



## Teachers' Standards

### **Standard 3 - Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge**

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings
- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship
- demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject

### **Standard 4 - Plan and teach well-structured lessons**

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity



## Key questions

- How can we make writing an inviting and exciting activity in English lessons?
- How can we balance the need for accurate transcription with the development of compositional skills?
- What is the role of collaborative writing and teacher writing?
- How can we give children a repertoire for writing by using texts as a starting point?

## Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE, 2012) produced a report which synthesised research on children's writing. Using research reviews of international evidence (Graham et al., 2012; Gillespie and Graham, 2010; Andrews et al., 2009; Santangelo and Olinghouse, 2009), it claimed that one of the key pedagogical approaches which had been shown to improve children's writing was teaching pupils the writing process. The report provides examples of how this might look in the classroom.

- *Teach pupils strategies/tools for the various components of the writing process such as: planning; drafting; sharing; evaluating; revising and editing; summarising; sentence combining*
- *Gradually shift responsibility from the teacher to the pupil so that they become independent writers*
- *Guide pupils to choose and use suitable writing strategies*
- *Encourage pupils to be flexible when using the different writing components*
- *Engage them in pre-writing activities where they can assess what they already know, research an unfamiliar topic, or arrange their ideas visually*

(DfE, 2012, p12)

There is clearly an important role for teachers in modelling writing, but what aspects of writing might be involved? In this chapter, we will look at both the compositional aspects of writing in English and the transcriptional elements.

## Composition and transcription

The marking system for SATs often leads to teachers encouraging children to insert fronted adverbials, semi-colons, adjectives and adverbs and similar features into their writing so that they can achieve higher marks. While it is laudable that children should be encouraged to make use of a range of literary devices, this approach can sometimes lead to rather stilted and formulaic prose which may tick boxes for gaining marks in a test, but would not be enjoyable to read. What is

most important is that writers have a range of devices at their disposal, but know how to use them judiciously to make their text interesting and engaging for readers. Ivanič (2004) describes different approaches or discourses below.



## Research focus

### Discourses of writing and learning to write

Ivanič (2004) looked at different approaches to teaching and learning writing and identified a *skills discourse* and a *creativity discourse*. In the former, the emphasis is upon accuracy, while in the latter the focus is upon content and engagement of an audience.

#### A skills discourse of Writing

*Underlying a great deal of policy and practice in literacy education is a fundamental belief that writing consists of applying knowledge of a set of linguistic patterns and rules for sound-symbol relationships and sentence construction. At its most extreme, this is a belief that writing is a unitary, context-free activity, in which the same patterns and rules apply to all writing, independent of text type.*

*In this view, what counts as good writing is determined by the correctness of the, letter, word, sentence, and text formation ...*

*...These beliefs lead to 'skills' approaches to the teaching of writing, which focus on the autonomous linguistic 'skills' of correct handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. A great deal of the teaching in this approach is explicit: children are taught spelling patterns and rules for grammatically correct and correctly punctuated written sentences. They undertake exercises which draw their attention to linguistic patterns and distinctions in written language, and their writing is assessed according to how accurately these patterns have been reproduced (p227).*

#### A creativity discourse of Writing

*The discourse of writing as the product of the author's creativity also focuses on the written text, but is concerned with its content and style rather than its linguistic form. In this discourse 'meaning' is central, with the writer engaged in meaning-making, and so it is concerned with mental processes as well as with characteristics of the text. Writing is treated as a valuable activity in its own right: the creative act of an author, with no social function other than that of interesting or entertaining a reader. This belief about the nature of writing generates value judgements about what counts as 'good' writing in terms of content and style, rather than, or in addition to, in terms of accuracy (p229).*

*Ivanič maintains that Experienced, eclectic teachers of writing recognise the advantage of inspiring learners to write about topics which interest them and the opportunities this provides for implicit learning, alongside explicit teaching about linguistic rules and patterns (p230).*

It is, then, possible for children to develop their understanding of the transcriptional aspects of writing at the same time as they develop their compositional skills. In fact, Myhill et al. maintain:

*that teaching grammar as a discrete, separate topic, where the grammar is the focus of study, is not likely to help writing development because it does not make connections between grammar and writing, or between grammar and meaning ...*

*a writing curriculum which draws attention to the grammar of writing in an embedded and purposeful way at relevant points in the learning is a more positive way forward. In this way, young writers are introduced to what we have called 'a repertoire of infinite possibilities', explicitly showing them how different ways of shaping sentences or texts, and how different choices of words can generate different possibilities for meaning-making.*

(2011, p3)

Myhill (2012) asserts that grammar teaching is most effective when it is taught in the context of reading and writing, either in the context of the linguistic demands of a particular genre, or the writing needs of a particular child. In the case study below you can see how a teacher begins a writing activity in a very simple way, which all children can engage with, before developing writing which involves phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs.



## Case study

### Six-word life stories

Sadiq had enjoyed a game played at a friend's house which involved people trying to tell their life stories in just six words. Afterwards, he searched the Internet for examples and discovered several websites which provided sample six-word stories, including the BBC's *Today*.

Sadiq's Year 5 class included several children who were reluctant writers, many of whom had good ideas when discussing themes orally. He decided to devote a lesson to six-word stories and shared some examples he had found online. He then asked children to think about famous people and fictional characters and to work in pairs to tell their life stories or to write something about their personalities or achievements, using only six words. Sadiq emphasised that the order in which the words were placed could have a powerful impact on the reader and urged children to reflect on their writing and discuss alternative vocabulary when appropriate. There were some interesting outcomes including:

*Goals, fame, transfer, wealth, England captain*

Sadiq then asked children to work individually, to think about themselves and tell the story of their lives in six words. He provided examples of what he and his wife had written the night before:

*Worked hard, became a teacher. Happiness!*

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Children enjoyed writing their stories and sharing them with each other. Sadiq told them that they did not have to share their stories if they didn't wish to, as some wrote quite poignant things about the loss of relatives, pets, etc.

Sadiq explained that the six-word stories were sufficient in themselves and did not have to be developed, but that he would like the children to go on to create six-line stories and later six-paragraph stories, using verbs, adjectives, nouns and adverbs to embellish them.

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## Start simple: how do you get reluctant writers writing?

The case study illustrates that good writing can be concise, and also shows that short pieces can be developed when appropriate. There is a misconception among some children that good writing has to be lengthy. It is important that we show that high-quality writing can be concise and convey powerful messages briefly.

Many people, including some teachers, admit that they do not enjoy poetry. There is even a word, *metrophobia*, for hatred of poetry. It may be that they were put off poetry by being introduced to it through lengthy ballads and epics, and by unfamiliar and complex language styles, which they would never have wished to use in their own writing. However, there are many poetic forms with highly structured writing which may have restricted numbers of syllables or lines, but which enable writers to achieve good results using few words. Haikus, cinquains and tankas are popular in schools and have the advantage that they do not have to rhyme and so enable authors to say what they mean, rather than having to adapt to the need for a rhyme. Limericks and triolets do have to rhyme, but have simple rhyming schemes. These poetic forms provide an introduction to reading and writing poetry which may lead to a more positive attitude to more challenging and lengthy works.

## Short, structured poetry

### *Haiku*

A Japanese form of poetry with 3 lines, 17 syllables in the sequence: 5, 7, 5:

*Doncaster Rovers*  
*Good days make up for the bad*  
*My team 'til I die*

### *Tanka*

A Japanese poem based on a Haiku but with two additional lines to give a more complete picture of the event or mood. One person can write a haiku and then give it to another poet to add two lines to create a poem of 31 syllables with the sequence: 5, 7, 5, 7, 7. This would then be returned to the original poet:

*Doncaster Rovers*  
*Good days make up for the bad*  
*My team 'til I die*  
*I wasn't born in Leicester*  
*But sometimes wish I had been.*

### **Cinquain**

A poetic form invented by the American, Adelaide Crapsey, containing 22 syllables on 5 lines in the sequence: 2, 4, 6, 8, 2

*Adder*  
*Sliding slowly*  
*Slipping through the long grass*  
*If I knew you were so close by*  
*I'd run!*

### **Triolets ('triplet')**

A French verse form with the structure:

- 8 lines. Two rhymes.
- 5 of the 8 lines are repeated or refrain lines.
- First line repeats at the 4th and 7th lines.
- Second line repeats at the 8th line.

