

The components of an effective writing lesson



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Experimental and random control trials, systematic reviews, meta-analyses and case studies together with research into what the most effective schools do (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2022](#)) all point to the efficacy of a *Writing For Pleasure* approach for conducting daily writing lessons.

The components of an effective writing lesson typically involve a reassuringly consistent (though adaptable) routine of: mini-lesson, writing time, and class sharing. What is innovative here is that, after a mini-lesson, children are invited to apply what's just been taught in a way that is relevant to their own writing (you can read more about this [here](#)).

The table below explains why this consistent approach is so useful and effective.

Lesson component	Explanation	Research & case study findings (Young & Ferguson 2021a , 2022)
Mini-lesson <i>Instruction</i>	A period of direct and explicit instruction (see our blog Getting Your Instruction Right For Writing for more details).	Children need regular and explicit strategy instruction if they are to develop their writing craft.
Writing time <i>Practice</i>	A sustained period for children to work on their writing.	Children need ample, sustained, and daily time in which to enact the processes involved in writing and to develop their writing craft.
Pupil-conferencing <i>Feedback</i>	During writing time, the teacher provides live verbal feedback and responsive individualised instruction through pupil-conferencing (Ferguson & Young 2021).	Children need responsive teaching based on formative assessment and regular feedback if they are to become better writers.
Class sharing <i>Feedback</i>	Time for children to read what they've been working on and receive feedback from their teacher and peers.	Children need regular feedback, an opportunity to read and discuss their writing with others, and additional bespoke instruction if they are to become better writers.

An excellent foundation and a good rule of thumb when you're first setting up a routine for writing lessons is to follow this kind of order and timings:

Mini-lesson ->
(3-10 mins)

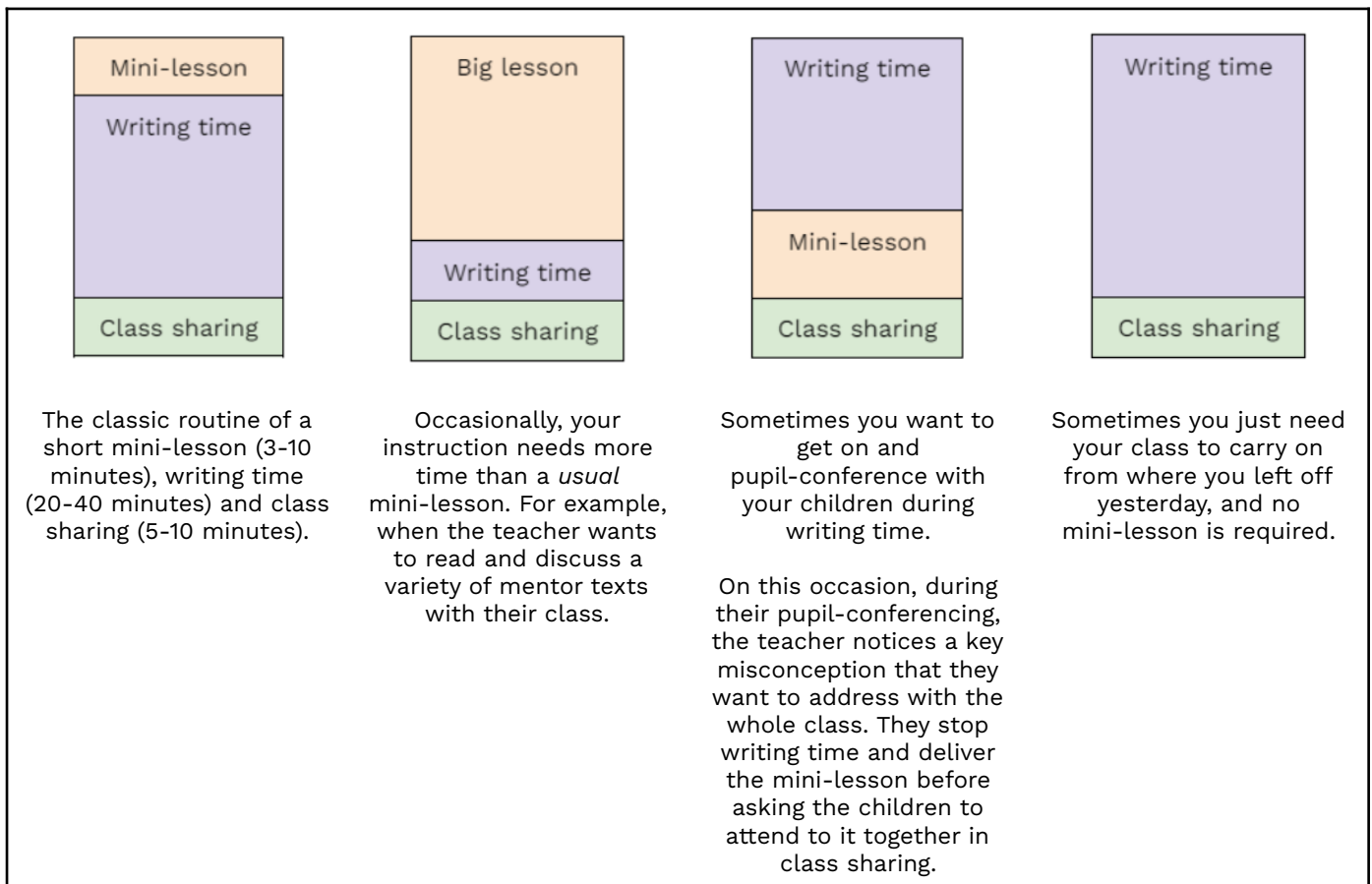
Writing time ->
(20-40 mins)

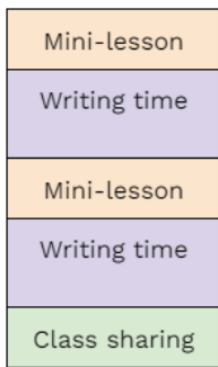
Class sharing
(5-15 mins)

Depending on the circumstances of your new class, you may find you need to build up to these kinds of timings at the beginning of the year. For example, your class may not have the emotional maturity or be developmentally ready to deal with a 10 minute mini-lesson. Similarly, they may not yet have the stamina to engage in writing for 40 minutes.

