

FIX IT

WRITING

Structured support to improve
students' writing at KS2 and KS3

TEACHER
HANDBOOK

teachit

by Richard Durant

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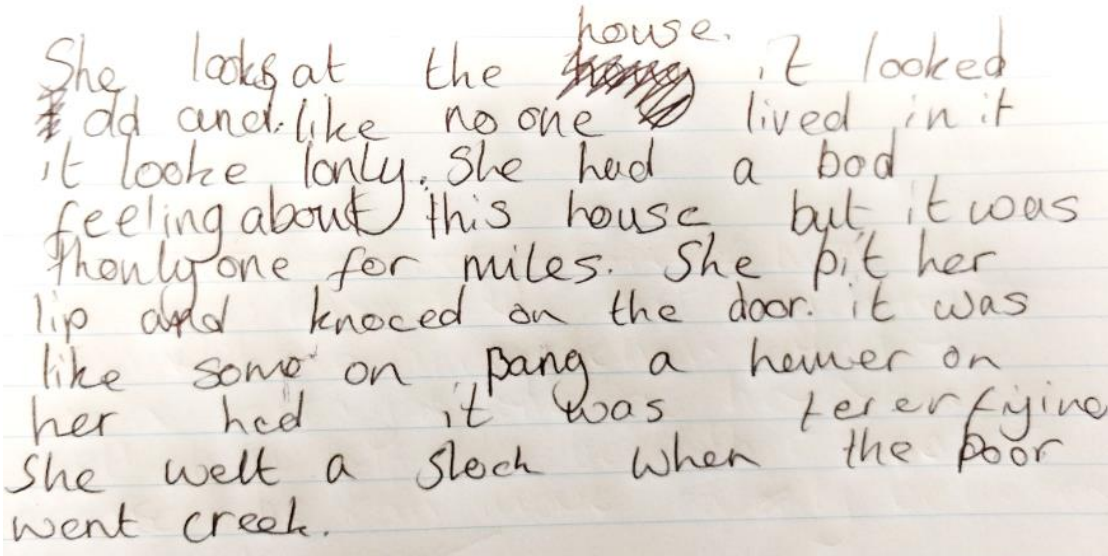
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Introduction

Literacy intervention in secondary schools tends to focus far less on compositional skills than on reading and spelling. Yet when weak writers arrive at secondary school, many of them are still struggling to write fluently and coherently. Most primary teachers are only too aware of these students' weaknesses and they typically address them in a determined and systematic fashion. There is no doubt that without these teachers' efforts many more students would arrive at secondary school with a crippling lack of self-belief in their ability to write effectively. Weak writers would benefit from a *continuous* writing programme, beginning in the final years of KS2, and stretching into years 7 and 8, so that – in effect – primary and secondary colleagues would be working together to ensure that all students were writing competently and confidently by the time they write in GCSE exams.

The challenge

Most students do write well by the time they arrive at secondary school, and they write even better by the time they leave. However, there is a conspicuous group of students whose writing skills do not seem to develop significantly during their secondary years, and whose lack of confidence gradually converts into apathy, defeatism, and even anger. The writing sample below is typical of one of these students midway through year 7:



She looks at the ~~thing~~ house. it looked
dd and like no one lived in it
it looke lonely. She had a bad
feeling about this house but it was
thonly one for miles. She pit her
lip and knoed on the door. it was
like some on pang a hammer on
her hed it was fererfijine
She welt a sloch when the poor
went creek.

This student has clear handwriting and seems to have some confidence in their ability to make sense. Plenty of year 6 or 7 students are weaker writers than this, but already we see many basic faults which might not be quickly and sensitively addressed in the hurly-burly of the secondary curriculum:

- mixed/wrong verb tenses ('looks'/'looked')
- unreliable sentence demarcation (full stops and capital letters)
- letters omitted ('th_', 'looke_')
- incomplete sentences ('some on bang' instead of 'someone was banging')
- high density of misspellings ('lonly', 'knoced', 'hamer', 'tererfiying', 'creek')
- incorrect use of upper case letters ('Bang', 'She', 'When', 'Door')

Other students are relatively able at the level of the sentence, but then their writing falls apart or peters out when they write at greater length. Again, these students' poor writing organisational skills may not improve significantly in their secondary school years, leading to frustration and resignation.

Weak writers share some of these typical characteristics. In addition to these, every writer has specific weaknesses as well as strengths. Building on the strengths while identifying and addressing the weaknesses is the challenge for any literacy practitioner – whether they are a classroom teacher, a specialist literacy teacher or a teaching assistant.

The purpose of *Fix it writing*

Fix it writing is designed to help all of those practitioners. The resource supports practitioners in diagnosing weaknesses, providing critical teaching to address those weaknesses, and monitoring progress. Of course, writing problems can never really be spotted and 'fixed'. If only it was that simple. However, the title reflects the urgency of the task and the need for practitioners to proceed with a sense of clarity and precision.

