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Training and Professional Development

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6 Writing

Nora Hughes

Introduction

- What writing do literacy learners do and aspire to do?
- What skills and knowledge do they bring?
- How can tutors support them in developing their writing further?

The learners whose writing we discuss in this chapter, and who are profiled in the learner texts, have varied experiences of and motivations for writing. They want to become more skilled and confident writers and see writing as a means to fulfilling their goals and aspirations.

For some people, these relate to their role in the family and the community. For example, **Malika** uses writing as a parent, friend and neighbour and would like to be a community translator. Others need writing for study or employment. **Eddie** wants to get a place on a bricklaying course, while **Sean** aims to study history at university and needs academic writing skills. Some people have more personal motivations for developing their writing. **Joyce** loves corresponding with friends and would like to write her autobiography.

These learners bring many skills and abilities as writers and communicators. One of the principles underpinning this chapter is that effective teaching of writing depends on recognizing learners' strengths and building on them.

How the chapter is structured

We begin with an overview of theory and in the remainder of the chapter we suggest ways of putting theory into practice.

Part 1: Themes from contemporary theory

As with reading, there have always been 'wars' over writing; some of these have been resolved over time and competing theories have been incorporated into established practice.[1] A recent example is a debate about syntax. Andrews *et al.* (2004) suggests

that children improve their sentence structure primarily through reading and develop it further through free writing. The counter argument is that they need to study and practise it explicitly.[2] More recently there have been debates about text messaging and its impact, positive or negative, on young people's ability to write more formally.[3]

Overall, there has been less research into how people learn to write than how they learn to read and much of it has been carried out with children. In this chapter we do not analyse any one theory in detail or judge competing theories, but explore ideas and approaches which, in our view, can be usefully applied to adults.

Two bodies of educational theory that are currently influential are **cognitive** and **social practice** theory, which both offer important insights.[4] In terms of writing development, cognitive theory focuses on writing as an individual, internal activity and the sub-skills that make up the writing process, while social practice theory is concerned with what people *do* with writing and the kinds of learning that will enable them to participate in real-life events and practices in which writing has a central role.

Purposes for writing: the concept of genre

The concept of **genre** is central to a social practice view of writing. Genres are conventional ways of using language, in different contexts and for different purposes. Genres evolve over time and vary across cultures, but at any one time there are genres that can be easily recognized and whose purpose is clear (see Chapter 3). In a social practice view of writing, developing **genre knowledge** is part of becoming an effective writer.

The original aim of a **genre** approach was to empower people from marginalized communities by teaching them to reproduce **powerful genres** such as academic essays, formal letters and reports. Another, more contemporary aim is to recognize and enhance people's everyday writing practices, including less prestigious and more personal genres, like shopping lists, notes or greeting cards.

Funds of knowledge

The concept of 'funds of knowledge' comes from a social practice view of learning. When applied to writing, it refers to learners' knowledge of familiar genres and ways of using language, acquired through their experience of literacy in everyday life. It also encompasses the personal and social resources they bring, such as cultural knowledge, values and motivations for writing.

When approaching a writing task, often a learner will understand the social context better than the tutor and can make judgements about how to address the reader. An example of this is **Geraldine's** letter to her local councillor (**Text 1b**), in which her knowledge of the Traveller community and her political astuteness make the letter particularly effective. Similarly, in more informal types of writing such as text messages or emails to friends or family, people know the conventions of their own cultures and subcultures and use this knowledge to make decisions as they write.

What teachers have to offer is explicit knowledge of how language works, how texts are constructed and the conventions of different kinds of writing, particularly more formal genres. So writing development can be seen as a shared construction of knowledge between learner and teacher.

Critical literacy

The concept of 'critical literacy' is central to a social view of writing. Essentially it means that writing is not neutral: a writer makes choices that reflect her view of the world and 'position' the reader.

Task 6.1

Consider these extracts from texts. First, what genres do you think they are taken from? Secondly, what 'critical' choices have the writers made?

1a Happy birthday! Lots of love xxx
1b Best wishes for your birthday.

2a I would be grateful if you would give this matter your urgent attention.
2b If I do not receive the full amount within one week I shall be obliged to take legal action.

3a Government troops killed twenty people when they opened fire on a group of civilians.
3b Twenty people were killed in an incident involving soldiers and civilians.

Comment 6.1

1a and 1b are birthday greetings expressing different degrees of intimacy. 1a is intended to be more intimate than the more formal, distant comment in 1b (though it is worth remembering that within different cultures intimacy and distance are expressed differently).

2a and 2b are from letters of complaint. In these the writer chooses whether to make a polite request or issue a threat.

3a and 3b are from news reports. When a journalist reports an incident, she can make clear *who* did *what* (3a), or she can disguise this by leaving out the subject of the action (*Government troops*) and using the passive voice (*were killed*) (3b). The passive voice gives an impression of objectivity and lack of personal involvement, which can disguise the writer's real position.

Motivation and confidence

In both a cognitive and social practice view of writing, motivation and confidence impact on people's development as writers. A cognitive psychologist, Keith Stano-

vitch, coined the phrase 'the Matthew effect'[5] to describe the downward spiral of lack of opportunity, loss of confidence and loss of motivation that mars many people's experience of formal learning (Stanovitch 1986). Cognitive theorists see this primarily as an individual experience; they analyse the impact of negative feelings on a learner's progress. Social practice theorists argue that confidence and motivation are linked to social factors, including inequality in the education system and institutional barriers based on class, race, gender and other factors; they give higher priority to the development of critical literacy skills as a tool for empowerment.[6]

In the field of adult literacy these issues are particularly significant; some learners, however confident they are in other aspects of their lives, see writing as something to fear rather than something which they can use for their own purposes. They need constructive feedback on their writing, recognition of their strengths and a chance to explore wider issues, including issues of power.

Creativity can be a key to alleviating anxiety and unlocking potential. **Sean** Taylor, in his article 'Improving on the blank page' (in Mace 1995), describes how participants in a poetry workshop, using the metaphor of a key, discovered that writing could be an 'ally' rather than an 'enemy'. Grief and Chatterton (2007) agree and offer examples of the use of creative tools to stimulate and encourage writing.

'Higher order' and 'lower order' skills

For most people, writing is more difficult than reading. While reading involves interpreting a code, writing involves using it with enough precision and skill to achieve a purpose.

Writing involves both 'higher order' and 'lower order' skills.[7] All human activity is made up of this combination. For example, higher order skills in gardening include planning the layout of the garden and choosing plants according to an overall design. Lower order skills include watering the plants and digging.

Task 6.2

Identify the higher and lower order skills involved in:

- listening to a party political broadcast;
- cooking a meal.

Comment 6.2

A person listening to a party political broadcast uses higher order skills to identify the speaker's intentions, noticing how she uses language to influence her audience. Lower order skills include hearing individual words and following the order of words in a sentence.

A person cooking a meal envisages the end product and uses all the different elements – ingredients, utensils and procedures – to achieve that end. Envisaging, designing and synthesizing are higher order processes, while turning on the gas and chopping vegetables are lower order.

In writing, higher order skills include organizing ideas and choosing language according to audience and purpose. Lower order skills include spelling and keyboarding, which rely mainly on memory and hand-eye co-ordination rather than higher order thinking.

A writer will find it difficult to create an effective text – one that is coherent, articulate and fulfils the writer's purpose – if she has difficulties with lower order skills such as spelling. This kind of difficulty can slow down the writing process and prevent the writer from fully expressing her ideas. Higher order thinking uses a lot of brain capacity and therefore writers need 'automaticity' in the lower order skills. But for many adult learners automaticity is difficult to achieve and producing a written text can mean struggling with every word.

Automaticity: 'getting the words down'

'A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker'.[8] Learner writers who have difficulties with lower order skills must draw on other strategies when writing, so that they can produce a text that conveys their ideas and achieves their communicative purpose. In **Text 1b**, **Geraldine's** strategy was to 'leapfrog' over unknown spellings, often writing only the first letter of a word and leaving the rest blank, in order to concentrate on building a persuasive argument.

This kind of strategy is good for producing a first draft, as it frees up the brain for the challenge of composition. In a finished text, however, unconventional spelling can make things difficult for the reader, slowing down the reading and undermining the clarity of the text.

'Correctness' and effectiveness in writing

Some choices made by writers, even if they are not 'correct' in terms of standard written English, reflect a spoken variety and do not impede communication. For example, in **Grace's** text (**Text 7**), the absence of plural and past tense markers does not seriously affect the clarity of the writing:

> I went to Rose birthday party and it was so nice,
>
> She nineteen year old and there was a lot of visitor that she invite to the party and did rent a big hall for the all night party.

But sometimes grammatical errors cause confusion, throwing the reader off course and making the writing less effective. In the first sentence of **Sean's** text (**Text 4**), his use of an adverbial phrase as the *subject* does not make sense, and the reader is forced to reread the sentence in order to understand the meaning:

> On my first day back in education as an adult at Shoreditch college in Hackney, was very daunting.

Nonetheless, it is important not to confuse the skilful use of written language with 'correctness'. A correctly spelt and punctuated text is not the same as an effective

text, as we can see from **Texts 1a** and **2a**. **Sharon's** *Scary Story* (**Text 2a**) is more 'correct' at sentence and word level than **Geraldine's** *Her New Life* (**Text 1a**); there are far fewer errors of punctuation, capitalization and spelling, but as a text it is less effective. While *Her New Life* has a clear structure and is written in the style of popular romantic fiction, *Scary Story* is less coherent and the 'voice' is not so easy to recognize.

An experienced writer can make choices about whether or not to follow standard conventions of grammar and punctuation. However, there is often a penalty to be paid for not obeying the 'rules'. A good literacy teacher will see beneath the 'surface' errors in learners' writing to the 'deeper' text-level qualities, but an employer or examiner may have a more superficial view and assume that a writer is incompetent.

Skills and strategies

For all these reasons, learners need support from teachers to develop writing skills at every 'level' of the process. Writing is difficult because it demands control over 'technical' aspects, such as punctuation and spelling, as well as 'strategic' ones like design, organization and register. The communicative toolkit of the writer is a mixed bag of higher and lower order skills.

The aim of literacy education is for people to develop enough confidence and control to be able to write for their own purposes. The extent to which they can do this, and the means to achieving it, will depend on the individual. For example, it is unlikely that an older person who is learning to read and write for the first time will acquire full automaticity in the lower order skills of writing, as she has not had an opportunity to learn the alphabetic code at a time in her life when this would have been achievable. But she can develop skills, strategies and confidence as a writer, provided she has access to learning that meets her needs, and can draw on support for writing, inside and outside the classroom.[9]

Learners working at higher levels of literacy, who may, for example, want to pass examinations, need to develop more independence and accuracy in their writing and be able to 'code-switch' between standard and non-standard usage according to their audience.

Cognitive overload

The concept of **cognitive overload** is an important one for writing, because writing involves a combination of complex processes, any one of which can present a challenge. It is often best to work on one new skill at a time, focusing primarily on one aspect of writing and providing **scaffolding** for the rest, so that the demands on the learner are realistic.

For example, when working on a text-level skill like organizing ideas in a text, learners could use a bank of words or sentences, as discussed later in the chapter; when working on sound-symbol correspondence they might read a text in which the syntax and vocabulary have been simplified to avoid distracting from the spelling pattern(s).

