

# **A Classroom Guide To Getting Your Year Right For Writing**

**Welcome To Our  
Community Of Writers**



**By Ross Young, Tobias Hayden  
& Felicity Ferguson**



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## The Writing For Pleasure Centre

The Writing For Pleasure Centre functions both as a think tank and as an action research community. The result is that we are continually engaged in sharing effective practices, case studies and research findings. The mission of The Writing For Pleasure Centre is to help all young people become passionate and successful writers. We look to accomplish this goal by investigating what world-class writing teaching might be. We do this through:



- Our school residencies and teacher training workshops.
- Curriculum development and creating resources.
- Conducting, disseminating and publishing research.
- Working with children, teachers, school leaders, teacher-educators and charities.

It's our hope that teachers regard The Writing For Pleasure Centre as a place where they can access a specialist network and continued professional development that is free.

If you're new to the idea of a *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy, you can read all about it at: **writing4pleasure.com**

**Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson** are the founders of The Writing For Pleasure Centre and authors of *Writing For Pleasure: Theory, Research & Practice*, *The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing* and *Real-World Writers: A Handbook For Teaching Writing With 7-11 Year Olds* and *Writing*. They both hold MAs in applied linguistics in education. As passionate writer-teachers, they now work around the UK and abroad helping teachers and schools develop extraordinary young writers. They convene The United Kingdom Literacy Association's international Teaching Writing Special Interest Group and also help run their Teachers' Writing Group. Ross was the lead researcher on '*What is it Writing For Pleasure teachers do that makes the difference?*' Their work continues to focus on the learning and teaching of young writers and is informed by their ongoing work with classroom teachers and early years educators.

**Tobias Hayden** was one of the case study teachers for the research project '*What is it Writing For Pleasure teachers do that makes the difference?*' He is a regular writer for The Writing For Pleasure Centre. This includes numerous blog posts, articles and examples of practice. He is also the co-author of two books: *The Writing For Pleasure Centre's Big Book Of Writing Mini-lessons: Lessons That Teach Powerful Craft Knowledge For 3-11 Year Olds* and *Getting Success Criteria Right For Writing: Helping 3-11 Year Olds Write Their Best Texts*. He holds an MA in Education and the title of his dissertation was: *Agency in a Year 4 Writing For Pleasure classroom: influencing their own instruction and co-developing product goals for a memoir class project*. He has spoken about this research at the UKLA's Teaching Writing Special Interest Group and will be presenting it at The UKLA's International Conference 2023 on *Writing Matters*.

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## Preface

Some years ago, we were teaching at our local primary school and we came to the conclusion that we were probably the worst teachers of writing in the whole entire world. We hated doing it, we hated teaching it, and our students got terrible results. Our students also hated writing and they hated us teaching it too!

Research has since confirmed why this was, and it appears that we were far from alone. Some of you might feel like this too. The fact is that many of us didn't receive the writerly education we should have had while we were at school. We know this because research shows that a great number of teachers feel deep shame about their own writing abilities, and consequently have grown up disliking writing. A friend of ours, Paul Gardner, carried out some investigations, and found that less than 2% of teachers wrote with or for pleasure, with half reporting that they had never felt any pleasure from writing in their lives (Gardner 2014). To make matters worse, the research surrounding ITE reveals that the majority of teachers around the world leave their teacher training feeling ill-prepared to teach writing (Young & Ferguson [2023a](#)).

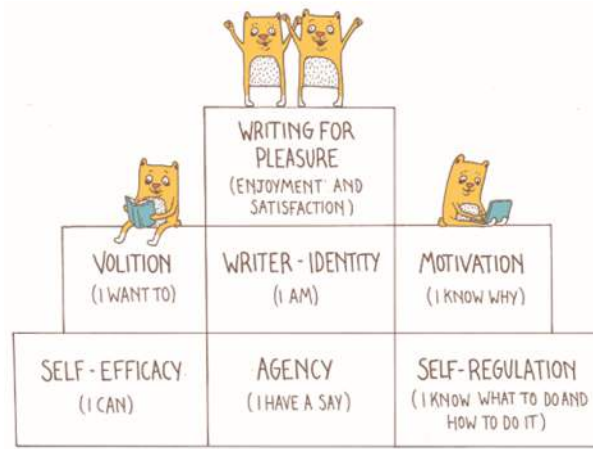
This is a serious problem, because how we were taught writing at school has a strong influence on how we feel about the subject, how we think it should be taught and what we know about it - our writerly knowledge. Unfortunately, it appears from the research that, as teachers, we regularly copy the same failed writing teaching that we once received (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2023a](#)). We should point out that there is of course a significant minority of teachers to whom this doesn't apply - but it certainly applied to us.

