

What is writing?

Writing is a process of using letters, words and sentences to communicate thoughts and ideas. Even though it might look simple, it requires the synthesis and application of many understandings and skills. Even when writing a note to a friend, the author needs to consider the ideas to be communicated, the structure and sentences that suit the purpose, the correct letters and sounds, how to form the letters and where to include punctuation – all to make sure that the message is communicated effectively.

Why is this important?

Writing provides an important way to communicate our ideas, and in doing so we can entertain, inform and persuade others. As we write, we sort our thoughts and learn new things. It is a way to express what we have learned but also a way to express who we are, our interests and our ideas. It makes our thinking visible and at school and throughout higher education, writing is used by others to judge our understandings of topics.

Communicating our ideas through written language can achieve many different purposes, can be crafted for different audiences and can occur in many different mediums including books (both print and electronic), posters, websites, charts, letters, postcards and signs.

What does the teaching and learning look like?

The best way to learn to write, or to become a better writer, is to write. In the early years of school, this is done through real-life and life-like situations as children experiment with drawing and writing, and build their confidence. To help students develop their knowledge and skills associated with writing conventions, teachers provide ongoing daily opportunities for students to write and to:

- generate ideas
- experiment with different text structures and ways of organising ideas (e.g. lists, recipes, stories)
- practise using different types of sentences (e.g. using 'and' or 'but' to link ideas)
- develop their knowledge of letters, sounds and spelling rules
- practise forming letters and develop handwriting skills
- represent their ideas in various forms including with paper, pencils and electronic devices
- share their finished writing with others.

Each term students are supported to create a specific written text as part of their English unit of work. For example, they might create a poster persuading others to read their favourite picture book, construct a written retell of a familiar fairy tale, or write a description of a favourite place. Students are also provided with an opportunity to create texts of their own choice during Writing Café activities, focusing on creativity, artistry, fun and enjoyment.

As students build their confidence with writing, there are also opportunities to refine work by using the writing process – planning, drafting, re-reading, editing and publishing. Teachers and peers are essential in this process, as they provide feedback and suggestions for the 'next steps' for authors.

How do we know how children are progressing?

Teachers use a range of strategies to monitor all aspects of writing as students develop their understandings and skills. Observations and checklists provide information about the development of elements of writing (e.g. knowledge of letters and sounds, handwriting) but the best way to monitor writing and to celebrate success is to examine a collection of writing samples, sometimes collated as a folio.

Teachers analyse samples of writing at the beginning (pre-test) and end of each English unit, as well as providing feedback throughout the learning phase. Teachers provide feedback in relation to Writing scales and criteria sheets, developed specifically for each writing task. In this way teachers and students know the 'next steps'.

What support can be provided at home?

- Draw attention to writing in the world (e.g. signs, posters, notes, advertisements, labels).
- Find everyday opportunities to tell and share stories (e.g. after visiting relatives, when something funny happens), encouraging some 'tall tales' and exaggerated events.
- Play with language, sharing your ideas and encouraging everyone to participate (e.g. silly rhymes and puns on words, new poems or stories with characters from your family).
- Find everyday opportunities to write (e.g. shopping lists, birthday cards, postcards, drawings, diaries, notes in lunchboxes, writing games where everyone writes a part of a story).
- Use a range of writing implements to build confidence and strength in young writers' hands (e.g. pens, pencils, chalk, whiteboard pens, paint, coloured paper, scissors, glue, stickers).
- Find some special occasions to write (e.g. a travel diary, describing major milestones, holiday plans).
- Model as you write and 'think-aloud' to describe the writing process (e.g. "I'll need to make a list!")
- Be an active and appreciative 'audience' for the budding authors in your family.
- Celebrate the successes!