The impact of new technology

As the cartoon character says, digital technology is changing what it means to write:[10]

Writing on a computer or mobile phone involves using 'non-traditional' skills. For example, a writer using digital technology can easily create **a multimodal** text, incorporating images and sounds which contribute to the overall meaning[11] Contemporary writing also involves new styles and ways of interacting with the reader which are increasingly global, rather than specific to any one language or culture (see Chapter 3).

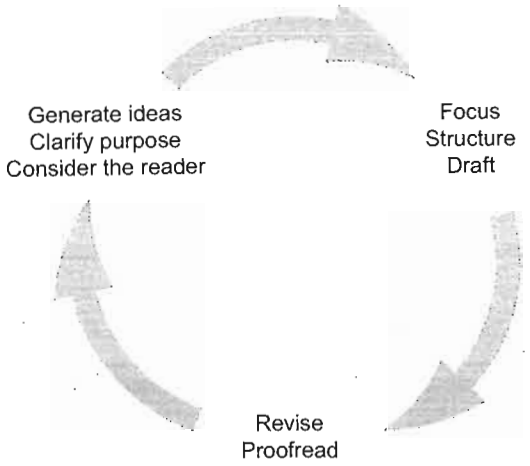
Another issue is the impact of computers on the writing process. For example, a computer makes drafting easier by speeding up the production of letters and enabling the writer to cut and paste chunks of text. It can also help with technical problems such as spelling, though it cannot remove them completely. If **Eddie** (**Text 3b**) had written his text on a computer, a squiggly red line would have told him that 'backlald' (for 'bricklayer') was incorrect, but the spellchecker would only have given him 'backland' and 'backlands' as alternatives, leaving him unable to come up with the spelling he needed.

The writing cycle

In a cognitive approach to writing there are distinct 'stages' that writers go through to produce texts. Among these are:

- generating;
- focusing;
- structuring;
- drafting;
- revising;
- editing.

Writing can also be seen as a cyclical process. For example, when revising a piece of writing, a writer often has new ideas which lead her to refocus, restructure and redraft her text.



The social practice view additionally stresses how the writer makes 'critical' choices throughout the writing process. For example, she might reconsider the stance she has adopted, as in Example 6.1, later in this chapter.

Learning to write by writing

People learn to write, not just by doing grammar or spelling exercises but by composing whole texts, with support from teachers focusing on both the technicalities of writing and on the wider social context that 'gives writing its meaning and power'.[12] There is a degree of consensus on this: in a social practice view, writing skills must be contextualized if learners are to develop the *genre knowledge* needed for the real world; in a cognitive view learners need to practise composing texts in order to understand the writing process as a whole, rather than just parts of it.

Top-down and bottom-up approaches

There is disagreement, however, when it comes to beginning writers. Government policy for primary schools has veered between a **top–down** and a **bottom–up** approach. In a top–down approach the starting point is whole texts and developing a sense of self as a writer; in a bottom–up approach people learn to put individual speech sounds (phonemes) into writing, before moving on to words, sentences and, eventually, texts.

In **Synthetic Phonics**, a controversial bottom-up approach outlined in Chapter 5, learners are discouraged from writing their own texts until they have mastered a certain number of sound–symbol correspondences and can consistently produce accurate spellings within this range. In the field of adult literacy most people

see this approach, if followed strictly, as unrealistic, particularly in view of the limited time adults have for learning; it could result in them never writing a single real text, much less developing a sense of self as a writer.

On the other hand it is important to be aware that producing a written word, let alone a whole text, is a challenge for beginner writers. In a top-down approach, teachers deal with this by providing **scaffolding**, such as word and sentence banks, to support people in constructing texts; they work on sub-skills like spelling outside the composing process, using material from learners' texts to generate patterns and explore strategies.

A writing curriculum

In a social practice view of writing, the curriculum comes from the contexts in which people write and their purposes for writing; in a cognitive view it is based primarily on a progression of skills. In most literacy courses these perspectives are combined.

When literacy is embedded in a vocational subject, the writing curriculum covers genres such as reports, job records, job applications and CVs. In discrete literacy classes it is designed around a wider range of genres, reflecting the interests of the group. 'Bringing the outside in' is characteristic of a social practice view of writing.[13] It means using class time to explore the range and scope of the writing people do in everyday life, and the skills and knowledge about writing that they bring.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 8, in-depth diagnostic assessment enables tutors to investigate with learners the skills they already have and the areas they need to work on. An example of diagnostic assessment of a piece of writing (**Geraldine's Text 1b**) is given at the end of Chapter 3.

Where to begin

On vocational courses the order of the curriculum is usually fixed but in less formal provision there is more flexibility and learners' own priorities are the starting point. In this case there are strong arguments for beginning with personal writing, especially personal narrative, rather than with formal, impersonal texts:

- Personal writing has a role in developing a writer's 'voice', building confidence and allowing people to experience writing as an 'ally' rather than an 'enemy'.
- The language of a personal text is closer to the language of speech, making it easier to move into the medium of writing.
- A personal narrative is based on a sequence of events; it is easier to sequence events chronologically than to sequence ideas logically, as required in many types of formal writing.
- There is evidence that adult learners are highly motivated by this kind of writing.[14] Student publications, in which personal narrative is the predomi-

nant genre, have a long history in adult literacy, comprising not only commercial publications but booklets and class magazines produced by learners and teachers.[15] The aim is to celebrate people's writing, create a wider audience and develop a *sense of authorship*, which in a social practice view of writing is part of becoming a confident writer.

Part 2: Developing writing at text level

'Authoring'

Text-level writing skills are sometimes referred to as 'authoring' skills. Authoring means creating a text that conveys the meaning, and has the impact, the writer intended. It means using words and images **rhetorically** to achieve a purpose, whether this is to tell a good story, express how we feel or persuade someone to do something.

Using learners' writing as models of 'authoring'

There is a tradition in adult literacy, of using learners' writing to demonstrate particuar qualities, as in the examples below.

In this short descriptive text[16] the author, who is a beginner writer, uses adjectives simply but effectively to give the reader an impression of her home and how she feels about it:

> My house is big.
> My kitchen is nice.
> My bedroom is warm.

In **George's** piece (**Text 15**)[17] the directness of the language and the repetition of key words and phrases create a powerful effect:

> It's not the same when you're in with foster parents. It's not the same. People want to move on.

In **Zahra's** piece (**Text 13**) a single visual image, the national flag of Somalia blowing in the wind, symbolizes the author's 'dream' of national unity and an end to conflict. She has used an image to enhance the meaning and impact of her words.

Reading as inspiration for writing

Zahara wrote her piece in response to Martin Luther King's famous speech, showing how reading can be a source of inspiration.

Literacy tutors also use 'hot' topics to stimulate writing, as in this example:

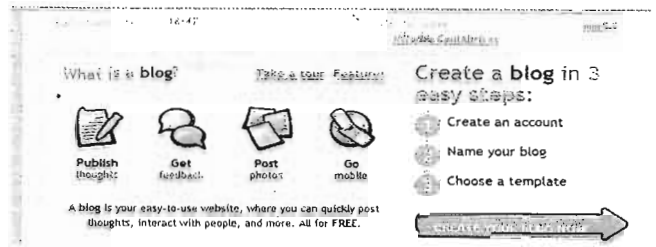
> *What credit crunch? City bankers receive £13bn bonuses this year*[18]

In the process of articulating their own views, learners gain valuable practice in text-level skills, including sequencing ideas, building an argument and using specialist language such as *credit crunch, banker, financial system, bonus, risks, rewards*, all of which can equip them to engage more confidently in debates on issues of concern to them. Difficult texts can be simplified to enable learners at all levels to participate (see Chapter 5).

Writing tasks arising from this topic could include a letter to the editor or an article or opinion piece for the class magazine or group blog.

Using new technology to develop 'authoring' skills

Using a computer makes it easy to produce a multimodal text, which can be shared online or incorporated into a group document. Inexperienced writers, by using photos, video clips, sound clips and other features, can create whole texts with relatively few written words, for example a poster to publicize an event, a PowerPoint slideshow or a blog. Blogsites such as this one are relatively easy to use:



Sharon's first blog on this site consisted of a photograph downloaded from her mobile phone and a caption:

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

Rebel

This is my cat Rebel.

Posted by Pet owner at 10:44 2 comments

In all these activities, a range of text-level skills are developed, including visual design, writing headings and captions and using the language and style of an online network or discourse community.

Genre and purpose

Authoring also means producing a text that 'works' and which the reader will recognize as belonging to a particular genre. For example, a recipe needs ingredients and instructions; a story needs a sequence of events and sufficient background information for the reader to make sense of them.

Key features of genres

Genres have recognizable features in terms of their organizational structure, visual format and language, for example:

Structure

Typically, a writer follows a set pattern according to the *purpose* of the text:

Argument essay:

1 Set out the main arguments.
2 Elaborate, illustrate, give evidence.
3 Summarize, restate the arguments.

Formal letter (or email) of request:

1 State the purpose of the letter/email.
2 Make a case, give evidence and background information.
3 Ask the recipient of the letter to take action.

Personal narrative:

1 Set the scene (themes, people, events).
2 Develop the narrative (and themes).
3 Close the story (and resolve the themes).

Format

Texts are often recognizable by how they look on the page or screen:

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

1989–1994 St Ann's Secondary School, Hackney

GCSE English, RE, History

2005–2006 East London Community College

City & Guilds Level 2 Certificate in Adult Literacy

EMPLOYMENT

1999– Finisher, John Brown & Co Ltd

Clothing manufacturers

Hackney, London E9 5JK

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.[19]

We can tell from a quick glance that the first of these is a CV and the second is a poem or song. A closer look confirms this: the first text has the standard headings and content of a CV; the second one has a line that is repeated word for word, a powerful device used in poems and song lyrics but less likely to be found in more 'functional' kinds of writing.

Language

The language of a text reflects its purpose. In the extract from the Robert Frost poem above, the sound of the words and the rhythm of the lines reflect the poet's feelings. In other kinds of writing, other aspects of language have a particular role to play, as in the examples overleaf.

Tense and narrative: in a story, verbs in the **past continuous** (pc) tense tell the reader what was going at the time the events took place, while verbs in the **past simple** (ps) tense narrate the events themselves:

> Daylight was fading (pc) and the wind was howling (pc) in the trees. She felt (ps) a light tap on her left shoulder and screamed ... (ps)

Imperative for instructions: in a recipe, the **imperative** form of the verb is used for giving instructions:

> Peel the bananas ... boil them together with the cinnamon ... Bake ... in the oven ...

Discourse markers: in a narrative, **temporal connectives** mark the passage of time and in an explanatory or persuasive text **logical connectives** mark a sequence of ideas, as discussed in Chapter 3. Learners' texts featured in this book include a wide range of connectives, including **temporal connectives**:

> on my first day back, as a young boy, now, the next morning

and **logical connectives**:

in the first place, so, because, although, as a consequence

Genre techniques

In a genre-based approach to writing, learners identify, analyse and practise all these features. Activities progress from teacher-led analysis and modelling, through shared authorship to independent writing, as described in textbooks dedicated to this approach.[20]

Text analysis

In a genre-based approach tutors use model texts to illustrate the typical features of genres. They ask questions, give prompts and invite discussion of key features, many of which learners know implicitly from their experience as readers.

In the following text, the layout and structure, the use of subheadings and the imperative form of the verb are all features of the genre:

Baked Bananas

Rating: ***** Reviews: 1

Serves: 4
Country: Aruba

Ingredients:

4 ripe bananas
2 tbs cinnamon powder
3 tbs vanilla extract
1 cup sugar
4 cups water

Method/directions:

Peel the bananas and boil them together with the cinnamon, vanilla extract, sugar and water for about 20 minutes.

