

# A Writing For Pleasure Manifesto



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# Introduction

*Teachers must help children to perceive themselves as writers before children are able to write for themselves.*

-Frank Smith

Recent surveys conducted by the National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2016, 2017) make it clear that for many years there has been a decline or stagnation in UK children's enjoyment, volition and motivation to write both in and out of school, with 49.3% of children showing largely indifference to or dislike of writing (Clark, 2017). Importantly, The National Literacy Trust also states that 'eight times as many children and young people who do not enjoy writing write below the expected level compared with those who enjoy writing' (2017, p.14). This is further supported by Ofsted's (2019) latest research which also states that pupils' motivation and positive attitudes towards learning to write are important predictors for attainment.

Graham & Johnson (2012, p.11), in a review of perceptions of writing in their classroom, state that: 'while 75% of the children demonstrated a positive attitude towards their reading experiences, only 10% of the same children described positive or happy associations in their writing memories. The majority of children... associated the writing experience with incompetence or anxiety; even those children who were perceived by me to be able writers did not consider the experience to be emotionally rewarding... children who were competent in their literacy skills, who met their targets, who could write successfully in a variety of genres, failed to express any sense of joy in their written achievements.'

Evidence also suggests that historically too many students are underachieving, with one in five primary pupils not achieving the expected standard in English, with far more pupils failing to achieve the standard in writing (Ofsted, 2009, 2012). Ofsted states that 'only 69% of boys achieved national expectations in writing' (2012, p.9) with 'white British boys eligible for free school meals... amongst the lowest performers in the country (2009, p.4)'. This is repeated in 2018, where we see the largest attainment gap between boys and girls with only 72% of boys reaching the expected standard (DfE, 2018). Further, 'standards are not yet high enough for all pupils and there has been too little improvement in primary schools' (Ofsted, 2012, p.4). This is repeated in 2017 where 'attainment at the expected standard, as measured by teacher assessment... is lowest in writing. This is similar to the pattern in 2016' (DfE, 2017). Finally, the DfE (2012, p.3) remarks that 'writing is the subject with the worst performance compared with reading, maths and science at Key Stages 1 and 2.'

Children are underachieving as a result of their dislike of writing, with The National Literacy Trust concluding in their 2017 annual survey that their findings 'highlight the importance of writing enjoyment for children's outcomes and warrant a call for more attention on writing enjoyment in schools, research and policy' (Clark, 2017, p.15). The research project which is the subject of this report set out to attend to precisely that.

Educational research consistently tells us that there are significant academic benefits to be gained alongside the personal and affective, with The National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2017) stating that ‘seven times as many children and young people who enjoy writing write above the expected level for their age compared with those who don’t enjoy writing.’ The most important pointer to high attainment in writing is motivation and volition (Alexander 2009; Beard 2000; Hillocks 1986; Clark 2016) and the best motivator is agency (Au & Gourd 2013; Dyson & Freedman 2003; Ketter & Pool 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Watanabe 2007). Agency, volition and motivation have very clear links to the experience of pleasure in writing.

Finally, in his review of 100 years of literacy research, Hillocks (2011) forcefully states, ‘we now know from a very wide variety of studies in English and out of it, that students who are authentically engaged with the tasks of their learning are likely to learn much more than those who are not’ (p. 189).



# Defining *Writing For Pleasure*

‘Writing For Pleasure is a volitional act of writing undertaken for enjoyment and satisfaction. Therefore, a Writing For Pleasure pedagogy is any research-informed pedagogy which seeks to create the conditions in which writing and being a writer is a pleasurable and satisfying experience. It has as its goal the use of effective writing practices with young apprentice writers and the promotion of the affective aspects of writing and of being a writer.’

(Young, 2019)

As literate adults, most of us would have little difficulty in defining what we mean by reading for pleasure and indeed it is now a statutory part of the UK National Curriculum (2013). Cremin et al (2014, p.5) states: ‘at the core of reading for pleasure is the reader’s volition, their agency and desire to read, their anticipation of the satisfaction gained through the experience and/or afterwards in interaction with others.’ However, little consideration has been given to what writing for pleasure might mean, particularly in the context of the classroom.

We know that children who enjoy writing and are motivated to write are eight times more likely to achieve well academically (Clark, 2017). Therefore, writing for pleasure is a vital consideration when teaching young writers. If we examine what professional writers have said on the subject (Cremin & Oliver 2017), alongside Cremin et al’s (2014) definition of reading for pleasure, we can define writing for pleasure as a volitional act of writing undertaken for enjoyment and satisfaction. The specific sources of enjoyment and satisfaction in and of writing are many and varied, and will be different for individual writers in different contexts. However, we argue that there are two types of pleasure in writing, namely, writing *as* pleasure (enjoyment) and writing *for* pleasure (satisfaction).

