Scaffolding Written Expression

Writing can be a demanding task that involves a large cognitive load. The writing process requires many skills, such as idea generation, research, planning and organising, sentence and paragraph construction, grammar, spelling, letter formation, and proofreading. Any difficulties with oral language are also likely to be seen in written work.

Keywords: *writing, written expression, writing process, adjustments*

Identify the Skill that Needs to be Targeted

When using a writing task to assess student skills, it is important to first identify which skill is being assessed. Consider providing adjustments in areas that are not the focus of the writing task. For example, if the goal is to gauge understanding of content, then it may be appropriate to allow an oral response or the use of assistive technology.

When determining adjustments, it can also be helpful to first identify the areas of writing a student is having difficulty with and then review the possible adjustments for that area. The following are examples of adjustments to support students during writing. To use this reference, identify the writing skills that are difficult for the student and consider the adjustment options in this section.

Idea Generation and Information Gathering	• Provide opportunities for paired brainstorming or joint research • Engage student(s) in pre-writing activities designed to help them generate ideas • Provide a visual stimulus where possible • Explain vocabulary used in the assessment task or information sheet
Planning and Organising	• Breakdown tasks into achievable steps, possibly with the support of a checklist • Provide mnemonics or reference lists of steps in the writing process • Provide a graphic organiser that fits the style of writing or text structure (e.g., sequence, compare/contrast) • Provide reference lists of transition or linking words and phrases
Spelling	• Include spelling when pre-teaching vocabulary and target topic words • Allow access to spell-check options using assistive technology • Make key words readily available to use in written task (e.g., in a personalised spelling reference book) • Provide visual supports (e.g., sound-spelling reference chart; checklist of steps for spelling with syllables)

Word Choice	• Prior to writing task, review any target academic vocabulary
	• Make key words readily available (e.g., in a personalised vocabulary book)
	• Provide access to a student friendly dictionary/thesaurus
Handwriting	• Allow more time for tasks when handwriting
	• Consider alternatives to handwriting at different stages of drafting and finalising (e.g., for some students typing a first draft rather than handwriting may be most appropriate)
	• Use of speech-to-text software (e.g., dictation) to record responses
Grammar	• Teach grammar rules (e.g., past, present, and future tenses) and then provide a reference chart for support
	• Explicitly teach and then use visual supports to remind students about the use of pronouns, conjunctions, adverbs and adjectives for sentence complexity
	• Allow students to work in dot point or note form
Editing and Proofreading	• Use visual supports such as a checklist with areas for proofreading
	• Use text-to-speech (e.g., *Read Aloud*) to allow them to hear their work out loud
	• Use assistive technology tools for editing such as *Grammarly*
	• Assign individualised, specific and reachable goals for the writing task

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please **contact us**. Language Disorder Australia provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or **hello@languagedisorder.org.au**

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References

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