

AERO's writing instruction model

An introduction to using evidence-based writing practices

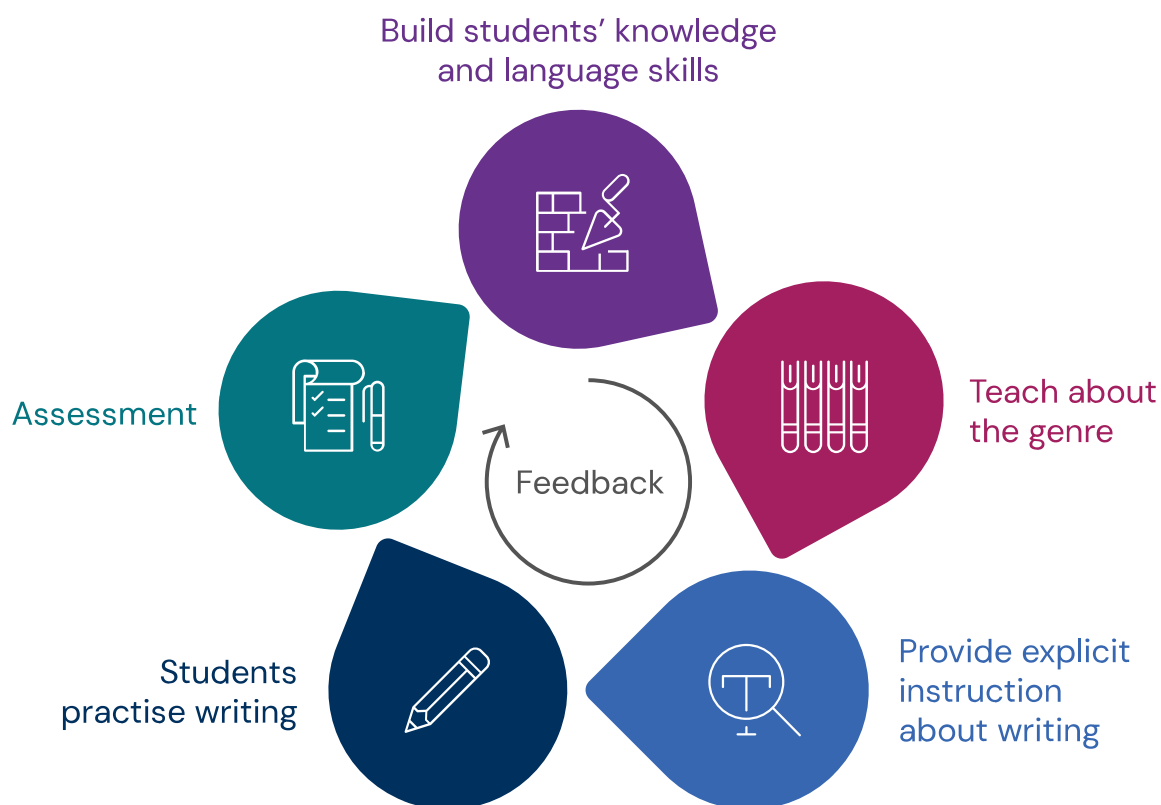
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The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has developed a School Writing Instruction Framework (SWIF) to support school leaders and teachers to deliver evidence-based writing instruction to students across all subject areas. The SWIF comprises professional development modules and classroom resources to strengthen teachers' knowledge of and confidence in teaching writing across subject areas.

AERO's Writing Instruction Model ([Figure 1](#)) introduces an approach to teaching writing that is explicit and systematic, and that can be used in all subject areas that require students to write. The model has been created for both primary and secondary teachers.

The model is intended to show that writing moves in and through different stages. To teach writing effectively, we must explicitly teach students the content knowledge they will need. Understanding the content in the targeted subject area and how texts are and should be written is an important first step in understanding how to write. This includes understanding the ways that purpose, audience, structure and language features intersect. Each subsequent stage of the model builds on this concept and needs to be supported by explicit teaching and appropriate activities for student learning. The SWIF professional learning courses align with and support the implementation of this model.

The model is not intended to be a checklist. It comprises several stages, but moving through each one doesn't signify completion or achievement of students' writing. Instead, the model is designed to help you consider how to plan, model and explicitly and systematically teach writing, while acknowledging the complexities involved. For example, although the 'Build students' knowledge and language skills' stage of the model is an important first step, this stage also needs to be integrated into various stages of program planning and delivery. Similarly, students aren't exclusively assessed (e.g., using summative assessments) in the last stage of the model. Assessment is integral to all stages and occurs at various points.