## Writing *as* pleasure

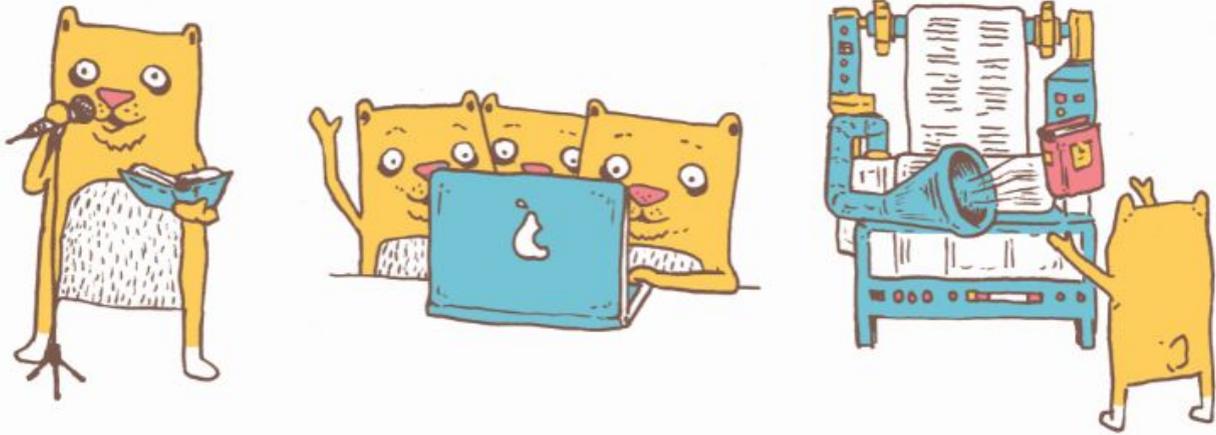
- Feeling a need to write and experiencing the fun and enjoyment in practising the craft of writing.
- Feeling confident and happy when engaging with the different processes of writing.
- Enjoying being part of a writing community, discussing their own writing and how it feels to be a writer.



Writing *as* pleasure is pleasure gained from practising the craft of writing, from engaging in the process or in particular parts of the process, whether it be: generating ideas; dabbling; getting the words down on paper or screen for the first time; revising a section till you get it just so; editing to perfection or publishing the final product with care. Carol Joyce Oates and Ernest Hemingway both recorded that, for them, the pleasure was all in the revising. For some, pleasure ends with the completion of the act of writing. The idea that it may be seen by others can fill them with dread!

## Writing *for* pleasure

- Having a sense of purpose fulfilled.
- The expectation of a reaction and a response.
- Sharing something to be proud of and feeling you've achieved something significant.
- The discovery of your own writing voice.



Gene Fowler remarks: *'writing is easy: all you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until the drops of blood form on your forehead...'* and, as T.S Eliot also stated, writing is the *'intolerable wrestle with words and their meanings.'* Writing isn't always pleasurable. So why do we put ourselves through it? Perhaps it is sometimes with the view of writing *for the pleasure of a purpose fulfilled* rather than the act itself.

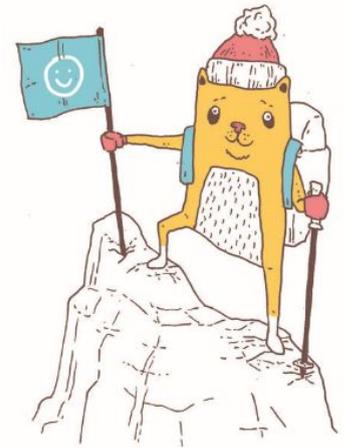
This type of pleasure is the satisfaction that comes *after* the act of writing. It's knowing that you will receive a response from your audience and that your writing will be put to work - sharing your memories, knowledge, ideas, thoughts, artistry or opinions with others. There can also be a pleasure in hearing the meanings other people take from your text. It can also come from listening to your own writing voice, from knowing you said what you meant to say or from achieving what you wanted your reader to feel. Writing *for* pleasure therefore gives children a feeling of empowerment and that their writing has enriched their life and the lives of others.

# The Affective Domains

*If what we do instructionally achieves the instructional end—A learns X—we have succeeded instructionally, but if A hates X and his teacher as a result, we have failed educationally*

- Nel Noddings

When we teach our young apprentice writers, we must bear the sources of enjoyment and satisfaction in mind, and teach with a view to giving them the opportunity to feel pleasure in the craft of writing and in seeing their hard work achieve its intended outcome. If we don't consider these things, our writing teaching suffers and children's writing performance suffers. But how do we encourage such feelings in the classroom? Again, our own research has shown that there are at least six affective domains which contribute to *Writing For Pleasure* (Young, 2019). Consider how you can encourage these domains in your classroom.



