

Getting writing instruction right for children with SEND



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

All children, but particularly struggling or less experienced writers, need high-quality teaching and explicit instruction if they are to fulfil their potential as writers. This is why SRSD instruction through daily mini-lessons works so well (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)). The concept is simple. Teach your class *one* writerly technique, process or strategy (what we call a *craft move*) before inviting them to use the move for themselves in their writing that day.

Case studies show that the most effective writing teachers deliver instruction in keeping with SRSD when teaching ‘craft knowledge’ (Young et al. [2021](#)), ‘sentence-level strategies’ (Young & Ferguson [20232d](#)) and ‘functional grammar lessons’ (Young & Ferguson [2022c](#)).

The best writing teachers understand how using the lesson structure shared below can be instrumental in helping children with SEND undertake writing meaningfully and independently. It is essential that teachers teach with clarity, elegance and simplicity. With this in mind, Young & Ferguson ([2021a](#)), inspired by the work of Karen Harris & Steve Graham, suggest that teachers of writing use the following process when delivering writing instruction:

Step One:	Orientate Remind the children of the class writing project they are currently working on. This includes checking they know what they are writing and who they are writing it for.
Step Two:	Discuss <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce the <i>craft move</i> you want the children to try out in writing time today. Give the <i>craft move</i> a name. For example ‘<i>show don’t tell</i>’.• Then be a salesperson. Tell your class why this <i>craft move</i> is so fantastic and how its use could transform their writing.• Link the <i>craft move</i> to the class’ success criteria for the writing project (Young & Hayden 2022). For example: ‘<i>show don’t tell</i>’ is going to help us achieve ‘share your characters’ feelings’, which is one of our success criteria.
Step Three:	Share Models or Model Live Share models. Show children examples of where other writers have used

	<p>this <i>craft move</i> in their writing. There should certainly be an example of where you've used the <i>craft move</i> in your own writing. You should also show examples from other recreational or commercial authors and/or from other students' writing. Invite children to ask you questions.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Model using the <i>craft move</i> live in front of your class. Share some of the writing you are currently working on and show how you're going to use the <i>craft move</i> to enhance your writing. Invite children to ask you questions.</p>
Step Four:	<p>Provide Information</p> <p>We always recommend turning your instruction into a poster or resource which the children can refer to throughout writing time. This helps them memorise the <i>craft move</i> and any conventions it might involve. For example, you might make a poster to accompany a lesson on punctuating speech. The poster can almost always be pre-prepared to save time and can remain up in the classroom over many days, weeks or even months. Children will be showing independent, self-regulating behaviour every time they consult the poster.</p>
Step Five:	<p>Invite</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite children to use the technique during that day's writing time. • Monitor children's use of the <i>craft move</i> during your daily pupil-conferencing (Ferguson & Young 2021). • Sometimes you might feel you want your children to practise the strategy prior to using it in their own writing. However, in all honesty, we find this is rarely necessary.
Step Six:	<p>Evaluate</p> <p>You can invite children to share how they used the <i>craft move</i> in their writing during class sharing and Author's Chair (Young & Ferguson 2020). If you have noticed a student who has used the <i>craft move</i> in a particularly powerful, innovative or sophisticated way during your pupil-conferencing, you should invite that child to share their writing with the class. The class can then discuss their friend's writing and its impact.</p>

<p>1. Orientate</p> <p><i>What the project is and who they are writing for.</i></p>	<p>2. Discuss</p> <p><i>Sell the craft move - explain why it's so fantastic.</i></p>	<p>3. Model</p> <p><i>Show them examples. Share your poster.</i></p>
<p>4. Provide Information</p> <p><i>Explain any conventions.</i></p>	<p>5. Invite</p> <p><i>Children use and apply the craft move during writing time.</i></p>	<p>6. Evaluate</p> <p><i>Pupil-conference during writing time. Share great examples with the rest of the class.</i></p>

It's important to remember that the stages shared above constitute a good guide. However, teachers should also feel free to experiment with them if they want to. The professional judgement made by a particular teacher might be that a certain stage could be omitted altogether and that another stage might need more time devoted to it. For example, some teachers like children to practise the *mini-lesson* prior to using it in their own writing, while others find this an unnecessary distraction. Some like to model the *mini-lesson* live, and

create their poster in front of their class, while others like to have made their poster prior to the lesson, or to share writing they have already crafted.

It can be useful to compare SRSD instruction with *The Gradual Release Of Responsibility* model for instruction (Pearson & Gallagher 1983). We hope that teachers notice how writing instruction can be delivered and then applied, in context, by children every day.



- *I did or I do* - The teacher either shares how they've used the *craft move* or models how to use it live.
- *We do* - The class is invited to use and apply the *craft move* in their own writing that day.
- *You do* - Children understand the value of the *craft move* and so continue to use it in their future writing, including in their personal writing projects (see Young & Ferguson [2021b](#)).

I, We & You sits in stark contrast to the ineffective but common habit of 'front loading' writing instruction at the beginning of a writing project and proceeding to 'cross your fingers' in the hope that the children will remember everything you've tried to teach them. This kind of practice doesn't help children to write well - least of all children with SEND (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).

If your teaching of mini-lessons is well planned and, above all, responsive to what your pupils need instruction in most, then over time children will internalise these strategies for themselves and so become confident, agentic, personally responsible and independent writers..

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