

The not so simple view of writing



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Writing is not simple. It's probably the most cognitively demanding thing children have to do while they are at school. It is also incredibly rewarding - both emotionally and socially.

This is the problem with the theoretical framework *The Simple View Of Writing* (Gough & Tunmer 1986; Berninger et al. 2002). In essence, it tells us that writing is about having some ideas and writing them down. While this is interesting to cognitive psychologists, such a common-sense perspective is possibly bordering on the offensive if shared with teachers. We suspect the model comes as little surprise to anyone who teaches children to write.



The Simple View Of Writing (Berninger et al. 2002)

Others think so too. This model has been continually revised and expanded upon (see Kim & Schatschneider 2017; Graham 2018; Kim & Park 2019; Kim 2020; Kim et al. 2021; Kim & Graham 2022; Young & Ferguson [2022](#)). Indeed, Berninger & Amtmann (2003) revised the model only a year later, producing their still very limited *Not So Simple View Of Writing*.

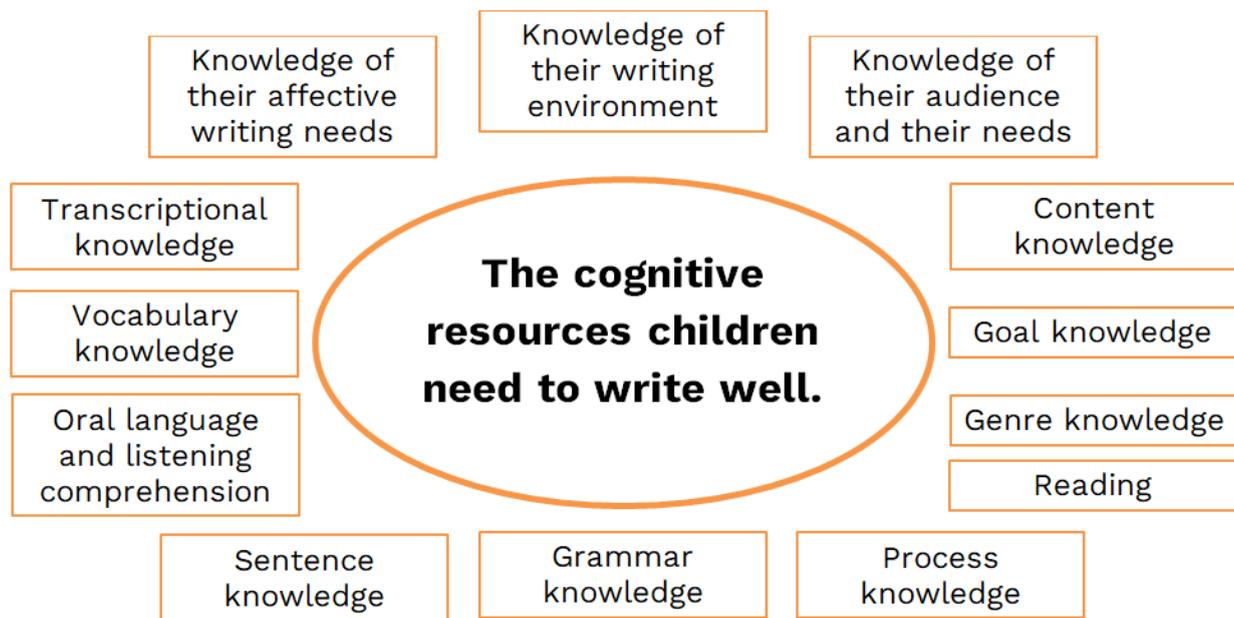


The Not So Simple View Of Writing (Berninger & Amtmann 2003)

This time, *executive function* was included to acknowledge that writers have to plan, manage and review their writing as they are crafting it. Again, we suspect this doesn't surprise you.

The temptation is to say that the *Simple & Not So Simple View Of Writing* are out-of-date and of little practical use. We wouldn't go that far. It's important to know how theoretical models for writing have been developed (see Young & Ferguson [2022](#) for more details). However, we do think the devil is always in the detail. If details are routinely left out of cognitive models for the purposes of 'simplicity' then it can quickly result in bizarre and narrow teaching practices being suggested and used in schools - practices which won't always align with what children actually need to develop as writers (Harris 2021; Young & Ferguson [2022](#)).

The latest understanding around ‘the science of writing’ is that to become great writers, children have to draw on at least 13 cognitive resources simultaneously. This can also be called their *writerly knowledge*. Our book [The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing](#) shares how teachers can develop this *writerly knowledge* in their classroom and across school.



The 13 cognitive resources children have to draw on to write well (Young & Ferguson [2022](#))

Our hope is that by sharing a more complete view of writerly development, we can help turn the tide on the pernicious underachievement of writing in schools (Ofsted 2009, 2012; DfE 2012, 2017, 2019, 2021). Indeed, the problem teachers and schools often face is knowing how to develop all these cognitive resources efficiently and effectively (Young & Ferguson [2021, 2022](#)).

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