We tried all the popular approaches in the UK at the time and none of them worked. We were frustrated. We wanted to do something about it. We decided that we would build a writing pedagogy from scratch and base it on what the science and research evidence said was the most effective and affecting practice (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2022a](#), [2023a](#)). We were no longer going to leave things to chance.

We conducted a total of twenty-three literature reviews spanning more than fifty years of scientific research. First, we started with the meta-analyses. For those who might not be familiar with the term, a meta-analysis is where a researcher will group many scientific studies on a particular subject in order to identify recurring patterns of effectiveness. We then read what case studies tell us about what the best performing writing teachers do in their classrooms which makes the difference. We discovered that there are 14 enduring principles which represent the most effective teaching practice. These principles all have a track record of raising standards and accelerating progress in writing. The principles are:

1. Build a community of writers
2. Treat every child as a writer
3. Read, share, think and talk about writing
4. Pursue purposeful and authentic class writing projects
5. Teach the writing processes
6. Set writing goals
7. Be reassuringly consistent
8. Pursue personal writing projects
9. Balance composition & transcription
10. Teach daily mini-lessons
11. Be a writer-teacher
12. Pupil-conference: meet children where they are
13. Connect reading & writing
14. Interconnect the principles

Interestingly, we noted that there were also six affective needs (relating to the emotions) that teachers should attend to in order to help children write happily and successfully. These needs are:



Young & Ferguson's (2021a) hierarchy of emotional writing needs

Once these principles and affective needs were identified, we reviewed the research on each one to help us better understand what we could be doing in our classroom to make the difference. In the end, we decided to call our approach the *Writing For Pleasure* approach. And now, for us, Writing For Pleasure has become simply a synonym for world-class writing teaching.

We began using this new approach, and it was having a transformative impact on our students. We moved to another school to see if it would work in another context, and it did. We then started to write about the pedagogy online, and other teachers started reporting that they were getting the same great results that we were.

Fast forward to 2019, and we were lucky enough to be given a research grant in conjunction with the Goldsmiths' Company and University Of Sussex. We travelled around to see what it was these other 'Writing For Pleasure' teachers were doing. What was special about this study was that, to participate, the teachers had to show that they had a track record for accelerating children's progress, and that their children reported that they loved to write and felt their affective writerly needs were being met.

What we found out from all this work has since been published as a book called *Writing For Pleasure: Theory, Research & Practice* (Young & Ferguson 2021a) and the establishment of The Writing For Pleasure Centre.

The Writing For Pleasure Centre is now informed by over 600 pieces of literature, case study work, action research by teachers in our affiliate schools, and empirical research on the subject of teaching writing (Young & Ferguson 2023a).

The Writing For Pleasure approach involves children and teachers writing together every single day. They write for many different purposes, and for a variety of audiences. They are *moved* to write about what they are most knowledgeable and passionate about. They also write to deepen their responses and understandings of what they read. They write to transform their own (and others') thinking about what they learn in the wider curriculum subjects. They write to entertain, to paint with words, to persuade and share their opinions, to teach others, to make a record of things they don't want to forget, and to reflect on their own thoughts and personal experiences. They write about themselves and their cultures. They also write to reflect and sustain the cultures of people they might not have met. They share their writing and talk about themselves as writers with their peers, teachers and caregivers. They learn how to live the writer's life.

Pupils explore new genres of writing through whole class writing projects. Together, they discuss the purpose of the writing project, explore its basic features, and study mentor texts together. They consider who they would like to write their pieces for and what they would like to write about most. Students are taught how to use the same features and expert techniques they identified from the mentor texts in their own compositions. They learn how to attend to their spellings, handwriting, grammar, and sentence construction. This helps them write happily and fluently. Pupils acquire a great deal of craft knowledge – what we call *craft moves*. This includes writerly strategies and techniques for negotiating the writing processes. We want children to know how they can take a germ of an idea and see it through to publication independently and successfully. Students are supported by being provided with clear processes and ambitious writing goals. They are given ample time and instruction in how to plan and how to improve on what they have already written through specific revision and proof-reading sessions.

Pupils receive daily in-the-moment verbal feedback and responsive assessment-based individualised instruction through teacher-pupil conferencing. These conversations are designed to push the writer and move their writing forward. Pupils are given many opportunities to discuss their compositions with their teachers and peers. At least one hour a day is devoted to the explicit teaching of writing and, within this time, children are engaged in writing meaningfully for a sustained period. We believe this is the only way they can learn about the discipline of writing and of being a writer. Across a school day, children also have opportunities to write about their reading and in response to their learning in other subjects. Importantly, pupils have access to personal writing journals which travel freely between home and school. We want children to live the writer's life and to be in a constant state of composition.

