

## The Writing Workshop

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Engagement
- Motivation and choice
- Conventions of print and sentence structure
- Spelling
- Vocabulary
- Purpose, genre and voice
- Writing process
- Response and author's intent

### Why a Writing Workshop?

For all writers, young and old, writing is a complex process. It involves tasks/stages during which the writer chooses topics to write about, plans ideas, translates ideas into a first draft, and reviews what has been written.

Children need **repeated, explicit demonstrations** of the processes involved in writing, with plenty of **opportunities to practise and experiment**. Planning for and teaching the **process, craft and mechanical aspects of writing** is essential for children to develop into independent, self-regulated writers who can easily draw on needed information from long-term memory. Communicating to children that the most important part of writing is the sharing of their thoughts and ideas and that lower-level skills such as grammar, spelling and punctuation can be dealt with when editing and publishing, can relieve their anxiety and increase children's confidence and sense of self-efficacy.



Because writers are continually planning and revising as they write, researchers recommend a **process approach** to the teaching of writing. This approach views writing as a set of behaviours which can be taught, learned, discussed and developed. It emphasises the importance of thinking, inquiring, imagining, creating, communicating and exploring language through writing and gives **equal attention to processes of writing and the written product**. The Writing Workshop is an instructional framework which teachers can use to support children as writers.

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During the Writing Workshop children learn how to be real writers and they are viewed as **real writers**. Teachers explicitly teach children how to work and learn actively as writers, through providing daily meaningful, authentic opportunities to write within a routine-driven, predictable learning environment. As writing is primarily a social activity, teachers scaffold children's learning and provide opportunities for children to listen and respond to each other daily. When a workshop approach is used, the creative and aesthetic dimensions of writing are fostered and motivation is enhanced as children have choice and control over writing topics. It provides opportunities

for the authentic integration of oral language, reading, fluency and vocabulary. Children begin to see reading and writing as reciprocal processes as they adopt the stance of the writer and then the reader.

Children need lots of experience with shared and interactive writing and shared reading before moving on to the Writing Workshop.



### CONDITIONS FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP TO FLOURISH

- Provide sufficient **time** for writing **daily**.
- Give children **choice of topic** and opportunities to write in a **range of genre**.
- Emphasise the development of children's **voice** and **creativity** in their writing.
- Provide opportunities for **social interaction** including an audience and response to children's writing through **daily conferences** and **share sessions**.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn the processes, craft and skills of writing through **tailored daily mini-lessons**.
- Use the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model and other **appropriate teaching methodologies**.
- Use **quality literature** to demonstrate writing techniques.
- Create a safe, highly-organised, routine-driven, **predictable learning environment**.
- Focus on content and writing as communication first and foremost; encourage **approximate spelling** in the case of young writers.
- **Assess** writing using checklists, rubrics and portfolios in order to plan mini-lessons on the craft, skills and processes of writing. See also: NCCA (2006) Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum.
- Hold **high expectations** for children's writing.

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### Getting Started with Shared and Interactive Writing

#### Shared Writing

In shared writing, the children choose what they would like to write about (the topic) and the teacher acts as their scribe. First they discuss the topic and then they work together to develop the writing. The teacher records the children's writing ideas on

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a chart or interactive screen by modelling aspects of the writing process such as:

- concepts of print, e.g., left to right, spaces between words, punctuation
- approximate spelling of unfamiliar words by segmenting syllables, stretching sounds and matching letters to phonemes (a phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word)
- how to use the word wall for high-frequency words
- how to combine ideas and elaborate on them
- how to add description and build context.

#### Interactive Writing

The teacher and children *share the pen*. Children are invited to come up and write on the chart or interactive whiteboard, e.g., particular words or sounds that they are familiar with and can spell. Collaborative writing opportunities with the teacher and other children is an important precursor to the introduction of a writing workshop.

In interactive writing, the teacher and children both act as the scribe.

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### Transitioning to Writing Workshop

Children begin to write their own stories independently when they have experienced shared and interactive writing, have a knowledge of some letter-sound relationships and an understanding that the written word is a communicative act. In daily mini-lessons, teachers think aloud and model how to:

- choose topics of personal significance and brainstorm ideas
- draw ideas and then label elements of the picture
- write sentences related to the picture
- discuss ideas with an audience
- add to and refine ideas
- consider word choice and select interesting and apt vocabulary

- spell by segmenting sounds in words
- use environmental print in the classroom as a spelling aid.

All children can make meaning on the page by mark-making/drawing and talking about their writing. Some will also be able to label elements of their drawings and others will be able to take it further and attempt to write sentences.

Regular assessment from conferences, rubrics and portfolios feeds into mini-lesson planning and differentiation.

