as scribe, before tackling the secretarial aspects in independent work.
- Encourage **short, real life writing** e.g. letters, e-mail (a quick reply is very motivating); notes (Post-its/memo board/short message to another adult); posters, adverts, signs, labels, captions; lists of all kinds; greetings cards for every occasion.
- Use **writing frames** of all kinds, e.g. sentence starters; simple patterns; outline plans. They provide a clear structure and often help those children who find getting started very difficult. Although aimed mainly at KS2/3, Sandy Brownjohn's book 'To Rhyme or Not To Rhyme?' has a wealth of rewarding, accessible ideas for simple frameworks which can be adapted for KS1. A 'health warning' about writing frames - some able children never need them and find them constricting; the best frames are the ones you construct with the children; and they are not 'fill the gap with one word' exercises.
- Encourage **collaborative** work, from whole class Shared Writing through small group work to paired working. It is less threatening to reluctant writers when they can share the responsibility; it encourages a lot of talk and discussion about writing; children are more likely to take risks and have a go; it promotes confidence and enjoyment.
- **Written conversations** are time consuming but often motivating to the reluctant writer. Write one or more questions for the child to answer; encourage replies and questions for you to answer. You can tailor the questions to individual interests, and encourage longer replies by making the questions open-ended e.g. 'What do you think about..?'
- **Read aloud** to children frequently from a wide variety of texts, and build up a collection of story/poetry/song tapes. **Repeated rereadings** of favourites gives children a bank of language and story structures to draw on in their own writing.

Older children can read their own stories on to tape (with an accompanying book) for younger children.

- Show children how to **brainstorm** ideas and words before writing; jot down ideas and keywords on Post-its or small pieces of paper, then arrange into some sort of order. Model 'topic webs' and other diagrammatic ways of planning.
- Provide **prompts** which children are taught how to use e.g. What to do if I can't spell a word. (This prompt card could be made by the class in Shared Writing of instructions, with a real purpose!) Other useful prompts are alphabet picture/letter sheets or an alphabet letter strip; 'tricky words' from the high frequency list; personal word lists; letter formation reminders; b/d card

Useful books: Writing - Developmental Continuum (0-7312-2357-8); Writing - Resource Book(0-7312-2358-6) from 'First Steps' Worldwide edition (Rigby Heinemann); 'To Rhyme Or Not To Rhyme?' Sandy Brownjohn (Hodder and Stoughton 0-340-61148-0)

JMS/QA/2/00

## Children's Writing and their Drawings

A five year old boy opened his book and picked up his pencil. 'What are you going to write?' I asked. 'How should I know?' he replied. 'I haven't drawn it yet.'

\* \* \* \* \*

This anecdote in Lucy McCormick Calkins book, 'The Art of Writing' will strike a chord with many Early Years teachers. The boy was using drawing as a *rehearsal* for writing, not just a prelude to it. Rehearsal in this sense does not mean planning a topic, or selecting material, or even considering the reader, but rather working in the 'here and now' without an idea of the final product.

The act of drawing and the picture itself both provide a supportive scaffolding within which the child can construct a piece of writing. By switching back and forth between drawing and writing, he can move from the relief and stability of one medium to the challenge of the other.

At this stage most of the child's meaning is carried in the picture. In time, children learn to create explicit texts which stand alone, but in early writing attempts, meaning is more often embedded in the picture rather than the text.

Drawing also helps children with the problem of *selection* of material from a whole range of activities and ideas. Drawings tend to hold the world still for a moment, often in a collection of objects placed here and there on the page. It is a big step forward when action and relationships enter the drawings, allowing the texts to change into narratives or chronologically ordered books.

At this stage, children need an assortment of drawing and writing materials, allowing them to experiment with different ways of 'mark making' on lined and unlined paper, on individual sheets and in small, informal books.

While drawing is a support for children's early writing, there comes a point when we need to discourage regarding drawing as an integral part of the *writing* process. It may seem strange to recommend drawing as an essential part of writing and then, later, to discourage it. We must watch for the signs indicating that a child no longer needs to weave drawing and writing together.

So, we watch to see if drawing is limiting rather than extending the child's range. For example, a child who is skilled at or loves to draw a particular character or scene, may have nothing to say about it. Sometimes children are rushing to finish writing so they can draw *afterwards*. Or they are still relying on the drawing to carry the main part of the message, and limiting the writing to extended captions. They need to realise that words, as well as pictures, can set the scene and describe characters.

At this stage, we could try using little books made of five or six sheets of lined paper, rather than pages with white spaces for drawing. The message is that the paper itself will pull children towards writing texts which can stand alone.

Similarly, at this stage, children need to experience and use *talking* to perform the rehearsal function, instead of drawing.