Genuine writing communities are created in classrooms. Children write in positive and enthusiastic writing environments which are headed up by passionate writer-teachers. Classrooms feel like a mixture of creative writing workshops and professional publishing houses. The approach is rigorous, highly-organised and reassuringly consistent. Pupils are encouraged to take risks and to be innovative, but also to write with focus and serious intent. Teaching is responsive - depending on what individual children need instruction in most. Whether they are in Nursery or Year Six and regardless of where they are in their language development or writerly experience, all children are treated as writers and are helped not only to write pieces which are successful in terms of the objectives of the curriculum but also meaningful to them as young authors.

Felicity Ferguson & Ross Young



# Introduction: Why start the year with a *Welcome Project*?

*By failing to prepare your writing year, you're preparing your writing year for failure.*

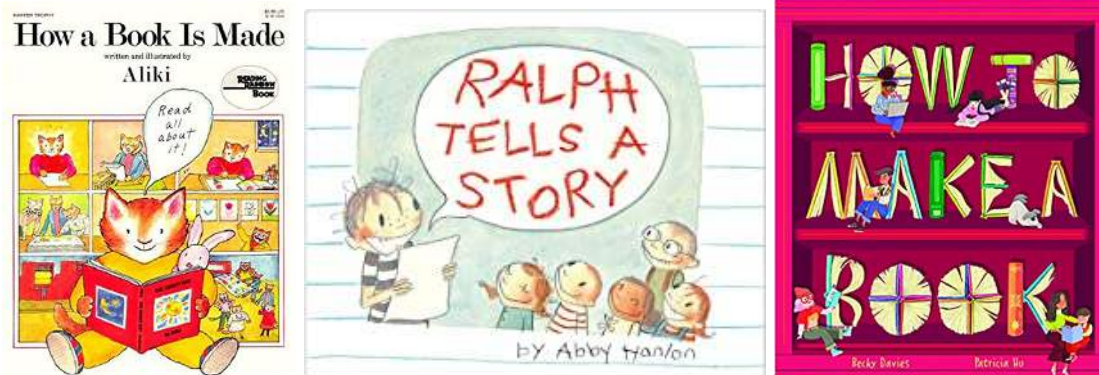
As you may or may not know, the *Writing For Pleasure* approach and its associated programme of study is demanding. After all, it's based on world-class writing practices. To be successful, it requires teachers and schools to be organised, rigorous, responsive, and reassuringly consistent. Classrooms need to run like well-oiled writing machines, to be what writer-teacher Emma Hardy calls her 'writing factory'. Your classroom should be two things simultaneously: a creative writing workshop and a professional publishing house.

Before you dive straight into teaching your writing projects for the year, you should put aside some quality time to set your classroom up right for writing. By undertaking a *Welcome Project*, you give children a real insight into how your classroom and your writing teaching is going to work across the academic year, and even how writing is taught across the whole school. With that said, every teacher runs their classroom in a slightly different way, so welcome projects also give children an opportunity to find out about the expectations for writing in their new class as compared to previous years. Welcome projects are also a chance for teachers to learn from their pupils. A time that's set aside to actually identify what your students need from you to write happily, meaningfully and successfully across the academic year.

We recommend that every teacher organises a welcome project at the beginning of the year and that this project lasts for around two to three weeks. However, we leave our guidance open to allow you to make your own professional judgement and adaptations. Parts 3-6 provide examples of what these first few weeks *can* look like in the Early Years Foundation Stage, then in Key Stage One and then Key Stage Two (3-11 year olds).

Before we begin, we couldn't miss the opportunity to share with you three excellent books which could help you get started on your journey: *Ralph Tells a Story* by Abby Hanlon, *How a Book Is Made* by Aliko and *How To Make a Book* by Becky Davies & Patricia Hu. All three of these books are wonderful texts for opening up discussion about what writing and being a writer is going to look like in your new class. It's important to explain that this year, as a class, you're going to try and do the exact same things authors do out in the real world.

Why not set aside a time to read these books with your pupils in your first week together?



Of course, you don't have to use these books every year. Before your current class leaves you at the end of the academic year, why don't you get the books out again and ask your class to all write a similar book based on how you taught them to write and be writers this year? These will be ready for your new class to read and discuss in September.

# Part One: The importance of establishing world-class writing teaching

*It is important that we create structures that hold students accountable for what they have been taught. Their work must demonstrate evidence of their practice in response to the teaching that has occurred.*

- Judy Davis & Sharon Hill

The *Writing For Pleasure* approach is based on *The Science Of Writing* ([2022a](#)), *Writing Realities* ([2022b](#)), what the research evidence has to say about the most effective writing teaching ([2023a](#)) and what it is the best performing writing teachers do that makes the difference ([2021a](#)). The approach focuses on the 14 enduring principles of world-class writing teaching. These principles are:

- Create a community of writers
- Treat every child as a writer
- Read, share, think and talk about writing
- Purpose purposeful and authentic class writing projects
- Teach the writing processes
- Set writing goals
- Be reassuringly consistent
- Pursue personal writing projects
- Balance composition and transcription
- Teach daily mini-lessons
- Be a writer-teacher
- Have conferences with pupils
- Connect reading and writing
- Interconnect the principles

We know that writing is something that is both personal and intensely social, both cognitive and emotive. The social conditions in which children are invited to write and the amount of existing ‘writerly knowledge’ children have at their fingertips have a direct impact on their writing development. If your writing environment is good, and children are knowledgeable about writing and being a writer, they flourish. If your writing environment is dysfunctional and children are ignorant about what’s involved in writing and being a writer, they fail (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2022a](#), [2022b](#), [2023a](#), [2023b](#)). It’s as simple as that.