Bake the bananas in the oven at 275° for 10 minutes.

Serve with favorite ice cream.

(*Caribbean Choice* website, www.caribbeanchoice.com/accessed 4 January 2008)

A text like this makes a good model: it is authentic and accessible, and for people who want to send in their own recipes to the website, as two of the learners in this chapter (**Joyce** and **Sharon**) have done, the simple structure is easy to imitate.

As we discussed earlier, texts written by learners themselves, with errors corrected, can also be used as models. **Malika's** personal narrative (**Text 8c**) and **Geraldine's** letter of request (**Text 1b**) show how language can be used effectively within the conventions of a genre. In *Friendship*, **Malika** tells a story, describes her feelings and develops a theme. In her letter of request to a local councillor, **Geraldine** gives convincing evidence to support her case and ends the letter with a direct challenge to the reader:

> You say you don't want Travellers on the road. If you don't want to see my Nan on the road don't close down where she lives.
>
> (Note that **Geraldine's** spelling has been amended in this extract.)

Exploring critical choices in writing

A model text like **Geraldine's** letter can also be used to discuss the critical choices made by a writer, for example the way she positions the reader or the point of view she puts across in the text.

In some kinds of writing, the main issue affecting the choices made by the writer is the balance of power between writer and reader.

Task 6.3

The balance of power between writer and reader:

- Can you think of a type of text in which the writer has more, or less, power than the reader?
- What difference does the balance of power make to how the writer approaches the task?

Comment 6.3

Most people, when dealing with an official form, such as a benefit claim form, have less power than the people who produced it. As a writer, the claimant is in a powerless position: she must word her answers in a way that will satisfy the reader, who has the power to refuse her benefit.

Form-filling is often taught as if it were a purely 'neutral' way of using literacy, when in reality there is often a power relationship involved.[21]

When working on this kind of form-filling it's helpful to discuss the wider social context, including issues of power, and focus on how to use writing to gain the desired outcome.

In the example below, the reader is in a position of power. A literacy group decided to write to the centre manager asking for better facilities. They were aware of the imbalance of power between them and their reader and discussed at length how to approach the task. They asked the tutor to provide support and she did so by facilitating group discussion about 'tactics' and choice of language.

The learners decided to use 'posh' language in order to be taken seriously. They asked the tutor for difficult spellings and vocabulary, for example *facilities*, *conditions*, *communities*, *progress*, *opportunity*, *ventilation*.

After reading the first draft, they decided to change their stance on a particular issue: one member of the group expressed concern that the letter contained a complaint about ESOL groups enjoying preferential treatment and in the end everyone agreed that it would be better to ask for good facilities for all users of the centre. This was the final result:

Example 6.1

Taking power as writers

Dear Ms Smith

Facilities in the learning centre

We are a group of learners who attend an English class at the centre two mornings a week. Our classroom is very small and there is only one window. We have one computer between ten of us. We feel that these poor conditions do not help us to learn.

We all study hard and value our lessons. Learning to read and write is very important to us. Some of us want to get jobs. All of us want to become more independent and play an active part in our communities.

We know that people who come to ESOL classes have bigger classrooms and better facilities. They make very good progress and we would like the same opportunity to do well. We think that everyone who uses the centre should have good conditions. We would like you to give us a bigger room with proper ventilation and more computers.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely

Modelling the construction of text

Modelling is a standard technique used in a genre-based approach to writing. In the example above, the tutor modelled the construction of the text using a digital display board. She discussed the process with learners, emphasizing the choices they could make as authors and pointing out typical features of the genre, such as the conventional closure, *Yours sincerely*, and the final sentence, which politely urges the recipient of the letter to respond:

We look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Scaffolding

Another classic genre technique is **scaffolding**. As with a literal, physical scaffold, the aim is to provide support for as long as it is needed. Scaffolding takes many forms, gives varying degrees of support and is reduced or withdrawn as the learner's skills and confidence grow.

At text level, scaffolding can take the form of a **writing frame**. This often consists of a skeleton text with key features provided, such as beginnings of sentences, as in this example of a health and social care report:

Report of visit to ... (name/address of client)

On ... I visited Mr/Ms ...

I arrived at ...
Mr/Ms ... was ...
She/he told me that ...
I offered to help by ...

I would recommend ...

The point of this approach is to enable learners to reproduce the features of a genre by giving them language and structures to practise with until they are able to produce their own texts independently.

However, some learners find this kind of frame difficult to use. For example they get confused trying to finish another person's sentences, particularly if the constructions used are unfamiliar. The challenge for literacy teachers is to find a form of 'framing' that is flexible enough to provide structure whilst leaving scope for independent thinking and expression.

Grief and Chatterton (2007) explain how **Zahra** (**Text 13**) used a simple frame based on Martin Luther King's famous line, 'I have a dream', to develop her own piece of writing. The frame gave her a basic structure and a stimulus to express her own ideas and feelings.

An approach used in ESOL contexts which can be adapted for use with literacy learners is *Reflect*[22]. Participatory tools and techniques, including visualization (graphics created by learners themselves), are used to explore issues of importance to them.

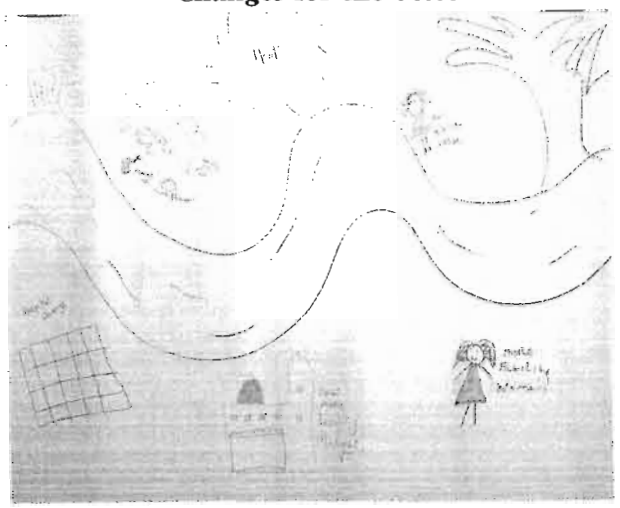
Learners choose a familiar object as a metaphor. A river, for example, represents the passage of time and is used for developing narratives or comparing a past time with the present. Learners begin by generating and sharing ideas, as in the example below:[23]

Example 6.2

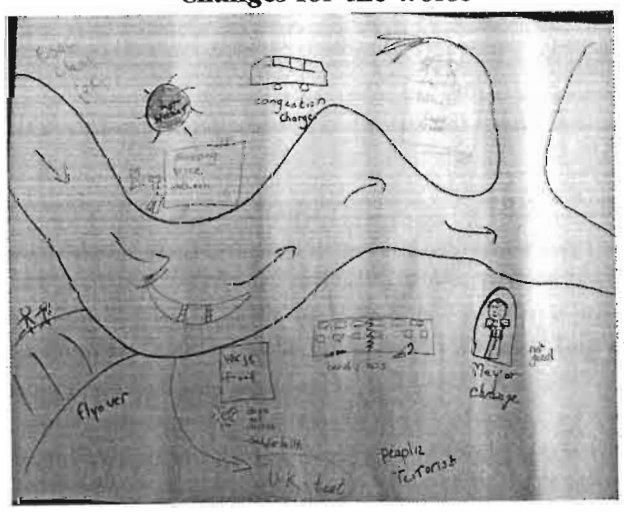
Using visualization

Learners in East London used the metaphor of a river to explore changes in the lives of their community. They divided into two groups – one group discussed changes for the better, while the other group focused on changes for the worse. They created pictures to represent their ideas visually:

Changes for the better



Changes for the worse



After discussion in separate groups, they came together to share ideas, develop themes and review and practise the language needed for communicating these.

In a literacy context this kind of collaborative process can be used as a starting point for writing.

Exploring register

Using and maintaining a recognizable **register** in a text is one of the things that makes it effective.

One way of exploring register is for learners to compose contrasting texts. These texts can be part of a **genre set** associated with a context or situation.

Example 6.3

Exploring register through genre sets

You have just travelled to Manchester to visit your cousin. The coach broke down and you arrived two hours late. Working in pairs or small groups, write an email:

- to a friend, describing the experience;
- to the transport company.

Questions to consider before writing:

- How will you address the friend or the company?
- What kind of language will you use in each case?

Whole-group discussion after writing:

- Compare the register of the two texts; project them on to a screen and ask the group to pick out specific uses of language and other features such as punctuation, which create the register. This is important as it shows how register works – it is not a mystery, but is founded in choices made by the writer:

  Hi Tom, here I am but what a journey!! ☹

  Dear Sir/Madam, I wish to complain about the appalling service provided by your company …

Exploring genre variation and change

Genres not only shift over time but vary between languages and cultures. Writing 'appropriately' is not just a matter of following conventions; it also means using language that is up to date and culturally sensitive.

One way of exploring genre variation is to read and compare sample texts before writing.

Example 6.4

Discussing changing genres

Embedded literacy: business administration

Learners compare samples, ranging from contemporary emails to memoranda from earlier decades. They look at salutations and endings such as *Hi guys, Dear*

all, Esteemed colleagues, Respectfully, Kind regards, etc. This enables them to place themselves, as contemporary writers, in a historical context and make choices when writing their own emails at work or for course assignments.

Task 6.4

Exploring differences in genre conventions across generations and cultures

A literacy group is preparing to write to friends and family, telling them of their success in gaining a literacy qualification and inviting them to the award ceremony. One learner has decided to invite the Learning Support Assistant who worked with him during the course:

- As oral preparation for writing, what questions might you ask the group in order to explore:
  - cultural and intergenerational differences in forms of address;
  - ways of reflecting the degree of intimacy between writer and reader.
- What additional resources might be useful?

Comment 6.4

Some possible questions you might ask the group are:

- How would you begin or end an email or letter to an older person in your family, a friend or a child?
- Would your children begin and end the letter/email to each other in a different way?
- What would you use in your first language? Would it sound right in English? (For example, in Mexico, people say 'many kisses' rather than 'love').
- What would the Learning Support Assistant think if she got an email which ended 'Lots of love'? What would be more appropriate? Why?

Resources could include a bank of salutations and endings for people to comment on, add to and select from, for their own texts.

Working on coherence

A text must be coherent if it is to be effective. A writer can build a coherent text, in which the structure and ideas are clear to the reader, by using a number of devices,

including: **signposts** such as headings and illustrations; **discourse markers** such as connectives; and **lexical sets**: words and phrases that express the main themes of the text (See Chapter 3).

One way to explore coherence is to compare sample texts, one coherent and the other not, asking learners to find the features that make them coherent or incoherent. Another way is to use a single model text. In both cases it is helpful to project the texts on to a screen and discuss key features as a group.

Sometimes it is best to focus on one feature at a time. Subheadings are the main organizing device in certain kinds of text, such as recipes:

Ingredients
Directions
Cooking time
Serves

In other kinds of writing, connectives are more important. For example, in **Sean's** personal narrative (**Text 4**), clear cohesive links are needed because the narrative does not develop in a linear way but is interspersed with comments on the general theme of education. In the final paragraph **Sean** signals to the reader that he is returning from these broader issues to his own personal story:

So getting back to my first day at collage ...

Having analysed sample texts, learners then compose their own, using similar devices, with scaffolding provided for those who need it.