SELF - EFFICACY  
( I CAN! )

## Self-efficacy

**'I can do this!'**

Self-efficacy is the belief that you can write well and realise your intentions.

- Writers with high self-efficacy are more likely to succeed academically because they persist at writing even when it's difficult.
- Writers with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to set themselves challenging learning goals.
- Self-efficacy is increased when young writers know the end goal for their writing.
- Self-efficacy is increased when children can apply in their current writing projects what they've learnt in the past.

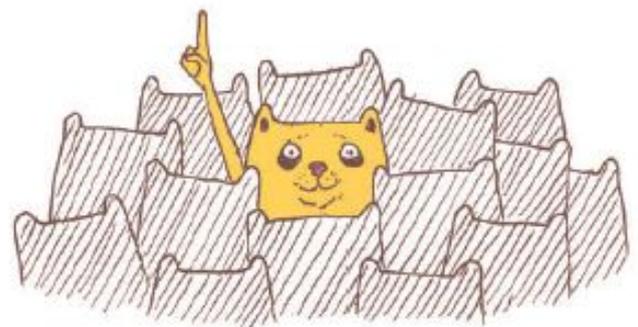
## Agency

**'I have a say!'**

Agency is about having control over your choice of writing topic and how you go about writing it.

Agency helps create a culture of writers with self-determination.

- Children like to be able to decide what they'll write about for class writing projects.
- Once experienced enough, children like to choose how they will write using their own preferred writing processes, and to write at their own pace.
- Children like to have time to pursue personal writing projects.



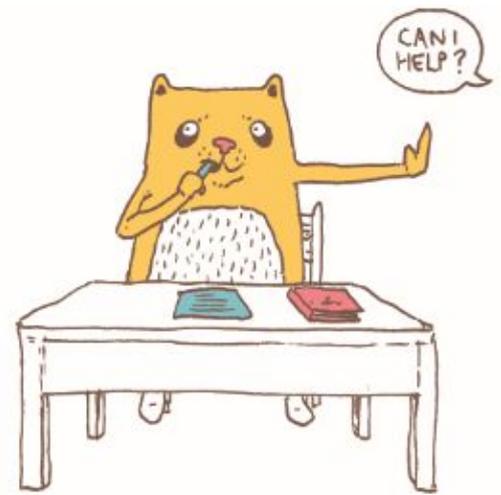
AGENCY

# Self-regulation

## 'I know what to do and how to do it!'

Self-regulation, the feeling of independence away from continual external intervention, is closely associated with the concept of writing as pleasure.

- A sense of ownership over their own writing craft is immensely important.
- Self-regulating writers have an interest in improving the quality of the texts they create.
- Children need to formulate their own goals for their writing and set their own deadlines.
- Children's sense of self-regulation is supported by the explicit teaching of the writing process, regularly teaching writing strategies and craft knowledge, and through pupil-conferencing.
- They don't feel they need their teacher all the time to be able to write well. They know how to use the writing environment of the classroom and the resources within it to help them succeed as independent writers.



SELF-REGULATION  
(I KNOW WHAT TO DO)

# Motivation

## 'I know why!'

The word 'motivation' derives from the Latin *movere* meaning 'to move'. Children are moved to write when they know why they are doing it. They know why they want to move their audience – even if the audience is sometimes only themselves.

- Undertaking the same behaviours as professional writers or those who write for recreation is clearly linked to an increase in children's motivation.
- Motivation is often what gets children through the difficult parts of the writing process because they know why they are staying with it.
- Children's motivation to write is increased when they have ownership over their writing process and publish their finished writing products to a variety of real audiences.
- When children have a personal interest or emotional investment in what they are writing, they have increased levels of concentration and engagement. They can become utterly absorbed in their writing over long periods of time.



MOTIVATION  
(I KNOW WHY.)

# Volition

## 'I want to!'

Volition is the need, urge, or internal demand to write.

- Young writers have a sense of volition when writing about experiences they have had or when the subject matter they are writing about is significant or culturally relevant to them personally. This results in the writing itself feeling important, and when things are important to children, they invest more care and effort in them.
- Children want to write because they like the satisfaction that comes from achieving their writing intentions and goals.
- Children who are avid readers are often also avid writers. This is because they are inspired and want to try out the things they are reading for themselves.



VOLITION  
(I WANT TO)

# Writer-Identity

## 'I am!'

Writer-identity is the feeling of knowing you are a writer and feeling a relatedness to others within a supportive community of writers.