Figure 1: AERO's Writing Instruction Model

The Writing Instruction Model is based on established evidence from the field of applied linguistics.^{1, 2, 3, 4} The teaching practices in the model align with AERO's learning and teaching model. They include a focus on teaching writing explicitly, guiding students' learning through modelling, before gradually removing scaffolds as students practise and develop mastery of the content. See AERO's [learning and teaching model](#) for more information about planning and teaching for how students learn.

Importantly, the model acknowledges the need for regular, quality feedback to students. Good writing takes time to draft and craft, and you should check for understanding and give additional instruction, guidance or feedback at all teaching and learning stages.



Build students' knowledge and language skills

The first stage of the model acknowledges that building new knowledge in all subject areas is foundational for student learning.

All subjects require information such as knowledge of facts, concepts and procedures to be explicitly taught so that students can ultimately apply this to think critically and creatively, and solve problems. Importantly, students require this knowledge, so they have content to write about.

In the first stage of the model, knowledge and language skills are closely connected. Across subjects, information is often presented in different genres. For example, students may encounter an explanation text followed by a narrative text in the same subject area, which can create heavy language demands. Explicit instruction needs to ensure close connections between new knowledge (through the provision of selected explanation, narrative and instructional texts) and the specific language features that are unique to different text types.

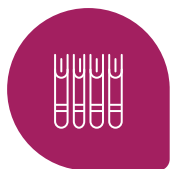
When planning teaching for building knowledge and language, consider language activities that reinforce the learning of new knowledge.

What does this look like?



Examples of how to build students' knowledge and language skills

- Lead whole-class instruction of relevant, knowledge-rich texts, explaining and modelling the language features of texts.
- Support students to read and understand knowledge-rich texts.
- Set spaced and varied interactive activities that allow students to hear and use the language associated with the content knowledge.



Teach about the genre

Teaching the genre involves explicit instruction for students to understand the purpose, structural features and intended audience of text types.

Genre theory acknowledges that writing is a social practice using language for purposes such as explaining, describing, arguing, reviewing and storytelling. Start by explaining the purpose or intention of the genre. Using the selected text, draw students' attention to how the text is structured to achieve its purpose. For example, if the focus genre is persuasion, key structural features of a persuasive essay would include an introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion.

The intended audience for the focus genre needs to be explained (i.e., What are the needs of the intended readers? How do you know?) Teachers can help students understand who their intended audience is, as this will influence the language features that are chosen in the context of the genre. Such features might include cohesive devices, expressions of tone, or the language of cause and effect.

What does this look like?



Examples of how to teach about the genre

- Identify the features of the genre you'll be exploring as part of your program.
- Deconstruct a selected text in the focus genre, explaining the structure, purpose and intended audience.
- Identify how language choices in the selected text shape meaning.



Provide explicit instruction about writing

At this stage of the model, students will have developed an understanding from previous and ongoing 'knowledge and language skill' activities that relate to the focus genre and key language features. Support student writing through explicit instruction, using the gradual release of responsibility. First, model writing of the focus genre, identifying key language features ('I do'), before moving onto guided and joint text construction ('We do').

As you model the focus genre ('I do'), demonstrate the writing process, thinking aloud to show how to incorporate identified language and structural features. Then start to elicit contributions from the students ('We do'). Students' contributions are important as they provide you with an opportunity to draw on specific sentence types to show how language features can be shaped into effective well-structured texts (e.g., how connectives can be used to ensure writing is cohesive or how they can be used in complex sentences to show cause and effect). Allocate time for guided and joint text construction where students are provided an opportunity to collaboratively construct a text in the focus genre.

What does this look like?



Examples of how to provide explicit instruction about writing

- Revisit and review learning about language features through modelling.
- Facilitate guided and joint construction of a text in the focus genre.
- Practise writing targeted sentence types to communicate understanding of content, providing feedback and guidance to students.



Students practise writing

Students' writing skills improve with practice. Increasing the amount of practice they undertake is key to their progress,⁵ including time for students to write extended tasks independently ('You do'). Creating time to write provides students with the cognitive space to develop grammatical and structural knowledge of different texts.

When writing is practised regularly, automaticity in skills such as syntax, sentence structure and punctuation will occur, ultimately improving students' creative and critical capacities in the production of their own texts.⁴

What does this look like?