An alternative to a model of coherence is one of incoherence. Here, the use of humour can be effective, for example a text that is a ridiculous muddle, veering between one topic and the next or endlessly repeating itself. The challenge for learners is to turn it into a coherent text.

Students can also use non-text based approaches, as in the example below.

Example 6.5

Using images to create coherent texts

Images can be used to organize a text on screen or on the page. The basic structure is provided by the sequence of pictures and the text is then developed further. Working in pairs or small groups, learners:

- Select images and sequence them according to the purpose of the writing (e.g. narrative or persuasive);
- Write a caption for each picture;
- Use each caption as the topic sentence of a paragraph;
- Revise and edit the text and present it to the whole group.

Part 3: Developing writing at sentence level

In this section we move on to writing at sentence level, looking at ways of approaching **grammar** and **punctuation**. We can't cover these comprehensively here, so we focus on some issues that arise frequently in literacy learners' writing.

Grammar and writing development

In previous chapters (3 and 4) we have discussed how writing can differ significantly from speech, particularly informal speech The following issues have particular implications for learner writers.

- Most published writing is in Standard English. In some varieties of English the grammar is very different to the Standard.
- The syntax of writing is different from that of speech. It is based on complete sentences (rather than phrases or fragments) and in more formal texts the use of complex sentences, with embedded clauses and other features, is common.
- In writing, punctuation is used to mark the boundaries of sentences and clauses; these boundaries do not always correspond with pauses in speech.
- In speech we often omit parts of words, such as verb endings, or pronounce them indistinctly, but we need to use them if we are writing in Standard English.

In this section of the chapter we discuss practical ways of approaching all these issues.

From speech into writing

Sharon's home language is a London variety of English, in which the past and present tenses of verbs are similar to Standard English. Yet in *'Scary Story'* (**Text 2a**), her inconsistent use of tenses affects the coherence of the text:

> I walk into the woods at nighttime and try to get my dogs and then I saw werewolves running towards us. We run to get to my car. I got one of my dogs into the car ...

There are a number of possible explanations for **Sharon's** inconsistent use of tenses here.

- She is moving between past and present as she might do in informal speech when recounting an anecdote. She is using the present tense for dramatic effect but reverts to the past tense at intervals.
- She may not be aware that each component of a word must be written down even if it is not pronounced (*walk* + *ed*).

- She finds it difficult to hear the separate sounds within a word.
- She thinks of the root word (*walk*) as being the most important part, and the ending as relatively unimportant.

Whichever of these is true, the issue is not that **Sharon** is unable to use language grammatically, but that she is still developing her understanding of written language and how it differs from speech. In the final section of this chapter, we give an example of **formative dialogue** (see Chapter 8) that could be used when working with **Sharon** on this piece of writing.

Teaching grammar for writing: inductive and deductive approaches

As discussed in Chapter 4, learners whose home language is a spoken variety of English may need to learn Standard English grammar explicitly, so that they can compare it with the grammar of their own varieties and make informed choices when they write, weighing up which variety best serves their purpose and fits the context in which they are writing.

There are two key approaches to working explicitly on grammar. In a **deductive** approach, the teacher teaches the 'rules' or general principles and learners practise applying them. In an **inductive** approach, learners 'discover' these themselves by analysing examples; the role of the teacher is to provide authentic examples, using questions and prompts as needed.

The activities described below, in which learners analyse the grammar of a model text, are part of an inductive method.

Example 6.6

Identify past tense verbs in narrative texts
Examples of narrative texts

- Personal narrative
- Biography
- Story
- Health or social care report
- Accident report
- Witness statement
- Record of a work procedure

Choosing models

Choose a model text according to the interests and needs of the group, for example a children's story with a family learning group, a formal report for a

vocational course, or, in a discrete literacy class, any kind of narrative text that members of the group are interested in.

Setting a context

Begin by discussing the context and purpose of the text, using questions, prompts and aids such as photos or recordings, to elicit learners' prior knowledge and experience.

Past simple tense practice activities

These could include the following:

- Follow a narrative and pick out key events
  - watch/listen to/read an audio/video clip or written text.
- Highlight the verbs
  - *–ed* endings of regular verbs;
  - common irregular verbs.
- Carry on the story
  - finish an incomplete narrative;
  - put in the missing verbs (choose from a word bank if needed).
- Create a narrative
  - use their own verbs or choose from words generated by the group.

It is helpful to do worked examples first before asking learners to work independently, and to cater for different learning styles, for example providing colour highlighters or using cards or other tactile approaches rather than relying exclusively on worksheets.

With many groups it is best to start with regular verbs ending in *-ed*. Initially you might need to write a model text in which most of the verbs are regular; this is unlikely to happen in a real text, as most common verbs in English are irregular. In the long term, aim to use authentic texts as far as possible, including examples brought in by learners themselves, as these reflect language as it is used in real life.

Learning written grammar through 'immersion'

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a recent research study (Andrews *et al.* 2004) suggests that young learners *acquire* knowledge of written grammar through reading, rather than through explicit teaching, whether deductive or inductive.

In an approach based on this idea of *acquisition*, learners read model texts, but there is no explicit teaching of grammar before writing; instead, the emphasis is on *experiencing* language through reading and reproducing it when writing. Proponents of this approach argue that, by frequently reading certain types of text, we internalize their grammatical features and reproduce these naturally in our own writing.

Example 6.7

Learning grammar through immersion

Learners have been reading different kinds of texts over a period of time. In this activity they are given the beginning of a text in which the language of a familiar genre is exemplified, for example:

> Dear Mama, you ask me what I'm doing. Well, I'm thinking about you and hoping that you are well...
>
> STRETCHING AND RELAXING
>
> Lie down flat on the floor, arms at sides, feet slightly apart. Inhale deeply and stretch your arms above your head along the floor, your fingers apart. Stretch your feet with toes apart ...
>
> *RUOK*

Learners then develop the text further, writing in the same style as the original. They can do this individually or in pairs. The point at this stage is for them to enjoy using the language and let the grammar emerge naturally. Once the group has produced drafts, specific points of grammar are identified and analysed, for example:

I'm doing ... I'm thinking ... and [I'm] hoping:

- present continuous tense;
- ellipsis (if appropriate for the level of the group) – see Chapter 3.

Lie down ... inhale ... stretch:

- imperative form of the verb

RUOK:

- the abbreviated nature of 'text speak', in which words that would normally be separate are compacted together (*areyouok*)

Most formal evidence of people's ability to acquire knowledge of written syntax without explicit teaching is to be found in research studies focusing on children. Purcell-Gates *et al.* (2004) in the United States found that pre-school children growing up in literate, English-speaking households, whose parents read them a story at bedtime, could easily reproduce the language of children's fiction, including the kind of syntax not normally found in speech.

Not all adult literacy students have grown up in these circumstances. Nonetheless, in some learners' writing there is evidence of the influence of reading on their syntax. For example, the sentences in **Geraldine's** Mills and Boon synopsis (**Text 1a**) are fluent and complex, featuring constructions often found in popular fiction:

> Having just moved to London after the death of her mother, she has no friends, no family and no job. She moved to London hoping to make a new life for herself and find her father. Little does she know she will also meet her future husband.

A favourite device used here is inverted word order for dramatic effect:

> Little does she know ...

Sean's personal narrative (**Text 4**) shows attempts to reproduce formal written syntax. His sentence structure is ambitious and works well up to a point, though he is not fully in control:

> On my first day back in education as an adult at Shoreditch college in Hackney, was very daunting. In the first place it was hard to relate to the boy who from the age of four to sixteen didn't enjoy his time at school also in Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

Sean's text, though it shows the positive impact of reading on his ability to use varied and complex sentences, also suggests the limitations of relying solely on acquisition. He has many skills, but would benefit from working explicitly on sentence structure and punctuation, while continuing to read as widely as possible.

Combining acquisition and explicit teaching approaches

Most tutors combine explicit teaching, both inductive and deductive, with approaches based on the concept of acquisition. In addition to reading and analysing model texts and providing support for people to try things out informally, they work on sentence structure, using learners' own writing and supporting them with developing their syntax as part of the revision process.

It can be helpful to writers to break down complex constructions and rebuild them in stages, eventually adding the punctuation needed to make the structure clear. This can be done interactively, with the tutor asking questions and giving prompts to draw out implicit knowledge. Colour coding makes the syntax easier to 'see', both literally and metaphorically.

In the first sentence of **Sean's** text, removing the embedded phrase, *as an adult at Shoreditch College in Hackney*, would reveal the basic structure of the sentence and **Sean** could later put the phrase back in, with commas to mark its boundaries:

> My first day back in education was very daunting.
>
> My first day back in education, *as an adult at Shoreditch College in Hackney,* was very daunting.

Similarly, when working on his second sentence **Sean** could remove the phrase, *from the age of four to sixteen,* and put it back in with punctuation:

> the boy who didn't enjoy his time at school ...
>
> the boy who, *from the age of four to sixteen,* didn't enjoy his time at school ...

Ultimately **Sean** could rebuild the whole sentence, adding the main clause and using the past perfect tense in the subordinate clause (*hadn't enjoyed*) to refer to a time further back in the past:

> It was hard to relate to the boy who, *from the age of four to sixteen,* hadn't enjoyed his time at school, also in Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

It is likely that **Sean**, who reads widely, knows the past perfect tense implicitly, though he may not use it when he speaks. The tutor could use questions and prompts to elicit this form of the verb, or offer an amended version of the sentence, drawing attention to the two contrasting tenses and asking **Sean** to explain the difference:

> It was hard to relate to the boy who ... hadn't enjoyed his time at school

This kind of activity can work on paper, with cards or on screen. In group activities an interactive whiteboard is helpful: learners remove and replace key elements (such as subjects and objects or main clauses and relative clauses) in order to explore their role in the sentence.

In **Sean's** case an auditory approach to syntax might also work, as there is evidence that his approach to spelling is often based on the sounds of words rather than visual memory.[24] In the case of syntax an auditory strategy would consist of reading the sentence aloud, exaggerating the phrasing and elongating the pauses, in order to draw attention to the different syntactic units within the sentence.

Sean is keen to work closely on this aspect of his writing. He is aware that he needs to develop greater accuracy and control if he is to fulfil his goal of studying at university.

Working on syntax with beginning writers: building sentences and texts

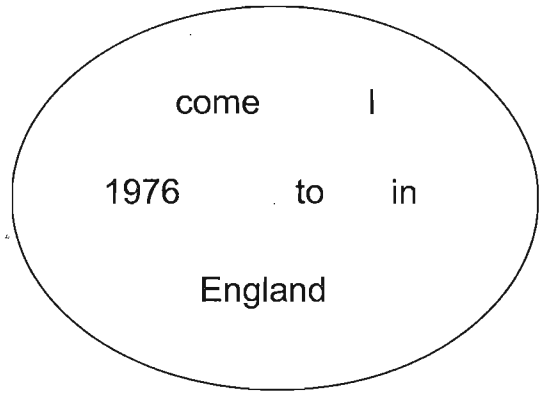
With beginning writers, Language Experience, an approach which is outlined in Chapter 5, provides opportunities to work on syntax. One benefit of this method is

that it draws on the communicative skills learners already have. Another benefit is that, in using their own language, it helps them move from speech into writing.

This is particularly important for those whose spoken grammar differs significantly from Standard English. Rather than asking a beginner writer to move from one grammar into another at the same time as producing a written text, the tutor uses the learner's own grammar, negotiating changes only if the meaning is unclear. This avoids making unrealistic demands on the learner during the writing process. For example, if a learner said "In 1976 I come to England", the tutor would write the word come, as it is clear from the context that the action took place in the past.

