



Writing curriculum rationale

‘English has a pre-eminent place in education and in society. A high-quality education in English will teach pupils to speak and write fluently so that they can communicate their ideas and emotions to others and through their reading and listening, others can communicate with them.’ (National Curriculum 2013)

Writing is probably the most cognitively challenging task we ask children to perform in primary school, and, alongside reading and mathematical fluency, it is an essential skill for all children to master to maximise their life chances. When we are driven by the writing TAFs (teacher assessment framework) at the end of KS2, writing can often turn into a tick list process that improves a single piece of writing but doesn’t improve the writer. This can be seen clearly when secondary schools all too often reassess children in Y7 because the writing produced that autumn is nowhere near the expected standard the child was awarded at the end of Y6. A writing approach focused around TAFs and artificial genre such as newspaper reports and portal stories does not prepare primary school children for their onward journey to secondary school. If our goal is for children to become competent and expressive writers in all curriculum subjects and be ready for the next stage of their learning journey, we must move away from writing approaches that satisfy the TAFs. We need to break down the writing process into its transferable parts and ensure we spend sufficient time practising key processes to automaticity to free up sufficient working memory for children to develop their own author’s voice. Rather than providing writing opportunities where children are continually focusing on **what** they write or trying to remember endless features to include from a tick list success criteria, we need to step back and give children time to think about **how** they write.

We can think of writing a little like baking; a professional baker can turn their hand to a myriad of cakes found in a patisserie in the same way a professional writer can use and adapt a myriad of genre to suit their purpose. When we ask children to read their class text and write a diary entry in response to an event one day and then ask them to write a newspaper report the following week in response to a series of events that have occurred in the class text, we are treating them like mini experts expecting them to process the content, the layout features of the genre, and the supposedly secretarial skills of grammar, punctuation, handwriting, spelling and so on. Rather than creating a patisserie, most children produce clunky writing that doesn’t flow, and they don’t internalise the features of each genre, so they need to be re-taught the features each time we ask them to write a newspaper report or portal story and so on. This is because we haven’t spent time building children’s schema to ensure they have enough background knowledge for the new knowledge to ‘stick’ to. Children are at the novice stage in Moss’s model in figure 1. In an already crowded curriculum, we simply don’t have time to write several newspaper reports or portal stories each term to build the schema for the genre to transfer into long term memory. Moreover, children will not be writing newspaper reports and portal stories in secondary school, so why are we asking them to write them in primary school? If we are honest, it’s because they satisfy the tick list on the TAFs at the end of KS2. To prepare children to become competent, articulate, and expressive writers in all curriculum areas, we need to be brave and move away from this approach and instead focus on a high-leverage approach that places audience and purpose, grammar, and punctuation at the heart of the writing journey. Referring back to the National Curriculum 2013, if children are to ‘write fluently so that they can communicate their ideas and emotions to others’, they need to know how to construct grammatically clear sentences that make sense to the reader and connect one thought to another. Going back to our baking analogy, rather than asking children to imitate a range of patisserie items that they can rarely replicate successfully at the point of learning, let alone later, we should consider teaching them to make a Victoria sandwich cake. Once they have perfected the art

of a sponge, they can go on to make chocolate cake, lemon drizzle cake, carrot and walnut cake, the base for a trifle ...

