



WRITING FOR LIFE ONLINE

Professional Development Manual



Welcome!



This manual contains some worksheets and information that you might find useful. We have many great things to cover and we are going to be very interactive, with lots of scope for questions, answers and discussion.

This manual is designed to be downloaded and kept, so do save a copy to your hard drive for future reference.

It contains the text of each module as well as handy worksheets for you to use in the classroom.

Looking forward to having you on the course!

Lyn Stone, Lifelong Literacy Director

Table of Contents

<i>Overarching Concepts in Writing</i>	3
The Simple View of Reading	3
The Simple View of Writing	4
Cognitive Load Theory (CLT)	5
<i>Grammar And Syntax</i>	6
The three broad categories.....	6
Parts of Speech Summary.....	7
<i>The Survival List</i>	8
Sight words: myths and facts.....	9
Orthographic Mapping	11
Word Lists in Depth.....	13
The Survival List	15
The Survival List Template.....	15
The 4-Step Process	19
4-Step Process Templates.....	22
<i>What About Writing?</i>	29
The Multiplier Effect	30
The 21 Day Writing Challenge.....	31
Muscle Memory.....	32
Quality and Quantity.....	33
Phrases, Clauses and Sentences.....	35
Dysgraphia.....	37

Overarching Concepts in Writing

The Simple View of Reading

'Mention the Simple View of Reading to a group of primary school teachers, and you will most likely be met with expressions of curious "tell me more", but I am yet to encounter teachers who report that they learnt about this model (introduced in the 1980s) in their initial teacher education. If The Simple View of Reading not the intellectual property of teachers, for heaven's sake, *whose intellectual property is it?*'

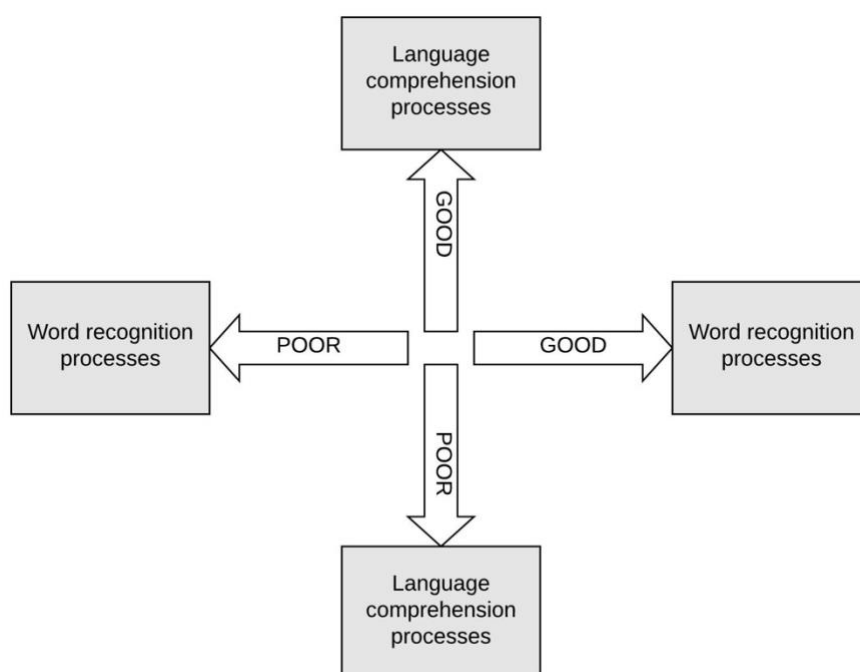
Pamela Snow 2019

The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer 1986) states that skill level in reading comprehension can be predicted by measuring two processes:

1. word recognition **multiplied by**
2. language comprehension.

So, the better you can convert the letters on the page into sounds and words, and the more words you understand, the more you'll be able to comprehend what you're reading.

The Simple View of Reading is a logical, testable formula grounded in decades of research.



The Simple View of Writing

Just as in the Simple View of Reading, the Simple View of Writing states that there are two critical, separate aspects of fluent writing. They are:

