



Teaching writing in secondary English:

Approaches to building confidence, enjoyment and achievement

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“Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions”

(Sagan, 1980)

“Reading and writing are important because we read and write our world as well as our texts, and are read and written by them in turn. Texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where the structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable. This is why the humble subject ‘English’ is so important” (Scholes, 1985, p. xi).

Introduction

As English teachers, we aspire for our students to be capable, motivated and confident writers. But the challenges we face in engaging our students in purposeful writing, in generating their enthusiasm for writing and in developing their writing skills, knowledge and attitudes are substantial and multifaceted. It is the case that the social and private worlds of many of the young people we teach are increasingly framed and negotiated through written language that is instantaneous, often fragmented, non-linear and typically conveyed at the ‘point of utterance’ as direct speech transferred through a digital platform. Text messaging, Instagram, Twitter, blogging and other forms of social media have become normative channels for (amongst other things) constructing identity; forming and sustaining relationships; defining an individual’s place in the world; and interacting in a myriad of contexts from the local to the global.

Immersed as they are in the affordances of digital technology, many of our students are dextrous and confident when it comes to managing the conventions of idiomatic and transactional writing associated with social networking and other forms of colloquial online communication. When it comes to the more complex writing demands of the school curriculum, however, students’ proficiency in the range of required literate forms (such as, for example, the discursive essay and the sustained narrative) remains fundamental to their academic success and foremost among the pedagogical challenges of English teachers. While young people are writing more and more regularly than at any other time in



human history, their everyday modes of written communication and their motivations for such writing are not readily transferrable to the academic context of school writing that privileges and rewards “written, literate English [as] a distinct dialect from spoken English, almost a separate language that has to be acquired” (Givon, 1993). Equipping students with the wide repertoire of writing capacities necessary to succeed in the world of school and work depends in large part on the pedagogical and theoretical choices of their teacher.

Our purpose here is to offer English teachers and other educators working with adolescents, a range of practical, research-based approaches for developing their students’ proclivity for and proficiency and confidence in writing, within and beyond the school context. The content of this paper is based on a professional learning course delivered in 2015 through the NSW Teachers’ Federation Centre for Professional Learning. Where appropriate, hyperlinks to web and print-based resources are included.

Our intention is to:

- revisit the principles of effective writing pedagogy;
- synthesise the significant understandings derived from research in the field;
- address a number of the challenges of teaching writing in secondary English;
- identify some proven strategies that can be simply adapted for integration into teaching and learning programs; and
- highlight a range of practical applications of resources in the classroom.

Intermittently throughout the paper, we offer invitations to write as a hands-on interlude. These brief activities are intended as ‘starters’ for more extended writing and can be adapted for a range of purposes in classroom teaching.

Some Myths About Writing

Before exploring the research-based principles of teaching writing and what these mean for teaching, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider some of the myths about writing that can operate as impediments to the design and implementation of a successful writing program.

These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The ‘product’ of writing is more important than the ‘process’ of writing;
2. Only a select minority or inspired elite are or can be accomplished writers;
3. Writing tasks should be undertaken in the main by students in their own time outside of class;
4. Writing is an activity mostly/most appropriately undertaken by an individual;
5. Students won’t be motivated to write unless it is assessable, so all writing must be linked to an assessment task;
6. Students must be taught techniques and grammar before they can begin to write effectively;
7. Creative writing is less important in secondary school than essay writing, especially in the senior years;



8. Creative writing and critical writing must be taught separately;
9. Creative writing is difficult to teach and cannot be rigorously assessed;
10. Form and content can be separated. Form does not follow function;
11. Writing to learn the conventions of privileged forms (such as, for example, persuasive texts, narratives, essays) is an end in itself;
12. The quality of a student's writing does not depend on quantity and quality of their reading;
13. To teach writing effectively you do not need to be a writer.

Each of these limiting myths has accreted around the pedagogy of writing, and constitute a set of common assumptions about the nature of the writing process; the place and purpose of writing in students' lives; the false dichotomy between the creative and the critical; the role of the teacher in facilitating writing development; and the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on student engagement, enjoyment and accomplishment. These myths are redressed both explicitly and implicitly throughout this paper by attention to what we know from research and best practice in teaching writing and the purpose of writing in subject English.