- Children feel like writers when the classroom is a place where authentic writing is being undertaken and discussed and where they are engaged in serious work. Therefore, it should have the atmosphere of a rich creative writing workshop coupled with the seriousness and professionalism of a publishing house.
- Children feel like writers when they are taught how to improve their writing by a knowledgeable and passionate writer-teacher.
- Children feel like writers when they are undertaking projects which match the writing done by fellow writers outside the classroom.
- Children feel like writers when they establish genuine audiences for their writing.
- Children feel like writers when they are given ownership over their writing craft.
- Children feel like writers when they are part of a genuine writing community where they can learn and interact with their fellow apprentice writers.
- Children feel like writers when they don't have the misconception that you can only be a writer if it's your profession or only once you're older. Instead, they identify as writers now. They know writing is a pursuit, a craft and that it can be done for purely recreational purposes.



WRITER IDENTITY  
(I AM!)

# The Most Effective Practice: What The Research Says

A teacher's approach to teaching writing is guided by what they think writing, and being a writer, actually is. When subscribing to *Writing For Pleasure* as a pedagogy, you gain an evidence-rich pedagogy which will not only be instrumental in cultivating an enduring love of writing but which also shares the very best principled practices for raising academic achievement. This is because research has long shown that the two are utterly connected. Your ambition must be for children's writing to match (in both composition and transcription) the standards of writing which are achieved out in the world, and for children to experience the kinds of pleasure available to writers through personal growth and artistic expression, effective communication of knowledge, and the possibility of making changes for themselves and others. The practices identified below are grounded in the latest educational research into the most effective writing instruction and, importantly, are the ones that are put into practice by some of the most effective *Writing for Pleasure* primary school teachers (Young, 2019). To find out more about this research, visit [www.writing4pleasure.com](http://www.writing4pleasure.com)

## 1. Creating A Community Of Writers

If we want to create life-long writers, then we need to teach children in an environment which reflects the way writers work. From the first we need to treat children as genuine writers, albeit apprentice ones. When writers see their teachers as positive, caring and interested in their lives, they are more likely to engage in writing at a high level of achievement. The classroom should feel like a **writer's workshop**. The aim of a writing workshop is to create a community of writers, in which teachers write alongside children and share their own writing practices, and children are shown how to talk and present their writing to others in a positive and constructive way.



Children are also seen as participants in determining writing projects, as opposed to passive recipients of someone else's choice. The community of writers take part in meaningful practices and writing projects they can identify with. Importantly, in a writing workshop, children are involved in actions, discussions and reflections that make a difference to how they are taught and undertake their writing.

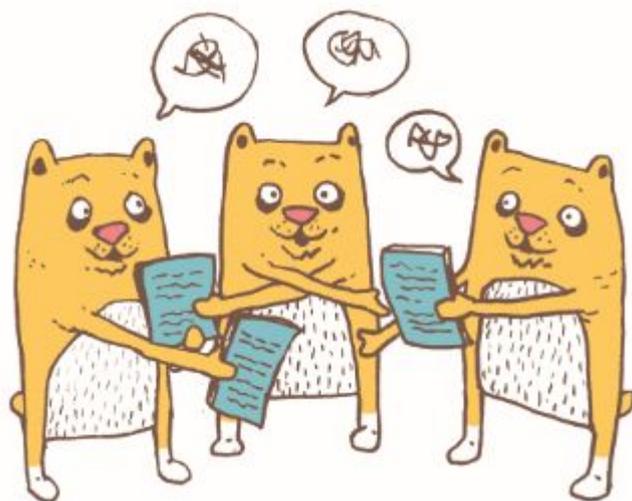
## 2. Every Child A Writer



In the writing workshop, effective writing teachers hold high achievement expectations for all writers. They see all children as writers and, from the first, teach strategies that lead to greater independence and ensure all children remain part of the writing community. They make the purposes and audiences for writing clear to children for both their class and personal writing projects. They teach what writing can do. They also model and promote the social aspects of writing and peer support in their classrooms.

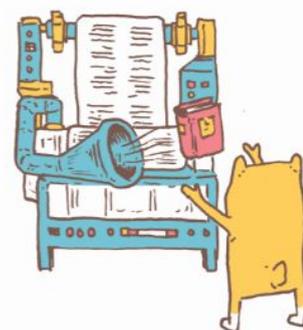
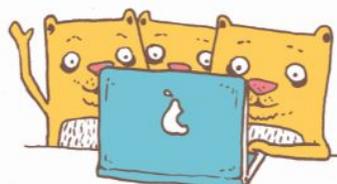
## 3. Reading, Sharing And Talking About Writing

In writing workshop, children are given ample opportunities to share and discuss with others (including teachers) their own and others' writing in order to give and receive constructive criticism and celebrate achievement. The writing community begins to build its own ways of talking and thinking as *writers*. This happens best when the writing environment is positive and settled in tone and has a sense of fostering a community of writers.



