

# Bulletin



**In the spotlight:  
Writing Instruction –  
From Transcription through to  
Critical Thinking. What works?**

**LDA Council 2022-2023**

(As at March 2024)

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Learning Difficulties Australia is an association of teachers and other professionals dedicated to assisting students with learning difficulties through effective teaching practices based on scientific research, both in the classroom and through individualised instruction.

**THE BULLETIN**

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# From the President

## Geoffrey Ongley

**W**e have kicked off the year to a good start with an incredibly positive response to our writing course 'Think it, Say it, Write it!', both in terms of feedback from the crowd, and ticket sales themselves. I would like to extend my personal thanks to the presenters: Laura Glisson, Peta Collins, Jenny Baker, Jacinta Conway, Toni Lang, Dr Alison Madelaine, and Mel Micallef. The presentations have been exemplary, and of course, I pass on my great thanks to Hema Desai as well for doing the hard work in pulling this together. If you didn't manage to catch the presentations, replays will be available until the 26th April 2024, and there's much more to come in the year ahead.

The beginning of the year also has brought some organisational changes.

Firstly, I would like to welcome Laura Glisson as our new Bulletin editor. She is a very welcome addition to the team! Thank you also goes to Julie Scali for all of her hard work in 2023 as our previous editor. She did an incredible job last year on the Bulletin and we know Laura is going to do just brilliantly as well.

Secondly, in regards to staffing, I would also like to note that Dr Sherree Halliwell concluded her role as the General Manager with us in February. We thank her for her contributions throughout her time with us and appreciate all the work she put into her time here at LDA.

From here, execution on our vision remains the key focus for the association. That vision is to ensure that supporting students with learning difficulties is the business of every teacher. In this regard, we are listening,

and you may hear from us in the near future asking you for your inputs and feedback as to how you feel we can best support you'.

Professional development will no doubt be key (but not the only thing) to improving the value we offer our members. On this front, we are making some small adjustments to facilitate further cohesion and less overlap between the Education Manager role, and the role of the PD Committee. Both remain extremely important, and focus areas will delineate between the two. The PD Committee will be primarily responsible for working on the longer term PD strategy and presenting this to council for comment and feedback, as well as continuing in its support of our Education Manager. Our Education Manager's focus will remain on execution of the plan and handling the tactical and operational areas of delivering our PD.

Finally, I am pleased to share that our membership is stronger than ever! We have recently grown the membership beyond any previous record, which is very exciting news. We deeply appreciate your shared commitment to supporting students with learning difficulties. Your involvement is crucial in making a difference. Thank you for being part of LDA!

**Geoffrey Ongley**  
President, LDA  
[president@ldaustralia.org](mailto:president@ldaustralia.org)

*Geoffrey Ongley is the Co-founder, Director and CEO of Training 24/7, as well as the CEO of Get Reading Right. Educationally, he has completed a Bachelor of Computer Science, Master of Business Administration (Finance), and a Graduate Certificate in Professional Legal Studies.*



# Consultant notes

## Dr Anne Bellert, Consultant Committee Convenor

**I**t would seem that our LDA consultant members are back at it for 2024 – hard at work, providing expert support for some of the most vulnerable students in the education system. Their work is so valued by the students they help, their families and (hopefully) teachers working in schools.

Many of you will have read or heard about the recent Grattan Institute report, 'The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success' (Hunter et al., 2023). The report discussed how a failure to teach reading impacts individuals across the lifespan. As experts who work 'up close' with students who experience learning difficulties, I'm sure you are aware of the social and emotional impacts on the child of experiencing ongoing reading failure, and the educational impacts (underachievement, disengagement etc.). However, the great tragedy of not being taught to read with evidence-based approaches is the long-term impact – both on the individual and on their community and society more broadly. "Every child we fail to teach to read misses out on a core life skill, and Australia misses out on their potential too. For those students in school today who are hardest hit by poor reading performance, the cost to Australia is about \$40 billion over their lifetimes" (Hunter et al., 2023, p.3). Lack of confidence to engage with print for living skills and requirements, limits in self-confidence (especially around engaging with their children's learning), unemployment and having low-paid jobs, or not feeling able to participate in community activities...

the list of negative consequences of a failure to be taught to read is long indeed. As an LDA Consultant member, you are one of the 'quiet achievers', making a huge difference to the learning and life outcomes of your students. Please know that LDA is very proud to have our LDA consultant members out in communities, working hard to overcome student disadvantage and disengagement. We 'see' you and we are so appreciative of the work you do.

I would like to mention another 'quiet achiever', LDA Council and Consultant Committee member, Felicity Brown. Felicity has been working assiduously (even on her holiday) to ensure that all our Consultants evidence annual professional development requirements in order to renew their membership. This is an important task that helps us maintain the very excellent reputation of LDA Consultants. There have been a couple of system issues that have made her job quite challenging at times, but Felicity has shown quiet tenacity and, as I write this, just about all the renewals are now approved. Thanks Felicity – your dedication and professionalism is a great asset to the Consultants Committee and I'm sure many consultants have benefited from your advice and assistance.

I wish all Consultants a successful Term 1 and hope you will all manage to have a well-earned rest over the Easter break (and have no hesitation to go hard on the chocolate!).

**Dr Anne Bellert**  
*Consultants Committee Convenor*

### Reference

Hunter, J., Stobart, A., and Haywood, A. (2023). *The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success*. Grattan Institute.



## Are you interested in becoming a Consultant Member of LDA?

Consultant Membership is a special category of LDA membership, currently open to Specialist Teachers and Speech Pathologists with training in the learning difficulties area and experience in teaching and consulting with students with learning difficulties.

In addition to standard membership benefits, Consultant Membership provides:

- Recognition of your expertise in the LD field
- Inclusion in a Consultant Network Group
- Eligibility for inclusion in the LDA Online Referral Service

For more information about becoming a Consultant Member, please contact our Consultant Convenor at [consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org](mailto:consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org) or phone Elaine McLeish on 0406 388 325.

We would love to hear from you!



# In this issue of the Bulletin...

## Laura Glisson, Editor, LDA Bulletin

I am pleased to bring you our first edition of the Bulletin for 2024 entitled *'Writing Instruction – From Transcription through to Critical Thinking. What works?'*. This edition will be in your hands after the completion of our 6-week writing course *'Think it, Say it, Write it! The Fundamentals of Written Expression'*, inspired by Joan Sedita's *'The Writing Rope'* (Sedita, 2019).

In order to provide effective instruction and intervention for students, including those with underlying learning difficulties, we need to understand the many complexities involved in writing. Two important frameworks that can assist us with this endeavour are Berninger's "Not So Simple View of Writing" (Berninger et al., 2022) and Sedita's "The Writing Rope" (Sedita, 2019). Both frameworks propose that writing involves a complex interaction of cognitive processes, essential skills and knowledge areas crucial for writing success.

But what works to improve the development of these skills and knowledge bases in the primary and secondary years? How can we *best* teach writing in schools to ensure that all students develop a solid foundation in transcription, spelling, syntactic knowledge, vocabulary breadth and depth, punctuation, text structure knowledge and author's craft so that they can produce texts for a wide range of audiences and purposes? In this issue, we bring you a series of articles written

by researchers, classroom teachers, education leaders and therapists who generously share with us what they know about best practice in writing instruction.

Firstly though, we remember Richard (Dick) Weigall OAM. Dick is an important person in LDA history, and his commitment to supporting children and adults with learning difficulties in Australia is legendary. Dick passed away peacefully in May of 2023, surrounded by his loving family. In a heartfelt obituary, written by Mim Davidson and Diane Barwood, we find out just a little bit about Dick's life and the legacy that he leaves behind.

Our feature article of this edition is 'Why writing instruction is needed' by Joan Sedita. In this article, Sedita introduces us to 'The Writing Rope' instructional framework, explaining each strand and why it's important for writing development. Packed full of essential information for educators, this piece gives us a theoretically and empirically sound evidence-base for writing instruction.

The second piece is 'Why AERO is working to support a whole-school approach to writing' by Christine Jackson and Annie Fisher. In this republication of an article from May 2023, Jackson and Fisher present a compelling argument for why we need whole-school approaches for writing instruction in Australian schools. They signpost additional resources published by AERO that support the explicit teaching of writing across a range of year levels and subject areas, including their practical sentence-level writing and punctuation guides available on the AERO website.

Our next article is by Stephanie Le Lievre, who was responsible for coordinating 'The Syntax Project', which many of our readers will be

familiar with and no doubt have benefited from. In her article titled, 'The Syntax Project: An explicit approach to target sentence level writing (and speaking!))', Le Lievre explains the importance of developing sentence-level writing skills for reading and writing success and shares practical ideas for how to effectively teach syntax to our students.



Next, Damon Thomas and Nathan Lowien bring us, 'Developing students' metalinguistic understandings for writing: Moving beyond form to function'. In this piece, Thomas and Lowien present an argument for building not just a shared metalanguage in schools for writing, but also for building *metalinguistic understanding* in our students. Metalinguistic understanding is the ability to think and talk about how language choices are used to make meaning in a text. Using examples from their work within a teacher education context, Thomas and Lowien share three practical strategies that help build *metalinguistic understanding* for writing instruction.

'Crafting sentences: Four simple writing techniques to elevate your students' learning' is the next article, written by Ingrid Sealey. Here Sealey shares four high-impact sentence-level writing activities that don't just help build effective writing skills in students, but also help students to better learn complex ideas and concepts in lessons.

Following this, Kim Knight brings us some practical ideas in her article, 'Writing their way through the forest', to help older students develop their analytical essay writing skills,

including the helpful 'Text + Theme Schema' tactic.

Moving onto the transcription component of writing, we have two articles of equal interest. In their article, 'Supporting schools to implement an evidence based and effective approach to teaching spelling', Tessa Daffern, Kate Hogg, Nicole Callaway, Heath Wild and Sharon Kelly, utilise two case studies to demonstrate the importance of effective spelling assessment and instruction in the primary years.

'How the Peggy Lego program supports your student's handwriting from the very beginning' by Berenice Johnston is our second piece on transcription. In this article, Johnston, an occupational therapist and PhD candidate in Perth, describes the 'Peggy Lego' program, a theoretically driven prewriting program that addresses prewriting motor patterns in the early years.

Following on from this article, we have a new article format where practitioners share their top tips or top resources on a given topic. In this edition, Kathryn Thorburn shares her 'Top 15 Resources for Writing'. Thorburn— a dual-qualified teacher and speech pathologist with a significant amount of expertise in instruction across all 3 tiers of intervention— identifies 5 practical resources, 5 technology tools, and 5 reference books that she often recommends to those working on writing instruction.

To wrap-up, we have Hema Desai who has written a book review for 'The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects' by Joan Sedita.

A sincere thank you to our contributors for this issue. Thank you for generously sharing your knowledge and expertise with our readers, and for your patience in working with me on my first edition as editor. If you are interested in contributing to a future edition of the Bulletin, please get in touch at [bulletin.editor@ldaaustralia.org](mailto:bulletin.editor@ldaaustralia.org).

Finally, I would like to thank my predecessor, Julie Scali, who helped curate and produce four excellent editions of the Bulletin in 2022 and 2023. Julie brought us four special editions covering mathematics, Tier 2 intervention, oral language and writing. These, and previously published editions of the Bulletin, are available to read on the LDA website. I hope that I can bring the same level of knowledge,


enthusiasm and rigour to the role of Bulletin editor that Julie did. Happy reading everyone!

**Laura Glisson, Editor, LDA Bulletin**

*Laura is a Certified Practising Speech Pathologist (Speech Pathology Australia) with over 13 years experience working with school-aged children and young people with speech, language and literacy difficulties. Laura works as the Co-director and Co-founder of Tracks to Literacy, where she provides professional learning support to educators and clinicians on oral language and literacy instruction, intervention and assessment. Laura also works clinically with upper primary and secondary-aged students with language, literacy and associated mental health difficulties, and is a member of the Language and Literacy in Young People research lab at Curtin University in Perth.*

## References:

- Sedita, J. (2019). *The Writing Rope: The strands that are woven into skilled writing*. Rowley, MA: Keys to Literacy.
- Berninger, V.W., Abbott, R.D., Abbott, S.P., Graham, S., & Richards, T (2002). Writing and Reading: Connections Between Language by Hand and Language by Eye. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 35(1), 39-56.




## LDA & AJLD Awards

### Celebrating our Professional Colleagues

- Would you like to see formal recognition of a colleague who has a career history that involves valuable contributions to the area of learning and learning difficulties through research and practice, innovative programs or excellent work as an LDA Consultant? The LDA Mona Tobias, Bruce Wicking and Rosemary Carter Awards, named in honour of our predecessors in the field, are all designed for this purpose.
- Would you like to celebrate a university student who is doing excellent research and producing publications in the area of literacy or learning difficulties? Let them know that they can apply for the LDA Tertiary Student Award.
- Would you like to see special recognition of a researcher in the field who is still in the early stages of their career? The publishers of LDA's Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties (AJLD), Taylor & Francis, provide a generous and prestigious Early Career Researcher Award to the first author of an outstanding article accepted for publication in the Journal. You can inform researchers you know about this opportunity.
- Would you like to have the chance to applaud a successful researcher whose work has made an important difference to you in your own career supporting children with learning difficulties? Taylor & Francis have available a generous Eminent Researcher Award, awarded by invitation of the AJLD Editor. Acceptance of the award involves the submission of an article to the AJLD, and these articles always provide an excellent bonus for the readers of the journal. Please contact LDA if you would like to put forward a suggestion for an eminent researcher who you would like to see considered for this award.

Recipients are presented with their awards at the LDA Annual General Meeting. Criteria and nomination procedures for all the awards, and lists of previous recipients, are available on the LDA website.

All nominations for the 2024 awards are due by 30th June. Contact enquiries@ldaaustralia.org if you would like more information, or for information and to apply, go to [www.ldaaustralia.org/award-nominations/](http://www.ldaaustralia.org/award-nominations/)



# Richard (Dick) Weigall OAM

## 27/02/1937 – 05/05/2023

### Mim Davidson and Diane Barwood

**R**ichard (Dick) Weigall OAM sadly passed away in May of 2023. Dick was assistant editor of the early iteration of the current LDA journal when it was named Australian Journal of Remedial Education, from 1975 to 2003. The journal would not be where it is today without the work and dedication of many in years past, but particularly the contributions of Dick who wrote numerous articles and drew all the cartoons published within the journal throughout these years.

Dick was born on 27th February 1937 and died on 5th May 2023. He taught at Geelong Grammar School for most of his teaching career, starting at Glamorgan while training at Mercer House, the independent teacher training institute in Victoria, later returning there as a teacher. Mercer House provided specialist literacy training to teachers with a minimum of 5 years classroom experience and a Primary Teaching Certificate. Dick also taught at Timbertop and Highton campuses of Geelong Grammar School.

It was at Mercer House that Dick met Chris Davidson, the founding editor of the association's journal and who remained as editor until 2003. Dick and Chris discovered that their fathers had gone through Medical School together and a lifelong friendship was formed.

Concerned with the difficulties some children experience in spelling, Dick pioneered the 'laboratory approach to learning' with the highly successful Australian Programmed Spelling 3690, a spelling intervention kit that was published in four editions. Later, Dick

wrote 'Grammar Match' which was a card game designed to teach grammar.

Not only was Dick Assistant Editor of the Australian Journal of Remedial Education (AJRE) from 1975 to 2003, he also drew all the cartoons published in the journal. Together, he and Chris Davidson designed and published three Spelling games in 1981; Race Through Reading, Sail Through Spelling and Pony Club Trail Ride. Later, Dick illustrated many of the SPELD SA downloadable, decodable books that are free for teachers and parents to this day.

In 'Learning Difficulties Australia: A History', Jenkinson (2009) writes, "The journal also set out to provide a much-needed forum for debate on remedial education practices.

Reflecting on editorial policy over the first 25 years, Chris Davidson and Dick Weigall (1991) wrote:

*The journal has a policy of being open-minded to new ideas... We have published controversial issues or fringe approaches for the interest of our readers, in the hope that there maybe a new line of understanding in our work... knowing that they do not necessarily express the views of AREA, but feel that unless we have an open forum for discussing new ideas, there is very little point in producing this journal.*

*The Editors supported properly conducted research procedures and are aware of the importance of maintaining high professional standards. However we owe it to children to be informed of new ideas to ensure that they have every possible chance to achieve their potential. There is no doubt in our minds that without the stimulus of relatively untried ideas, little progress will be made in our understanding of the learning process. (p. 2).*

As well as teaching, Dick assisted children and adults with learning difficulties. In 1968, he began volunteering for the charity 'People



Image credit: Geelong Advertiser and supplied by Garry Pierson from Geelong Grammar School Corio

Experiencing Learning Difficulties'. Dick's more than 40 years commitment to this cause and work for the AREA Journal was recognised in 2010 with the award of the Order of Australia 'for service to children and adults with disabilities, particularly through the development of special education programmes, techniques and materials.' He was also a volunteer at Barwon Valley School in his retirement.

He will be long remembered for his care and dedication to children and adults with learning difficulties, and for the vital role he played in Learning Difficulty Australia's history.

Vale Dick.