One of the principles of world-class writing teaching is to build a community of writers. Writing at school should be a social event that involves lots of different people. One of the first things children need to know is *why* they are in the writing class. What is the reason for being there? A writing classroom is a physical and social environment that children and teachers have to negotiate and maintain. It’s a place where writing gets made and published, and a place where apprentice writers meet, learn, and work on becoming better writers.

We know that a writing classroom works best when children have been taught how to regulate themselves both emotionally and socially, and when they have strong writer-identities and feel a sense of internal and situational motivation (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2023b](#)). Classrooms which are pleasant, supportive, cooperative, and encouraging of choice and agency are the ones which do well. This is because they are well-organised, communicate very clear behavioural expectations, make routines and structures explicit, and ensure children understand their responsibilities. This is what *Welcome Projects* are all about.

*Writing For Pleasure* schools don’t allow their writing classrooms to work haphazardly, nor do they produce laissez-faire writing. Instead, teachers work hard on their welcome projects to ensure that the writing pedagogy of the school is based on a collective history and a reassuringly consistent routine of common practices. These common practices need to be established and understood from Nursery onwards, and they must continue across and throughout the whole school. For example, you’d expect to see children and teachers understanding:

- The writerly values of the class and school
- How people feel about writing and being writers
- The reasons for making writing while at school
- The expectations for final written products
- The typical ways in which classrooms work on their writing together
- The writer’s discipline - how to live the writer’s life.

As part of this understanding, teachers should reflect on [what sort of writing teacher they are](#). Young & Ferguson (2021a) consider there to be six common orientations teachers can have towards the teaching of writing, namely:

- The presentational or skills-based view of writing
- The naturalistic self-expressionist orientation
- The structuralist and genre-based approach
- The book-planning literature-based model
- The critical literacy and multiliteracy perspective
- The environmental and community orientation

Teachers and schools should reflect on how they perceive each of these orientations and how these affect the relationship between the teacher and their pupils, the teachers' and school's curricular priorities, and the typical strategies teachers might employ.

Teachers should also come together as a whole school to write a clear [school vision](#) for how children are going to develop as writers, and then formulate a clear [writing policy](#). They can think about the common practices they want their pupils to learn and develop year-on-year. What this can look like will become clearer as you progress through this book.

## Part Two: Preparing for a successful welcome project

*Strangers don't work well alone. When a class becomes a community, its members learn to help and model for each other.*

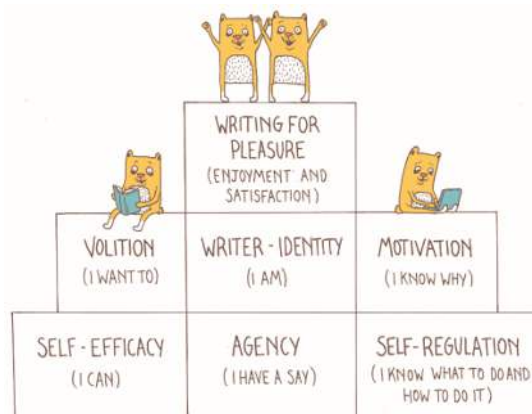
- Donald Graves

It's good to have a plan for the key teaching you want to cover with your new class during this time. If you are an experienced *Writing For Pleasure* teacher, you can probably anticipate what the most pressing needs will be. However, our plans for welcome projects always need to be flexible and responsive to the needs of each unique class we receive each year.

During welcome project sessions, it is important to talk with as many children as possible to help you pick up on any general trends, interests, writerly expertise or difficulties there might be across your class. A *Welcome Project* is one of the best times to find out what it is your young writers are going to need to learn about across the year. For those of you coming to this for the first time, it might sound like a daunting task - particularly because you have to learn and adapt your lessons as you go. You will need to plan in a proactive, informed and responsive way, deciding at the end of each day what you will want the next day's lesson to be.