## 4. Purposeful & Authentic Writing Projects

Meaningfulness affects learner engagement and outcomes to a considerable extent. Writing projects are most meaningful to children if they are given the opportunity to generate their own subject and purpose, write at their own pace, in their own way, with agency over how they want to use the form, and with a clear sense of a real reader. Given these circumstances, writers are likely to remain focused on a task, have self-determination, maintain a strong personal agency over and commitment to their writing, and so produce something significant for themselves and in keeping with teacher expectations. In short, when children care about their writing, they want it to do well.



## 5. Explicitly Teach The Writing Processes



Effective writing teachers give direct instruction in the different components of the writing process (how to generate an idea, plan, draft, revise, edit, publish). They scaffold children's understanding of these processes through demonstration, discussion, modelling and sharing exemplars which they have written themselves. The ultimate aim is for children to relinquish their dependence on this scaffolding and develop their preferred writing process.

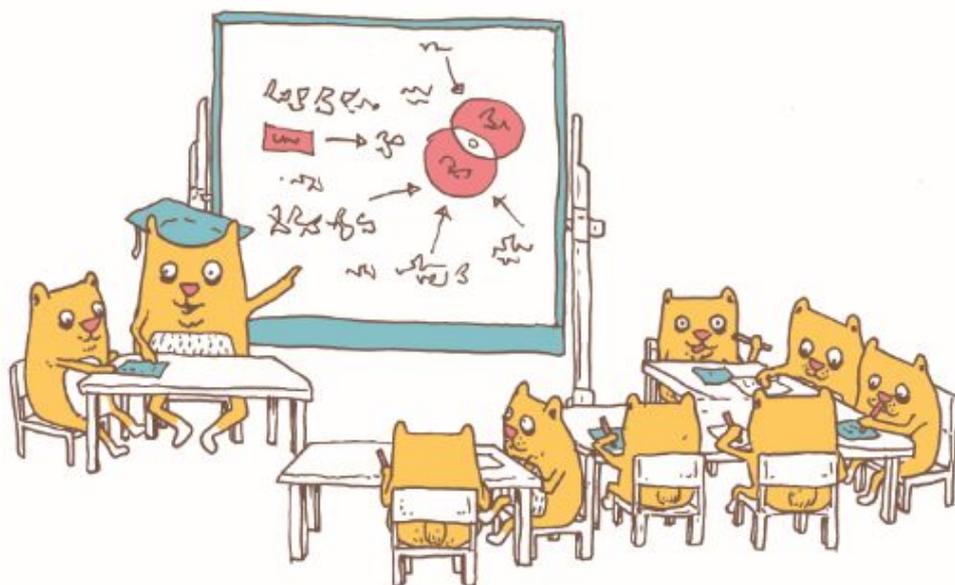
## 6. Setting Writing Goals

To maintain children's self-efficacy, commitment and motivation during a class writing project, teachers should ensure that children know the **distant goal** for the project, that is to say the future audience and purpose for the writing. The class, as a community, should have a say in setting the **product goals** for the project. This is what will they have to do to ensure their writing is successful and meaningful. Setting shorter-term **process goals** (e.g. generating an idea/planning/drafting/revising/editing/publishing) benefits learners in terms of cognitive load, focus, motivation and achievement; for example, 'You have two days left to complete your draft'. However, once experienced enough, children should be able to use their own writing process and only need the final deadline for completing the project; for example 'You have eight more writing sessions before these need to be ready for publication'.



## 7. Reassuringly Consistent

Good classroom organisation is absolutely vital as it facilitates learning, ensures focus and builds writing confidence. It also saves time - time that can be used beneficially by the teacher and the children. Resources will be visible and consistent across classes and the whole school and will communicate strategies clearly. Children need the reassurance of knowing how a writing lesson is expected to proceed.



A routine of **mini-lesson**, **writing time** and **class sharing** is the most effective routine teachers can adopt. A mini- lesson is a short instruction on an aspect of writing which is likely to be useful to the children during that day's writing. During writing time, teachers conference with groups or individuals. A well-organised classroom ensures children write largely independently. For example, children will know the routines for working on class writing projects and that, once finished for the day, they may concentrate on their personal projects.

## 8. Personal Writing Projects

It is essential that children are given time to write for a sustained period every day and to work on both class and personal writing projects. Personal projects should be seen as an important part of the writing curriculum since it is here, through exercising their own choice of subject, purpose, audience and writing process, that they have genuine autonomy and come to understand the true function of writing as an empowering and pleasurable activity which they can use now and in the future. Teachers will hold equally high expectations for personal writing projects as for class projects. Personal projects can provide the teacher with insights into children's personalities and help build relationships, and can also provide evidence when assessing children's development as independent writers.



## 9. Balancing Composition With Transcription

Schools often have their own policies for the teaching of spelling and handwriting. However, studies emphasise that these skills are best learned in the context of a child's purposeful and reader-focused writing. Mini-lessons on aspects of transcription take place at the beginning of a writing session.