TRANSCRIPTION and IDEATION

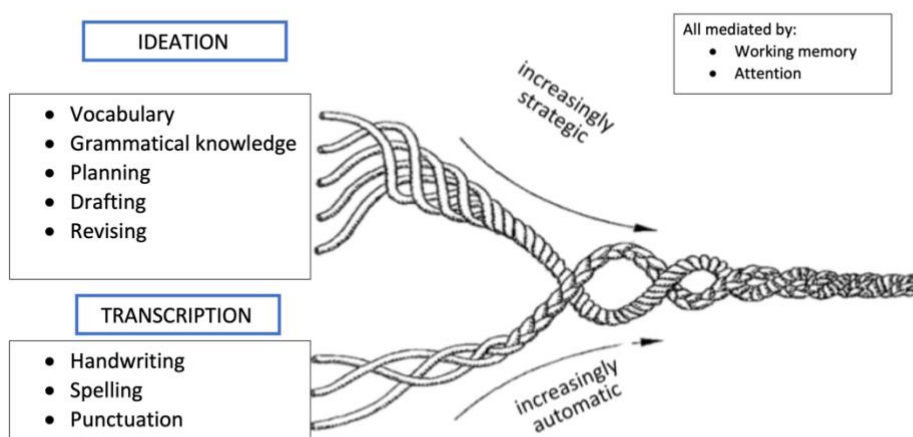
Transcription definition

“The process and physical acts of representing sounds to written symbols, including spelling and handwriting skills” (McCutchen, 2000)

Ideation definition:

“The generation and organization of ideas” (Juel et al. 1986)

The Writing Rope



The Writing Rope with acknowledgement to Scarborough 2001

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT)

It would be very remiss of us indeed not to mention Cognitive Load Theory.

This is a principle first coined by Emeritus professor John Sweller of the University of New South Wales. It is one of the most highly cited educational psychology theories of all time.

Cognitive Load Theory helps educators become better at delivering high quality lessons across all subjects. At the basis of it is the idea that explicit instruction and worked examples help reduce the amount of pressure on working memory, so that students can understand and remember content better.

It is especially important to have a notion of CLT and how it relates to writing. Since writing is an activity that places great demands on working memory, a crucial goal for teaching and learning has to be automaticity in the transcription process. This allows working memory to be freed to then develop an increasingly strategic approach to text generation.

Dylan William describes CLT as 'the single most important thing for teachers to know'. Full conceptual understanding of this theory is best gained through independent study and is not the focus of this course, but it's highly recommended. The links in the online part of the course are there to help broaden and deepen this understanding.

Coming soon: Ollie Lovell, teacher and podcaster extraordinaire has just finished writing a brilliant summary of CLT called *Cognitive Load Theory in Action*. It's due for publication in September, but I've had a sneak preview of it and I can tell you it's a ripper! Look out for it through John Catt Publications.

Grammar And Syntax

The three broad categories.

When we communicate:

- We talk about things and what they do, are or have. They are:

- We describe those things. They are:

- We connect those things to other things. They are:

Fill in this diagram with the six main parts of speech

Universals		
Modifiers/describers		
Connectors		

Parts of Speech Summary

Nouns

Definition

Nouns name people, places, things, feelings or ideas.

Etymology

Latin *nomen* 'name'. This is why when you *nominate* someone, you say their *name*.

Verbs

Definition

Verbs express do/be/have.

Etymology

Latin *verb* 'word'.

Adjectives

Definition

Adjectives describe or modify nouns.

Etymology

Latin *ad*(towards)+*ject*(throw)+*ive* 'throwing towards (the subject or object)'.

Adverbs

Definition

Adverbs describe/modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs.

Etymology

Latin *ad* (towards) + *verb* (word) 'towards the word'.

Prepositions

Definition

Prepositions connect nouns to other parts of the sentence. They show where a noun is in space or time.

Etymology

Latin *pre* (before) + *pos* (put) 'putting before'.

Conjunctions

Definition

Conjunctions join words, phrases, clauses and sentences together.

Etymology

Latin *con* (with) + *unct* (to join) 'joining with'.

The Survival List

In this section we are going to look at efficient ways of storing words in long term memory, both for instant and effortless recognition and for accurate recall.

We first need to look at some definitions and processes, and we also need to look at inefficient ways of storing words.

Finally, there is a template for creating truly powerful word lists.

Sight words: myths and facts

"In education, the term sight word has at least three meanings. We will be using only one. A sight word is **a familiar written word that we recognize instantly, automatically, and effortlessly, without sounding it out or guessing**. It doesn't matter if the word is phonically regular or irregular. The point is that a word is immediately recognized. A sight word vocabulary (or simply sight vocabulary), refers to all of the words a student knows instantly and automatically. Phonemic awareness plays a central role in building a student's sight vocabulary. This may seem puzzling because most people assume that we store words based on visual memory. However...scientists have shown that this is not the case."

David Kilpatrick 2018

Words are not independent objects to be learned by sight like people's faces or the flags of the world's nations. They contain a limited set of parts that can be combined and recombined to form many and varied wholes.

Let's look at some common myths:

MYTH	FACT
Sight words are irregular words that cannot be sounded out.	The English writing system has complexity, and any high quality instructional program will contain a scope and sequence designed to teach that complexity systematically. Within a high quality system like this, no words are irregular.
Sight words are words that need to be learned as wholes and not a sum of their parts.	Learning whole words without attention to internal structure or morphological kinships is possible for some words, but certainly not <i>all</i> the words. A better system teaches structure.
Sight words are stored in visual memory.	Multiple experiments, including mixed case and font experiments have shown conclusively that permanent word storage is not an act of visual memory. Word recognition is in fact faster than recognition of visual objects. Research has also shown that children with excellent visual memories can still struggle with reading.

