



NSW Department of Education

# Writing guide

Years 3 to 10

A guide to support conversations about evidence-based writing instruction in primary and secondary contexts

Literacy and numeracy  
2024



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This document is designed for online use. For further information on professional learning, resources and assessments included in this guide please contact [Literacy.Numeracy@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:Literacy.Numeracy@det.nsw.edu.au).

# Purpose of the resource

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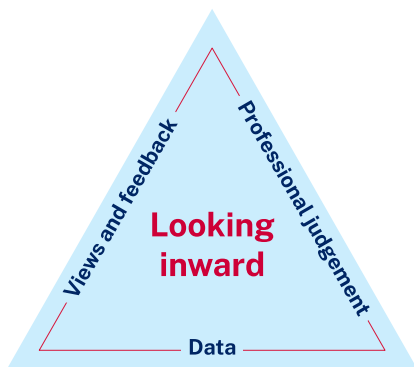
The purpose of this guide is to support Directors, Educational Leadership, principals, school leadership teams and teachers to have informed conversations about evidence-based writing instruction in all curriculum areas and contexts.

This guide can:

- assist with an analysis of current practices
- help to inform planning for school improvement in writing
- suggest ways to build capacity and understanding of effective writing with explicit classroom practices and professional learning resources.

## Situational analysis

This guide can be used as part of the situational analysis in the following ways:



**Looking inward** includes analysis of data such as evidence of staff knowledge and perceptions around writing, and evidence of students' current skills in writing.

The guide should be used in conjunction with a thorough analysis of internal and external measures such as:

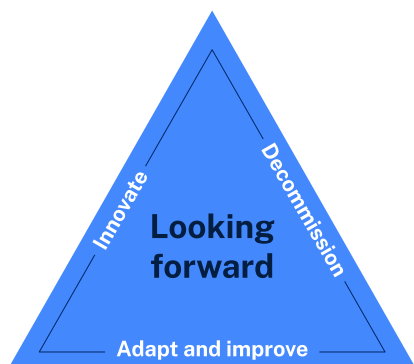
- school-based data
- [NAPLAN](#)
- [National Literacy Learning Progression](#)
- [EAL/D Learning Progression.](#)



**Looking outward** includes comparing the school's approach on the teaching of literacy to the research on effective writing instruction.

This guide:

- explains the components of effective writing
- describes evidence-based practices for writing instruction
- describes the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.



**Looking forward** includes making decisions in response to information gained in the **Looking inward** and **Looking outward** phases.

This guide makes suggestions for ways to adapt and improve writing instruction across Years 3-10.

# Writing instruction evidence base

Unlike speaking and listening, writing skills do not develop naturally. A student's writing development is influenced by their context, cognitive capabilities and resources, and motivation to write. Teachers need to create classroom environments that foster enthusiasm and opportunities for writing, high levels of effort, and high expectations. Reading and talking about rich texts provides motivation, inspiration and a model for student writing. Students must be explicitly taught the knowledge and skills they require to become effective writers.

While no singular model encompasses all the components and considerations required for skilled writing, multiple frameworks support teachers to understand the complexities of writing development.

The Simple View of Writing (Berninger et al., 2002) outlines how both foundational writing skills (transcription) and text generation (composition) are necessary for skilled written expression. Strength in one area cannot make up for weakness in the other. Writers need fluent transcription skills (handwriting, keyboarding and spelling). They also need to master the more complex compositional aspects of writing (ideas, words and sentences).

The Writing Rope (Sedita, 2019) supports a deeper understanding of skilled writing by organising the many skills, strategies and techniques into five overarching components. These include the compositional components of critical thinking, syntax, text structure and writing craft, and the transcription skills of spelling, handwriting and keyboarding.

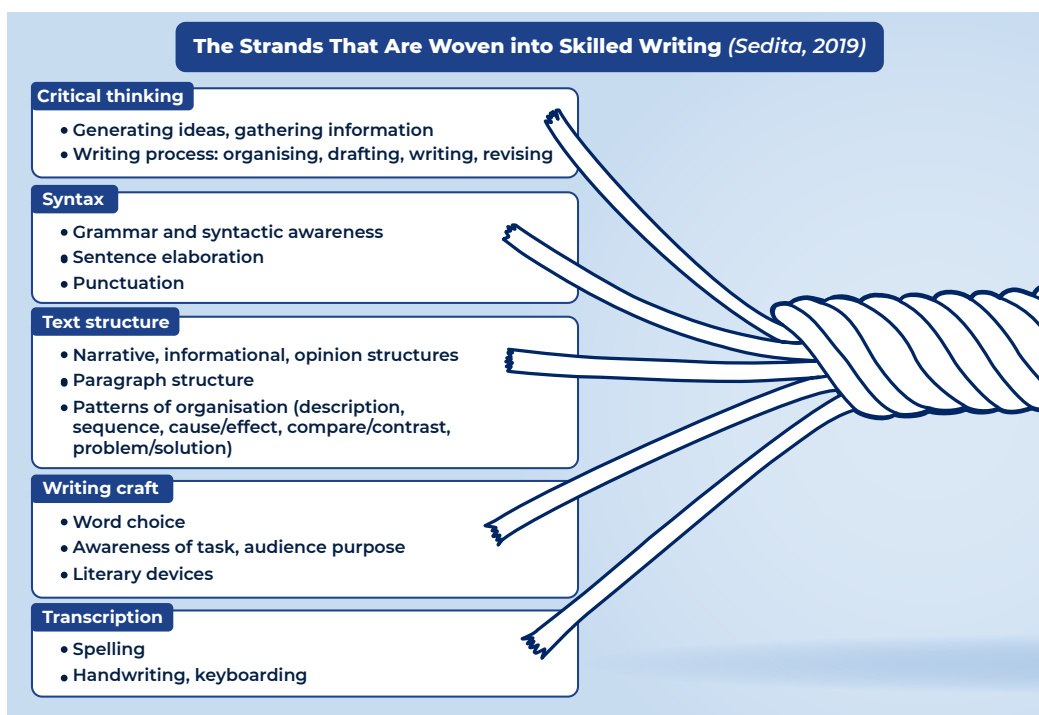


Figure 1. The writing rope adapted from J Sedita (2019)



The coordination of knowledge, skills and thought processes required for skilled writing brings with it a significant cognitive load. Writing requires students to employ executive functioning and self-regulatory processes and skills (for example, goal setting, reviewing). They must also use their working memory and long-term memory.

