

The Write Team

Non-Fiction Writing

Teaching Ideas
Key Stage 2

by Helen Cross

*A Bath Festivals Learning and Participation
Project funded by*

 Paul Hamlyn
Foundation

NON-FICTION WRITING

- To develop non fiction writing that has purpose and creativity.
- To tap into children's interests and give confident creative focus for these interests.
- To encourage them to write informative and engaging prose, using drama and speaking and listening elements to strengthen ideas and confidence.

WEEK ONE

1. Persuasive Writing

Automatic writing – write about a website you have visited that you like. It can be anything at this stage, CBBC etc. Just get out all your ideas about why you like that website and what it offers you. Think how you first heard about it or stumbled across it. Think about the benefits and drawbacks of that website. Write for a full five minutes just letting your thoughts pour out.

Together – share some of the automatic writing on the board, gather words associated with this website writing. Think of how we have used adjectives to convince and detail our arguments. Write up all the benefits and drawbacks of the websites under discussion and share all the ideas in the group.

2. Group activity

We are now going to think specifically about websites related to writing. There are many to find via Googling 'children's writing websites' Two to start, and both with a very different style and approach, might be www.literacytrust.org.uk and www.poetry4kids.com

Think about these writing sites and others you discover. Who runs them? What are they aiming to do? Look at the links on the Write Team Website to the Arvon site, the Poetry society, the Everybody Writes site. Think what works and what we like and why we like it. Discuss the challenges of writing websites (e.g. they can have too much text, they can seem dull, they can be hard to read on screen, they can be too complicated or offer too many options, or feel academic and hard work, or too lightweight or too targeted to selling services or ideas)

Now look at the Write Team Merlin website or The Write Team Website <http://www.bathlitfest.org.uk/writeteam.aspx> Introduce how it works, why it was thought necessary and what it aims to do.

Children to have a look through and read some of the work that has been posted online by the older Write Team students.

Think about how easy it is to use, if it seems accessible and enjoyable. If you would want to visit the site again. Do you like the writing you have read? Would it be

helpful for you to post work on such a site?

3. Small groups discussion and notes

Discuss what you like and don't like about the Write Team website. Make notes.

Think if you would visit it again, and if not why not.

Think of what the website currently offers and how you would improve the website.

Collect five points for developing the website in the future.

Share these ideas with the group – collect on the board.

4. Individually and planning

On a Mind Map or a Spider Diagram imagine if you were working for a Web Design Company and you are in charge of devising your own unique Writing Website. It should be bold, new and original. What would you come up with?

- Be as imaginative as possible. Think ambitiously as if money and technical skill were no object.
- What would be the distinctive selling point of your website?
- Think how it would stand out from all the others that we have looked at.
- What is it offering that no other website is able to offer?
- Who would you target as a user of your website?
- How would you attract them to your website?
- What incentives would you offer?
- How would you aim to present the writing and encourage users to read it?
- What would the design be like in terms of colour and layout, font and style?
- What would you call the website e.g. Brilliantwriting.com or Shareyourwriting.com or Pensonfire.co.uk

5. Writing

Write an A4 one-side proposal for your own website. Really try and imagine you are presenting this to the boss of your Web Design Company and trying to convince her to give you the go ahead to develop and design and launch the site. Think of words to convince her of your idea – perhaps share these words and phrases on the board to get you thinking. Think of persuasive language and how it is different to everyday speech. Think of how we make language upbeat and optimistic and encouraging. What adjectives would you use? Would you write in the past/present/future tense? Would you use the third or first person? You could play around with different options. You might then go on to write about:

- The benefits of your website
- The future users of your website
- How it could make a profit
- How it would look and feel and be distinctive.

Complete your proposal and present to the group in a Dragon's Den style presentation. Some children can be the Dragons who question the proposer on their idea and decide if they are convinced and want to invest in the proposed website.

WEEK TWO

We are building on the work of last week and need to work with/or finish our website proposal work before we start this.

We are building on the work on the last week and honing our persuasive language for our imaginary website. Now we are going to design an advert/poster for the website. We will do this on paper first and then imagine an online advertisement – and the different challenges and opportunities of this.

In the group look at some advertisements - for websites and other products. Think of the use of colour, language and image. Think how the writers and designers have made their posters punchy and appealing. How have they attracted attention? What words and ideas have they used? Think of the use of questions to draw you in. Or humour. Or juxtaposition. Think of the choices the writer has made in terms of tense and first/third person approach.