### How can I get a good feel for what my class needs if I've never taught them before?

Children have a number of cognitive and emotional needs that need to be attended to in order for them to write well (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2022](#)). These include:

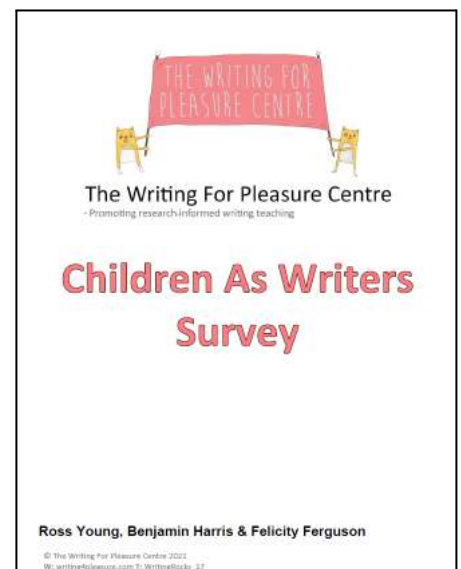


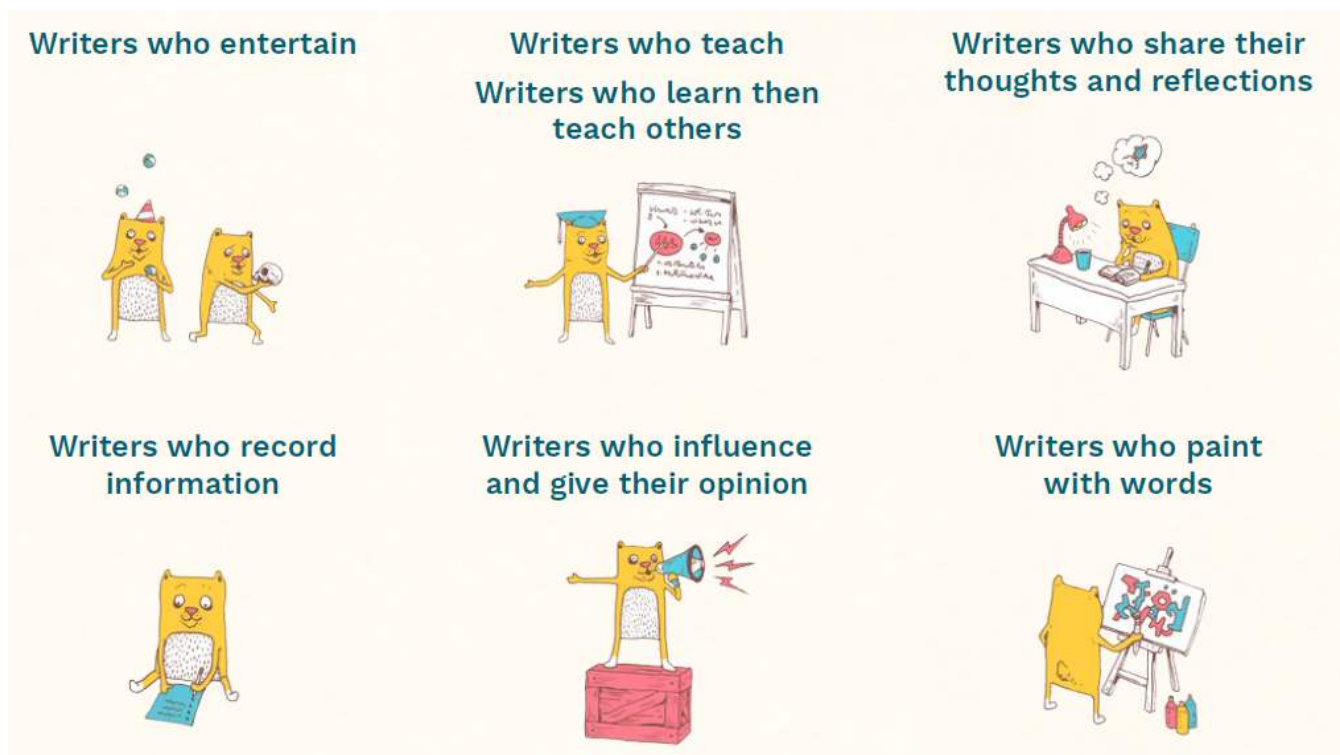
One way to quickly obtain useful information about your class and their writerly needs is to conduct our [Children As Writers](#) survey at the beginning of the year. It's always well worth taking time out to do this survey properly.

Talk through each question with the children and help them to understand what the question is asking. Some of them may need some clarification. For example, question eight on the survey is:

*Do you know why you are writing the things you write at school?*

Now, a lot of children might answer 'yes, always' to that question because there's often no other reason than 'because my teacher wants me to.' This is not particularly useful. So it may be worth sharing with the class some of the main reasons we are *moved* to write (see next page), and finding out how often they get to publish their writing to real audiences beyond their teacher's evaluation [[LINK](#)].





(The reasons we are 'moved' to write from Young & Ferguson [2020](#))

You also want to avoid *satisficing*. This is when children tell you what they think you want to hear! It's important that your class knows that it is beneficial for you and your teaching if they answer as honestly as possible. Once you have collected your data, it only takes about half an hour to input it onto the spreadsheet supplied, after which a report is automatically produced giving you a summary of your class' writerly needs.