### Some of Dick's publications for LDA

Dick Weigall (1998) Guest editorials: Enthusiasm, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 3:1, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404159809546549>

Dick Weigall (1998) Editorial: Disabled or enabled?, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 3:3, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404159809546564>

Dick Weigall (1999) Editorials: When a man becomes a reader, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 4:4, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404159909546602>

Dick Weigall (2000) Editorials: What makes a good teacher in the 2000's, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 5:1, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150009546610>

Dick Weigall (2000) Editorials: Area in the new millennium, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 5:4, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150009546636>

Dick Weigall (2001) Editorial: A foreign country, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 6:3, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150109546671>

Dick Weigall (2002) Enhancing academic performance in non-academic ways, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 7:1, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150209546687>

Dick Weigall (2004) Editorial: Watching students achieve success, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 9:2, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150409546756>

Dick Weigall (2004) Editorial: Time to reflect, *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 9:4, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150409546773>

Dick Weigall (2005) Editorial: Very special people, *Australian Journal of*

*Learning Difficulties*, 10:1, 2-2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19404150509546779>

#### Mim Davidson

*As well as being a friend of the family, Mim Davidson has known Dick as a colleague for over 50 years. Mim is a Learning Difficulties Australia Consultant – Specialist Teacher, an LDA Life Member in the Canterbury/Kew LDA Network, and was the 2022 Winner of the Rosemary Carter Award.*

#### Diane Barwood

*Diane was a colleague of Dick Weigall for over 40 years. Diane is also a Learning Difficulties Australia Consultant – Specialist Teacher, an LDA Life Member, a Canterbury/Kew Network Leader and was the 2021 Winner of the Rosemary Carter Award.*

## LDA History

Learning Difficulties Australia began life over 55 years ago when a small group of remedial teachers in Melbourne began meeting for informal discussions over coffee. Like most classroom teachers, the members of this group were no strangers to children who were significantly underachieving, especially in reading and mathematics. The learning difficulties of these children were, however, rarely officially acknowledged at this time and there were few opportunities for teachers to receive the specialised training needed to understand and support them.

Learning Difficulties Australia was first established in 1965 as the Diagnostic and Remedial Teachers' Association of Victoria. In 1987 it became an Incorporated Association under the name of the Australian Remedial Education Association, and in 1994 the Association was renamed the Australian Resource Educators' Association. There was a further change of name in 2001, when it adopted the current name of Learning Difficulties Australia.

LDA's current Journal, the [\*Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties\*](#), was first established in May 1969 under the name Remedial Education (1969 to 1972), and then the Australian Journal of Remedial Education (1973 to March 1996). It was renamed the Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities in June 1996.



A cartoon by Dick, published in one of his editorials titled 'Enthusiasm'.



# Why writing instruction is needed

Joan Sedita

The ability to write is as essential to learning as the ability to read. As Graham and Perin (2007) note in the Writing Next guide, summarising writing research for 4th to 12th grade students:

*“Writing is not just an option for young people – it is a necessity. Along with reading comprehension, writing skill is a predictor of academic success and the basic requirement for participation in civic life and the global economy. . . All students need to become proficient and flexible writers.” (p. 19)*

In addition to using writing to communicate, writing also improves reading comprehension. Students who are given the opportunity to write in conjunction with reading show a greater ability to think critically about reading. Many of the skills involved in writing; such as sentence and paragraph writing, note taking, summarising and spelling, improve reading comprehension and reinforce fluency and word reading skills (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Writing, like reading, is a relatively new cultural development. It does not come naturally the way speaking does, and it is a demanding and highly complex process. Becoming a skilled writer begins with the acquisition of foundational skills, that then leads to application of more sophisticated writing skills, strategies and techniques.. There is wide variation in writing ability among students across grades and within the same grade. It is not unusual for students who have grade-level or above reading ability to have difficulty writing well. All students benefit from

writing instruction, even those for whom learning to write seems to come effortlessly. Quality writing instruction is more than simply having students write more. It must provide explicit instruction with guided practice in multiple components of writing that are integrated for skilled writing.

## The Writing Rope: An Instructional Framework

The *Writing Rope* (Sedita, 2019) is an instructional framework for teaching writing across all grades that identifies five components, or categories, of writing skills that students must learn to become skilled writers: *Critical Thinking*, *Syntax*, *Text Structure*, *Writing Craft*, and *Transcription*.

Sedita (2019) explains the need for an instructional framework this way:

*“The literature and discourse related to literacy instruction tends to focus on reading, even though writing is just as important for student literacy achievement. In addition, significant attention is paid to the multi-component nature of skilled reading, while writing tends to be referred to as a single, monolithic skill.*

*Much has been written about the multiplicity of skills involved in reading, beginning with the “five components” model that became*

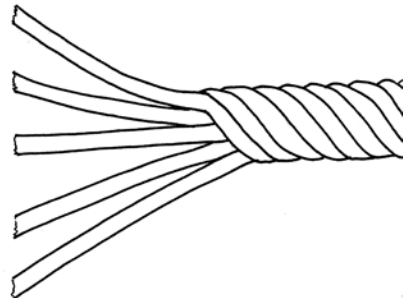


*popular after the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension). On the other hand, when attention is paid to writing instruction, teachers are not sure what writing instruction should include. Many educators who are knowledgeable about effective reading instruction are not able to: (1) identify the components of skilled writing, (2) explain how levels of language contribute to skilled writing, (3) identify a set of writing assessments, or (4) suggest a comprehensive curriculum for teaching writing.*

*With a nod towards Hollis Scarborough’s Reading Rope, in 2019 I developed a model that identifies the multiple components*

The Writing Rope...  
The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing  
(Sedita, 2019)

- Critical Thinking**
  - Generating ideas, gathering information
  - Writing process: organizing, drafting, writing, revising
- Syntax**
  - Grammar and syntactic awareness
  - Sentence elaboration
  - Punctuation
- Text Structure**
  - Narrative, informational, opinion structures
  - Paragraph structure
  - Patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution)
  - Linking and transition words
- Writing Craft**
  - Word choice
  - Awareness of task, audience, purpose
  - Literary devices
- Transcription**
  - Spelling
  - Handwriting, keyboarding



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*that are necessary for skilled writing. In 2001, Scarborough published a graphic that depicts multiple components of language comprehension (i.e., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge) and word recognition (i.e., phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition) as strands in a rope. As students develop skills in these components they become increasingly strategic and automatic in their application, leading to fluent reading comprehension. A similar “rope” metaphor can be used to depict the many strands that contribute to fluent, skilled writing.” (p. 1)*

The components (i.e., strands) of the *Writing Rope* are explained below. It is important to remember that instruction must be provided for skills and strategies that are part of every strand in the rope. Teaching students to write high-quality, elaborated sentences and well-structured paragraphs is just as important as teaching them how to write different types of writing such as informational, narrative, and opinion. Developing fluency for the transcription skills of spelling and handwriting is also important so students’ cognitive energy can be focused on the composing part of writing.

### The Critical Thinking Strand

This strand draws significantly on critical thinking and executive function skills, as well as the ability to develop background knowledge about a writing topic. Students engage in critical thinking as they think about what they want to communicate through their writing. For example, if students are composing an informational or opinion/argument piece, they may also need to incorporate higher level comprehension skills to gather information from sources.

*Writing, like reading, is a relatively new cultural development. It does not come naturally the way speaking does.*

This strand also includes awareness of the *writing process* (i.e., thinking, planning, writing, revising). For the thinking stage, students benefit from explicit instruction for brainstorming strategies and skills for gathering

information from written and multimedia sources, such as note taking. They also need to learn planning strategies for organising their thoughts, including the use of prewriting graphic organisers. Students need to be metacognitive and purposeful about working repeatedly through the stages of the writing process, and they benefit from explicit instruction in revising and editing strategies.

### The Syntax Strand

Individual sentences communicate ideas that add up to make meaning. Efficient processing of sentence structure is necessary for listening and reading comprehension, as well as for communicating information and ideas in writing. Syntax is the study and understanding of grammar – the system and arrangement of words, phrases and clauses that make up a sentence. Students develop syntactic awareness as they learn the correct use and relationship of words in sentences. This begins with exposure to standard English by listening to people talk and reading or listening to written text. Students benefit from explicit instruction focused on building sentence skills, including activities such as sentence elaboration and sentence combining.

### The Text Structure Strand

Text structure is unique to written language and an awareness of text structure supports both writing and reading comprehension. Students benefit from explicit instruction for several levels of text structure, including:

- **Narrative, informational, and opinion text structure:** knowledge of the different organisation structures for these three types of writing, including the use of introductions, body development, and conclusions
- **Paragraph structure:** understanding that written paragraphs are used to group text into manageable units that are organised around a main idea and supporting details
- **Patterns of organisation:** understanding that sentences and paragraphs can be organised to convey a specific purpose including *description, sequence, cause and effect, compare and contrast, problem and solution*
- **Transition words or phrases:** the use of words or phrases to link sentences, paragraphs or sections of text including knowledge of

transitions associated with specific patterns of organisation.

### The Writing Craft Strand

This strand addresses skills and strategies often referred to as *writers’ craft* or *writers’ moves*. This includes a number of techniques that writers employ that affect writing style, text structure and choice of words. Students benefit from explicit instruction in the following:

- **Word choice:** purposeful use of specific vocabulary, word placement and dialogue to convey meaning and create an effect on the reader
- **Writer’s voice:** the techniques and style of writing an author uses to show emotion, personality or point of view
- **Literary devices:** understanding and use of common literary elements (e.g., plot, setting, narrative, characters, theme) and literary techniques (e.g., imagery, personification, figurative language, alliteration, allegory, irony).

When teachers share examples of mentor texts that include clear models of how authors use techniques, students are able to imitate them in their own writing.

This strand also addresses the importance of being mindful of the task, audience, and purpose when writing. Awareness of these elements influences decisions about word choice, tone, length and style used in a writing piece.

### The Transcription Strand

This strand addresses spelling and handwriting/keyboard skills. These are basic skills that are needed to transcribe the words a writer wants to put into writing. Once students become automatic and fluent with spelling and handwriting/keyboard, they can focus their attention on the other strands of the Writing Rope. If students do not develop fluency with these skills by grade 3, this will put a constraint on writing development as they move into the later grades.

### Integrating reading and writing instruction

In general, there is a strong case to be made for integrating writing and reading comprehension instruction. The Institute of Education Sciences 2017 research guide *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively* (Graham et al., 2017) notes that reading and

writing share cognitive processes. In this guide, Graham and colleagues point out Fitzgerald and Shanahan's (2000) shared knowledge model that "conceptualises reading and writing as two buckets drawing water from a common well or two buildings built on the same foundation."

**Reading Supports Writing:** One of the recommendations included in *Teaching Secondary Students to Write Effectively* (Graham et al., 2017) is to show exemplars of sample text to teach students the key features of text (e.g., text structure, organisation, grammar, spelling, use of literary devices and sentences) for the three major genres of text (opinion/argument, informational, narrative). An understanding of these key features of a text is known to help students write these types of text.

*Quality writing instruction is more than simply having students write more.*

**Writing Supports Reading:** The *Writing to Read* research guide (Graham & Hebert, 2010) summarised the research evidence for how writing can improve reading. The report notes that reading and writing are both communication activities and writers gain insight about reading by creating their own texts, leading to better comprehension of texts produced by others. The report concludes that evidence shows that having students write about the material they read enhances their reading abilities, including reading comprehension.

## Connecting the Ropes

There is a significant amount of overlap between the components of Scarborough's Reading Rope and Sedita's Writing Rope. As the graphic indicates, the following connections can be made:

- The background knowledge and verbal reasoning elements of the Reading Rope are connected to the Critical Thinking strand of the Writing Rope. Students draw on their background knowledge and apply critical thinking as they gather ideas and information before writing.
- The language structures and syntax elements of the Reading Rope are connected to the Syntax strand of the Writing Rope. Activities such as sentence combining and sentence elaboration support both the reading of complex sentences and writing high-quality sentences.
- The literacy knowledge of genres element of the Reading Rope is connected to the Text Structure strand of the Writing Rope. Teaching students about introductions and conclusions and the differences in text structure among types of writing such as informational, narrative and opinion supports both reading comprehension and writing.
- The vocabulary element of the Reading Rope is connected to the word choice part of the Writing Craft strand of the Writing Rope. Growing students' vocabularies supports both reading comprehension and their ability to find the right words to express themselves when writing.
- The word recognition elements of the Reading Rope including the alphabetic principle and spelling-sound correspondences are

connected to the Transcription strand of the Writing Rope. Students need to become fluent with phonics concepts in order to decode and spell words. Learning to write letters at the same time as learning letter-sound correspondences supports beginning reading and writing.

In conclusion, educators must place greater emphasis on explicit instruction for multiple components of writing, and writing instruction that is integrated with reading instruction has significant benefits for the development of students' literacy abilities.

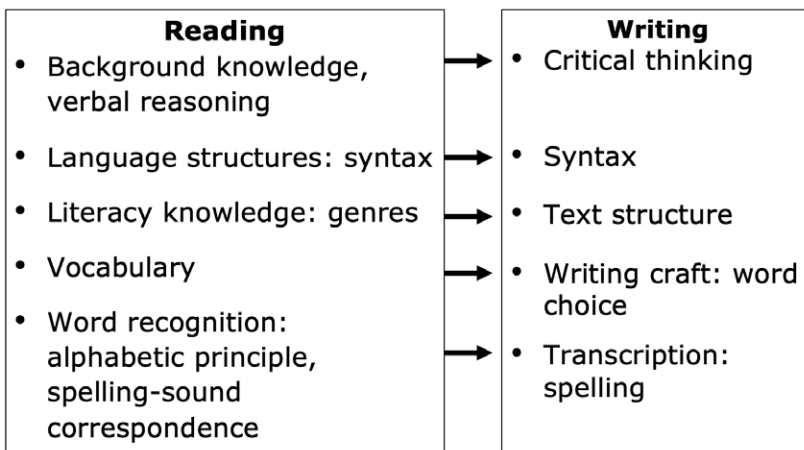
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## About the Author

Joan Sedita is the founder of *Keys to Literacy*, a literacy professional development organization working across the United States and other countries. Joan has been in the literacy field for over 40 years as a teacher, administrator, and teacher trainer. She is the creator of *The Writing Rope* framework, and has authored multiple literacy professional development programs, including *The Key Comprehension Routine*, *The Key Vocabulary Routine*, *Keys to Beginning*

## Connections



*Reading, Keys to Content Writing, Keys to Early Writing, and Understanding Dyslexia. Beginning in 1975, she worked for 23 years at the Landmark School, a pioneer in the development of literacy intervention programs. Joan was one of the three lead trainers in Massachusetts for the Reading First Program and was a LETRS author and trainer. Joan received her M.Ed. in Reading from Harvard University and her B.A. from Boston College.*

#### Conflict of Interest

Joan Sedita is the author of the book, *The Writing Rope: The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing* (2019), and receives financial benefits related to its sale. Copyrighted images have been reproduced with permission. The author did not receive funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors to write this article.



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# Why AERO is working to support a whole-school approach to writing

**Christine Jackson and  
Annie Fisher**

**S**tudents' ability to write — and write well — across school subjects is critical for their success in school. This is because writing is how students learn to synthesise knowledge, critically analyse information, and develop sophisticated logical relationships between ideas to express opinions.

The skill of writing is also crucial for students' further education and careers. Writing enables us to share our stories, to communicate scientific findings, to develop sports coaching game plans, to pitch sponsorship

proposals, and many other important things. It allows us to communicate, collaborate, and innovate.

While the teaching of writing in school is often situated with English teachers, the reality is that writing is critical to many learning areas.

*...we see an opportunity to build a larger knowledge base for teachers*

It is a skill that needs to be embedded across subject areas through explicit teaching, regular practice and assessment tasks. As secondary students progress through schooling, they are now expected to write longer and more complex pieces. In many subjects, they are assessed through extended pieces, such as reports, essays and exams.

When teachers prioritise the teaching of writing in all subject areas, it gives students more opportunities to practise



and craft their language, and to write confidently with purpose.

If students are confident about writing, this will encourage them to elect extension courses in English in senior years, and enable them to choose senior subjects with extended writing demands.

Despite the importance of writing, a concerning number of students still write at levels lower than expected for their age. Over the period of 2011 to 2018, the share of students performing at or below national minimum standards on [the NAPLAN writing test](#) increased by six percentage points for Year 5 and by eight percentage points for Year 9 (Australian Education Research Organisation [AERO], 2022).

The most effective way to improve student writing is to systematically build teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching the types of writing that are most relevant for the learning area, as it connects to the curriculum.

The other key ingredient is time; for teachers to invest in teaching writing, and for students to spend on sustained writing.

However, we hear from many teachers that they don't feel adequately prepared to teach [writing](#) (New South Wales Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2018). In our work at AERO, we see an opportunity to build a larger knowledge base for teachers and to support them to teach writing explicitly and confidently in all subject areas.



AERO has established a working research partnership with three schools across Australia, to pilot a Secondary Writing Instruction Framework

That's why we have created writing resources aligned to the Australian Curriculum and have launched a pilot research project supporting a whole-school approach to the teaching of writing.

## A whole-school approach to writing

AERO has established a working research partnership with three schools across Australia to pilot a Secondary Writing Instruction Framework.

*...we hope students will receive the quality writing instruction that sets them up for success*

Through the framework, we have collaborated with schools and teachers, and have drawn from past and current research. We have produced a suite of evidence-based professional learning resources and practical guides to inform a school-wide approach to teaching writing.

AERO has teamed up with schools to develop:

- Guidance on how best to teach grammar in the context of a subject area.
- Explicit activities for implementing grammar and writing instruction in the classroom.
- Professional learning sessions and resources demonstrating how to identify and assess features of quality writing.
- Guidance on how to align the National Literacy Learning Progressions to subject programs in order to effectively target student writing improvement.
- Guidance on the teaching of writing in [English](#) and other subject areas ([Science](#) and [Health and Physical Education](#)), as part of a whole-school approach to writing.

## Start with Simple, Compound and Complex Sentences

We have worked together with teachers to create a set of guides that provide a starting point for the explicit teaching of writing. They clearly explain [simple](#), [compound](#), and [complex](#) sentences and provide examples of these types of sentences to use easily in the classroom.

The guides explain that good writing will generally feature a [mix of sentence types](#), all of which are structured and punctuated correctly. The choice and mix of sentences in a text should be informed by an understanding of the purpose and audience for the writing.

## What about writing in subjects other than English?

AERO has recently published a new series of subject specific writing guides to highlight the types of sentences mostly used in [Science](#), [English](#), and [Health and Physical Education](#) and how these sentences function in different genres.