Reconnecting with the purpose of writing in English

The beating heart of English is 'story': your story, your students' stories, and the infinite and endlessly flowing spring of others' stories. All writing can be considered as a form of story in the broadest sense, regardless of the form it may take. A news article, a film review, a scientific report, or a discursive essay can be viewed as just as much a part of the continuum of human story-telling as a narrative, memoir or play. The kernel of each is the communicative act of shaping and conveying ideas for a particular purpose and audience, whether it be to inform, entertain, persuade, instruct, reflect, argue, inspire or console. As [Umberto Eco](#) urged, "to survive you must tell stories" and in the telling, the writer enters into the "great enduring conversation about what it means to be human ... connecting with the eternal conversation about living, on the inside and the outside" (Kronman, 2007, p. 48). Through using language to compose their own stories and respond to those of others, our students find a unique space in our English classrooms to learn, grow, make meaning and deepen their understanding of the self and others: an opportunity scarcely available nor legitimised in the other curriculum subjects.

Scholes' belief that "we write our world" (Scholes, 1985, p. xi) is a pithy reiteration of the established view that writing is a medium for thinking and making sense of experience. When we write, we write our way into meaning, discovering ideas and generating insights that would otherwise remain unrealised or latent. We write to clarify, solve problems, shape and communicate our values, beliefs and perspectives, experiment, access the interior world of thoughts and feelings and conduct our transactions in the public, social and professional realms. Every act of writing is therefore potentially an act of creation. To understand this is to understand that the purpose of writing in English extends well beyond preparing students for the often narrow but nevertheless obligatory requirements of examinations and assessment tasks. [Anne Lamott](#) captures a sense of this non-utilitarian purpose of writing (and reading) when she remarks that:



Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation. They deepen and widen and expand our sense of life: they feed the soul. When writers make us shake our heads with the exactness of their prose and their truths, and even make us laugh about ourselves or life, our buoyancy is restored. We are given a shot at dancing with, or at least clapping along with, the absurdity of life, instead of being squashed by it over and over again. It's like singing on a boat during a terrible storm at sea. You can't stop the raging storm, but singing can change the hearts and spirits of the people who are together on that ship (1994).

Just as evocatively, the words of [Doris Lessing](#) on the significance of writing and stories in our lives remind us of one of the defining dimensions and responsibilities of our role as English educators:

We are a jaded lot, we in our threatened world. We are good for irony and even cynicism. Some words and ideas we hardly use, so worn out have they become. But we may want to restore some words that have lost their potency...

We own a legacy of languages, poems, histories, and it is not one that will ever be exhausted. It is there, always.

We have a bequest of stories, tales from the old storytellers, some of whose names we know, but some not. The storytellers go back and back, to a clearing in the forest where a great fire burns, and the old shamans dance and sing, for our heritage of stories began in fire, magic, the spirit world. And that is where it is held, today.

Ask any modern storyteller and they will say there is always a moment when they are touched with fire, with what we like to call inspiration, and this goes back and back to the beginning of our race, to the great winds that shaped us and our world.

The storyteller is deep inside every one of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is ravaged by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise. But the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us - for good and for ill. It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative ([Lessing, 2007](#)).

The storyteller "deep inside" each one of our students can potentially find expression through the opportunities we offer and the pedagogical approaches we implement in our classrooms.

See Invitation to write: Inspiro App – Seven White Horses - *Attachment 1*



Some insights from science into the affordances of writing

With advances in neuroscience over the last decades, we are gaining valuable insights into the role of writing in cognitive development and the benefits of and processes involved in the act of writing. Most pertinent amongst these for teaching writing is the evidence that:

- Expressive writing has been shown to reduce stress by 60%. This kind of writing may include, for example, journal writing, blogs, reflections, narratives and musings (Ciotti, 2014);
- Writing for 15 minutes, three times a week, has been shown to improve sleep and have positive impacts on mental health (Pennebaker, 2012);
- Regular expressive writing is linked to improved immune function, mood and well-being (Pennebaker, 2012);
- Blogging can trigger dopamine release, similar to that triggered when listening to music or jogging (Pennebaker, 2012);
- Writing regularly can assist in closing ‘mental tabs’ (ie. too many windows/tabs open in the brain, leading to stress and neural overload) (Ciotti, 2014);
- Writing by hand has been shown to improve understanding and the retention of information. Pen to paper writing sends unique sensory signals to the brain that build motor memory and imprint knowledge in the brain more effectively than through using a keyboard (Ciotti, 2014).

