

# You're their writer-teacher!

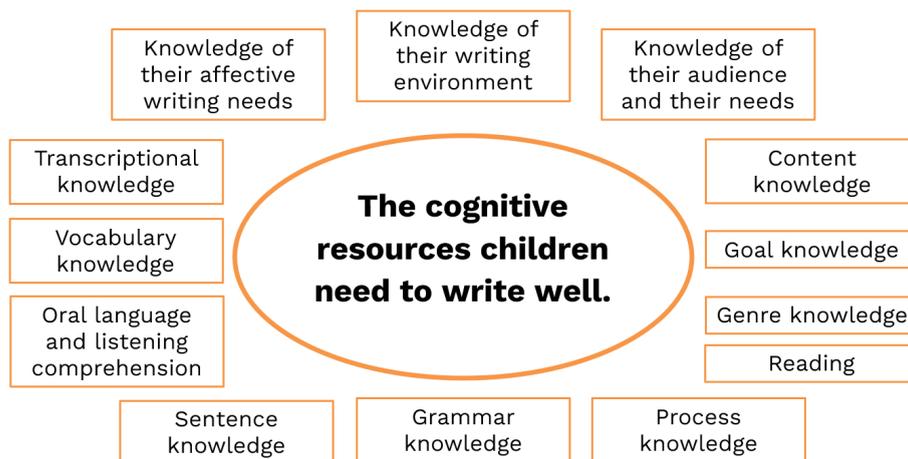
## Supporting children to find fruitful writing ideas



## The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Children unnecessarily (but routinely) underperform in writing classrooms simply because they are required to write on topics for which they have limited knowledge and little motivation to write about (Young & Ferguson [2022a](#), [2022b](#), [2022c](#)). This is particularly true for children with SEND (Young & Ferguson [2023a](#)). Writing is probably the most cognitively challenging thing children have to do while at school. Writing requires them to coordinate at least thirteen different cognitive resources simultaneously (Young & Ferguson [2022a](#)). One of these cognitive resources is content knowledge.



*(Writing is hard (but rewarding). The cognitive resources children have to draw on to write well. Adapted from The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing by Young & Ferguson [2022a](#))*

Having been brought up on a diet of scheme-supplied writing prompts, contrived topics, and artificial writing situations, many children learn to detest the writing classroom (Clark et al. [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2022c](#), [2023a](#)). Children can find that the quality of their writing is actually being judged on their ability to remember the stuff they've been required to write about by their teacher or scheme-writer rather than on the quality and accuracy of their craft. Teachers too end up spending the majority of their writing lesson giving out content knowledge and not *writerly knowledge* (Young et al. [2021](#); Young & Ferguson [2022a](#)). Children's writing development suffers as a result.

In contrast, in *Writing For Pleasure* schools, we know that when children are allowed to choose and access a topic they are familiar with and emotionally connected to, their writing performance improves and they produce higher quality texts (Young & Ferguson [2021](#), [2022b](#), [2023b](#)). This is particularly true for children who traditionally struggle with writing (Young & Ferguson [2023a](#)). This is because, perhaps for the first time, they can write from a position of cognitive strength, confidence and expertise. They get to access content which is not only stored in their long-term memory but they are also extremely keen to write about. This frees them up to focus on [all the other demanding cognitive resources](#) required to write successfully!

However, the move from being assigned writing topics to sourcing their own isn't always an easy transition for some children. Therefore, as their writer-teacher, they may need your support in finding a writing topic that's going to be fruitful and serve them well.

### **Giving children choice doesn't mean you can't give advice or direction**

Despite what some teachers might think, the *Writing For Pleasure* approach isn't actually a child-centred pedagogy (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)). We do not support the naturalistic/self-expressionist approach to teaching writing. *Writing For Pleasure* is neither child-centred or teacher-centred. Instead, it is utterly centred around helping children write the very best texts that they can. Although we recommend that children are given choice over the topics for their writing, this shouldn't be taken to mean that teachers shouldn't care about the probability and quality of their pupils' choices.

A *Writing For Pleasure* teacher is always looking to give their honest opinion and feedback on children's writing - from idea generation all the way through to proof-reading and publishing. As the most experienced writer in the room, you should always be pupil-conferencing with the children and sharing your advice and expertise. This means that, from a position of care, you can intervene and help children make decisions about their topic choices. The best time to do this is during *Ideas Parties* and when you're taking your *Writing Register*. Some teachers, when taking the *Writing Register*, like to meet with children in small groups to discuss their writing ideas and give their advice, recommendations, and, when necessary, definite direction! The rest of the class can be working on their personal projects during this time. Sometimes, when they feel it necessary, teachers will set aside a couple of sessions to do this. This means they get to spend quality time with every child.

Giving direction might mean a teacher asks a pupil not to write about football again for a class writing project and instead suggest that they do that kind of writing in their personal project time. Teachers can be direct and tell children to choose something else - as long as they can explain to the child *why*. For example, *'I think it's important that you develop as a well-rounded writer'*.

Teachers should also support children's decision making during *Ideas Parties*. This can be done in a number of ways:

1. Take part yourself. Spend time with each group and add your own ideas to their flipchart paper. This is also a lovely opportunity to get into conversation with your young writers and give feedback on their possible ideas.
2. Add recommended ideas to children's flipchart paper **before** an *Ideas Party* begins. For example, you could write certain narrative genres (scary, adventure, love, sci-fi, fan-fiction) in the middle of their flipchart paper. Alternatively, you could provide some suggested characters or settings they **could** use. You could also stick pictures of front covers taken from some of the children's favourite books onto the paper and encourage children to 'leapfrog' off of these texts to come up with their own story ideas.
3. For non-fiction, there is nothing stopping you from **suggesting** that they write about certain topics or a topic they are currently learning about in the wider-curriculum. For example: *Ancient Egyptians* or *Rivers*. In fact, this is the perfect opportunity to see how much children are currently enjoying their topic learning! If children don't take you up on your very kind offer, this often tells you something! The point here though is that they don't **have** to write on your suggested topics if you think they have a more fruitful idea of their own.
4. Specifically challenge or ask the class if anyone would be willing to write on a particular topic. For example: *'could anyone write me a story a bit like Harry Potter?'*, *'I would love it if anyone would be willing to write a pirate adventure story for me'* or *'could someone make an information book about the Romans for me to read to my daughter?'* Children are so nice - many will be happy to oblige.

We have to say that teachers are usually frustrated by children's topic choices when they have failed to put aside enough instructional time to work with their pupils. As we always say, if you rush certain processes, you get disappointing and rushed outcomes. As a writer-teacher, put your instructional focus into the things that are bothering you most. If you're unhappy with the quality of children's writing ideas - spend more time with them on it.

Finally, as the title of our publication suggests, you can help children generate fruitful writing ideas by using some of the techniques found in our eBook: [No More: I Don't Know What To Write... Lessons That Help Children Generate Great Writing Ideas For 3-11 Year Olds](#)