So how do we permanently store a word to make it into "**a familiar written word that we recognize instantly, automatically, and effortlessly, without sounding it out or guessing**"?

As Dr Linnea Ehri says:

“Any word becomes a sight word when its spelling (letters) is fully connected to its pronunciation (sounds) and meaning in memory.”

In other word: structure, phonology and meaning are the features worth *noticing* in words, not their general shape, not their decontextualized onset and rime, but their linguistic structures. If you get good at recognising these aspects of words, you get good at teaching them for permanent storage.

Orthographic Mapping

How do children become fluent readers and writers? They do so by building up a store of words they can recognize effortlessly, without sounding them out and without looking elsewhere for cues. In fact, once they have a word in their sight word vocabulary, they cannot suppress its sound and possible meanings when they come to that word again.

But how do words get to be that way in the first place? Think about the massive amount of words and word parts you recognise instantly. Did you consciously memorise every single word you ever encountered? Let's place it into perspective: the average literate adult can automatically recognise between 50,000 and 70,000 words and word parts. Did we do some kind of memorization trick 70,000 times? Did someone teach us every single one? No, that would be impossible.

What we did was use orthographic mapping and *self-teaching* to gain our permanent sight word vocabulary.

Linnea Ehri, a researcher at the University of California spent much of her time focusing on this process and coined the term *orthographic mapping*.

Let's break it down:

ortho = correct, straight + graph = that which is written
mapping = matching one representation to another

When learning to read, children look at the sequence of letters on the page, translate them into possible phonemes that they represent, and then blend those phonemes to form pronunciations of whole words.

So they map the symbols, to the sounds, to the words. The letter represents the sound which in conjunction with the other letters and sounds, represents the word. These sequences then become bonded, eventually resulting in effortless decoding, regardless of how complex the pattern is. So a word like *straight* can be memorised just as efficiently as *cat*, if the person has high orthographic mapping skills.

Ehri's key findings:

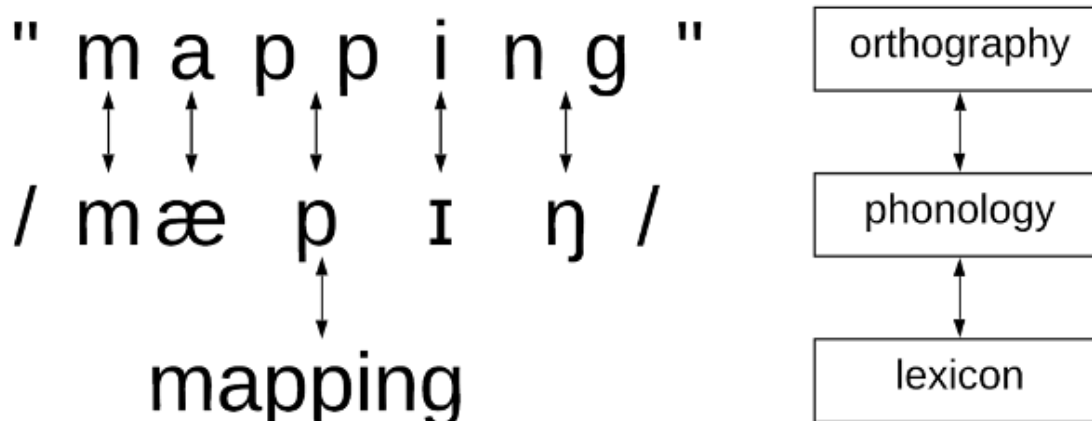
- Children who have good knowledge of grapheme-phoneme correspondences can retain words in their long term memory with more efficiency than those who don't.
- Underpinning this proficiency is phonemic awareness.
- The crucial part to all of this is attention to the *sequence* of letters in a word.
- This builds cumulatively and eventually results in seemingly effortless decoding of familiar, and more importantly, unfamiliar or irregular words. This is where David Share's Self-Teaching Hypothesis comes in (a story for another day).

Teaching that enhances orthographic mapping

- Develop the ability to copy efficiently. Copying words, sentences and paragraphs is a great way not only to practise fluency and spelling, using a scaffolded, stable framework, but if used purposefully, can also enhance everything else that constitutes writing.
- Drill new words, first by sounding each phoneme whilst following the sequence of the letters and then by saying the whole word.
- Please don't ask students to write the words over and over again. That just becomes a futile exercise. To map them efficiently, they have to attend to their pronunciation.
- Define and use each word in a sentence. If you don't provide definitions, the words might as well be in Swahili or Dothraki. NEVER divorce words from their definitions.
- Use the words in copied/dictated sentences and paragraphs.
- Have students compose sentences containing the words.
- Build up to hundreds of words and practise drilling them frequently.