The guides include current, annotated samples of student writing, to explore how writing can develop through improving the sophistication and variety of sentence types.

If students are to be successful in school, at work, and in their personal lives, they must learn to write. But writing is complex and does not develop naturally!

Our intent is to provide resources that support teacher confidence in writing knowledge and instruction, and to highlight the importance of providing students with many opportunities to practise writing in each school subject.

Through taking a whole-school approach to teaching writing and supporting all teachers to teach students to write with purpose and clarity, we hope students will receive the quality writing instruction that sets them up for success.

*This article was first published by EducationHQ. Read the original article at [educationhq.com/news/why-aero-is-working-to-support-a-whole-school-approach-to-writing-148208](https://educationhq.com/news/why-aero-is-working-to-support-a-whole-school-approach-to-writing-148208).*

Since this article went to print, AERO has published a [Punctuation guide](#) and subject specific guides in [Science](#), [English](#) and [Health and Physical Education](#). AERO is working this year to create a suite of Professional Learning modules that focus on:

- examining writing data and teachers' confidence in teaching writing;
- understanding a functional view of grammar as part of teaching sentence types across all subjects in the classroom;
- a spotlight on the writing demands in assessment and criteria; and
- moderating student work.

These Professional Learning modules will be trialled in 2024.

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## About the Authors

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*Annie Fisher is a Senior Researcher at AERO and an experienced primary school teacher and leader, dedicated to evidence-based writing instruction.*

# The Syntax Project: An explicit approach to target sentence level writing (and speaking!)

Stephanie Le Lievre

## Syntax

Syntax refers to the arrangement of words in sentences, clauses, and phrases. It refers to the rules that govern the structure of sentences and phrases in a language, constituting one aspect of the broader framework of grammar, with morphology representing the other.

When educators and researchers use the term 'syntax' they are usually referring to one's oral syntactic structure or written syntactic structure. Oral communication often allows for more flexibility and improvisation in syntax, whereas there are strict grammatical rules and formality when it comes to the writing modality. Regardless of the modality (oral or written), both need to be taught and targeted explicitly to ensure children have a strong

grasp of syntax for expression and comprehension.

## Syntax for writing

The Writing Rope (Sedita, 2023) provides a great conceptual model of understanding the intricacies of writing. The five major components are: 1) Critical Thinking, 2) Syntax, 3)

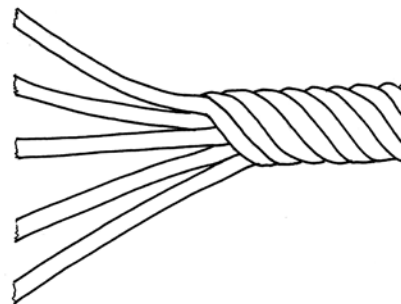
Text Structure, 4) Writing Craft, and 5) Transcription.

As evident in the model, skilled writing involves several complex skills.



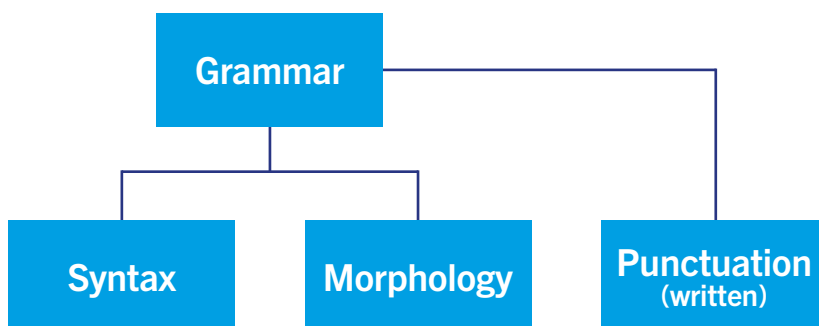
The Writing Rope...  
The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing  
(Sedita, 2019)

- Critical Thinking**
  - Generating ideas, gathering information
  - Writing process: organizing, drafting, writing, revising
- Syntax**
  - Grammar and syntactic awareness
  - Sentence elaboration
  - Punctuation
- Text Structure**
  - Narrative, informational, opinion structures
  - Paragraph structure
  - Patterns of organization (description, sequence, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution)
  - Linking and transition words
- Writing Craft**
  - Word choice
  - Awareness of task, audience, purpose
  - Literary devices
- Transcription**
  - Spelling
  - Handwriting, keyboarding



© Joan Sedita www.keystoliteracy.com

Image 1: The Writing Rope (Sedita, 2019)



So, if emergent writers are tasked with prompts like "write about your weekend", it's understandable how they can feel completely overwhelmed. Not only must they recall their weekend activities, but they also need to focus on letter formation, spacing, spelling, syntax, vocabulary selection, and even punctuation. Comments like "How many times have I reminded them about using periods and capital letters?" and "Their phonics knowledge seems to vanish when they're asked to write"

are sentiments echoed on teacher platforms and Facebook groups. We as educators need to understand the sub-skills of writing, Cognitive Load Theory, and the importance of guided (heavily scaffolded) instruction, particularly for emergent writers. Commercial writing programs often target a number of The Writing Rope strands well, particularly skills relating to text structure and writing craft. While these programs undoubtedly have their merits, it's important we comprehensively address and teach all facets, or strands, of writing.

AERO's 2022 analysis of student writing data (Jackson et al., 2022) uncovered some intriguing (perhaps even startling) findings regarding NAPLAN writing in Australia, particularly concerning sentence structure and punctuation. The majority of Year 9 students were using punctuation in their writing at a Year 3 level (Jackson et al., 2022). In order to unpack these writing results, we need to reflect on the way in which we are teaching syntax and punctuation.

Often, syntax or grammar instruction is approached haphazardly or follows a loosely structured scope and sequence. Or, it is done in a traditional sense where it is taught in isolation and completely decontextualised from writing and reading content. What is required is a meticulously designed sentence curriculum that offers clear instructional guidance, ensuring consistency and coherence in teaching sentence-related concepts.

## The Syntax Project

In order to provide some much-needed support and guidance in sentence-level writing instruction, in 2022, a group of teachers and school leaders from different primary schools across Australia participated in The Syntax Project. Teachers were accepted into the project if they had experience with an explicit-instruction model and could demonstrate an understanding/experience with syntax level instruction. The scope and sequence and lesson design is heavily influenced by the Writing Revolution (Hochman & Wexler, 2017), in addition to Writing Matters (Van Cleave, 2014).

The Writing Revolution provides educators with a research-informed teaching approach known as the Hochman Method. This method prioritises explicit, starting from individual sentences and progressing

to full compositions. There are six core principles of The Writing Revolution:

1. Students need explicit instruction in writing, beginning in the early elementary grades.
2. Sentences are the building blocks of all writing.
3. When embedded in the content of the curriculum, writing instruction is a powerful teaching tool.
4. The content of the curriculum drives the rigor of the writing activities.
5. Grammar is best taught in the context of student writing.
6. The two most important phases of the writing process are planning and revising.

In The Syntax Project, we focus on developing syntax skills through various strategies such as expanding sentences, completing sentence stems, combining sentences, using appositives, and converting fragments into sentences. These lessons are designed to progressively develop these crucial sentence-level skills throughout the Primary Years. They are customisable, allowing teachers to integrate them into their reading and writing material - an important principle of The Writing Revolution (Hochman & Wexler, 2017).

## Instructional language

Embedded within the Syntax Project is a focus on grammatical terminology. Extensive research demonstrates that traditional grammar instruction, which primarily involves labelling and identifying parts of speech, does not effectively enhance writing

skills. However, by explicitly teaching components such as parts of speech (word class), clauses, phrases, subjects, and predicates, we establish a shared language for instructional purposes. While understanding terms like 'verb', 'noun', and 'adverb' may not directly enhance writing quality, they facilitate communication and instruction. For instance:

"Can you incorporate a more dynamic verb into this sentence?"

"Could you merge these sentences using an appositive?"

"Let's refine this sentence by adding an adverb of manner."

The inclusion of some of this explicit grammatical language can build metalinguistic awareness, enabling students to contemplate their writing choices.

## Simple doesn't mean simplistic

There's a common misconception that focusing on sentence-level writing is only relevant for very early writers, i.e. students in the Early Years. However, sentences form the foundation of all writing, as emphasised by Hochman & Wexler (2017), and mastering the art of a sentence involves complexity beyond initial stages of instruction. Take for example, simple sentences. Despite their name, simple sentences can often contain quite sophisticated language structures including appositives and adverbial phrases. Take these three examples of simple sentences below:

- The horse galloped across the meadow.
- Gracefully, the bird soared through the sky.

**adjective**



A word that describes or modifies a noun. It describes what a noun is like.

Adjectives and nouns work together in sentences to give a clear picture of people, places and things.

4 Image credit: Tracks to Literacy

Image 2: Adjective Vocabulary Definition Slide from The Syntax Project - Year 1 Term 1 Lesson



- Perth, the capital of Western Australia, boasts stunning beaches and vibrant cultural attractions.

The last one can trick people. It may look like a complex or compound sentence at first glance, but it is in fact a simple sentence as it only contains one subject-verb unit. It includes an appositive ('the capital city of Western Australia'), which has the primary purpose to re-name or provide clarity about the noun preceding it. The point being, simple does not equate to simplistic and the simple sentence can still be refined and built upon in late primary and high school, in addition to a range of compound and complex sentence structures.

## The power of conjunctions

A significant component of The Syntax Project involves explicitly teaching specific conjunctions, prioritising their function over their classification. William Van Cleave's book, *Writing Matters* (2014), offers a valuable resource in its well-organised appendix, which categorises conjunctions based on their functions (e.g. causal, temporal, contrasting, conditional). By leveraging these resources to complement The Syntax Project, we equip students with the skills to effectively link related ideas using appropriate conjunctions.

For example, let's consider 'although' versus 'since'. 'Although' serves to highlight a contrast, whereas 'since' indicates a causal relationship. While students may grasp the meaning and usage of 'since' relatively quickly, mastering the function of contrasting conjunctions like 'although' often requires more time and practice. In our lessons, we maintain consistent sentence structures but vary the conjunctions to underscore their distinct meanings and functions. For instance:

**Since** deforestation rates have accelerated, \_\_\_\_\_

**Although** deforestation rates have accelerated, \_\_\_\_\_

These sentence stems are near identical except for the conjunction, yet the possible endings for each are very different. When teaching students to combine sentences or complete sentence stems using a conjunction, our questions are always 'what is the relationship between the clauses' or 'what is the function of the conjunction'?

In the Grade 5 and 6 content, the Syntax Project resources go beyond these conjunctions to teaching specific conjunctive adverbs such as 'furthermore', 'moreover', and 'nevertheless'. These advanced adverbs act as connectors and are valuable additions to tier two vocabulary instruction.

## Syntax for reading

Understanding syntax and how to teach it is crucial for educators, as it not only enhances students' ability to express themselves effectively in writing but also facilitates their comprehension of intricate syntactic structures and techniques, such as pronoun reference (anaphora). However, there seems to be insufficient focus in educational practice on teaching techniques that specifically address complex sentence structures (Zipoli, 2017). Zipoli (2017) has summarised four potentially confusing sentence structures:

- Reversible Passive Sentences.** E.g. *The dog was chased by the man.*  
In this sentence, the two nouns can be reversed. Additionally, the sentence is in the passive voice, where the subject undergoes an action rather than performing it.

- Adverbial Clauses with Temporal or Causal Conjunctions.** E.g. *Before she left for school, Millie picked a flower from the garden.*

These sentence structures can be confusing as the clauses are not necessarily in temporal order.

- Centre-Embedded Relative Clauses.** E.g. *The doctor who treated my grandmother provided excellent care.*

A relative clause is a dependent clause that modifies a noun or pronoun in an independent clause, and is usually introduced by relative pronouns (that, who, what). The inclusion of this embedded clause often results in the subject and predicate (or verb) of the independent clause being distanced from each other, occasionally leading to a more challenging comprehension of the connection between them.

- Sentences with Multiple Clauses.** E.g. *Although she had never been to Europe before, Sarah decided to embark on a solo backpacking trip across the continent, exploring famous landmarks in cities like Paris and Rome, while also immersing herself in the local cultures and cuisines.*

Students with attention deficits, poor working memory, and limited processing abilities may find it challenging to comprehend long sentences containing multiple clauses.

The implications of challenging sentence structures for reading instruction include:

- Explicitly teaching sentence-level writing alongside paragraph and composition skills, integrating it into reading content to boost comprehension. Research consistently shows a strong link between reading and writing, with numerous studies demonstrating how writing can improve comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2010).
- Employing self-monitoring techniques when facing texts with complex sentence structures. Pausing to reflect and analyse sentences can enhance comprehension. For example, taking a moment to consider the meaning of a sentence: *"Let's pause here*

### Skill development: We do

- Read the sentence stem (subordinating conjunction with dependent clause)
- Select the appropriate independent clause
- Use this to complete the sentence.



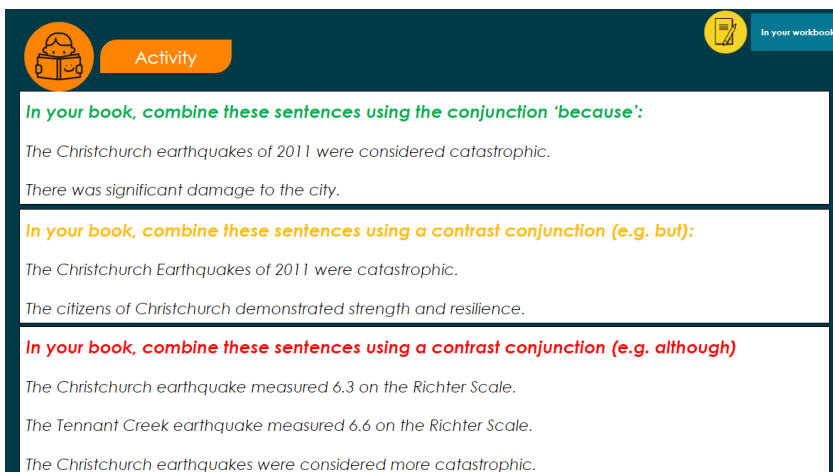
**Although** Rue didn't study for the test, \_\_\_\_\_.

she failed.

she managed to do well.

my dog was snoring.

**Although** Rue didn't study for the test, **she managed to do well.**



**Activity**

**In your book, combine these sentences using the conjunction 'because':**

The Christchurch earthquakes of 2011 were considered catastrophic.

There was significant damage to the city.

**In your book, combine these sentences using a contrast conjunction (e.g. but):**

The Christchurch Earthquakes of 2011 were catastrophic.

The citizens of Christchurch demonstrated strength and resilience.

**In your book, combine these sentences using a contrast conjunction (e.g. although)**

The Christchurch earthquake measured 6.3 on the Richter Scale.

The Tennant Creek earthquake measured 6.6 on the Richter Scale.

The Christchurch earthquakes were considered more catastrophic.

Image 4: The Writing Revolution strategy (combining sentences) embedded into reading material (Serpentine-Greenfields Year 4 Knowledge Unit)

and think about what this sentence is conveying.”

- Encouraging students to identify the subject and predicate (or verb) of each clause in particularly complex multi-clause sentences. This practice significantly aids comprehension, especially in cases involving anaphora or variations in subjects across clauses.

## Conclusion

The Syntax Project, inspired by methodologies like The Writing Revolution (Hochman & Wexler, 2017), provides a structured approach to teaching syntax, emphasizing explicit instruction and the gradual development of essential sentence-level skills. It is important to tailor these pre-made resources to suit individual contexts and embed sentence-level writing into reading & learning material.

## Acknowledgement

I want to express my gratitude to the teachers, schools, and speech pathologists across Australia who contributed to the development of the original materials for The Syntax Project. Special recognition goes to the resource moderators: Jasmyn Hall, Christina Guy, and Rebecca Glasson. I also want to extend my appreciation to the committed educators at Serpentine Primary School, with whom I am honored to collaborate daily as we strive for excellence in education. A heartfelt thank you to Ochre Education and the Fogarty Foundation for their invaluable support in adopting and enhancing The Syntax Project resources. Lastly, thank you to Brad Nguyen and Nathaniel Swain for allowing us to use their icons for engagement norms.

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- About the Author**
- Stephanie Le Lievre serves as the Principal of Serpentine Primary School and holds the role of co-director at the non-profit organisation, The Science of Teaching and Learning Australia. She is also a co-founder of the Facebook community, Reading Science in Schools. With a background in Speech Pathology, Stephanie has earned her Level 3 Classroom Teacher status, demonstrating her commitment to education and professional development.*

## About The Syntax Project

In 2022, a group of teachers and school leaders from 17 different primary schools across Australia participated in The Syntax Project, facilitated by Stephanie Le Lievre from Serpentine Primary School (WA). Teachers were accepted into the project if they had experience with an explicit-instruction model and could demonstrate understanding/experience with syntax instruction. All lessons went through a review process by one of the project moderators: Stephanie Le Lievre, Rebecca Glasson, Christina Guy and Jasmyn Hall. All lessons were created in teachers' own time and have been shared freely to encourage professional collaboration amongst teachers and schools. The original materials can be accessed freely here: <https://thesyntaxproject2022.squarespace.com/thegrammarproject>.

In 2023, The Syntax Project was given to Ochre Education, a not-for-profit company that is committed to advancing student outcomes and closing the disadvantage gap by supporting teachers to teach, and enabling all Australian students to access a high-quality curriculum, through their online library. With funding support from the Fogarty Foundation, Ochre Education has created updated versions of the Term 1 and Term 3 materials which can be accessed here: <https://ochre.org.au/ac/the-grammar-project/> (Term 2 and Term 4 are due to be released in 2024). Related professional learning can be accessed here: <https://ochre.org.au/ac/professional-learning-resources/the-grammar-project/>.