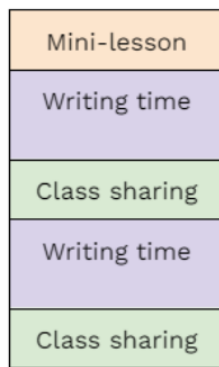
Once you and your students are comfortable with this kind of routine, you can begin to play around with it. Routine doesn't mean rigidity –a good routine always has a component of flexible response. The routine's importance is found in knowing *what* a good writing lesson typically involves and having a shared language you can use with your class. Your students will soon get used to language like: *workshop time, mini-lesson, writing time, silent writing, social writing, conferencing time, class sharing and Author's Chair* (Harris [2021](#)).

Once comfortable, there are endless ways in which you can play around with these key combinations. Doug Kaufman (2022) suggests thinking about your daily schedule in a graphic form of boxes that help you to clarify the time you want to spend on different events *and* envision the multiple possibilities for structuring the daily routine to respond to pupils' needs and personal agendas. Here are just a few examples:





Sometimes, during pupil-conferencing, you pick up on something you want to teach to the whole-class. This is an additional *responsive* mini-lesson delivered in the middle of writing time.

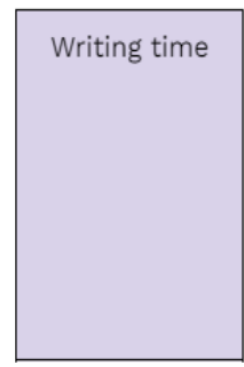


Sometimes having a sharing session in the middle of writing time gives children an opportunity to reflect on how they are getting on using and apply the mini-lesson which was taught at the beginning of the session (Young & Ferguson [2022](#)).



Sometimes, you may want your pupils to review what they crafted yesterday with their peers before continuing.

You then teach a mini-lesson based on what you are seeing during pupil-conferencing.



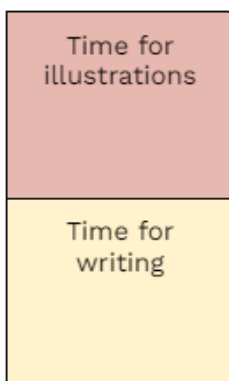
Sometimes, you simply want your class to continue on from what they were working on yesterday.

You pupil-conference for the whole of writing time.

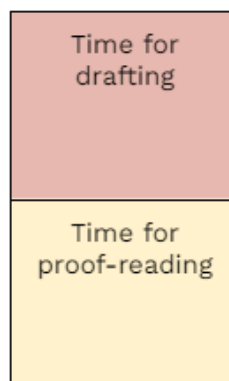
You decide that plenty of writing time is required today and so don't provide time for class sharing.

It's vital that we think carefully about the process goals we set for writing time, too (Young & Ferguson [2021a](#), [2022](#)). A process goal is something we would like children to achieve or get done by the end of a writing session. It's important to say that by *writing time* we don't necessarily mean *drafting*. Writing time simply means time engaged in the processes of writing. For example, writing time might mean: making front covers; working on plans; drafting a picturebook page; producing a single paragraph of writing; reading; conducting research; discussing and revising some already crafted writing; proof-reading for spellings; or publishing.

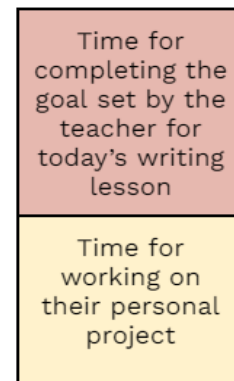
Here are some examples of the sorts of ways that you can set process goals for writing time:



You might switch between time for drawing illustrations and time for writing about those illustrations.

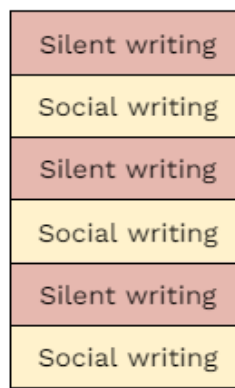
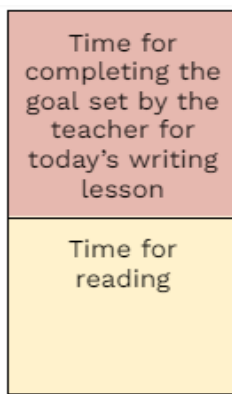


You might switch between asking the children to draft and asking children to proof-read what they've just drafted.



You might set a specific goal you want your pupils to achieve during writing time. For example, proof-read your manuscript for spellings.

Once done, the children will know that they can work on their personal writing project (Young & Ferguson [2021b](#)).



You might set a specific goal you want your pupils to achieve during writing time. For example, review their writing against the product goals established for the class writing project (Young & Hayden [2022](#)).

You might find that if you don't break up writing time into chunks of 'silent writing' and 'social writing', your children's compositions can go haywire (Whittick [2020](#)), so you respond to the need.

Once done, the children will know that they can read.

The reason these components are so brilliant is because they offer the potential for explicit instruction, meaningful practice and formative assessment every single day. These are the absolute bedrocks of all teaching and learning.

By Doug Kaufman & Ross Young

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