Louise McCarthy sits in front of me	A
She's the kind of girl I'd like to be	B
She has long hair	a - Rhymes with 6th line
Louise McCarthy sits in front of me	A - Identical to 1st line
I'd really like to ask her home for tea.	a - Rhymes with 1st line
I wouldn't dare.	b - Rhymes with 3rd line.
Louise McCarthy sits in front of me	A - Identical to 1st line
She's the kind of girl I'd like to be.	B - Identical to 2nd line

### **Limericks**

Limericks have five lines and are usually humorous. The first, second and fifth lines rhyme and have the same rhythm. The third and fourth lines have five to seven syllables, the same rhythm and rhyme with each other. Some well-known nursery rhymes have a limerick form, for example:

Hickory, dickory, dock,  
The mouse ran up the clock.  
The clock struck one,  
The mouse ran down,  
Hickory, dickory, dock.

Rhyme can be introduced as children feel confident in using it. Rhyming dictionaries can be useful, as can websites like Rhyme Zone, which also provide near rhymes, but children need to be cautious about using the dictionaries' suggestions unless they are confident they understand the word they choose and know that it is appropriate. Used alongside ordinary dictionaries, rhyming dictionaries and websites can promote vocabulary investigations and help children broaden their lexicons while developing their reference skills.

All of the poetic forms above are complete writing entities in themselves and do not need to be expanded. However, these forms can be used as starting points for writing more extensively and perhaps even as a prelude to writing a story. Some authors introduce chapters in novels using *epigraphs*, quoting lyrics or extracts from poems to arouse the reader's interest. J.K. Rowling, writing as Robert Galbraith, does this to great effect in her Cormoran Strike detective thrillers, although these books are certainly not suitable for young readers.

## Developing prose writing

If children can gain confidence from producing short, meaningful writing which enables them to succeed and receive praise from teachers and classmates, they are much more likely to approach more extended pieces with enthusiasm. However, they still need models so that they can see how such writing can be constructed and the kind of features which are appropriate. One way of doing this is to engage them in shared reading where they hear their teacher read as they follow text and then join in with the reading, often pausing to discuss the text and the language used. This can be followed by the teacher modelling similar writing, thinking aloud about different ways of expressing ideas as well as spelling and punctuating. Gradually, children can contribute their own ideas which can be incorporated. They might work in pairs to develop the next sentence before sharing their ideas with the class.

Roth and Guinee (2011) describe *interactive writing*, which involves teacher and pupils working together *to construct a meaningful text while discussing the details of the writing process* (p333). As in the developed stage of shared writing, the teacher invites children's contributions and draws upon their ideas to develop a piece of writing and acts as a scribe to model spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, etc. Interactive writing follows Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development in that learners can achieve more when guided by an experienced teacher. Roth and Guinee maintain that *The instruction does not follow a specified sequence but evolves from the teacher's understanding of the students' strengths and needs* (p335).

In the case study below, Daniel, a Year 5 teacher, introduces a story opening as an example and plans to use it in a variety of ways to help children develop their own writing.



## Case study

### A story opening

Daniel planned a series of lessons for a three-week period. He began by putting up a display of first pages and covers of well-known children's stories, displaying the covers separately from the text and asking children to try to match covers to openings. He then invited the class to bring along their own favourite story openings and sought volunteers to read these to groups. There was a discussion about the features of good openings, which revolved around the following questions.

- What are the features of opening sentences which make you want to read on?
- What are the features of opening paragraphs which make you want to read on?
- What do you want to know after reading the first page of a story?