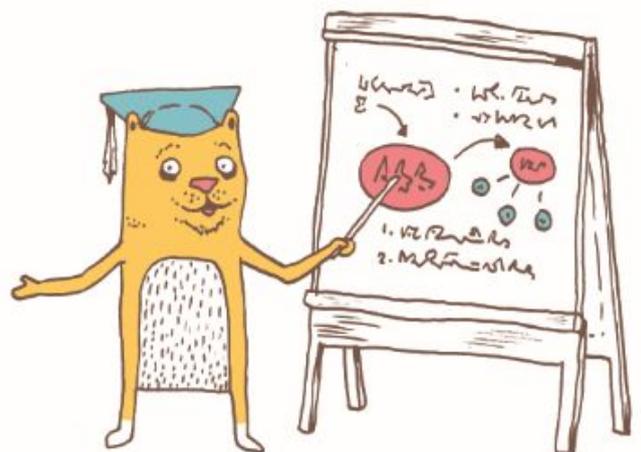


Spelling and punctuation should be largely self-monitored as children write, marking their text for items to be checked and corrected at the editing stage. Invented spellings should be seen as acceptable in the drafting stage, and handwriting skills are best practised when publishing a completed piece with an obvious purpose in mind.

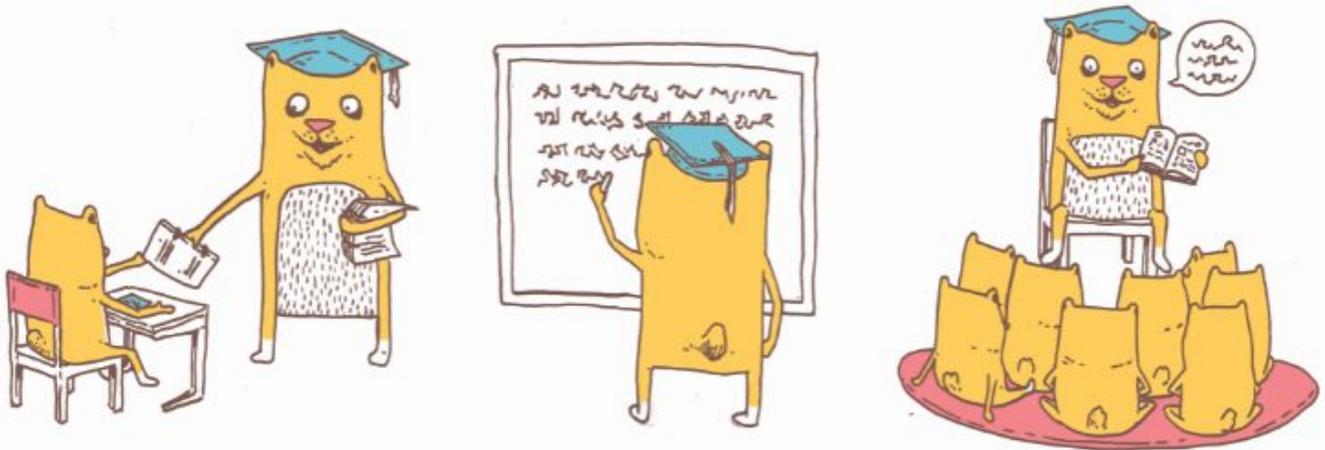
Research shows that there is no evidence to link the formal teaching of grammar with improvements in children's writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Successful writing teachers know that if grammar is to be understood in a meaningful way, it must be taught functionally and applied and examined in the context of real purposeful writing. Grammar teaching should therefore take place within mini-lessons and should, as far as possible, be useful and relevant to the children's writing that day. It's important that children also have mini-lessons in writing study. This is when strategies and craft knowledge for the different writing processes are taught, such as techniques for editing your manuscript, 'dabbling' around a writing idea or how to develop a character.

## 10. Teach Daily Mini-Lessons

Feeling you can write well on your own is really important to children, and while all children need guidance, advice and individual instruction, they also need to be taught self-regulating strategies through daily mini-lessons. These lessons should focus on how to generate ideas, use planners and checklists, or what to look for when improving and revising a draft. They also need ready access to resources for editing and publishing. Self-regulating writers work independently to a large extent, freeing their teacher to conference with individuals or small groups.



# 11. Being A Writer-Teacher



Just as it would be difficult to teach children the tuba if you've never played one, so it is difficult to teach children to be writers if you never write. Become a writer-teacher who writes for and with pleasure and use your literate life as a learning tool in the classroom. Children gain from knowing that their teacher faces the same writing challenges that they do. Write and share in class your own pieces in relation to the projects you are asking the children to engage in, but be sure to maintain reciprocal relations when discussing and modelling your own writing processes and the exemplar texts you have written. Sharing the strategies that you really employ in your own writing is highly effective instruction.

