

Research underpinning Stage 6 Literacy in context – Writing resources

‘Writing should not be taught in isolation from content – writing will enhance [a] student’s ability to understand subject matter.’ Hochman and Duffy (2015).

All teachers are responsible for teaching explicit literacy skills to their students and in each key learning area in Stage 6 there is a wide range of opportunities for students to learn how to capably write about the essential content they are learning.

It is crucial that students learn literacy skills in the context of the syllabus content, to improve both their understanding of the complex subject matter and the literacy skills that underpin what they are learning. ‘The Writing Revolution’ by Hochman and Wexler (2017), describes 6 principles to consider when teaching to improve student writing:

- writing needs explicit instruction
- sentences are the building blocks of all writing
- use curriculum content for writing instruction to be powerful
- curriculum content drives the rigour of the writing activities
- grammar is best taught in the context of student writing
- planning and revising are the most important aspects of good writing.

The Stage 6 resources begin with activities to **improve student writing through subject vocabulary**. Research demonstrates that knowledge and understanding of the words used in subjects is crucial for students to effectively engage with the curriculum, making it an ideal place to begin the journey of improving student writing. Studies also support the idea that vocabulary is a significant factor in student achievement of subject outcomes (Quigley 2018). This resource includes scaffolding to provide a structured and systematic approach to supporting students with building their subject vocabulary. Adapted from Quigley’s ‘Select, Explain, Explore, and Consolidate’ (SEEC) model, these activities can be adapted for use in every subject area and unit of work to create a consistent approach to building student awareness and effective use of learning area specific vocabulary in the Stage 6 classroom.

‘Explicit and systematic strategy instruction in planning, drafting, evaluating and revising, with modelling, guided practice and feedback, has a significant positive effect on student writing quality in ... secondary.’ Graham and Perin (2007).

This informs the second set of the Stage 6 resources, **Improve student writing through planning for writing**. A series of activities have been provided that support students to write about the texts that they read in their subject areas, giving them explicit guidance on how to summarise and annotate, which research shows can support gains in student achievement in both reading and writing (Hochman and Duffy 2015). In using these resources, teachers should consider creating regular opportunities for their students to write in response to curriculum content and classroom reading as this enhances learning across stages and subjects and supports their comprehension of the material (Graham et al. 2020).

As a guided approach to the teaching of writing is most beneficial in supporting students to engage with writing and creates a safe and motivated environment conducive to frequent and routine writing practice, this resource contains scaffolds and strategies to model effective writing as students learn to refine their own skills. These ideas inform the third section of the resources, **Improve student writing through writing and feedback**. All teachers must be teachers of writing and as with any other new or complex skill, explicit teaching is essential to provide clear and effective instruction and reduce the cognitive burden on students. ‘The more students know about a topic before they write, the better they will be able to write about it’ (Hochman and Wexler 2017). Teachers may use the activities to ‘build the field’, improving student knowledge and deep understanding of the content by making links to prior learning and guiding students through effective note-taking and summarising strategies. Modelled responses to questions can be used as scaffolds to support explicitly teaching what the desired writing product should look like. This is essential to ensure students understand the expectations of the writing task before they are provided with an opportunity to write. Regular formative assessment and quality feedback on student writing that is focused on the intended learning and identifies improvement pathways, is evidence-based best practice to support student achievement in every subject area (CESE 2020).

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