

Planner, adventurer or VOMITER?

Which best describes your pupils? Once you know, these six strategies will help them to become confident, independent writers

As teachers, we often think of the writing process as linear: children work their way through the stages of generating ideas, planning, drafting, revising (evaluating), editing (proofreading) and maybe publishing; in that order and in much the same way.

In this we would be wrong because, in fact, an individual's process can be discursive, and all writers (both in school and those outside it) have their own preferred ways of working through some or all of these stages. We need to acknowledge and allow this.

Children like to personalise their process. They love deciding what kind of a writer they think and know they are. For example, they might fit into one of the following categories:

Adventurer

Likes to write a draft first before looking at it and using it as a plan for a second draft.

Planner

Likes to plan in great detail, working out exactly what will be written and where it will go before they begin their draft.

Vomiter

Likes to write their piece out from a plan, before attending to revision and editing separately.

Paragraph piler

Likes to write a paragraph, reread it, revise it and edit it before moving on to drafting their next paragraph.

Sentence stacker

Likes to write a sentence and ensure it is revised and edited just how they want it before moving on to the next sentence.

However, what we sometimes overlook is the importance of explicitly teaching each of these processes, maybe because our sights are fixed on getting to the end product quickly so we can get on with the assessment. So maybe we miss out revision, or rush children through the planning stage. Maybe we set rigid deadlines. But this won't give our young writers the process-knowledge they need to achieve long-term writing success. And everything will be so much better if we write ourselves, and share with children our own personal insights into what helps us to be a writer.

Six strategies to model to your class

In our own classroom we have found some good ways of teaching children strategies to manage the processes. All of them, if properly taught and if practised daily, can equip our apprentices to be self-regulating, to know what to do and how to do it and to write independently of us – in short, to do all the things that writers do out in the world.

You can teach these strategies in mini-lessons and invite children to use them in that day's writing. Think about modelling for the children the approaches you yourself employ when writing. Use good exemplars, ideally written by you, which could show your class how you planned, drafted or revised. And conference them while they are writing, ironing out any process problems as you do so.

1 Help them find their own ideas

Research shows that, when children have a personal investment in their writing topic, they write better, so don't let the fear of

hearing "I don't know what to write" lead you to choose a topic for them, even though you might have selected and be teaching a particular genre.

All children have something to write about – friends and family, places, experiences, incidents, memories, interests, responses to books they've read, games, films. But they may need you to show them how writers tap into these possibilities. Let them record ideas, even if it's just one word, in an ongoing writer's notebook, and show them how to dabble – play around with drawings, words, phrases, and thoughts on paper to develop an early writing idea. Hold writers to high standards; your expectation will be that, whatever they decide to write about, it must be written well.

2 Show how you plan

You can share how you planned your own example text.

Perhaps you spent a lot of time thinking or daydreaming.

Maybe you did more drawing or played around with the dabbles. Maybe you talked it through to yourself or to someone else. Give children agency to do it their own way or let them choose from a variety of formats like grids, mind-maps or webs. Reassure them that plans can always be changed.

3 Draft and try things out

A draft isn't the final product; in fact, a draft is simply the place where writers are finding out what they want to say for the first time. We found in our classroom that children not only planned but drafted in different ways. However, we taught



everyone two really useful strategies, both aimed at helping them keep the composition flowing. The first was to suggest they used a ‘trying things out’ page in their book to do just that – try out a few different ways of saying something, or write an extra bit and see how it sounds. The second strategy was to make a set of ‘drafting rules’ to help children carry on composing and avoid getting hung up on transcriptional issues at the wrong time. The rules are: invent a spelling if unsure and circle it; put a box where you might need an item of punctuation but aren’t sure; underline any ‘sticky’ bits, and read your writing to a partner if uncertain about how to go on. Transcriptional issues are fixed at the editing stage.

4 Provide a revision checklist

Revising is all about thinking how best to say what you want to say; it’s not the same as editing, which is only concerned with transcription.

Revision is quite a complex process, and it makes matters more difficult

if we expect children to think about composition and transcription at the same time. We found teaching children to use the following strategies helpful.

- Re-read carefully as many times as you wish
- Share and discuss possible changes and improvements with a partner
- Keep in mind the purpose and audience for your piece
- Focus on whether your reader will understand the piece, whether it fulfills your intention and whether it sounds good

As a class, we wrote and gave out revision checklists tailored to our class writing project, making sure they were centred on composition and the needs of the audience.

“Children love deciding which kind of writer they are”

5 Use the CUPS strategy

Children gain from being explicitly taught how to proofread more than from having their teacher make the transcriptional corrections for them. We gave our class a number of strategies for proof-reading their manuscripts; especially useful was the CUPS strategy (Capitalisation, Use of vocabulary, Punctuation, Spelling) which had them editing their whole piece four times, with a different focus each time. We felt this strategy, combined with the use of an editing checklist, made proofreading a manageable task and helped children first detect and then correct their errors. You can easily model proofreading for them.

6 Offer a publishing menu

Children take pride in their compositions and are motivated to do well if they know there is a genuine opportunity for publication at the end. You can jointly construct with your class a varied and authentic publishing menu, with possibilities ranging from: texts placed in class libraries around the school; given as gifts; put out into the community – local libraries, waiting rooms, corner-shops, cafes; recorded as podcasts or videos; performed to parents; published online. And finally, publishing parties where balloons and cake are the non-negotiables!



Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson are the founders of The Writing For Pleasure Centre. You can now pre-order their book ‘Real-World Writers: a guide to teaching writing with 7-11 year olds’ from routledge.com