All teachers need a thorough understanding of how the complex cognitive processes of writing develop, and how the many components work together as students write increasingly complex texts skillfully, strategically and critically. This understanding of the science of writing should inform the practices used to explicitly teach writing in all curriculum areas, and the strategies used to assess students' writing behaviours. Writing is required for success in every subject area and so every teacher has a responsibility to develop the subject specific writing skills of their students.



# The writing process

The writing process shows the stages involved in composing texts. It is important to provide explicit instruction during all stages: planning, drafting, composing, re-reading and revising, editing and proofreading, and publishing. Guiding students to monitor their writing throughout the writing process encourages reflection on the purpose of the text and the intended audience.

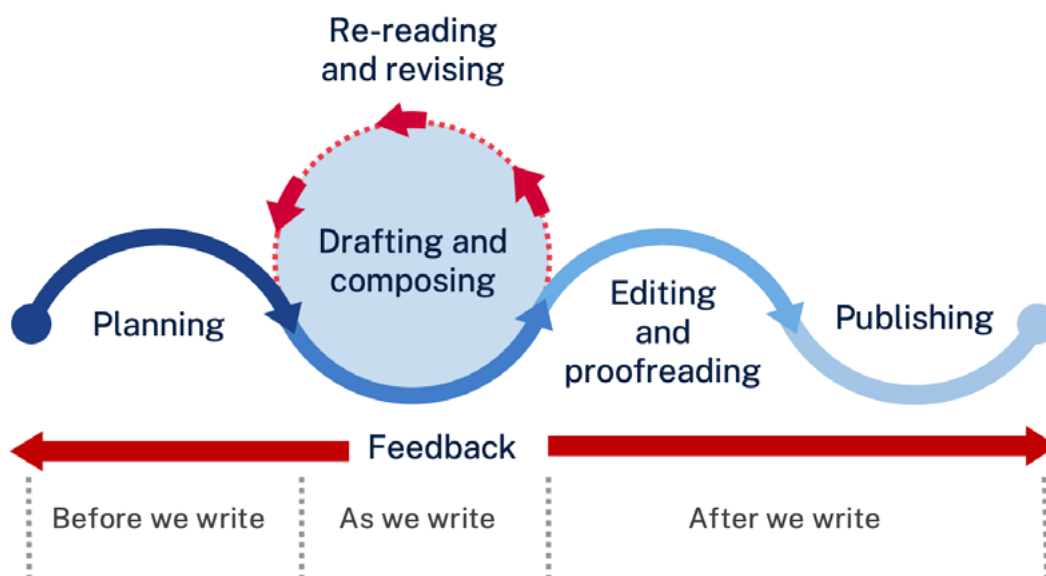


Figure 2. The writing process

- **Planning** involves generating and organising ideas and preparing for writing for a particular audience and purpose. Students should be supported with a range of opportunities to plan, such as research, drawing, discussion and using mind maps.
- **Drafting and composing** involves the writer recording their ideas and creating a draft text. The teacher models how planning can support drafting and composing.
- **Re-reading and revising** involves looking over the text as a whole and reworking the organisation and details. In this stage, students make changes to their writing at the word, sentence, paragraph and whole text levels, clarifying their message and enhancing their meaning.
- **Editing and proofreading** involves making changes to a text to ensure that it follows the conventions of written English, in particular spelling, punctuation and capitalisation.
- **Publishing** involves the writer presenting their work as a complete piece. Students should have regular opportunities to publish their writing, share writing with others and celebrate their achievements.

## The support cycle for teaching writing

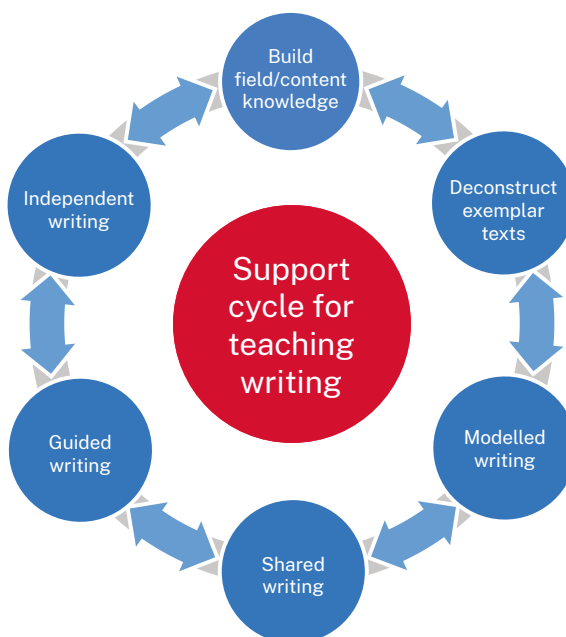


Figure 3. The support cycle for teaching writing adapted from Nicolazzo, M and Mackenzie, N (2018)

[The support cycle for teaching writing](#) helps teachers explicitly teach students what to do in each stage of the writing process -before they write, as they write and after they write. Apply this cycle when working at the letter, word, sentence, paragraph or whole text level. It is important to note that the cycle can move in both directions and a teacher would not address every element of the support cycle in a single lesson. Teachers should move between phases, guided by the lesson focus and levels of support that individual students may need. This cycle mirrors the gradual release of responsibility model (I do, we do, you do) (Fisher & Frey, 2013), as it slowly increases students' independence from teacher-led tasks to student-led tasks.

## Creating a supportive classroom environment for writing

Writing is one of the most difficult and demanding tasks we engage in, and learning to write well is even more challenging. A supportive classroom environment will encourage students to engage fully with writing instruction, apply their best efforts when writing, and support one another through positive interactions around writing tasks.

