

# How to get success criteria right in the writing classroom



## The Writing For Pleasure Centre





- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

At The Writing For Pleasure Centre, we don't believe that being a great writer is a gift bestowed on just a few lucky children. We don't accept the romantic notion that we can just leave children to develop as writers naturally. We don't just cross our fingers and hope for the best. We appreciate that children, rightly, want to be made privy to *what* they need to do to create successful and meaningful texts and, importantly, *how* to do it.





Establishing success criteria (also known as: product goals, toolkits, ingredients, options, choices, or 'craft moves') is arguably one of the most powerful instructional strategies a teacher of writing can employ in their classroom (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2023a](#), [2023b](#); Young & Hayden [2022](#)).

We want children to write the best text they possibly can. Our job as exceptional writing teachers is to make what can feel implicit, scary and confusing for them, explicit, useful and wholly attainable. The point is you're making the covert overt for children as they begin to craft their own pieces of writing.

We've talked about how success criteria can go BADLY wrong in a previous article ([LINK](#)). However, in summary, they go wrong when they are:

-  Narrow (only focused on the use of grammar craft moves)
-  Constructed solely by the teacher
-  Not linked to reading mentor texts together
-  Imposed

To get success criteria right, we need to make sure that teachers and pupils:







-  Read and discuss a host of quality mentor texts together ([LINK](#))
-  Extract craft moves which you and the children agree would be good to use in their writing ([LINK](#))
-  Model how and why *you* use these craft moves in your own writing ([LINK](#))
-  Invite children to use the 'moves' for themselves ([LINK](#))

Importantly, in *Writing For Pleasure* schools, success criteria aren't imposed. If a child hasn't used a certain craft move in the context of their composition, they are instead asked to show how they *could* have used it. They do this at the revision stage of a project on their 'trying things out page'. If they like what they've done, they have an opportunity to add what they've written into their final manuscript (Young & Ferguson [2022](#)). However, they are not obliged. We believe this is the behaviour of greater-depth writers. They are showing how they *could* have used a certain craft move in the context of their own piece of writing if they wanted to, but made the authorial decision not to include it.

This avoids the ‘overwriting’ that can sometimes occur when children are forced to include every single craft move in their final manuscript. We believe this is a sensible way of meeting the needs of the child as an agentic author, and at the same time meet the needs and expectations of the National Curriculum and assessment framework ([LINK](#)).

It’s important to note that in *Writing For Pleasure* schools children are also given time to pursue their own personal writing projects (Young & Ferguson [2021b](#)). This gives students opportunities to craft some writing away from the daily demands of the curriculum and success criteria.

Academic research and case studies of the best performing writing teachers have shown that, when done well, establishing success criteria as part of your teaching practice can:

-  Yield an effect-size of +2.03 (for context, anything over a +0.4 is generally considered to have a significant positive effect on children’s writing progress)
-  Increase children’s feelings of self-efficacy (writerly confidence)
-  Help children feel a sense of self-regulation (they feel they can write well independently)
-  Improve children’s sense of agency (I have a say!)
-  Increase children’s motivation to write (I know why...)
-  Promote feelings of being part of a community of writers

(see Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2023b](#) for more details)

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If you found this article useful and want more information, consider purchasing the following eBooks: *Getting Success Criteria Right For Writing: Helping 3-11 Year Olds Write Their Best Texts* ([LINK](#)), *The Writing For Pleasure Centre’s Writing Development Scales & Assessment Toolkit* ([LINK](#)) and *Reading In The Writing Classroom: A Guide To Finding, Writing And Using Mentor Texts With Your Class* ([LINK](#)).

