

The Writing For Pleasure Centre's

Guide To Personal Writing Projects & Writing Clubs For 3-11 Year Olds



Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson



The Writing For Pleasure Centre
- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

The Writing For Pleasure Centre

The mission of The Writing For Pleasure Centre is to help all young people become passionate and successful writers. We look to accomplish this goal by investigating what world-class writing teaching might be. We do this through:

- Our school residencies and teacher training workshops.
- Curriculum development and creating resources.
- Conducting, disseminating and publishing research.
- Working with children, teachers, school leaders, teacher-educators and charities.



We have developed this research-rich website to share the most effective teaching practices. It's our hope that teachers regard The Writing For Pleasure Centre website as a place where they can access a specialist network and continued professional development that is free.

The Research Base

For the past fifty years, research has been consistent on what makes great writing teaching. Despite this, we as teachers can be inundated by a variety of approaches and training, all promising a lot but often lacking the necessary grounding to be successful in the long-term. This is why our website and pedagogy is based on the following:

- Extensive scientific research into the most effective writing instruction.
- Case studies of what the best performing teachers of writing do that makes the difference.
- Our own research into a *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy.
- The wisdom of professional writers.

If you're new to the idea of a *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy, you can read all about it at **writing4pleasure.com**

The Writing For Pleasure Centre functions both as a think tank and as an action research community. The result is that we are continually engaged in sharing effective practices, case studies and research findings.

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Why personal writing projects?

Writing is about making your mark on the world, both literally and figuratively. It is a sign that you exist.

When the conditions are right, children love engaging in personal writing projects. This is writing children pursue for themselves. It's not crafted simply to please the needs of the curriculum. It's something of their own. It's an opportunity for them to use and play around with everything they know and love about writing and create something personally meaningful. They explore and develop their favoured genres, their writer-identities and, essentially, their voice. It also provides them with an opportunity to write from a position of strength. Because they are writing on a subject of their own choosing, and about something they are already knowledgeable about, they are sure-footed. They write with verve, swagger and confidence. It also means children can pour their cognitive energy into writing something of quality rather than having to worry about what they've been required to write about within a limited period of time.

The academic rationale for personal writing projects

Writer-teacher Donald Graves (1983) once said that, when children are invited to choose their own writing topic rather than have one assigned to them by their teacher or a scheme writer, it's the difference between owning and renting a property. Children are more committed to looking after their house and tending their garden if it is theirs. When children care about their writing, they want it to do well and so put in a commitment that's not always seen with teacher-assigned tasks. Indeed, when children are allowed to choose and access a topic they are familiar and emotionally connected with, their writing performance improves and they produce higher quality texts (Kellogg 2001, 2008; Graham 2006; Young & Ferguson 2021).

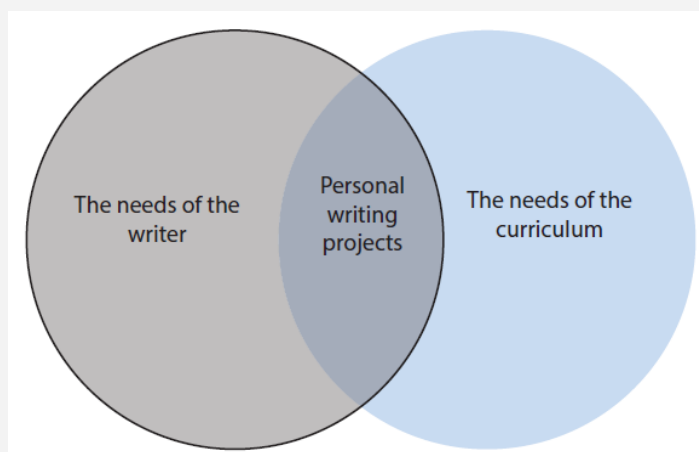
Empirical evidence shows how children can achieve remarkable academic progress when they are given time and opportunity to engage in personal writing projects (Graham & Johnson 2012; Young 2019). This is because pursuing a personal writing project is demanding. Children have to take cognitive responsibility for their writing and see a germ of an idea through to publication independently. Incidentally, this is one of the things the greater-depth standard is looking for from children.

Whilst it's not the purpose of personal writing projects to act as material for assessment, they are nevertheless an absolute treasure trove for finding evidence of independent application of the requirements of the framework.

How to introduce personal writing projects

Children should be using and applying all they know and learn from class writing projects in their personal ones. We would like to emphasise that giving children full agency to choose their own topics and ways of writing does not mean that your lessons are suddenly allowed to be loose and without structure. In fact it's quite the opposite. The more ownership we afford children, the more organised we need to be as teachers (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)).

It is crucial for practitioners to understand that, as Young's (2019) research clearly showed, **agency alone does not guarantee that personal writing will be pleasurable or academically successful**, a fact not generally articulated in other research studies. Alongside agency, **writers need the solid foundation of high-quality instruction**. In this way, children can appropriate the knowledge, skills, projects and texts of the school curriculum and of class writing projects and blend them with their own writing topics and their personal and social desires.



Personal writing projects are driven by the needs of the young writer but are often supported by what they've learnt through the curriculum and from class writing projects.

Young & Ferguson ([2021](#) p.169)


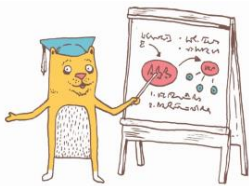



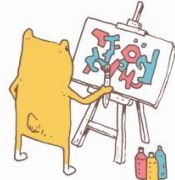
The kind of authentically creative and genuinely independent work we want our apprentice writers to do relies on application of knowledge and skills learnt. This is where you as the teacher will need to continue putting in your hard work, teaching, support and advice. This means you will need to use the principles of effective writing teaching during personal project time (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)).

1. **Start with a mini-lesson.** Just as you would with any class writing project. Children can either use and apply what you've taught them or else continue to pursue their own interests. You should base your mini-lessons on what you think your class would benefit most from. See our [Big Book Of Minilessons](#) for over 300 tried and tested lessons you can teach your class during personal project time.
2. **Provide an ample amount of writing time.** Children need a sustained period in which to work on their writing. During this time, you should write amongst your pupils too - using your own writer's notebook.
3. **Conduct pupil-conferences.** Continue to provide individualised feedback and responsive instruction to the children in your class through pupil-conferencing - just as you would for class writing projects. For more information on pupil-conferencing, [see our guidance](#).
4. **Include time for sharing and feedback.** End a session by giving children an opportunity to share what they've been working on with others at their table. You could also conduct some Author's Chair sessions. For more information about Author's Chair, read [Ben Harris' action research](#).

What might children need to know to be successful during personal project time?

Personal writing projects are at their most successful when children are knowledgeable about writing. Therefore, we believe children need to know about the following:

Know about the purposes and audience for their writing. Ensure children know the different reasons and purposes for which we write, as shared below. You might want to stick these into children's notebooks or at least have them on display in the classroom. You might also want to give them access to our publishing and performing menu. This will help children consider who they might like to give their writing to once it's finished. This menu can be found in the Appendix. You'll also find an A4 version of the writing purposes shared on the next page.

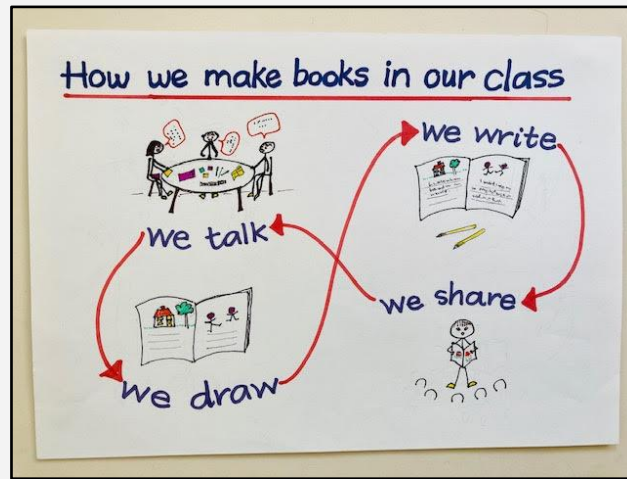
Writers who entertain 	Writers who teach Writers who learn then teach others 	Writers who share their thoughts and reflections 
Writers who record information 	Writers who influence and give their opinion 	Writers who paint with words 

(Figures from Young & Ferguson [2020](#) p.5-7)

Know what genres are out there. Ensure children know what genres are possible. We think this is best done together on big flipchart paper. With your class, create a list of all the different genres you can think of. This should be put on display or turned into a resource that can be stuck into the children's notebooks.