The act of writing regularly is therefore not only advantageous for students’ academic performance: it is also of considerable potential benefit to an individual’s health and well-being.

Principles of teaching writing

In the educational domain, a substantial body of research and scholarship over the past five decades has been devoted to understanding how to optimise students’ knowledge and understanding of, and skills and accomplishment in, writing. The predominant pedagogical models of writing have emphasised writing as a *process* and stressed the development of writing skills as a complex and recursive endeavour, requiring collaboration between an expert teacher and engaged, active students. Over the past five decades, there have been a number of models for teaching writing and these can be summarised (although inevitably over-simplified) as follows:

1. Writing is a process requiring the writer to move from the ‘pre-writing stage’ through a drafting and editing stage, to publication. The process of writing demands careful attention to the craft of writing and the centrality of the purpose and audience in writing. The teacher is an informed, supportive and interested mentor, intervening to provide the writer/s with the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to achieve their writing goals (Murray, 1980).
2. Writing as a process is a developmental experience, with the writer moving back and forth through stages of the writing process in order to shape and publish a product. Writing requires a communal environment that values the art and craft of writing, the experimentation and growing confidence of the writer, and the centrality of the writer’s voice (Graves, 1983).



3. Writing requires “4 essentials”: ‘Writing is important’; ‘Writing is a craft’; ‘Writing is mainly learned by writing’; and ‘Writing is intended for readers’. “Abundant reading and purposeful talk interweave continually with the writing” (Walshe, 1980).
4. Writing requires a knowledge and understanding of the genres of writing. The conventions and structures of the range of genres of writing must be mastered by students. This involves an understanding of the social purpose of texts, and the ways in which power relations are inscribed in certain prevailing genres. This model emphasises a knowledge of the form over content (Christie, in Sawyer, 2004).

Informing the NSW English syllabus documents are a number of key assumptions and principles about writing that draw on aspects of these models and include the following:

- Students learn best by *doing*. Teachers offer an abundant and engaging range of writing tasks for meaningful purposes and real audiences;
- Getting better at writing requires doing it a lot. Development in writing capacity requires regular opportunities to write in order to normalise the writing process;
- *Purpose* and *audience* shape all writing. Teachers make this clear to students before expecting them to write;
- Writing is a process, not a ‘one-shot-act’ to produce a product for the teacher (as examiner);
- “There is ample empirical evidence that anyone can get better at writing, and that what teachers do makes a difference in how much students are capable of achieving as writers” ([NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing](#));
- We not only learn to write, but *we write to learn*. Writing is a means of discovering, connecting, clarifying and communicating what we know and who we are;
- We too often ask our students to read about writing and write about reading;
- Writing involves four elements: the writer, the reader, the ideas and the craft. “I (writer) intend to persuade you (reader) of the importance of X (ideas) and will do so in Y form (craft)” (Walshe, 1980);
- *What* is being written will shape *how* and in what *form* it is finally presented;
- The continuum of writing begins with reflection and culminates in publication;
- The teacher must model being a writer by writing with the class and sharing their writing (and their process of writing) as much as possible;
- The teacher provides exemplars of good writing by immersing students in others’ writing;
- The teacher must help the students to understand writing as a process and provide many authentic opportunities for sharing and publishing students’ writing;
- Teachers must monitor students’ writing and show them how they are growing as writers. Every writer needs a writing partner – a caring, patient, helpful person to share in the journey;
- Not all writing should be linked to assessment;
- Reading and writing are not binary opposites (i.e. it is false to perceive reading as passive reception and writing as active production). Both are part of the same process of actively re-writing everything that is read and actively re-reading everything that is written. Students learn to read texts from a writer’s point of view and write texts from a reader’s point of view;



- Effective writing practices and routines should begin in Years 7-10 in order to build student capacity and capital, cultivate positive attitudes to and enjoyment of writing, and develop confidence in writing.

