# Evidence-based writing instruction for 11-18 year olds

The Writing For Pleasure Centre
- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

We need to acknowledge that writing is *really really* hard. It's probably the most cognitively demanding thing students have to do while they are at school. As this diagram, taken from our publication ***The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing***, shows, pupils have to draw on at least thirteen different cognitive resources to write well.
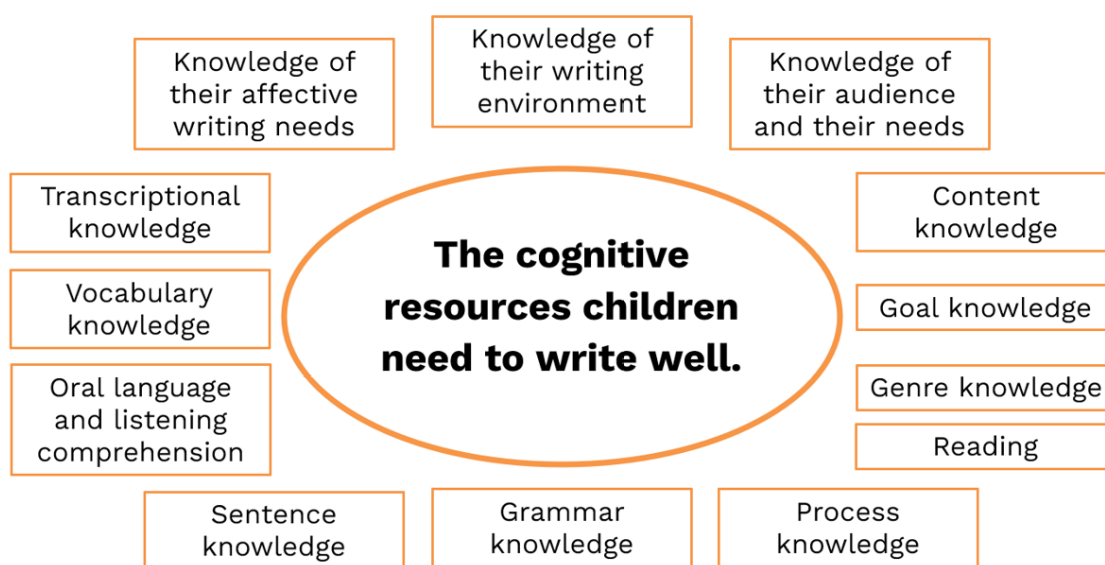
Young & Ferguson (2022) *The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing* The Writing For Pleasure Centre

These include: Knowledge of their writing environment; knowledge of their audience and their needs as readers; their content knowledge; goal knowledge; genre knowledge; their reading abilities; their knowledge of the writer's process; grammar knowledge; sentence-level knowledge; oral language and listening comprehension; vocabulary knowledge; transcriptional knowledge, and knowledge of their own emotional and affective writerly needs.

Due to this complexity, it's important that secondary school teachers utilise evidence-based writing instruction. This article looks to share such practices. To help me, I'm going to discuss the 'effect-sizes' taken from the meta-analyses research with you (Hillocks 1986; Graham & Perin 2007; Koster et al. 2015; Graham et al. 2023). 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. Now, anything above a +0.4 is generally considered by researchers to have a significant positive effect on children's writing performance.

Explicitly teach students the writing processes (+0.47)

Explicitly teaching pupils about the writing processes and how to use them in a self-regulating way is shown to be highly effective practice. The writing processes include: generating ideas, planning, drafting, re-reading, revising, proof-reading and publishing.

Articles and resources to support:

- The components of an effective writing unit [LINK]

Pursue purposeful and authentic class writing projects - (+0.92)

Pupils' writing outcomes are improved if they engage in challenging inquiry and extended class writing projects where they write for authentic purposes and real and varied audiences.