Highly effective classroom environments are ones where:

- teachers are enthusiastic about writing, and foster this enthusiasm in their students
- students are taught the metalanguage of writing so that a common language is shared across the classroom and they can attribute their success in writing to the knowledge, skills and processes they are being taught

- writing instruction is ‘high challenge, high support’ to encourage students to work towards goals to improve their writing
- writing tasks are thoughtful, authentic and purposeful
- support is provided to scaffold student success, encouraging self-motivation and regulation
- instruction is differentiated so that it is appropriate to the interests and needs of students
- students’ writing is celebrated and shared with others
- classroom routines promote frequent opportunities for positive interactions between students when writing across all curriculum areas
- students are taught to be reflective and evaluative of their own and others’ writing.

(Graham et al., 2018)

## Assessment of writing

Teachers observe and analyse student writing behaviours, processes and products to identify individual learning needs and plan for explicit writing instruction.

Teachers assess the aspects of writing they are focusing on at a point in time to inform differentiated instruction. They should monitor and provide feedback on student progress to support the development of student writing goals that are targeted, explicit and achievable.

Consistent teacher judgment in assessing students’ writing is crucial as it allows for accurate comparison of students’ writing over time, helping teachers identify growth and areas needing improvement.

Teachers should provide students with opportunities for self and peer assessment as it fosters a more active and engaged learning process. When students assess their own work, they develop critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the writing process. Additionally, peer assessment encourages collaboration, communication, and the sharing of constructive feedback among peers. This not only helps students improve their writing but also promotes a sense of responsibility and accountability for their own learning.

Some students require a diverse range of assessment approaches and appropriate adjustments to demonstrate their understanding. Assessing a student’s English language proficiency on the [EAL/D Learning Progression](#) and triangulating this information with other forms of assessment may also be needed for some learners.

The [National Literacy Learning Progression](#) supports teachers and school leadership teams to understand the development of a student’s writing skills. Teachers can set up and use Areas of focus in PLAN2 before, during and after writing instruction to monitor writing development, evaluate the impact of their instruction and demonstrate growth.

Advice on assessing each component of writing is included within each section of this guide.



# Leading to improve writing

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Principals and leadership teams have a pivotal role in driving writing improvement in schools. This guide supports conversations about writing improvement in the context of school strategic planning.

## Principal

### To drive improvement in writing, a principal:

- ensures all staff have a consistent understanding of evidence-based instruction and assessment of writing
- promotes writing improvement as the shared responsibility of all staff in all key learning areas
- leads a consistent whole school understanding of writing development using the syllabus and the [National Literacy Learning Progression](#)
- facilitates collaboration and collegial approaches to whole school writing improvement, including through professional learning and strategies, such as classroom walk-throughs, collaborative planning, co-teaching, and opportunities for assessment moderation to ensure consistent teacher judgement
- ensures strategies and tools used for the assessment of writing and the collection of student data are aligned to the evidence base
- ensures and supports a consistent approach to data analysis and student progress monitoring in order to measure impact and identify learning needs
- budgets for professional learning, the purchase of resources and intervention programs for students who need further support with writing
- recognises the cultural diversity of school communities and facilitates opportunities for staff to understand and respond to the literacy learning needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and EAL/D learners
- ensures literacy and language learning is properly supported and emphasised, recognising these are fundamental to student literacy development.

## Leadership team

### To drive improvement in writing, a leadership team:

- engages with ongoing research and evidence on the components of effective writing
- has a robust understanding of the components of writing and how they work together to achieve the ultimate goal of effective writing
- reviews current literacy practices, teacher understanding and beliefs about writing and resources; this could include an evaluation of existing literacy classroom practice and the roles of the literacy coordinator and teams
- develops a shared responsibility and consistent use of language when discussing writing across the school

- establishes a consistent approach to the explicit and systematic teaching of writing in all subject areas
- provides opportunities for differentiated professional learning to strengthen teacher expertise in the explicit teaching of writing
- develops a consistent school understanding of writing development using the syllabus and the [National Literacy Learning Progression](#)
- establishes systems and structures to:
  - ensure consistent, ongoing and evidence-based assessment of writing across the 3-10 context
  - use data to make informed decisions about targeted interventions and differentiated writing instruction
  - support collaborative strategies such as classroom observations, classroom walk-throughs and consistent teacher judgement through the analysis of work samples
  - collaboratively plan for the teaching of the components of writing through explicit practices such as the gradual release of responsibility model
  - provide in-class support for explicit teaching of writing including co-teaching, observation of best practice and opportunities for feedback, reflection and collaboration
  - engage in reflective and evaluative conversations with colleagues
  - support teachers to implement targeted interventions for students with identified writing concerns
  - ensure teachers are making adjustments and differentiating learning to cater for the needs of all learners including EAL/D learners, students with disability and additional learning and support needs, and high potential and gifted learners.

This guide outlines the evidence base underpinning each of the key components of writing, which can be used to inform evaluative discussions in all school contexts.

# Transcription skills

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Transcription skills (handwriting, keyboarding and spelling) are the basic skills needed to transcribe the words a writer wants to put into writing (Sedita, 2023). Teachers need to explicitly teach, model and provide opportunities for students to practise each aspect, both independently of and interdependently with composition skills.

Handwriting and keyboarding both involve the coordination of motor, perceptual, sensory and cognitive skills. Instruction should focus on posture, pencil grasp and correct letter formation to develop a technique that is efficient, automatic and legible. With practise, students should develop a legible, fluent, personal handwriting style. When developing keyboarding skills, students should also use correct posture and finger placement with the aim of developing touch typing.

Spelling instruction should provide students with the knowledge and skills to simultaneously coordinate the three interrelated word forms:

- phonology -the units of speech sounds in words (syllables, onset and rime, and individual phonemes)
- orthography -common letter patterns and rules
- morphology -the meaningful word parts and how they can connect.

Teachers should guide students to investigate and build words using the phonological, orthographic and morphological components of spelling to form spelling generalisations. This process is known as linguistic inquiry.

Students need to develop transcription skills to the point of automaticity so they can focus their cognitive attention on the higher order compositional aspects of writing.