In the light of these principles, it is instructive to reflect on our teaching practices by noticing some of the orthodoxies of writing pedagogy that may constrain our students' engagement and development. The table below highlights a number of potentially limiting practices and reflection points for consideration.

| Writing (composing) | Reflection point for teaching |
|---|--|
| Students are frequently required to respond to someone else's writing (texts they have read) | Is there an appropriate balance between opportunities for students to write in response to others' texts and opportunities to compose their own texts? |
| Topics are usually assigned by teacher, with limited choice in content and form | Are there opportunities for students to choose their own writing topics? Are there options for students to select from within assessment tasks? |
| The audience for student writing is generally that of the teacher (as examiner) | Do students have opportunities to write for a range of audiences beyond those of the teacher (and peers)? |
| Writing tasks are often not explicitly connected to a meaningful purpose, beyond assessment | Does a writing task include a purpose that can be connected to students' lives? |
| Little class time is dedicated to writing | Do students have regular opportunities in class to engage in the process of writing |
| There is an emphasis in the classroom on critical writing, with creative writing often undertaken by students at home in their own time | Are there opportunities for creative as well as critical writing in class? |
| Writing is usually assessed as a final 'product' | Are students encouraged to reflect on their writing in order to develop confidence as writers and to internalise the writing process? Are aspects of the process of writing assessed in addition to the final product? Is all (or most) student writing assessed? |



A few words about the causes of writing reluctance, resistance and underachievement

Don Graves, one of the great international leaders in writing research and pedagogy, summed up the phenomenon of student resistance to writing in school when he observed that:

Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils ... anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say "I am."

"No, you aren't" say most school approaches to the teaching of writing. We ignore the child's urge to show what s/he knows. We underestimate the urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process and what children do in order to control it.

Instead, we take the control away from children and place unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions. Then we say, "They don't want to write. How can we motivate them?" (1980).

When students make the transition from primary to secondary school, they are faced not only with the challenges of, for example, a dramatically different structure of their school day: they must also learn the specialist discourses and writing conventions of distinct subject areas in order to succeed. For some students, the perception of writing as a personally rewarding and meaningful endeavour can be steadily eroded when they struggle with the staple forms and modes of academic written communication as they progress through secondary school.

In this vein, the work of Gee in the field of learning and discourses (1996) offers some helpful insights into why some students struggle with the writing demands of the curriculum and how an understanding of Primary and Secondary Discourses can enable more effective approaches to engaging students. As Gee explains, Discourses are:

ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, gestures, attitudes and social identities ... A Discourse is a sort of identity kit, which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise ...

Primary discourses are those to which people are apprenticed early in life ... as members of particular families within their sociocultural settings ... [and they] constitute our first social identity. They form our initial taken-for-granted understandings of who we are and who people 'like us' are.



Secondary Discourses are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisations within various ... groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialisation ... They constitute the meaningfulness of our 'public' (more formal) acts (1996, p. 127, p. 137).

Students come to secondary school with ownership of and confidence in the Primary Discourses they have acquired through, for example, their lives with family and friends, and their involvement in sport or hobbies and social media. Success in school, however, requires increasing mastery of Secondary Discourses. These discourses are the privileged modes of communication in school and are typically:

- specialist discourses of subjects/disciplines/cognate fields;
- assessment and examinations;
- academic and conceptual writing;
- written language in literate forms;
- regulatory and authoritative.

These discourses must be learned. Too often, there can be a tacit demarcation between the Primary Discourses students bring to school and the Secondary Discourses of the institution. Students' individual linguistic and experiential 'capital' (their language, dialect, experiences) may not be sufficiently utilised as the basis for their learning. Effective pedagogy recognises, values and builds on a student's Primary Discourses as the foundation for initiating them into the necessary Secondary Discourses of the world of school, work and society more broadly. This, in turn, develops students' understanding of how language functions to produce and reproduce power; to exclude and marginalise; and to perpetuate existing power structures and the dominance of particular cultural groups. "Language is the basis of all the predictions by which we set the course of our lives" (Britton, 1970, p. 31): it is the baseline of all our negotiations in accessing (Secondary) discourses of power. So, without skill and mastery in language, we can be denied entry to the layered structures and systems of society. The teacher then, through their wise pedagogy, becomes the enabling presence in students' increasingly literate lives.