Articles and resources to support:

- Establishing publishing goals for class writing projects [LINK]

Deliver idea generation and planning instruction (+0.49)

Early on in a writing project, the best writing teachers teach lessons focused on composition to ensure quality. This means teachers give pupils specific instructional time to generate writing ideas and plan their writing.

Articles and resources to support:

- No more: I don't know what to write… Lessons that help children generate great writing ideas [LINK]
- No more: I don't know what to write next… Lessons that help children plan great writing [LINK]

Deliver writing strategy instruction (+0.76)

Teaching 'craft knowledge' through 'self-regulation strategy development instruction' is probably the most validated teaching practice a teacher of writing can employ. The key here is teaching a single strategy before inviting students to apply that taught strategy to their writing that day. The same concept applies to grammar teaching (+0.77) and teaching at the sentence-level (+0.73).

Articles and resources to support:

- Getting writing instruction right [LINK]
- The components of effective grammar instruction [LINK]
- The components of effective sentence-level instruction [LINK]

Balance composition and transcription instruction (+0.71)

Early on in a writing project, the best writing teachers teach lessons focused on composition to ensure quality. Towards the end of a project, they move their focus towards teaching about transcription to ensure accuracy. This includes, for pupils who need it, receiving spelling, handwriting and/or typing instruction.

Articles and resources to support:

- No more: 'My pupils can't edit!' A whole-school approach to developing proof-readers [LINK]
- The research on handwriting [LINK]
- The research on spelling [LINK]
- If in doubt, circle it out! how to create a class of independent spellers [LINK]

Read as writers (+0.46)

When students read and discuss mentor texts in the writing classroom - texts which match the kind of texts they are actually going to go on to write themselves, they perform better.

Articles and resources to support:

- Reading in the writing classroom: A guide to finding, writing and using mentor texts with your class [LINK]

Give feedback (+0.34)

Excessive written feedback or extensive error correction has little to no positive impact on young writers' academic progress. Indeed, negative comments and heavy marking repeatedly result in pupils feeling less enthusiasm for writing, writing less, and having a low opinion of themselves as writers. In turn, this results in students doing the minimum to get by.

However, when pupils receive short, positive, and focused verbal feedback from their teachers while they are actually engaged in writing, they revise their compositions to a significantly higher standard. It's the combination of personalised instruction and immediate verbal feedback that appears to be the reason why pupil-conferencing is such a highly effective practice.

Articles and resources to support:

- A guide to pupil-conferencing with 3-11 year olds: Powerful feedback & responsive teaching that changes writers [LINK]
- A quick guide to class sharing and Author's Chair [LINK]

Set writing goals - (+0.44)

Goal setting involves setting:

1. Publishing goals (children knowing who they are giving their writing to at the end of a project)
2. Product goals (what they need to do or include to write a great piece)
3. Process goals (little deadlines which are set along the way to publishing)

Articles and resources to support:

- Establishing publishing goals for class writing projects [LINK]
- Getting success criteria right for writing: Helping 3-11 year olds write their best texts [LINK]
- Trust the process: setting process goals [LINK]

Be a writer-teacher (+0.41)

When students can observe their teacher writing, it assists them in successfully producing their own compositions. Students can also act as writer-teachers. This includes observing and learning from how their peers write successfully too.

Articles and resources to support:

- What does effective 'shared writing' look like? [LINK]
- A quick guide to class sharing and Author's Chair [LINK]

The task of teaching writing to adolescents is undeniably challenging, as it demands the orchestration of numerous cognitive resources. However, the evidence-based practices we've explored in this article provide a roadmap which can guide students towards becoming happy and successful writers. By explicitly teaching the writing processes, fostering purposeful and authentic writing projects, teaching writing strategies, and maintaining a balance between composition and transcription, teachers can empower their students to excel. Reading as writers, providing constructive feedback, setting meaningful writing goals for lessons, and embracing the role of being a writer-teacher can further enhance this journey.

References

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