

WRITING for Year 3

Hopefully by **now** the children in year 3 can:

- Form the letters correctly
- Use a reasonable amount of English vocabulary
- Use basic grammar correctly
- Speak (English) in sentences
- Develop their own creative ideas

If the children in your year 3 class cannot write reasonably well in their own language (Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese, Tamil ... whatever it is), then what chance do they have of succeeding in English?

If a child in the year 3 class is having difficulties with writing (in English), the teacher should first check out whether he/she can write in another language.

So, now presuming that the children have caught on to the basic idea of creating written words from the spoken words, and they have some spoken words which they are ready to write ... how can we get them writing reasonably well in English?

Bear in mind that children who are native English speakers struggle to produce good writing in English too. Teachers and children can feel proud of their successes!

A good teacher will break the task into smaller steps, rather than expecting children to leap straight into producing perfect English writing. So here are some steps to take.

Translating Spoken Words into Written Words

For some children, this is where the difficulty lies - even if they have their own ideas which they would willingly put on paper, they are not confident about changing spoken words into written words.

In Malaysian primary school classroom this lack of confidence is dealt with by enabling a lot of **copying**.

Words and sentences to fill in a gap or complete a sentence are provided elsewhere on the page or on the board. If a child is reasonable observant or at least paying attention, they never need to think about how to write the word.

Use Dictation

Rather than providing the words in written form, the words should be provided as spoken words (so that the step of thinking which words to write is removed).

- The children should practise listening and then writing what the teacher says, without visual assistance.
- This could be words, or sentences.
- The children write the words to the best of their ability.

- The children can then check what they have written against something on the board or in the textbook.
- The teacher could dictate directly from the textbook (while their books are closed) - it will make the children pay more attention to what is written in their text books.
- The dictation could be simply key words, vocabulary - but it should always be presented in context. For example, the teacher says, "Apple, I eat an apple for my lunch, apple." (and the children write 'apple')

Dictation should be a frequent, common practice activity in the classroom. The material could be of varying length. Variations can soon be added:

- Dictate a sentence with a gap - they have to work out which word goes in the gap.
- Dictate a whole sentence very quickly, and then wait for them to write down as much as they can remember - then repeat it.
- Whisper dictation - dictate in a very quiet voice.
- Let one of the children dictate.
- Group dictation - children work in groups, with one in each group reading the words for the others to write.
- **Running Dictation** - *see below*

Running Dictation

'Running Dictation' is a fun activity that actually practises all of the four language skills - reading, speaking, listening, and writing. It just sometimes takes a little bit of practice to get the children used to doing it properly so that it is really worthwhile. So make sure first of all that you, the teacher, understand it well.

Print small text(s) on pieces of paper, and tack them on the wall or doors (outside works well) where the children cannot see them from their seats.

Children work in pairs.

- One child runs to where the text is, reads and remembers as much of it as he can, and then runs back to his/her partner.
- The child who ran now dictates the text to his/her partner who writes it down - correctly.

NOTES:

- There could be several texts and the children could swap tasks for the next text. The child who writes must not be allowed to read the text, only listen and write.
- The child who runs and dictates can tell the child who writes how to spell words, but must not write them.
- The child who runs and dictates can take the text in small chunks - word by word if necessary - but should try to remember as much as he can at one go.
- *[If there are an odd number of children, three children can work in a group with one child running, reading, and dictating, and the other two writing.]*

VARIATIONS: There are lots of possible variations, once the children are used to the system.

- Vary the length and number of the text(s),
- put gaps in the text(s) which they have to then find answers to,
- ask them to put the texts in order after they write them ...

The text(s) should be obviously related to the specific writing task. The words can even be taken directly from the text book - it usually takes a while for even the brightest kids to notice, and even then they should be told to keep their books closed until they finish.

IDEAS for Writing

At this stage, the children are not expected to produce great written works of art. At this stage in their development you, the teacher, will be inspiring them for writing, helping them to believe that they are capable of writing, and that it will be fun!

So if you are regularly practising **Dictation**, and **Running Dictation**, with your class, soon they will be ready to try writing some of their own ideas (*and you, and they, will be so proud!*)

1. Pre-Writing

This is the **FUN** part of the lesson - for the teacher *and* the students! This is when your teaching skills will shine, when your children will be motivated. ***And YES it will take a bit of time and effort!***

(You will need to prepare and plan more than a few minutes before you enter the classroom ...)

