



# How to teach writing

**Ross Young & 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.

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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 2024).

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, 2024). 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, 2024). We were no longer going to leave things to chance.

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 2024).

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 by *reading as writers*. 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: How to use *How To Teach Writing*

*How To Teach Writing* is a collection of articles that are designed to slowly guide you through the principles and practices of world-class writing teaching.

Importantly, we cover quality writing teaching from the EYFS-KS2. It doesn't matter what writing approach you use, you'll find any of our articles useful. You can pick and choose the articles that you think will be most helpful and interesting to you and which best fit your particular context. We've made sure that each article can stand alone. In this way, they are perfect for staff meetings. They allow you to focus on areas of writing teaching that matter most to your school.

If you're planning to introduce our whole approach into your classroom or school then we can recommend reading the articles in the order we've organised them. By the end, you'll be well placed to deliver world-class evidenced-based writing teaching. Exciting!

Above all, we wanted these articles to be short, engaging and utterly practical. We want you to feel like a better writing teacher after reading them and enacting the advice that's shared.

**Part 1** is designed to give you a really good grounding in what the research says about delivering evidence-based writing teaching for EYFS, KS1 and KS2. It also shares the research around ensuring a good connection between reading and writing. Finally, we share best practice when it comes to working with children with SEND.

**Part 2** helps you know how to plan successful units and individual writing lessons.

**Part 3** gives short practical advice on a whole host of important writerly topics. Hopefully, you've browsed our contents page to see just how much is covered!

## Conclusion

We hope that you've found this book interesting and useful. Our own journey from being discontented and ineffective writing teachers to *Writing For Pleasure* teachers has been truly transformative. As we reflect on the principles, research, and practices discussed throughout this book, it becomes apparent that a paradigm shift is not only necessary but achievable. We can turn the tide on pupils' pernicious underachievement and dislike for writing.

Informed by extensive research and real-world application, the practices that have been shared with you promise to reshape your classroom into a vibrant writing community. A place where you and your students write daily, explore genres, discuss mentor texts, and hone your craft through iterative and innovative processes.

The book started by delving into the research landscape, sharing with you the 14 principles of world-class writing teaching. We discussed the profound nature of the reading/writing connection and how we support children with SEND. We talked about how exceptional writing teachers have a comprehensive understanding of how to plan writing units across the EYFS-KS2. It was also important to decipher exactly what it is the EYFS Framework and the KS1 and KS2 STA Writing Statements are asking teachers to evidence. We've demystified this process, offering clarity for teachers.

Our 'How to...' guides aimed to empower you with practical strategies. From instilling purpose and audience into your writing units to fostering a love for reading, establishing success criteria, and navigating effective grammar lessons, we've tried to cover the spectrum of skills essential for both you and your pupils.

The vision for effective writing teaching is clear – students should not only master curriculum objectives but they also learn to live the writer's life. They should engage in personal writing projects, receive daily feedback, and participate in meaningful teacher-pupil conferences.

The establishment of The Writing For Pleasure Centre, and this publication in particular, marks a new collective effort to redefine writing education. Drawing on over 600 pieces of literature, case studies, and empirical research, this approach is a testament to the impact evidence-based writing practices can have on creating purposeful and pleasurable writing classrooms (Young & Ferguson [2024](#)).

In conclusion, let us not forget that your journey only starts here. The future of writing education lies in the hands of dedicated educators like you who have embraced innovation and will foster a genuine love for writing in your classrooms. As we close this chapter, it is the beginning of countless exciting writing adventures for you and your pupils.



In *How To Teach Writing*, Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson present thirty essential articles which will revolutionise any EYFS-KS2 classroom. From the authors who transformed their own ineffective writing teaching, this guide delivers actionable strategies and evidence-based practices.

Discover the 14 principles of world-class writing teaching, learn about the reading/writing connection, understand how to support children with SEND, and unpick what assessment statements are really asking.

This book is also packed with some amazing 'How to..' guides including:

- How to plan an effective writing lesson
- How to plan a purposeful and effective writing unit
- How to deliver an effective grammar and sentence-level lesson
- How to do effective modelled and shared writing
- How to teach children to read as writers
- How to help children generate great writing ideas
- How to help children plan their writing
- How to help children revise
- How to help children proof-read their writing
- How to establish success criteria effectively
- How to give effective verbal feedback
- How to arrange your written marking
- How to assess pupils' writing
- How to develop children's oral language and vocabulary use in the writing classroom
- How to use focus groups when teaching writing
- How to set up personal writing projects

This book is the key to achieving great results whilst also fostering a love of writing. It's time to redefine your writing teaching. Start your journey today.