

# How To Teach Non-Fiction Writing In The EYFS

**Felicity Ferguson & Ross Young**



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

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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](http://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 [2023a](#)).

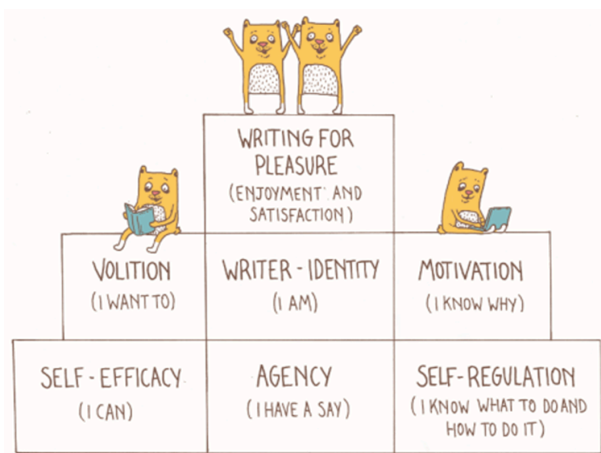
This is a serious problem, because how we were taught writing at school has a strong influence on how we feel about the subject, how we think it should be taught and what we know about it - our writerly knowledge. Unfortunately, it appears from the research that, as teachers, we regularly copy the same 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

This eBook shows you how to help children in the EYFS make picturebooks for others to read in which they can share what they know, what they are interested in, what they remember, and what they would like to tell or teach others about.

As teachers in the EYFS, you are in a highly responsible, privileged and rewarding position. A child's most important writing teacher is always their first one, and children will remember the pleasure of making their first picturebooks with you long after they have left your class. And you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have given them the foundations of a solid apprenticeship in writing which your colleagues in Key Stage One will later build on.

We start here by taking a fresh look at what informational writing can be like, since there's still a widespread misconception that it has to be objective and impersonal. In fact, it's a genre full of different and exciting possibilities, as the high-quality texts in your class library will demonstrate. Elements of entertainment, artistry, and a personal voice are now the hallmarks of much good non-fiction writing, and rightly so. It is our job as teachers to show children that they can take up the opportunity to write rich hybrid texts for their readers to both learn from and enjoy. For example, they can teach others whilst also being entertaining by including a few jokes and anecdotes, make their record or reflection more vivid by painting with words, and infuse their information with a little piece of personal memoir. If we help children write their non-fiction texts in this way, we are giving them the chance to put their knowledge, passion, expertise, humour and personal identity on the page for others to appreciate. And when this writing is shared, it can become a valuable social resource, strengthening empathy and connection within the classroom community.

### Progression in non-fiction writing

Children in the EYFS love to tell their teacher about the things that have happened to them or to others, and they often make their first non-fiction picturebooks in the form of simple recounts. Over time, children progress to understanding and writing more complex texts. For example, they start to consider why things have happened and to give personal opinions and interpretations of the facts. Through writing explanations and instructions, they take up the opportunity to share their knowledge, interests and expertise. Finally, with increasing maturity, they begin to be able to understand and work with dual viewpoints and arguments, and manage a larger piece of information through classifying and describing its different elements.

All these are vitally important genres for children to encounter if they are to become successful readers, writers and thinkers. We therefore provide below a table to show how you can choose and organise a range of non-fiction writing projects to reflect the progression in these genres over a child's school career. We strongly recommend that you keep this table in mind when considering the long-term planning of non-fiction writing in your school.

Unlock the magic of writing non-fiction in the EYFS with *How To Teach Non-Fiction Writing In The Early Years*. This innovative guide by writer-teachers Felicity Ferguson and Ross Young is designed to transform how young children create and share their knowledge in the early years writing classroom.

Based on extensive research and practical experience, this book offers a fresh perspective on teaching non-fiction. It emphasises the importance of infusing personal voice, humour, and artistry into informational texts, making them engaging and memorable for both writers and readers. Within these pages, Ferguson & Young also present *The Writing For Pleasure* approach, a methodology proven to inspire the youngest of writers and enhance their writing skills.

Inside, you will find:

- A detailed progression for teaching non-fiction writing.
- Step-by-step guides for planning and teaching non-fiction writing projects.
- Insights into using mentor texts to inspire and guide your young writers.
- Practical advice on delivering effective writing lessons, including idea generation, planning, drafting, revising, proof-reading and publishing.
- Strategies to support multilingual learners and children with special educational needs.
- Methods for assessing writing in a way that celebrates growth and creativity.

The authors, drawing on their own challenging journey to becoming effective writing teachers, share their story and research findings, providing a compelling argument for a new way of teaching writing that prioritises both rigour and pleasure.

Equip your young writers with the tools and confidence they need to express themselves and share their knowledge with the world. *How To Teach Non-Fiction Writing In The Early Years* is your essential guide to fostering a lifelong love of writing in every child.