

Writer's Workshop

For Ages 8-12 years

How to implement
an effective writing
program in
the classroom.



By David Holmsen

Writer's Workshop Versus Traditional Writing Methods

Writer's Workshop is inherently different from a traditional writing lesson that might be more familiar to you. Traditional models of teaching writing have limitations, and do not give students an authentic reason to write. Traditional models of teaching writing ask students to write on artificially created scenarios and expect students to complete a piece of writing by the end of the lesson or even worse - finish it for homework. Developing writing behaviours, strategies and processes are largely ignored in the clamber to get students to produce a polished piece of writing to be assessed. Writing traditionally is a linear experience, where the teacher controls everything, including the order, purpose and goal. Writing ceases to become personal or worthwhile in such a model. Writer's Workshop offers immediate relief from this tired and largely inefficient model.

Traditional Approach	Writer's Workshop
teacher orientated	student centred
lacks authenticity	naturally authentic
lack of real choice	allows genuine choice
time restrictions	unlimited time to write
final product assessed	writing process is celebrated
emphasis on publishing	predictable lesson structure
less differential	writers are celebrated



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Writing Survey

Name: _____

Date: _____

I am _____ years old.

MARK EACH LINE TO SHOW YOUR RESPONSE.

- a. I write at home. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- b. I write at school. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- c. I like to read. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- d. I am good at spelling. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- e. I am good at punctuation. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- f. I am good at revision. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- g. I am good at editing. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- h. I am good at proofreading. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- i. I like writing. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- j. I like to write stories. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- k. I like to write poems. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- l. I like to read my stories aloud. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- m. I like to write non-fiction pieces. Never | Occasionally | Daily
- n. I am good at writing. Never | Occasionally | Daily

Answer these questions.

1. What do you enjoy most about writing?

2. What do you find most difficult about writing?

3. When you think about writing, what is an area that you would like most help with?

4. What are two simple goals (Goals for Growth) that you would like to set yourself that will help you improve your writing?



Hot Penning Lucky Dip Writing Cards



What if no-one in the world could read or speak? How would we communicate with each other?

What if your teacher turned into a fly? What would your school day be like?

List as many silent things as you can, e.g. dust, a leaf growing.

A big bear is after you. Describe how you try to escape from it.

Ask Homer Simpson five questions. Don't make them too easy for him!

Report a detailed eyewitness account of an asteroid hitting the Earth's surface.

What is the kindest act that you have ever seen?

What if there were eight days in the week? What would you do on the eighth day?

In your opinion, what would be the best job in the world?

Explain the three most important rules for cricket (or another selected sport or game).

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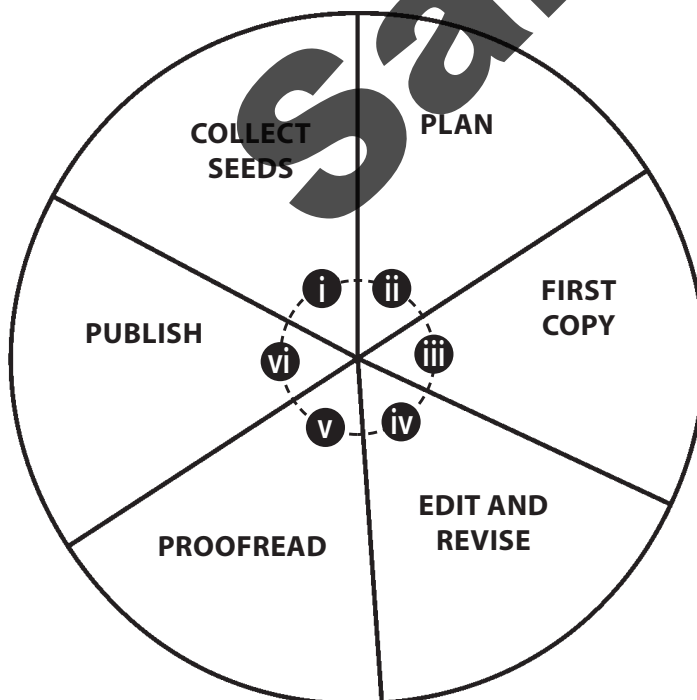
Writing Time

10-40 minutes

Writing Time is the allocated time in the lesson when students can concentrate on the process of writing. Writing is not a linear process, rather it follows a cycle. There is no start or end point - students can work on any part of the writing process in Writer's Workshop. Students retain control over their writing by choosing where they want to be in the writing cycle. The teacher should pay attention to where each writer is up to in the writing process and help them work towards the next part of the cycle. If they have had enough of something, they can stop. If they wish to publish their work, they can. If their works needs a re-write, they can do this also.

- ① Mini-Lesson
- ② Checking The Status
- ③ Hot Penning
- ④ **Writing Time**
- ⑤ Reflection And Sharing

Writing Time Consists Of Six Parts – Each Part Is Of Equal Importance



4. Writing Time

i. Collect Seeds

Pre-writing – what writers do before they write.

ii. Plan

Pre-writing – what writers do before they write.

iii. First Copy

Students begin to write.

iv. Edit And Revise

On-going through every copy.

v. Proofread

Copy free from errors.

vi. Publish

Final copy.

Writing is not a linear process, rather it follows a cycle.




Key Points

- » Collect a variety of interesting and stimulating objects to be placed in a 'Seed Box' and act as writing stimuli. Some possible items might include a lucky charm.
- » Display a picture as a stimulus and prompt discussion by asking: "What is happening?", "What will happen next?", "Where are they?", "How are you connected with the photograph?"
- » A great modelling tool to use is to always think out loud at any stage of the writing process. Let the students hear what you are thinking. Use this opportunity to use writing terminology and common standards of writing practice. Invite students to similarly share their thoughts with the class.

How many times have we heard students frustratingly declare that they have nothing to write about? These students can be taught the skill of idea collecting.



A Seed Book

- » Issue each student with a Seed Book. A Seed Book is a place where ideas can be jotted down and then played with and eventually developed. Seed Books are low-risk and high comfort tools.
- » Collecting seeds involves thinking, dreaming and gathering. Allow students to discuss, chat, jot, scribble, draw, conference, daydream, read, etc. It's time to allow imaginations to work overtime. Writing is just thinking on paper.
- » Students can carry their Seed Books with them everywhere – if not physically, then at least mentally. Every time they go somewhere, see or hear something, it provides them with an experience that might develop into written expression.
- » Each time that you introduce a topic, ask students what story or writing might come from it. Allow for discussion.
- » Give students meaningful experiences beyond narratives so that they see how writing incorporates a range of genres such as: information reports, poems, explanations, procedures and so on. To test this, give students a writing stimulus (say a picture) and ask them to respond to it using different text types. Confident writers will be able to respond to the stimulus using a combination of text types.
- » Give students physical experiences by stimulating their senses of smell, touch, sight and sound.
- » Read picture books and discuss themes. Ask students what writing ideas can come from the books.
- » Use the Hot Penning Lucky Dip Cards  (see pages 26-28) for additional stimulus.
- » Google story starters for on-line fun programs to help generate story ideas.