Daniel then introduced the children to a story opening from an as yet unpublished book written by his friend. He told them that his friend wanted to continue the story and would welcome their ideas, but he also wanted to know how he could improve the opening. Before reading the story opening, Daniel gave each child a card with a word which would appear somewhere in the text. He asked children to discuss with neighbours what the words were and what they meant, and then asked if anyone was unsure about how to say a word or its meaning. They could use dictionaries, if they wished. Cards with the following words were provided.

money	banknote	suitcase
bundle	sweat	padlock
stairs	footsteps	step uncle
cupboard	bed	millions
tickle	hasp	digit roller
door	playing field	receding

Daniel told the class that, after he had read the opening to them, he would ask them to discuss their words as they appeared in the story and then write a sentence or two which described the significance of the word in the story.

### THE CASH STASH

#### CHAPTER ONE

#### CASH

*Id never seen so much money before. I bet hardly anyone in the country had ever seen that much money, unless they worked in a bank or had just robbed one. The suitcase was full almost to bursting. The neat bundles of banknotes were crammed in tightly and had visibly risen when Id opened the case, as if stretching after being squashed into a small seat on a car journey.*

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*I hesitated before touching the money, but then courage came quickly and I snatched up one of the bundles and flicked its edge so that the notes made a sort of zipping sound as I ran my finger along their edges. The top note was a twenty. I flicked through again to see if all of the notes in the bundle were twenties too - they were. Then I flicked through again even more slowly and tried to count approximately how many notes there were. Around fifty, I reckoned - a thousand pounds in a bundle and the suitcase was stuffed with bundles. There were forty-eight on the top row - £48,000! I delved into the case and found that there seemed to be six bundles in each pile. My head began to spin as I tried to do the maths. Forty-eight thousand times six: six eights made forty-eight and six forties made 240, so that was 288 thousand. £288,000! More than a quarter of a millions pounds! And there were three more suitcases. Could these, too, be equally well-filled with banknotes? If they were, that would make more than a million pounds.*

*I felt a drip of sweat trickle from my armpit. This was incredible. No wonder there was a coded padlock on the cupboard door. No wonder the case had a padlock too. How could anyone be so careless as to forget to lock the locks? Before I had time to give this another thought, I froze in terror. Someone was coming up the stairs. I could hear the familiar heavy tread of my step uncle's footsteps and their sound was getting louder.*

*I closed the suitcase and clicked its padlock together. As quietly as I could, I crawled out of the cupboard and back into my bedroom. Quickly, I tried to lock the padlock on the door, but it was stuck. Someone had tried to lock it but hadn't put the hasp into its hole. The padlock was locked, but not properly. There was no time to experiment with the four digit-rollers to try to unlock it, so I put it back onto the door as soon as I had shut it. Then I crawled under the bed and tried to hold my breath. Something was jabbing into my back and I worried that my legs might be sticking out, but when the door to my bedroom opened and footsteps moved across the room, there was no word from my step uncle to indicate that he knew I was there.*

*All I heard was one word: "Idiot!". Then I heard the sound of the padlock being removed and the door to the cupboard opening. The rustlings which followed had to be the sound of a suitcase opening. Within a minute it was all over. I heard the suitcase snap shut, the door close and the digit rollers turn before the padlock on the door was locked too. After that my step uncle left my bedroom and I heard the sound of his footsteps receding as he descended the stairs. I crept out from under the bed and wondered what to do next. Uncle Mark thought I was at the village playing field with my mates. I didn't want him to find that I was actually at home and that I'd been in the cupboard which he'd told me was kept locked for safety reasons.*

(from Waugh, D., 2016, *Cash Stash*)

When Daniel had read the story opening, he took the children to the school hall and asked them to move around the room meeting different people and then discussing the words on their cards and their significance to the story. He wanted them to talk with children who did not sit at their tables and to gather as much information about as many words as possible. Back in the classroom, he found the class better able to discuss the text than usual and eager to contribute ideas about the story, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it might be developed.

Children could then choose to work individually or in pairs to write a letter to the author with their views and suggestions, and to include at least one paragraph to follow the opening. Daniel promised to show these to his friend and ask him to reply.