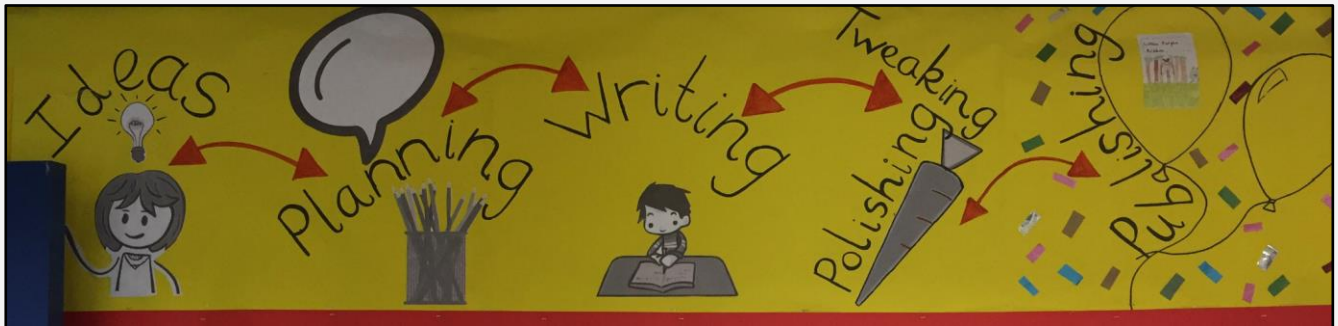
Know a variety of idea generation techniques. Ensure children have access to a variety of idea generation techniques so that they -and you- never have to be scared of the blank page. Again, our [Big Book Of Writing Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) provides over 80 different age-appropriate idea generation techniques you can teach to your class.

Know how to work through the writing processes. Ensure you have the writing processes on display and that children know that they should work their project through these processes towards publication or performance. A process chart like one of the examples below could be stuck into children's notebooks.

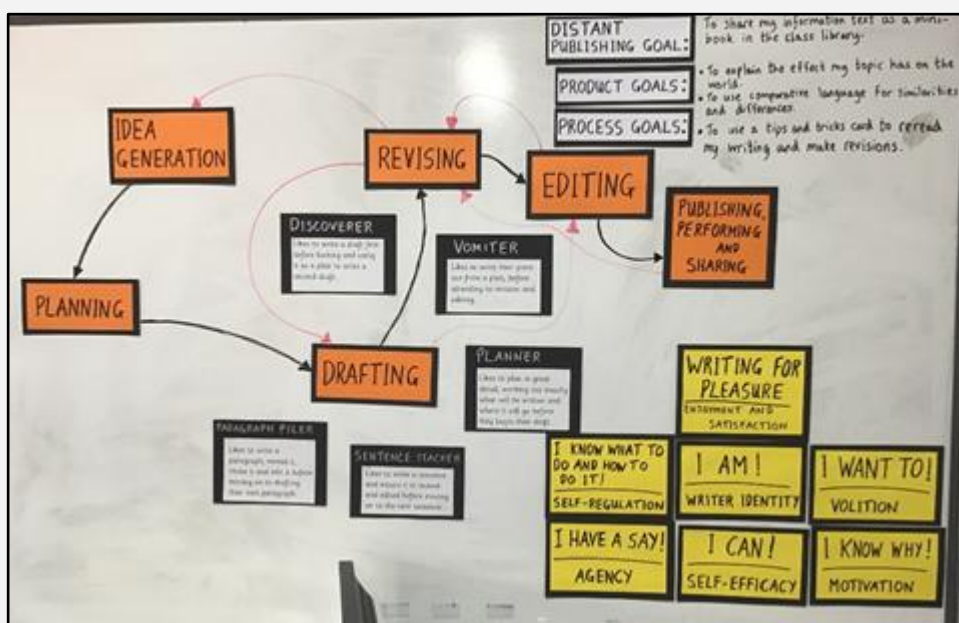


Here we can see how the figure of eight encourages children in the EYFS to see 'book making time' as a dynamic, productive and playful time for talking, writing, drawing and sharing.

Here are the writing processes as conceived by writer-teacher Laura Goulden's mixed Year One and Two class:



Here we see that children can move back and forth between the following processes: Ideas, planning (including talking and drawing), writing, tweaking (revising), polishing (editing) and publishing. Note that children offered up their own terminology for the display after having a mini-lesson about the writing processes.



Finally, here is Tobias Hayden's writing processes display for his Year Four class. Again, notice how his arrows indicate how writers will move back and forth between the different processes. The processes include: idea generation, planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing, performing and sharing.

What are children doing during personal project time?

Children want to write. They want to write from the very first day they attend school

- Donald Graves

During personal project time, children will be doing many of the following:

- Deciding what they are going to work on
- Deciding how they are going to use their time
- Generating new writing ideas
- Choosing who they might work with on a project
- Talking, drawing and/or formally planning
- Discussing their project with others
- Writing with others
- Writing about the things they are passionate or knowledgeable about
- Writing their own versions of the texts, media and popular culture they love.
- Working through the writing processes at their own pace
- Abandoning pieces, resurrecting old pieces, updating pieces or translating pieces into different languages
- Revising, proof-reading, preparing their manuscripts for publication
- Making a final published copy of their project

Specific advice for personal writing projects in the EYFS

We recommend that personal book-making projects occur outside of your daily writing workshop session. To learn more about writing workshop sessions in the EYFS, see [our guidance](#). Personal projects can occur successfully during periods of continuous provision and when your class has access to an excellent writing centre. There are many spontaneous moments where you can turn to a child and say: *'Hey, you can make a book about that if you want to'* and off they can go to the writing centre to make it - using everything they've learnt in writing workshop time to help them.

- When a child shares a story with you, or something they know a lot about, they can be invited to go to the writing centre and turn it into a picture book.
- Children's dramatic play can be turned into picture books.
- During dramatic play, children may feel a need to create writing (lists, instructions, posters, signs, directions, maps, labels, scripts, books etc...).
- Children can role play 'writing workshop' in the writing centre.
- Other activities in the curriculum can spur children to create picture books for others outside the experience to read (parents, children in other year groups).
- After reading the children a book, you can invite them to go and make their own.
- When they make or do something, they can be invited to craft a How to... book for others to learn from.
- When children mention an event or an occasion they are going to take part in after school or at the weekend, you could invite them to make a book as a gift to take with them.
- You could invite children to make a book for you or the class - just because you like their books so much and you haven't read a new one in a while.
- A mass invitation. For example, 'I'd love it if some people could make some new books for the class to read!' or 'I don't know anything about... can someone make me a book to teach me?'.
- During the day, you can simply ask children what their next book is going to be about.

Specific advice for personal writing projects in KS1

We recommend that personal projects run in very similar ways to class writing projects in KS1. To learn more about class writing projects in KS1, see [our guidance](#). We recommend you follow the same routine of: mini-lessons, book-making time and class sharing. The only difference is children can have autonomy over the type of writing they would like to 'make' during writing time. Finally, you might find Marcela Vasques' action

research project about introducing personal writing projects in KS1 useful. This can be found in the Appendix.

