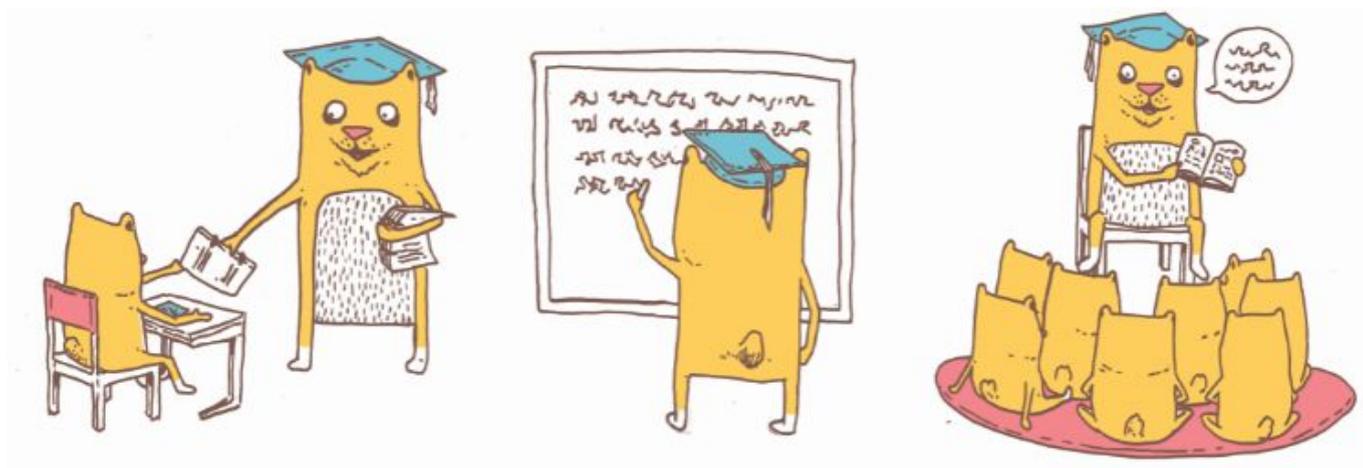


www.writing4pleasure.com's guide to becoming a writer-teacher



Teachers who perceived themselves as writers offer richer classroom writing experiences and generate increased enjoyment, motivation and tenacity among their students than non-writers.

Teresa Cremin & Sally Baker

As you may have noticed when reading the material on our site, developing yourself as a writer-teacher will be beneficial to the success of your classroom practice. You will talk with your apprentice writers, suggest strategies for them to try, set process and product goals together and advise them on their compositions. You will be doing this through pupil conferencing and mini-lessons, but it will also happen naturally through the creation of a community of writers. Being a writer-teacher does not mean you have to be good at writing, but it does mean that you join and become a member of your community of writers, writing alongside the children when possible.

Why be a writer-teacher?

- There is no way of helping children to see themselves as writers if you yourself are not interested in it. You must demonstrate to your community of writers that you believe writing to be interesting, utterly possible, enjoyable and satisfying. Teachers who are not themselves members of their class writing community cannot effectively model how to be part of it. In essence, if writing is important to your life, children will think it is important to their lives.
- Just as it would be difficult to teach children to play the tuba if you've never played it yourself, you are going to find it harder to teach writing and how to be a writer if you don't do it yourself.
- Writer-teachers write in the hope of better understanding how to build writing communities. For example, by creating or joining a writer-teacher group, you know how a writing workshop behaves and what it feels like. When teachers and children do the same writing, everyone in the writing community sees everyone else as a learner and a teacher.
- Writer-teachers write to ensure they can talk with children about writing authentically and from a position of empathy and experience. Children trust and listen to you when they know they are about to learn something from a fellow writer rather than from a teacher. They trust that the advice, tip, trick or secret you're about to give is coming from someone who has been there themselves.
- We underestimate the influence school policies or assessment arrangements have on our teaching of writing. There is no better way to understand the consequences your writing pedagogy has on your apprentice writers than to write yourself.
- In a more traditional way, through shared-writing, writer-teachers model and make visible the normally invisible processes that occur whilst writing by showcasing the inner dialogue that writers often undertake whilst crafting.
- Writer-teachers model how writers' reading material can often move them to write for themselves.
- Writer-teachers write to share their own writing goals with their class and the variety of ways in which they are *moved* to write. This can help generate agency and showcase the power of personal writing projects.
- It helps you see how you rely (either positively or negatively) on your own history of being taught to write. It may be that our childhood writing experiences can provide us with no comfort or encouragement in writing now as adults.
- Most importantly, writer-teachers write because of the pleasure it affords them and because they want to share this pleasure with their class.