### Teaching and Assessing for Learning

Regular assessment of children's writing using checklists, conferences and rubrics can help teachers determine children's progression with writing, in line with the Progression Continuum for Writing in the Primary Language Curriculum. Children should also be encouraged to self- and peer-assess, using appropriate child- and teacher-designed rubrics and checklists. This information can then feed into planning for differentiated instruction and scaffolding towards the next stage of

development. Children move through predictable stages of development in spelling, which increases their capacity to produce more complex text. Keeping samples of children's writing in a portfolio provides a record of progress over time.



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### Structure of the Writing Workshop

#### 1. The Mini-Lesson (approx. 10 mins.)

The Writing Workshop begins with a mini-lesson. A mini-lesson is a short lesson focused on one aspect of writing in which the teacher provides explicit instruction using a think-aloud. The mini-lesson is often linked to high-quality children's literature or a piece of the child's own writing. **Whole-class mini-lessons** take place when all children, or the majority, need explicit instruction with one specific craft, convention, process or organisational technique. **Small-group mini-lessons** take place when a group of children demonstrate a need for a specific skill or craft. Small-group lessons are based on the teacher's notes

and assessment records. While the teacher conducts small-group lessons with a targeted group of children, the children not involved in the small-group continue to work independently on their writing from the previous day or begin a new piece. The teacher will conference with 3-4 of these children after the small-group lesson concludes. Daily mini-lessons play a critical role in assisting children in enhancing the quality of their writing and in discovering their own voice.

The Writing Workshop has three parts:

- (1) a mini-lesson
- (2) independent writing and conferencing
- (3) a share session

In a mini-lesson, the teacher provides explicit instruction on one specific craft, convention, process or organisational technique involved in writing.

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### TYPES OF MINI-LESSONS

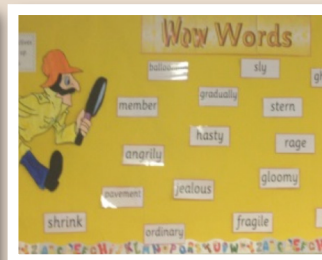
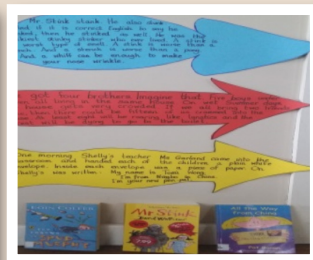
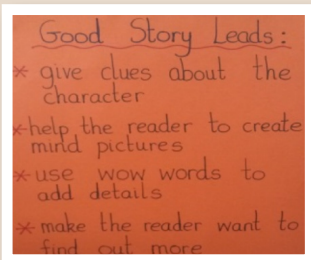
#### Management and organisation (when necessary):

Teaching the routine of the Writing Workshop, e.g., the structure of the Writing Workshop, how to use writing folders, rules for conferences and how to respond within a share session.

**Process (when necessary):** Teaching the steps in the writing process, e.g., choosing a topic, drafting, revising, editing and publishing.

**Conventions (1-2 times a week):** Teaching skills to improve the readability and fluency of the piece, e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure.

**Craft (3-4 times a week):** Teaching a technique to enhance writing quality/style, e.g., using details, strong introduction and crafting an effective title. Recording key ideas on an anchor chart and displaying in the classroom provides a visual reminder for children.



### 2. Independent Writing and Conferencing (approx. 20-30 mins.)

During sustained, independent writing time, the teacher engages in conferences with individual children. Conferences are short (approx. 5 mins) and teachers should aim to conference with 3-4 children daily. A good conference involves 80% child talk and 20% teacher talk. The teacher's job is to nudge details from the writer, to understand what the writer is trying to do and to continue to encourage children as writers. During

conferences, teachers also use this one-to-one time to note specific concerns or areas of expertise for individual children. This will enable the teacher to provide differentiated instruction during future conferences and plan content for small-group mini-lessons. In this way, the teacher provides support in response to children's particular needs. At the end of independent writing time, it is important that children are given a few minutes to read over what they have written and encouraged to fix-up any errors they notice. This provides

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teachers with insights into children's level of awareness of errors and their capacity to self-correct. It can also feed forward into future mini-lessons.

### 3. Share Session (approx. 5-10 mins.)

One child sits on the author's chair or a designated area in the classroom and reads his/her writing aloud to the class. This is a natural opportunity for children to transfer fluency skills learned in the reading workshop by reading to their audience with appropriate rate, pitch, and expression.



In the share session, each child reads his/her writing aloud while children in the class listen, ask questions and say what they like about the writing.

Children in the class listen for details, ask questions and state what they like about the piece of writing. The share session creates opportunities for teachers to model appropriate language structures in response to the writing, and for children to develop their vocabulary and oral language. The share session also provides the writer with positive feedback from a real, attentive and appreciative audience and increases children's confidence and motivation to write. To conclude the workshop, the teacher and children may reflect on the mini-lesson and set goals for the next workshop.



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