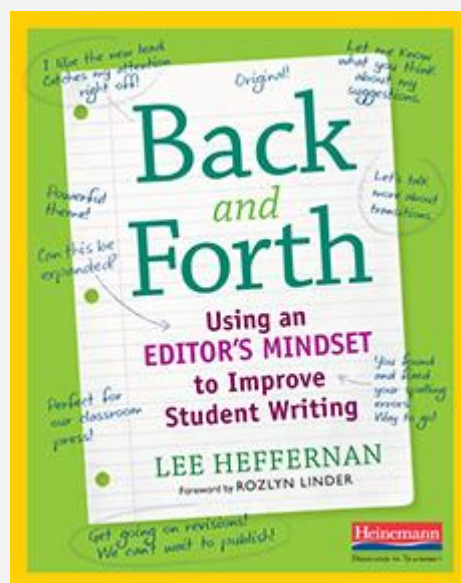
Top tips and essential mini-lessons

Where teachers can go wrong. If you don't provide children with a sustained period in which to write and if you don't provide regular opportunities for children to engage in their personal writing projects, the whole initiative breaks down. Children need to stay in contact with their pieces to keep them alive. It is not enough to have 15 minutes a week on a Friday afternoon to re-engage with a piece you haven't even looked at for over a week. Children can't build up momentum and motivation for a project this way. As a result, they become listless and restless during personal project time and the whole thing becomes tokenistic and a bit of a meaningless waste of time.

Set up a class publishing house and let children set up their own independents. Let children write in clusters or in pairs. Let them put writing out on their publishing house as a team.

Setting up our publishing house

One dominant aim of any great writing teacher is to nurture children's identities as writers. We want children to feel like genuine writers who go through the genuine processes to be published authors. Additionally, we want to give children ownership over the themes for their publishing houses and, to a certain extent, over [their class library](#). Here is a mini-lesson that may take a bit more time than the usual suggestion of 10-15 minutes. Indeed, you might want to spend a few whole sessions on this, but it's worth it.



Having read '[Back & Forth: Using An Editor's Mindset To Improve Student Writing](#)' by Lee Heffernan, I was inspired to create a class publishing house in my own classroom. When I first taught this lesson,

I was fortunate enough to have accepted a publishing deal and so took the opportunity to explain the process I was going through and the relationship I was building with the publishing house and my 'editor'. What I've come to realise is that a compositional editor is a very critical friend. They look to push your ideas and your writing to its maximum potential. They support and champion you but they also tell you when things need untangling.

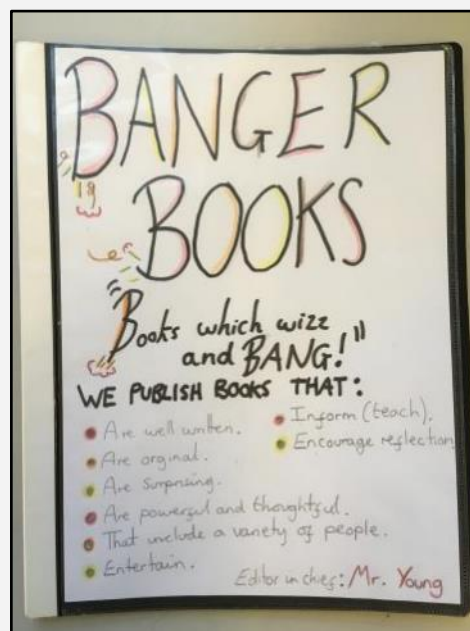
A publishing house, I've also discovered, has a certain identity, a certain statement of intent and a certain reputation for producing certain types of books. I decided to talk about it a little with my class.

We discussed which publishing houses were publishing our favourite books in the class library and we decided that, in many ways, I was the children's chief editor and, as a writer-teacher, the children were often mine too! But we didn't have a publishing house. We publish into the class library but what does our library stand for? What sort of texts do we want to publish for each other?

Importantly, what sort of texts do we need to

publish for each other? What's our mission? We discussed this and created our own mission statement for our newly formed publishing house...now we needed a name and a logo.

The children got together and came up with a variety of ideas. We took a vote and agreed on '*Banger Books Publishing: Books Which Wizz And Bang!*' Alongside it was a logo which we felt everyone would be able to draw and add to their published pieces easily.



However, there was some disappointment in the class. Some of the children became attached to their particular vision for their publishing house and felt that maybe their idiosyncrasies weren't visible in our whole class mission statement. So with that, we decided that we could also have smaller, independent houses and that these would need mission statements, brand names and logos too. It was also agreed that these independents would have to be unique enough to not encroach on Banger Books Publishing. The result was the poster below, showcasing the independents and what sorts of books they were looking to publish on their label. Children met and conferred with the editors

when they felt they had something to publish with them. They shared any revision or editorial ideas for the manuscript before it went to press. I was also around to offer advice and an independent voice too.



Delightful Disabilities People with disabilities have great abilities. We are looking to publish: stories, poems, fiction, memoirs and lots of other things about disabilities.

Paw Publishing Bring animals to life. We are looking to publish high-quality texts which have strong animal characters and have a strong environmental message.

Writing Is Life Writing that keeps you alive. We are looking for memoirs that entertain, are well written and include lots of people and loads of info.

Horrible Horrors Bone-cracking books that will scare you to death. We publish high-quality books that are well written, powerful, have a meaning, are scary, entertaining or surprising.

Fantastic Feminism Books for rebel boys and rebel girls. We want our books to include an amazing girl! Something that the girl does to save the day, to be thoughtful, to have

a moral.

Amazing Action *Books that explode.* We publish high-quality texts that are scary with lots of action and are well written.

Poetic Poems *Painting with words.* We publish high quality books that are well written, very artistic, entertain readers, not boring, poems about the things you like.


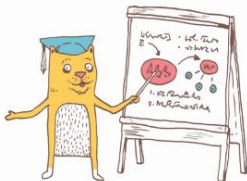




Super Sports *Super sliding swooping books.* We publish high-quality books that are well written, about sport, are funny and are adventurous.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Why do writers write and what do bookshops do? To help children find a purpose, genre and audience for their personal project, why not spend time considering why writers write and what bookshops do by teaching the mini-lessons below.

Why do writers write?

This mini-lesson is based on Young & Ferguson's (2020) reasons children are moved to write:

Writers who entertain 	Writers who teach Writers who learn then teach others 	Writers who share their thoughts and reflections 
Writers who record information 	Writers who influence and give their opinion 	Writers who paint with words 

(Figures from Young & Ferguson 2020 p.5-7)

One great way to get the children to reflect on their own writing and ideas is to ask them to think about: **Why do writers write?** so they can also reflect on why they write, what they like writing about and the purpose behind their writing and other writers' writing. You can create a poster for your class or the children can create and generate

ideas in their books. When I taught this lesson it was good to have the display that the children had created because we kept referring to it during conferencing and other mini lessons. They could confidently tell me and know why they were writing, increasing their **confidence** and **motivation**.



The children in Year Two thought carefully about ‘Why do writers write?’ They created a display for their classroom, which they referred to during conferencing and mini lessons.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre’s BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Doing what bookshops do