WRITER IDENTITY
(I AM!)

How to be a writer-teacher

I immersed myself in writing for pleasure, and brought my pleasure into the classroom. The effect was palpable. I saw my lived life become an educative experience.

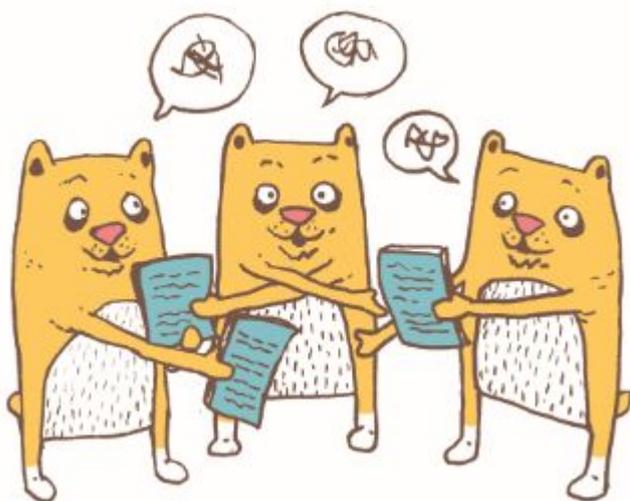
Doug Kaufman

The hardest thing in becoming a writer-teacher, particularly if you lack confidence or are tentative about the idea, is to shake off how you yourself were taught writing. The shadows of our writing past can lead us to believe that writing is a mythical gift that is simply bestowed upon lucky people. We can also believe that all writing is high-stakes and always has to be highly accomplished. The real fact of the matter is that it can be quick, easy, low-stakes, successful and done for fun. It is a craft. If you're nervous about setting up a notebook or becoming a writer-teacher, here are a few things to try:



1. Don't ever assume you can't write or that you don't write well. You're an apprentice writer alongside the children in your class. You want to improve too. Accept and celebrate the fact that some children in your class may well write better than you. Take and learn as much from your community of young writers as you give to them.
2. Don't put high expectations on your writing endeavours. You don't have to write with a view that it will be seen by anyone. It's good to ignore the 'phantom reader' who you feel is judging your writing. A reader beyond yourself doesn't have to exist if you don't want them to.
3. Get yourself a notebook. The more notebooks you have, the better, and in a variety of sizes.
4. Have a notebook with you at all times and always within touching distance. Don't ever say to yourself that you'll remember that writing idea and write it down later because you'll always forget it.
5. See writing as being like doodling. Try out dabbling as a technique.
6. Write dribbles. Dribbles are pieces of writing that can only be a maximum of say twenty or fifty words.
7. Take inspiration from children. A good place to find writing ideas is in children's compositions. If you like a subject or idea a child has written about, why not use it as a template for your own writing?
8. Write on your phone using a note-taking app. A good way to start is to write a little something the moment a writing idea strikes.
9. Write down lines or phrases you like from your reading or from the things you hear people say.
10. Write up funny anecdotes or episodes you talk to your friends about. Usually, the stories we share with friends or loved ones are also things we can write about.
11. Consider starting a journal. You don't have to write in it every day; only when something significant comes to mind.
12. Try using Peter Elbow's (1998) 'freewriting' technique. This is where you write non-stop whatever comes to mind, for ten minutes. Once completed, you comb this writing for anything you think might be worth developing further.

