

# Suggested writing practices for children with behavioural or emotional disorders



## The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

This article looks to share the most effective writing instruction for children who present challenging behaviour. Writing problems are common among students with behavioural disorders and ADHD. Most of these recommendations come directly from research specific to pupils who have emotional or behavioural disorders (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)). Otherwise, the recommendations are based on improving students' self-efficacy (confidence) and self-regulation (feeling of competence), both of which are typically low amongst pupils identified as presenting challenging behaviour or are struggling inexperienced writers (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#)).

- Focus on confidence building, a daily sense of success, a daily feeling of competence, getting things done, making progress on a project, knowing what they have to do and how to do it, and giving them a sense of agency, ownership and personal autonomy (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2023](#)).
- Mini-lessons, taught through the principles of SRSD instruction (Young et al. [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2022a](#), [2023b](#)).
- Goal setting (Young & Hayden [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).
- Help pupils with their writerly problems by providing pupil-conferencing and allowing them to ask others for assistance. When conferencing, always give a positive personal response to what they are writing about before looking to teach them something (Ferguson & Young [2021](#)).
- Give pupils access to a variety of mentor texts *as* they are writing. These provide children with a sense of security (Young & Hayden [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).
- Provide children with ample time in which to plan. Over time, teach a variety of planning strategies so that pupils can choose their favoured one (Young & Ferguson [2023c](#)).
- Don't limit students' participation or decision making during writing lessons. For example, teach pupils how to generate their own writing ideas and allow them to write on a selected favoured topic - which they are motivated by (Young & Ferguson [2022b](#)).

- Teach responsively. Adapt to what your students need instruction in most. Teachers shouldn't be planning their writing lessons well in advance. Always keep an eye out for what your class is unconfident about and give them the instruction they need in that lesson or the next day (Young et al. [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2022a](#), [2023b](#)).
- As long as they are being productive each day, allow students to write at their own pace, using a writing process which suits them (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).
- Provide children with personal writing project books that they can use whenever they are tired of working on a class project or else have finished what they wanted to do for that lesson (Young & Ferguson [2021b](#)).
- Provide time for pupils to share their writing with friends to hear their reactions and responses.
- Always ask pupils with challenging behaviour what they think they did well during that writing session.
- Allow students who are competent typers to write using computer technologies (including the use of electronic spell checkers and smart speakers during proof-reading).
- Be a role model by writing alongside the students in your class. Write for your own pleasure - and enjoy their company (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).
- Allow pupils to use 'temporary' spellings while drafting (temporary spellings are then corrected at the proof-reading stage) (Young & Ferguson [2023](#)).
- Focus handwriting instruction on students' ability to write fluently and happily as opposed to insisting on a particular style ([LINK](#)).

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If you are interested in reading about how to support children with SEND to be great writers, get our latest eBook: [Supporting children with SEND to be great writers: A guide for teachers and SENCOS](#). Remember, it's [FREE](#) for members:

