DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS: Suggested Strategies to build student skills and student engagement in the writing process

Students often face huge barriers when asked to write. It is therefore important that students are supported throughout the writing process to help them improve not only their writing skills, but to build confidence as well. Some general suggestions include:

❖ Modelled; guided; and independent writing activities or MGI

| DEPENDENCE	⟶	INDEPENDENCE
Guided Practice teacher support; instruction; modelling; demonstration	Gradual withdrawal of support small group work; pair work Intermittent periods of independent work	Independent writing Self-checking

❖ Deconstruction; joint construction; construction

❖ Scaffolding and graphic organisers

❖ Explicit teaching of writing skills

❖ Overcoming barriers to writing

❖ Build collaborative learning skills though group structures

❖ Feedback to provide information on how to improve (oral and written)

❖ Peer and self-assessment

❖ Goal setting and personal learning plans

❖ Positive reinforcement to acknowledge student success at all levels, remember

ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN

The Writing Cycle
Building independent learning

THE CURRICULUM CYCLE
Beverly Derewianka, 2005
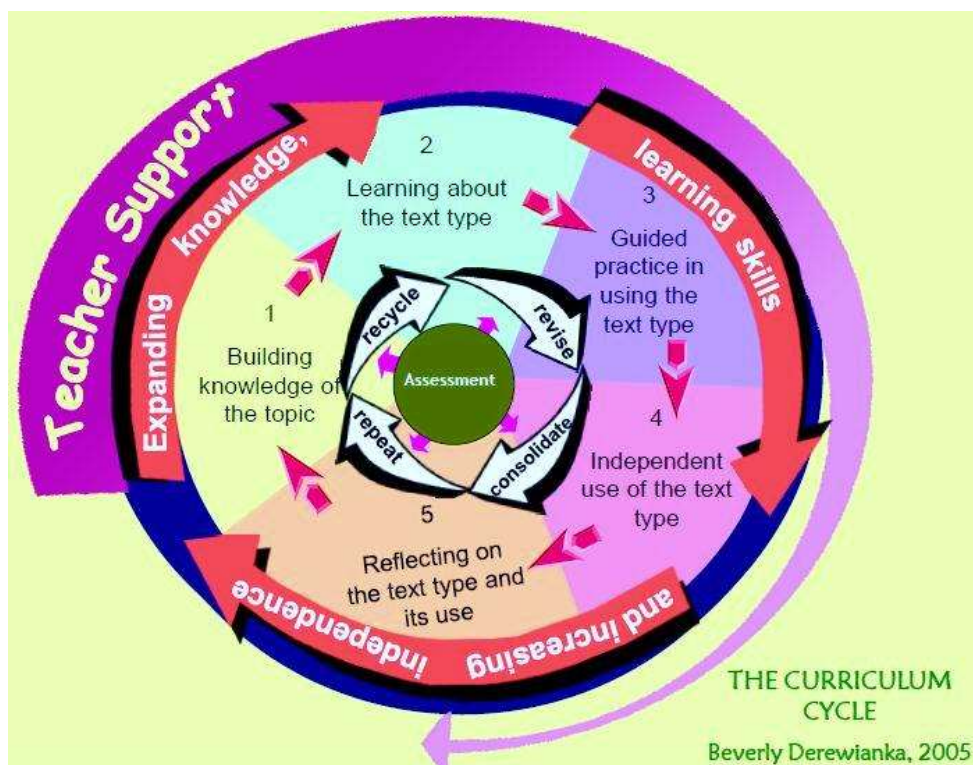
More specific strategies may include:

1. **Building vocabulary**
   - Word puzzles
   - Matching activities: synonyms; term with its meaning; word with a visual image
   - Grouping words into key language features, e.g. connective words; temporal; cause and effect; technical/jargon
   - Students create flashcards to build vocabulary and revise
   - Anagrams
   - Provide spelling tips – Look, Say, Cover; SLURP: say the word; listen to how the word sounds; look at the patterns in the word; understand rules; relate the word to words you already know; practise writing the word.
   - Ask students to create a glossary of key terms and concepts
   - Locate terms in the text
   - Play a game – memory cards; competitions;
   - Ask students to stand in a circle. Throw a bean bag to a student who must say a word from a previously learned list. They return the bag to the teacher who continues to toss the bean bag to another student.
   - Jigsawing – to build vocabulary – group words, e.g. temporal words; connectives; descriptive words; modality (high/low); contrast; summarise; emphasis
   - Supply the spelling of important words on prompt cards
   - Use word banks
   - Colour code different types of words within a text, e.g. connective words
   - Word hunt competition – ask students to locate a specific type of word in the text, e.g. technical words and reward with a prize

2. **Sentence construction**
   - Begin with a simple sentence. Involve students in the process of adding descriptive words; connective words; and clauses to create a complex sentence. E.g. Simple sentences

     I went to McDonalds. I ate a hamburger.
     - Change to compound sentence
     - Change to complex sentence
     - Change verbs to make sentence more interesting
     - Add information to nouns to make sentence more interesting
     - Add information to verbs to make sentence more interesting.
   - Break up the sentence into individual words written on cards. Students sort the cards in the correct order. To add a different dimension, give each student in a group only one word. They then sort themselves into the correct order.
   - Deconstruct sentences by highlighting circling and underlining key language structures, e.g. only connective words or temporal words.
   - Use strategic questioning to guide students through the analysis of language features:
     - Can you think of a more effective verb, noun, adjective?
     - What tense should we be using?
     - This sentence is a bit clumsy. How can we make the meaning clearer?

- o This is how we would say it, but how do we write it?
- o Should we combine these two sentences or separate them?
- o What sort of punctuation do we need here?
- Provide students with flawed sentences that they must correct and improve.
- Provide punctuation tips and practise punctuating sentences

3. **Working with the text**
   - Use visual stimulus (photos; cartons; diagrams; symbols; picture books) to engage students with the text
   - Joint deconstruction using templates
   - Work with students to create the marking criteria/rubrics
   - Underline, highlight or circle key word choices or grammatical features
   - Jigsawing to build understanding of structure
   - Model the text – the structure (title; topic sentence; purpose; supporting sentences; concluding or lining sentence; function of each paragraph.; language features (technical and types of language)

Modelling the Text		
TEXT STRUCTURE	**The Water Cycle**	**LANGUAGE FEATURES**
Statement of phenomenon	All water on earth is part of the water cycle.	Timeless present tense.
Explanation Sequence Telling How and why	To begin with, water on the earth's surface is heated by the sun and becomes water vapour as it evaporates. When the water evaporates it rises and then cools, turning back into small drops of water. This process is called condensation. As the water condenses the drops of water join to form clouds. As more and more drops of water become heavier and consequently fall back to the earth's surface as precipitation, such as rain, sleet or hail.	Words for sequence Subject specific technical words Words for sequence Subject specific technical words Cause and effect words Subject specific technical words
Conclusion	The cycle then begins again.	

- Sequence sentences in the correct paragraph structure. This may be done using software such as SMART Notebook or a simple cut and paste activity.
- Sequence paragraphs to form the whole text
- Use close passages – selecting a specific word type to focus attention on a language feature
- Match topic sentences/concluding sentences to paragraphs
- Match text types to headings
- Equations – students complete an equation to sum up key features.

$$\boxed{} + \boxed{} + \boxed{} = \boxed{}$$

4. **Analysing the question**
   - Explicitly teach the directive words – describe; outline; explain; assess; evaluate; respond to; report on
     Why and how ⟶ '**Explain** the impact of technology on people's lives."
   - Break down question into key components by highlighting, circling and underlining key words
   - Make connections with the question by linking question to prior knowledge and learning

5. **Prewriting: Planning the response**
   - Use graphic organisers to brainstorm ideas; make comparisons; find similarities and differences; determine prior knowledge; identify key ideas and build examples; visualise the content or key arguments; sequence key points. These may include:
     - Venn diagrams
     - Concept maps
     - KWL
     - Table summaries
     - Diagrams
     - flowcharts
   - Give yourself a hand! Students record the key arguments/examples in each of the five fingers

   - Sketch to stretch, e.g.

   ┌───┐
   │ Sketch your response to the text in the box. Then describe your │
   │ sketch and response to the text.   │
   │   │
   │   ┌───┐   │
   │   │   │   │
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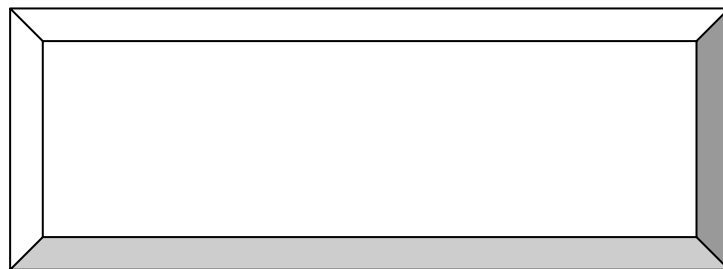
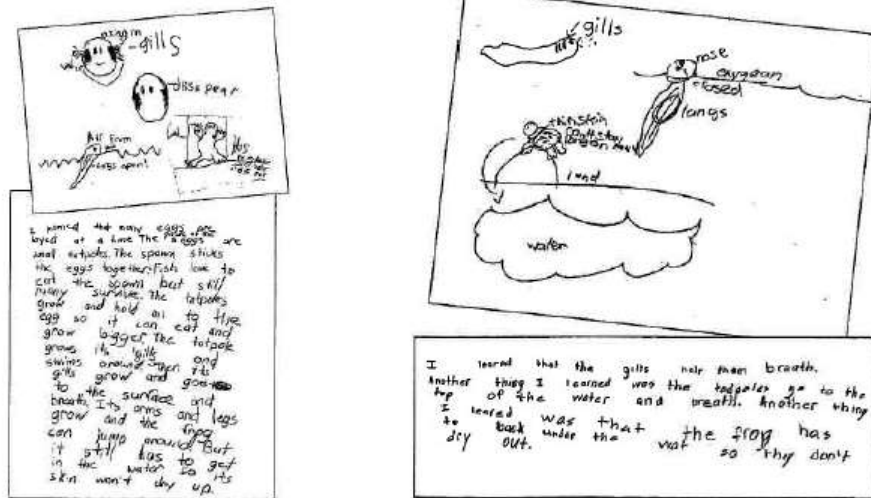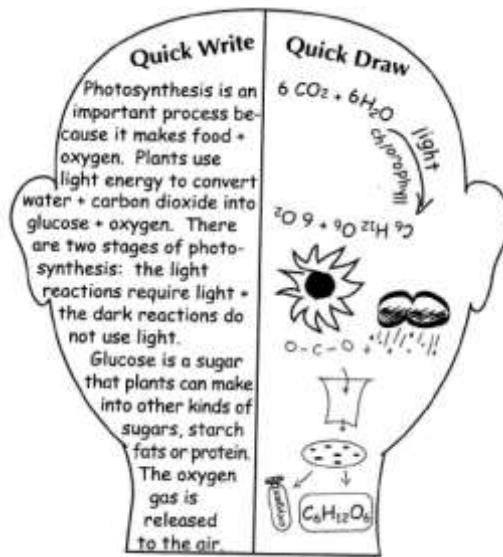**Exemplar**

