Effective Writing Teaching

What The Research Says

Ross Young & Felicity Ferguson
Introduction
The mission of The Writing For Pleasure Centre is to help all young people become passionate and successful writers. We look to accomplish this goal by investigating what world-class writing teaching might be. We do this through:

- Our school residencies, teacher training institutes and workshops.
- Curriculum development and creating resources.
- Conducting, disseminating and publishing research.
- Working with children, teachers, school leaders, teacher-educators and charities.

We have developed our research-rich website and pedagogy to share the most effective teaching practices. It’s our hope that teachers regard The Writing For Pleasure Centre website as a place where they can access a specialist network and continued professional development that is free.

The Research Base
For the past fifty years, research has been consistent about what great writing teaching involves. Despite this, we as teachers can be inundated by a variety of approaches and training, all promising a lot but often lacking the necessary grounding to be successful in the long-term. This is why our website and pedagogy is based on the following:

- Extensive scientific research into the most effective writing instruction.
- Case studies of what the best performing teachers of writing do that makes the difference.
- Our own research into a Writing For Pleasure pedagogy.
- The wisdom of professional writers.

If you’re new to the idea of a Writing For Pleasure pedagogy, you can read all about it at writing4pleasure.com

The Writing For Pleasure Centre functions both as a think tank and as an action research community. The result is that we are continually engaged in sharing effective practices, case studies and research findings.

We are fortunate to be supported by our close links to national literacy associations like The UKLA and The National Literacy Trust as well as with academics, exceptional teachers of writing and teacher training universities both at home and abroad.

Finally, if you’re interested in becoming more involved in our work, you can contact us at: www.writing4pleasure.com/contact

Effective writing teaching: what the research says

The aim of this booklet is to share with you the enduring principles of effective writing teaching. For the past fifty years research has been consistent about what world-class writing teaching involves. Despite this, we as teachers can be inundated by a variety of approaches and training, all promising a lot but often lacking the necessary grounding to be successful in the long-term. This booklet is based on extensive scientific research looking specifically at the most effective writing instruction. We focus in particular on the following highly influential meta-analyses:


Warning! Terms and conditions apply...

When researchers look to group scientific studies on a particular subject (in this case writing teaching), it’s called a meta-analysis. They will look to identify any recurring themes across 100s of studies before calculating their overall effectiveness. It’s important to note that not all researchers agree on the overall effectiveness of certain writing instruction nor is it a good idea to focus too hard on the effect size a researcher has assigned a particular writing treatment. Instead, teachers should use what they learn from this booklet in a way which reflects the context in which they work, what they personally know to be true about effective practice (including from their own experience and expertise) and what they can learn from case-studies of the best performing writing teachers (Young & Ferguson 2021). Finally, it’s important to acknowledge there is still a lot we don’t know about the teaching of writing and that new discoveries are being made all the time.
Meta-Analyses

This table, adapted from our book *Writing For Pleasure: theory, research and practice* (Young & Ferguson 2021 p.76) lists the types of instruction that are repeatedly identified as the most effective writing practices teachers can employ. They are what we call the enduring principles of world-class writing teaching. The table represents the largest collection of writing research ever pooled. The researchers analysed all the contemporary research into the teaching of writing and looked for significant patterning. They were then able to determine an ‘effect size’.

We provide the effect size to show you how powerful the particular type of instruction is across the multiple studies analysed. Anything above a 0.4 is deemed to be significantly and positively effective. Anything at -0.32 or below is deemed to be significantly ineffective or indeed damaging. Here you can see that formal grammar teaching is the only treatment which has been repeatedly shown to have a negative impact on children’s writing outcomes.

The next 11 pages provide a short summary for each of the identified teaching practices highlighted in the table, including what you can do in your classroom to make a difference.

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Set writing goals (2.03)

Practical things you can do:

- Identify the **distant goal** for a writing project with your class. Establish what the genuine purpose for the writing is and who is going to receive the writing when it is published or performed.
- Identify **product goals** for a project (what your writing will have to do or include to be successful & meaningful) with your class. Together, use effective and ineffective exemplar texts to help you establish these goals.
- Make sure the product goals are on display, can be read, and are understood by the class.
- Plan mini-lessons which will help children in their pursuit of the product goals.
- Set realistic **process goals** (writing deadlines) as milestones for children to achieve on their way towards formal publication or performance of their writing. Remind children of these deadlines but also remain flexible.

**Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:**

For examples of class writing projects and how to write your own exemplar texts: [writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/](http://writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/)

For advice on planning class writing projects:

Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘Participating in the formulation of goals and having some agency over them has a positive effect on the subsequent quality of children’s texts’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
A contemporary writing workshop approach (1.75)

Practical things you can do:

- Ensure you establish a reassuringly consistent routine for writing sessions. A regular routine of mini-lesson, writing-time and class sharing is recommended.
- Mini-lessons should be taught which will be helpful to pupils during that day’s writing time.
- It’s essential that mini-lessons follow the highly-effective self-regulation strategy development routine of:
  
  Introduce -> Share -> Provide Information -> Invite

- Mini-lessons should be planned in response to what you are noticing your students need instruction in most.
- Mini-lessons should be focused on teaching writerly techniques, strategies, processes and literary features which children will find useful time and time again.
- Mini-lessons should be focused on helping pupils produce meaningful and successful texts.
- Students should have time to write meaningfully and purposefully every day.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

For 100s of mini-lessons, see our class writing projects:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

To learn more, see our Real-World Writing approach based on a contemporary writing workshop routine:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘Newly acquired writing strategies, processes and linguistic techniques taught through mini-lessons can only be internalised and retained in a child’s writerly repertoire if there is a daily and sustained period in which to write’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Teach the writing processes (1.26)

Practical things you can do:

- Have on display a poster which shows the flexible, creative, and recursive nature of the writing process.
- Ensure students know that writing can include a set of processes such as generating ideas, planning (prewriting), drafting, revising (evaluating), editing (proof-reading), publishing, and performing.
- Once they are experienced enough, allow students to develop and use a writing process that suits them best.
- Allow pupils to write at their own pace and to monitor their own writing deadlines.
- Encourage fluency whilst drafting and don’t overburden students as they undertake for the first time the difficult task of translating their ideas into sentences, paragraphs, and a whole text.
- Encourage separate and dedicated time for children to revise and then to proofread their compositions in preparation for publishing or performance.
- Ensure that publishing or performing is part of any class writing project.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

See our class writing projects for advice and mini-lessons on how to navigate the different writing processes:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

'Schools achieving dramatic writing progress ensure children understand writing to be a multi-step process which involves taking a germ of an idea and seeing it through to publication or performance’
- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Pursue authentic and purposeful writing projects (1.07)

Practical things you can do:

- Discuss with students what they believe to be the authentic reasons we are moved to write.
- Plan class writing projects around a future purpose, audience, and the production of a handwritten or electronic writing product.
- Ensure there is variety in who pupils publish for. They should publish both for people they will meet and those they will never meet. Younger audiences and older ones, informed audiences, and ignorant ones, readers in authority and positions of power and those who need support and a voice.
- Ensure that students’ published writing is accessible in the class or school library or elsewhere in the school or local community. Make sure the writing isn’t simply there for display purposes but is actually going to ‘get to work’ and meet readers.
- Reflect on whether you are actually setting pseudo-authentic tasks which don’t need a real audience. How might you be able to adapt these tasks to serve a legitimate purpose and audience instead?

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

For example class writing projects:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

‘Authentic & purposeful writing projects have the power to secure young writers’ engagement & significantly contribute to positive academic achievements. These outcomes are the result of the projects’ capacity to bring together the rigour & objectives of a school curriculum & children’s personal & social interests and knowledge’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Reading, sharing, thinking & talking about writing (0.89)

Practical things you can do:

- Give students ample opportunity to talk to one another and to you as writer-to-writer.
- Ensure that talk takes place throughout a writing project and not only during the production of idea generation, planning or first drafts.
- Pupils can be encouraged to take notes of anything their peers have recommended to be changed or attended to in their piece.
- It’s important that teachers model how to talk about writing.
- Encourage students to reflect together on how their developing compositions are attending to the distant and product goals for the class writing project.
- Allow pupils opportunities to read, respond, and be inspired by each other’s published works.
- Discuss ground rules for talking and make these rules into a poster.
- Encourage periodic reading aloud to selves, teacher, or peer during writing time.
- Establish Author’s Chair.
- Teach a metalanguage for talking about writing.

‘Children’s ability to reflect both on the written product and on the thinking behind their own writing processes is known to be important for attainment’
- Young & Ferguson (2021)

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

See our Real-World Writers approach for advice on setting up a social community of writers:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

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Feedback from teachers and peers (0.80)

Practical things you can do:

- Engage in daily pupil-conferencing and establish a systematic and organised system for delivering them.
- Respond first and foremost as a genuine reader.
- Keep mental or brief written notes of repeated whole-class or individual writing issues. This can then inform your future planning of mini-lessons.
- Disruptions can negatively impact on pupil-conferencing during writing time. Share the expectation with your class that you are not to be disturbed during conferencing and that the atmosphere must be quiet and orderly.
- Ensure that any adult helpers or assistant teachers are trained in delivering pupil-conferences.
- Over time, model and train your pupils on how to peer conference.
- Continue to engage in your own writing and so boost your ability to provide effective pupil-conferences from a position of expertise and understanding.
- If you’re going to provide written feedback, ensure pupils have enough time to attend to your comments.