Teaching that impairs orthographic mapping

- Encouraging students to guess words by looking away from unfamiliar words, e.g. prompting them to look at pictures
- Getting students to develop the habit of skipping unfamiliar words
- Getting students to only look at the first letter of a word
- Grouping words to be learned by sound.
- Asking students not to point to words as they read.
- Sending home lists of words to be somehow 'memorised'
- In the initial stages: providing reading material that doesn't match the sequence of grapheme-phoneme correspondences being introduced. How do they get exposure to what you've taught if the practice material contains other patterns?



Orthographic Mapping diagram

Word Lists in Depth

At the University of Illinois in 1961, a psychologist called Edward Dolch compiled a list of 220 of what he thought were the most common ‘tool/service words’, that is, words used across all written language regardless of genre.

His theory was, that if every child learned to read them effortlessly, they would be guaranteed academic success.

It’s a nice theory. But it’s been horribly misused, as has his list. The same thing has happened to the Fry Word List, a more modern list of 1,000 words in common usage.

Due to the popularity of a method of reading instruction called “Whole Word” or “Look-Say”, teachers have been teaching these words are wholes.

It’s a tempting shortcut to do this, as children actually *can* learn a bunch of words this way and some of them, having won the brain-architecture lottery, can even intuit the written code from this.

But does the method promote orthographic mapping? The answer is a resounding no.

Also, the use of these lists is about as far away from systematic teaching as you can get.

For instance, in the Dolch List, the word *big* (a simple 1:1 CVC pattern) is right there with *away* (a two-syllable word containing a digraph) and *said* (an unusual pronunciation of the digraph , which only really occurs in this word and in some accents in the word again, but which follows the grammatical/etymological pattern of *lay* and *pay*).

The amount of times I see children being given homework requiring them to learn this mishmash of random patterns astonishes me. This is whole word learning and not viable for many children.

The other thing about that mishmash, is that if teachers take the time to teach even the simple code via a high quality phonics program, a huge percentage of students’ time and energy can be saved by focusing on the less regular words and on the enormous, awe-inspiring task of learning to write.

The picture below shows the Dolch List, separated into basic decodable/encodable words (red words) and words with a deeper orthographic structure (black words):

Dolch 220 Basic Word (listed by frequency)

Words 1-25	Words 26-50	Words 51-75	Words 76-100	Words 101-125	Words 126-150	Words 151-175	Words 176-200	Words 200-220
the	look	get	ride	away	again	black	warm	wash
to	is	them	into	old	play	white	ate	show
and	her	like	just	by	who	ten	full	hot
he	there	one	blue	their	been	does	those	because
a	some	this	red	here	may	bring	done	far
I	out	my	from	saw	stop	goes	use	live
you	as	would	good	call	off	write	fast	draw
it	be	me	any	after	never	always	say	clean
of	have	will	about	well	seven	drink	light	grow
in	go	yes	around	think	eight	once	pick	best
was	am	big	want	ran	cold	soon	hurt	upon
said	am	went	don't	let	today	made	pull	these
his	then	are	how	help	fly	run	cut	sing
that	little	come	know	make	myself	gave	kind	together
she	down	if	right	going	round	open	both	please
for	do	now	put	sleep	tell	has	sit	thank
on	came	long	too	brown	much	find	which	wish
they	could	no	got	yellow	keep	only	fall	many
but	when	came	take	five	give	us	carry	shall
had	did	ask	where	six	work	three	small	laugh
at	what	very	every	walk	first	our	under	
him	so	an	pretty	two	try	better	read	
with	see	over	jump	or	new	hold	why	
up	not	your	green	before	must	buy	own	
all	were	its	four	eat	start	funny	found	

Pressley, M. (2005). *Dolch professional development guide*. Columbus, OH: SRA.

Code-based instruction would deal with all the red words, leaving time to focus on mapping the trickier black ones.

The Survival List

Definition: The Survival List is intended to be a personalized, growing list of words students need to learn as a priority in order to ensure two things:

1. Fluent, automatic, age-appropriate writing
2. The development of an efficient orthographic mapping system




As a solution, I have extracted words that don't have a simple code structure and have placed them in families containing similar patterns. I use a simple marking system that I teach to my students so that they become aware of the words' structure and they practise the words in various ways.






When teaching irregular words for maximum orthographic mapping, ask three simple questions in this order:

1. Does the word have a pattern that can be found in other words?
2. Does the word belong in a close family?
3. Once phonology, morphology and etymology are studied, is there a quick trick that might be beneficial for memory?