Examples of how to support students to practise writing

- Assign writing tasks that progress in complexity, detail and abstraction, starting from sentences, moving to paragraphs and then extended texts.
- Allow sufficient time for students to apply the writing skills they've learnt independently in extended texts.
- Gradually remove scaffolds so students can consolidate their knowledge and language skills on their own.



Assessment

Assessment for and assessment of learning allow you to collect evidence of student achievement to clarify students' learning and understanding. How the assessments are reflected as part of teaching and learning can be both formal and informal.

Assessment for learning (formative)

This form of assessment usually occurs through the teaching and learning process to clarify students' learning and can be used to modify instruction and maximise learning as it takes place. Formative assessment strategies offer a scaffold for building the necessary knowledge and skills for the more complex summative assessment. In terms of the model, this means you provide clear goals for writing activities, segmenting the learning into meaningful and achievable chunks, followed by checking students' understanding and giving additional instruction, guidance or feedback.

Assessment of learning (summative)

Assessment provides a line of sight from curriculum, through the teaching of the subject's content, to the determination of whether the student has learned the subject's particular knowledge and skills. Summative assessment is often used at the end of the program to evaluate whether learning has taken place. The alignment between the content of a subject and the assessment of whether learning has taken place can be made explicit for students through the design of a quality assessment task that reflects the identified learning outcomes and clear evidence of success.

Clarity about how curriculum, content and criteria are connected provides students with transparency on how to be successful in their assessment task. This means that the language used to communicate the task should be clear and accessible for all students. The assessment task should explicitly outline what the writing requirements are, including which text features, sentence types, paragraphs and scaffolded structures students should use.

Providing students with an understanding of what quality writing looks like and how it's assessed is an essential part of this stage. This can be achieved by providing students with specific student self-assessment checklists that align with the assessment's quality criteria.

Using data to analyse and evaluate students' knowledge and language skills harnesses the power of assessment for examining learning needs and informing targeted teaching practices.

Moderation

Moderation is an important part of the assessment process as it is one of the quality assurance processes we look to for reliability and validity in judgement decisions. It's a social practice that involves reaching a shared understanding of the quality of work or coming to an agreement on a marking decision. As you moderate, present, discuss and critique judgement decisions based on critical evidence in the sample or portfolio of work.

What does this look like?



Examples of assessment

Assessment for learning (formative)

- Begin with a deep understanding of what your students need to learn.
- Set clear and measurable learning objectives.
- Regularly check for student understanding.
- Provide timely feedback that is individualised where possible.

Assessment of learning (summative)

- Understand the relationship between curriculum, planning, teaching and learning, desired student outcomes and assessment in your subject area.
- Design an assessment task that reflects identified learning outcomes and outlines acceptable evidence:
 - Consider the language used to communicate the task.
 - Make the writing requirements visible.
 - Ensure that criteria connect to identified learning outcomes.
- Share quality criteria with students.
- Use student assessment data to analyse and evaluate student understanding of subject content and to plan for future teaching.

Feedback

Good feedback tells students where they're going, how they're going and what they need to do to improve. Some feedback can be an instant response to a question answered or an action observed. Feedback needs to be honest, constructive and clear. The model situates feedback in the centre to acknowledge the significant impact it has on student writing quality. Student writing improves when formative assessment of writing is routine.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Callaghan, M., & Rothery, J. (1988). *Teaching factual writing: A genre base approach*. Metropolitan East Disadvantaged Schools Program.
- 2 Humphrey, S., & Feez, S. (2016). Direct instruction fit for purpose: Applying a metalinguistic toolkit to enhance creative writing in the early secondary years. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 39, 207–219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03651974>
- 3 Derewianka, B. (2020). Growing into the complexity of mature academic writing. In H. Chen, D. Myhill & H. Lewis (Eds.), *Developing writers across the primary and secondary years* (pp. 212–236). Routledge.
- 4 Knapp, P., & Watkins, M. (2005). *Genre, text, grammar: Technologies for teaching and assessing writing*. UNSW Press.
- 5 Graham, S., Liu, X., Aitken, A., Ng, C., Bartlett, B., Harris, K. R., & Holzapfel, J. (2018). Effectiveness of literacy programs balancing reading and writing instruction: A meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 53(3), 279–304. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.194>
- 6 Graham, S., Hebert, M., & Harris, K. R. (2015). Formative assessment and writing: A meta-analysis. *The Elementary School Journal*, 115(4), 523–547. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681947>