

Pie Corbett – How to use the shared writing approach to teach writing



Teach children to become better writers by looking at these examples of guided writing for KS1 and KS2 pupils

<https://www.teachwire.net/news/pie-corbett-encourage-good-literacy-habits-with-these-shared-writing-techni/>

Shared writing lies at the heart of teaching writing. This is the generic term for [writing with and in front of the children](#) as a precursor to the class writing more independently. It is the key moment at which writing is taught. Teachers who do not do shared writing are not teaching writing.

The teacher uses the assessment of children's writing to decide on the key 'progress points' that need to be focused upon during shared writing.

These may be aspects of composition (eg using a short sentence for impact or handling speech marks) or a more general aspect of writing behaviour (eg using a plan to develop plot).

There are two key, interrelated processes – ‘demonstration’ and ‘joint composition’. Shared writing is pitched about one level above the children’s own writing so that they are constantly engaged in progress.

1. Demonstration

This is where the teacher shows the children how to do something in writing that is new, or difficult, and will help the children make progress. The teacher writes in front of the children on a flip chart, giving a running commentary, revealing the decisions that are being made.

The children are witnessing a writer at work. This has to be well focused and fairly brisk so that it holds attention.

It should be centred on the key aspects that need teaching, avoiding too many ‘useful comments’ that cloud the objectives.

Use coloured pens to make progress points stand out. As the teacher writes, the children offer comments and suggestions so that they are fully engaged and not passive observers

2. Joint composition

This is similar, except the children begin to take control, with the teacher scribing their ideas. If ‘demonstration writing’ is *‘I’ll show you and explain’*, then ‘joint composition’ is *‘Now let’s have a go together and you explain’*.

There is a shift from the teacher as model towards the children doing more of the thinking, composing, explaining and working as writers.

The teacher is writing down what is said on a flip chart, taking over the transcription, but also reminding, prompting and challenging so that the writing remains focused on the progress points.

The teacher is constantly balancing the focus between pushing children to 'generate' ideas and then 'judge' what works best – pausing to reread and listening to the flow of composition so the next sentence can be composed.

We read back to help us write on. What ends up on the board has to be the best work the teacher can elicit from the children. In the same way, when the children write their own version independently, what they end up with on their page has to be the best they can find within themselves.

The pace will need to be brisk, but have pauses for 'thinking time'. On some occasions you may refer back to the model text to remind children of what effected writing sounds like, or to check a certain technique

Children use their [magpie books](#) to jot down ideas. The teaching assistant creates a word bank, listing everyone's suggestions.

From dependence to independence

[Formative assessment](#) is taking place virtually all the time as the class is being taught, with the teacher picking up on what is happening and constantly trying to move the writing forwards, deepening understanding and engaging the learner.

Gradually the teacher steps back so that the children take on more and more responsibility, moving from dependence to independence.

Too much analysis and explanation by the teacher can spoil the flow of joint composition. Ideally, it has a breathless sense of

excitement as the text emerges. The key is to encourage the children to suggest ideas, test them out and then press on.

The teacher is the gatekeeper of quality. Nothing shoddy is accepted. Remind the children of the key features they need to use in order to ensure progress. Try pausing to hear several ideas and then ask the children to choose which they think will work best – and explain ‘why’.

Through constant teaching, these complex writing processes eventually become increasingly well-orchestrated, internalised and automatic, especially where such processes are articulated. It is saying difficult things aloud that helps us all, in the end, to be able to say them silently in our heads.

Eventually, the children hear the questions they need to ask and aspects of writing become an automatic part of their repertoire.

They find they can hold an internal dialogue with themselves about the choices available and consider how effective a particular word or phrase will be, or how well their writing rereads. Writing processes have to become automatic habits.

Guided writing

This is a form of group teaching, focused on children who have similar needs, based upon assessment of their writing and observation of how they write.

‘Guide’ the group through the part of the writing process that everyone else is focused upon. For example, if the class are working on the ‘opening’ to a story, then the guided session will also focus on guiding the group through writing their openings.

The teacher helps children remind themselves of targets, progress points and writing processes. The model and toolkit is revisited. Try writing on mini-whiteboards as children are more likely to experiment, before copying up into their journals.

The main point about guided work is that the children should be doing most of the thinking and writing. It is a scaffolded bridge from dependence towards independence.

Take time to reflect. Writers nearly always read their work aloud, and this is an important habit to develop with children. You read your work aloud primarily to 'listen' to it – to hear how it sounds, whether it flows and the effect it creates.

Make it a habit to always re-read a paragraph through and ask the children the following questions:

- Which are the best bits and why?
- Are there any places we could improve?
- Are there any mistakes?
- This begins to develop the habit of editing and proof-reading. Finally, at the end of the session, it is worth asking:
 1. What have we learned about writing?
 2. To write this really effectively, what did we have to do?

The children's ideas can be listed as part of the writing toolkit. This final reflection can capture matters of technique (we had to use 'show and not tell') as well as writing habits (we had to concentrate).

It is worth typing up the shared writing so that it can be stuck into children's writing journals for children's pleasure as well as reference when they are writing.

Assessment Opportunity

- Focus on specific progress points from 'marking'
- Revisit progress points, pushing children to use and discuss effects
- Expect children to use progress points more independently with immediate sharing and discussion of impact
- Writing with close support but becoming more independent
- Putting progress points into action independently

Teaching Writing Strategy

Demonstration *I'll show you how to do something*

Joint composition *Now we'll have a go together*

Mini-writing *Children write, on a specific focus, using mini whiteboards for immediate feedback*

Guided writing *I'll support you in a small, focused group*

Independent writing *You have a go on your own*

[Transforming Writing](#) is a teacher research project into formative assessment and writing. The project is managed by the [National Literacy Trust](#), researched by John Rooke from the University of Winchester and led by Pie Corbett and Julia Strong. It is funded by the [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#).