## What do transcription skills look like in a 3-10 classroom?

### Students

- sit with correct posture to support and maintain writing and typing stamina for extended periods
- fluently write correctly formed letters, numerals, symbols and punctuation marks with consistent size and spacing between words
- develop and maintain a legible, fluent, personal handwriting style
- use pencil grasp and finger placement to type increasingly complex words, punctuation symbols, sentences and more complex texts
- demonstrate understanding and ability to coordinate the three interrelated word forms, (phonology, orthography, morphology) when spelling familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary
- use a range of digital applications to compose and edit texts
- monitor, evaluate and respond to feedback to refine their use of transcription skills
- actively reflect on and adjust goals to improve their writing.

### Teacher

- understands the importance of transcription skills as foundational to effective writing
- explicitly teaches transcription skills using the gradual release of responsibility model so that students view modelled instruction and participate in shared, guided, collaborative and independent practice of transcription skills
- explicitly teaches and uses the language of the three interrelated word forms, for example, phonological, orthographic, morphological, phoneme, grapheme, syllable, morpheme, root, prefix, and suffix
- provides regular opportunities for deliberate practice across all curriculum areas
- co-creates writing goals with students
- where appropriate, provides students with opportunities to choose mode of transcription to aid fluency of composition
- provides students with additional learning or language needs with alternative methods for transcription, for example, text-to-speech devices, speech-to-text devices, word-prediction software, symbol-making software
- uses formative and summative assessment information to inform differentiated instruction for all students
- supports the planning and implementation of intensive targeted teaching for students who need further instruction in transcription skills

- provides effective and timely feedback and supports students to adjust their writing goals
- collaborates with literacy experts to refine practices in using evidence-based strategies, to analyse data, and to plan for student improvement.

## Assessment of transcription skills

The National Literacy Learning Progression supports teachers to understand the typical developmental pathways for spelling, handwriting and keyboarding and this understanding should be applied to the observation and assessment of transcription skills as students write or type.

Handwriting can be assessed in terms of efficiency, legibility and fluency. These components are best assessed outside of text composition to ensure they are not impacted by the more complex demands of crafting ideas.

Teachers should pay attention to students’:

- pencil grasp and control
- posture
- letter formation
- size and spacing of letters and words
- position and organisation of words on the page
- fluency and automaticity

Assessment of keyboarding should involve direct observation of students as they type as well as the analysis of student work samples. This will provide information about the skills and processes they use, including:

- fine motor skills
- accuracy
- posture
- technique (for example, correct finger placement)
- typing speed and fluency
- engagement and focus
- ability to navigate word processing programs
- touch typing skills

Teachers should provide opportunities for feedback and goal setting to support students to improve aspects of handwriting and keyboarding that require specific focus.

The Spelling diagnostic assessment can be used as both a formative and summative assessment. It assists teachers to establish where individual students are in their spelling development so that teaching can be differentiated, and student learning progress can be monitored over time.



The grouping of assessment items into the different forms of spelling knowledge and skills (phonological, orthographic and morphological), along with links to the NSW English K-10 syllabus and National Literacy Learning Progression, assists teachers in identifying areas of focus to close the gaps in learning and support student progress in spelling.

Teachers have the flexibility to use the on-demand assessment with individual students, small groups or whole classes.

## Syllabus links

Writing should be explicitly taught in all subject areas. Writing about what they learn supports students to develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. Teachers should identify opportunities for explicit writing instruction in all syllabuses.

The English learning area has a particular role in developing literacy because of its inherent focus on language and meaning.

**Stage 2:** EN2-HANDW-01, EN2-HANDW-02, EN2-SPELL-01

**Stage 3:** EN3-HANDW-01, EN3-HANDW-02, EN3-SPELL-01

**Stage 4:** EN4-ECA-01, EN4-ECB-01

**Stage 5:** EN5-ECA-01, EN5-ECB-01

Many connections exist between spelling, handwriting and keyboarding and focus areas in the NSW English K-10 syllabus.

## National Literacy Learning Progression links

The Spelling, Phonic knowledge and word recognition, Handwriting and keyboarding and Creating written texts sub-elements of the National Literacy Learning Progression support teachers to understand the development of students' transcription skills as they pertain to achieving syllabus outcomes.

### Further support

Professional learning	Assessment tools and resources
<p><a href="#">Lead Learner series – Spelling</a>  <a href="#">Focus on creating texts -module 3: Focus on spelling</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Spelling diagnostic assessment</a>  <a href="#">PLAN2</a>  <a href="#">Podcast – Teaching spelling</a>  <a href="#">Podcast – In conversation about handwriting</a>  <a href="#">Spelling lesson advice guide</a>  <a href="#">Handwriting lesson advice guide</a>  <a href="#">Handwriting practice sheets A-Z</a>  <a href="#">Morphemes suggested sequence</a>  <a href="#">Phonics sample sequence</a></p>

# Grammar and punctuation

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Skilled writing requires students to have a clear understanding of the rules and functions of grammar and punctuation. Students must be explicitly taught how to make links between the parts of speech (word-level grammar) and how they are ordered to form sentences (syntax). Oral language is important for learning to write, as talking promotes control over the grammatical structures of spoken language, a key predictor of success with writing (Mackenzie & Hemmings, 2014).

Teachers should model how to analyse, deconstruct and craft a range of well-structured sentences (sentence-level grammar) to communicate ideas across all key learning areas. Extracts from rich texts used during reading and writing instruction provide powerful exemplars for grammar and punctuation instruction.

Through activities such as sentence building, sentence elaboration and sentence combining, teachers can effectively teach the concepts and conventions of grammar and punctuation. The mechanics of writing should be taught and consolidated, then applied to paragraph and whole-text composition across a range of subject areas. Teachers should then guide students to apply their understanding of grammar and punctuation to create their own texts. The ultimate aim of grammar and punctuation instruction is that students can independently understand and craft a range of sentences which achieve both the functions of grammar and the desired impact of written expression.

