

Which writing model would best guide us to raise writing standards in our school?



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Teacher question:

We want to find a writing model to guide our efforts to improve writing achievement across our school. Which model would you recommend (e.g. *The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing*, *The Simple View*, *The Writing Rope*?)

All the models you mention have value, but we also think they suffer from various issues. We'll take a quick look at each of them, and then suggest another model you might want to consider.

Firstly, [*The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing*](#). This theory was first developed by John Hayes and Linda Flower in 1981. It created interest in that it gave importance to the writing process. The theory defined what it believed to be the three main cognitive processes involved in writing: 'plan', 'translate' and 'review'. However, it wasn't written for teachers nor was it about children. It was a theory about how adults might write.

Next up is [*The Simple View of Writing*](#). This model was based on the research of Berninger and colleagues (2002), which tried to reduce the act of writing down to two processes: ideation (getting or having an idea) and transcription (transcribing that idea onto paper or screen). The following year, executive function (defined as planning, managing and reviewing) was added to complete their model, which they then renamed [*The Not So Simple View of Writing*](#).

Thirdly, a model entitled [*The Writing Rope*](#) was developed by Joan Sedita in 2019, with a nod to Hollis Scarborough's *The Reading Rope*. Her model asserts that the 'components of skilled writing' are multiple and multi-dimensional. To illustrate the model, she helpfully uses the analogy of different strands (components of writing) weaving together to form a complete rope (fluent, skilled writing). These strands are categorised under the labels of: *Critical Thinking*, *Syntax*, *Text Structure*, *Writing Craft* and *Transcription*.

Each of these models can be useful. The major value of *The Simple View of Writing* lies of course in its very simplicity. Its perspective on how writing might be crafted is easily understood, and lets teachers know that *compositional* and *transcriptional* instruction is important when teaching children to write (in case you didn't know!). *The Writing Rope* attempts a more complicated description of what skilled writing actually entails; below each category of skill is a set of sub-skills which could certainly guide instruction. *The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing*, as the name suggests, could help teachers consider how writers go

through a number of processes when crafting writing and that knowing about these processes could inform their instructional decision making.

Just as we can point up the benefits of these models, so we can highlight their deficiencies. For example, the *Simple View* presents a too reductive interpretation of the craft of writing, in which there are many essential omissions; the *Rope* is also an incomplete model with some confusion and omissions; the *Cognitive Process Theory* is a computational model of what experienced adult writers might do, and so doesn't attend to what young developing writers do (and need to do) as they write.