# Developing students' metalinguistic understandings for writing: Moving beyond form to function

**Damon Thomas and Nathan Lowien**

As schools around Australia have come on board with the Science of Reading, we have witnessed a monumental shift in how children are being taught to read (e.g., Department of Education, Queensland, 2023). As confidence increases on the reading side of the literacy coin, it is perhaps unsurprising that many teachers and school leaders are beginning to shift their attention to writing. Teaching writing well is one of the most important responsibilities of any teacher since writing skills support student learning in every school discipline (Graham et al., 2016). Given the central role of writing in school assessment, students who struggle with writing are unlikely to experience school success (Cutler & Graham, 2008; Daffern et al., 2017), with negative consequences stretching beyond school into the workforce (Oliver, 2010).

It is clear from more than a decade of national testing that certain students struggle more with writing than others, particularly males, those attending schools in rural or remote areas, and those who have parents with limited educational outcomes of their own (Thomas, 2019; Thomas et al., 2023).

Fortunately, quality teaching has been found to make a world of difference for every student learning to write (Graham et al., 2021; Koster et al., 2015). Knowing how to teach writing well is therefore a key priority for every teacher.

## Prerequisites for teaching writing well

Teaching writing well requires sufficient declarative and procedural knowledge about writing. Kirshner and Hendrick (2020), drawing on seminal work by John Sweller, explained that for students to learn to solve any problem, they need both declarative and procedural knowledge in the subject or discipline of the problem. Kirshner and Hendrick (2020) stated, "You can't communicate about something, write about something, discuss or argue about something etc. without first knowing about that something and then also knowing the rules (i.e., the procedures) for doing it" (p. 18). Yet research over several decades (e.g., Jones & Chen, 2012; Macken-Horarik et al., 2018; Myhill, 2000) has found that "the absence of explicit grammar teaching in the English curriculum in Anglophone countries for nearly 50 years" has meant many primary and secondary school teachers lack the declarative and procedural knowledge of language to teach writing explicitly and effectively (Jones et al., 2013, p. 1245). Teachers who lack sufficient knowledge about language struggle to analyse writing choices made by authors in texts, and to guide their students to do so, increasing



the challenge for them to make explicit how a given text works.

A key aspect of declarative knowledge missing for many teachers (especially those who completed their teacher training when whole language approaches were mainstream) is known as *metalinguage* (Humphrey & Macnaught, 2016). As explained by Matruggio (2019), "to teach language explicitly, teachers and students need a language to talk about language" (p. 2), or in other words, a metalanguage. Learning about the various grammatical forms (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives) and teaching students to identify them in written texts can be described as building a shared metalanguage. If a metalanguage is shared by teachers and children across a school, students will experience a consistent approach to learning about this important aspect of declarative knowledge about writing.

In recent years, a concerted effort has been made to develop teachers' declarative knowledge about language forms, both in research (e.g., the Australian Educational Research Organisation's *Secondary Writing Instruction Framework*) and in the

provision of ready-to-deliver teaching resources (e.g., Serpentine Primary School's *The Syntax Project*, which offers an impressive array of free lesson resources). While the focused attention given to developing teachers' and students' declarative knowledge about language forms is admirable and important, we echo arguments made by Macken-Horarik (2012), Myhill (2021) and others that declarative knowledge about language forms is unlikely to improve students' writing proficiency on its own. In the context of writing instruction, we consider procedural knowledge to involve understanding how language choices work in texts to make meaning and achieve social purposes. Such knowledge requires just as much attention in classrooms as knowledge of the basic grammar forms. This aspect of declarative writing knowledge has been described in this article as metalanguage, while the associated aspect of procedural knowledge can be referred to as *metalinguistic understanding*. For a teacher to develop knowledge of metalanguage and metalinguistic understanding would be akin to a doctor who knows the various parts of the body and also how they function together to keep a person healthy.

## Metalinguistic understanding

Metalinguistic understanding refers to the ability to think and communicate about how language choices are working to make meaning in a given text. These language choices can focus on grammar or syntax (e.g., recognising how sentences in a narrative have more relating verbs when introducing characters, more adverb phrases when describing settings, and more action verbs when expressing physical events), text structure (e.g., recognising how the orientation stage of narratives commonly include some combination of a settings phase, a characters phase, and a foregrounding of the complication phase), rhetorical/literary devices (e.g., recognising the use and meaning of a metaphor, such as describing an antagonist as a storm brewing in the shadows), and many other options. As explained by Myhill and Newman (2023), metalinguistic understanding involves moving beyond the simple use of language to reflecting on the ways it is used to make meaning.

There are many benefits of developing metalinguistic understanding in

classroom contexts. Perhaps most importantly, it has been found to enhance student writing outcomes (Cremin et al., 2020). Research by Myhill and Newman (2016) found that teacher passion for writing alone is not enough to improve students' writing. While it is important for teachers to be passionate writers and teachers of writing, only when they possess sufficient metalinguistic understanding can they link the writing choices in texts to pedagogical knowledge and transfer to improve student attainment (Cremin et al., 2020). It is clear from influential work by Steve Graham and colleagues in the US that providing more class time for children to write is crucial (e.g., Graham et al., 2015), but writing attainment really picks up when enough of this time is used for explicit teaching of language forms and functions, coupled with explicit feedback about children's own writing choices (Ryan et al., 2021). Teachers who dedicate time to discussing the forms and functions of language in high-quality written texts give students the best chance of developing metalinguistic understanding to support writing across subject areas.

Classroom discussions about language forms and functions are referred to by Debra Myhill and colleagues as *metatalk*. Metatalk, which relies on strong oral language skills, develops children's metalinguistic understanding as they use talk to reflect on, scrutinise, and justify writing choices made in mentor texts and in their own writing (Myhill et al., 2013). Given the limitless possibilities afforded by language for writing, metatalk in the classroom should not be overly reductive. "Developing metalinguistic thinking is not about directing young writers to 'correct' choices or formulaic patterns of writing; it is about enabling the kind of thinking that will help writers to become independent and creative decision-makers in their own right" (Cremin & Myhill, 2012, p. 111). Understanding and using the various forms of language intentionally to achieve different effects rather than being ends in themselves makes writing a versatile and transferable skill that students will leverage and benefit from constantly across the subject areas (Carey et al., 2022). While it can be interesting to learn about the many forms of language for their own sake, grammar teaching in isolation will not reliably improve children's writing (Andrews, 2005; Andrews et al., 2006). The goal is for students to intentionally make language choices to fit a writing context

(i.e., genre, purpose, audience needs, register). While teachers and students do need to develop a shared metalanguage first, this becomes most useful for writing when they understand how the various language forms work in different kinds of written texts.

## How to develop metalinguistic understanding

As explained above, metalinguistic understanding is commonly developed through classroom metatalk (i.e., oral discussions about writing choices). This involves teachers opening dialogic space for children to think about possible language choices in a specific place in a text, and inviting them to describe, elaborate, and justify the choice they believe would work best to meet the purpose of the text (Myhill et al., 2020). To help with this, students can be led to put themselves in the shoes of the audience, considering their needs and meeting them through their language choices (Midgette et al., 2008). In this way, perspective taking can be a useful skill to guide decision-making while writing.

Another tool to support metatalk is the selection and use of high-quality mentor texts for students to analyse and emulate. This practice has been identified as a feature of effective writing instruction (e.g., Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007), and we argue that the exploration of mentor texts presents an ideal time to engage children in metatalk about the author's language choices. Once they can clearly identify and understand the choices that led to the success of the mentor text, they can attempt to emulate these choices in their own writing, bearing in mind that there are many ways to meet the social purposes of different genres.

## Developing metalinguistic understanding in a teacher education context

The following section of this paper introduces three practical classroom strategies for developing children's metalinguistic understanding, informed by the research of Myhill and colleagues (e.g., Myhill, 2021; Myhill et al., 2020). We also provide examples of these strategies from the first author's teaching of preservice teachers at the University of Queensland (hereafter UQ).



### Example Strategy 1: Fill the Gap

The first practical strategy is known as *Fill the Gap*. Here, a teacher selects an extract of text from a mentor text, usually a paragraph or so in length. The extract selected should provide a clear example of a target language choice in use. Importantly, the extract should be long enough for students to see the choice in its surrounding context. With an extract selected, the teacher should delete the target language choice, leaving one or several gaps in the extract. Clearly, deleting a target language choice requires the teacher to have a strong enough knowledge of language to identify it in the text. With the modified extract shown to the class, students are then invited to discuss and justify what they believe should fill the gaps. Ideally, the students will have developed a strong shared metalanguage, which they can be encouraged to draw on as they justify their choices to fill the gaps. Once sufficient time is spent discussing possibilities, the teacher reveals the author's choices and the class discusses their effects in the text.

In Damon's teaching at UQ, he uses an extract from Kenneth Grahame's much-loved *The Wind in the Willows* to demonstrate the Fill the Gap strategy for preservice teachers. This is part of a learning experience about the use of adjectives to build interest and description in narratives. He introduces the text and shows a brief extract from near the end of the story when the main characters are creeping through an underground tunnel to launch a surprise attack on a pack of mischievous weasels and stoats that have taken up

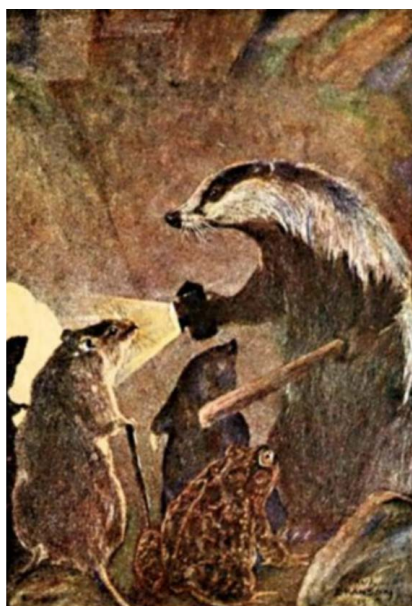


Figure 1 The animals traverse the tunnel

residence in Toad Hall. Most adjectives have been removed, and Damon invites the preservice teachers to turn and talk about what language choices they think should fill the gaps. Here is the abstract:

*It was \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and poor Toad began to shiver, partly from dread of what might be before him, partly because he was wet through.* (Grahame, 1908)

When the talk begins to quieten, Damon shows them an image of the characters traversing the tunnel from an illustrated version of the text (illustrated by Paul Bransom). This raises the volume of talk again as the preservice teachers justify and sometimes modify their choices to match the image.

Next, Damon invites each preservice teacher to call out one adjective to fill the gaps and thereby describe the tunnel. By this stage, the preservice teachers are typically invested in the task and keen to know Grahame's actual choices, so he reveals the original extract from the text, as follows:

*It was cold, and dark, and damp, and low, and narrow, and poor Toad began to shiver, partly from dread of what might be before him, partly because he was wet through.* (Grahame, 1908)

Most preservice teachers are pleased at this stage, as they discover they made many of the same choices as the beloved children's book author. The group then conclude the use of the strategy by discussing what they discovered about the author's use of adjectives to build interest and description at this tense point in the story.

### Example Strategy 2: Let's Compare

A second strategy for developing metalinguistic understanding described by Myhill (2021) is named *Let's Compare*, in which the teacher guides students' to compare language choices made in two or more written texts. This can involve the comparison of clauses, sentences, paragraphs, phases, or stages. There are many possible variations on this strategy. Teachers may show students the same language choice made in two high-quality mentor texts, highlighting how there is not one correct way to achieve a given purpose in writing. They might compare the same language choice in a lower and higher quality version of the same text, creating

space to discuss why the choices in the higher quality version are more effective (note: this is a great strategy for highlighting the development of a student's writing over time). Another option is to compare the same language choice made in two different genres to emphasise differences between them (e.g., showing how procedural texts often have verb groups at the beginning of clauses – **Add the milk to the flour. Mix the ingredients together**, while clauses in narratives rarely begin with verb groups) and discussing how these differences relate to the social purpose of the genre. Again, Let's Compare affords opportunities for students to draw on metalanguage to explain how language choices are functioning in different texts and why, drawing on both declarative and procedural knowledge.

At UQ, Damon demonstrates the Let's Compare strategy using two versions of the text description stage of a review written by a Year 5 student: the first unchanged and the second modified to have considerably less information in select noun groups (both versions can be seen in Figure 2 below). At this stage in the course, the preservice teachers have built up a shared metalanguage for discussing the grammatical parts of noun groups, including several pre- and post-modifiers that can be used before and after the main noun for different effects. To start, he shows the two texts with all words in black font and preservice teachers are asked to consider what sets them apart. After some discussion, he shows the texts with noun groups in red font, making it easier to identify and compare the noun groups (as in the Figure 2 example below). During the class discussion that follows, the preservice teachers' attention is drawn to the use of grammatical forms including articles, determiners, demonstratives, possessives, and numerals, which can all function in pre-modifiers to describe which part of the noun (e.g., the back of the door), which one (e.g., that bottle), how many (e.g., ten puppies), what like (e.g., hungry sharks), and what kind (e.g., children's books). Students also explore the use of prepositional phrases (e.g., dogs on the footpath) and embedded clauses (e.g., cars powered by electricity) as post-modifiers (i.e., providing more information after the main noun in the word group). This process highlights the considerable work done in this review (and others like it) by expanded noun groups, preparing the preservice

**TEXT DESCRIPTION:** The main characters are three fish: a young clown fish called Nemo, his father, Marlin, and a blue fish with a short memory called Dory. On Nemo's first day at school, two scuba divers catch Nemo and take him in their boat. His father goes to rescue him with Dory, who he meets on the way. Together, they go on a mission to find Nemo and soon encounter many sea creatures, including three sharks named Bruce, Anchor and Crush.

**TEXT DESCRIPTION:** The characters are three fish: Nemo, Marlin, and Dory. On Nemo's first day at school, divers catch Nemo and take him in their boat. His father goes to rescue him with Dory, who he meets on the way. Together, they go on a mission and soon encounter sharks.

Figure 2: Finding Nemo Review (adapted from Humphrey et al., 2012)

teachers to use pre- and post-modifiers intentionally to expand noun groups in their own review writing.

### Example Strategy 3: Collaborative Revision

The last practical strategy from the work of Myhill (2021) focused on in this paper is named *Collaborative Revision*. For this strategy, students work with a partner or in a small group to revise a short text to make an explicit change to a given language choice. An example could be to revise a literary description of a fictitious monster to infer that it is friendly rather than frightening. Importantly, this revision task is not designed to be lengthy or onerous; students do not revise long pieces of writing. Instead, they are given a contained task for applying their learning about a given language choice.

Damon sets several collaborative revision tasks at UQ and finds them to be highly engaging for preservice teachers. In one example, he displays a short news report of a burglary, missing language choices that express circumstantial details of events (i.e., adverbs and prepositional phrases that function to express how, when, where, or why events occurred). The initial news report can be seen as follows:

*A burglary occurred. The criminals smashed a window and entered the premises. It was discovered that the owner's prized cat was stolen. If you know anything about this shocking deed, please contact Crime Stoppers.*

After considering the logical places that would benefit from circumstantial details (e.g., [when] A burglary occurred [where]. The criminals smashed a window [how] and entered the premises [where]. . . and so on), the students work in small groups to revise the news report.

As they share their revised (and much improved) versions, they are asked to justify their added language choices. It becomes clear quite quickly that some groups have written their compositions to be humorous, while others have written them in keeping with typical serious newspaper stories. This affords the opportunity to use the Let's Compare strategy to discuss the sorts of audiences that would appreciate different revised versions of the news report. The three simple strategies for developing metalinguistic understanding outlined here are extremely versatile, being useful at different times in classrooms to suit a given learning purpose.

### Conclusion

Developing students' metalinguistic understanding should be a key aim when teaching writing, since the success of writing instruction is determined by how well students can write different texts for different purposes. Effective writing instruction prepares children to communicate with others through writing for many reasons and to enhance their own learning in every subject area. Developing a shared metalanguage is crucial to this because knowing the forms of language constitutes a key aspect of declarative writing knowledge (i.e., the nuts and bolts that make up clauses and sentences). However, without declarative and procedural knowledge, it is unlikely that isolated grammar exercises will transfer into the writing of different texts in different contexts (Andrews, 2005). We join those calling for all teachers of writing to develop knowledge about language forms, making use of the tremendous and often free resources that have been purpose built for classroom learning. At the same time, we urge teachers to consider that knowledge of language forms becomes more useful for writing

when it is extended to consider function (i.e., how the various forms work in different texts to help meet the texts' social purposes, whether to persuade, inform, instruct, entertain, etc.). In this short article, we have drawn on research that has found the development of students' metalinguistic understanding to benefit writing, moving beyond form to function. Giving time in classroom writing instruction to explore how strong writing involves the intentional use of language forms as tools to make meaning is an important way to make the most of grammar instruction.

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# Crafting sentences: Four simple writing techniques to elevate your students' learning

**Ingrid Sealey**

One of the many challenges for teachers is supporting students to master conceptual knowledge. Often this knowledge requires students to think about several key ideas and to understand the relationships between those ideas. This conceptual knowledge could be, for example, understanding the roles of women in medieval society, the factors leading the British Empire to establish penal colonies in Australia, or the parts and functions of the organelles in animal cells. What makes this content challenging to teach is the complexity of the ideas and knowledge. Techniques that work well for teaching complex skills (such as gradually releasing students through an I Do, We Do, You Do) are not always well suited to this kind of information. Wanting students to learn this knowledge while simultaneously asking them to demonstrate it to us through a complex skill, such as essay writing (even if we do gradually release essay writing skills), can lead to cognitive overload. At Teach Well, we encourage teachers to help manage this complexity for our students by focusing on the ideas and knowledge first, before we get students to take on trickier forms of expression.

So, how should we best help students think about these key ideas and relationships? How can

effective sentence-level writing instruction help position students to better comprehend, think about, and express relationships between key concepts?