## What do grammar and punctuation look like in a 3-10 classroom?

### Students

- engage with a range of texts across all curriculum areas to develop awareness of how an author selects and uses grammar and punctuation to convey meaning
- discuss how the audience and purpose influences the grammar and punctuation choices made by the author
- have a clear understanding of the rules and functions of grammar and punctuation
- demonstrate understanding of parts of speech and apply this knowledge when making choices at the word group level
- identify the number of ideas contained within longer compound and complex sentences
- select, use and experiment with a range of simple, compound and complex sentences with increasing sophistication, considering their effect on the reader
- select, use and experiment with complex punctuation for effect
- use metalanguage to demonstrate knowledge of grammar and punctuation when composing and evaluating sentences, paragraphs and whole texts
- listen to and reflect on teacher and peer 'think alouds' of texts. A 'think aloud' strategy involves a skilled writer thinking aloud as they create texts so others can eavesdrop on their thought processes as they apply grammar and punctuation to shape and control the meaning of their writing

- monitor, evaluate and respond to feedback to refine their use of grammar and punctuation to impact audience
- actively reflect on and adjust goals to improve their writing

## Teacher

- exposes students to a range of model texts in all curriculum areas, which highlight a wide variety of increasingly complex sentence types
- uses metalanguage when engaging students in discussions about the grammatical and punctuation choices authors make according to their audience, purpose and intended impact
- understands that use of grammar and punctuation is dependent on a student's oral language proficiency
- understands that grammatical functions and rules need to be explicitly taught in the classroom, using the metalanguage of grammar
- understands the importance of grammar and punctuation at the word and sentence level as the building blocks of writing cohesive extended texts
- explicitly teaches the parts of speech, their function within sentences and how to use them to effectively convey meaning
- explicitly teaches students the structure and use of sentence types for different purposes
- models how to write more sophisticated and technical texts using increasingly complex grammar and punctuation to support meaning
- plans for and implements targeted explicit teaching using the gradual release of responsibility model. Explicit teaching practices could include:
  - building the field through content and vocabulary knowledge
  - teaching and using the metalanguage of grammar and punctuation
  - deconstruction of carefully selected exemplar texts, drawing attention to deliberate choices at the word, sentence and whole text levels and the impact these elements have on the audience
  - using a 'think aloud' to show how skilled writers use grammar and punctuation when composing texts
  - modelling the use of grammar and punctuation in written texts for an intended purpose, engaging students in rich discussions about the effectiveness of selected features
  - asking literal and inferential questions about texts, evaluating the effectiveness of the use of grammar and punctuation, including prompting students to support responses with evidence from the text and use background knowledge to justify their thinking
  - co-creating writing goals with students
  - jointly constructing texts with students, to scaffold the use of grammar and punctuation to shape meaning for a particular purpose

- use of effective questioning and prompting to guide students to use and experiment with grammar and punctuation
- supporting students to monitor, evaluate and refine their compositional choices
- provides opportunities for independent practice
- uses formative assessment information to monitor student progress and differentiate learning
- models how to and provides opportunities for students to give, receive and act on self and peer feedback
- provides effective and timely feedback and supports students to adjust their writing goals
- collaborates with literacy experts to refine practices in using evidence-based strategies to analyse data and to plan for student improvement.

## Assessment of grammar and punctuation

The National Literacy Learning Progression supports teachers to understand the typical pathways for the development of students' understanding and application of grammar and punctuation. By setting up and using Areas of focus in PLAN2, teachers can effectively track and monitor student growth and improvement in particular focus areas in the context of syllabus outcomes and content.

Teachers should assess students' knowledge of grammar and punctuation by observing students' depth and application of understanding before, during and after writing instruction.

Analysis of work samples also provides a view of how students apply their understanding of how to structure sentences that are grammatically correct, punctuated effectively and create the desired impact on the reader.

## Syllabus links

Writing should be explicitly taught in all subject areas. Writing about what they learn supports students to develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. Teachers should identify opportunities for explicit writing instruction in all K-10 syllabuses.

The English learning area has a particular role in developing literacy because of its inherent focus on language and meaning.

**Stage 2:** EN2-CWT-01, EN2-CWT-02, EN2-CWT-03, EN2-UARL-01

**Stage 3:** EN3-CWT-01, EN3-UARL-01, EN3-UARL-02

**Stage 4:** EN4-ECA-01, EN4-ECB-01

**Stage 5:** EN5-ECA-01, EN5-ECB-01



Many connections exist between grammar and punctuation and focus areas in the NSW English K-10 syllabus.

## National Literacy Learning Progression links

The Grammar, Punctuation, Creating written texts and Understanding texts sub-elements of the National Literacy Learning Progression support teachers to understand the development of students' grammar and punctuation knowledge as it pertains to achieving syllabus outcomes.

## Further support

Professional learning	Assessment tools and resources
Focus on vocabulary <u>Improving reading and numeracy suite:</u> <u>Language features</u> <u>Improving reading and numeracy suite:</u> <u>Text structure and features</u>	<u>Resources in the Universal Resources Hub</u> <u>Creating written texts lesson advice guide</u> <u>PLAN2</u> <u>Grammar PL and resources summary</u>

# Text structure

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Text structure refers to the ways information is organised in different types of texts. Depending on the purpose for writing, authors select, use and manipulate text structures to achieve a desired impact on their audience. This may be to entertain, persuade, or inform, or a combination of these.

Imaginative texts, such as narratives, may include an orientation, series of events that build to a complication, and a resolution. Texts designed to inform their readers often feature headings, subheadings, definitions or classifications and labelled diagrams. An effective persuasive text usually features an introduction with a clear statement of position, body paragraphs with supporting arguments and a conclusion reinforcing the writer's position.

Hybrid texts combine structural and stylistic elements from imaginative, informative and persuasive texts.

To effectively compose an extended text, writers will also need to use a range of cohesive devices suited to the text's purpose. Authors may use structural elements such as cause and effect and compare and contrast to support the reader to focus on key concepts and relationships, anticipate what is to come, and monitor the development of ideas across sentences, paragraphs and the whole text.

Students need to be explicitly taught to make decisions about which text structures best convey the purpose of their writing to their intended audience.