The case study illustrates how sharing and discussing a text can be a preparation for writing. A range of other activities might follow, often beginning with oral work, examples of which can be seen below to match this story opening or any other.



## Activity

Look at the possible activities described below and consider the following.

- How could you adapt them to meet the needs of your class?
- Which other activities might you include for your own class?

## Possible activities to follow story opening

### *Picture sheets for writing around*

Provide A4 sheets of paper and ask children, in pairs, to make a quick sketch of a character or a scene from the story in the centre of the sheets. Ask them to pass these on to others, who can make notes around the pictures about the characters or events. Encourage brevity, with single words and phrases being used. After the sheets have been passed around to a few people, have children give them back to the original artists who can use the notes to create a short description.

### *Hot-seating*

Ask for volunteers to assume the role of a character from the story and answer questions in role. Get the rest of the class to discuss and write questions for the character.

### *Dramatise an event from the story*

In *Cash Stash* this might be the discovery of the suitcase or hiding under the bed. Get children to work together to plan a short dramatic sequence, perhaps asking characters to speak their thoughts aloud. They might produce a storyboard with notes and dialogue.

### *Collecting synonyms*

Use the word cards and the story and invite children to find synonyms. From the story, they might look at:

*courage      approximately      reckoned      crept      delved*

You could also use the word cards as a starting point for this activity.

### **Write a blurb for the story**

Display a range of book covers and ask children to look at books to get a feel for what is expected in a publisher's blurb. Ask them to write their own blurbs and to ask others how effective they would be in persuading them to buy the book.

### **Write the next two sentences/paragraph and make predictions**

At different points in sharing a story with children, stop and ask them to discuss what might happen next. They could write down their predictions and then write the next few lines and share these with their group and the class.

### **Write the story so far in six words**

An interesting follow-up to six-word story activities could involve children retelling this new story opening in six words. Ask them to decide what the key events are and to work in pairs or small groups to choose six key words.

### **Four-letter words**

Ask children to describe a chapter in four words or four sets of four words, or even four sets of four-letter words. As with the six-word stories, this encourages careful reflection on content, as well as engagement with vocabulary and spelling (see also Chapter 12, Writing in Art).

### **Collect adjectives and adverbs**

Although teachers often emphasise the importance of using adjectives and adverbs, real books tend to use these descriptive devices sparingly, making them more powerful and keeping the story flowing. Ask children to find examples of adjectives and adverbs in the story and to consider alternatives. Ask them to consider whether some aspects of the story might have benefited from more description. In *Cash Stash*, they might focus on the following:

*Adjectives:*     *neat*        *full*        *well-filled*     *small*        *heavy*  
*Adverbs:*        *tightly*     *visibly*     *slowly*        *quickly*     *quietly*     *properly*

### **Look for similes and metaphors**

The first part of *Cash Stash* includes just one simile:

*as if stretching after being squashed into a small seat on a car journey*

Ask children if there could be opportunities for other similes or metaphors and if these could improve the writing and help paint a more vivid picture for the reader.

**Write openings together and in pairs**

Ask children to devise openings for their own stories, once they have looked at a range of published stories. They could then pass these on to other pairs or groups and ask them to continue the story by writing the next paragraph.

**Developing writing**

Note how the writing which can emanate from exploring story openings can be varied in style and presentation. There are lots of opportunities for developing an awareness of authorial devices, incidentally, as well as through direct teaching. The National Curriculum and SATs make considerable demands upon children and teachers, so that when writing takes place the focus is not always on composition. What about fronted adverbials, subordinate clauses, similes and metaphors? Do we need a liberal sprinkling of adverbs and adjectives? All of these can be deployed to make writing more varied and interesting, but children will use them more naturally and effectively if they see models of writing and have the opportunity to discuss style and its effect on an audience. A good resource to complement this is Wilcox's *Descriptosaurus*, which is a DfE-recommended text. It offers sample nouns, verbs and adjectives, as well as example sentences, to offer children extra support for their writing.