After working with more than 3,000 teachers and leaders across Kindergarten (WA; aged 3.5-4.5) to Year 12 classrooms, in almost all curriculum subjects; we have seen the power of arming teachers with a small set of sentence-level writing activities. The power of these activities is their wide applicability and flexibility — they can be used to generate thinking by students about almost any conceptual knowledge — and the accumulated evidence demonstrates that these activities can support both conceptual knowledge and improve student expression and writing.

This article shares some of the experience of this hands-on work with educators. There are some excellent 'how to' guides and resources available to support teachers to adopt these activities. The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has produced a suite of resources including guides on sentence combining and various sentence structures referencing the broader literature (AERO, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, McLean & Griffiths, 2022). Many of our teachers have also found The Writing Revolution (Hochman & Wexler, 2017) to be an excellent support manual, and the four activities in this article are included in the book. As such, this article will focus on some of Teach Well's learnings about how these activities can be best brought to life. The four sentence-level writing activities discussed will include:



1. Sentence stems
2. Sentence expansion
3. Sentence summarising
4. Sentence combining

## Our Experience – Every educator is well placed to give these activities a go!

Educators don't need to be experts in everything to do with English grammar to make the most of these activities. Teachers of almost every subject, from Physical Education to Religious Education and certainly primary classroom teachers, find having a small, robust, frequently-used set of activities to be very helpful. The four techniques below have stood the test of thousands of Australian classrooms, increasing student learning and engagement. No grammar experts are required — you will build your skill level with your students as you use these activities.

## When should I consider using these activities?

- **During initial instruction and in lessons** with a lot of conceptual information or facts. Students build their conceptual knowledge in a



topic by thinking intentionally about the key relationships and ideas.

- **In review activities.** Each of the activities asks for varying levels of information retrieval and this can strengthen the encoding of key concepts and ideas.

## Sentence Stems

Sentence stem activities can be crafted to fit almost all conceptual content. All subjects and year levels have big ideas with relationships to explore. Sentence stem activities are an ideal strategy for deepening student understanding of this type of content.

In a sentence stem activity, the teacher provides the first clause of a complex or compound sentence and the conjunction (signaling the relationship between ideas). Students then generate the second clause and write the complete sentence.

Image 1 and image 2 are examples from Science and Humanities and Social Sciences, which show how students can be asked to consider different key relationships, with the subordinating conjunction determining the relationship students should focus on.

It can be helpful to think about relationships in the information you are presenting to students. Are the ideas unfolding chronologically? Or are there interdependencies or conditions that

### Top Tips for Sentence Stems

1. There's no magic number of sentences in a sentence stem activity. Even just using one sentence and varying the range of conjunctions you use over time can increase student understanding of your content.
2. Be sure to include a subordinating conjunction in your stems (at the beginning or the end of the sentence). The subordinating conjunction highlights the relationship between the big ideas. Without the conjunction this can become a less powerful cloze activity.
3. Do use these activities verbally with students. If time is short, have students pair-share and prepare their answers before calling on some non-volunteers to share their full-sentence answers orally.



#### When acids are added to bases...

*When acids are added to bases they react to form a salt compound and water.*

#### When metals react with acids ...

*When metals react with acids they produce a salt compound and hydrogen gas.*

#### If you see effervescence...

*If you see effervescence, a gas is likely being produced from the reaction.*

Image 1: Example of Sentence Stems in Science Including Key Concepts (acids and bases)

#### Although renewable resources can be exploited or used again and again...

*Although renewable resources can be exploited or used again and again, if they are not managed sustainably, they can be significantly depleted.*

#### Because the supply of non-renewable resources is limited...

*Because the supply of non-renewable resources is limited, it cannot be replaced once it has been used.*

#### Some natural resources are found everywhere, whereas...

*Some natural resources are found everywhere, whereas others can only be found in specific locations (e.g., mineral ores, oil and coal).*

Image 2: Example of Sentence Stem Activity in Geography and Earth Sciences Including Key Concepts (renewable and non-renewable resources)

are required for some ideas to hold true? Are there hierarchical relationships or contrasting positions? Our teachers often find it helpful to have a list of subordinating conjunctions handy whilst constructing stem activities to expose their students to a variety of vocabulary and relationships.

## Sentence Expansion

Have you ever marked student assessments and found your feedback to every second student is to "add more detail", only to find that those same students generally don't add more detail in the next round of work they submit?

This is one of the most common challenges for teachers, particularly as students move through upper primary and secondary school. Sentence expansion activities are an excellent vehicle for explicitly teaching, modelling, and gradually releasing the skill of adding detail to a sentence.

In a sentence expansion activity, students add detail to a simple sentence, drawing from a given source or previous learning, with the teacher directing them to the critical content through questions or question words.

In table 1, taken from a primary history lesson, the teacher has students retrieve

critical information from the lesson by asking questions to probe for more detail, scaffolding and effectively guiding students through writing an expanded sentence about the First Fleet arriving in Sydney Cove.

Although these types of activities are common in early childhood classrooms, particularly to first introduce students to key syntactic structures, they remain an excellent vehicle for more open retrieval of information when working with older students.

For example, in this secondary Religious Education lesson on the Diocletian Persecution (table 2), students are asked to retrieve multiple key ideas to expand the sentence "They persecuted Christians." before constructing their more detailed sentence.

## Sentence Summarising

In a sentence summarising activity, teachers guide students to create high-quality, structured summaries using question words to direct them to the critical content.

When we summarise, we identify the essence of the information before us. Yet, we also know that novice learners often misunderstand what is considered to be critical content,

Initial sentence	Questions to probe more detail	Expanded sentence
<i>They arrived.</i>	<i>Who arrived?</i> <i>When and where did they arrive?</i> <i>What did they do upon arrival?</i>	<i>On <b>26 January 1788</b>, the <b>First Fleet</b> arrived at <b>Sydney Cove</b> to <b>start a new British penal colony</b>.</i>

Table 1: Steps in a Sentence Expanding Task for the First Fleet (Humanities and Social Sciences)

Initial sentence	Questions to probe more detail	Expanded sentence
<i>They persecuted Christians.</i>	<i>Who persecuted the Christians?</i> <i>When did this persecution occur?</i> <i>What took place during this persecution?</i>	<i>During the <b>Diocletian Persecution</b> in <b>303</b>, a group of <b>Roman emperors</b> issued a series of edicts that <b>denied Christians legal rights</b> and demanded them to <b>comply with traditional non-Christian religious practices</b>.</i>

Table 2: Steps in a Sentence Expansion Task for the Christians (Religious Education)

making summarising very difficult. I'm sure that teachers have all experienced when students' summaries of text are often nearly as long as the original text themselves!

Sentence summarising activities help to guide students towards including the critical content in their sentences, and to help them order their thinking. This is especially powerful during the initial stages of instruction when students are encountering multiple new ideas, and also during further instruction when we can expose students to additional layers of information and support them to read more complex texts.

Beyond the direct benefits for reading comprehension, the ability to summarise is essential for writing effective paragraphs (Hochman & Wexler, 2017; McLean & Griffiths, 2022; Sedita, 2019). Such sentences serve as ideal topic or concluding sentences for the commonly used TEEL (or other) paragraph writing structure in extended writing tasks. Image 3 is a slide taken from our Masterclass Course for Years 3-10 teachers, which explains the four steps required to create an effective sentence summary activity.

## Sentence Combining

The impact of learning to combine sentences on student writing has been highlighted by literature reviews into effective writing instruction (Graham & Hebert, 2010; McLean & Griffiths, 2022; Sedita, 2019). In these activities, students combine shorter sentences of critical content to improve sentence quality, complexity and variety.

Sentence combining is one of the most studied techniques for improving student writing, even if it has not been adopted widely in classrooms. One reason for this might be that teaching sentence combining can be surprisingly tricky. Teachers are experts in their domains of knowledge and the curse of expertise can make the task of combining sentences appear deceptively simple. Consequently, teachers may find it difficult to explain to students exactly what they are doing and the decisions they are making, as they model combining sentences together. Many students are familiar with conjunctions such as 'and', 'or', or 'but' but they don't always find it straightforward to apply this knowledge when combining sentences.

Let's have a look at two examples using different source materials to practice sentence combining.

In the first example (image 4), the teacher used a more traditional approach to sentence combining where students were provided with three

## Creating a Sentence Summary Activity



### 1 Information Source e.g., text, video, image

The Egyptian pyramids are ancient pyramid shaped masonry structures located mostly in modern Egypt. As of November 2008, sources cite either 188 or 138 as the number of identified pyramids. Pharaohs commissioned seasonal agricultural workers to build the pyramids approximately 4500 years ago. They were designed as tombs for the country's pharaohs and their consorts in the belief that they would provide protection in the afterlife.

### 2 Write summary sentence containing some of the critical content:

*Approximately 4500 years ago, seasonal agricultural workers built pyramids in Egypt to protect pharaohs and their consorts in their afterlife.*

### 3 Determine what question words will prompt students to include the detail that was removed from the summary sentence:

What: *built pyramids*  
Who: *seasonal agricultural workers*  
When: *approximately 4500 years ago*  
Where: *Egypt*  
Why: *to protect pharaohs and their consorts in the afterlife*

### 4 Decide on the prompts (if any) you will leave to further scaffold or constrain student summaries:

What: *built pyramids*  
Who: *seasonal agricultural workers*  
When: .....  
Where: .....  
Why: .....

Image 3: How to Create a Sentence Summary Activity

sentences about inflation and tasked to create one combined sentence.

In this second example (image 5), an art teacher uses three sentences and a graphic organiser with visuals to support students to create a combined sentence about the concept of 'tone'.

## Some take-home messages for school leaders and teachers

Sentence-level writing activities are powerful for enhancing students' ability to comprehend and express the relationships between ideas. These activities should always be delivered with participation tactics and checks for understanding. Teachers should use 'think alouds' and explain to students what they are doing when they model with students. It is always better when introducing these activities to provide more guidance than is needed rather than too little guidance. If students have success with the task, they will be more motivated to try the task with less support next time. That is certainly easier than taking a student who was unsuccessful the first time and needing to re-engage them with the task.

### Top Tips for Sentence Combining

1. Model variations of sentence combining.
2. Prepare a 'think aloud' to accompany modelled examples. It's worth preparing this to explain why you made the choices of conjunctions and structure for your modelled examples.
3. Consider providing a table of conjunctions for students to select from, at least initially (see Image 4). Encourage students to identify the relationships between the sentences and select appropriate conjunctions to match (or expand beyond the limited conjunctions that students favour).
4. [AERO's Sentence Combining guide](#) is excellent and outline many different types of combining. Teachers have found it helpful to introduce sentence combining in small steps with lots of practice for each so that students can internalise the processes.

### Inflation

- » Inflation is an increase in the prices of goods and services.
- » Inflation is measured using the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- » Australia's target rate of inflation is set at 2-3%.

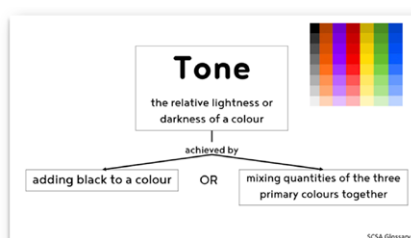
Combine these sentences about inflation into one sentence.

Inflation, an increase in the prices of goods and services, is measured using the Consumer Price Index with Australia's target set at 2-3%.

Inflation is an increase in the prices of goods and services, and Australia's target rate is 2-3% as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

The Consumer Price Index is a measure of inflation (an increase in the price of goods and services) and Australia's target rate is set at 2-3%.

Image 4: Example Sentence Combining Activity – Inflation (Economics)



- » Tone is the relative lightness or darkness of a colour.
- » Tone can be achieved by adding black to a colour.
- » Tone can be achieved by mixing quantities of the three primary colours together.

In one sentence, define tone and how it is achieved.

Tone, the relative lightness or darkness of a colour, can be achieved by adding black to a colour or by mixing quantities of the three primary colours together.

Image 5: Example Sentence Combining Activity – Tone (Art)

## Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Teach Well team for their contributions to the examples and the collation of teacher experiences included in this article.

## Our Experience – Introduce these activities in lessons, reviews and practice

It can be more straight-forward to initially introduce sentence-level writing during lessons before using them in review activities. During lessons, teachers have more time to guide practice and gradually release the writing skill and this ensures a higher success rate for their students. However, once teachers have guided a few examples in their lessons, sentence-level writing can often be incorporated efficiently into daily, weekly, or monthly reviews and practice to help students focus on retrieving key information and practice constructing well-written sentences using this key information.

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### About the Author

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### Conflict of interest

Ingrid Sealey is the CEO of Teach Well which receives financial benefits related to professional learning mentioned in this article. Copyrighted images have been reproduced with permission. The author did not receive funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors to write this article.



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# Writing their way through the forest

Kim Knight

There are numerous texts out there based on how to structure essays (Knight, 2022; McLaren, 2003), but for secondary students, the first challenge is understanding the text. For this article I thought I would share one of the strategies from my book aimed at helping English students (and arts and sciences students) find ways to delve into texts, and a way for teachers to support students to write with greater depth and not merely retell the plot or events.

When we think of writing, we don't think of reading comprehension processes,

but like all complex systems there are points where the two cross over.

Essay writing for upper primary and high school students is a task that often involves writing about texts, novels, short stories, poems, articles, plays and so on (Knight, 2022). And editing one's own work requires rereading the constructed text to check that the words, sentences and paragraphs work cohesively to build a representation of what the student wants to say. So, I feel it is important to start with some text comprehension prior to writing when working with this group of students. This is where I intend to start, sharing a way to assist students to comprehend their assigned text while, at the same time, planning their work and starting to write.

To comprehend a text, we are thought to have explicit and implicit reactions to it. There's what the sentence states, then there's what we infer from our world knowledge (Kintsch & van Dijk, 1978; McNamara & Magliano, 2009). We

build cohesive meaning by essentially 'adding-up' these sentence-by-sentence interpretations to understand a text in its entirety. But what do we do for students who struggle with building meaning this way and writing about what they think?



Here's a schema (Figure 1) I propose for thinking and writing about texts. I call it the Text + Theme Schema (T+T schema, for short).

*...to support students to write with greater depth and not merely retell the plot or events*

This is an easy scaffold to draw on a white board while discussing texts. Tutors or speech pathologists working one-to-one or in small groups, might write this on a notepad. I'll demonstrate its use with a worked example of the schema using Little Red Riding Hood, a text familiar to us all.

You write the name of the text to the left, then add themes on the right as you read or discuss the text with your students.

When you first use the schema to generate themes (Figure 2), remember you are also generating vocabulary which can form the basis of vocabulary building activities and lessons. Don't let an opportunity go to waste. See books like *Bringing Words to Life* by Beck et al for ideas (Beck et al., 2013).

It's important for students to know that many topics can be themes, so encourage students to list them all. You might like to add your own examples too. The girl in the story is walking through the forest, so write 'forests' or 'nature.' She meets a strange wolf, so write 'strangers.'

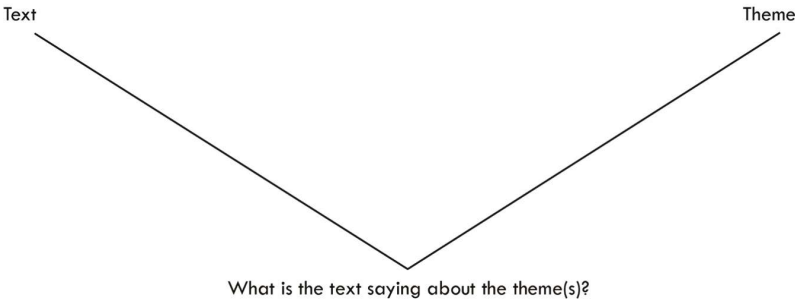


Figure 1. Text + Theme Schema

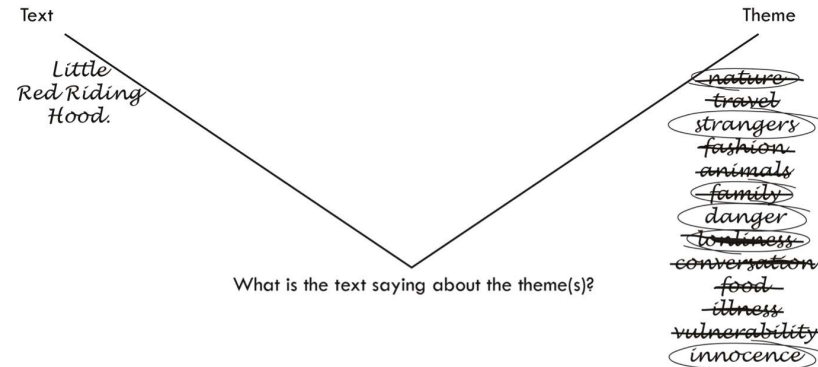


Figure 2. Text + Theme Schema in action

She's wearing a red cape—it's in the title, so it might be important—so why not write 'fashion'? It's important for students to realise that even though some themes might seem weak and irrelevant, and others more important, stronger, we can cull the list later. Also, listing everything is a good motivator; it helps some students get started, feel a sense of achievement and it demonstrates they comprehend the exercise too.

### 'What is the text saying about the theme?'

This is the part where meaning and writing meet and we drill down into comprehension to support students to write an evaluative sentence or two in response to the text (Figure 3).

This appears to be a straightforward question, but students with language and learning difficulties might still struggle to answer this question. In this case, we can introduce more scaffolding questions which tap into what students think and feel, which encourages inferencing about what is understood from the explicit information at sentence-level. It starts with a simple multiple-choice question, then encourages the link back with the concrete, textual elements, to encourage interpretation and build

meaning. These conversations can be supported in the classroom, small groups or with individuals (Figure 4).

Here is a worked example of how a student might get to the final answer using the sequence of additional questions in the schema.

1. I think the text is saying something bad about strangers. . .
2. ...because the girl meets a stranger and tells him too much and then the stranger does something bad.

So maybe, the text is saying that you shouldn't talk to strangers or bad things might happen.