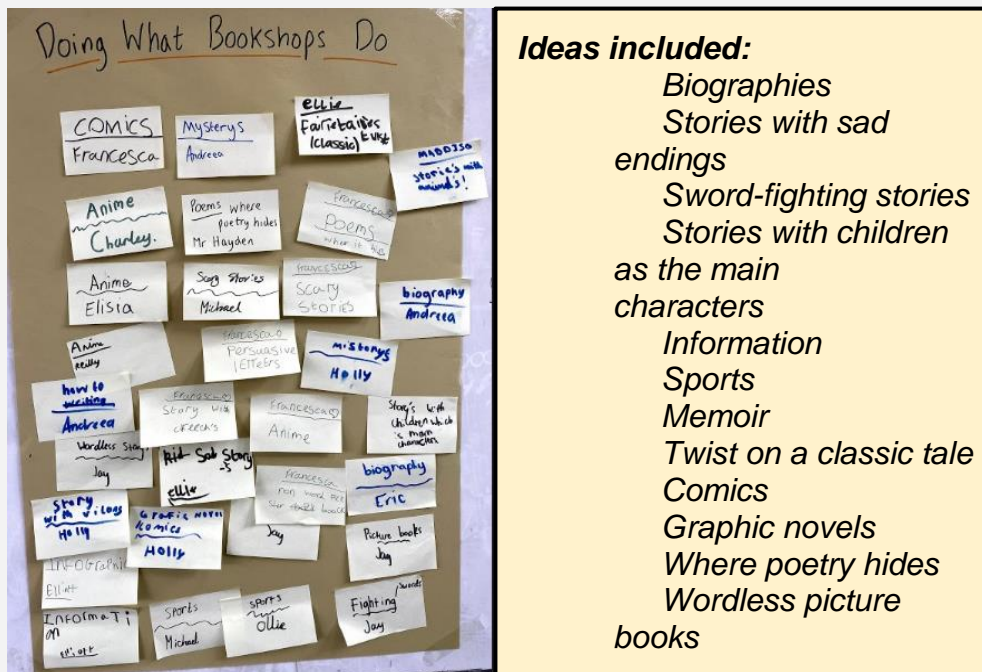
A town isn’t a town without a bookshop

- Neil Gaiman

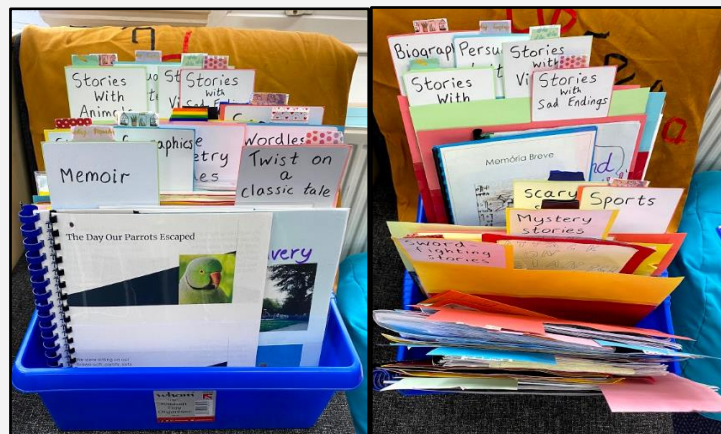
If you’ve ever been to a good independent children’s bookshop like *Bags Of Books* in Lewes or *The Book Nook* in Hove, you’ll notice that they place their books under certain categories. For example, here are the categories for the picture books at *Bags Of Books* when I visited last Summer:

Father’s day, brand new picture books, books about transport, dinosaur stories, non-fiction picture books, summer stories, classic picture books, poetry picture books, first experiences, celebrating pride, diversity in picture books, all about feelings, be you - be kind, books - books -books, wordless picture books, funny picture books, animal stories, our planet, magical picture books, alternative fairy tales.

We can increase children’s motivation and writer-identities when we explain to them that in their classroom, they will try to do the same thing bookshops do. They will make books throughout the year and place them under different categories. The children can be invited to think about what categories they would like their class library to have and you can build class writing projects around children making books for that category. For example, one class writing project might be to produce ‘funny books’ for the ‘funny picture book section’. It might be the case that you even take children on a school trip to see how libraries or children’s bookshops organise and categorize their collections.



Here we can see a poster where the children have come up with categories both for the existing writing in the classroom and aspirations about what they would like to write/read.



Here we can see children being given the responsibility of organising their own section of the class library. They are beginning to make decisions and are placing published pieces into their relevant categories.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Why not have an ideas party before writing time starts? A teacher's biggest fear about giving children personal project time is that they 'won't have anything to write about - they can't come up with ideas'. If you teach children just some of the many idea generation techniques that come as part of our [Big Book Of Mini-Lessons](#), this is never the case. However, another way to calm your anxiety is to have an 'ideas party' together before writing time begins.

Let's have an ideas party

The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas

- Linus Pauling

Generating ideas is one of my favourite things about teaching young writers. Children have a wonderful ability to come up with unique and original ideas in a way that I can't. When you gather children onto the carpet with some flipchart paper next to you, write 'things we can write about' at the top and then invite them to come up with ideas for the class writing project, it's like a creative bomb goes off. This is especially true with children who have had a long apprenticeship with the principles of contemporary writing workshop approach (Young & Ferguson [2020](#), [2021](#)). The best thing about generating ideas in a social way with others is that often other people's ideas spark your own ideas off too. You can pin these lists up around the room so children can refer to them over many days if they want to. With the youngest of children, you may want to draw diagrams of the things they suggest, as opposed to writing it down.

Share with your class what you're planning to write about for the class writing project and then ask children to talk about what they might want to write about. You can then invite children to share their ideas and write them up on the flipchart paper as you go.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Take a writing register. At the start of a session, why not take a Writing Register to see what everyone is currently working on.

Keeping a writing register

A good way of helping children to develop the habits and disciplines of a writer is to introduce them to the idea of a writing register. When I have tried this, I have included columns for: *audience, purpose, genre, diamond moment, process goal, and product goal*. This is probably best introduced by you as a way to keep tabs on the children's class or personal projects. But after a while, you will be able to hand over responsibility for updating this to the children. A register is something which transfers very well to online and can support children to be in a constant state of composition. I really like this idea as it helps children know what their classmates are working on and because it can act as an idea generation technique in itself. It also helps them to set goals, which is one of the most effective strategies any writer can employ.

In the mornings when children come in and settle down to their personal projects, or whenever you have your writing time, you could ask some of them to volunteer to give any updates about what they have been working on. You can fill out the register with the responses so everyone can get an understanding of how it works. Eventually, this is

a responsibility the children can take on for themselves. You can share this digital document with them so they can even add to it from home. They may even wish to develop their own way of recording what they are working on and what writing goals to set themselves.

Name	The memoir idea I need to draft!
	The time I got scared on the bus.
	the Day I got 9-11 9/11 9/11
	When me and Maxie went to dolly jungle
	The time my brother got locked in the bathroom
	The time I released my bunny into the park.
	The safe ground
	The time I rode a bike in school.
	I got scared by a demon under bed
	X I wen I gon to the Doty
	When me and Michael always get ourselves into the water
	The time I jumped out of a tree and broke my arm
	When I was a baby out (pish)
	the time I was in the water in school

An example of a writing register filled out by Tobias’ Year Four class.

Class Writing Register:	
My cat	Snail
Sun	Friend Pat
basketball	flowers
Sonic	Roblox
flowers	Among us
Pets	Birds
gardening	Roblox
Mario	Golf
bees	My house
Swimming	Roblox
Lego	Baby sister
Presents	Roblox
	Miss Clark
	Ms Vasques

An example of a whole-class writing register poster made in Marcela Vasques’ Year Two class.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre’s BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

A place to store future writing ideas. At the beginning of the year, ensure children leave some space in the back of their book for collecting potential writing ideas. As a writer, you simply must make a note of promising writing ideas before you forget them. Writing ideas are like dreams. They are vivid the moment you have them but if you try to remember them later, they elude you – unless you’ve written them down.

I’ve got more ideas than I know what to do with!

What to do when you have more writing ideas than you know what to do with?! This can become a regular occurrence for children. When generating ideas for what they would like to write about, as part of a class writing project, children can find it tough to choose the one idea they want to pursue. In Writing For Pleasure classrooms, though, they need not worry. Writing for pleasure teachers will always ensure children have access to a personal writing project book. This is a writer’s notebook that can go between home and school every day and is a place where children can pursue other writing projects and ideas away from the demands of the class’ writing project. This is the perfect place for children to pursue the other ideas they’ve generated.

For this mini-lesson, show children how you collect any excess writing ideas and add them to your ‘future writing projects list’ at the back of your notebook. You can explain that the children could start creating such a list too and that they are free to work on these other projects during personal project time and when they are at home. End the mini-lesson by giving children some time to set up their ‘future writing project lists’.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre’s BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Embrace intertextuality. Let children rework and remix the stories, non-fiction, films, TV programmes, computer games and popular culture they know and love. This is what writers do. It’s called intertextuality - where children take something they know - and create something new. You might find Lucy Taylor’s [we read - we write project](#) useful reading.