The Survival List Template

Below is a list of some words put into families and marked. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list of words, but a template for further study. The marking and families can be used in the 4-Step Process which follows.

	Word	Pattern	Family	Marking/mnemonic
1.	was	The W-Effect: when <w> precedes <a>, the <a> often makes an /o/ sound (see illustration)	wash, wand, want, wander, wasp	An arrow pointing from the <w> to the double underlined <a>. 
2.	to	Belongs to a small family where the letter <o> makes an /oo/ sound	do, who, lose, shoe, move, prove, canoe	Double underline. <u>to</u>
3.	there	<ere> making an 'air' sound, but also put into the same family as 'here'. These words contain the same pattern and are connected in meaning.	here, where	Underline the letters <h-e-r-e> in all three words. <u>here</u> <u>where</u> <u>there</u>
4.	said	<ay> to <aid> in the past tense	lay, pay	Double underline unusual sound of <a-i>. lay → laid pay → paid say → said
5.	once	Builds up from the spelling of <i>one</i> , with the insertion of <c>, like the <c> in <i>twice</i> .	one, twice	A cross under Final Silent <e> with an arrow to show it making <c> say its second sound, /s/. Say letter names for spelling. 
6.	they	<ey> making an /ay/ sound	grey (non-US), obey, prey, convey, survey	Double underline to show <ey> making an uncommon sound. <u>they</u>
7.	have	Final Silent E stopping the word from ending with an Illegal Letter	give, live, serve, five etc.	A cross under Final Silent <e> with an arrow to show that it is stopping the <v> from being at the end of the word. 

8.	love	The letter <o> making an /u/ sound	above, some, come, money, monkey, honey, other, mother	Double underline to show <o> is making an uncommon sound, cross under Final Silent <e> with an arrow to show that it is stopping the <v> from being at the end of the word. 
9.	our	This is one of the supremely sticky spelling words. I have had to develop a technique of building up a memory of this word based on the word <i>you</i> , which is quickly learned.	<i>you</i> becomes <i>your</i> becomes <i>our</i>	When saying for spelling, I get students to say the letter names. Trying to link it with sounds, especially in Australian and English accents is next to useless. <O-u-r>
10.	eye	Another supremely sticky word that doesn't bear sounding out.	A rare instance of a lone existence. Just draw this picture and get students to practise saying the letter names.	
11.	friend	That strange <i> in the middle.		A cross under the silent <i>. "If you come round to my house I'll <i>fry</i> the <i>end</i> of the roast for you because you're my <i>friend!</i> ". For spelling: fri...end. 
12.	people	Silent <o> in the middle.	leopard	A cross under the silent <o> "When people see a leopard, they say 'o!'". 
13.	walk	Silent <l> and unusual sound of <a>	talk, chalk, stalk	Double underline for <a> and a cross underneath the silent <l>. 

14.	any	<a> making an /e/ sound	many	Double underline the unusual <a> sound: "Annie Needs You!" any
15.	buy	Silent <u>	build	Cross under the silent <u>. "Would u rather build or buy your dream home?" buy x
16.	write	Silent <w>	wrong, wrist, wrap, wreck	Cross under the silent w, arrow to show Final Silent E making the <i> say its name. write x
17.	could	Unusual vowel sound, silent <l>	would, should	"Oh u lucky ducky". Nessy does a YouTube video on this that will drive you insane but your students won't forget it.
18.	does	Unusual vowel sound, -es third person singular suffix.	goes	go → goes do → does
19.	library	Collapsing syllable		"There's a bra in the library!" li-bra-ry
20.	too	Has two homophones (<i>two</i> and <i>to</i>)	Rather than teach this alongside the other two, I separate them out and teach this one to mastery first.	There are <i>too</i> many <o>s in this word!

The 4-Step Process

So we've established that orthographic mapping, the *process* of storing words in long-term memory happens best if words are driven via the phonological route. Now what? How *do* we make that happen for the myriad words out there?

By taking four steps.

TARGET WORD: DIAGONAL

1. Define the target word in child-friendly language.

You don't have to recite the Oxford English Dictionary. You also shouldn't canvas the audience with questions like, "Does anybody know what *diagonal* means?"

This type of questioning can and does lead to wrong answers, which quite possibly could be the ones your students are paying attention to at the time. Introduce new information by introducing new information, not a bunch of dodgy theories and then the new information. That's Direct Instruction 101. It also allows slow processors to not always get beaten by fast processors.

Here is a suggested dialogue:

TEACHER "Repeat after me: Diagonal is an adjective. It describes a straight line that goes up or down, and across."

STUDENTS "Diagonal is an adjective. It describes a straight line that goes up or down, and across."

TEACHER "What part of speech is the word *diagonal*?"

STUDENTS "An adjective."

TEACHER "What kind of line does it describe?"

STUDENTS "A straight line."