So what should you do in Pre-Writing? Anything that:

- Enthuses the children about writing (and reading) generally.
- Enthuses the children about the topic in hand.
- Supports the children by teaching necessary vocabulary and structure.

So this **pre-writing experience**, *for example*, could be:

- A song
- A story - told or read to the children
- A play or drama - with the children joining in and/or watching
- A video
- A physical experience - such as tasting fruit for a written piece about fruit
- A game - for example a guessing game

FAQs

Q. How long should the **pre-writing** stage of the lesson take?

A. As long as it takes. This is, after all, the important part of the lesson. This is when the children are learning what they need.

Q. Could it take longer than the actual writing stage?

A. Yes. It could.

2. Writing stage

So - what should they write?

Well, there are **set writing tasks within the Year 3 KSSR text book** - which I get the impression that many teachers avoid/ignore/ never quite get to. They prefer to set an exercise from the activity book, or give an exercise to the board because they are confident the children can complete it easily.

Here are *a few* of the text book writing topics:

- Topic 1: Ask the pupils to write about what they and their friends do in the morning, afternoon and evening.
- Topic 2: Write about what you do to stay healthy.
- Topic 3: Choose a person ... write about him or her.
- Topic 4: Ask and write about the occupations of your friends' parents.
- Topic 5: Write about what you and your friends like and do not like to do.
- Topic 6: Choose a pet and write about it.
- Topic 7: Choose a sea creature. Write about it. (*Children need to surf the Internet to find pictures*)
- Topic 8: Encourage the pupils to create and write their own ending to the story.
- Topic 9: Write about Pulau Tioman

It is a good idea to **actually do these activities** because

- the grammatical structure for the writing is laid out really clearly,
- and the appropriate vocabulary is all within the pages of the text book.

So, yes, do them, please!

However, while they are all very safe topics, they are hardly exciting, interesting, motivating, now are they?

So now let's look at some ways to **spice them up a bit**.

SURPRISE and CHALLENGE students, and REWARD them for trying

Remember the three important elements for motivating and engaging students?

[\(Surprise, Challenge, and Reward - follow the link if you haven't already seen this.\)](#)

In the actual writing task, these elements can easily be added in the way the children are required to **present** their writing. So

- Firstly ask the children to quickly produce a draft of the writing, and check for mistakes.
- Then using a variety of colours, shapes, materials let them take pride in presenting their piece.
- Finally display their work on the classroom wall / pin-up board / or a collection of books on a desk.

So what can you use to make the presentation more interesting?

Post-It notes - so many colours! Children love them. And they come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You can even (sometimes) get ones that are extra sticky.

- Children can write a sentence on each as part of a topic, and stick them all onto a display.
- Children can be given some notes with the words already on them and put them together to make a text.
- Children could stick notes with vocabulary words onto a large picture or poster.
- Children could present each other with words on notes and challenge the t make a sentence.

Coloured Paper (and maybe **Sharpie pens**) - just letting children put their writing onto a variety of coloured papers can liven up the task.

Coloured Card is even better than paper. It can be folded and/or cut into interesting shapes, and then the writing can be written on white paper and stuck on or written directly onto the card.

- Make a cube / dice, and put something on each side
- Make a box and fill it with slips of paper (*see [here](#) for instructions for the box*)
- Make a tree with the children's writing forming bunches of leaves on the branches
- Make houses, cars, ...

Make a [Pop-Up Card, Little Books, or Pop-Up books](#) (*click on the link for instructions*)

These activities are a great incentive for children to write something and be proud of it.

Make models out of **Play Dough** or Plasticine to go with the writing.

Draw or paint a **picture**, or use coloured pictures from magazines torn to create a mosaic to illustrate the writing and display on the classroom wall or desk.

Children create a **dish** - follow a recipe, or design a recipe - to accompany a piece of writing, and share with other children.

Present a **play** or read **poetry** the children have written.

Remember: Surprise them with something different, challenge them to try something different, let them be rewarded when they achieve something unexpected and new.