13. Find a writing process which works for you.
14. If you don't like where your writing is going, abandon it and move on. Regard it as simply practice.
15. Have a moment in the day where you sit down and write *something*.
16. Purchase books about writing. We can certainly recommend:
 - a. *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You* by Ralph Fletcher: HarperCollins
 - b. *Discover Your Own Literacy* by Donald Graves: Heinemann
 - c. *Bird By Bird: Instructions On Writing And Life* by Anne Lamott: Anchor Books
 - d. *Writing Without Teachers* by Peter Elbow: Oxford University Press
 - e. *100 Ways to Improve Your Writing* by Gary Provost: Penguin Books
 - f. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* by James Gardener: Vintage Books
14. Join or create a writer-teacher group.
15. Join our @WritingRocks_17 Twitter community & use #TeacherByDayWriterByNight.



How to share your writing with your class.

When we write live, we give children the impression that they are simply to copy what we have written. And probably the impression that writing comes easily. This kind of writing is done under pressure and is often phoney (Hillocks 1986). However, when sharing an example of your writing with your class, you can engage in rich discussion with them about your intentions, how you kept an eye on your audience and the craft decisions you made. In turn, they can ask you questions about it. So how do you discuss your writing with children?

1. Talk about the purpose and audience you had in mind when writing. What did you want the writing to achieve or do to the reader? How did you want people to react?
2. Children will want to get into a conversation with you about your writing. They want you to tell them how you developed the piece. Where did you get the idea...? How did you do that...? Why did you do that...? Share with them the writing tricks, tips and secrets you used to make the piece happen.
3. They may want to emulate your intentions and the spirit of your writing, and to try out the strategies and techniques that you used, but with their own writing ideas .
4. An exemplar written by you can give children a feel for the writing project they are about to engage in and what it is going to look like as a product at the end. They are able to see for themselves what the ultimate goal for the project is.

Creating a writer-teachers' group

The perfect place to start if you're considering setting up a writer-teacher's group is by reading *Introducing Teachers' Writing Groups* by Jenifer Smith & Simon Wrigley or by joining an existing group. You can find out whether there is a local group near you by contacting the National Writing Project at nwp.org.uk



Another good resource is the *Teachers as Writers* website supported by Arvon. Arvon is a charitable organisation which supports creative writing. Alternatively, here are a few basic tips for starting up your own group:

Early on, establish a regular time and place to meet. Some groups like to meet once every week while others will meet once every half term. Next, send out an invitation. It's good to send out an initial invite to *all* staff explaining the structure and a brief rationale behind the group, and to send out regular reminders about your next scheduled meeting.

This is a good routine to follow:

1. **Writing time.** Start with a short writing exercise or some free-writing to get people warmed up and ensure everyone has engaged in some writing. Popular exercises can be found on the National Writing Project website. Alternatively, there are a lot of idea generation techniques in Part B of this book.
2. **Sharing time.** Invite the group to discuss and share any of the writing they have undertaken or are currently undertaking since the last meeting. People can also discuss their process and ask for advice on their developing compositions.
3. **Discussion time.** It's good to end the session by discussing how your development as writers is impacting the ways in which you teach your apprentice writers in school. People can also share good teaching practice from their classrooms.

We recommend that it's always a good idea to bring cake to meetings. Once people get comfortable with the format of the meetings, it's good to devote one to discussion of your own writing histories. Invite group members to think about how they were taught writing. First, how many people in the group consider themselves to be writers? Of those, how many attribute this to having a good writing teacher? How many good writing teachers did they have over the course of their whole education? For those who don't consider themselves writers, why might this be the case? What can be learned from your own writing histories in terms of how you want to teach writing now? To keep things fresh, we also recommend that you occasionally partake in some collaborative writing.

- To find more about writer-teachers, visit our website at www.writing4pleasure.com
- Alternatively, join our writer-teacher community on Twitter [@WritingRocks_17](https://twitter.com/WritingRocks_17)
- Finally, to find out more about our writer-teacher retreats, please email us at: literacyforpleasure@gmail.com