TEACHER "Does the line go one way or two ways?"

STUDENTS "Two ways."

TEACHER "Which ways?"

STUDENTS "Up or down and across."

And so on.

2. Inspect the structure.

Break the word into its base and any affixes.

Diagonal is composed of three parts: the base -gon-, the prefix dia- and the suffix -al.

-gon- means “angle/corner”

dia- means “through”

-al is a derivational suffix used to form adjectives

This word describes a line that goes from one corner to another.

3. Who is in its family?

What other words have dia- or -gon- in them? Notice how I’m not interested in words containing -al. Can you figure out why?

dia- family:

diagram

diorama

diagnosis

dialogue

-gon- family:

polygon

hexagon

pentagon

4. Write and say two ways, first for spelling, then for reading.

Once 1-3 are explored, it’s time to write the word, saying each part carefully, so that orthographic mapping is maximised. They write the word, mark any parts they need to pay attention to and *revisit* these words often by drilling them two ways: first for spelling (sound it out), then for reading (say the whole word).

As a starting point, I choose words that don’t have a simple code structure and either place them in families containing similar patterns or use mnemonics. I teach a plain marking system to highlight the structure of the words.

The marking system goes like this:

- Underline letters that go together but represent one sound, e.g. <th>, <aw>, <igh>:
path, saw, night
- Put a cross underneath silent letters, e.g.

house, crumb, autumn

- Indicate with a superscript arrow any letters having an effect on letters around it, e.g.

wash, gate

The Survival List expands as our lessons progress. Students practise the words on the list two ways: first for spelling, then for reading. For spelling, they sound out the letters all the way to the end, pronouncing digraphs and silent letters as they go. For reading, they say the whole word. Take *night* for example:

FOR SPELLING: /n/-/aɪ/-/t/

FOR READING: *night*

4-Step Process Templates

The following worksheets are a simple guide to operating the 4-Step Process. In the early years, each box has a picture representing a different part of the process, i.e. definition, what parts the word contains, who is in its family and a space for practising the word(s). As the children get older, the picture is replaced with a word.

These can be pre-printed and then stuck into workbooks. It's also a good idea for the teacher to make their own worksheet for each word and keep them on hand for later years.

4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET FOUNDATION-1









4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET YEAR 1









4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET YEAR 2









4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET YEAR 3



meaning



built







family



practice

4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET YEAR 4

 <p>meaning</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	 <p>built</p> <hr/>
 <p>family</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	 <p>practice</p>

4-STEP PROCESS WORKSHEET YEAR 5-6

<p>meaning</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>built</p> <hr/>
<p>family</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>practice</p>

What About Writing?

After all, that's why you came to this course in the first place. What does all of the above have to do with writing?

My view is that if you take care of the building blocks of words, if you understand the process of working and long-term memory, and you add that to some knowledge about the structure of written sentences, you are well on your way to being a superlative writing teacher.

This section, therefore is where you put it all together.

The Multiplier Effect

Children whose literacy is developing typically, form habits that help them continue to progress and become increasingly proficient. They scribble, write, take notes and copy text in many different contexts. For instance, how often have you seen children drawing pictures and putting words into the mouths of their characters? Have you ever received notes from children? These are all habits that typically developing children have...

Habitual writing has a 'multiplier effect' on children's skills. The act of writing or copying is something they do with frequency and those rich in those habits get richer, while the poor get poorer.

There are distinct Matthew Effects in writing, as there are in reading.

Children who struggle with literacy form habits to avoid practice or miss out on opportunities to form habits that help them progress. This happens because they are stuck at the lower levels of literacy acquisition (i.e. phonemic awareness and phonics). The act of writing or copying is something they avoid or do infrequently.

The 21 Day Writing Challenge

To assist students to develop the habit of writing, I have broken their daily writing exercises into three parts. It is called the 21 Day Writing Challenge and though it is used mainly for children who need help to catch up at school, it can easily be adapted for a Tier One teaching cycle.

This challenge is a way of allowing the students to access the multiplier effect that habitual writing gives. It is not intended to take the place of formal, expert intervention, but instead, is designed as a scaffolded booster to help form the habit of writing.

The online course has a pdf guide to the 21 Day Writing Challenge. I often give a copy of this out to parents so that they can do the challenge as homework.

Muscle Memory

I wanted to mention an interesting phenomenon known as muscle memory. Here's the definition from the Oxford English Dictionary:

“The ability to reproduce a particular movement without conscious thought, acquired as a result of **frequent repetition** of that movement.” (emphasis added)

Just to give you an idea of how strong a muscle memory can be, I recently read this on Twitter:

I have some weird muscle memory that makes me type prodcut not product. Particularly annoying as my job title is Head of Prodcut...