Another way for inexperienced writers to work on syntax is by generating words around a topic and using these to build sentences. The tutor uses discussion, questions, prompts, model texts and audiovisual aids to elicit and create a word bank, usually on cards. Each person chooses words she wants for her text, makes them into sentences and uses the sentences to build a text.

Sometimes the tutor writes all the words needed for a sentence, in a circle or on cards, and the learner uses these to construct the sentence:



England. 1976 In I to come

At other times the tutor provides more difficult words and the learner combines these with words she already knows. In **Yvonne's** case (**Text 16**), the tutor provided:

shopping market onions

Yvonne was able to write some of the words independently, including:

yam fish home

to the some

At this stage the focus is on building sentences, rather than on practising new spellings, which is best done afterwards to avoid distraction and overload.

Sometimes the focus can be on a particular **word class**. In the activity below, using one of the model texts discussed earlier in the chapter (Williams 2003), learners fill in the missing adjectives. Later they build their own texts using the same adjectives or others of their choice.

My house is big.

My kitchen is nice.

My bedroom is warm.

big nice warm

small cosy cold damp

My house is ...

My kitchen is ...

My bedroom is ...

Grammar needed for writing: bilingual learners

Generally speaking, when working on grammatical aspects of writing with groups that include bilingual learners, some different or additional issues need to be addressed, as there are likely to be features of English grammar that differ from the grammar of their home languages and they may need to learn them explicitly.

For example, when working on past tense verbs, bilingual learners may need to clarify the distinction in meaning between the **past simple** and **past continuous**.

For those who speak English as a first language these tenses can also be challenging, though for different reasons: sometimes the form of the verb is different in their spoken variety or, as we saw with **Sharon**, phonological features of informal speech carry over into their writing, including indistinct verb endings.

When working on the past simple and past continuous tenses, begin by exploring the context of a narrative and demonstrating the different meanings of the two tenses. Provide opportunities for bilingual learners to practise these orally (if necessary focusing on one tense initially and the other one at a later date, to avoid confusion). Choose a model text that exemplifies the use of past simple and past continuous verbs and ask learners to consider the role that each plays in the narrative.

Example 6.8

Identifying past simple (ps) and past continuous (pc) verbs in a text
Different kinds of narrative text can be used, depending on their relevance to the group and the context for learning, for example:

Care worker's report:
Mr Patel was sitting up (pc) in bed when I arrived (ps).

Accident report:
I was standing (pc) on the corner of Blackstock Road and Seven Sisters Road when a blue VW Golf approached (ps) the junction very fast and crashed (ps) into a stationary red van.

Story:
Daylight was fading (pc) and the wind was howling (pc) in the trees. She felt (ps) a light tap on her left shoulder and screamed (ps)...

This is just one example of a grammar point that is likely to be particularly important for bilingual learners. Other examples are discussed in Chapter 4. For approaches to working on spoken and written grammar with bilingual learners, see the partner volume to this one: Paton and Wilkins (2009).

Approaches to developing punctuation

Punctuation marks are symbols that carry meaning; writers use them to send 'signals' to readers to guide them through a text. At sentence level they clarify the grammatical structure and at text level they work alongside other symbols to create an overall design. As with grammar, it is helpful to approach punctuation through looking at its use in context.

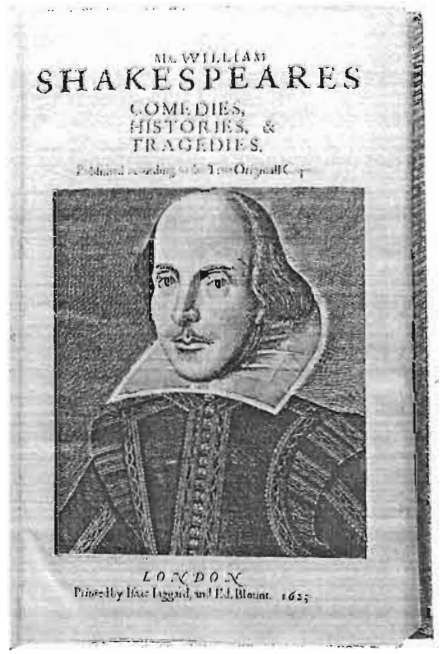
Changing conventions in punctuation and capitalization

All literacy conventions vary according to genre and change over time. As technology develops and new genres come into being, different 'rules' apply and new symbols emerge (recent examples are bullet points and emoticons such as smileys ☺).

Since Shakespeare's time there have been a number of small shifts in the use of punctuation marks and capital letters. This is shown clearly in the famous title page below.

Task 6.5

Changing conventions of punctuation and capitalization
Look at the title page of the first complete works of Shakespeare, published in 1623. Can you identify uses of punctuation and capitalization that are different from what they would be today?



Comment 6.5

This text is a little over-punctuated and over-capitalized by today's standards. The writer has used:

- a full stop at the end of each heading/subheading;
- a full stop after the abbreviated version of a name (*Ed*);
- commas before *and;*
- initial capitals in *True Original Copies.*

One missing punctuation mark which would normally be used today is the apostrophe for possession:

MR WILLIAM SHAKESPEARES COMEDIES
MR WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

Activities for exploring changing conventions in punctuation

It can be empowering for people to explore changes in punctuation, as it challenges the view that punctuation is always 'right' or 'wrong', by showing that it is based on social convention.

- Investigate the punctuation used in a range of texts (e.g. advertisements, menus, recipes, TV listings, food labels, emails, text messages). Ask learners to bring in their own texts; add samples to illustrate particular changes or innovations. Invite learners to:
  - discuss how punctuation marks are used and find any differences between genres;
  - identify new symbols that have come into use in their lifetime.
- Research the history of punctuation, using sample texts from different historical periods and drawing on published books and web-based sources.

Activities focusing on the role of punctuation and other symbols

- Examine a particular feature in a text, such as the use of bullet points, and discuss its purpose.
- In small groups people share what they already know about punctuation marks and other symbols, and feed back to the whole group. The tutor provides questions, ensuring that the range of punctuation covered and the wording of the questions are appropriate to the level of the group:

  Which punctuation mark would you use?
  - *To show that a question is being asked?*
  - *To express surprise or strong feeling?*
  - *To indicate that another person is being quoted?*
  - *To separate items in a list?*
  - *To convey friendliness and informality (in a text message or email)?*
  - *To make a list of items stand out from the body of the text?*

Scaffolding can be provided for this activity, such as a bank of symbols on cards and/or a bank of terms:

full stop question mark smiley bullet point

- Working in pairs, learners try out a particular symbol in a short text and share their drafts with other pairs.
- In small groups, learners read a story aloud, with one person playing the part of the narrator and the others reading the words of characters in the dialogue, using the line breaks and speech marks as a guide.

Punctuation and syntax

The greatest challenge punctuation presents comes from its relationship with syntax. Punctuation is part of the written code and is based on written sentences rather than units of speech. The most 'basic' punctuation marks, the full stop and comma, are used to mark the boundaries of sentences and clauses. This is not as easy as it sounds, because syntactic units in written language do not wholly correspond with units of meaning and sound in speech.

As Mina Shaughnessy (1977) and Roz Ivanic (1996) found in their research with adult learners, learner writers tend to apply the logic of meaning and prosody when using punctuation.

In this extract (**Text 14**) **Joyce** has used a capital letter and full stop to mark a **topic unit** or unit of meaning beyond the level of a sentence, and a comma to divide it into smaller units:

> The plane journey was something I can never forget, I was sick all the way the experience was unforgettable.

This 'sentence' is about her journey as a whole; the smaller units consist of an introduction (*The plane journey was something I can never forget*) and an elaboration (*I was sick all the way the experience was unforgettable*).

In conventional punctuation, the introductory clause would end with a full stop, as it is a complete sentence with a subject (*The plane journey*) and a finite verb (*was*), but **Joyce**, looking at it from the point of view of meaning, sees it as an introduction and only uses a comma.

She also sees the second and third clauses, *I was sick all the way* and *the experience was unforgettable*, as part of a single thought or utterance and does not break them up with punctuation, whereas conventionally they would be marked as separate sentences.

Joyce's use of full stops and commas is logical, but incorrect in terms of current conventions in English.

Joyce also uses punctuation as a rhetorical tool. Twice in the same text she uses a capital letter and full stop to mark a short, technically incomplete sentence, in order to heighten the impact of her words:

> The land that pave with that proverbial gold.
>
> Still living the dreams of one day.

Sometimes it is acceptable in standard written English to use incomplete sentences rhetorically; indeed it is a favourite device of many fiction writers, as in the famous opening sentence of *Bleak House*:

> Fog everywhere.[25]

But fundamentally writers need to understand what a 'complete sentence' is if they are to use punctuation conventionally. As Roz Ivanic (1996) points out, teachers often give advice based on 'common-sense' definitions, such as 'a sentence is a group of words that makes complete sense' or 'a full stop marks a long pause and a comma marks a shorter one'. Unfortunately, these are not always a reliable basis for making punctuation decisions, though they can be useful as starting points.

For learners at higher levels of literacy, accuracy in punctuation may be an important aim, particularly if they want to gain a vocational or academic qualification. For learners whose literacy skills are less developed, it is unrealistic to expect total accuracy in the use of full stops, however 'basic' this skill may seem to those who have managed to acquire it.

Developing a sense of what a 'sentence' is

Tutors can help learners at all levels develop their understanding of what a 'sentence' is, beginning with simple sentences before moving on to compound or complex sentences. With some groups technical terms such as **subject**, **verb** and **predicate** are useful, as they identify the key components explicitly. With others it is essential to find more concrete ways of making the concepts clear. In most of the examples below, the technical terms can be used or not, as appropriate to the group.

One of the simplest ways of introducing the idea of a 'sentence' is to identify two main components, **subject** and **predicate**.

Example 6.9

Activities focusing on *subject* and *predicate*

1 Learners make sentences from colour-coded components: subjects and predicates. The full stops are on separate cards, to highlight their role as symbols and so that learners will use them actively to mark the ends of sentences.

With basic literacy learners, and initially at all levels, it's best to begin with short or single-word subjects. In the examples below, predicates are shown in italics.

She | *went shopping* | .

. | *is a hundred and fifty years old* | Her house

climbed through the window | . | A burglar

Eventually use longer, multi-word subjects to show that a subject can be long or short, a single word or a *noun phrase*. Use different colour fonts to illustrate the concept visually.

My cousin Yvonne | . | *went shopping*

. | *climbed through the window* | A burglar wearing a balaclava

The house where my grandmother used to live | .

is a hundred and fifty years old

As with earlier activities, some learners like using cards they can handle, while others prefer to move things around on a screen.

2 A fun activity is to have a 'lucky dip' of subjects and predicates, which can lead to incongruous results:

My cousin Yvonne is a hundred and fifty years old.

A burglar wearing a balaclava went shopping.

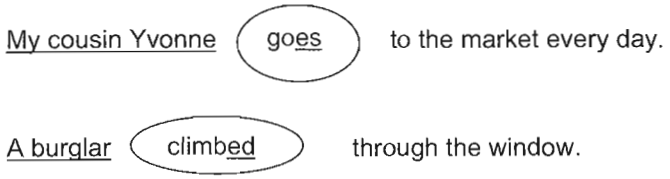
3 Subjects and predicates, separately and combined, can be used to contrast 'complete' and 'incomplete' sentences. A subject or predicate on its own is a fragment, but combined they make a complete sentence. With the help of prompts if needed, learners identify incomplete sentences, discuss what makes them incomplete, and add subjects or predicates to make them complete:

climbed through the window (Who climbed through the window?)