You will also be able to see each child's individual attitudes towards writing. This is useful, since those with negative feelings about writing are the ones you are going to want to spend some quality discussion time with over the next few weeks, drawing out their personal opinions on what they feel they need to be able to write happily and successfully.

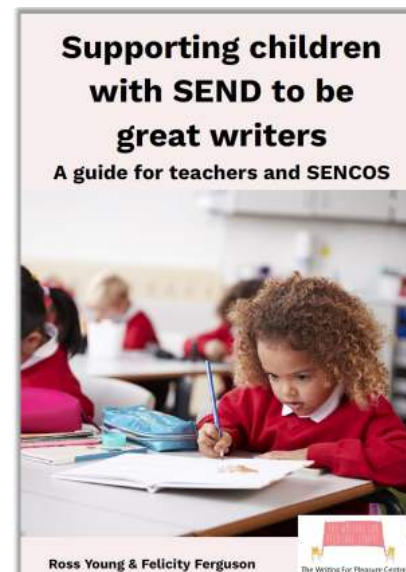
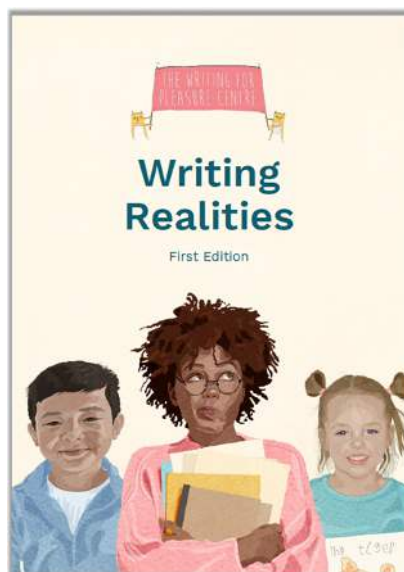
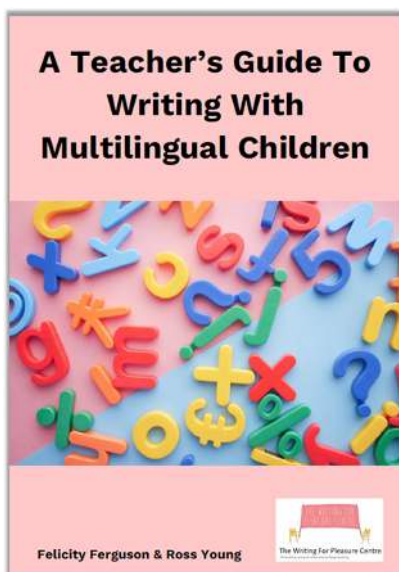
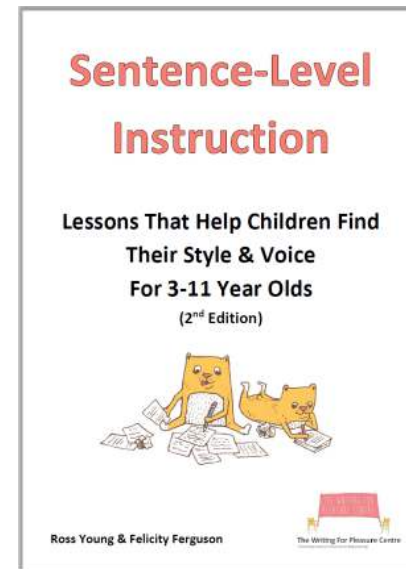
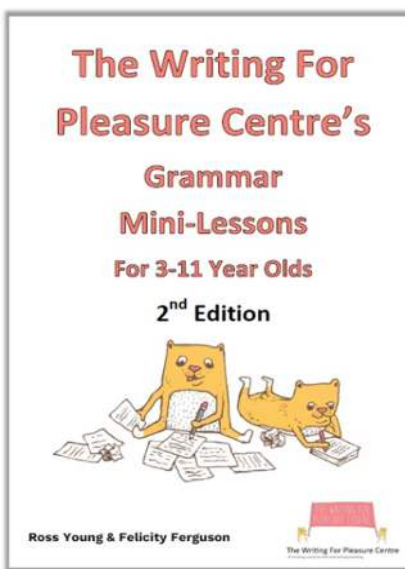
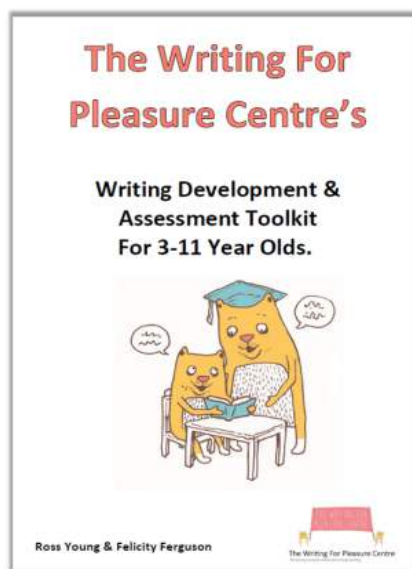
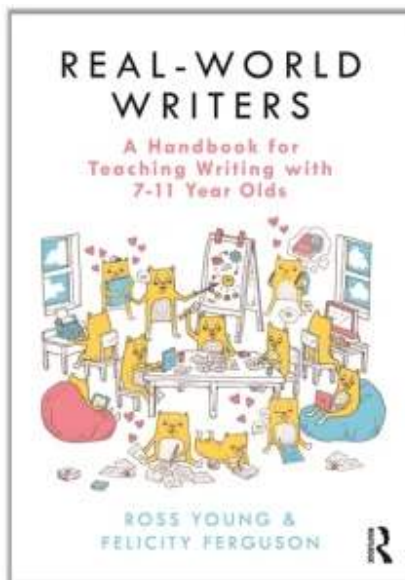
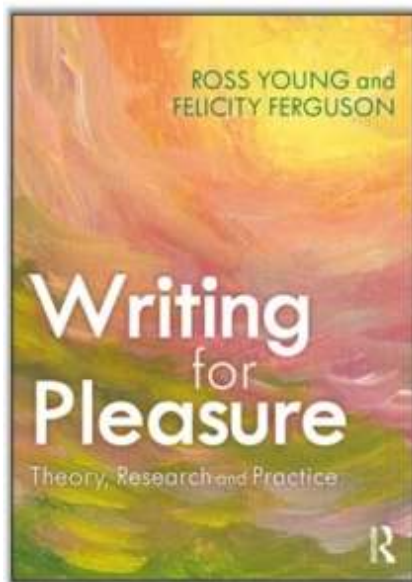
## Part Three: Plans for welcome projects: EYFS-KS2