It's not simply a typo, it's an almost unbreakable pattern that your fingers have learned on a keyboard

It's a familiar scenario for anyone who's sent *regrads* or tried to extend their social *newtork*. I myself work in literacy and *language*.

Muscle memory is very strong.

So grip, posture and starting point for letter formation is a combination of motor, linguistic and visual sequences which get set in concrete very very fast. From the day a child picks up a writing tool, that brain is solidifying repetition after repetition until automaticity is achieved.

My point is, make that grip, posture and formation the highest quality you can make it, because three years on, after countless repetitions, whatever sequence of movements was practiced is pretty much a permanent sequence.

If you are trying to change the way a child holds a pen and forms letters, the older they get, the more you have to get their commitment to changing. It can be done, but why not advocate strongly for excellent, corrective, vigilant instruction in the first place?

Quality and Quantity

“I had to write two pages at school today, but I only got half a page done.” I hear this from my students constantly. Sometimes they’re kept in during their break times to “get more done”.

If anyone needs their downtime, it’s my students. But something else is going on too. Very often, children’s written output is measured on the quantity of writing they do without much heed to the quality.

It’s the guiding philosophy behind the popular “cold write” exercises that so many children are regularly asked to do. In a cold write, student scaffolding is taken away and in a given time period, students have to just do free-form, unguided writing on a random, never-discussed-before topic. It is usually intended as a kind of formative assessment, but is a source of shame and dread for many students (unbeknownst to many teachers), and is a colossal waste of time and energy.

If you have made the effort, as a school system, to implement a consistent and high quality literacy instruction curriculum in the foundation years, and if your students are proficient at the word-level, why take away that high quality instruction in the later years?

There is nothing wrong with providing frameworks and templates all the way through primary and high school. Let’s look at a taxonomy of frameworks. Each one has an example on the online module:

1. Simple sentences

Think of a subject. Think of a verb. Combine. Repeat. Add colour.

2. Simple sentences with modifiers

Think of a subject. Think of a verb. Combine. Repeat. Add colour.

3. Compound sentences

Let’s play the FANBOYS Game.

4. Sentence types

We can use any of the above sentences and express them four ways: as statements, as questions, as imperatives and as exclamations.

5. Complex sentences

Let’s get some subordination happening!

6. Paragraph planning

This is where your students begin to combine simple, compound and complex sentences with sentence types. Sentence types also lead into genre planning.

7. Genre planning (hint: narratives are harder than anything else)

The one thing I need to say about genres for writing, is that narratives are *hard*. And if you don’t particularly want to tell a story, narratives are boring and awful. Don’t shoot the messenger. No one cares if you can write narratives in the real world. Remember, writing is about thinking is about learning. Take your focus off narratives and “what we did in the holidays” recounts and put it on writing about the knowledge your students can and should gain throughout their academic careers.

If you *must* get children writing narratives, please do practise reported speech and its conventions:

- Indicate who is speaking.
- Line break if you can.
- Open and close inverted commas properly.
- Practise driving the narrative through speech.
- If you *have to* use dialogue, plan it properly.

8. Writing to learn

And finally: what writing is for. I don't write books to teach others about the stuff I'm thinking about. I write them to help clarify my knowledge of those subjects.

Saying that, it's important to write for your audience. It's important to be clear, to be brief, to not be ambiguous (except as a literary device, and that's best left to authors of fiction), to be orderly. Frameworks will help with this.

As a stunning example writing to learn, I would like to introduce you to a history book called "Europe in the Modern World" by Edward Berenson, with Catherine Johnson and Katharine Beals.

From their preface:

"The discipline of history cannot be separated from the written word [and neither should any other discipline]. And writing a paper for a history class is vastly less difficult when you are fluent in the fundamentals. That is the rationale for embedding Writing History exercises in this book. The exercises provided here and on our website will give you enough practice to write smooth and cohesive prose and to do so fluently. At the same time, because all of the exercises are drawn from sentences and paragraphs in the text, they reinforce your knowledge of the material.

In the end-of-chapter Writing History sections we begin at the sentence level and build from there. Good writing entails, first, writing sentences, and second, connecting those sentences into larger units of thought: into paragraphs and papers whose arguments in analysis would be impossible to create without written language.

After introducing the paper, we move on to the sophisticated elements that great writers have always used but that are rarely, if ever, explicitly taught. Here we show how the structure of the sentence allows writers to develop, and especially to refine, their thoughts and style. We conclude with practice in avoiding the common stylistic mistakes that can obscure the meaning of texts."

If only all textbooks were like this.

Phrases, Clauses and Sentences

Having covered phonemes and graphemes, syllables and morphemes, it's now time to jump into the world of phrases, clauses and sentences: the building blocks of all writing.

Let's begin with sentences. When we looked at grammar and parts of speech, we saw that communication can take place if two bare minimum elements were present: the universals known as nouns and verbs.