- Quick draw, quick write – students are asked to draw a visual representation of the topic or concept. Then they use the diagram to describe the topic.

- Post-its and butchers' paper are very useful tools for students to brainstorm and organise ideas
- Use an information map.

TOPIC:		
WHO	WHAT	WHERE
WHEN	HOW	WHY

6. **Writing the response**
   - Structure paragraph writing using the acronym, 'PEEL' Use the acronym - point; examples; explanation; link

   > **PEEL**
   >
   > **P**oint – one sentence referring to the question and introducing the main idea. Follow this with further elaboration
   >
   > **E**xamples/evidence – a number of sentences giving examples from the text
   >
   > **E**ffect/explanation – explanation on how the examples help you understand the idea
   >
   > **L**ink – it back to the question

   - Whole class and small group activity – each group is assigned a specific task, e.g. writing the topic sentences; they then share their sentence with the other groups to build a complete paragraph.
   - Hamburger paragraph structure
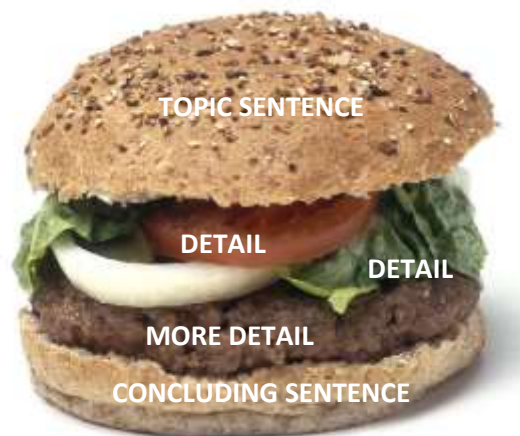
   - Use metacognitive strategies such as making Connections; Predicting; Visualising; Questioning; Monitoring and Summarising
   - Use writing conferences: teacher with student; student with student; small group
   - Joint construction whereby students collaborate to write together. A very useful online site for joint construction is 'PrimaryPad'.
   - Joint construction

     The teacher chooses a topic that is similar to the one currently being taught or has been taught recently, so that all students hove the background knowledge to write about it. The teacher elicits ideas and suggested sentences from the class and also takes on the role of the scribe. This makes it less confronting for the students.

     The teacher guides the students with focus questions such as:
     o What will be a suitable title?
     o What type of statement do we need to start with?
     o Is there another way we can write that?
     o What is another word we have learnt that we can use to say that?
     o What do you think comes next?
     o Have we covered everything?

- POWER – prepare; organise; write; edit; rewrite

7. Editing, proofreading and publishing the written response
- Spoof marking a range of responses
- Create marking criteria –students work together to create their own
- Create a checklist to support independent editing
- Develop group plan for writing and publishing – Drafting; revising; conferencing; editing; proofreading; publishing
- Teach self-talk – questions to ask yourself as you edit and proofread
- Develop group of symbols to use when editing and annotating text

8. Effective use of group structures to build collaborative learning
- Students create protocols for group work, e.g. support and encourage your peers; actively listen; respect each other's opinions
- Think-Pair-Share
- Developing an arguments –while standing students taking turns to add a supporting statement or example; sit down when finished
- Prompts – use prompts to guide and support student responses in group discussions
- Assign each group member a specific role or task
- Use a template to record key points
- Record group discussions for later review
- Provide thinking time when asking questions or guiding discussions

9. Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment (see separate booklet)
- Create a learning plan – students complete column graph to plot their confidence level at the beginning of the project and again at the end to plot their growth
- Students establish learning goals, e.g. goal; strategies; reward
- Students keep a learning journal of their experiences for self-reflection

10. Providing effective feedback to build learning (see separate booklet)
- Feedback should be positive, but NOT, empty praise. It should provide information to the student on how to improve and move on to the next step.
- DO NOT use **RED** pen
- DO NOT assign marks or grades