**Research focus****Teachers as writers**

Cremin and Baker (2014, pp5-6) looked at two aspects of teachers' writing in the classroom: demonstration writing and writing alongside children, and argued as follows.

*In demonstrating spontaneously, teachers can begin to share the blank spots, uncertainties and emergent nature of drafting thinking on the flip chart or interactive whiteboard. Some have found that by thinking aloud their concerns, voicing their choices and defending their decisions, they are able to demonstrate the genuine struggle of writing and that this was of value to the children (Cremin and Myhill, 2012). However, some studies suggest that teachers are concerned about demonstrating writing in the public forum of the classroom (Cremin, 2006; Turvey, 2007). As a consequence, they may pre-write the haiku or tanka for example in the privacy of their own homes, 'pretending' to demonstrate the act of composition in school. Others may simply avoid demonstration writing.*

*When writing alongside children, literally sitting alongside them, teachers may for example take part in journal writing, enabling children to draw on the 'texts of their lives' (Fecho, 2011) as a resource to retell, reinterpret, or remake their stories.*

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Others may undertake the same set writing challenges publishing their own work alongside the younger writers. Practitioners have found that working 'inside the process' in this way, helps them appreciate the challenge of the tasks they set and enhances their empathy for child writers (Cremin, 2010). It can also enable teachers to seize informal opportunities to discuss emerging issues and difficulties, writer to writer. Many have found that children settle more quickly when they write alongside them and that through engaging in informal conversations from the position of a fellow writer, they were able to offer informed support and advice (Cremin, 2010).

Children's comments have included: 'It's only fair that they write with us because we're all writing and the teachers aren't just standing around talking'; 'I like it when she writes with us - she does the same thing as us, so she's one of us'; 'It makes it easier - she doesn't interrupt'; and 'Sometimes she finds it hard, sometimes writing is' (Goouch et al. 2009). These suggest that their teachers' positions as writers were influencing the younger writers' perspectives too.

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## Conclusion

In this book, writing is explored in every curriculum subject. A common theme is that children need to understand that there are different ways of writing which are appropriate for different situations. This chapter has focused on English, which is typically the subject in which there is the greatest focus on accuracy in writing and developing an understanding of different genres. As primary teachers, we need to extend this into all areas of the curriculum, so that expectations are consistently high and children understand what is expected. The keys to achieving this are:

- teacher modelling and shared writing;
- wide experience of texts;
- active involvement in writing, with oral work often preceding writing;
- the provision of interesting and often brief and manageable tasks designed to enable children to express their ideas and experiment with language usage.

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## Further reading

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For examples of six-word stories see:

BBC *Today*. Available from: [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/reports/misc/sixwordlife\\_20080205.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/reports/misc/sixwordlife_20080205.shtml)

Fershleiser, R. (2008) *Not Quite What I Was Planning: Six-Word Memoirs by Writers Famous and Obscure*. New York: Harper Perennial.

For rhymes:

Rhyme Zone: [rhymezone.com](http://rhymezone.com)

Rhymer: [rhymer.com](http://rhymer.com)

For ideas for short, imaginative poetry activities, three books by Sandy Brownjohn are packed with ideas.

Brownjohn, S. (1980) *Does it Have to Rhyme?* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Brownjohn, S. (1982) *What Rhymes With Secret?: Teaching Children to Write Poetry*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Brownjohn, S. (1994) *To Rhyme or Not to Rhyme*. London: Hodder Stoughton.

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Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D. and Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching Elementary School Students to be Effective Writers: A Practice Guide* (NCEE 2012- 4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Available from: [http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications\\_reviews.aspx#pubsearch](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications_reviews.aspx#pubsearch).

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Roth, K. and Guinee, K. (2011) Ten minutes a day: The impact of Interactive Writing instruction on first graders' independent writing. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 11(3): 331–61.

Santangelo, T. and Olinghouse, N. (2009) Effective writing instruction for students who have writing difficulties. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 42(4).

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wilcox, A. (2013) *Descriptosaurus*. Abingdon: Routledge.