



1. Baseline assessment and planning – the ‘cold’ task

Teaching is focused by initial assessment. Generally, teachers use what is known as a ‘cold’ task or a ‘have a go’ task. An interesting and rich starting point provides the stimulus and content but there is no initial teaching. The aim of this is to see what the children can do independently at the start of a unit, drawing on their prior learning. Assessment of their writing helps the teacher work out what to teach the whole class, different groups and adapt the model text and plan. Targets can then be set for individuals. By the end of the unit, pupils complete a ‘hot’ task or a ‘show us what you know’ task which is an independent task on a similar type of writing with an interesting stimulus. Progress should be evident which encourages pupils and helps schools track the impact of teaching.

2. The imitation stage

The teaching begins with some sort of creative ‘hook’ which engages the pupils, often with a sense of enjoyment, audience and purpose. Writing challenges, such as informing Dr Who about how the Tardis works or producing leaflets for younger children about healthy eating, provide a sense of purpose. The model text is pitched well above the pupils’ level and has built into it the underlying, transferable structures and language patterns that students will need when they are writing. This is learned using a ‘text map’ and actions to strengthen memory and help students internalise the text. Activities such as drama are used to deepen understanding of the text.

Once students can ‘talk like the text’, the model, and other examples, are then read for vocabulary and comprehension, before being analysed for the basic text (boxing up) and language patterns, as well as writing techniques or toolkits. All of this first phase is underpinned by rehearsing key spellings and grammatical patterns. Short-burst writing is used to practise key focuses such as description, persuasion or scientific explanation.

3. The innovation stage

Once students are familiar with the model text, then the teacher leads them into creating their own versions. A new subject is presented and the teacher leads students through planning. With younger pupils, this is based on changing the basic map and retelling new versions. Older students use boxed-up planners and the teacher demonstrates how to create simple plans and orally develop ideas prior to writing. Ideas may need to be generated and organised or information researched and added to a planner. Shared and guided writing is then used to stage writing over a number of days so that students are writing texts bit by bit, concentrating on bringing all the elements together, writing effectively and accurately. Feedback is given during the lessons, as well as using some form of visualiser on a daily basis, so that students can be taught how to improve their writing, make it more accurate, until they can increasingly edit in pairs or on their own.

4. Independent application and invention – the ‘hot’ task

Eventually, students move on to the third phase, which is when they apply independently what has been taught and practised. Before this happens, the teacher may decide to give further input and rehearsal. Students are guided through planning, drafting and revising their work independently. It is essential to provide a rich starting point that taps into what students know and what matters so that their writing is purposeful. Writing may be staged over a number of days and there may be time for several independent pieces to be written. With non-fiction, students should apply what they have been taught across the curriculum. The final piece is used as the ‘hot’ task, which clearly shows progress across the unit.

It is important that at the innovation and independent application stages, the writing becomes increasingly independent of the original model rather than a pale copy. Whilst four-year-olds may only make a few simple changes, older students should be adding, embellishing, altering and manipulating the original structure. From Key Stage 2 onwards, almost all children will be using the text structure and writing tools to write, drawing on the model, their wider reading and experience so that they are writing independently at a high level. This has to be modelled in shared writing.

The aim of Talk for Writing is to develop imaginative, creative and effective writers. In the same way, the aim of Talk for Reading is to grow confident, critical and appreciative readers. No student can be said to really be a reader until they make their own choices about what to read and begin to develop a taste. In the same vein, children are not really writers until they decide what they want to write and have opportunities to create their own writing tasks and write about their interests and lives creating stories, poems and informative writing for themselves.

For this reason, schools plan ‘invention’ units which often sit between taught units. These ‘invention’ units are when students have time for their own writing. Teachers may provide a stimulus such as a film clip, interesting object, drama, wordless picture book, work of art, music, visitor or visit as a starting point but the students decide what and how to write. This is truly independent writing. In the early years, children should be playing at making up stories daily, acting stories out and at least once a week be led by the teacher through making up class stories for future sharing.