

Setting up for writing for pleasure



Writing for pleasure every day

Our students need the practice of writing freely every day. If truth be told, we should all write every day – for the sheer joy of putting our observations, thoughts, recollections, daily doings, our hopes and dreams and everything else into words. Writing for pleasure.

That is, writing for our own purposes, for the pleasure of exploring what words can do on the page, of responding to a stimulus that has resonance for the writer. Writing for purposes other than to be measured against a checklist of observable behaviours.

Words. Words. I play with words, hoping that some combination, even a chance combination, will say what I want.

Doris Lessing *The Golden Notebook* 1962

The following are some ideas to consider to encourage writing in the classroom, every day.

Note: When you decide to introduce something new in terms of classroom arrangement, or timetable expectation, or classroom processes, the beginning of a new term is ideal. It establishes that things are going to be done differently, with the challenge of new, achievable explorations. It stimulates the interest of the students; they are not coming back to what they have been doing for 10 weeks (or 20, or 30 ...), so there is opportunity for a new beginning.

Observing the world around us

You can start with encouraging students to observe what is around them, and to make notes about what they see. Kath Cartwright calls this Noticing and wondering, a key component of Mathematics (see her resources at <https://primarylearning.com.au/resources/>). Observation skills form an essential component of the new [Science and Technology syllabus K-6](#).



Notebooks

- Small, spiral-bound notebooks are able to go everywhere with the students at school. Buy a notebook for every child in your class at the beginning of the term. Packs of these can be sourced cheaply from \$2 and office supplies shops. This becomes the ‘observations and ideas’ book, the ‘writing every day’ book. You have one too. Value it for, and with, your students. You can set a series of small tasks to get the students involved in recording their observations.
 - ✦ Autumn is the perfect time to notice changes in the playground – the temperature, colour changes in deciduous tree leaves, falling leaves, summer flowers dying and autumn ones starting, the clothes people are wearing, and the games being played, even what is on offer at the canteen. Collect leaves to write on.
 - ✦ Find examples of written text/numbers/plane shapes on the ground in the playground. Determine why they are there/why they are the colour they are/whether we really need them
 - ✦ Identify any teachers who are wearing glasses/a hat/joggers/a wristwatch/a step monitoring device. Record some questions you might ask them about this item
 - ✦ Locate and record any safety signs; find a direction sign and follow it; record what you see. Make up a story about a person following signs. Pages from Shaun Tan’s *‘Arrival’* and some Dr Seuss books can inform this idea.
 - ✦ Find spheres. Record location. Think of a different shape that could do the same job
 - ✦ Lie on your back and look up at a tree in the playground; write words that you think of. Use as the basis for writing a story about things being caught in the tree (see *‘Stuck’* by Oliver Jeffers)
 - ✦ Sit on a seat with your eyes closed for a minute. Use a timer or partner to count. Listen. Record sounds. Identify sounds that are familiar and unfamiliar. What do you notice?

Children share and use these for ideas related to both maths and science and technology, for building detail in stories, and for building their observation skills.

Try it for a term – you will generate your own ideas and observations to use in classroom writing.

In-class opportunities to write

- ‘Drop everything and write’. This process takes a similar form to ‘Drop Everything and Read’ - DEAR. It means an uninterrupted, silent focus on writing for up to about 10 minutes. Like DEAR, it can be hijacked by lack of purpose, lack of valuing, and lack of commitment. Teach your students how to do it. For success, have DEAW at the same time every day. Provide a stimulus if you wish – image, a line of poetry, an incident; link directly to learning in other subjects; link to observations; write with your students; provide opportunity to share the ‘best bits’.
- A version of this is known variously is ‘Quickwrite’, or ‘Write right now’. The original idea is to write at the same time every day, and to write quickly for 3-5 minutes only. It is private.
- I was recently introduced to the website [Pobble](#) - ‘One picture. One teaching resource. Every day.’ The Stage 3 teachers I spoke with use this stimulus to start the day. They are excited about how much the students enjoy ‘that sort of writing’. With this resource, diversity is guaranteed, without pressure on the teacher’s imagination. Try it and let me know how you go.

How can I know what I think until I see what I say?

Attributed to E.M. Forster, in W.H.Auden, 1962



Places and spaces

- Create places and spaces for writing. It is possible to set up a 'writing centre' in every classroom. This can be a chair and desk equipped with some basic necessities for writing, including
 - ✦ paper, (various types, sizes, colours and textures, both lined and unlined, leaves big enough to write on – more ideas below),
 - ✦ rulers and a date stamp
 - ✦ writing implements (various, including graphite pencils of different hardness, coloured pencils, pens of different colours and inks, leaves and sticks – more ideas below)
 - ✦ envelopes and sticky notes
 - ✦ folders and plastic sleeves
 - ✦ a variety of [graphic organisers](#) that you have taught students to use for specific purposes, including tables and columns and shopping lists
 - ✦ printed tables for developing plans
 - ✦ magnifying glasses.
- Have resources on hand for students to use – in the early years students need access to:
 - ✦ individual alphabet and sound charts
 - ✦ a list of the names of the children in the class (with pictures early in the year) plus your name on a card
 - ✦ days of the week, months, seasons
 - ✦ number charts – all accessible.
- Use the home languages of the children in your room – words the children want to use, with pictures.
- Construct a writing 'office' for each student that can be used at their table, for privacy. You will need two manila folders. One way to do it is [here](#).
- Writing paper – use textured paper; write stories over dried paintings; use paper streamers to write windy day poems and tie them to a tree outside (tidy up after yourselves); maps; newspaper pages; telephone book pages have marvellous texture if you can get hold of them; autumn leaves, fallen bark and sticks.
- Writing implements - write with candle wax and put a wash over it; use lemon juice to create 'secret writing'; write rainy day poems on newsprint with water soluble pens and leave them in light rain for several seconds (or spray with water); introduce pens with nibs; use found objects like feathers, twigs, leaves, grasses etc. and use with writing ink and watercolours.

Writing for pleasure

Reading and responding to written texts for pleasure appears in the [NSW English syllabus K-10](#) from Early Stage 1. However writing for pleasure is not noted until Stages 4 and 5, Outcomes EN4-1A and EN5-1A. Does this mean we cannot have our students experience the pleasure of creating something new in their writing? I don't think so.

There is a message here for us as writers too. If the only modelled writing students see is work-related, marked and annotated and only shows 'mistakes', it will certainly become tedious. If the only writing we do is work-related, it can become tedious too.

Play with writing and learn to enjoy it again yourself.

Writing can be cathartic. Writing can be an escape. Writing can be an exploration. Writing can be so many things. Why limit yourself to the drudgery of only writing because you have to, when you can also write simply because you love to write?

Katz 2009

Resources and References

Pobble: 'One picture. One teaching resource. Every day.' at <http://www.pobble365.com/> accessed 07/03/2019

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Katz, Christina *Reasons to Write: Write for Pleasure* in Writers on the Rise, Wordpress, January 19 2009 at <https://writersontherise.wordpress.com/2009/01/18/reasons-to-write-writing-for-pleasure/> accessed 07/03/2019

Tan, Shaun (2007) *The Arrival* Arthur A. Levine Books, Scholastic: NY