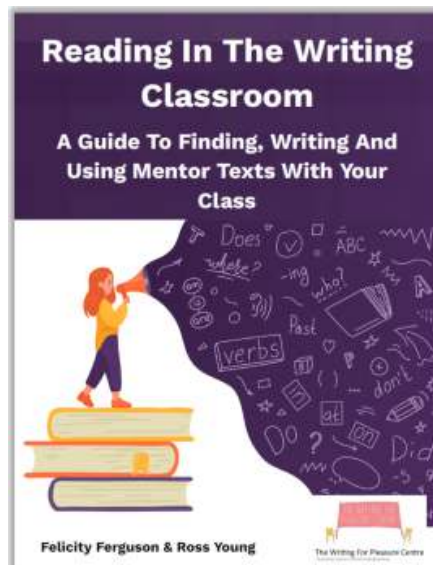
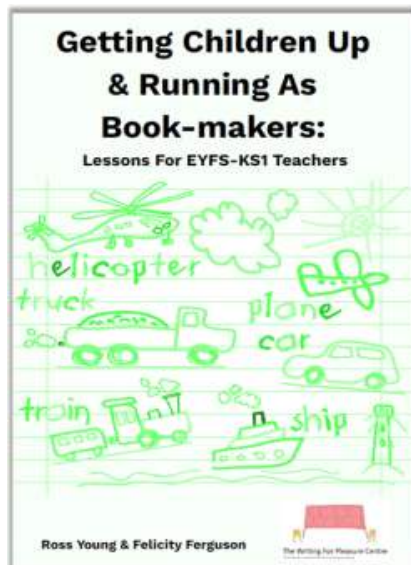
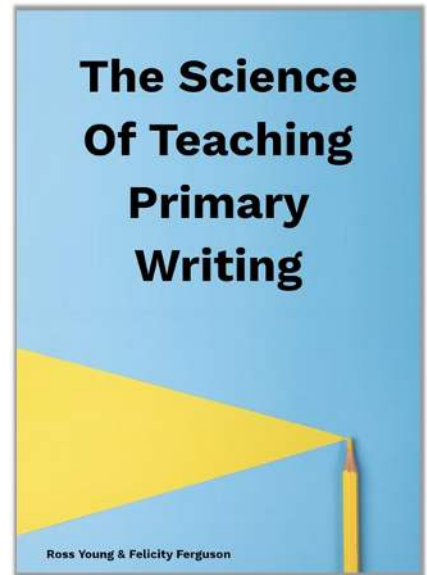
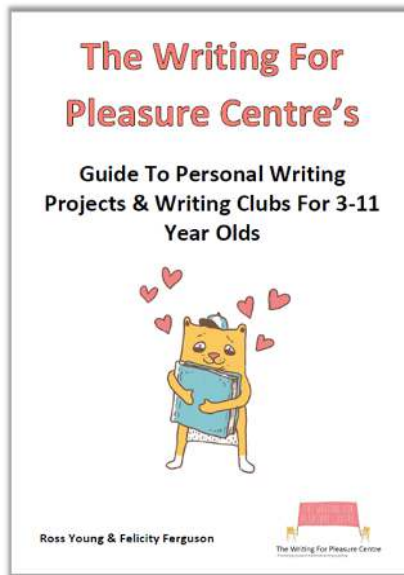
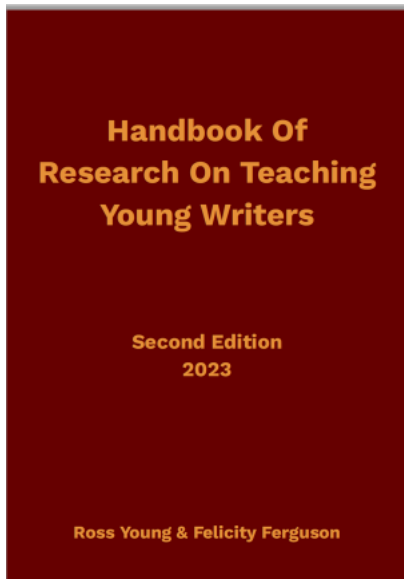
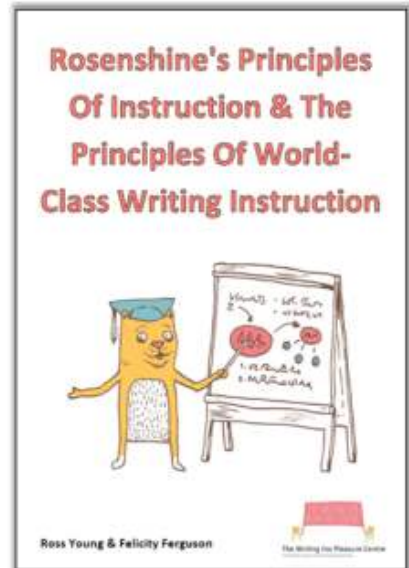
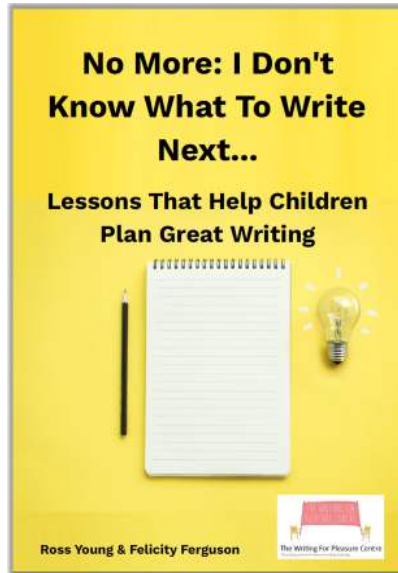
The following plans are intended to act as guides to what a good welcome project might look like in each key stage. They are real plans which have been used by each of us in the course of our teaching. We have found them to be very useful for our particular classes, and they have been tailored to match the needs of each cohort. However, if you are trying out this approach for the very first time and are unsure of where to start, then leapfrogging off one of these examples with your own class will go a long way towards setting you and the children up for a successful writing year.