Embrace illustrations. ‘Drawing is not a rehearsal for writing: drawing is writing’ (Horn & Giacobbe 2007). There is always writing hiding in plain sight in children’s drawings. Interestingly too, when children are encouraged to draw as part of their writing process, they create more meaningful texts and with deeper complexity than they would without drawing (Hui 2011; Mackenzie 2011; Mackenzie & Veresov 2013; Olshansky 2014).

Let children 'make books'. Sometimes children don't want to write in their notebook. Instead they might want to 'make' a picture book using loose leaf paper and a stapler. They also want to make chapter books with a front and back cover and with illustrations at the top of each page. Make these resources available.



Aston's picture book and next to it Nathan's published 'chapter book'.

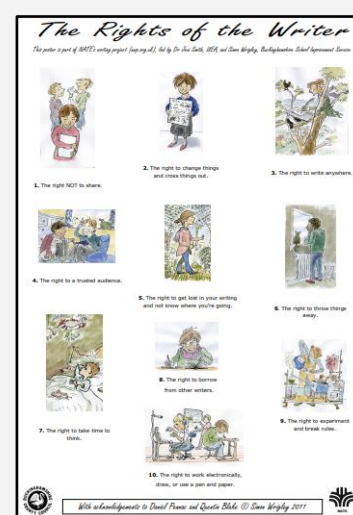
Bring in the technology. Give children access to laptops or tablets. Let them use collaborative word processors and presentation makers like Google Docs and Google Sheets. This way they can work and write online together at the same time by sharing a document. For more details, why not read Tobias Hayden's and Marcela Vasques' *"Anyone wanna collab?" Personal writing projects go online!* [action research project](#).

Establish rules and expectations. Make sure children know what the behavioural and organisational expectations are for personal project time. You can also talk about their rights and responsibilities as writers. Let children know what the typical routine is going to be for project time too. For example: mini-lesson, writing-time and class sharing. Finally, ensure children can write in an organised and orderly environment but also one that allows them to talk, collaborate and write together.

Our writers' rights and responsibilities

Daniel Pennac, in his book *The Rights Of The Reader*, created 10 rights for child readers. In 2011, The National Writing Project produced [its own ten rights](#) for writers which includes the following:

1. The right not to share.
2. The right to change things and cross things out.
3. The right to write anywhere.



4. The right to a trusted audience.
5. The right to get lost in your writing and not know where you're going.
6. The right to throw things away.
7. The right to take time to think.
8. The right to borrow from other writers.
9. The right to experiment and break rules.
10. The right to work electronically, draw or use a pen and paper.

Jeni Smith helped write these rights and you can listen to her talk in the video [here](#).

Using the poster as a springboard, I asked the children in my class what their rights and responsibilities were in the writing classroom. Below, you can see what they came up with. I have since placed them into a number of different categories which I find really interesting. The categories include: the role of the teacher, home writing, reader in the writer, what to write, how to write, sharing writing and 'getting your writing reader-ready'.

The Rights Of The Child Writer In 5RY

The role of the teacher:

The right to have a writer-teacher.

The right to be shown the 'writing tricks' other authors use.

The right to a pupil-conference where you receive genuine writing advice from a writer-teacher.

Home writing:

The right to a home/school writing journal.

The right to write anywhere.

The right to take writing to and from home.

Reader in the writer:

The right to magpie and borrow ideas from other writers.

What to write:

The right to write about the things you care about and express yourself.

The right to generate ideas in lots of different ways.

The right to write in many different genres,

The right to write Inspired by...poems.

The right to write a poem that doesn't rhyme.

The right to write memoir.

The right to write a gift for someone.

How to write:

The right to use 'planning grids' or else get your ideas together.

The right to move around the writing process – to write your own way.

The right to make mistakes, cross things out and change your mind.

The right to abandon personal writing projects.

The right to take time to think, to be unsure and to write freely.

The right to get lost in our writing and not know where you're going.

The right to experiment and take risks.

Sharing writing:

The right to be shy.

The right to give and receive 'author talks' from your peers.

The right to a supportive audience.

Getting your writing 'reader ready':

The right to circle unsure spellings whilst writing and deal with them later.

The right to have time to revise and edit your piece.

The right to work electronically and illustrate your manuscripts.

The right to publish your favourite writing into the class book-stock and beyond.

The right to make a few mistakes when you're publishing.

Hopefully, the instructions above provide enough information for you to do this for yourself in your own classroom. What I would say is that this particular mini-lesson may take longer than your usual 10-15 minutes.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Help children set themselves goals. Goal setting is one of the most powerful things a teacher of writing can employ. Some children can find managing personal project time difficult and need help deciding what they are going to work on and how they are going to use their time productively. Teaching these mini-lessons should help:

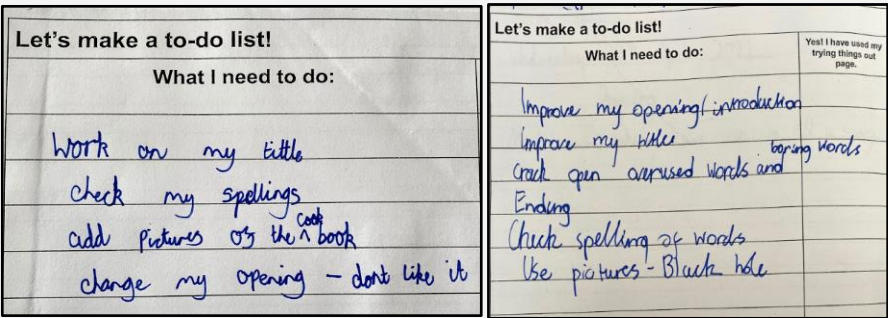
Let’s make a to-do list

The best goals, writing or otherwise, are specific, measurable, and keep you coming back at regular intervals

- P.S Hoffman

While I’m drafting a text, I’ll often make a mental note of things I know I’m going to want to go back to and sort out. I often have to finish a draft before I have the mental capacity to change it. The same goes for children. As a community of writers, it can be useful to make a collaborative ‘to-do list’ together on flipchart paper - adding to it when things arise. Children can make suggestions of things to put on it, and you as the teacher can make recommendations. In this way children begin to identify for themselves what is expected as well as what is possible. Over time, children can be encouraged to make their own list like the examples below.

This mini-lesson is usually best introduced just before class sharing. Class sharing is a reflective time. Children are listening, reading, discussing and commenting on each other’s developing compositions. This is a fruitful time to make a to-do list of things we might need to attend to or think about again when we are revising. Invite children during class sharing and Author’s Chair to give suggestions for the class ‘to-do list’.



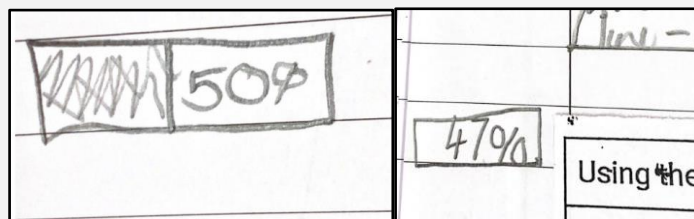
Here are a couple of examples of children’s individual to-do lists along with a whole class example generated after most children had finished drafting a memoir.

(Taken from [The WfP Centre’s BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Percentage complete

I once had a young lad in my class who enjoyed writing a little percentage in the corner of his book. At the end of each writing session, he would rub it out and update it. He called it his 'percentage complete'. He really enjoyed computers and would regularly talk about them. He had a fascination for the progress bars that would often appear when downloading something or if an update was occurring. He also liked to do this with his writing. I guess it brought him a sense of progress and achievement each day - no bad thing. Anyway, the other children in class cottoned on to it and started doing it too.