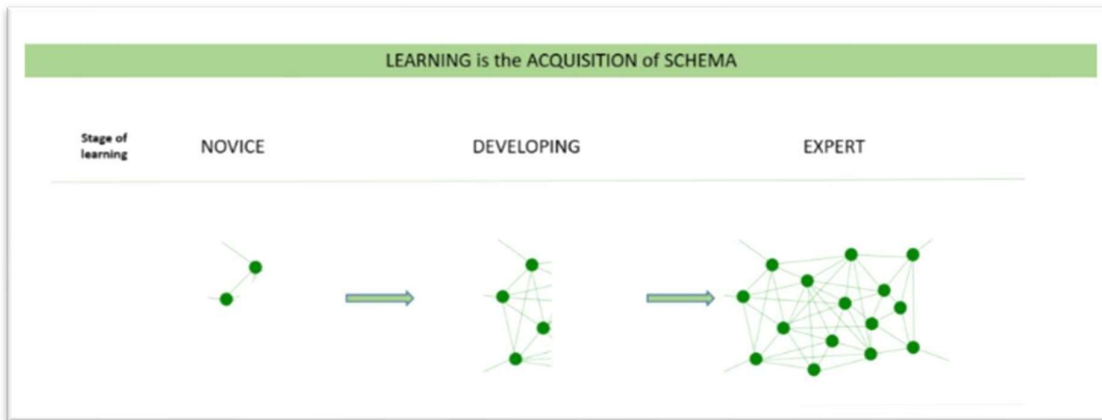


Fig 1: <https://paulgmoss.com/2020/02/18/schema/>

Strunk and White (1979), in their seminal book on the development of writing, identify an effective sentence should have no unnecessary words and that every word should tell us something important. In order for children to get to this point, their handwriting, spelling and understanding of grammar and punctuation needs to be sufficiently automatic that they can give their full focus to **how** they wish to express themselves to suit their audience and purpose – using content knowledge they already have. The next step is to apply these processes when thinking about **what** to write. In a nutshell, if you can't compose sentences with automaticity, you waste working memory that can be devoted to audience, purpose and developing your own style (Graham, 1997; Scardamalia and Bereiter 1986; Strong 1986). As children progress through KS2 and we prepare them for secondary school, if they can't create and manipulate sentence structures fluently, their ability to take notes from key points and convert them into fluid sentences is hampered (Hayes and Flower 1986). It also limits the complexity and coherence of sentences structures that children use (Beringer, Nagy and Beers, 2011). We only need to read examples of clunky balanced arguments or formulaic persuasive letters to see this.

Syntactic control (the ability to write fluid sentences that read well and link to what has gone before and comes after) is very difficult to learn (Saddler, 2012). Children who read a lot often become competent writers regardless of what they are taught in school, but to ensure equity and that all children receive their curriculum entitlement, most children need to be taught through direct instruction (Martlew, 1983). We can't just stick to formulaic tool kits or a small handful of writing techniques, such as 'because, but, so' sentences. We need to begin with a kernel sentence, ensure that every child knows what a simple sentence is and is not and then expand and combine sentence structures in a systematic and carefully sequenced order. This process must be contextualised; that is using content from the curriculum, so children are focusing on **how** they are writing rather than **what** they are writing (Hochman and Wexler, 2017: 11-15, Willingham, 2009:13, 67). There needs to be lots of oral rehearsal, experimentation, and discussion (Willingham, 2009: 173). In YR and KS1, children will also need to be given sufficient time to develop their pencil grip and fluent handwriting as well as building their code knowledge to support spelling. In an already crowded curriculum, we therefore need to think carefully about the opportunity cost when selecting the number and type of writing opportunities. Rather than being driven by an overly full, genre-based approach which leads to children not seeing grammar and punctuation structures transferring across genres, we can have



far more leverage by using a selective text-type approach where the writing is driven by the consistent attention to audience and purpose.

In our writing curriculum, the content comes either from the class novel or a previously taught PKC unit. The text types are identified, introduced in a specified sequence, and revisited regularly so children learn the structures to automaticity. We use a systematic planning frame for narrative and non-fiction writing and the grammatical structures and punctuation is taught in a carefully planned sequence and revisited regularly to ensure they are embedded in long-term memory.

In sport, we accept that the drills we practise will help us play the game, but in academic subjects we often want to practise the end product – for example writing at length. Our writing curriculum focuses on understanding what a simple sentence is and uses this kernel sentence structure to expand the sentence, combine sentences, and use phrases purposefully and effectively. By practising sentence combining, we are practising the drills and practising composition. This is done within the context of previously taught learning, so children can focus fully on the **how** – i.e., manipulating sentences and thinking about their effects rather than using working memory to think about **what** they are writing. This enables children to focus deeply on the nuances in different sentence combinations (Saddler, 2012) and for children who always begin their sentences in certain ways or really on certain structures, it helps them build a bank of alternatives.

Once children become fluent and comfortable with sentence combining using the structures taught for their year group, their working memory is freed to begin to think about audience and purpose and in KS2 to begin to convert their planning notes to a composition (Saddler, 2012).