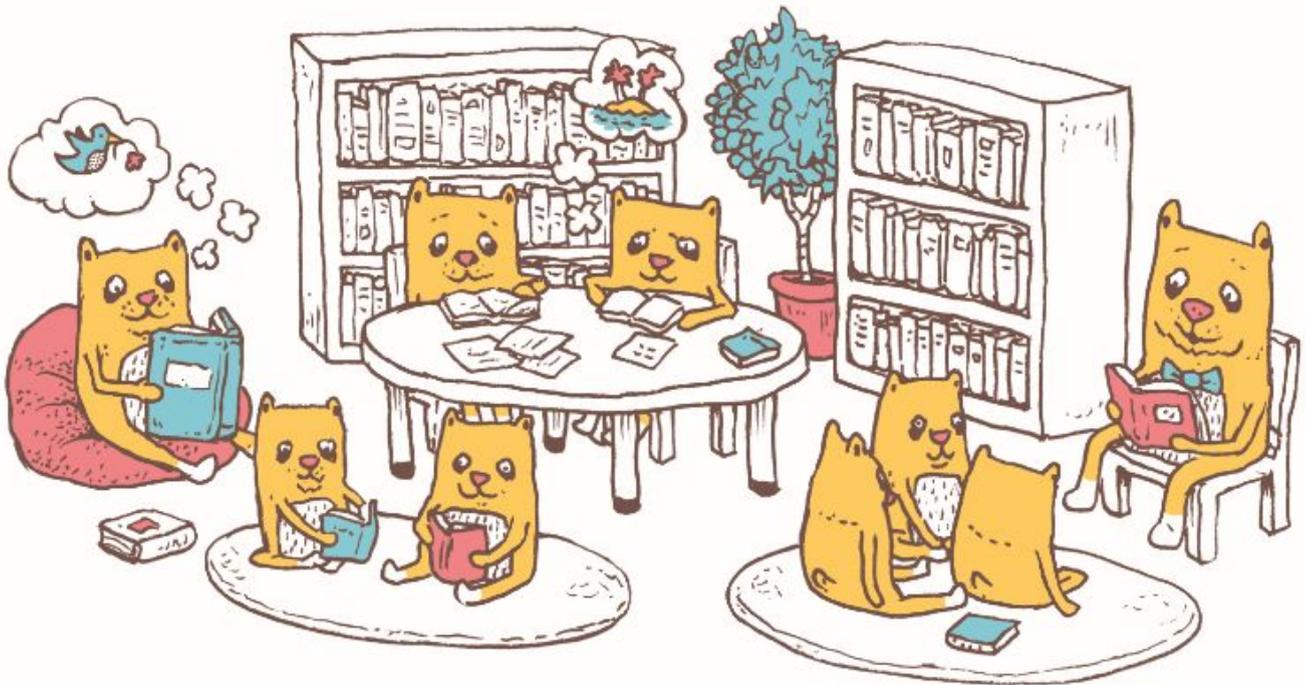
# 12. Pupil Conference: Meeting Children Where They Are



A rich response to children's writing is crucial. Many teachers use both written and verbal feedback. Research particularly emphasises the usefulness of 'live' verbal feedback, which is immediate, relevant and allows children to reflect on and attend to learning points while actually still engaged in their writing. It is seen as superior to 'after-the-event' written feedback. Verbal feedback is given through conferences, which will be short and are most successful in a settled, focused and self-regulating classroom. Teachers give feedback initially on composition and prioritise those who are in most need of assistance. Only later into the child's process do they attend to transcriptional issues. Finally, writer-teachers are better able to advise and give feedback because they understand from personal experience the issues children encounter when writing.

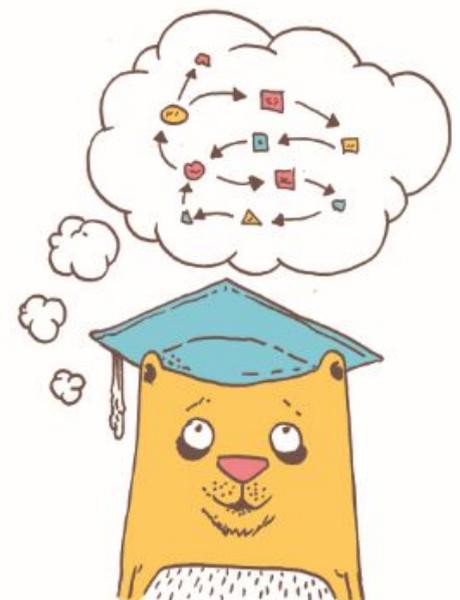
# 13. Literacy For Pleasure: Reading And Writing Connecting

Successful writing teachers know that children who read more, write more and write better. A reading for pleasure pedagogy (Cremin *et al* 2014; Hansen 1987) assists a writing for pleasure pedagogy since the individual reading of good texts available in school and in class libraries provides children with models, and continually suggests and inspires ideas and themes for personal writing projects. Successful writing teachers also know that reading aloud poems and whole texts to the class in an engaged way has a significant effect on children’s vocabulary and story comprehension, and increases the range of syntactic structures and linguistic features the children will use in their writing.