This is written but the whole process can be verbal at first and provide a springboard for whole class or small group discussion, which can then be written.

### SMART goals

I thought I would share something helpful if writing is a focus for your students' IEPs. You will already be familiar with SMART goals, but definitions of the components can vary, so here's an example of how I see them.

<b>Specific</b>	This is the goal, so specify the exact task or activity to be achieved.
<b>Measurable</b>	Make the goal measurable (note: more specific tasks are easier to measure)
<b>Achievable</b>	Ensure the team have the time and resources they need to support the plan.
<b>Realistic</b>	Determine if the goal is realistic for the student and not too challenging.
<b>Time-bound</b>	Set a realistic timeframe and a date for review.

Here are some SMART goal examples, based on the tasks described in this article:

- Student will identify and list themes in a text with 90%+ accuracy on three occasions with mild-to-moderate support by the end of the term applying a scaffold (the T+T schema).
- Student will identify strong and weak themes in a text with mild-to-moderate support from the teacher during a whole class exercise with 90%+ accuracy.
- Student will identify what a one-page text/chapter/poem/short story is saying about a theme with 90%+ success while independently applying a scaffold (T+T schema) on 3 occasions.
- Student will apply a visual scaffold to analyse a text (short story, poem, novel or novel chapter) and make commentary which expresses a deeper understanding of the themes, at sentence level, with 90%+ accuracy on three occasions.

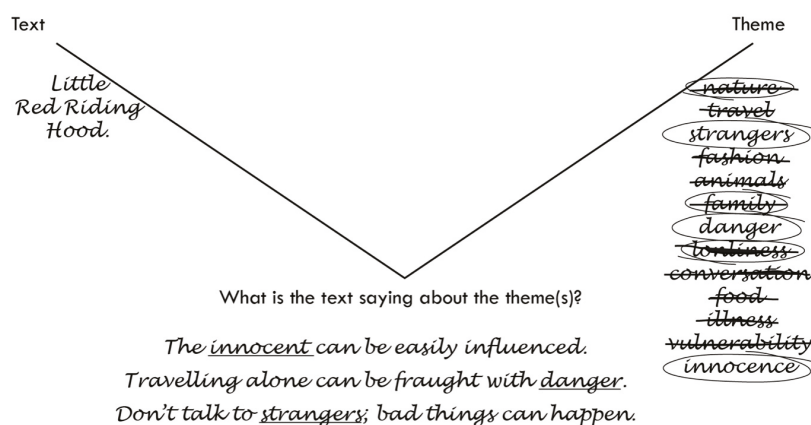


Figure 3. Where meaning and writing meet

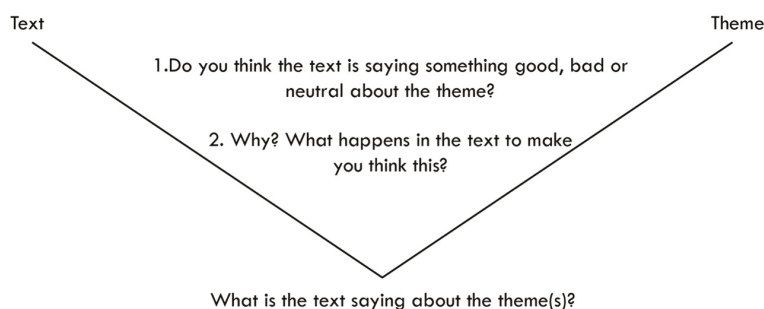


Figure 4. Scaffolding questions

### A note on inclusion

In a MTSS model (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016), there are benefits to applying a system such as the one described. It's a visual representation of a thinking process we take for granted and allows students who struggle to evaluate to 'see' the process and follow it (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). Once a student learns it, they can apply it to any and all texts they need to analyse in small groups; it can be applied to entire novels, or single chapters, scenes and paragraphs (Knight, 2022). By applying

scaffolding such as this, you are creating inclusion for students with language and learning difficulties without hampering the performance of typically progressing students, and without creating additional materials like cloze passages and extra worksheets—inclusion does not necessarily mean a tonne of extra work on your part.

## To sum-up

I hope this schema forms the basis for a useful transition from reading, to discussion, to writing in the classroom setting that supports students with language and learning difficulties. There are ways for scaffolding and differentiating the task further to support students who can discuss this type of content but still can't get it down on paper, students who struggle to independently write paragraphs, students with poorer vocabularies, and students who need support with writing a basic sentence and understanding syntax, scaffolding that all flows from and links to this schema. But I don't have the space here to elaborate. It would fill a book ;)

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## Conflict of Interest

Kim Knight is the author of the book, *Essay Writing for Adolescents with Language and Learning Difficulties* (2022), and receives financial benefits related to its sale. Copyrighted images have been reproduced with permission. The author did not receive funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors to write this article.



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# Supporting schools to implement an evidence-based and effective approach to teaching spelling

**Tessa Daffern, Kate Hogg,  
Nicole Callaway, Heath  
Wild and Sharon Kelly**

**L**earning to spell is complex, takes time and is dependent on instruction. Teaching spelling effectively is equally complex yet essential to supporting students' literacy learning throughout school. This article shares insights from two case studies focused on supporting schools with evidence-based and effective assessment and instruction in spelling. The first case study describes a large-scale professional learning initiative involving 72 Australian schools. The second describes the subsequent journey that one of those schools embarked on towards whole-school evidence-based and effective assessment and teaching of spelling skills.

## Spelling proficiency matters

Spelling matters for the reader and the writer. Accurate spelling ensures that an intended message is conveyed with clarity. A proficient speller can focus their attention on expressing their ideas and using precise and varied vocabulary when creating

written texts (Daffern & Mackenzie, 2020; Sumner et al., 2016). If a text contains spelling mistakes, it can hinder comprehension, may lead to confusion and misinterpretation, and can influence a reader's perception of the writer's literacy skills and attention to detail (Pan et al., 2021; Varnhagen, 2000).

Spelling proficiency is associated with academic success. Critically, spelling proficiency needs to be an instructional priority in schools because it supports students in learning to read and write (Graham & Santangelo, 2014; Ouellette et al., 2017). Students experiencing persistent challenges with spelling may become less motivated to read and write, and may subsequently become disengaged with learning across the curriculum (Daffern & Critten, 2019; Daffern & Mackenzie, 2020).

## Assessing and teaching the components of spelling

Instruction in spelling is best informed by a spelling error analysis measure that has been empirically tested to ensure the test words, type of response task, sub-lexical error analysis items and corresponding subscales are robust, reliable and valid. Published research on assessment and instruction in spelling provides empirical validation of Triple Word Form Theory, its accompanying assessments, including the Components of Spelling Tests, and instructional approach (see, for example, Daffern, 2017; Daffern & Fleet, 2021; Daffern



et al., 2015;  
Daffern &  
Ramful, 2020).

According to  
Triple Word  
Form Theory,  
Standard  
English spelling  
encompasses  
three word  
forms as seen in Table 1.



Triple Word Form Theory assumes that the phonological, orthographic and morphological word forms can develop concurrently from the early years of learning to write. However, learning is largely contingent on the quality of assessment and instruction. When provided with explicit, systematic and targeted instruction informed by error



<b>Phonological</b>	The study of phonemes, including manipulating and segmenting phonemes in words. A speller needs to apply their phonological knowledge accurately and efficiently when spelling words by integrating their knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences.
<b>Orthographic</b>	Knowing the plausible graphemes for each phoneme. It also entails recognising that some graphemes are dependent on the position of their corresponding phoneme in a word and knowing that certain graphemes can be explained by their etymology (origin).
<b>Morphological</b>	The study of morphemes as well as the generalisations for combining morphemes (i.e., how to add a prefix or suffix to a base or root). Understanding the etymology of morphemes can also form part of morphological instruction.

Table 1. Triple Word Form Theory

analysis data, students can learn to use and integrate the phonological, orthographic and morphological components of spelling with increasing efficiency, accuracy and autonomy.

## Supporting schools with evidence-based assessment and instruction in spelling

### Case study one: Professional Learning Pathway (PLP) on assessing and teaching spelling

In a large-scale professional learning initiative, 72 Australian public schools participated in a Professional Learning Pathway (PLP) on assessing and teaching spelling in the early years of school, designed and delivered by Daffern. Data were collected (with

signed consent) from 290 participating teachers and their students ( $n = 2,436$ ) in Foundation to Grade 2 (aged between 6.5 to 8 years).

The PLP duration was approximately half a school year. Educators attended webinars and viewed pre-recorded videos presented by the first author. They also participated in collaborative lesson planning, trialling lessons in response to spelling error analysis data, and engaged in structured reflections.

#### **Spelling assessment: using error analysis**

A core component of teachers' learning in the PLP was centred on the linguistics of spelling and analysing spelling errors using the Components of Spelling Test for the Early Years (CoSTEY)

(now in its 2nd edition: Daffern, 2023b). Informed by Triple Word Form Theory, the CoSTEY is a diagnostic and comparative assessment with Australian norms. Statistical reliability testing of the CoSTEY revealed robust levels of internal consistency (0.951 to 0.970; Daffern, 2022). The CoSTEY includes 26 linguistic constructs across three component tests (Phonological, Orthographic and Morphological). Table 2 provides a suggested assessment schedule for the CoSTEY in school contexts. Supporting information about assessing spelling in the early years was made available to the participating teachers. For an example, see information video <https://youtu.be/8dtXNYkfJVg>.

The [online version of the CoSTEY](#) (Daffern, 2020) provides automatically generated error analysis data, saving teachers considerable time while yielding comprehensive, reliable and normed data. The online version analyses 255 sub-lexical items across 174 words that students spell to dictation, and it provides colour-coded instructional recommendations mapped from the error analysis to enhance its diagnostic utility. When using the CoSTEY, teachers refer to the data alongside their adopted phonics sequence (ideally aligned with decodable texts they are using), to provide targeted instruction in both spelling and reading. Teachers also flexibly use the corresponding [CoSTEY manual](#) (Daffern, 2023) to support their teaching. The

Grade	Timeframe	CoSTEY Component Tests	Purpose		
			Comparative	Diagnostic	Longitudinal
Foundation	Semester 2: Term 3	Phonological (Part A only)	✓	✓	
Grade 1	Semester 1: Term 1	Phonological (A & B)	✓	✓	✓
		Orthographic (A & B)	✓	✓	
		Morphological	✓	✓	
Grade 2	Semester 1: Term 1	Phonological (A & B)	✓	✓	✓
		Orthographic (A & B)	✓	✓	✓
		Morphological	✓	✓	✓

Table 2. Suggested assessment schedule using the CoSTEY

		Syllabification (7 items)	Phonemic knowledge (14 items)	Onset/Rime (10 items)	Spelling conventions (14 items)	Total Score (45 items)
Pre-PLP	Raw mean (SD)	4.70 (0.24)	8.03 (0.26)	9.0 (0.04)	8.44 (0.19)	30.18 (0.24)
	Mean %	67	57	90	60	67
Post-PLP	Raw mean (SD)	5.29 (0.39)	11.78 (0.38)	9.22 (0.26)	10.39 (0.40)	36.3 (6.77)
	Mean %	76	79	92	74	79

Table 3. Teachers' linguistic knowledge ( $n = 290$ ), pre- and post-PLP scores

manual includes extensive instructional activities, follow-up assessments and explicit teaching guides aligned with the assessment codes. Activities are also designed to encourage reading and writing connections to be made when teaching spelling.

### **Teachers' linguistic knowledge**

At the commencement and conclusion of the PLP, the participating teachers were assessed on their linguistic knowledge. They responded to 45 questions, adapted from existing measures (Carreker et al., 2010; Puliatt & Ehri, 2018; Stark et al., 2016). The pre-PLP results informed the design and delivery of the professional learning and helped to gauge the impact of teachers' learning. Although mean scores were low to begin with (see Table 2, Pre-PLP scores), particularly in phonemic knowledge, there was considerable improvement in teacher's learning (see Table 2, Post-PLP).

The teachers also responded to open-ended questions about their instructional practices prior to commencing the PLP. A combination of phonics instruction and rote learning methods (whole-word learning using *Look-Say-Cover-Write-Check* activities) were the most reported teaching practices. Given the observed low levels of linguistic knowledge (see Table 3), particularly in phonemic awareness, explicit and accurate phonics instruction was likely minimal and/or compromised.

### **The instructional approach: Explicit, targeted and systematic teaching of the spelling components**

Following the PLP, participating schools trialled an instructional approach informed by Triple Word Form Theory and developed by Daffern (see Figure 1). The approach involved:

- Using the CoSTEY as a valid and reliable spelling error analysis measure grounded in Triple Word Form Theory;
- Explicitly teaching strategies and generalisations based on the CoSTEY error analysis data;
- Including phonological, orthographic and morphological strategies regularly (ideally each week);
- Providing opportunities for spaced and cumulative learning (learning the phonology, orthography and morphology of a small group of words, one step at a time, spaced over a series of lessons);

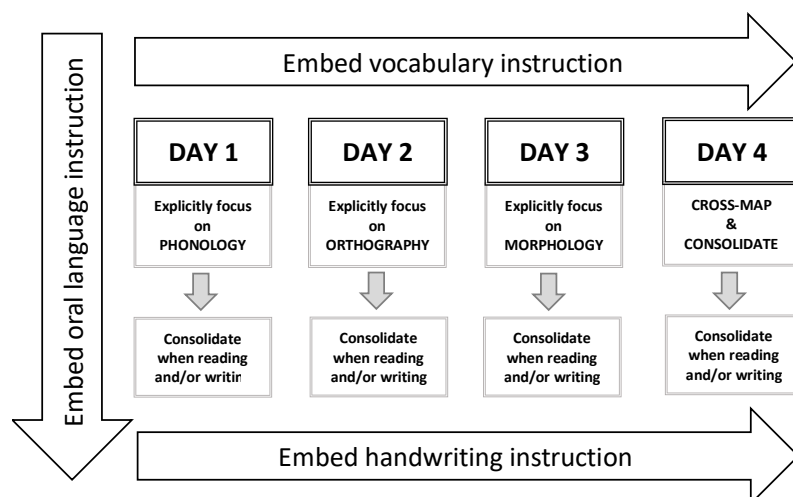


Figure 1. Structuring an evidence-based and effective instructional approach to teaching spelling

Note. Figure 1 used with permission from Daffern, T (2021 & 2023a,b).

- Using metalanguage when modelling, and encouraging students to use taught metalanguage;
- Selecting words that are relevant to the teaching focus, and including words to expand students' vocabulary;
- Including short, sharp and focused explicit teaching episodes (ideally 4 times a week);
- Providing ample, targeted consolidation in a range of contexts;
- Integrating daily handwriting instruction when teaching spelling;
- Ensuring learning intentions are visible;
- Providing immediate, corrective, specific and ongoing feedback.

### **Post-PLP insights from participating educators**

At the conclusion of the PLP, the teachers shared insights on implementing an explicit, structured and targeted approach to teaching the components of spelling. Through a process of inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Sproule, 2006; Willis, 2006), four themes emerged as detailed in Table 4.

### **Case study two: Showcasing the journey to spelling success at Burke Ward Public School**

Burke Ward Public School is located in the Far West of New South Wales in the regional centre of Broken Hill. The school caters for students from Foundation to Grade 6 and approximately 33 percent of students identify as coming from an Aboriginal background. The school caters to

students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds with an average Family Occupational and Educational Index of 162. The school's two Multi Category classes and the town's primary tutorial centre class support students with diverse abilities, in addition to the school's nine mainstream classes. The school has a mix of aspiring leaders, experienced, established, and beginning teachers.

### **Spelling instruction at Burke Ward Public School prior to the PLP**

Burke Ward Public School recognised a need to improve their instructional approach to spelling. Prior to their involvement in the large-scale PLP, teaching spelling was considered to be ad hoc and the 'poor cousin' of reading and writing. Spelling was taught as a 'stand-alone subject' delivered in small groups at the end of 'guided reading lessons', particularly in Foundation to Grade 3.

Teachers in Grades 1 and 2 used assessments and teaching resources that do not align with *Triple Word Form Theory* which included inventories from *Words Their Way* (Bear et al., 2012) and 'word study' activities using *Word Matters* (Fountas & Pinnell, 1998). Each week, teachers in Grades 3 to 6 provided their students with word lists and a 'spelling rule' to learn. Students were also given personal words to learn, including words they may have incorrectly spelled in their writing. Testing was completed each week and required peer marking. Students completed activities from a 'spelling contract' with a choice of activities to complete

such as rainbow writing, putting words in a sentence and dictionary meanings. There was little consistency across classes in terms of teachers' pedagogy, including the use of metalanguage.

### **Burke Ward's shift to evidence-based spelling instruction**

Since 2021, Burke Ward Public School has implemented an evidence-based approach to teaching spelling across

the whole school. This has included the use of the online CoSTEY (Grades 1 and 2) and CoST (Grades 3 to 6) as part of their literacy assessment schedule and instructional approach.

An ongoing professional learning support structure has been implemented for the teachers during this time. This has been particularly necessary due to staff turn-over each year. Each school term, teaching teams have met with the school executive team and Daffern to interpret the CoSTEY and CoST error analysis data, and plan targeted lessons (see Tables 5 and 6 for examples of deidentified, truncated overall component score data). Teachers have regularly evaluated their teaching and student learning using the data to make objective and systematic instructional decisions. The CoSTEY and CoST data have provided a reliable source of evidence of student learning, enabling teachers to review and adjust their teaching priorities as needed. Where minimal progress of learning for a particular student was observed, the school has considered probable contributing factors and implemented appropriate and context-specific intervention.

Specialist coaching, workshops and lesson observations have been part of this journey. The school has not only focused on teaching spelling as a discreet literacy skill, but also in the context of reading and creating written texts. Examples of some recorded lesson observations can be accessed via the links below.

