

# Supporting students' writing skills

Many students from refugee backgrounds may have had little or no previous formal schooling or have had significant interruptions to their schooling. Such experiences impact on important language and literacy education and as a result some students may not be literate in their first language. For students whose education pathways have been constant, but are learning English as an additional language, focusing on writing skills is also of great importance. Explicitly supporting learning of literacy skills involved in writing is needed if all students are to reach their full potential.

Providing support with writing to students from migrant and refugee backgrounds involves a wide range of approaches and strategies. Which ones you use as a tutor will depend on the skill level of your student and your confidence with the strategies. For a broad introduction to supporting students with writing, watch the 'Tips for Tutors: Writing and Vocabulary' videos.

The following information on this sheet provides an introduction to the writing process, followed by a breakdown of strategies to be used before, during and after writing.

## Being a successful writer

Writing successfully involves understanding the purpose, structure and language features of a range of texts. See 'Using Text Types' for more information. Many students with foundational and developing language and literacy skills will need to:

- understand and experiment with the differences between speaking and writing: spoken language is often more informal and interactive and meanings communicated can be clarified, whereas written language needs to be clear as it often stands alone as a conveyor of meaning
- be familiar with a range of text types: labels, letters, book reports, science reports etc
- understand the intended audience: friends, teachers, strangers etc
- understand the purpose of writing: to describe, inform, persuade, instruct etc
- learn the language features and structures of different text types
- have initial support to organise their writing
- understand the need and have the opportunity to practise writing
- understand the writing process

## The writing process

Students can be supported to explore the writing process in homework club time. Exploring all elements of the process with your student will support their understanding of the challenges and complexities of writing well, and their skills in this area of literacy. Whilst it is ideal to explore the complete process with your student from start to finish, you can also concentrate on certain sections of the process where necessary.

## Stages of writing

### ***Prewriting***

Thinking about the purpose and the audience

Planning

Brainstorming

Clarifying

Gathering information through talking, reading and note taking, looking at models

## **Writing**

Drafting  
Organising  
Discussing and changing  
Redrafting

## **Editing**

Proof reading  
Checking  
Incorporating changes into the final copy

## **Publishing**

Can be an informal printing out of a finished text and circulating for others to read or as part of an anthology of students' work

## Support with handwriting

Many students will need explicit modelling and practice in writing in English script. They may also need practice in writing a certain amount of words in a specified timeframe in legible writing. The script taught in Victorian schools is Victorian Modern Cursive script. If necessary, encourage your student to spend time practising letter formation using free hand or specific practice sheets designed for early writers.

## Spelling

Many students will benefit from being shown explicit spelling strategies when practising words that are linked to their writing work.

### ***Tutor Strategies:***

- Look at spelling patterns and links to words that have the same pattern e.g. cart, park, prefixes and suffixes
- Limit the number of words practised and introduce more when they have been consolidated
- Use student's preferred learning style: visual; auditory; kinesthetic
- Help students to discover spelling rules: if appropriate encourage students to try to spell on own
- Refer to available resources e.g. dictionary, chart or list

### ***Student activities***

- The look, say, spell, cover, write, check strategy
- The trace, copy, recall strategy
- Dictionary use

## Supporting students during different stages of writing

Spending time with students supporting their writing skills can involve a wide range of activities in addition to writing the actual text. The following stages and strategies explore how assisting students with their writing goes beyond them putting pen to paper or hand to keyboard.

### **Before writing**

#### ***Tutor strategies***

- Look at samples of different text types
- Play picture and sentence matching games
- Read about the topic

- Explore glossaries
- Pre- teach or elicit vocabulary
- Model target language that will assist with text type: modals; tenses; voice; word types, punctuation use
- During modeling, encourage students to discuss and respond
- Limit the number of focuses to demonstrate and discuss
- Encourage students to verbalise ideas
- Suggest / provide techniques to organise ideas: concept maps; notes
- Explore sentences starters
- Jointly construct a text with the student

### ***Student Activities***

- Ask students to reconstruct the samples or models of the text type.
- Brainstorm possible words and sentences
- Start organising ideas within a visual text template

### **During writing**

#### ***Tutor Strategies***

- Encourage talk about writing
- Focus on meaning and appropriateness
- Discuss incorrect language structures in context
- Ask questions, make suggestions and provide constructive support

### ***Student Activities***

- Use visual templates for writing in
- Use dictionaries: synonyms; new words; correct spelling

### **After writing**

#### ***Tutor Strategies***

- Provide feedback including:
  - » Positive aspects
  - » areas for improvement
  - » examples of well written texts
- Support reflection on text: what worked well; what didn't; what does the student need to learn more about
- Use the writing for reading activities and games
- Celebrate achievements

### ***Student Activities***

- Identification areas for practice
- Share the written product with other students

## **Conclusion**

Writing well takes much practice and students should be aware of the correlation between practice and improved performance. Students should be encouraged to practise writing in a range of ways and as often as possible in topics areas they are interested in, alongside school work that needs completion.