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- Young, R., Ferguson, F. ([2022f](#)) *Getting Children Up And Running As Book-Makers: Lessons For EYFS-KS1 Teachers* Brighton: The Writing For Pleasure Centre
- Young, R., Ferguson, F. ([2022g](#)) *A Teacher's Guide To Writing With Multilingual Children* Brighton: The Writing For Pleasure Centre
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## Recommended further reading and resources







**In *Welcome Projects: A Classroom Guide To Getting Your Year Right For Writing*, writer-teachers Ross Young, Tobias Hayden and Felicity Ferguson share their secrets about having a great year of writing with your pupils.**

**With so many things to attend to and consider at the beginning of an academic year, quality time to think about what your writing teaching will look like is often at a premium. This eBook shows you how to gain that time, and how to use it productively for the benefit of both yourself and your class.**

**Spend the first two weeks following our advice and carry out a successful *Welcome Project*, which will help children in a friendly and reassuring way understand what writing and being a writer is going to mean in your class or school.**

**This eBook provides:**

- **A suggested welcome project for setting children up in the EYFS as book-makers**
- **An example of a welcome project for KS1**
- **An example of a welcome project for KS2**
- **Over 40 illustrated lesson examples and visuals taken from real classrooms and from the work of expert practitioners**
- **Top tips from practising teachers**
- **Answers to frequently asked questions**

**This book is essential reading for writing coordinators and teachers. By undertaking quality *Welcome Projects*, you learn what your pupils need from you to write happily and successfully. You can be sure that you will have laid the groundwork for a year that's right for writing.**