

Writing as a process

By Georgina Barton

Writing is a creative process that takes time. Unfortunately, many practices aim to improve writing tasks that require students to plan for 5 minutes and then write for another 20 minutes or so. Sound familiar? In addition, to this type of writing—called ‘on-demand writing’—are set assessment tasks that students are often expected to complete in their own time.

Much research on the teaching of writing discusses writing as a process (there are other approaches to teaching writing that I will explore later on). A process approach to writing means that writing can be broken down into a series of distinct steps or stages. Moreover, these stages are not necessarily linear in practice. Good writers work back and forth with a text oscillating between reading, reflecting, brainstorming, writing, checking an argument, finding a source, checking a footnote etc.

The process approach to teaching writing acknowledges there are some really rich activities that you can do as a teacher to support your students **before** actually writing the task. Students then construct their text **during** the writing process. Most importantly there are other strategies you can use **after** writing to ensure understanding, improvement and satisfaction of the writing process.

I will now unpack each of these steps.

1. BEFORE writing

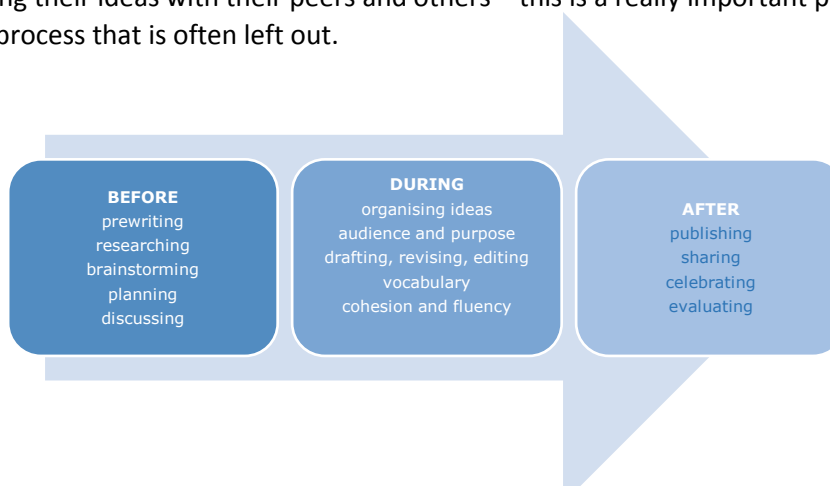
How often do you provide the opportunity for students to explore their writing tasks and topics before they start drafting?

In the ‘before writing’ stage a number of actions can take place. Often referred to as pre-writing student engage in creative activities that spark the imagination.

BEFORE
prewriting
researching
brainstorming
planning
discussing

Some before writing strategies include:

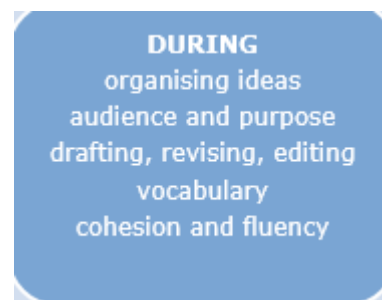
- On the spot characterisations – have students draw or act out their prospective characters if they are writing a narrative or students can explain their character to a peer who then has to draw an image of this character
- Mind mapping or brainstorming – this is a great way to get some pre-writing ideas on paper
- Summarising information about the topic at hand
- Drawing and moving to represent meaning in a text – a good idea is to use a stimulus text so students have some further understanding before starting the task
- Journaling and planning – have students write a journal or diary that could include images for inspiration
- Discussing their ideas with their peers and others – this is a really important part of the writing process that is often left out.



2. DURING writing

A number of phases need to happen in the ‘during writing’ stage. Often students write one draft thinking this is their final product. I have seen some excellent feedback from teachers too but often times, the student has been unable to take on board this information to improve their writing (I will write more about this problem in a future blog post).

Here are some strategies that help students when in the ‘during writing’ step:



- Audience and purpose - it is critical that students know clearly the purpose of the writing task and who they are writing for. This makes all the difference.
- Organising ideas - students could map out their writing structure using a graphic organiser or even on a storyboard. This includes the bare-bones or skeleton of their writing.
- Drafting – the purpose of the writing comes in handy during this phase. If students have planned comprehensively then this part of the writing can be really enjoyable. On the other hand, if planning is dubious then they can get stuck relatively quickly. I recommend getting down all your ideas first and then you can work on editing. Feedback through this phase is vital and not just from the teacher. Get peer feedback – an online blog is a good way to go!
- Editing and proofreading – in the editing phase you want to make your writing really effective. This includes looking at fluency and cohesion. See my cohesive devices document. It also involves ‘ramping up’ your vocabulary use – try an online thesaurus for example.

3. AFTER writing

The ‘after writing’ stage can be overlooked due to busyness. I am sometimes guilty of this!

- Publishing – depending on the type of text being written this can take quite some time. Publishing requires skills that are outside the remit of writing the actual text. Imagine putting a newspaper article or webpage together – this would require knowledge about by-lines, tags, and formatting including inserting images and font size, colour etc.
- Evaluating – discussing ways in which to improve your work next time is crucial for writing development. This can happen between peers, teacher-student, student-other.
- Sharing and celebrating your work with others – this can be exciting and creative. Some ideas for sharing work include:
 - Online blog or multi-user collaborative document such as OneNote
 - Website
 - Presentation or performance to parents/carers and community
 - On display in the local library or museum etc.