When children receive short, positive, and focused feedback from their teachers while they are actually engaged in writing, they revise their compositions to a significantly higher standard’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

For advice on pupil-conferencing, see our Real-World Writers book:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

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Genre-study (0.76)

Practical things you can do:

- Whenever you are planning a class writing project, consider whether you have exemplar texts from the world outside school.
- Don’t share an exemplar text you have written at home without spending time explaining the processes, procedures, strategies, and techniques you employed to craft it.
- Invite students to ask questions about the exemplar texts you’re crafting and have crafted.
- Construct product goals for a project in conjunction with your class and in response to reading and discussing effective exemplar texts.
- Spend time discussing what not to do in your own texts by looking at ineffective examples.
- At the end of each writing project, collect great examples of students’ texts to show to your pupils the following year.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:

See our child-facing Genre-Booklets:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

Read our book Real-World Writers for advice on how to conduct genre-study weeks:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘Genre-based approaches to teaching writing have achieved spectacular improvements in student outcomes. Such approaches achieve twice to over four times expected rates of learning whilst at the same time closing the gap between the most and least successful students’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Time spent revising (0.58)

Practical things you can do:

- As a class, set your product goals for the class writing project. Students can then use these goals to help them when crafting their writing but particularly when revising.
- When revising, pupils need to know what they are looking to achieve. Therefore, create a pupil-friendly rubrics based on the class product goals. Students can then use these rubrics as they are revising their compositions.
- Give pupils ample and dedicated time in which to revise their drafted texts.
- Don’t ask pupils to revise and proof-read their texts at the same time.
- Through mini-lessons and repeated purposeful practice, pupils need to be taught and invited to use techniques for revising.
- Pupils revise their compositions to a higher-standard and with greater care and attention when they know the writing is going to be published or performed.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:
See our class writing projects for our revision-checklists and revision mini-lessons:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

For advice on how to teach revision, see our book Real-World Writers:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘Time spent revising can blur the distinction between assessment and instruction and so transform classroom assessment into a moment of learning’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Time spent generating ideas and planning (0.50)

Practical things you can do:

- Understand that generating and choosing an idea to write about is part of the writing process and precedes formal or informal planning.
- Writing ideas can be generated as a whole class, in groups, or individually.
- Appreciate that planning strategies are many and varied and can include: talking, drawing, physical and dramatic play, thinking, daydreaming, observing, reading, gathering notes from the internet, mind mapping, webbing, drawing diagrams or maps, tables, lists, writing notes and possible phrases, writing an outline, creating or filling in a planning grid, free writing, or discovery drafting.
- Provide children with a variety of planning strategies and techniques and give children ample time to plan.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:
Follow the link to see our student-facing idea generation techniques, planning-grids, and other planning mini-lessons: writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

Our book Real-World Writers gives advice on how generate writing ideas with your students and how to teach planning:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘Children who spend time planning have been shown to produce more complete stories and improve their writing performance’
- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Children writing in response to their reading (0.50)

Practical things you can do:

- Giving students ample time to read enhances the quality of their writing.
- The more students are given an opportunity to write, the more their reading comprehension improves.
- Instruction in writing supports reading; instruction in reading supports writing.
- Pupils who read and listen to high-quality texts include more literary features and write better texts.
- Students who read poetry include more imagery and other poetic devices in their own writing.
- Children who read for pleasure write more and write better.

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:
Following this link for dozens of mini-lessons which encourage pupils to use their fiction and non-fiction reading to enhance their writing:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

For advice on how to connect reading and writing instruction, see our book
Real-World Writers:
Google: Real-World Writers: A Handbook for Teaching Writing with 7-11 Year Olds

‘In the highest-achieving classrooms, reading and writing are interwoven, with students frequently writing about what they were reading and using books to further develop topics they choose for writing’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)
Functional grammar teaching (0.46)

Practical things you can do:

- Teach a particular grammatical or linguistic feature, discuss it in terms of its function, and invite pupils to try it out in their writing that day.
- Teach how basic sentences can be combined into complex or compound sentences, with children being invited to try it out during that day’s writing time.

Introduce -> Share -> Provide Information -> Invite

- Teach about the function of grammar in the context of the genre pupils are engaged in as part of the class writing project.

‘The best performing teachers teach grammar within the context of authentic and meaningful writing and give direct instruction before inviting children to apply the technique during that day’s writing time’

- Young & Ferguson (2021)

Writing For Pleasure Centre resources:
Read hundreds of example functional grammar mini-lessons as part of our class writing projects:
writing4pleasure.com/class-writing-projects/

Improve your own subject by downloading our functional grammar table:
writing4pleasure.com/resources/

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Further Reading

If you’re interested in developing your writing teaching further, we offer a wide-range of evidence-informed CPD including our popular school residency programme, teacher workshops and multi-day institutes. Find out more at www.writing4pleasure.com/training

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Join us

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