## What does text structure look like in a 3-10 classroom?

### Students

- engage with a range of texts across all curriculum areas to develop awareness of how an author selects and uses elements of text structure to convey meaning
- discuss how audience and purpose can influence and shape an author's use of text structures
- apply background knowledge about content, form, audience and purpose to understand the impact of text structure in a range of texts
- listen to and reflect on teacher and peer 'think alouds'. A 'think aloud' strategy involves a skilled writer thinking aloud as they compose texts so that others can eavesdrop on their thought processes as they select and use structural elements for purpose
- engage in high quality conversations about text structure
- use graphic organisers and text structure scaffolds when planning their writing
- select, use and experiment with text structures appropriate to audience and purpose
- monitor, evaluate and respond to feedback to refine their use of text structures to impact on audience
- actively reflect on and adjust goals to improve their writing.

## Teacher

- provides opportunities for students to explore a range of texts and engage in rich discussions on an author's use of text structures
- understands that use of structural and stylistic elements is dependent on having a high level of background knowledge about the content, form, audience and purpose of the text and builds this background knowledge for students where necessary
- plans for and implements targeted explicit teaching using the gradual release of responsibility model. Explicit teaching practices could include:
  - building the field through content and vocabulary knowledge
  - teaching and using the metalanguage of text structure
  - deconstruction of carefully selected exemplar texts, drawing attention to structural elements and the impact these elements have on the audience
  - using a 'think aloud' to show how skilled writers use text structure when composing texts
  - modelling the use of text structure in written texts for an intended purpose, engaging students in rich discussions about the effectiveness of selected features
  - asking literal and inferential questions about texts, evaluating the effectiveness of the use of text structure, including prompting students to justify their responses with evidence from the text and/or background knowledge
  - co-creating writing goals with students
  - jointly planning and constructing texts with students, modelling the use of graphic organisers to support the use of structural features to shape meaning for a particular purpose
  - use of effective questioning and prompting to guide students to use and experiment with text structure
  - supporting students to monitor, evaluate and refine their compositional choices
  - provides opportunities for independent practice
  - uses formative assessment information to monitor student progress and differentiate learning
- provides effective and timely feedback and supports students to adjust their writing goals
- collaborates with literacy experts to refine practices in using evidence-based strategies to analyse data and to plan for student improvement.

## Assessment of text structure

The National Literacy Learning Progression supports teachers to understand the typical pathways for the development of students' understanding and application of text structure. By setting up and using Areas of focus in PLAN2, teachers can effectively track and monitor student growth and improvement in particular focus areas in the context of syllabus outcomes and content .

Teachers should assess students' knowledge of text structure by observing students' depth and application of understanding before, during and after writing instruction.

Analysis of work samples also provides a view of how students experiment with, select and use text structure to convey meaning effectively.

## Syllabus links

Writing should be explicitly taught in all subject areas. Writing about what they learn, supports students to develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. Teachers should identify opportunities for explicit writing instruction in all [K-10 syllabuses](#).

The [English learning area](#) has a particular role in developing literacy because of its inherent focus on language and meaning.

**Stage 2:** EN2-CWT-01, EN2-CWT-02, EN2-CWT-03

**Stage 3:** EN3-CWT-01

**Stage 4:** EN4-URP-01, EN4-ECA-01, EN4-ECB-01

**Stage 5:** EN5-URB-01, EN5-ECA-01, EN5-ECB-01

Many connections exist between text structure and focus areas in the NSW English K-10 syllabus.

## National Literacy Learning Progression links

The Creating written texts and Understanding texts sub-elements of the National Literacy Learning Progression support teachers to understand the development of students' knowledge of text structure as it pertains to achieving syllabus outcomes.

## Further support

Professional learning	Assessment tools and resources
<p><a href="#">Focus on creating texts: Modules 1 and 2</a></p> <p><a href="#">Focus on understanding texts: The components of reading</a></p> <p><a href="#">Improving reading and numeracy suite: Language features</a></p> <p><a href="#">Improving reading and numeracy suite: Text structure and features</a></p>	<p>Resources in the Universal Resources Hub</p> <p>Creating written texts <a href="#">lesson advice guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">PLAN2</a></p>

# Language features

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Language features refer to the specific linguistic techniques writers use to engage their audience, convey meaning and create different effects. These techniques may include figurative and descriptive language, imagery, dialogue, repetition, rhetorical devices, sentence structure and punctuation.

With explicit instruction, practise and feedback, students can learn to select and combine techniques to shape their writing and communicate effectively. Through exposure to and deconstruction of exemplar texts, teachers can promote an awareness of audience and purpose, and highlight elements such as an author's deliberate choice of vocabulary, sentence structure or literary devices and the impact these have on the reader. Teachers should model how deliberate stylistic decisions can influence the reader's interpretation of and engagement with a text.

Using the gradual release of responsibility model, students should be supported to apply their understanding of language features to their writing. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to reflect on their ideas and stylistic choices, and to consider the effectiveness of their approach. This is necessary to develop student motivation for creating texts and to support their appreciation of the craft of writing.

## What do language features look like in a 3-10 classroom?

### Students

- engage with a range of texts across all curriculum areas to develop awareness of how an author selects and uses language features to convey meaning
- discuss how audience and purpose influence and shape the author's choice of language features
- apply background knowledge about content, form, audience and purpose to understand the impact of language features in a range of texts
- listen to and reflect on teacher and peer 'think alouds'. A 'think aloud' strategy involves a skilled writer thinking aloud as they compose texts so that others can eavesdrop on their thought processes as they select and use language features for purpose
- engage in rich discussions about language features
- select, use and experiment with language features appropriate to audience and purpose
- monitor, evaluate and respond to feedback to refine their use of language features to impact on audience
- actively reflect on and adjust goals to improve their writing.



