

Teaching children how to plan their writing in KS2



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Plans are of little importance, but planning is essential

- Winston Churchill

Planning strategies have been shown to help children craft better texts (Young & Ferguson [2023a](#), [2023b](#)). These include (but aren't limited to) the use of graphic organisers and planning grids. By using graphic organisers or planning grids, we can make available to our classes the typical journey writing in a particular genre goes through to be successful. For example, a biography *can* follow a sequence of:

- Introduction
- Early life
- What led to the subject's most important achievement
- The subject's main achievement
- What the person did afterwards
- Why the person is significant for the writer

There are obvious benefits (and also limitations) to providing children with such grids. Planning grids and graphic organisers are like directions, giving inexperienced writers a reassuring road map they can follow to help them maintain the cohesiveness of their piece. They help children get a handle on their ideas and their intentions. Of course, once they get going with their drafting, they don't *have* to stick to what they've put down on their planning grid - but it's always there to orientate them if they get lost. However, it's right to say that, for some children, a planning grid can limit any unique interpretations or innovations of the genre they might have had. These children might benefit more from our other planning strategies. For example, 'adventuring' (see our eBook [No More: I Don't Know What To Write Next... Lessons That Help Children Plan Great Writing](#) for more details).

It's important that children know that even the best laid plans can often go awry and that everything can be subject to change once they begin drafting.

Research suggests that teaching and modelling a planning strategy before inviting children to use it for themselves during that day's writing time is effective practice (Young & Ferguson [2023a](#), [2023b](#)). The key here is to *show* students a planning strategy, don't just *tell* them.

Steps for teaching planning strategies

Step One:	<p>Orientate</p> <p>Remind the children of the class writing project you are currently working on. This includes checking they know what they are writing and who they are writing it for.</p>
Step Two:	<p>Discuss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduce the <i>planning strategy</i> you want the children to try out in writing time today. Name the strategy. For example ‘<i>Story Arcs</i> (see our eBook No More: I Don't Know What To Write Next... Lessons That Help Children Plan Great Writing for more details). ● Then be a salesperson. Tell your class why this <i>planning strategy</i> is so fantastic and how its use could transform their writing. Share how you’ve used it in the past.
Step Three:	<p>Share Models or Model Live</p> <p>Share models. Show children examples of where other writers have used this <i>planning strategy</i> in their writing. There should certainly be an example of where you’ve used it to help you plan a piece of your own writing. You should also show examples from other students in previous years or classes. Invite children to ask you questions.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Model using the <i>planning strategy</i> live in front of your class. Tell them about an idea you’re currently working on and show how you’re going to use the strategy to help you with your draft. 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>planning strategy</i>. For example, you might make a poster to accompany a lesson on using a <i>Planning River</i> (see our eBook No More: I Don't Know What To Write Next... Lessons That Help Children Plan Great Writing for more details). 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 <i>planning strategy</i> during that day’s writing time. ● Monitor children’s use of the strategy during your daily pupil-conferencing (Ferguson & Young 2021).
Step Six:	<p>Evaluate</p> <p>You can invite children to share how they used the <i>planning strategy</i> during class sharing and <i>Author’s Chair</i> (Young & Ferguson 2020). If you have noticed a student who has used the strategy in a particularly powerful, innovative or sophisticated way during your pupil-conferencing, you should invite that child to share their work with the class. The class can then discuss their friend’s planning and its impact.</p>

It can be useful to compare this kind of instruction with *The Gradual Release Of Responsibility* (Pearson & Gallagher 1983).



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

Top tips

- One thing we would certainly recommend is that teachers don't ask children to stick their plans in their book prior to drafting. We want children to be looking at their plans and so have them in front of them as they draft.
- Consider giving the class more than one session on their plans if you think enough children would benefit. Children who have finished what seems to be a good plan can work on their personal writing project. This allows you to work with children who may need a bit of extra support. For more information on setting up personal writing projects in your class, see our eBook: [A Guide To Personal Writing Projects & Writing Clubs For 3-11 Year Olds](#) (Young & Ferguson [2021](#)).
- Children find planning easier when there is a genuine purpose and future audience for their writing (beyond their teacher's evaluation), and when they've been allowed to generate their own writing idea within the parameters of the class writing project.
- Give children time to talk about their writing ideas before they begin any kind of formal or informal planning. When the plan is completed, give them another opportunity to talk it through with a friend or peer.
- Whatever planning strategy you choose to teach your class, avoid asking them to do much writing. Instead, where possible, encourage them to use diagrams, symbols or drawings. For example, there is no reason why children can't draw on our planning grids or graphic organisers. Drawing stops children from 'treading on their own writing toes' when they come to draft their piece. How many times have you seen a child who has been asked to plan ending up writing their whole story out in the plan? This needn't happen.

To find out more, consider downloading our eBook: [No More: I Don't Know What To Write Next... Lessons That Help Children Plan Great Writing](#).

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Plan Great Writing



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