The house where my grandmother used to live (What about the house?)

4 At higher levels of literacy it is important to be able to identify the subject and verb in a sentence and to be aware that in Standard English the verb is sometimes **inflected** to indicate **person** or **tense**, as in this activity.

Ask learners to underline the subjects and circle the verbs. Do worked examples and discuss them first:



All these activities can be made more effective by using sentences from texts that learners have been reading or, even more importantly, from their own writing.

Punctuation and the writing process

Learners develop punctuation skills as they compose whole texts. Having a reader in mind encourages a writer to use punctuation to convey meaning. Activities to develop a sense of authorship in relation to punctuation include the following.

- **Formative dialogue**: ask learners to explain their punctuation choices, one-to-one or in pairs.
- **Peer review**: display a draft on screen and discuss the use of punctuation.
- **Revision**: encourage learners to revise for punctuation, focusing on how effectively they have used it to communicate with the reader.
- **Proofreading**: ask learners to focus on a single punctuation mark that they've been working on individually or in the group.

Punctuation and capitalization

Capitalization is partly a word-level process in writing: it involves forming upper case letters when handwriting or selecting them when keyboarding. It is also a sentence-level skill, involving the use of capital letters, along with full stops, to mark the boundaries of sentences.

Task 6.6

Analyse the use of capital letters, full stops and paragraphs in this piece of writing by **Yvonne** (**Text 16**). For the purposes of the task we have amended **Yvonne's** spelling.

I went to the market to do some shopping When I got to the market I bought some potato and spinach some fruit with onions and rice at same market And yam and fish and chicken and some milk Some cod and chips I bought some orange juice and banana.

And come back home.

Comment 6.6

Yvonne's text is an example of written language that is close to speech, but showing some knowledge of writing conventions. On the basis of her limited experience, **Yvonne** appears to have formed a hypothesis about the role of capital letters, using them to break down her text into manageable chunks. Each chunk is about the length of a sentence and sometimes corresponds to a sentence syntactically:

I went to the market to do some shopping When I got to the market ...

At other times **Yvonne's** use of capitals seems to reflect her thought processes during the production of the text, with each new thought marked by a capital letter:

And yam and fish and chicken and some milk Some cod and chips ...

Yvonne's writing shows partial knowledge of the function of paragraphs and full stops. She understands that a new paragraph indicates a new idea or event, and has divided her text into paragraphs, one about going to the market and buying food, the other about coming home again. She knows that a full stop is used at the end of a unit or chunk of text, and has marked the end of each paragraph with a full stop.

To help **Yvonne** see the difference that punctuation makes, the tutor could begin by pointing out one or two places where a full stop or comma would make it easier to follow, and then ask **Yvonne** to carry on the process. To allow her to experiment, the full stops and commas should be movable symbols, either on cards or on screen.

Yvonne could also benefit from working with a partner on matching subjects and predicates, as described earlier, using simple sentences from their own speech or writing.

Part 4: Developing writing at word level

Vocabulary[26]

English vocabulary is very large and capable of expressing many nuances and shades of meaning. This is a wonderful resource for writers which, if explored, can enhance their pleasure and confidence in the writing process.

Range and precision: taking risks

In **Sean's** personal narrative (**Text 4**), the word *daunting* vividly conveys how he feels at the prospect of returning to education as an adult. It captures the exact quality of the feeling in a way that a more everyday word such as *worrying* would not have done. **Sean** took risks when he drafted this text, using many words he was unsure of, like *apprehension*, *techniques* and *disrespectful* (*aprehenchon*, *texneces*, *disrespectable*). This resulted in a much more powerful piece of writing than he could have produced had he limited himself to words he could spell.

One way that learners can begin to take risks is by engaging in 'low-stakes' writing practice[27] – trying out new ways of expressing thoughts, ideas and feelings. This kind of writing can help people develop the self-assurance and flexibility they need for writing in general, including more 'functional' writing. In some contexts, such as family learning or creative writing with literacy, the arts of storytelling and poetry are part of the curriculum. In discrete literacy classes many people also enjoy this kind of writing and value the increased confidence it gives them.

Unfortunately, what is often promoted in textbooks and educational websites, in exercises devoted to 'descriptive' writing, is an overwhelming focus on adjectives, despite the fact that overusing them leads to writing that is flowery or unnatural. In exercises using kernel sentences, simple statements like

> The man went down the street.

can end up as:

> The tall, thin, blond man went happily down the wet street.

Notice that the verb in this sentence (*went*) is lifeless and uninformative: it reveals nothing of the man's state of mind, or the state of the pavement. It would have been more effective, and more economical, to let the verb show that the man was happy (he *danced*) or that the street was wet (he *skidded*). It's also worth asking whether the adjectives describing the man's appearance, *tall*, *thin* and *blond* contribute anything to the story.

'Low-stakes' activities for developing vocabulary

Example 6.10

Verbs for storytelling

- **Miming**: Verbs are written on cards (e.g. *dance*, *skid*, *creep*, *tiptoe*, *dash*). Learners take it in turns to pick up a card and act out the verb written on the card. Others guess what the verb is. The word on the card is eventually revealed. (This can be a small group activity if people feel too shy to mime in front of the whole group.)
- **Pictures**: Each card has a picture illustrating an action in the story. Learners think of a verb for each picture or match two sets of cards, one with pictures and the other with verbs.
- **Going round the group**: Each person suggests a more interesting verb to replace went. The tutor gives prompts such as 'How was he feeling as he went down the street'? 'How would he move if he were drunk/injured/excited/scared?'

It's a good idea for the teacher to join in these activities, sharing the risk taking with learners and providing models, miming a particular verb to get the story going or suggesting a word that reveals a character's physical or mental state and setting off a chain of related words (*stumbled*, *staggered*, *swayed*, etc.).

Vocabulary for specific contexts

Different kinds of vocabulary are needed for different types of text, and word choice depends on the audience and purpose of the writing. In an embedded literacy course, vocabulary development can be linked to a writing assignment; in a discrete literacy course it can relate to learners' roles as parents, workers or members of the community.

A useful pre-writing activity is to elicit and build a **lexical** or **semantic set** of words and phrases needed for the type of text and its purpose. As well as extending vocabulary, this enables people to build more coherent texts by means of **lexical cohesion**.[28]

EXAMPLE 6.11

Building lexical sets for writing

Motor vehicle assignment: *mechanic*, *hub*, *chassis*, *align*, *alternator*
Meetings and minute taking: agenda, matters arising, point of order, chair's action.
Job application: substantial experience, hardworking, conscientious, motivated.

Learning words in a meaningful context makes them easier to remember. It's also helpful to limit the number of new words and phrases being learned at any one time.

Passive and active vocabulary

A person's *active vocabulary* consists of the words they know and use. Their *passive vocabulary* consists of words they know but are less likely to use, as discussed in Chapter 3. Pre-writing activities, to enable people to access passive vocabulary and use it actively, could include asking them to:

- suggest key words for a topic;
- pick words from a bank and match them to definitions;
- discuss the meanings of words in a text and choose some to practise in sentences;
- compose a text, using words they have generated and practised.

Bilingual learners, who have grown up speaking another language or languages, may not have a large passive vocabulary in English, as they have not been immersed in English since childhood (see Chapter 4). They may need additional input from the tutor, including pre-teaching of words and phrases needed for a writing task. For discussion of this aspect of second language learning see the partner volume of this book, *Teaching ESOL* (Paton and Wilkins 2009).

Spelling

Spelling is a complex and much debated issue in adult literacy. This complexity arises from the interplay of a number of factors, including:

- **linguistic**: the nature of the alphabetic system and the difficulties posed by the 'opaque' spelling system of English;
- **cognitive**: the role of memory in spelling, and the need for individuals to develop their own strategies according to their learning style;
- **social**: the value attached to conventional spelling and the fact that it is often equated with competence or even 'intelligence';[29]
- **affective**: the distress caused by the stigma attached to 'poor' spelling, and the fact that many learners are understandably anxious to improve their spelling skills above all others.

In this section we will look at each of these factors and consider implications for practice.

Linguistic factors

The alphabetic code and the writing process

In an alphabetic writing system, individual speech sounds are represented by abstract symbols. The shapes of words and letters do not reflect either their sound or their meaning. The shape of the symbol *t*, which represents the sound of the first letter in *tree*, is entirely random; the word *elephant* does not look like a real elephant any more than *house* looks like an actual house.

So spelling involves drawing on a body of abstract knowledge during the already complex process of composing a text. Some people develop automaticity in spelling, but many people writing in English, including experienced writers, find it hard to produce conventional spellings as they write.[30] A writer in this situation must use other strategies, such as skipping over words at the drafting stage (as **Geraldine** did in **Text 1b**), using a personalized checklist for proofreading, or asking a tutor or friend for support. It is important to discuss these strategies with learners, so they can decide what works best for them.

Sound–symbol correspondence

As explained in Chapter 3, every alphabetic language has a set of regular sound–symbol correspondences, but in English this set is very large because of the number of variations. Irregular words are an added complication.

Many people argue that English spelling is unnecessarily difficult and call for it to be reformed. They point out that many of the variations and exceptions exist for purely historical reasons, often arbitrary ones, and that a more consistent system would remove at least some of the barriers people face when learning to write in English.

The *schwa* presents a particular challenge for the learning and teaching of spelling. This vowel sound, the most common one in the English language, can be spelled in many different ways (see Chapter 3).

Proponents of **synthetic phonics** argue that the entire set of regular sound–symbol correspondences, including all the variations, can be learned, stored in the memory and retrieved when writing. They suggest an order in which to study them and recommend that people master each new pattern before moving on to the next one. However, for many adult literacy learners this would be extremely difficult. An added problem is that, if divorced from writing whole texts for real purposes, learning spelling in this way can feel pointless and alienating.

On the other hand, knowledge of sound–symbol relationships is an important tool for writing, without which writers would only be able to use words whose spelling they could recall visually. Learners need access to this body of knowledge and tutors need to find ways of incorporating it into the writing curriculum.

One approach is to focus on groups of words with the same spelling patterns, generating these from words in texts that learners are reading or writing. The rationale for this is twofold:

- people are motivated to learn words they want or need for a purpose;
- learning a type of word or a pattern is more useful than learning an individual word, as it gives the learner underpinning knowledge that can be applied to other words.

Eddie's text (**Text 3**) contains many spelling errors, from which he and a tutor would need to select.

One word that could be grouped with others of the same pattern is *would*. Using an *onset-rime* approach (see Chapter 5), learners could:

- divide *would* into its onset and rime:

  w + ould = would
- add the onsets *c* and *sh* to the same rime:

  c + ould = could
  sh + ould = should
- learn and practise the whole group: *would, could, should.*

These words are difficult, but they are among the most common words in the language.

Another way of working on sound–symbol correspondence is to incorporate regular work on phonics into a literacy course. In adult contexts this means devoting a small proportion of each lesson to learning or revising a new pattern, following a logical order such as the one recommended in the English adult literacy core curriculum (DfES 2001). To take an example from **Eddie's** text, it would be logical to work on consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) words such as *fed* and *bed*, before tackling more difficult words like *write* and *like*, in which the long vowel sound is represented by the middle *i* combined with the final *e*.

For all learners, knowledge of sound–symbol relationships is a step towards more accurate spelling, but for many it remains extremely difficult and they need to combine it with other strategies (see the section on cognitive factors below).