### **Lesson demonstration 1: Explicitly teaching the inflected suffix -ing**

<https://youtu.be/CoGZ6RUNNk0?si=epp1Ik0m8ueirsSz>



### **Lesson demonstration 2: Explicitly teaching the inflected suffix -ed**

[https://youtu.be/cX7jMjl6A\\_E?si=DyvDjcrsaGerg4AK](https://youtu.be/cX7jMjl6A_E?si=DyvDjcrsaGerg4AK)



### **Theme 1: Explicit and data-informed teaching can increase student engagement, motivation and confidence when learning to spell.**

Examples of comments from the teachers:

- *Students are more engaged and enthusiastic about spelling. They love being word detectives!*
- *Students are more engaged in learning which is targeted to their specific needs.*
- *Students ... feel more confident when spelling unfamiliar words independently.*

### **Theme 2: Explicit and data-informed teaching can improve students' metalanguage and spelling**

Examples of comments from the teachers:

- *Evidence of improved spelling skills can be observed in their independent writing.*
- *My students are developing better strategies for spelling and also understanding and using the metalanguage of spelling.*
- *There has been a very positive impact on the learning of our students. They're much more aware of how words are created and are using the metalanguage of spelling on a daily basis.*
- *My students are more conscious of the spelling and trying to transfer all the knowledge gained in writing regularly.*
- *The students have transferred their knowledge and skills into reading and writing.*

### **Theme 3: The CoSTEY enables teachers to reliably identify and address students' learning needs in spelling.**

Examples of comments from the teachers:

- *The CoSTEY provides such a great insight into what the students need to work on. I've also learnt how to differentiate for the different ability levels.*
- *The thorough assessment task ... showed me lots of gaps I wasn't aware of for my students and how I can target these gaps.*
- *The CoSTEY allowed for targeted explicit teaching.*
- *Our teaching is more focused on students' needs due to the analysis of the CoSTEY and therefore spelling is more targeted.*
- *The CoSTEY analysis has allowed me to target areas for students with quick results.*

### **Theme 4: Professional learning that is collaborative, research-informed, reflective and sustained can enable increased pedagogical content knowledge, engagement and confidence in teaching spelling.**

Examples of comments from the teachers:

- *As a team, we carefully looked at the data and created lessons that were a direct result of the data. It has also highlighted a 'where to next' focus for our school.*
- *I have shared lessons with my team to gain feedback from the lessons and to provide some context for other*
- *The professional conversations about the linguistics of spelling have been amazing!*
- *The PLP has helped the teachers involved in being able to implement different activities when teaching spelling to help a variety of students. We have also been able to reflect on the common areas that came up as mistakes and make them a priority for revision.*

Table 4: Post-PLP insights from participating educators

	Phonological growth %	Orthographic growth %	Morphological growth %
Student 1	19	0	0
Student 2	8	2	0
Student 3	23	12	4
Student 4	42	8	7
Student 5	23	18	2
Student 6	35	8	6
Student 7	33	8	15
Student 8	31	24	13
Student 9	2	4	9
Student 10	2	18	16
Student 11	54	14	11
Student 12	34	8	16
Student 13	40	28	18
<b>Group mean %</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

Table 5. Sample CoSTEY longitudinal data for Grade 1 (2021) to Grade 2 (2022)

Note. Raw scores for each component are converted to percentages for ease of interpretation. Complete data are shown, capturing only those students who completed the CoSTEY in consecutive years.

### Lesson demonstration 3: Explicitly teaching the derivational suffixes -ance and -ence

<https://youtu.be/qZyZJBQH1Bw?si=1-QpmdsAiyDXds4v>



Changing the status quo in spelling assessment and instruction takes courage, wisdom and persistence. For some teachers, the journey has been challenging, but their willingness to continually improve their practice and embrace an evidence-based instructional approach is testament to their commitment to improving student outcomes. Examples of some teacher reflections are listed below:

- I initially felt overwhelmed by the content as it was a new approach for me to teaching spelling, and I

struggled to feel as though I could present it to students. Learning that it is better to go at a slower pace to ensure deeper understanding makes me feel better.

- As I get more familiar with Triple Word Form Theory, I'm beginning to see how I can integrate spelling with other syllabus focus areas.
- The individualised data from the CoST is a fantastic support and has helped to determine 'where to next' for spelling for individual students. I feel like I am still learning to find the best balance between using the individual data and building a whole class program. The CoST Teacher Dashboard will help with this.

The teachers have also observed the impact of using metalanguage accurately and consistently across all the school grades. Metalanguage can help students learn the structure of written words, as one teacher observed:

- During a lesson in Term 4, a Kindergarten student (first year of school) was learning about trigraphs.
- During the lesson, the student noticed a word with four letters to represent a phoneme and asked if it was a 'square graph'. It was explained to the student that the grapheme is called a 'quadgraph' because of the four letters that represent one phoneme like in the letters 'eigh' in the word 'eight'.

The impact of Burke Ward's commitment to building teacher capacity and implementing an evidence-

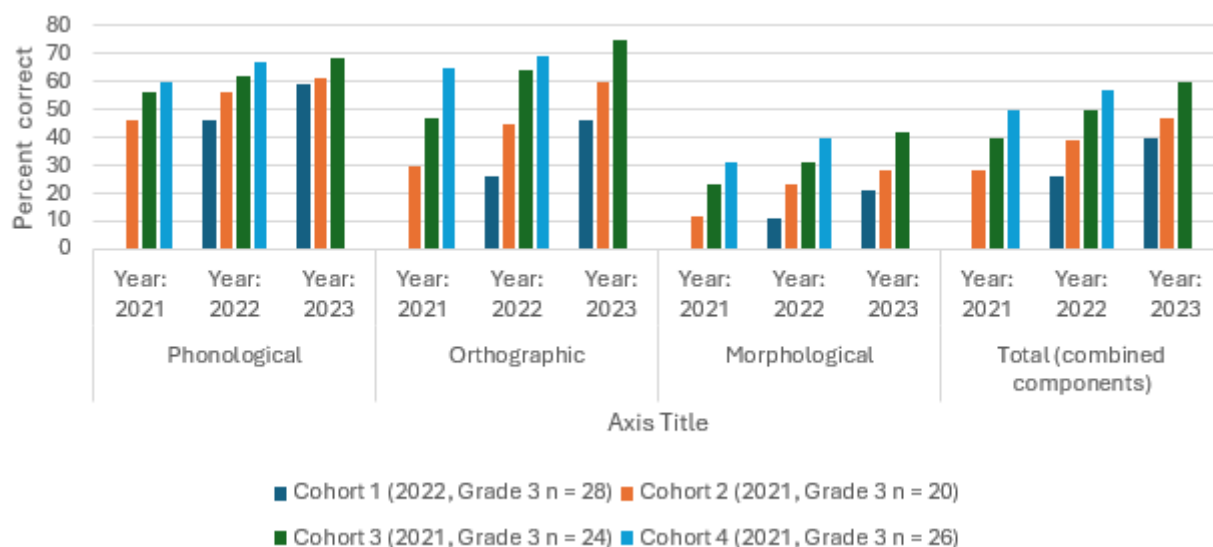


Figure 2. Summary of CoST: Grades 3 to 6 longitudinal data involving four cohorts of students (2021 to 2023)

Note. Raw scores for each component are converted to percentages for ease of interpretation. Complete data are shown, capturing only those students who completed the CoST in consecutive years.





Figure 3. Foundation (Kindergarten) teacher uses a handwriting scaffold when teaching spelling



Figure 4a. Draft 1

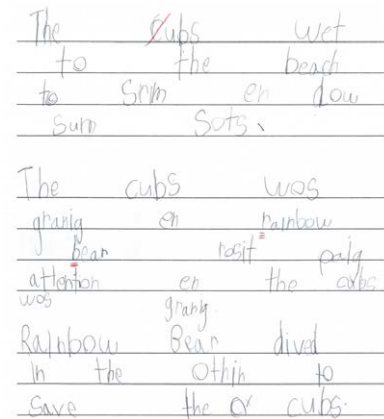


Figure 4b. Draft 2



Figure 4c (Published text)

Figures 4a-c. A Foundation student's writing: from drafting to publishing: 'Rainbow Bear' by Grace

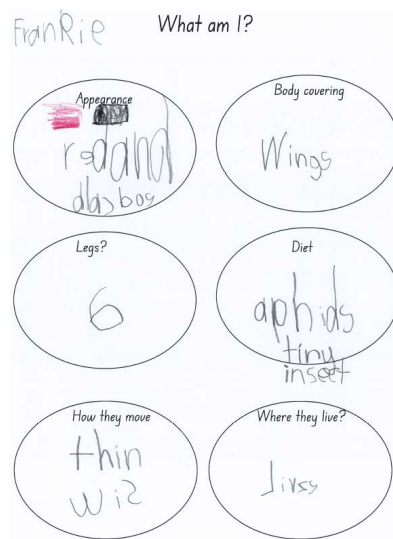


Figure 5a. Plan

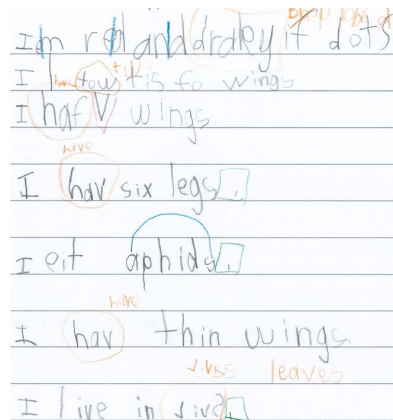


Figure 5b. Draft 1

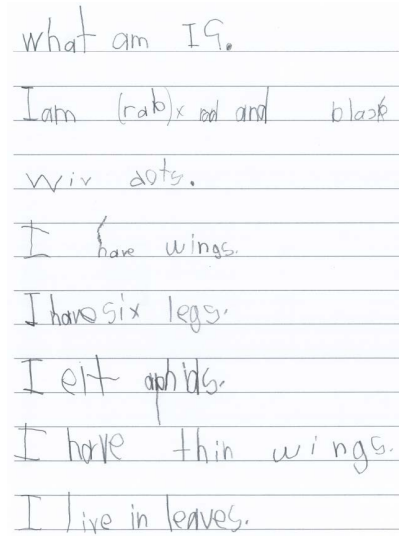


Figure 5c. Draft 2

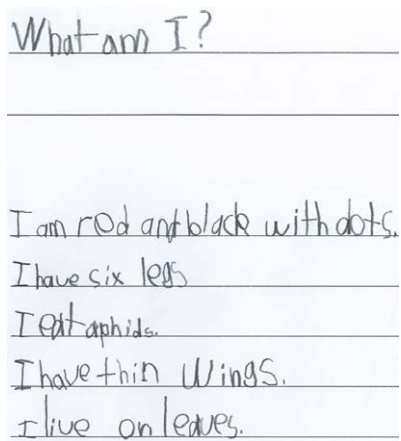


Figure 5d. Published text



Figure 5e. Published illustration

Figures 5a-e. A Foundation student's writing: from planning to drafting and publishing: 'What am I?' by Frankie

based instructional approach has had a positive impact on students' motivation and confidence to learn.

Teachers have also integrated handwriting instruction when teaching spelling, using scaffolds such as coloured dotted third lines (see Figure 3). Expectations in the quality and quantity of students' writing have increased, with writing occurring daily and encompassing multiple phases of the writing process to include planning, drafting, proofreading, editing, and publishing (see Figures 4 and 5). Qualitative improvements have not only been observed in spelling, but also in students' handwriting, reading, stamina for writing, willingness to use a broader range of vocabulary when writing, and overall quality of written texts.

## Concluding remarks

A key component of an evidence-based and effective approach to teaching spelling requires alignment between valid and reliable spelling error analysis data and explicit instruction in the spelling components as underpinned by Triple Word Form Theory. Changing a pedagogical approach can be complex and it takes time to see tangible benefits. Nonetheless, it is possible in the presence of sustained school leadership and a shared vision; specialised coaching delivered directly to teachers; quality assessment and teaching resources; collaborative instructional planning; and structured evaluations of practice. Strong pedagogical content knowledge is central to student outcomes. Improvements to initial teacher education programs will also help to further address observed gaps in literacy instructional practices across Australia (Louden et al., 2023) so that teachers can enter the profession adequately equipped to implement evidence-based literacy instruction.

Further information about the online CoST and online CoSTEY including instructional videos and dashboards, can be found at the following links: <https://www.youtube.com/@tessadaffern1621> and [www.tessadaffern.com](http://www.tessadaffern.com).

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### Conflict of interest

Dr. Tessa Daffern is the author of the CoSTEY and CoST and receives financial benefits related to their sales. Copyrighted images have been reproduced with permission. Dr Tessa Daffern received some funding from the NSW Department of Education for providing initial professional learning, and from Burke Ward Public School for providing ongoing coaching.

## 2024 AGM SAVE THE DATE

15

DAY

10

MONTH

24

YEAR

The 2024 Learning Difficulties Australia AGM has been scheduled, please save the date. The AGM will take place via zoom at 8pm.



# How the Peggy Lego program supports your student's handwriting from the very beginning

**Berenice Johnston**

## The role of prewriting in our classrooms

Written expression is a critical way a student can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. However, becoming proficient in writing is a complex journey that involves the coordination of various skills including transcription, text generation and executive functioning (Berninger et al., 2006). Consequently, handwriting, a transcription aspect of written expression, receives significant attention in early education, with research indicating that kindergarten students may spend up to 42% of their day on writing and paper-based tasks (Marr et al., 2003).

Given the importance of handwriting in literacy and academic success, providing comprehensive, high-quality instruction is imperative (Limpo and Graham, 2020; Dinehart, 2015). Such instruction can help students overcome barriers and thrive in this critical aspect of development.

Just as with written expression, the development of handwriting is complex and is dependent on the integration of a range of skills; with visual motor skills and fine motor skills being good predictors of handwriting success (Daly et al., 2003; Dinehart, 2015). Prewriting ability is an initial stage of this development and is

considered an important precursor for handwriting success.

Prewriting is the early stages of making marks and patterns including: vertical lines, horizontal lines, circles and diagonals. According to Asher (2006), mastering these prewriting patterns is essential before students begin formal instruction in letter formation. However, despite its recognition as a key initial step in handwriting development, there is limited evidence available about how to best teach prewriting and consequently it is overlooked in classroom instruction. (Reutzel et al., 2019). One potential program for prewriting could be the Peggy Lego program. This program is currently being investigated for its efficacy by researchers at Curtin University. In this article, we consider the theory behind this program and how this research project may inform evidence-based practice.

## Theory to guide our practice

The three phases of motor learning theory can be used to guide both prewriting and handwriting intervention. When first learning a motor task (such as handwriting), the student is in the cognitive phase where the motor action is slow and inconsistent and heavily reliant on cognitive effort. The next stage, the associative phase sees motor actions becoming more efficient with less cognitive effort required to complete the motor task. The final automatic phase is when the motor task is efficient and effective and little cognitive focus is required (Zwicker & Harris, 2009). When this theory is applied to the motor task of handwriting, we can understand the development of handwriting through these phases, but the aim is for the

student's handwriting to become an automatic motor task. When the motor aspect of handwriting becomes automatic, it allows the student to

reduce the cognitive load associated with handwriting and dedicate their cognitive resources to high level skills such as the language domains required for written expression.


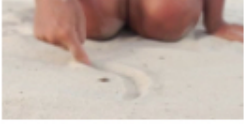


Initially the prewriting patterns can be taught in the kindergarten environment (4-5 years) and ideally prior to the introduction of the concept of letters and sounds. The first phase of the program is taught in isolation from the concept of letters and sounds as the key focus is on forming the motor action and students understanding what the movement is and what it is called. When students have this level of understanding embedded into their motor memory, they will then be more likely to translate this motor action into their letter formations as they start learning about the concept of letters and sounds. As students transition into the next phase of learning and are introduced to letters and sounds, they can attempt self-composing those letter formations, with the existing motor knowledge they have about the prewriting patterns that form the letter.

## Putting prewriting into classroom instruction

Whilst teaching handwriting can seem onerous, and teachers feel they may not





<b>Gross motor</b>	
<b>Sensory based</b>	
<b>Consistent verbal cues</b>	
<b>Consistent visual cues</b>	

know where to start, when instruction is broken down in a systematic and developmental sequence the process can become efficient. An essential stage in this process is teaching the efficient motor pattern for each individual letter (Graham, 2010). By supporting kindergarten students to understand and form the prewriting patterns, they will be more likely to be writing ready when letter formations are introduced. Due to the developmental nature of the Peggy Lego program however, it is essential that within the school setting that a whole-school based approach to instruction is adopted so the teaching efforts of the kindergarten team is then built upon by the preprimary/foundation staff and beyond.

## What is the Peggy Lego program?

The Peggy Lego program was initially published by Peggy Lego, a Western Australian teacher in 1983. It provides a viable option for classroom instruction due to its alignment with both the theory and evidence of handwriting. Peggy's program is based on motor learning theory, which initially teaches students how to form prewriting patterns, the simple pencil movement required to form most letters of the

alphabet. The next learning phase in this program explicitly teaches students to link those prewriting patterns to letter formations, enabling the student to self-compose letters.

Four key strategies used during explicit instruction include

- **Gross motor** – student engages in a whole body that replicates the prewriting pattern
- **Tactile** - student engages in a tactile task with their hand and fingers that replicates the prewriting pattern
- **Verbal cue** – a consistent verbal prompt is stated to describe the movement required for the prewriting pattern
- **Visual cue** – a visual image of the prewriting pattern is shown to the student to show them prewriting pattern.

The common prewriting patterns taught in the classroom include a vertical line, horizontal line, anticlockwise half circle, diagonals and up and overs, and down and unders.