For this mini-lesson, explain how good writing can sometimes take time. It is moulded and worked on over many writing sessions. This can be tough for some people. You could share how one child kept his motivation up by giving himself a little progress percentage and updating it each day. The percentage he chose depended on how close he felt he was to final publication. You could invite other children to give it a try if they wanted.

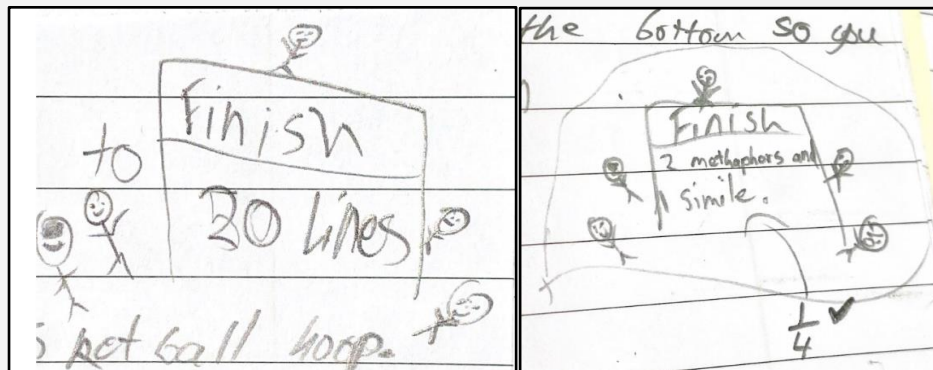


(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Where's your finish line?

As a writer, I decide on what I want to achieve in a given writing session. I'm old enough and experienced enough to do this implicitly these days. However, for young writers, this discipline needs to be taught. This is particularly important for children who lack motivation, have ADHD, or might suffer from an emotional or behavioural disorder. It's really important for these children to keep in mind what it is they are meant to achieve in an individual writing session. That's why asking them to set themselves a 'finish line' for the lesson is a good idea. For example, can they make a certain number of pages in their picture book? Can they get all their drawings done? Can they write a certain number of lines? Can they focus on book-making or doing their writing for a certain period of time?

For this mini-lesson, explain how it's good to have a finish line in mind for a particular writing session. It makes you feel good and that you've achieved something. Tell the children what you hope to get done during the session before asking a few of the children what their 'finish lines' are going to be.



(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Using a writing calendar

As a writer, I have to set myself writing goals. I have to know when I'm going to get certain things done. When am I going to get that chapter drafted? When am I going to give it a reread? When am I going to do the proof-reading? What's the publishing deadline? Am I going to meet it or do I need to let Bruce (my publisher!) know it's going to be late? Children can appreciate being given the opportunity to behave and regulate themselves in the same way. We also know from research and case studies that setting writing goals like this is one of the most effective practices teachers can employ in the writing classroom; particularly for children lacking in confidence or motivation. This is also true for children with behavioural or emotional disorders.

For this mini-lesson, explain how you keep track of your daily writing. You might have an electronic calendar or use one on your phone. You could show this to your class and explain how it keeps you on track and makes you accountable for your daily writing. You can then invite them to try it out during that writing week.

Writing Calendar	
M	Goal(s): Generate a Idea/Draft my Idea ✓
T	Goal(s): I want to make a simile while drafting ✓
W	Goal(s): First Draft ✓
T	Goal(s): Crack open boring Endings, first Words
F	Goal(s): Try opening
S	Goal(s): Crack open boring Words
S	Goal(s):

Writing Calendar	
M	Goal(s): How to free create a good opening
T	Goal(s): To do halfway through my story
W	Goal(s): 100 50 words in my draft.
T	Goal(s): 3 lines in my draft. ✓
F	Goal(s): 100 words in my draft
S	Goal(s): Tell a pain injury story.
S	Goal(s): 50-100 words in my draft

(Taken from [The WfP Centre's BIG Book Of Mini-Lessons For 3-11 Year Olds](#) Young et al. 2021)

Invite children to source their own writer's notebook. At the beginning of the year, you might want to invite children to find a notebook they would like to use during personal project time. They can find one at home they like or parents could be invited to go shopping for the notebook of their child's dream! The point is that children's notebooks should look very different to the exercise books they use at school. One of our Writing For Pleasure schools ensures that they also have a variety of notebooks in school for children to choose from, if for whatever reason they can't source their own.

Write with the children too. Make sure you have your own notebook and that you use it in and out of personal project time. Make sure you're being a role-model and are living the writer's life in the way you hope your children are too (Kaufman 2009). Your notebook should be going to and from school just as the children's will. Showcase how you use your notebook during mini-lessons. You should also make sure you don't spend all your time conferencing with children during writing time but take some time to sit at a table and write amongst the children yourself. Engage in conversation with them as you write too - asking and offering advice and talking about writing and being a writer more generally.

Balance time for talking with time for silent working. Children talk with one another before they write, as they write and after they write. These interactions occur in different ways and can include:

- **Idea explaining** Children share what they plan to write about during the session with others.
- **Idea sharing** Children work in pairs or small 'clusters' to co-construct their own texts together.
- **Idea spreading** One pupil mentions an idea to their group. Children then

leapfrog on the idea and create their own texts in response too.

- **Supplementary ideas** Children hear about a child's idea, like it, and incorporate it into the text they are already writing.
- **Communal text rehearsal** Children say out loud what they are about to write - others listen in, comment, offer support or give feedback.
- **Personal text rehearsal** Children talk to themselves about what they are about to write down. This may include encoding individual words aloud. Other children might listen in, comment, offer support or give feedback.
- **Text checking** Children tell or read back what they've written so far and others listen in, comment, offer support or give feedback.
- **Performance** Children share their texts with each other as an act of celebration and publication.

However, a time for silence and focused concentration is important too. For this reason, you might find writer-teacher Laura Whittick's action research project entitled [Write a little - share a little](#) useful reading.

Understand that children will engage in writing processes that are different to the ones you're used to. Personal writing projects give children an opportunity to engage in writing processes that are not typically made available to them during class writing projects. For example, abandoning, updating, reimagining, co-writing and even translating (for multilingual students).

Discarding a project is fine. However, it is important to keep a tab on children who continually abandon projects as they are often the ones who would benefit from some intervention and maybe some writing advice on how to stay with a particular idea.

There are several reasons that children abandon a project:

1. They aren't really that motivated by their subject.
2. They want to continue but have got stuck and don't quite know how to realise their intentions.
3. They have been distracted by another idea that, at present, feels more exciting and worth pursuing!
4. They've realised they don't know enough about the topic.
5. It feels too personal or inappropriate for the classroom context.

All of these situations do happen, but children will sometimes return to previously abandoned topics later on in the year.

(Young & Ferguson [2020](#) p.77)

Understand that children will engage in genres that are different to the ones you're used to. Children might pursue forms of writing that are different to what is usual. For example, children might write: fan-fiction, slam poetry, choose your own adventure stories, graphic novels, lists, coding, questionnaires, quizzes, fanzines, recipes, screen plays, scripts and reviews.

No more 'I'm finished'. Personal writing projects should be available to children throughout the day but particularly in writing lessons. Once children have completed what they've set out to do during the class writing project each day, they should automatically know that they can continue work on their personal project. This means there is no wasted time and you no longer need to hear 'I'm finished...what should I do?'

Allow children's notebooks to go to and from home and school. Clark's (2016; 2017) reports state that children who write at home are five times more likely to progress beyond curriculum expectations in writing than those who do not. Therefore, we want children to be in what we call a 'constant state of composition' (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)). To achieve this, we need to ensure children can access opportunities for writing as much as possible. Part of this is allowing children's notebooks to go to and from school. Children like to work on their projects at home with family members. They also like to take their notebooks out with them during playtimes. With my class, I would always ensure they lined up at the beginning and at the end of the day with the book they were planning to read that night and to have their notebook in hand.

We must also remember that sometimes children write from a need to metaphorically 'escape' unsupportive or stressful family circumstances. Bruning and Horn (2000) rightly remind us that school may be the best, the safest, and the only space where children ever get the opportunity to write for themselves. Therefore, schools must take this responsibility incredibly seriously and provide children with space and time in which to write solely for their own purposes.