Invitation to Write (Concrete to Abstract) - *Attachment 2*

See Jane Hirshfield's article: "Three Key Opening the Gate of Poetry to Young Writers" - *Attachment 3*

The 7 Essential Conditions for Developing Writing Confidence, Enjoyment and Accomplishment

We have learned from research and best practice that there are a number of overarching 'conditions' that contribute to an effective writing program in secondary schools:

1. Time
2. Choice
3. Understanding writing as *process*
4. Real purposes & audiences



5. Craft knowledge & skills
6. Response
7. Community

The following discussion identifies the key reasons why each condition makes a difference to student engagement and writing development and offers some brief suggestions and resources for creating these conditions in your classroom.

1. Time

Carefully designed writing programs include regular, visible *time* for writing.

- Regular time for writing ‘normalises’ writing and enables students to build writing repertoires, enjoyment and confidence.
- The average time spent on ‘real’ writing in secondary classrooms (as distinct from copying notes and similar lower-order tasks) is 1 day in 8, when research shows that developing as a writer requires some writing 4 days in 5 (cf. Graves; Murray).
- To become good writers, students need time to think, plan, write, confer, read, write again, revise and write some more.
- To become good writers, students need time to explore models of the types of writing they are seeking to compose.

Writers need time to experience demonstration, scaffolding and support.

What does this mean for teaching?

Making time for writing not only legitimises writing as an important, intrinsically rewarding and potentially empowering human endeavour: it also signals to students that their writing is a core component of learning that is worthy of regular class time.

- Allocating 5-10 minutes’ writing time in every second or third class for individual reflective or expressive writing, writing in pairs using stimulus, or whole group writing is an immediate means of integrating writing time into programs (see Digital Resources for 7-10 English, Practical Strategies for Teaching Writing: - *Attachment 4* [Inspiro App Ideas Generator](#); [Creative Writing Quick Starts](#)).
- It is important to ensure that a proportion of students’ writing is not directly tied to assessment. If all writing is inevitably linked to assessment, students come to see writing in narrowly utilitarian ways – ie. writing is what we do for school assessment.
- Find time for writing that is playful and enjoyable, and where possible, collaborative (Writing collaboratively – First lines) - *Attachment 5*



A familiar approach to classroom practice is the “I Write, We Write, You Write” approach.

- “I Write” (teacher modeling, writing with and for class) involves:
 - students being engaged in a lively demonstration;
 - thinking aloud, sharing reasons for decisions while brainstorming; drafting, revising, editing, and publishing;
 - inviting questions;
 - making explicit the challenges and proposing possible solutions.
- “We Write” (shared writing) involves:
 - engaging students in every step of the process, from brainstorming to publication;
 - encouraging students to springboard off one another to develop, elaborate, and correct the piece.
- “You Write” (independent writing) involves:
 - students having some choice in selecting topics;
 - students applying the skills that have been modeled and discussed;
 - conferring with the teacher;
 - celebrating by sharing the completed piece with a partner, the class, or via publication.

2. Choice

- “Topic choice is at the heart of success in writing” (Graves, 1983).
- Choice correlates directly with motivation and achievement.
- Choice can be created even within the constraints of Stage 6.
- Recognise that writers start at different places and develop at different rates.
- Begin with where students are ‘at’ – build capital by drawing on their known worlds, experiences and language (eg. [Heart-mapping](#), surveys, journals, free-writes, quick-writes, and many web resources that offer stimulating writing prompts and ideas – eg. [Stardust](#), [Where I’m From 1](#), [Where I’m From 2](#), [Thinkamigo app](#), [Ideas Stimulator](#), [Story Spark](#), [Brainsparker](#)).

What does this mean for teaching?