## Teacher

- provides opportunities for students to engage with a wide range of texts
- understands that use of language features is dependent on a student's oral language proficiency and vocabulary knowledge
- knows that use of language features is dependent on having a high level of background knowledge about the content, form, audience and purpose of the text and so builds background knowledge for students where necessary
- plans for and implements targeted explicit teaching using the gradual release of responsibility model. Explicit teaching practices could include:
  - building the field through content and vocabulary knowledge
  - teaching and using the metalanguage of language features
  - deconstruction of carefully selected exemplar texts, drawing attention to deliberate word choices, sentence structure or literary devices and the impact these elements have on the audience
  - using a 'think aloud' to show how skilled writers use language features when composing texts
  - modelling the use of language features in written texts for an intended purpose, engaging students in rich discussions about the effectiveness of selected language features
  - asking literal and inferential questions about texts, evaluating the effectiveness of the use of language features, including prompting students to support responses with evidence from the text or to justify their thinking with background knowledge
  - co-creating writing goals with students
  - jointly planning and constructing texts with students to support the use of language features to shape meaning for a particular purpose
  - use of effective questioning and prompting to guide students to use and experiment with language features
  - supporting students to monitor, evaluate and refine their compositional choices
- provides opportunities for independent practice
- uses formative assessment information to monitor student progress and differentiate learning
- provides effective and timely feedback and supports students to adjust their writing goals
- collaborates with literacy experts to refine practices in using evidence-based strategies to analyse data and to plan for student improvement.

## Assessment of language features

The National Literacy Learning Progression supports teachers to understand the typical pathways for the development of students' understanding and application of language features. By setting up and using Areas of focus in PLAN2, teachers can effectively track and monitor student growth and improvement in particular focus areas in the context of syllabus outcomes and content.

Teachers should assess students' knowledge of language features by observing students' depth and application of understanding before, during and after writing instruction.

Analysis of work samples also provides a view of how students experiment with, select and use language features to convey meaning effectively.

## Syllabus links

Writing should be explicitly taught in all subject areas. Writing about what they learn, supports students to develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. Teachers should identify opportunities for explicit writing instruction in all syllabuses.

The English learning area has a particular role in developing literacy because of its inherent focus on language and meaning.

**Stage 2:** EN2-CWT-01, EN2-CWT-02, EN2-CWT-03, EN2-VOCAB-01, EN2-UARL-01

**Stage 3:** EN3-CWT-01, EN3-UARL-01, EN3-UARL-02, EN3-VOCAB-01

**Stage 4:** EN4-URP-01, EN4-ECA-01, EN4-ECB-01

**Stage 5:** EN5-URB-01, EN5-ECA-01, EN5-ECB-01

Many connections exist between language features and focus areas in the NSW English K-10 syllabus.

## National Literacy Learning Progression links

The Creating written texts and Understanding texts sub-elements of the National Literacy Learning Progression support teachers to understand the development of students' knowledge and application of language features as it pertains to achieving syllabus outcomes.

### Further support

Professional learning	Assessment tools and resources
<p><a href="#">Improving reading and numeracy suite: Language features</a></p> <p><a href="#">Improving reading and numeracy suite: Text structure and features</a></p> <p><a href="#">Focus on creating texts: Modules 1 and 2</a></p> <p><a href="#">Focus on understanding texts: The components of reading</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Resources in the Universal Resources Hub</a></p> <p><a href="#">Creating written texts lesson advice guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">PLAN2</a></p>

# Vocabulary for writing

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Vocabulary refers to the words we know, understand and use to communicate effectively. It is critical for skilled reading comprehension and also plays an important role in word recognition.

When a student uses sophisticated vocabulary to add precision to their writing, this indicates deep word knowledge and an understanding of their audience and purpose for writing. This relies on a writer's understanding of the meaning of particular words, their confidence to use this vocabulary in the context of their writing and the ability to spell the word accurately.

Due to the interconnectedness of reading, writing and oral language, vocabulary must be taught through each of these modes, both explicitly and incidentally. To promote vocabulary learning, teachers should model 'word consciousness' (Quigley, 2022), showing a keen interest in and curiosity about words they come across in a variety of texts. Through exposure to rich texts and explicit instruction, teachers can highlight the impact of an author's deliberate word choice.

Students should be provided with many opportunities to reflect on their choice of vocabulary, considering the effectiveness of their writing in achieving the purpose for writing. This encourages students to refine their use of vocabulary when writing, promotes rich language discussion and makes students aware that word choices in writing are specific, deliberate and powerful.

Key to making decisions about vocabulary instruction is an understanding of the three tiers framework (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013):

**Tier 1:** Basic words used in everyday conversation that do not usually require explicit instruction, for example: 'think', 'around', 'eat', 'clock', 'orange'. The exception is for some EAL/D learners and learners with a disability where Tier 1 words need to be taught in context.

**Tier 2:** Words that are used more frequently in texts than in spoken language and that usually require explicit teaching. Tier 2 word learning is essential for building formal academic language within all subject areas as they add precision and detail, for example: 'switch', 'struggle', 'interesting', 'unsure'.

**Tier 3:** Words with low frequency of use that are often limited to specific topics and domains. These words usually require explicit teaching within subject areas. Tier 3 words might be content words from science, geography, mathematics or history, for example: 'circumference', 'isosceles' and 'integer'.

The development of a rich oral vocabulary for EAL/D learners is especially important in helping these students to learn to read and write.

Before, during and after writing, teachers should explicitly teach the subject specific (Tier 3) vocabulary students require to craft texts in all curriculum areas. Modelling how to apply taught Tier 2 vocabulary to add precision and achieve the purpose of their writing is essential. Students require specific and timely feedback on their use of vocabulary at all stages of the writing process.

## What does vocabulary for writing look like in a 3-10 classroom?

### Students

- read widely to expose themselves to new vocabulary
- use knowledge of word forms (phonology, orthography and morphology) to experiment with increasingly complex vocabulary
- draw on home language and literacy experiences when reading and writing
- become 'word conscious' whereby they notice words and enjoy learning and talking about them
- listen to and reflect on teacher and peer 'think alouds'. A 'think aloud' strategy involves a skilled writer thinking aloud as they create texts so that others can eavesdrop on their thought processes as they select and use vocabulary to add precision to their writing
- use graphic organisers such as the Frayer model to learn and deepen understanding of unfamiliar and important discipline-specific words to apply this vocabulary to their writing
- discuss and incorporate increasingly sophisticated vocabulary in their writing
- use subject-specific and Tier 2 vocabulary to add precision when composing texts across all curriculum areas
- monitor, evaluate and respond to feedback to refine their use of vocabulary to impact audience
- actively reflect on and adjust goals to improve their writing.