# 14. Successful Interconnection Of The Principles

Research cannot emphasise strongly enough that all these principles, critical to the effective teaching of writing, are powerfully interconnected and should be considered as such. Think, where do you currently see your practice making links between them, and where is more development going to be required?



# Common Misconceptions Debunked

**Writing For Pleasure just means giving children ‘free-writing’ time.**

- ‘Free-writing’ is actually a compositional technique popularised by Peter Elbow (1998) in which writers write whatever comes to mind for 10 minutes before mining the writing for any interesting or fruitful topics which might be worth further exploration. Alternatively, the topic is already known to the writer and they simply write freely on the subject for 10 minutes before working on it as a composition. A *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy, however, is a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to teaching writing and does not have the restricted meaning described above.

**Writing For Pleasure is a hippie free- for- all. It means no teaching. No direct instruction. You just hope children naturally develop.**

- A *Writing For Pleasure* approach is a cohesive and carefully conceived pedagogy based on 14 principles of effective practice. These principles are the result of three literature reviews, spanning 50 years of research and involving well over 300 pieces of literature and research on the subject of teaching writing.
- A *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy does not advocate for a naturalistic approach to the teaching of writing (Hillocks 1986). Quite the opposite. It requires continual and skilful direct instruction from expert teachers of writing.

**Writing For Pleasure should be seen as separate from the school’s curriculum.**

- Some teachers believe that children should be given some ‘free-choice’, ‘personal writing’ or ‘golden writing’ time and that this can be referred to as *writing for pleasure*. It is stipulated that this kind of writing must be quite separate and distinct from ‘class’ writing. Thus, an artificial wedge is driven between ‘class writing’ and ‘writing for pleasure’, to the detriment of both. In fact, the two should work in rich combination, as our *Writing for Pleasure* manifesto and pedagogy has made clear. Every class writing project should yield the children enough fruit in their own terms for it to feel pleasurable and satisfying. And ‘personal writing’ projects must be seen to be as valid and as important as class writing projects. Children should be allowed freedom of choice about how they wish to interpret a class writing project, and be given time to pursue personal writing projects.
- A *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy should definitely replace a school’s curriculum if that curriculum is not serving the needs of children as genuine apprentice writers. All writing that takes place in a classroom should attend to children’s affective needs, such as a sense of enjoyment and a feeling of intrinsic satisfaction in the writing projects they undertake. This means that children's completed class writing projects can ‘get to work’ and serve legitimate purposes and a variety of audiences.

## **Writing For Pleasure doesn't care about the quality of children's written products.**

- Whilst a *Writing For Pleasure* pedagogy advocates for children discussing and generating their own ideas for class writing projects, it simply doesn't follow that *Writing For Pleasure* teachers will accept low standards in terms of a final written product. Quite the opposite. Because these projects are serving real audiences, they must be of the highest quality. This means teachers sharing their own and others' writing and identifying what the class will need to do to ensure that their pieces are successful and meaningful. For example, collaboratively discussing and setting product goals is extremely useful. Children are encouraged to write in such a way that they are motivated for their writing to be the best it can be, both in terms of composition and accurate transcription.

## **Because Writing For Pleasure lets children choose their topics, they only ever write about trivial stuff like television characters and their friends!**

- This might happen at first, usually because children have never before been given such freedom to choose their ideas for writing projects. It soon changes once generating their own ideas becomes the norm. Besides, nothing children write about is ever trivial if you actually talk to them about it, and if you have high expectations for the writing. For more information on this issue, we recommend reading Ralph Fletcher (2012) or Anne Haas Dyson's (2014) work.

# Conclusion

*I feel like if I never wrote – life would be a bit boring wouldn't it - having loads of thoughts but never being able to show it.*

- Ellie (8)

So what now? Well, why not visit our accompanying website **writing4pleasure.com** There you can:

- Read our Goldsmiths' sponsored research *What Is It Writing For Pleasure Teachers Do That Makes The Difference?*
- Explore and download examples of classroom based practice.
- Find information on how you can share an aspect of your own *Writing For Pleasure* practice.
- Enjoy lots of free resources; for example, whole school and individual teacher audits for reviewing your writing practice and other CPD resources are available.
- Find out more about writer-teacher groups.



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