- Provide opportunities for writing that depend on individuals generating their own ideas or through the use of a wide range of stimuli.
- For assessment, consider the affordances of portfolios, allowing choices within broader mandatory frameworks, including choices in medium of presentation/representation.
- Consider including a range of options or variations within an assessment task to enable some opportunity for student choice in writing.

3. Understanding writing as a process

Central to the approach to writing underpinning the *NSW English K-10 Syllabus* is the concept of writing as a “creative process in which meanings are made through the active and continued involvement of the writer with the unfolding text” (Emig, 1988).



Writing as a process often (although not always) involves three broad stages:

- I. Pre-writing, drafting, revising (which makes up 85% of the writer's time). It consists of the many activities students engage in before and during writing, such as:
 - Generating ideas, opinions, perspectives
 - Quick-writers
 - Talking
 - Building on personal 'capital' of knowledge, experience, memory
 - Brainstorming
 - Note-taking
 - Using graphic organisers
 - Outlining
 - Planning
 - Observing
 - Researching
 - Summarising
 - Experimenting
 - Making lists
 - Hypothesising
 - Making connections between 'known and new'
 - Organising ideas into a coherent form/medium.
- II. Writing, rewriting/editing and publishing, which can overlap with stage one of the process. This is the stage when students are:
 - Drafting
 - Seeking feedback
 - Editing
 - Proofreading
 - Polishing
 - Publishing.
- III. The third stage of the process is the post-writing stage, during which the writing is distributed to audiences and the writer takes the opportunity to reflect on the writing experience in order to further internalise the writing process.



The table below provides an overview of the stages of the writing process, with suggested practical strategies for each stage. *Click on table below to download.*

| Pre-writing | Practical Strategies | Writing | Practical strategies | Post writing/ Response | Practical strategies |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience or problem • Motivation • Decision to write • Growth of intention • Stimulus • Incubating, rehearsing, discussing, researching, gathering, collecting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word cache • Writing Derby • Interest inventories • Activity cards • Memory • Observation • Pictures • Questions • Problems • Issues • Interviews • Role-plays • Media • Film • Literature • Objects as stimulus • Photos • "Starters" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft writing, including revising • Revising and editing • Select, reject, change • Discuss • Meditate • Doodle • Read • Reshaping, polishing, rewriting, proofreading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work individually, in pairs, with teacher, sharing drafts, receiving feedback • Use computers to draft and edit and revise • Use a contract method to individualise writing • Establish a works in progress file, and a portfolio of polished pieces • Allow time for talk - room to reflect is crucial | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product and publication • Appropriate format • Distributed to readers • Reader's response conveyed to the writer • Writer's attitude and feelings about the writing experience • Reflection on growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral presentation - reading to class, assembly, staff, library, the elderly, primary students, festivals • Podcasts • Short film • Displays in class, school foyer, library, public centres, window displays, mobiles • Publish - school newsletters, online, class anthologies |

- Whenever possible, teachers can attend to the process that students might follow to produce texts and share challenges, impediments and solutions that have worked for you.
- Teachers can encourage a focus on understanding what writers do: modeling and offering strategies for thinking and producing texts.
- The writing process takes time and involves the growth of a repertoire of skills, strategies, routines, and reflective abilities.
- The process can't and shouldn't be turned into a formulaic set of steps. Experienced writers shift between different operations according to tasks and circumstances.
- Encourage students to develop their own 'toolbox' of strategies for writing: strategies for starting to write; strategies for progressing writing; strategies for overcoming writing blocks etc.
- Provide opportunities for talking about and *reflecting* on the process (eg. EE2 Major Work Journal).
- Writers do not accumulate process skills and strategies once-and-for-all. They develop and refine writing skills throughout their writing lives.
- Expose students to insights from published writers through, for example, platforms such YouTube ([Writers on Writing](#)) and by highlighting the common characteristics of successful writers. These include, for instance:



- o Routine and habit;
- o An awareness of one's own process of writing;
- o Perseverance;
- o A repertoire of strategies and skills to meet writing challenges;
- o Revisions, revisions, revisions.