The most fortunate students receive help in a very expensive form – regular, small-group or even individual 'intervention', either in or outside the classroom. The high cost of this sort of intervention demands that the right intervention is applied to the right students. When schools get this right, the cost is justified and students benefit from time-limited intervention activities that boost their confidence and independence, rather than leaving them dependent and helpless.

The structure of *Fix it writing*

At its core, *Fix it writing* provides teaching session plans, each targeted on a specific and crucial aspect of successful composition – crafting sentences for clarity, using conjunctions to link ideas and information, sequencing and developing ideas, and so on.

Each section ends with general explanations of the ‘problem’, the crucial concepts and terminology related to the problem, and a variety of partial ‘solutions’ to the problem. Each session plan is therefore offered as a sort of ‘landmark lesson’, around which diligent practitioners can organise imaginative interventions, informed by the broader advice in the book and by their own judgement. *Fix it writing* is certainly not intended as an ‘off the shelf’ programme to be worked through from beginning to end with every student.

The session plans *are* the nucleus of the resource, and their common format is explained more fully later in these introductory pages. Essentially the sessions’ format is adapted from the literacy intervention programmes that emerged from the National Literacy Strategy and the Secondary Strategy. One advantage of drawing on these earlier materials is that many practitioners will already be familiar with the core approaches. In addition, the stepped approach of the sessions is designed to both challenge students to sharpen their skills, and to convince them that they *can* meet those challenges.

Finally, I have not mentioned the end of key stage 2 writing assessments, how these might turn out in the coming years, or how *Fix it writing* might contribute to students’ performance. Although these assessments are very important to primary schools, I still believe that it is students’ progress across KS2 and KS3 that should be our collective aim. If *Fix it writing* can help promote that aim, and can support a focus that can be shared by primary and secondary practitioners, then I will be more than satisfied.

Richard Durant May 2017

Progression in writing: a framework

Although writers progress in different ways, typical progression descriptors can be a helpful point of reference. Such descriptors can help to diagnose key features of weaker writers' habits, and to choose specific next steps. *Fix it writing* aims to support practitioners in identifying and promoting those next steps.

Writing progress markers: sentences and paragraphs

	Working towards the expected standard Students can ...	Working at the expected standard Students can ...	Working at greater depth within the expected standard Students do ...
Sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use <i>and, but, or</i> use some subordinating conjunctions including <i>when, while, if, because</i> use relative pronouns including <i>who, which, that</i>. use different verbs use forms mostly accurately (e.g. use the right tense form – present <i>sing</i>, past <i>sang</i> – and match verb forms to subject – <i>I sing / she sings</i>.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use a wide range of clause types and structures, sometimes varying their position within the sentence use adverbials (e.g. <i>quickly, last Tuesday, on the floor, with difficulty</i>) and noun phrases (e.g. <i>a pair of frightened eyes</i>) effectively to add detail, qualification and precision write formal sentences mostly accurately use passive (e.g. <i>she was seen</i>) and modal verbs (e.g. <i>should, might</i>) mostly appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use the features of the expected standard use these features with growing independence and confidence, and trying out subtle ways to create effect and clarify meaning.

	Working towards the expected standard Students can ...	Working at the expected standard Students can ...	Working at greater depth within the expected standard Students do ...
Paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use paragraphs to organise ideas • use some links within and across sentences and paragraphs (e.g. <i>this ..., next ..., then ...</i>). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use paragraphs/sections to help to organise content,(e.g. use topic sentences to begin paragraphs, followed by explanation and/or example) • use a range of linking words, including adverbials (e.g. <i>however, similarly, fifty years ago</i>) within and across sentences and paragraphs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use the features of the expected standard • write coherent paragraphs that link effectively • use these features with growing independence and confidence, and carefully structure their writing to support their overall purpose.
Key progress targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • begin to use complex sentences • use the right tense • punctuate sentences correctly • use paragraphs • use some helpful linking words and phrases (cohesive devices). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vary length and structure of sentences • use complex sentences well • use the right verb forms (e.g. past, passive, modal) • use commas for clarity • link sentences and paragraphs helpfully. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design sentences for clarity and emphasis • try out different ways of saying the same thing • use the full range of punctuation accurately • use a range of cohesive devices • link and sequence paragraphs well.

Informed by Interim teacher assessment frameworks at the end of key stage 2, Standards and Testing Agency, July 2016.

A crucial characteristic of progress in writing is that students move from being *able* to operate key skills, to operating them voluntarily. Essentially, students move from knowledge to capability to willingness. For example, many weak writers *know* where full stops should go, and they can write them into a text from which they have been removed. Next they are *able* to use them in their own writing when prompted and scaffolded. Finally, they use them without prompting. At this point they are independent in their use of that skill.