Think of a name for your website (if you haven't already) and the key selling points you envisaged for your own website last week. How will you communicate these ideas in words and image?

Think how you could take these unique features and put them onto a poster or an advert.

1. Individually

Write out a short piece of text that will draw attention to your website. It only needs to be a few lines long but it should be very creative, eye-catching and unforgettable. Imagine this text will be on a poster than will be put up around the school.

Think of what language would be appealing to your school child audience. Think how you would attract their attention with your use of words and design. Don't just choose the first words that come to mind, play around with ideas and phrases and try to make things as punchy and strong as possible. Edit and hone your first ideas so they boil down and become stronger and stronger.

Now you should have come up with a name for the website, a headline for the poster, a tagline perhaps, and the short piece of persuasive text

On a sheet of A3 design a poster for your website that includes text and image. Imagine it is a poster that will be put up around the school to attract children to visit your website

Use colour and design to present the text to best effect.

(If anyone has real problems thinking so imaginatively about a fictional site, they could do this workshop instead for the existing Write Team Website, which should help guide their thoughts and offer a more visible concrete option – they can keep returning to the existing site as they design their poster)

Put all the posters on the wall to create a gallery of images and designs.

2. In small groups

In small groups go round and look at all the posters as if in a gallery. Make notes on which website posters attract you and why. Which are the most effective? What words have the writers used to attract you to the websites? Think what works best for you. What is most creative, and intriguing and funny and bold? Discuss with your group what works and what doesn't as you look around the 'gallery'.

3. In a big group

Come together and each group to share the notes about what works and what does not. Be critically articulate. The challenge is not to be negative but to be thoughtful and insightful.

WEEK THREE

Now, following on from what we have learned about what works and what doesn't in terms of advertising, we are going to think of creating and writing an online advertisement for one of your websites.

To get you thinking, look at some of the online advertisements (there are many to see on a general Yahoo site – one for KitKat involves a comedy tennis player throwing a tennis ball out of the screen, as if 'at' the viewer.).

Think how they work and act different to print advertisements. Think how the adverts move and how they try to immediately and quirkily attract your interest. Think how that thrown ball tries to really hit you in the face. Think why the website advertisements try so hard to 'hit you in the face' immediately.

Think how easy it is to click onto a new page immediately and how hard the websites have to work to make you stay with them and read their information, and act on it.

1. In small groups

Choose a different person's website to one that you have already worked on. Each group of four to choose one of the new websites to work on.

As a group think what could happen in a thirty second online advertisement to promote your chosen website. Write a short script detailing very carefully the scenario you have imagined - this should be no more than one side of A4. It is like writing a small film:

- Think of your audience and what you are wanting them to do when they have seen your advert (i.e. visit your website/buy your product/write a poem)
- Think of the setting of your film/advert – a classroom, a study, a writers studio – think how important location and place is for all imaginative work..
- The characters – who is going to be in this short film/advert – their ages, problem, dilemma.
- The scenario in the advert. What is going to happen that is memorable and appealing.
- Think of a couple of lines of dialogue. Using very persuasive/quirkily/funny language as we tried to do last week on our posters, but now try to be even tighter and more economical with the language as there is very little room for any chatter, every line needs to matter and work to best effect.

For example:

A bored schoolboy, 9 years old, is shown flicking balls of paper into his bin in a bedroom, while a TV blurts out nonsense in the corner of the room. A computer screen shows a buzzy video game, his mobile phone flickers with messages. He sighs, bored. He sinks his head onto his paper. A voice over says: 'Bored? Tired of Life? Lacking imagination, drive, energy?'

He looks shocked by the voicover then nods, amazed.

Suddenly a big pen drops from the ceiling and the voiceover says, 'Then the Bigpen.com is here to help.'

He picks it up with all his strength and is suddenly enlivened as if he's just put a finger in a socket.

The pen starts to whirl him around the room in a crazy wild dance. He holds on to it like he's on a Bucking Bronco.

When he comes to a stop he looks down at his desk and he's written a page of handwriting. He starts to read it, his face lights up, he's laughing and enlivened from head to toe. The voiceover says, 'Thebigpen.com Start writing. Start living.'