Bob Walshe (2009) developed an overview of the writing process, comparing the writing process with the *artistic* process, the *scientific* process and the *problem-solving* process. *Click on table below to download.*

| | PROBLEM | INVESTIGATE | GET INSIGHTS | EXPRESS | REFINE | ANNOUNCE | RESPONSE |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| ARTISTIC PROCESS | Experience ☐ Feel challenged ☐ Decide on project | Absorption ☐ Engagement ☐ Study/research ☐ "Imagining" | Illumination ☐ Inspiration or revelation/ "flash" | Drafting ☐ e.g. in painting, preliminary sketching or "roughing" | Developing ☐ Working out ☐ Crafting ☐ "Finishing" | Communication ☐ Show to intimates ☐ Exhibit widely | Response ☐ Appreciation ☐ Criticism ☐ Evaluation |
| SCIENTIFIC PROCESS | Problem ☐ Define as a question ☐ Plan the inquiry | Observation ☐ Exploratory stratagems ☐ Data collection | Illumination ☐ e.g. methodical generalisation; or inspiration | Hypothesis ☐ Draft precisely | Experiment/test ☐ Verification or falsification ☐ Final writing | Publication ☐ Perhaps first to associates, then more widely | Response ☐ Acceptance or criticism |
| PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS | Problem/puzzle ☐ Define as a question ☐ Plan the inquiry | Investigation ☐ Collect data ☐ Review alternatives ☐ Think laterally | Illumination ☐ "Ah-ha" ☐ Insights | Formulation of best solution | Checking ☐ Error elimination ☐ Critical review | Report ☐ Demonstration ☐ Performance | Response ☐ Appreciation ☐ Criticism ☐ Evaluation |
| WRITING PROCESS | Experience ☐ Decide to write ☐ Define the writing-aim ☐ Early broad plan | Pre-writing ☐ Idea-recollection ☐ Research ☐ Brainstorming | Illumination ☐ "See a pattern" ☐ "Limit the subject" ☐ "Get a lead" | Drafting ☐ Plan; or further brainstorming; then first draft | Revision ☐ Self-editing ☐ Redrafting ☐ Proofreading | Publication ☐ Show to another ☐ Read to others ☐ Circulate widely | Response ☐ Appreciation ☐ Criticism ☐ Evaluation |

4. Real purposes & audiences

In his research in classrooms, Applebee found that the most common one-person audience for student writing was the teacher-as-examiner (1981). We know that all writing is shaped by purpose and audience: "Writing differs according to its purpose and audience. One important dimension of development in writing ability is the growth of a sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom the writing is intended" (Britton et al, 1975). It follows, then, that if students' writing is limited to the audience of the teacher, for the purpose of assessment, then the scope for developing authentic engagement and development in writing is correspondingly constrained.

In Britton et al's schema of language functions (1975), the three major types of written communication are: expressive; transactional; and poetic. Students should have abundant opportunities for expressive writing since confidence in expressive writing leads to growing confidence in the more complex, convention-driven forms of transactional and poetic writing.



| Expressive language | Transactional language | Poetic language |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students write themselves into understanding and meaning through this mode. This uses language which is personal or “close to the self”. This mode can be used as the foundation to move into the more demanding functions of transactional and poetic writing. Language varies according to function: e.g. a letter to a friend is <i>expressive</i>. A letter to an insurance company is <i>transactional</i>. A letter constructed as part of a story or literary work is <i>poetic</i>. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In this mode, we use language to get things done. It has a more formal function, to persuade, to theorise, to record, to inform, to instruct and to argue a case or point of view. Transactional writing requires a knowledge of the audience and select and shape language accordingly. Assists students in developing a command of register and rhetoric. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing becomes more speculative, with increasing distance between the audience and the “I” of the text. Imaginative, argumentative, theorized writing. The audience may be known, unknown or implied. The purpose of the writing is to entertain, offer aesthetic experience, represent ideas, emotions and ways of thinking in imaginative forms. Conventions of genres may be required to compose in this mode. |

- All writing is part of the continuum of writing development.
- Students are often required to leap from ‘question’ to finished product.
- Many students need more structure in order to focus on the process of moving from expressive through to transactional and poetic writing.