Nouns function as the subject of a sentence. The be/do/have is expressed by the verb. Once this partnership is established, we have a sentence.

As you probably know, there are sentence types. They are categorised according to the way the subjects and verbs interact with one another. Let's start simple.

Simple sentence: 1 subject, 1 verb

Worked example: The dog was sleeping.

Subject: dog

Verb: was sleeping

Simple sentence but a bit more jazzy: Still 1 subject, still 1 verb

Worked example: The beautiful, quiet dog was sleeping soundly in his comfortable basket yesterday.

Subject: dog

Verb: was sleeping

If you want to make your sentences less simple and add even more sophistication, you can bring in clauses. These are subject/verb constructions within sentences, and can be dependent or independent. When you use dependent clauses, you have complex sentences.

Complex sentence: 1 independent clause + 1 dependent clause

The cat was sleeping because the dog had been chasing her.

Subject in the independent clause: the cat

Subject in the dependent clause: the dog

Verb in the independent clause: was sleeping

Verb in the dependent clause: had been chasing

Subordinating conjunction: because

You can even stick two independent clauses together to get a compound sentence. All you have to do is get two subject/verb combinations and use a coordinating conjunction, like *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so* (FANBOYS).

Compound sentence: 1 independent clause + comma + 1 independent clause

Worked example: The cat was sleeping, but the dog had other plans.

Independent clause 1: The cat was sleeping

Independent clause 2: The dog had other plans

You could spend days on this. In fact, if you like it, I recommend you do, with William Van Cleave.

For writing, however, going beyond simple sentences by playing with conjunctions is a fabulous exercise.

Let's do a lesson with that cat and that dog:

Say the two independent clauses above, but change the conjunction. How does that change the meaning of the clauses (not all of the conjunctions fit)?

The cat was sleeping for the dog had other plans.

The cat was sleeping and the dog had other plans.

The cat was sleeping or the dog had other plans.

The cat was sleeping yet the dog had other plans.

The cat was sleeping so the dog had other plans.

And phrases? They're great to know about too. They're simply a collection of words within a larger construction (sentence or clause) that don't contain both a subject and a verb.

A phrase can be one word, such as 'they' in 'They fed the animals in the forest', where 'they' is the subject of the sentence, or a group of words such as 'the animals in the forest', which is the object of the verb. This phrase includes the smaller phrases 'in the forest' and 'the forest'.

Phrase structure is fun, but as to its use in enhancing writing, it's not necessary to get too bogged down with them.

Dysgraphia

If you cast your mind back to the Simple View of Writing, you will remember that there are two critical components to fluent writing:

1. Transcription (the mechanics and conventions of writing)
2. Ideation (text generation)

We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes, forming letters on a page is a severe weakness for some children. In extreme cases, letter formation and organizing/expressing written information caused by neurological impairment. This impairment is known as *written expression disorder* or *dysgraphia*.

In simple terms, dysgraphia is difficulty with *both* processes in the Simple View of Writing.

A quick checklist if dysgraphia is suspected:

On a scale of never-rarely-sometimes-frequently-always, how often does the child:

- Have messy handwriting?
- Reverse numbers? (e.g., 67 for 76)
- Write letters backwards?
- Have difficulty writing numbers legibly and distinctively from letters?
- Mix up lowercase and uppercase letters?
- Have trouble correctly spacing letters in words and/or between words?
- Have difficulty writing on a line and within margins?
- Have trouble ending sentences with punctuation?
- Have difficulty keeping columns straight when setting up a maths problem?
- Have difficulty writing text from left to right?
- Resist writing tasks?
- Have difficulty getting thoughts down on paper?
- Have difficulty copying text?
- Have trouble completing writing tasks independently?
- Make spelling errors in homework assignments?

If the answer to these questions is in the majority frequently/always category, it is a good idea to contact a psychological professional who can diagnose dysgraphia.

Then what happens?

In confirmed dysgraphia cases, it is important to implement reasonable accommodations as soon as possible. Some reasonable accommodations are:

- Allowing more time for written work.
- Allowing students to begin projects and assignments early.
- Allow and encourage the development of keyboarding skills.
- Provide excellent writing templates.
- Look into providing a scribe for high-stakes assessments wherever possible.

- Allow dictation software wherever possible.
- Check your marking paradigm for neatness or spelling criteria.

A note on pen licences

Arbitrary 'pen licence' systems that discriminate against children with poor letter formation, regardless of cause, are frowned upon by this author and those of us in the field who work with struggling children.

It is a school's responsibility to establish good handwriting techniques from the very start, and it is also their responsibility to monitor and provide understanding and appropriate support for children who struggle with this. Pen licences occupy the same reprehensible territory as discouraging left-handedness, corporal punishment and reprimanding people who stutter.