Perform your adverts (that are much better than that!) to the group as in a small play performance, each person reading a line or acting as the narrator (or film them on a Flip) and then, as last week, decide which works best and why.

WEEK FOUR

We are building on our proposal and adverts about our website and thinking now about launching the website to a wider audience beyond the school. How can we do this most effectively using language and text and image?

1. In the Group

Look at the news articles about websites. Think why and how they are newsworthy.

Why have the newspapers written about these websites? (think about other areas of the press not just newspapers, online news sites, radio stations, TV stations - all areas of the media)

Discuss how the media get their ideas –

From reporters' investigations

From informants

From members of the public

Often from press releases (which are written by the publicity departments and sent to the journalists in the media).

Any others you can think of, publicity stunts, interviews, pranks etc?

Look at some examples of press releases (there are plenty on the websites of the writing organisations in the press section). A good one to look at might be:

http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/news/1807_filmclub_project_has_positive_impact_on_literacy

– note how they are factual and informative, giving information that the journalist might need to write the article. They are using some of the persuasive language we discussed last week but in other ways they are different. Think how and why.

Read this Press Release and discuss what works and what doesn't. Would you want to read on? If you were a journalist would you write an article/broadcast a feature/interview someone from the organisation/record a news item based on this information. If not, why not? How could the organisation have made it more appealing to you as a member of the press ?

Think how this information is not so much about puff and promise and more about facts and information and figures and details.

2. In small groups

Imagine that the website you proposed and advertised is now up and running. Now it just needs to be launched to the public and before this, to the media – to help you gain publicity for it.

Imagine you are the PR company in charge of promoting to the media one of the websites someone in your group designed last week.

- Think what you will do to promote it to the newspapers.

- Think of what your publicity campaign will be - which newspapers might be interested in your website, and why?
- Think of TV and radio stations and what they might do to help you promote your website.
- Think of some quirky ideas as well as some practical ones. Could you dress as somebody/something as a publicity stunt? Could you create an imaginary situation/scandal to attract the interest of the press? Could you enlist the help of a celebrity/star/VIP to put their name to your campaign and attract photographers and media? Try and be as imaginative and wild as possible.
- Think how you might have a launch event - where might it take place (hotel, football ground, theme park etc) to attract maximum media interest. How could this be wild and quirky and eye-catching?
- Think: Where, Why, When, What

Share your publicity campaign with the group.

3. Individual writing

Write a short press release about your website that details the site and your launch event

- List the facts about your website
- Who is targeted by it?
- Why it is newsworthy?
- What is happening at the launch event?
- Are there any memorable people/celebrities/stars lined up to attend?

Think of making your writing engaging but informative, combining facts and punchy eye-catching language.

Share some of the releases with the group – who can imagine they are journalists, deciding which release is most enticing and which they would go on to attend and cover.

WEEK FIVE

Building on our work so far, we are now going to work on writing up a journalistic article about the website

1. In pairs

One person to be the journalist, the other to be the author of the PR release - Think where you work as a journalist Is it a magazine, or an online gossip site, or a highbrow newspaper or an academic journal?

The journalist reads the release and then interviews the author about their release and their website. The journalist should try to think of interesting and quirky questions, really trying to get a fun and engaging angle on the material they have in the press release. Think what your readers want to know about is truly newsworthy and how it will be written up for the newspaper.

Change over so both people are journalists and interviewees.

2. Individually

Write up your interview as if for your publication/media organisation.

Give it a punchy headline and title.

What have you pulled out to make this a newsworthy piece. (if the technology is available you could record some as radio interviews and others as online blogs, and others as TV 'sofa' interviews.)

Share the articles/interviews/blogs with the group.

3. Editing

Work in pairs again looking at one another's journalistic work. Make suggestions on how the work could be improved.

- Think of the language used – is the vocabulary appropriate?
- How is the punctuation – perhaps read the article out loud to think how it sounds, and if it would benefit from a few more full stops or commas.
- Check over the spelling.
- Think if there is anything missing in terms of information – or any additions that would make the article more sparkling and eye-catching.
- Were you clear about the meaning of the writing, and if not how could you have been made clearer.

Share your editing thoughts with the article's author and the original writer to look over their edited piece and decide which suggestions to accept and reject.

Complete a final, perfect, sparkling piece of authored work!