Conclusion

You either learn your way towards writing your own script in life, or you unwittingly become an actor in someone else's

- John Taylor Gatto

There are many compelling reasons why, far from being on the periphery, personal writing projects should have a central place in the writing curriculum. As we have said, they have the power to motivate young writers and improve their performance both through engaging their interest and through the effect of allowing them self-expression and self-determination. They can be instrumental in making a bridge between home and school, and in helping the building of relationships and confidence. Children learn what they are capable of doing by themselves, and teachers get to know them (and they get to know each other) better as people and as writers (Ferguson & Young [2021](#)). Through writing in their own way and for their own reasons, the true purposes of writing, why we write, become clear to children, because they now have access to the perfect arena for engaging in the writing they will do out of school and in their own present and future lives. Therefore, by allowing and supporting children to pursue personal writing projects, we can indeed give them the means of 'learning towards' writing their own scripts for life.

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Setting Up Personal Writing Project Books In KS1

Marcela Vasques

Background:

I work as a Year Two class teacher at Richard Alibon Primary School which is located in a deprived area in the borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Principle(s) in focus:

- Pursue personal writing projects

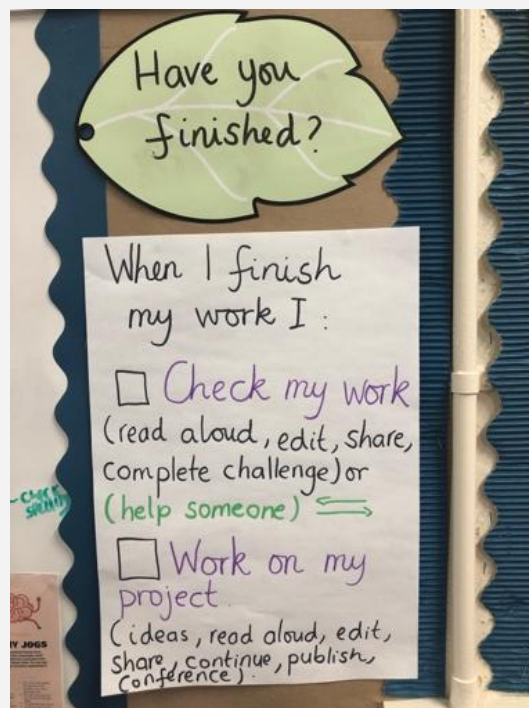
Aims:

- To encourage and allow the children to find their own voice as writers.
- To develop children's motivation, self-efficacy and self-regulation.

Description:

After establishing a routine of conferences with my class and the daily use of personal projects books, I was amazed at how much the children had to offer and how they cherished their own personal writing. The richness of exchanges and discoveries between the children and I through conferences and sharing the personal project books made it clear that those children deserved more. Their voices had to be heard!

"Children teach us through the information they share about subjects they know....Teachers can't afford to be without the energy-giving power of children's knowledge." - Donald Graves (Writing: Teachers and Children at Work)

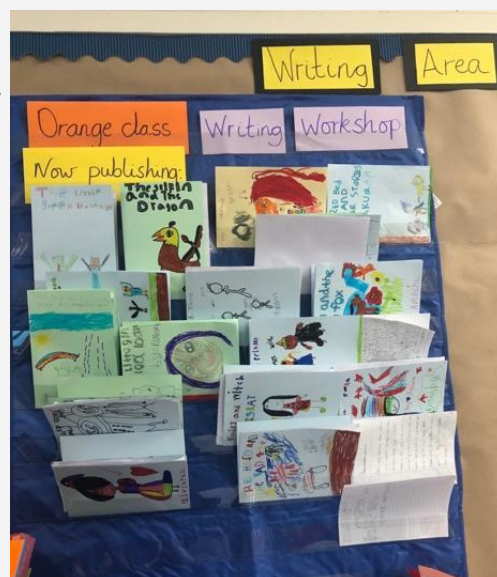


Start with yourself – I started the year sharing my own personal project book with the children. I shared pictures of things from my life and some of the poems I wrote. Then, I gave the children their own project books and invited them to share the things they did (if they wanted to) or something about themselves. This helped to establish a channel of communication and made my presence less authoritarian.

Explore memoirs – I shared with the children a memory basket as suggested by Jacobson in 'No More, I'm done!'. As I did this, the children wanted to share more about themselves. In my basket I had; my favourite book as a child, a picture of me as a child, toys I liked to play with and the nursery rhymes I used to sing.

Share – It was important that the children had the opportunity to share their own work with me, the class, and other classes too. This increased motivation in all the children. I also allowed the children to publish their work from their own project books if they thought they were ready.

Some of this published writing came from their project books.
Children taking a germ of an idea and seeing it all the way
through to publication on their own!



I shared this very simple diagram, so the children started to understand the writing processes independently.

Establish a routine – It was important that the children had a routine and knew when to use their project books, just giving it to them and hoping they would use it would not be sufficient, especially for children in KS1. We needed to set up routines. This year, the use of personal project books improved because they know that when they arrive at school they get their own project books and write. They independently use a date stamp before they start writing each day. I conduct conferences while they write, sometimes I write alongside them. Our TA takes the register as they arrive and also conducts conferences when it is possible. No time is wasted!

Impact:

- Trust between the children and I developed as a result of sharing their personal projects books and memoirs. They knew they would be heard and had agency over what to write. They knew their ideas/ stories/ thoughts/ lives were valued. As a result, they wanted to write (motivation and writing for pleasure).

“I didn’t like to write before now I do.” said K.

- Establishing a routine of sharing with the class, other classes and their peers was very important for their motivation to write. They had an expectation of a reaction and a response.

“I really like to write because you get to know more about my stories,” said C. Teacher: “Who gets to know about your stories?” “My audience.” replied C.

- Personal project books helped the children know what to do and how to do it when writing. It encouraged self-regulation in the classroom for all stages of learning & levels.
- Children developed and increased their stamina for writing.



- Parents/ Carers valued the children's writing from their personal projects and this helped to establish a deeper connection with parents/ carers:

"It's so lovely to see that A could write about Kelsey, our dog that died this year, thank you, Ms Vasques!" "Can I have a copy of his writing about his cousin in Australia, please? We loved it!" said H.'s parents.

Reflection:

- Next steps. I want to ensure that children recognise the principles of WfP in their relationship with writing. Pointing out their motivation, self-regulation, volition, ensuring (and understanding) they have agency.
- At the start of the year, the children offered small snap shots about themselves and their lives. They would start a new piece of writing almost every day, however; this is developing, they are now able to continue their projects from where they have stopped and explore more of their ideas.
- Drawing is really important for early writers, some of their most interesting writing came from their drawings. It was essential to give these children time to discuss their drawings and their ideas. It has certainly increased their volition and self-efficacy. It helped the children to write for pleasure.

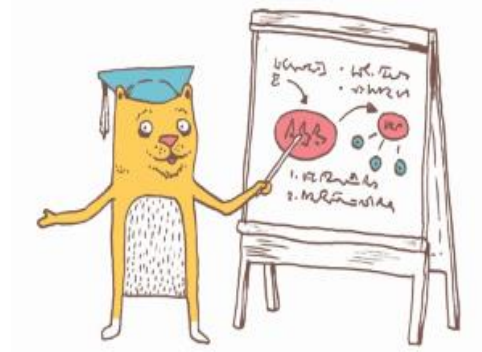
Why do we write?

Writers who entertain



Writers who teach

Writers who learn then teach others



Writers who record information



Writers who influence and give their opinion




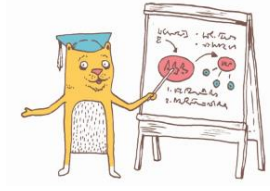




Writers who paint with words



Writers who share their thoughts and reflections



What can we write?

