

# Guided Writing Frequently Asked Questions

## What is guided writing?

Guided writing is an important element of the teaching sequence as exemplified in the Primary Framework and is a key step between whole-class teaching and independent writing. It is during the guided writing session that children are supported to improve their writing and to work with increasing independence.

During guided writing, teachers work with carefully selected groups of children according to their current targets or specific needs. Teachers should consider carefully these targets or needs and plan the content of the session accordingly.

## How is guided writing different within the Primary Framework?

Guided writing has been seen as quite a mechanistic process with children grouped according to ability and with groups remaining constant for extended periods. Teachers have been concerned about rotation of these fairly fixed groups to ensure that all children receive an equal number of sessions.

Within the Primary Framework, there is a much more flexible and personalised approach to guided writing. Groups should be selected according to current needs, so they should be very fluid. As learning is not linear, children with similar abilities or levels of attainment do not necessarily have the same needs at a particular time.

When planning a guided session, the teacher should be thinking about the specific needs of the children today and whether there is a group with similar needs. If so, these can be addressed through a guided writing session.

## Why should I do guided writing?

Guided writing is an essential stage in the teaching sequence as it enables the teacher to scaffold children towards independence.

Guided writing contributes to the personalisation of learning by enabling the teacher to tailor the teaching to the needs of the group and facilitating the teaching and learning of individual children. The teacher is able to observe and respond to the needs of individuals within the group to give immediate feedback on success and to discuss further areas for improvement.

## How do I group pupils for a guided writing session?

Following assessment and the identification of the learning needs of the class, the teacher then groups the children with similar needs. The number of children in any group will also vary, more than six to eight children would not usually form a manageable group. The groups should be flexible to enable each child to achieve success. This may mean that a child attends two different guided writing sessions to consolidate a particular area of learning or to extend the child's learning.

## How long should a guided writing session be?

Guided writing sessions will vary in length according to the purpose and the activity. For example, a drama activity to stimulate ideas before writing may be very short. At other times, the full session between whole class teaching and plenary may be needed.

## How frequent should guided writing sessions be?

There is no set pattern for the number of guided writing sessions to be taught. This will depend on the needs of the children. It is important to remember that guided writing is one of the key teaching strategies to support children in achieving their targets, so it should take place reasonably frequently.

## What happens to the rest of the class?

During many guided writing sessions, other children will be engaged in part of the independent writing process. They will always be engaged in meaningful learning activities.

Teachers have developed a great deal of expertise in identifying appropriate learning activities and encouraging children to become more independent during guided reading and these skills apply equally to guided writing.

## What does a good guided writing session look like?

Guided writing sessions will vary enormously, but the teaching will be focused on the needs of the particular group of children who are involved in the session. The principles, advantages and an example are shown below.

## At what stage of the writing process do I teach guided writing?

### **Guided writing can take place at any stage of the writing process.**

Before writing: to support children's planning and drafting of their work.

This should refer back to and build on the previous shared writing session. Activities might include:

- supporting children as they formulate their ideas – this may incorporate drama or role-play;
- reviewing objectives for writing and/or the children's targets;
- the teacher modelling the process of planning and drafting (this may include rerunning part of the shared session for targeted groups of children);
- developing sentence construction and punctuation;
- retelling a known story in the correct sequence and as a writer: in complete sentences (look at speaking and listening objectives);
- planning a piece of explanatory writing drawn from a model discussed in the shared session;
- oral rehearsal.

At the point of writing: support can be provided to groups as they begin to write or when they have already started to write independently (in order to support the revising process). Children can be supported to:

- write the first or next paragraph of an explanation text and be invited to read it aloud to the group;
- reread for clarity and purpose;
- use alternative vocabulary;
- use greater precision – choice of phrases, use of complex sentences;
- use greater cohesion – use of connectives, consistency of tense, time, person and so on;

- remember objectives for writing and be supported in checking their work against the success criteria.

After writing: feedback sessions.

After children have worked independently on their writing there should be opportunities for them to assess their writing. After writing, you could:

- support children to check their work against success criteria, edit, proofread and reflect on the impact on the reader;
- review progress and targets;
- discuss next steps in writing and set new targets where appropriate.

## How does guided writing fit into the different phases of the Primary Framework?

Guided writing can take place throughout the planning phases. You would expect a greater emphasis on guided writing during the final writing phase as guided writing often follows on from shared writing and addresses the specific development needs of the group, which may be general, e.g. variety of sentence structure or genre specific, e.g. use of emotive language when writing a persuasive argument. The session may simplify the shared session for less confident writers or extend the shared session to challenge more able writers.

## How can I use guided writing to inform assessment?

Guided writing is underpinned by effective *Assessment for learning (AfL)*. Guided writing sessions provide opportunities for ongoing assessment. Teachers identify the learning needs of children based on their assessments; they set precise writing targets that will address the needs of each group. The teacher explains the targets to the group and regularly reviews them with the children. Feedback is provided at every stage; this may take the form of self-assessment, peer-assessment or teacher-assessment.

## How can guided writing support inclusion?

Guided writing sessions can provide highly effective support to English as an additional language (EAL) learners. These sessions should:

- be set in context, based on, linked to or in preparation for classroom work;
- provide explicit modelling/articulation of writing so that attention is drawn to grammatical features, if appropriate, and/or focus for guided writing such as persuasive language – use of modals (could, would, might and so on);
- provide opportunities for focused, planned talk:
  - paired/group talk at an exploratory level to gather ideas;
  - clarify thinking, reach shared understanding;
  - oral rehearsal of identified language required for writing;
  - further modelling/recasting of oral language where necessary;
- address the appropriate use and extension of vocabulary. This includes understanding of the nuances and intensity of words and phrases and their use within a genre and its register;
- review/assessment of writing against success criteria – language/vocabulary misconceptions addressed.

## Where else can I go for guidance and resources?

The Primary National Strategy has produced two new resources to support effective teaching of guided writing; a booklet and a DVD. Both of these should be available in school and can be found on the website:

[www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframework/cpd/literacy/improving\\_writing\\_day\\_1/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframework/cpd/literacy/improving_writing_day_1/)

The booklet *'Improving writing with a focus on guided writing'* (Ref: 00618-2007BKT-EN) is available from:

### **DCSF Publications**

**Tel:** 0845 60 222 60

**Fax:** 0845 60 333 60

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Additional resources to support children with EAL:

*Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and teaching for bilingual children in the primary years* (00164-2007)

*Assessment toolkit to support pupils with English as an additional language* (0319/2002)