Strategic Support of
PLANNING FOR WRITING IN ADULTS

Identifying the key aim of written assignments

Clearly, all writing has a purpose. The student needs to understand what is required, so that the appropriate terminology, style, perspective and so on can feature in the piece. There are a number of categories:

1. Writing to imagine, explore and entertain

2. Writing to inform, explain and describe

3. Writing to persuade, argue and advise

4. Writing to analyse, review and comment

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Structure – thinking about levels

It can be useful for learners to explicitly think about the different levels that we engage with when writing, though aspects of the levels are inter-connected:

- **Word level:** Explicitly running through different types of language (imaginative, technical, genre-related, formal versus informal, academic versus reflective etc.) as well as discussion of aspects like concision and perspective will all be useful.

- **Sentence level**: Focusing upon aspects of sentence structure and voice (active versus passive), sentence length, use of connectives will help the learner explicitly broach how he/she builds sentences to fulfil certain writing 'purposes'. E.g. instructional text has lots of clear, short sentences.

- **Text level**: This view of the piece looks at overall organisation and purpose of the piece and how this influences the words, sentences and paragraph structure within it.

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Planning what to write

- Planning what to write incorporates brainstorming and planning ideas for essays,this involves supporting learners to explore different planning tools and techniques to find out which suits them.

- Getting started can be one of the most difficult areas for all students, but most particularly for those with literacy-related difficulties. You might hear such learners say:

  - 'I don't know how to plan'

  - 'I don't like planning – I just like to get started'

  - 'I know what to write, but I just can't seem to get it down on paper'

  - 'Talking about the subject is easy, but I hate writing it down'

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Planning for writing

- Planning for writing is an important skill and one that can be taught.

- Failing to specifically address the question is a common area of difficulty.

- Learners with literacy-related difficulties may need help in understanding what is required.

- In getting started with the writing process, it is important to ensure that students are familiar with the most common question terms.

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Examine the Question

The first step in planning for writing is to examine the question, keeping in mind the audience and structure. Students should be encouraged to:

- Highlight or underline the word/words that identify what the subject of the question is.

- Identify and highlight or underline (in a different colour) any specifics of the question.

- Identify and highlight or underline (in a different colour) the key words – that is, to identify what the question is asking the writer to do?

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Planning: concept maps or linear notes?

- Concept maps are an ideal way for many students to deal with a vast amount of information and put it in some kind of order.

- The information can be 'brainstormed', that is, written down as it comes to mind without worrying about relevance or order, and then re-organised into a meaningful form.

  - Not all students like using mind maps – they should be encouraged to develop techniques that they find useful.

  - Linear notes – developed in a table style format, can be useful for students. This may be particularly helpful where the question requires students to compare one or more sets of facts. In such cases Venn diagrams can also prove useful.
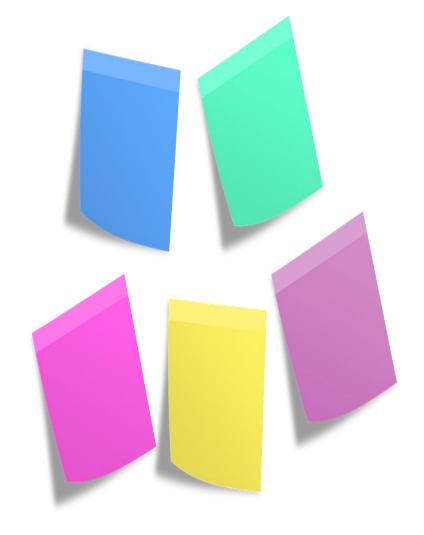
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Organising the writing task: post-it notes

Once the information has been brainstormed, the second phase is to **organise** the writing task.

Post-it note sorting can be helpful because:

- Key ideas are written on post-it notes or small index cards – so they can be considered and ranked in importance.

- The cards can then be moved around manually to form a structure for the piece of writing.

- Students often find this technique useful for re-drafting as it enables the order or the way ideas are linked to be reappraised easily.

Colour-coded linear table for essay/report writing

Breaking down the sections of the essay or report into colour-coded rows in a table (**Introduction**, Findings, **Conclusion** etc.) can help to 'chunk' the writing into smaller more manageable pieces, thus making the process less daunting.

The cells of the colour-coded table can:

- Include the assignment/brief instructions
- Be used to brainstorm key ideas and plans for each section
- Be used to consider each of the sections independently
- Track the approximate word count for each section

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Writing frames

There are several published writing frames available. These are templates consisting of starters, connective and sentence modifiers that offer a structure for writing.

Advantages	Dis-advantages
1. They offer an organised structure 2. They can stop the student from 'freezing' and not knowing how to start or continue 3. They encourage the student to write using paragraphs	1. They may constrain a student's writing style 2. Unless used carefully, students may become over-reliant on them and is unlikely to be available in an exam situation 3. They can discourage metacognition

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