All taught writing in YR should be sentence dictation in Sounds Write lessons. It's vital that teachers model speaking in complete sentences and that children become attuned to grammatically correct sentence structures in spoken language. The children who appear to be the 'natural' writers almost invariably live in households where spoken language is very similar to written language, so they are not having to 'translate' their spoken thoughts into grammatically correct written thoughts. It's only 'perfect practice that makes perfect' (Vince Lombardi Jr.); we don't want children to be given plentiful opportunities for imperfect practice, so modelling is key (Lemov, Woolway, Yezzi, 2012).

The yearly overview map identifies the grammar and punctuation to be taught every half term and the medium-term plans suggest where in the unit particular structures should be taught and revisited. From Y1, children are taught to write simple sentences in a specified sequence using the KLLs and the sit behinds. Children are taught that simple sentences contain a subject and predicate. They learn that the predicate contains the object and the verb. This is done through lots and lots of oral rehearsal, identifying sentences and fragments, discussion, and sentence dictation. Once they have a secure understanding of simple sentences, they are introduced to commands (where the subject is implied) through sentence dictation. Children are then introduced to compound sentences using specifically identified co-ordinating conjunctions. When combining these simple sentences, the subject is retained in the second clause and therefore a comma is used. Children are not introduced to expanded noun phrases until Y2 so that they can secure their understanding of comma usage in compound sentences. In Y2, children secure their understanding of commas in lists and in complex sentences with specified subordinating conjunctions. They then learn how to use commas to separate adverbial phrases in LKS2 as well as using commas with reporting clauses in speech punctuation. This systematic approach significantly reduces the risk of comma splicing, and it prepares children for embedded clauses in UKS2.



Teacher subject knowledge is crucial, and teachers are expected to refer to the KLI sit behinds and subject knowledge packs.

Text types are introduced in a specific order and build sequentially year on year to ensure there is enough time in the curriculum to secure a particular text type before a new one is introduced. In KS2, children begin every term by writing a biography of the author they are studying. This serves several purposes: to introduce the author and learn about other texts they have written; to begin to understand the author's motivations for writing and the context in which they wrote; to review and secure grammar and punctuation taught the previous year / term; and to give time to begin reading and analysing the class novel in reading lessons because children will use this content in their writing tasks.

Opportunities for non-fiction writing are provided for all year groups linked to previously taught foundation subject units and core poems are identified. There are also opportunities for non-fiction writing in response to reading lessons. It's important to note that the poems listed are not exhaustive and schools should supplement the two-week poetry units with poems relevant for their context. NB the English subject leader must maintain oversight of poems and poets studied following the principles of the reading rationale document. Poetry is studied in reading lessons to perform and analyse. We do not ask children to write poetry.

Some key elements to our writing curriculum

- In KS1, a core text is studied for half a term and is taken from our reading canon. In KS2, the core text is studied for one term.
- Non-fiction writing units (using content from previously taught PKC lessons) are paired with poetry units in reading lessons.
- In KS1, children learn to write simple non-fiction reports where the purpose is to inform.
- In LKS2, children learn to write non-fiction reports where the purpose is to explain.
- In UKS2, children learn to write non-fiction reports where the purpose is to discuss.
- Text types are introduced slowly with plentiful opportunities to revisit, so the structure becomes embedded and can be applied competently in other curriculum subjects.
- Children are given the layout features for the text type – they do not spend precious learning time feature spotting.
- The planning templates are consistent (using *The Writing Revolution* approach) to reduce cognitive load, so children can attend to how they are writing.
- Key grammar is carefully sequenced and revisited to build automaticity.
- Grammar is always taught in the context of the curriculum with plentiful teacher modelling and oral rehearsal.
- Model texts only contain previously taught grammar and punctuation and grammar and punctuation that is the focus of that unit.
- Following the principles of *The Writing Revolution*, most emphasis is placed on the planning and drafting stages of the writing process.



1. OPENING
Summary: _____
a) _____
b) _____

2. RISING ACTION
Summary: _____
a) _____
b) _____

3. CLIMAX
Summary: _____
a) _____
b) _____

4. RESOLUTION
Summary: _____
a) _____
b) _____

5. ENDING
Summary: _____
a) _____
b) _____

Y2 – Y3 Non-fiction Plan

1. INTRODUCTION
Summary: _____

2. SPO 1 (teacher to record subheading)
Topic Sentence: _____

1. _____

3. SPO 2 (teacher to record subheading)
Topic Sentence: _____

1. _____

4. CONCLUSION
Summary: _____

Fig 2: Standardised planning templates based on *The Writing Revolution*