Each prewriting pattern has a name and rhyme that supports the student to form the pattern with correct directionality. Once students have master the prewriting patterns, they can progress

into the next phase of the program where the patterns are linked to letter formations. In this phase of the program, students are taught how to form letters by combining a number of the prewriting patterns. Even though each letter has a unique formation rhyme, only a small number of prewriting patterns and rhymes are needed to form all letters of the alphabet. When providing a cue for the lower case "t", for example, the teacher models how to draw the tall man and the sideways sideways patterns and uses the verbal cue, "tall man, start at the top pull down and stop, sideways sideways to the magic land." The patterns and rhymes support the formation of letters using correct directionality. Once students form letters with correct directionality, their motor plan for the letters is more efficient and they inch closer toward that ultimate goal of handwriting automaticity.

*...while the Peggy Lego program was developed initially in the early 80's, it is still being used widely in classrooms*

Whilst this program and others do align to the theory and evidence of handwriting instruction, it is imperative that instruction for prewriting is supported by evidence to increase confidence in educators' ability to support students transitioning to automatic handwriting skills. In response to this existing gap in evidence relating to prewriting instruction, a current research project is underway through Curtin University exploring the efficacy of the Peggy Lego program. While this research is underway, evidence from theory can also guide our practice.

Even though the Peggy Lego program was developed initially in the early 80's, it is still being used widely in classrooms around Western Australia as well as therapeutically by occupational therapists in a remedial

<p><b>JACK AND JILL</b></p>  <p>Jack and Jill went up the hill, and down the hill.</p>	<p><b>OVER THE GATE</b></p>  <p>Up and over the gate.</p>	<p><b>SIDeways SIDEWAYS</b></p>  <p>Sideways, sideways, to the magic land.</p>	<p><b>STARTS WITH A CLICK</b></p>  <p>Starts with a click, goes around and stops.</p>	<p><b>TALL MAN</b></p>  <p>Starts at the top, pulls down and stops.</p>	<p><b>UNDER THE GATE</b></p>  <p>Down and under the gate.</p>
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approach. Currently educators and therapists can access training on how to implement this program through webinar sessions which provide the overarching evidence and theory to guide handwriting instruction, as well as detailed information about implementing the Peggy Lego program. Currently a teacher-based manual is under production, due to be released in 2025. For further resources, information and links to upcoming training sessions you can visit <https://www.lil-peeps.com.au/peggy-lego>.

## Conclusion

Prewriting is an important skill to consider in handwriting development. The Peggy Lego program offers an option for classroom instruction, with alignment to current theory and evidence on effective handwriting instruction. As part of the ongoing research at Curtin University, we aim to contribute to the development of the Peggy Lego program that may assist teachers in supporting young children with prewriting and academic success.

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## About the Author

Berry is an occupational therapist with 20 years experience working with children and within the school setting. A special interest of Berry's includes handwriting as well as self regulation, and the impact both of these areas have on a students participation in the classroom. Berry is currently completing her PhD, through Curtin University, investigating the efficacy of the Peggy Lego program.

## Conflict of Interest

Berenice (Berry) Johnston, author of this article, receives financial benefit related to training and distribution of the Peggy Lego program. Berry retains the copyright for the Peggy Lego program and has exclusive rights for training and distribution of the associated resources. Images have been reproduced with permission. The author did not receive funding from public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors to write this article.

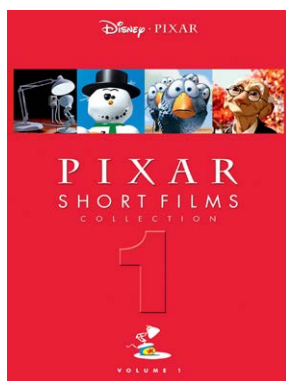
# Kathryn Thorburn's Top 15 Resources for Writing

## Kathryn Thorburn

Here are my top 15 resources that I recommend to teachers and speech pathologists when working on written instruction with school-aged children and adolescents. Writing is a task that requires the integration of a wide range of skills. The resources below were chosen as they provide engaging stimulus for writing at sentence, paragraph, and multi-paragraph level, include a range of reference books for developing knowledge of research and practical application and include classroom friendly technology tools that can be easily used by teachers in the classroom.

### 5 Practical Resources for Writing

Below are my top 5 practical resources to support written expression. I recommend these for use with primary and high school students especially when I want to capture a writing sample.



#### Pixar short films

These are excellent for written retells. Using a short film format allows students

to pause or replay the story to support their memory and break the task into a series of bite size steps to support students to organise their ideas into a written response. Using a short film allows the written response to be compared to the original story, allowing clear insight into the student's ability to write accurately and concisely.



#### Bluey videos

These are also perfect for written retells. Use these to compare and contrast episodes, analyse in terms of characters, setting and themes or write about the universality of the themes and why the show has international success. The ability to interpret the messages of episodes at a literal or more abstract level allows rich discussions of the implied messages and representation of Australian culture.



#### Formulas for Frames (Jenny Baker)

Ideal for Grades 3 to 6 and includes free online professional development. The Formulas for Frames resources

allow for the development of an instructional scope and sequence across Grades 3 – 6 and provide practical classroom friendly tools to support both oral and written narratives.



<https://www.freospeech.com.au/shop>

#### The Grammar Project – K-6 Sentence Level Writing Resources

There is great value in the explicit teaching of sentence level writing skills. The resources from The Grammar Project allow the development of a K-6 scope and sequence that supports the classroom application of the principles of sentence combining and expanding sentence fragments as supported by the approaches of Bruce Saddler [Teacher's guide to effective sentence instruction], William Van Cleave [Writing Matters], and the Hochman Method [The Writing Revolution]. Lesson materials, a scope and sequence additional professional learning related to the project can be accessed at Ochre Education (<https://ochre.org.au>).



## COMPARISON

- 1 Determine the text structure by looking for signaling/linking words.
- 2 Write a main idea:  
\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were compared on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 Write a recall:  
The first idea is \_\_\_\_\_ (describes the topic for this idea).  
In contrast (or another signaling word), the second idea is \_\_\_\_\_ (describes the topic for this idea).
- 4 Review and add any missing details.

### Text Structure Strategies Resources

Knowledge of text structures makes a positive contribution to both reading comprehension and writing skills. These resources support the explicit teaching of the vocabulary and structure of expository text and support text comprehension and text construction skills. The website link below includes fabulous free Text Structure Summary Posters which can support development of a consistent whole school approach (found at the bottom of the page at the following link).

<https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/comprehension/articles/implementing-text-structure-strategy-your-classroom>

## 5 Technology Tools for Writing

Difficulties with writing shouldn't mean a student misses out on opportunities to construct written text. The tools listed below have been trialled and tested in my work with teachers in mainstream classrooms and in clinic settings with great success. They provide a low cost but highly effective way to support students to engage in the classroom instruction and resources listed above. These tech tools below support student access to classroom content with minimal need for changing the lesson or task.

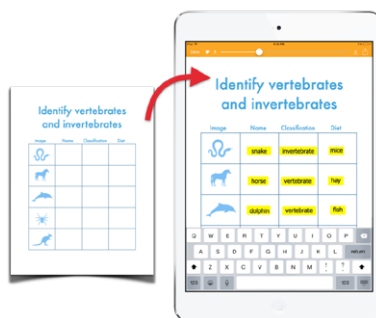


### Keedogo Plus App

Low-cost app providing alternate keyboard with word prediction. This is set up as an alternative keyboard and can be accessed regardless of the task

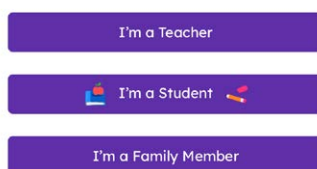
being completed on an iPad. It is simple to swap between keyboards and as students develop skills and confidence, they naturally swap to typing full words and sentences rather than using the word prediction function.

### Snap Type



This app allows students to type into a photo and email their response or upload into cloud storage as a pdf. The latest upgrade includes both text to speech and speech to text functionality. Students can take a photo of a hardcopy worksheet or textbook, or alternatively they can screenshot or upload a pdf, type into the document and then export their responses as pdf.

## Seesaw



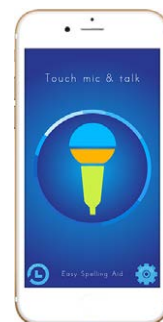
### Seesaw

Student learning tool allowing drag and drop formatting or video options. Seesaw integrates to the Learning Management System – Canva, allowing students to access and complete learning tasks, particularly when reading and writing skills are in need of support. This is also an ideal tool for students who need pictures or videos to scaffold their writing.



### Pictello

Uses pictures or photos to scaffold writing and present works with text to speech functionality. This is ideal if you need to create a series of photos or short videos to use as a stimulus for writing.

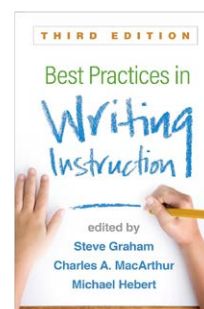


### Easy Spelling Aid

A low-cost app supporting spelling and student ability to independently edit written work. Easy Spelling Aid is a translator that when set to translate English to English it allows students to check and edit their work by speaking the word they wish to write and then reading it from the screen.

## 5 Reference Books for Writing

Below are my Top 5 reference texts to help develop teacher and clinician knowledge on writing development, writing instruction and writing intervention for school-age children, adolescents and young adults.

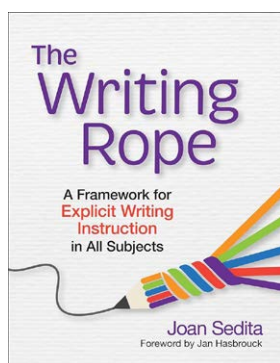


### Best Practices in Writing Instruction 3rd Edition, 2018 (edited by Steve



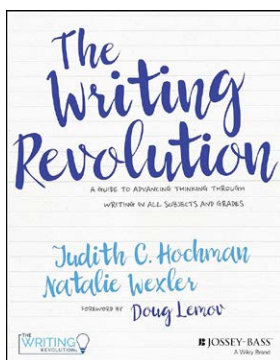
Graham, Charles A. MacArthur & Michael A. Herbert)

This book is now in its 3rd edition and provides a comprehensive overview of the research basis for effective writing instruction. A fabulous reference book for those wanting to deepen their knowledge of the research related to writing instruction.



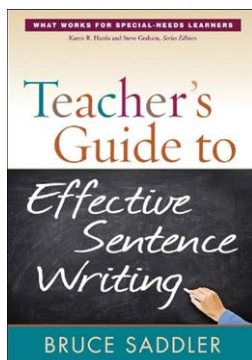
**The Writing Rope**, 2023 (Joan Sedita)

A practical, concise and user-friendly overview of the research related to writing instruction with practical application to the classroom. An ideal starting point for classroom teachers and those new to the research related to writing instruction.



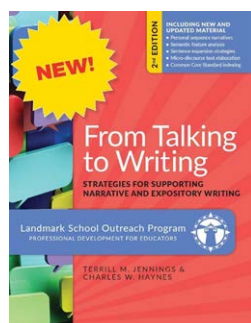
**The Writing Revolution**, 2017 (Judith Hochman & Natalie Wexler)

The Writing Revolution is a practical and user-friendly resource for developing a consistent approach to writing instruction of expository text from K-12. It includes practical application across all secondary subject areas and can be used as a book study for departments or staff teams to develop skills and application in the classroom.



**Teacher's Guide to Effective Sentence Writing**, 2012 (Bruce Saddler)

Sentence combining has a strong research basis as an effective approach for explicitly teaching sentence level writing skills. This resource outlines the research, provides a scope and sequence [Grade 2 – 12] along with chapters of practical activities, and includes sample lessons to support the translation of research into practice.



**From Talking to Writing 2nd edition**, 2018 (Terrill Jennings & Charles Hayes)

A recently updated resource, this book is ideal for those providing intervention support for students with language and learning disabilities or English Language Learners. It outlines how to scope and sequence skills with examples and provides guidance for simplifying the language of instruction for concepts related to writing instruction in order to reduce cognitive load and support all students to build skills to master writing structure, language structure and narrative development.

## About the Author

*Kathryn Thorburn is a dual qualified Speech Pathologist and Teacher with a Masters in Special Education. She has 25 years experience as a Speech Pathologist and runs a small private practice, Language and Learning. Kathryn has 20 years experience in education, she is a NESA accredited teacher and has taught in mainstream classroom & school executive roles in NSW Department of Education, and AISNSW schools across K-12.*

*She has worked in an Education Officer: Developmental Disabilities Role within Catholic education, piloted a Rehabilitation - Education Liaison Role for the Hunter New England Paediatric Brain Injury & Rehabilitation Teams and has more recently been involved in the curriculum reform process with NESA for K-2 & 3-6 English. Kathryn is providing expert mentor support for the Hunter NELI project as part of the AISNSW School Based Research Project.*

*Kathryn understands first-hand the demands placed on classroom teachers, she strives to make the complex practical and to support schools in supporting learners in the most effective, time and resource efficient manner possible.*

For more info, check out [www.languageandlearning.com.au/](http://www.languageandlearning.com.au/)

# Book Review: The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects

Reviewed by **Hema Desai**

Sedita, J. (2023). *The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing in All Subjects*. Brookes Publishing: Baltimore

As a speech pathologist specialising in supporting students with specific learning difficulties, I frequently encounter my students expressing their struggles with writing. These challenges can encompass various areas such as generating ideas, constructing sentences, selecting appropriate vocabulary, punctuating their work, spelling, or handwriting. Such difficulties often lead to heightened anxiety and a general reluctance to engage in writing tasks. This is no surprise, though, as writing is one of the most cognitively demanding tasks we require students to master, and it does not come naturally to everyone. According to Berninger et al. (2022), effective instruction in written expression targets both transcription skills (such as letter formation, handwriting fluency, spelling, punctuation, and spacing) and composition skills (including topic knowledge, vocabulary, sentence formulation, grammar and syntax, text organisation, genre, and audience awareness). Collins (2022) further emphasises that ensuring students develop fluent, mature written expression poses a significant challenge due to the complexity of writing. This is why it is crucial for literacy teachers to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to support their students effectively.

In May 2023, I attended an online course on The Writing Rope by Joan Sedita. Following this inspiring presentation, I swiftly acquired Sedita's The Writing Rope: A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects, eager to dive deeper into each strand of The Writing Rope and discover strategies to assist my students to become skilled and fluent writers.

*...ensuring students develop fluent, mature written expression poses a significant challenge due to the complexity of writing*

The opening chapter of this book offers an introduction to The Writing Rope, a framework that organises multiple writing skills, strategies, and techniques into five components that represent the elements of a comprehensive writing curriculum: critical thinking, syntax, text structure, writing craft, and transcription. Each component of The Writing Rope is briefly outlined in this chapter, with more in-depth information provided in subsequent chapters. Working closely with students on a one-to-one basis, I have found that presenting The Writing Rope diagram to both students and parents serves as an excellent method to illustrate the intricacies of the writing process and to identify specific areas to focus on as part of our learning goals.

Chapter 2 delves into summarising recommendations gleaned from four research reports. The recommendations for elementary school-aged children (ages 5-13) include:

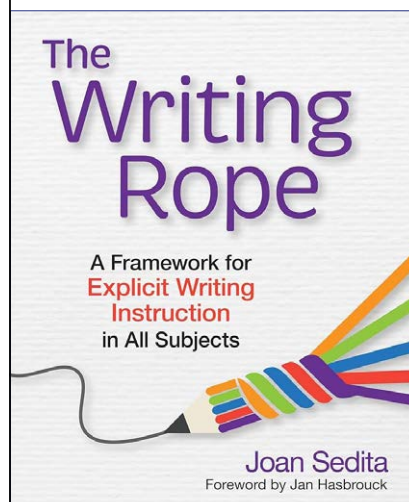
- Provide daily time for students to write.
- Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.

- Teach students to become fluent in handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.
- Create an engaged community of writers.



Moreover, this chapter addresses strategies to enhance student motivation in writing, which is one of the biggest challenges I face with my reluctant writers. It introduces seven teaching principles essential for effective writing instruction that are also available to download from the Brookes Download Hub <https://blog.brookespublishing.com/7-teaching-principles-for-effective-writing-instruction/>. Additionally, practical ideas for scaffolding are provided, directing readers to the book's appendix for reproducible full-sized lists of scaffolds.

I found the section on using mentor texts as writing models particularly



interesting as this is something I use a lot with my students and aligns with approaches such as 'Talk For Writing'. Sedita emphasises that 'Most people learn new skills by emulating others, such as how to cook a meal, play basketball, or play the guitar'. It is the same with writing. Mentor texts serve as examples for students to mimic style, language, and structure in their own writing. The chapter offers practical tables outlining focus areas for utilising mentor texts, emphasising the importance of explicit instruction to help students analyse texts effectively and apply similar techniques in their writing endeavours.

### *This book adeptly integrates theory and research with practical resources and ideas*

The following chapters offer a comprehensive exploration of each component of The Writing Rope. Within each chapter, you will find easily accessible tables containing:

- A scope and sequence for reading and spelling up to Grade 3
- Task, Audience, and Purpose Questions
- Sensory Words (Writing Craft)
- An explanation/definition of various literary devices
- Anchor charts for examining elements in mentor texts
- The process writing routine (Think, Plan, Write, Revise)
- Peer- or Self Feedback Checklists
- Sentence Basics
- Sentence combining examples
- Paragraph templates
- Writing templates and checklists

For added convenience, large photocopiable versions of each of these resources are included in the appendix, serving as invaluable tools for educators, speech pathologists, and others involved in literacy instruction.

This book adeptly integrates theory and research with practical resources and ideas, establishing itself as an indispensable tool for teachers and speech pathologists alike. It has become a staple on my desk, regularly consulted for motivational inspiration or to utilise the numerous templates and checklists provided in the appendix. I highly recommend this book for educators

across both primary and secondary levels, as well as for speech pathologists seeking valuable resources to enhance their practice.

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### About the Author

*Hema Desai is the Education Manager for Learning Difficulties Australia and is also the Director of Connect: Literacy, Speech and Language Services. She is a Speech Pathologist and has worked in the United Kingdom and Australia specialising in working with children with literacy needs.*