Accent and pronunciation

Adult learners come from varied language backgrounds and speak English with many different accents. Vowel sounds vary from one region to another, and learning how to represent them in writing can be difficult in a group. For example, the vowel sound in *bed* is different in different accents, and for some people the pronunciation of *bed* and *bad* is almost identical. This is an enormous complication when using phonics for spelling.

For tutors the challenge is to support individuals in moving from the sounds of their own natural speech into the letter patterns of conventional English spelling.

Morphology and spelling

As discussed in Chapter 3, morphology is the study of the structure of words.

From the point of view of spelling, what writers need to know about morphology is that:

- spelling longer words can be easier if you divide them into components such as 'roots', prefixes and suffixes;
- a suffix (and occasionally a prefix) can change the spelling of the root word;
- this happens in predictable ways which can be learned;
- there are exceptions.

Morphology is usually a core part of a spelling curriculum. As the concepts being learned are very abstract, teachers often help learners gain 'ownership' of them by using an inductive approach. This involves providing models and asking learners to look for patterns, for example how and when a plural or past tense ending affects the spelling of a root word:

family/families

hurry/hurried

'Imported' words

All languages absorb words from other languages. In terms of spelling, the problem with this process in English is that imported words tend to retain their original form, or at least a version of it that does not fit within the normal range of English spelling patterns. This makes the words difficult to spell, for example *technique, rhythm* and *psychiatrist.* (Strategies for learning difficult words are discussed below in the section on cognitive factors.)

There are particular issues for speakers of other languages when dealing with English spelling (see Chapter 4). Tutors need to be aware of these when supporting bilingual learners.

Cognitive factors

People's ability to remember spellings depends on many factors, including age and cognitive style. People who are dyslexic can have difficulties arising from visual or auditory processing problems or inefficiency in the working memory. Finding strategies which draw on their distinctive strengths, as well as addressing weaknesses, is particularly important for these learners.

Some people use knowledge of word structure or sound-symbol correspondence to apply spelling rules when writing. Others draw on their visual memory of words and their implicit knowledge of patterns: they go by the 'look' of the word:

easily 'looks' right, whereas *easyly* doesn't

Another visual strategy is finding words-within-words. Do carnivores eat *meat* or *meet*? In this case it's easy to choose the right spelling, as the word *eat* is contained within the word *meat*.

Some people like to have an overview of all the possible letters or combinations that can be used to represent a sound, but for many literacy learners this kind of global approach only leads to confusion. For them, trying to learn more than one spelling pattern at a time is not a good idea, particularly if the patterns are similar.

Example 6.12

Homophones *there, their* and *they're*

Many people understand the distinction in meaning between these words, but still get them confused when they write them. This is because the main factor in choosing the correct spelling is memory. For these learners it is better to concentrate on one word at a time, exploring its uses and building up associations to which the memory of the word can be 'pegged':

- using a drawing, photograph or other visual image.
- grouping words of the same pattern and learning them together

  here, there and everywhere.

The strategy adopted depends partly on the word itself and partly on the learning style of the individual. When working in a group, it is best to assume that there will be as many preferred ways of learning spelling as there are people in the group, and use a variety of approaches.[31]

Task 6.7

Developing strategies for spelling difficult words

How would you remember the spelling of the words *rhythm* and *necessary*?

Comment 6.7

Ways of tackling these words could be:

- Highlight single and double letters in contrasting colours:
- Learn the necessary letters by heart:

  r-h-y-t-h-m
- Use a mnemonic:

  Rhythm **h**as **y**our **t**wo **h**ips **m**oving.

  It is ne**c**e**ss**ary to have one **c**ollar and two **s**ocks.

Social and affective factors

As discussed earlier, social pressure to spell conventionally is very strong and conventional spelling is often regarded as a sign of 'intelligence', despite the fact that it depends more on memory than on higher order intellectual processes. The stigma attached to 'poor' spelling causes problems for many people, including lack of confidence, a distorted view of their own abilities and a tendency to focus on spelling as if it were the most important aspect of literacy.

On the positive side, there are affective factors that can help with spelling, such as motivation to learn words that are personally significant to the learner. In **Text 12**, there is evidence that **Aftab** can learn personal key words, including long ones like *Bangladesh*.

In **Eddie's** text (**Text 3**): most key words are misspelt, including *bricklayer, fed up, learn, read, write* and *help*. However, he wrote this text before he started a literacy course and it is likely that he could learn some personal key words with the support of a tutor, choosing words that he needs for his goal of becoming a bricklayer:

mix + er = mixer

brick + lay + er = bricklayer

Literacy tutors can respond to positive and negative affective factors in spelling in several ways, including:

- taking into account learners' interests and priorities;
- giving constructive feedback;
- discussing the reasons for the difficulty of English spelling, including historical reasons;
- working on spelling regularly and systematically, in the context of meaningful writing tasks.

Approaches to learning and teaching spelling

Having explored some of the factors that impact on the learning and teaching of spelling, we now consider a number of established approaches.

Making a link with reading: text-based activities

As with other aspects of writing, whole texts can be used as a starting point for work on spelling. Using a text that the group has been reading,

- explore spelling issues arising from words in the text;
- ask learners to suggest strategies for difficult words;
- devise practice activities;
- set up a writing task drawing on the themes of the text, using a selection of the words.

To take just one example, the word 'favorite' in the text 'Baked Bananas' (page 205) could be used in a number of ways:

- To compare British and American spelling: ask the group to compile a list of words with the same patterns, such as

favor	favour
flavor	flavour
color	colour
neighbor	neighbour

- To explore the broader social issues arising from this example: the global spread of American English, the current trend towards US spelling, and the reasons behind it. This kind of discussion enables learners to take a longer view of spelling and helps demystify current conventions by putting them in a historical context.
- To identify and discuss the *schwa*. The middle syllable in the word *favourite* is normally swallowed and the word is pronounced something like *fave / rit*.

  Sometimes the spelling of the schwa can be revealed by going back to the root word, where the syllable is a little more distinct and the pattern can be seen more easily:

  favour
  favourite

Diagnostic assessment: identifying strengths and areas for development

One way to meet individual needs in a spelling programme is through diagnostic assessment and dialogue. In this part of the chapter, we will refer to writing by **Aftab** and **Eddie**.

Aftab: Text 12

Aftab is a bilingual learner who had limited access to literacy as a child, and for whom English is not a first language. In view of this, his spelling in English is remarkably strong.

- Personal key words are spelt correctly:

  Aftab, Bangladesh, England, family, problem, college, English.
- Phonic strategy is often successful. Even when a word is not completely correct it is based on existing words or patterns (in this example *add, mesh, on*):

  addmeshon (for admission);

  or he uses a logical phonic alternative (*oz*), combined with visual memory of the word as a whole:

  becoze (for because).

- Vowel sound confusion reflects the pronunciation patterns of Sylheti:

  smool (for small).
  live (for leave);
  batter (for better).

Eddie: Text 3

It is evident from this piece of writing that **Eddie**, unlike **Aftab**, has fundamental problems with spelling, though he does have some knowledge that can be used as a starting point.

- He uses initial consonants correctly.
- He remembers the spelling of two personal key words: *work* and *hope*.
- He knows the consonant digraph *-ck* and uses it in *backlald* (*bricklayer*) in which the vowel sound is short, but incorrectly in *lick* (*like*), in which the vowel is long and the final *-e* is needed.
- He uses the consonant blend *-lp* correctly in *help* (*holp*), but misses the blend *br-* in *bricklayer* (*backlald*).
- He can't always identify the component sounds of words; sometimes he adds an extra phoneme: *lont* for *lot*, or an extra syllable: *reder* for *read*.

Spelling in the context of learners' own writing

It is clear that **Aftab** would benefit from continuing to learn personal key words, as this is something he already does successfully. **Eddie** could also try this strategy; his motivation for writing is linked to a vocational goal and he could pick words he needs for this context.

Aftab could extend his knowledge of sound–symbol correspondence in regular words, learning new patterns and clarifying confusions. For **Eddie** this is also very important but he is likely to find it difficult.

Both learners could set up a regular spelling routine in which they choose words they want to learn; decide on strategies for learning them; practise them and test themselves at frequent intervals. A well-known framework for doing this is *Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check*.[32] Two basic principles underpinning this approach are:

- the words must be useful to the learner, who chooses them from his own writing;
- the tutor's role is to help the learner explore strategies that will work for him as an individual.

Aftab could work towards developing proofreading skills, though at present this would be difficult for him, as his knowledge of English spelling is still fairly limited. In **Eddie's** case it would only be realistic to proofread for a very small number of words that he has been working on.

Dyslexia and spelling

Eddie's problems with spelling affect his ability to produce a legible text or use writing to express his ideas. There is a discrepancy between this extreme difficulty with spelling and the qualities in his writing, including clarity and coherence at text and sentence level, and logical, if not completely accurate, use of punctuation and capitalization. This combination of notable strengths and difficulties can be a sign of dyslexia.

Eddie has some knowledge of spelling to build on. A tutor would have to be encouraging, realistic and selective in her feedback and her suggestions for learning, and support him in trying out different strategies. He would probably find it helpful to work with a specialist tutor one-to-one, as this would give him scope to investigate his strengths and difficulties and find strategies for moving forward with spelling.

Learning and teaching spelling: putting it all together

When working on spelling with groups and individuals it is worth remembering some basic principles:

- Practise regularly and for short periods.
- Concentrate on one pattern or aspect at a time.
- If working regularly on phonics, follow a recommended sequence.
- Provide opportunities for review and consolidation.
- Vary the activities and use a multi-sensory approach.
- Use technical terms to shed light on useful concepts, as appropriate to the group (e.g. *vowel, consonant, prefix, suffix*).

- Use contexts that are meaningful and relevant to adult learners.
- Use words from texts that people are already reading.
- Make links with learners' own writing.
- Provide opportunities for active and collaborative learning.
- Explore the history of English spelling and discuss the difficulties it presents.
- If possible, make spelling fun!

Part 5: Supporting the writing process as a whole

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, people learn to write by writing. Learners need opportunities to compose whole texts, with support from tutors on both the technical skills of writing, like punctuation and spelling, and the strategic skill of producing an effective text within a given social context. They need opportunities to develop confidence, a sense of themselves as writers and a repertoire of 'voices' for the different kinds of writing they want or need to do.

A recent NRDC research study (Grief *et al.* 2007) suggests that it is important for teachers to:

- set up writing tasks carefully, using pre-writing activities to prepare for writing;
- make the composition process explicit;
- engage in formative dialogue with learners;
- give useful feedback.

In this section we discuss each stage of the process, drawing on theory and practice covered earlier in the chapter. These are only examples; when planning, tutors have to take into account a wide range of factors, including the writing people do and aspire to do outside the classroom, how they feel about writing, how they work together as a group, the ways they prefer to learn and the sub-skills they need to develop.

Effective teaching depends on being responsive and flexible, going with the 'teachable moment', picking up on issues as they arise and responding effectively.[33] This is often quite subtle, requiring skill on the part of the tutor. In the case of writing, it means noticing and analysing how learners use spoken and written language and being aware of the social, affective and cognitive factors that can impact on writing, as discussed throughout this chapter.

Before writing

Generating ideas

Pre-writing activities are important because they enable learners to:

- draw on their knowledge of the topic, genre and wider social context;
- express ideas orally first, as a bridge into writing;
- practise language or literacy skills needed for the task;
- build confidence and motivation for writing.