Here are some examples of expressive, transactional and poetic writing.

| Expressive language | Transactional language | Poetic language |
|---|--|--|
| Letter to a friend Journals Stream of consciousness Personal responses Reading logs Notes Monologues Emails, text messages, social media Character profiles | Letter to get something done Review (book, film, etc) Essays (argumentative, expository) Posters Interpretations Lists Directions Instructions Interviews / News stories | Letter in a novel Poems Stories Visual representations Plays Songs Dramatisations Scripts Character monologues Multimedia creations |



What does this mean for teaching?

- All students have a point of view, opinions, ideas and their own experiences of themes explored in texts (eg. loyalty, love, fear, hope, loss etc.).
- Where possible, encourage and make explicit the connections between the purpose of writing and students' real worlds.
- Where possible, broaden the range of audiences for writing, beyond teacher. Use, for example, online publishing sites and/or create a class website for the purpose of sharing writing (see Digital Resources for 7-10 English) - *Attachment 4* .
- Discuss the 'audience' for examination responses and the implications of this for nature of writing.
- Explore a wide range of texts in order to develop students' understanding of how different purposes and audiences determine, for example, a text's language forms and features, point of view, tone, style, and mode of representation.
- Avoid the false distinction between the process of creative writing and the process of critical writing. All writing draws on the writer's creative and critical capacities: it is the purpose and audience which shapes the nature of the final 'product' rather than the process of writing.

5. Craft knowledge and skills

The conventions, structures, stylistic features, and mechanics of good writing are often best developed in the context of students' writing, with informed instruction by the teacher that is specific to students' shared or individual writing challenges. Nancy Atwell's pedagogy of 'mini lessons' are highly effective for teaching the range of technical and stylistic skills required by all students. The more students have the opportunity to write in a wide range of forms, for a wide range of purposes and audiences, the more refined their craft knowledge and skills will become.

What does this mean for teaching?

- Revisit Cambourne's "Conditions of learning"
- Reward "approximations".
- Learn more about the dimensions of creativity and how these can be assessed in classroom contexts.
- Provide modeling/demonstration of strategies for revising and editing.
- Provide individualised feedback and support where possible.
- Create structured opportunities for peer feedback and support.



6. Response

All writers need audiences and students benefit enormously from both teacher, peer and others' feedback on their writing. From the work of researchers, we also know that the relationship between writing and talking is a crucial one for the developing writer. Britton believed that "writing floats on a sea of talk" (1975, p. 21).

Part of the necessary response to students' writing is through assessment. The limitations of space in this paper preclude the coverage of assessing writing (which will be the subject of a separate paper).

7. Community

The final 'condition' for an effective writing program is the attention given to creating an environment which values and celebrates individual, collaborative and communal learning. Writing is a social act. It takes place within of a web of relationships: between the writer and the reader/audience. An effective writing program requires the establishment of a community of writers/learners where students feel safe to experiment, take risks, share ideas, have fun, and write with the trusted support of a teacher and peers. As Graves reminds us, "writing is an unpredictable act requiring predictable classrooms both in structure and response" (Graves, 1983).

What does this mean for teaching?

- Make time for sharing writing and the experience of writing.
- Normalise the process of writing.
- Find ways to build rapport through enjoyable and playful writing activities (see Practical Strategies for Teaching Writing) - *Attachment 6*
- Celebrate writing and students' achievements in writing.
- Ensure there is a safe environment for taking risks.
- Build an ethos in the classroom which conveys to students that 'we are all in this together'.

Concluding thoughts

At the centre of our work as English educators is the ideal of nurturing students who leave our classrooms capable, confident, vibrant and well-equipped to meet the challenges of living and working beyond school. Our legacy to each young person we teach is far more than the measurable set of knowledge, skills and understandings that are assessed and reported on throughout their secondary education. To inspire a love of and acuity for language, in all its endless manifestations; to empower students to 'write their world'; and to know that their lives have been shaped for the better because of our attentive and informed teaching: this is part of the legacy that, because it cannot be quantified through instrumentalist means, represents our greatest gift, privilege and responsibility.



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