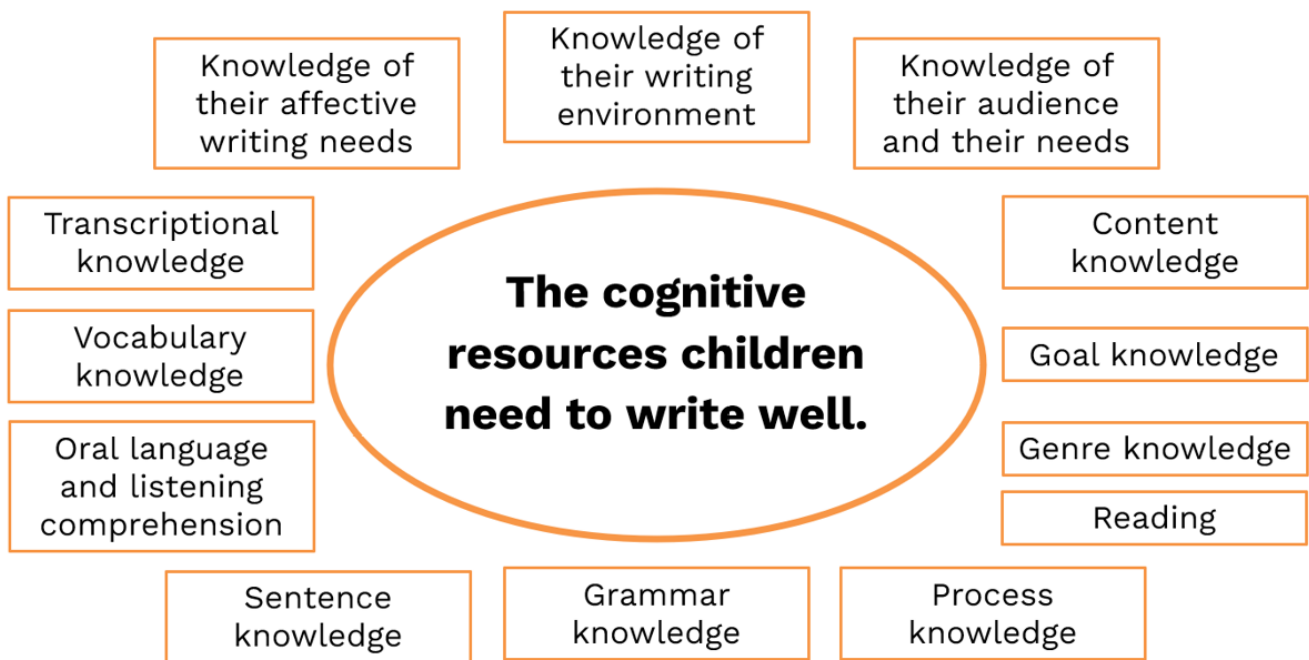
Another problem with these three models is that they fail to fully account for the fact that writing teaching happens in a classroom amongst others. The result in each case is an incomplete description of the nature and processes of writing while at school. In addition, the models don't say much about *instruction*, how a class teacher can raise writing achievement in their school. That wasn't why they were created. The danger is that the lack of a clear vision is likely to have an adverse effect on the quality of instruction.

We think you might like to look at The Writing For Pleasure Centre's [Writerly Knowledge Model](#) to help your school with its writing improvement. It combines rigorous instruction in the processes and craft of writing with principles that contribute significantly to children's social enjoyment and personal satisfaction. It's based on [The Science Of Writing](#) and, as a result, creates successful young writers.

Here are some things we can attend to in our teaching which will make a difference:

- The **amount** of explicit writing instruction we provide, and the **time** we give children to apply what's been taught to their writing. In our model, children routinely receive a dedicated writing lesson every day, lasting at least 60 minutes. The structure of the lesson typically follows: a mini-lesson, a sustained period of writing, opportunity to read and discuss what's been written [[LINK](#)].
- The **content** of the instruction. In our model, teachers usually model and teach one thing during a mini lesson. This item is chosen by the teacher in response to the needs of the genre being written but also to the writing needs of the class [[LINK](#)].
- The **quality** of how the instruction is delivered. In our model, instruction is direct and highly focused, with clearly stated purposes and good explanations, and allowing children time to use and apply what's just been taught.
- The **sequence** of how the instruction is delivered. In our model, children are regularly directed and supported through the processes involved in taking a germ of an idea and seeing it through to successful publication [[LINK](#)].

These considerations are an essential part of the *Writing For Pleasure* approach, which you can read about in our eBook [The Science of Teaching Primary Writing](#). One of the great strengths of the [Writerly Knowledge Model](#) is that it matches evidence-based writing instruction recommendations.



Young & Ferguson (2022) *The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing* The Writing For Pleasure Centre

As you'll see, the model above explains what 'writerly knowledge' entails. It shows a collection of the kinds of knowledge which children will acquire over time, through high-quality instruction and repeated meaningful practice. Again, you can read about what each kind of knowledge encompasses in our eBook [The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing](#).

To give you a typical example: in the section on *Sentence Knowledge* we share that, when children are taught at the sentence-level through the principles of SRSD instruction, their writing performance improves and they produce higher quality texts (Young & Ferguson 2023).

In [The Science Of Teaching Primary Writing](#), you'll see how we suggest practical instructional practices and provide resources to match each kind of writerly knowledge that needs to be developed. This, alongside developing the social aspects of learning to be a writer, sets our approach apart from the other models you mention.

Finally, to help you evaluate your school's existing practice and to consider how you develop the different writerly knowledges in your school, we have attached [a free audit tool](#).