Examples of pre-writing activities from earlier in this chapter are the 'credit crunch' debate on page *219* and the community workers' discussion on page 226, in which learners share ideas, explore themes and work on the grammar or vocabulary they need for the topic.

Exploring the writing cycle

Writing is a process which, though individual in many ways, has elements that can be identified and practised. Learners may have implicit knowledge of this which the tutor can draw on.

Example 6.13

Visually representing the writing cycle
One way of showing the cyclical nature of writing is to use cards with different 'stages' written on them and ask learners to sequence them. This can lead to discussion of what writing involves, including the fact that it is not a linear process.[34]

Planning

When working on the planning stage of writing, it can be helpful to:

- offer a framework – a spider–gram or other visual tool - or invite learners to create their own planning tools;
- help people draw up plans, using questions and prompts;
- discuss options, including the option *not* to plan, for example when spontaneity is more important than structure, as in a personal email or text message.

During writing

Providing scaffolding for a first draft

The point of scaffolding is to give support that frees up the learner to express ideas and develop a text.

Scaffolding can include:

- a writing frame;
- grammar and vocabulary needed for the topic and type of text;
- spellings of difficult words.

The type and amount of scaffolding will depend on the learners and the tutor must make a judgement about what kind of support to offer, how much structure to provide and how best to use learners' own language and ideas as a starting point.

Responding to drafts

This is one of the most significant aspects of teaching writing and demands sensitivity and skill on the part of the tutor.

Research with adult learners in the UK and USA (Grief *et al.* 2007 and Condelli *et al.* 2003) suggests that it is important to respond to drafts as a *reader*, not just as an assessor, using formative feedback and dialogue to:

- support the development of a sense of authorship;
- build confidence;
- develop awareness of audience, discussing the needs of the reader and the impact of the writer's choices;
- offer support with technical aspects of writing.

When responding to a draft:

- respond with interest to the content;
- use open questions to help the writer develop her ideas;
- highlight aspects of the writing that are effective and explain why;
- point out errors that might cause problems for a reader;
- explore the choices open to the writer.

When a learner is 'stuck' during drafting, remind him or her of ideas he or she expressed earlier and give prompts to help the learner clarify what he or she wants to say.

If the learner is worried about technical problems:

- remind him or her to stay focused on the overall purpose of the text;
- suggest short-term strategies, such as asking for spellings of words he or she needs, using a word bank or writing the first letter of an unknown word and moving on.

Most literacy learners need assurances that there will be opportunities to work on spelling and other technical aspects of writing later, if not at the drafting stage.

All these ways of responding to drafts can be used in small groups as well as one-to-one.

Formative feedback and dialogue

Example 6.14

Formative feedback to Sharon (Text 2a)
Formative feedback to **Sharon** on her draft of *Scary Story* could cover many issues. To avoid overload or demoralization, it would be important to be selective and highlight qualities as much as areas for development. Here are some examples of comments the tutor might make, each of which could be the beginning of a dialogue:

This really is a 'scary story': there's a lot of running and tripping and an atmosphere of panic! You've created this effect very well, using the words 'run' and 'running' several times. Did you enjoy writing the story? Did you make it up or is it based on one you've read?

Sometimes I got a bit lost in the story. For example, when you say 'they' in the fifth line, who do you mean? Who are 'they'? Who do you mean by 'the other person'? If you make these things clear, your story will be easier to follow.

Your use of punctuation is very strong. You have used full stops to mark the ends of sentences. Did you use the grammar check on the computer (the squiggly green line)?

Let's talk about the verbs you've used in the story. Verbs can make a big difference to how easy it is to follow. Do you know what a verb is? Let me show you some examples ... (See pages 212–13 for discussion of **Sharon's** use of tenses.)

Are you thinking of putting this story in the class magazine? If so, how will you illustrate it? How will you make the title stand out? Can you make it look scary?

After writing

Revision

To revise effectively we must be readers of our own texts. When a teacher responds to a draft as a *reader* she is modelling the revision process, focusing on the effectiveness of the text, discussing issues such as clarity, expressiveness, coherence and fitness for purpose. These are the kinds of issues that a writer needs to consider when revising a text.

Recent research in the area of *assessment for learning* (Black *et al.* 2005) suggests that it is important for learners to draw up their own criteria and apply these when revising. This can work especially well as a group activity when working on a particular type of text.

Example 6.15

Eliciting criteria for effectiveness in writing

- Project a sample text on to a screen or interactive whiteboard.
- Evaluate it as a group: analyse what makes it more effective or less effective.
- The group draws up a set of criteria related to the genre and the purpose.
- Learners now apply these criteria collaboratively in assessing other texts (e.g. each other's drafts).
- Finally, each person uses the criteria independently to revise her own writing.

Many learners are unused to the idea of revision and have the unrealistic expectation that a first draft, if written by an experienced writer, is already perfect. Many people confuse revision with proofreading and it's important for tutors to make a clear distinction between the two processes: **revision** is for **effectiveness**, **proofreading** is for **correctness**.

It can be helpful for people to draw up their own revision checklists. For example, while some people find it hard to maintain a consistent register in a piece of writing, others have problems with sequencing or using suitable headings.

Revision as a creative process

Revision need not be just a hard slog but can be a creative process. For a writer, the purpose of revision is to find better ways to express what she wants to say and achieve the effects that she wants to create. This can be enjoyable and satisfying. For example, **Sharon** could make her *Scary Story* more effective visually, using 'scary' pictures or a font like Chiller for the title; she could also get satisfaction from making the story more coherent and enabling her readers to follow the plot.

Even in more formal or impersonal writing the creative aspect of revision is important. For example, when revising a persuasive text like a letter of request, a writer might choose new words or phrases that make the points more clearly or heighten the impact of the text.

Teachers can help by supporting the redrafting process, focusing on both linguistic and visual features, as in **Sharon's** case. Skilful questioning can help people develop their drafts, improve their use of language and other modes of expression and make their writing more effective.

Proofreading

Even proofreading, which means checking for errors and correcting them, can be enjoyable, especially if done in a group. Some tutors use games, such as *the first team to find the twenty deliberate mistakes wins*, which many learners enjoy (though this can be undermining for some people).

It's often a good idea to focus on just one issue, for example verb endings, plurals, full stops or capital letters, depending on what people have been working on recently.

As with revision, each person can draw up her own checklist, in response to formative feedback from the tutor. Many learners will need extra support, especially those at an early stage of literacy.

Conclusion

Writing is a difficult but potentially rewarding activity for adult literacy learners, and one that is important to them for many reasons, as discussed at the beginning of this

chapter. They aspire to use writing to fulfil a variety of personal and social goals, and they bring funds of knowledge and experience as a resource for learning.

Further reading and resources

Grief, S. and Chatterton, J. (2007) *Writing*. London: NRDC.

Moss, W. (1999) Talk into text: reflections on the relationship between author and scribe in writing through language experience, *RaPAL Bulletin*, 40.

NRDC, *Voices on the Page*, www.nrdc.org.uk/voices accessed 17 June 2009.

Notes

1. For discussion of the debate around 'genre' and 'process' theories, see Wray D. (2004) *Literacy: Major Themes in Education, Vol. 3. Writing: Processes and Teaching*. Routledge/Falmer.
2. See National Literacy Trust website for a summary of this debate, including brief historical overview and references: www.literacytrust.org.uk/database/Writing/grammar.html. Accessed 15 June 2009.
3. See Crystal, D. (2008) *Txtng: The Gr8T Db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also '2b or not 2b?', article by David Crystal, with contributions by Will Self and Lynne Truss, in the *Saturday Guardian Review*, 5 July 2008.
4. For discussion of this issue with reference to literacy, see Purcell-Gates, Jacobson and Degener (2004) especially chapter 7, 'Print literacy development through a widened lens', pp. 81–125.
5. Named after a child who participated in research on this issue.
6. See Clark, R. and Ivanic, I. (1997) *The Politics of Writing*. London: Routledge.
7. For example, Bereiter, C. and Scardamalia, M. (1987) *The Psychology of Written Composition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
8. Goode, P. (1985) A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker, in G. Frost and C. Hoy (eds) *Opening Time*. Manchester: Gatehouse, cited in Woodin, T. (2008) ' "A beginner reader is not a beginner thinker": student publishing in Britain since the 1970s', Paedagogica Historica, 44 (1&2).
9. In some communities the practice of collaborative writing, in which everyone contributes ideas and more literate members of the community take the role of scribe, is still strong. See Mace, J. (2002) *The Give and Take of Writing: Scribes, Literacy and Everyday Life*. Leicester: NIACE; and Saxena, M. (1994) Literacies among the Panjabis in Southall in Mary Hamilton *et al.* (eds), *Worlds of Literacy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
10. *Guardian* (2007) Guide, 14 March: 34. 'Home-clubber' cartoon by Modern Toss, website: www.moderntoss.com accessed 15 June 2009.
11. See also Kress, G. (2003) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. London: Routledge.
12. From Clark and Ivanic (1997), *op. cit.*
13. The NRDC practitioner guide, *Writing* (Chatterton and Grief 2007, *op. cit.*), suggests activities for 'bringing the outside in'. See also: Appleby, A. and Barton, D. (2008) *Responding to People's Lives*. London: NRDC; and Fowler, E. and Mace, J. (2005) *Outside the Classroom: Researching Literacy with Adult Learners*. Leicester: NIACE.
14. See *Voices on the Page* www.nrdc.org.uk/voices accessed 15 June 2009.
15. See Woodin (2008), *op. cit.*
16. From Williams (2003).
17. This piece of writing was produced using Language Experience. It illustrates how beginner writers can be eloquent speakers, using rhetorical devices intuitively to create powerful texts. See *Voices on the Page*, *op. cit.*
18. *Guardian*, 26 May 2008.
19. From the poem by Robert Frost, 'Stopping by woods on a snowy evening', in E.C. Latham (ed.) (2001) *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. London: Vintage, p. 224.
20. See for example: Hyland K. (2004) *Genre and Second Language Writing*. Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press; Wray, D. (2004) *op. cit.*; Spiegel, M. and Sunderland, H. (1999) *Writing Works: Using a Genre Approach for Teaching Writing to Adult and Young People in ESOL and Basic Education Classes*. London: LLU+, London South Bank University.
21. See Fawns, M. and Ivanic, R. (2001) Form-filling as a social practice: taking power into our own hands, in J Crowther, M. Hamilton and L. Tett (eds) *Powerful Literacies*. *Leicester: NIACE*.
22. See Moon, P. and Sunderland, H. (2008) *Reflect for ESOL Evaluation: Final Report*. London Language and Literacy Unit at London South Bank University.
23. Thanks to Becky Winstanley, Tower Hamlets College, for this example.
24. For example, he writes *indivigle* for *individual*, *perants* for *parents* and *apprehencon* for *apprehension*.
25. Dickens, C. (2003) *Bleak House*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics.
26. In the English Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, vocabulary is listed as a word-level element in reading but a text-level element in writing. In this book, for reasons of consistency, we discuss vocabulary under word level.
27. For discussion of this approach, see Vacca, R.T. and Vacca, J.L. (2000) Writing across the curriculum, in R. Indrisano and Squire. (eds) (2000) *Perspectives on Writing: Research, Theory and Practice*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
28. See Chapter 3.
29. See Clark and Ivanic (1997), *op. cit.*
30. See Peters, M. (1985) *Spelling: Caught or Taught? A New Look*. London: Routledge.
31. For examples see Basic Skills Agency (2008).
32. *Ibid.*
33. See Grief *et al.* (2007).
34. See Grief and Chatterton (2007).