<p>Writers who entertain</p>  <p>Genres: <i>Picture books, fairy tales, fables, character-driven short stories, setting-focused short stories, developed short stories, graphic novels, flash-fiction, fan-fiction, choose your own adventure stories</i></p>	<p>Writers who teach Writers who learn</p>  <p>Genres: <i>Information, explanation, discussion, historical account, people's history, biography, science report, match report, faction</i></p>	<p>Writers who reflect</p>  <p>Genres: <i>Memoir, diary autobiography</i></p>
<p>Writers who record information</p>  <p><i>Note taking, making lists</i></p>	<p>Writers who influence Writers who give their opinion</p>  <p>Genres: <i>Letter for personal gain, advocacy journalism, community activism</i></p>	<p>Writers who paint with words</p>  <p>Genres: <i>nature poetry, animals and pets poetry, poetry that hides in things, inspired by...poetry, social and political poetry, anthology of life poetry</i></p>

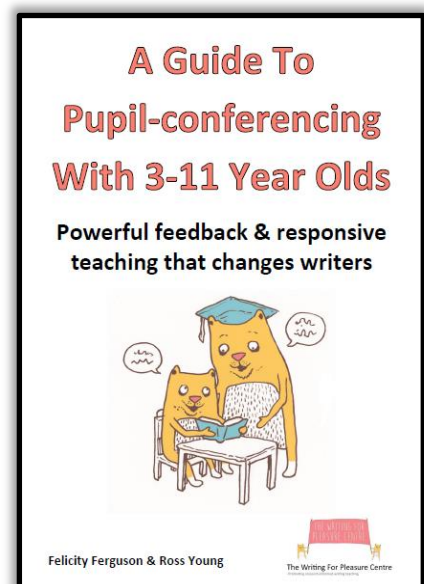
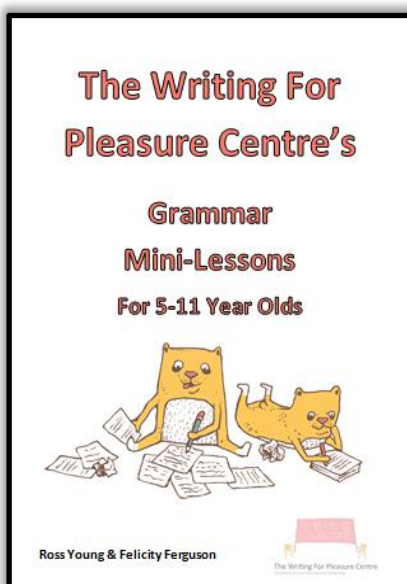
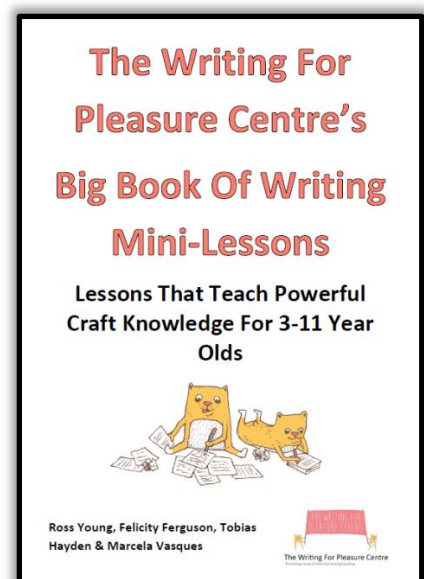
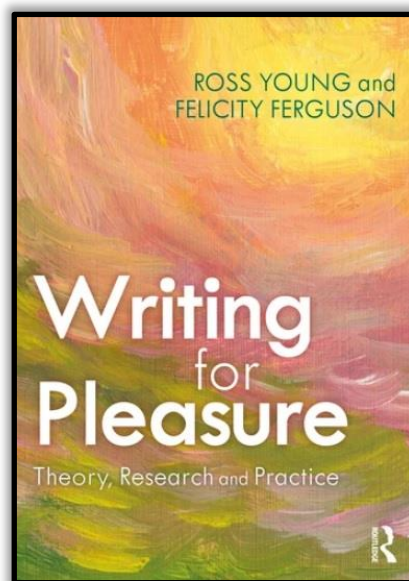
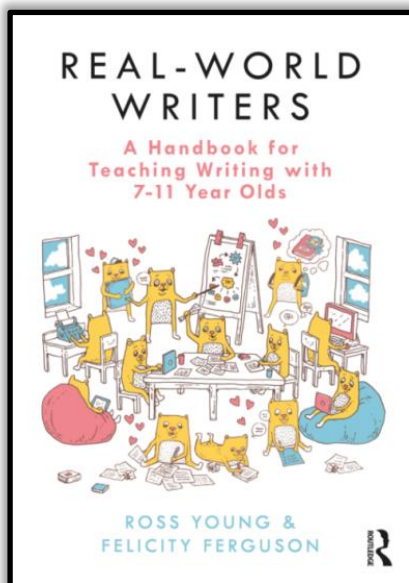
Publishing & Performing Menu

Choose how you'd like to publish or perform your finished writing!

- Read it out during class sharing times (in your own or in another class).
- Have a live debate or political discussion evening centred around the writing.
- Read it out during assembly.
- Have a slam poetry evening.
- Have a lunchtime or after school 'coffee house' read-aloud club.
- Have a publishing party or a writers' picnic.
- Hold special writing celebration evenings or exhibitions where the community can be invited in to read, hear or see live/videoed performances.
- Put it in a frame or give it as a gift.
- Put it on your bedroom wall.
- Put it in the bathroom for people to read on the loo or while they're in the bath.
- Leave it in the car to read during traffic jams.
- Turn it into a presentation.
- Turn it into a film.
- Turn it into a piece of artwork.
- Add it to the class or school library.
- Send it to another school either here or abroad.
- Send it in the post to a friend or a family member.
- Take it home to share with the family.
- Mail it to a person who needs to read it.
- Send it to an expert, charity or association to see what they think.
- Collect it together with other pieces to make an anthology.
- Share with another class via their class library.
- Enter it into year group, school, local or national writing competition.
- Send it to a local or national newspaper, magazine or fanzine.
- Publish it online.
- Publish it in the school newsletter or newspaper.
- Have a 'lecture day' where people can sign up to hear different speakers discuss what they've learnt during class topics.
- Put on a book or poetry sale. You can sell your writing - especially if people know it's going to a good cause. It can feel good knowing your thoughts, passions and ideas are worth money.
- Make an audio recording for the class library or school website.
- Suggest that it be used as an 'exemplar-text', when the writing is kept by your teacher to help teach next year's class.
- Ask if you can place it anonymously in local establishments such as: libraries, places of worship, local history centres, museums, art galleries, train stations, bus stops, bookshops, corner shop windows, lamp posts, gates, fences, takeaways, retirement homes, cafes, coffee-houses, pubs, sports-clubs, dentists' or doctors' surgeries, on buses or trains.

More from The Writing For Pleasure Centre

What we have provided you with here is just a quick guide to get you started with implementing our resources successfully. However, there is still a lot more to explore and learn! We call our approach the *Real-World Writers* approach, and it is based on our own research into evidence-based practice and case studies of world-class writing teachers. You can read about this research in more detail in our book *Writing For Pleasure: theory, research and practice*.

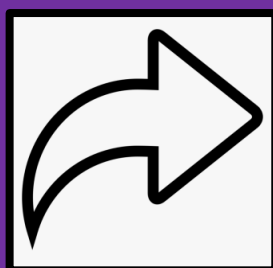


And finally...

- We are always looking to add extra exemplars to our Genre-Booklets. Please share your own writing with us or any good examples written by the children in your class. You can send any pieces to www.writing4pleasure.com/contact



- If this writing project or one of the mini-lessons has gone really well, please consider writing it up as an example of practice. You can find out more by visiting www.writing4pleasure.com/get-involved



- If you're interested in developing your writing teaching further, we offer a wide-range of evidence-informed CPD including our popular school residency programme, teacher workshops and multi-day institutes. Find out more at www.writing4pleasure.com/training

CPD

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