### Teacher

- understands the role of vocabulary for reading, writing and communicating in all curriculum areas
- explicitly teaches word-learning strategies and regularly exposes students to increasingly complex vocabulary through the use of a wide range of quality texts
- understands the importance of selecting Tier 2 vocabulary for explicit instruction.
- understands that teaching spelling (phonology, orthography and morphology) is critical to students' use of learnt vocabulary in their writing
- considers home language and literacy experiences of all students, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students and those from language backgrounds other than English and EAL/D learners
- promotes 'word consciousness' (Quigley, 2022) as part of everyday practice.
- explicitly teaches word-learning strategies, such as how to use context clues and morphology, to assist with determining the meaning of unknown words
- assesses and monitors vocabulary progress through pre-and post-assessment opportunities such as having the students self-assess their understanding of a word or monitoring student use of words in writing

- plans for and implements targeted explicit teaching and learning of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary using strategies such as the SEEC model to encourage student use of learnt vocabulary when writing (Quigley, 2018, p.139):
  - **Select:** Select words with consideration for difficulty, importance to topic, prior knowledge of students, frequency of appearance in text, interrelationship between words and if academic (Tier 2) or subject specific (Tier 3) vocabulary.
  - **Explain:** Say the word, write the word, define the word (using a student-friendly definition), give multiple meanings, examples and non-examples and clarify any misunderstandings.
  - **Explore:** Explore the etymology and morphology of the word, including common word parts, word families, synonyms, antonyms, different meanings and the word in use in various contexts. Teachers might use word clines, word webs and the Frayer model as strategies to explore words.
  - **Consolidate:** Engage in multiple and frequent opportunities for students to consolidate their understanding of taught vocabulary through activities such as cloze passages, short answer questions, using the word independently in extended responses and real contexts.
- plans for and implements targeted explicit teaching using the gradual release of responsibility model. Explicit teaching practices could include:
  - building the field through content and vocabulary knowledge
  - teaching and using the metalanguage of vocabulary
  - deconstruction of carefully selected exemplar texts, drawing attention to deliberate word choices and the impact these have on the audience
  - using a ‘think aloud’ to show how skilled writers select vocabulary when composing texts
  - modelling the use of vocabulary in written texts for an intended purpose, engaging students in rich discussions about the effectiveness of selected vocabulary
  - co-creating writing goals with students
  - jointly planning and constructing texts with students to support the use of vocabulary to shape meaning for a particular purpose
  - use of effective questioning to guide students to use and experiment with vocabulary, prompting them to justify their choices
  - supporting students to monitor, evaluate and refine their compositional choices
- provides opportunities for writing in all curriculum areas
- uses formative assessment information to monitor student progress and differentiate learning
- provides effective and timely feedback and supports students to adjust their writing goals
- collaborates with literacy experts to refine practices in using evidence-based strategies to analyse data and to plan for student improvement.

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## Assessment of vocabulary

The challenge in assessing vocabulary knowledge lies in the nature of vocabulary itself. Students can have a surface level understanding of what a word means, but not know a word deeply enough to support inference, reasoning and reading comprehension, or use it with precision when writing. Also, we each acquire vocabulary through contexts that we are exposed to and experience, and these experiences may be different from one person to the next. Therefore, the assessment strategy used will depend on what it is the teacher needs to focus on:

- breadth – the number of words an individual knows the meaning of
- depth – being able to define words, provide attributes of the word (for example, morphological, etymological and grammatical features), supply examples of synonyms and antonyms, and explain the precise use of a word within a range of contexts (for example, the word ‘volume’ can be used differently depending on context. It can mean a measure of sound, a measure of space a substance occupies or a measure of quantity).

Analysis of work samples where students use learnt vocabulary can provide information as to whether students have developed surface, precise or deep understanding.

The National Literacy Learning Progression supports teachers to understand the typical pathways for the development of vocabulary. Due to the interconnectedness of vocabulary, it features in all three elements of the progression: Speaking and listening, Reading and viewing, and Writing. Teachers can use the behaviours described by the progression to support their observation and assessment of students’ vocabulary knowledge.

The Vocabulary knowledge scale for assessment gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of vocabulary. Students use the scale to demonstrate the breadth (number of words) and depth (level of knowing) of their vocabulary knowledge. The Vocabulary sort assessment tool and the Vocabulary recognition tool for assessment give students opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge of vocabulary in relation to a specific topic or unit of learning. All three assessment tools can be used as a pre and post-assessment to inform teachers of student vocabulary development before and after explicit teaching instruction.



## Syllabus links

Writing should be explicitly taught in all subject areas. Writing about what they learn supports students to develop a deeper understanding of subject-specific content. Teachers should identify opportunities for explicit writing instruction in all K-10 syllabuses.

The English learning area has a particular role in developing literacy because of its inherent focus on language and meaning.

**Stage 2:** EN2-VOCAB-01, EN2-CWT-01, EN2-CWT-02, EN2-CWT-03, EN2-UARL-01

**Stage 3:** EN3-VOCAB-01, EN3-CWT-01, EN3-UARL-01, EN3-UARL-02

**Stage 4:** EN4-ECA-01, EN4-ECB-01

**Stage 5:** EN5-ECA-01, EN5-ECB-01

Many connections exist between vocabulary and other focus areas in the NSW English K-10 syllabus.

## National Literacy Learning Progression links

The Creating written texts, Understanding texts and Speaking sub-elements of the National Literacy Learning Progression support teachers to understand the development of students' vocabulary knowledge as it pertains to achieving syllabus outcomes.

## Further support

Professional learning	Assessment tools and resources
<p><a href="#">Focus on vocabulary</a></p> <p><a href="#">Lead Learner series: Vocabulary</a></p> <p><a href="#">Improving reading and numeracy suite: Vocabulary</a></p>	<p><a href="#">Vocabulary assessment tools in the Universal Resources Hub</a></p> <p><a href="#">PLAN2</a></p> <p><a href="#">Vocabulary resources on the Universal Resources Hub</a></p> <p><a href="#">Vocabulary lesson advice guide</a></p> <p><a href="#">Podcast: Vocabulary for reading instruction</a></p>

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## Definition of terms

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For support in defining the terminology used in this document please refer to the [Literacy definition of terms](#).