Developing Independent Writers Through Talk for Writing



The core aim of Talk for Writing is to grow independent writers. Through the Imitation, Innovation and Independent Application process, children gain the knowledge, language and experience they need to succeed. As they become more confident, support is gradually removed so they can make more writing decisions themselves.

By the end of KS2, children must be able to write independently of the model text. This is crucial for statutory assessment: the STA's 2027 teacher assessment guidance makes it clear that writing judgements must be based on independently produced work and schools must provide sufficient opportunities for this. **See the STA's 2027 KS2 teacher assessment guidance on GOV.UK.**

> This aligns fully with Talk for Writing. Across our network of Talk for Writing Centres, where the approach is successfully embedded, we see children producing excellent independent writing, often in schools with very high levels of Pupil Premium and English as an Additional Language (EAL). The key lies in knowing how to move children smoothly from Imitation towards Independence.

From Imitation to Independence

Talk for Writing begins with an aspirational model text worth learning from. Children explore how it works, examine its underlying structure and build a toolkit of useful writing techniques.



During the Innovation stage, children begin to adapt what they have learned, with the pace of progression tailored to the child:

YOUNGER PUPILS AND THOSE NEW TO ENGLISH

Simple substitution

Essential for younger children, pupils new to English, and those needing extra support. Changing a character, place or object while keeping the underlying pattern helps them internalise useful language and grammatical structures.

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MOVING UP THROUGH THE SCHOOL

Advanced innovation

As pupils move up through the school, simple substitution no longer develops independence. Innovation must become more challenging, such as changing the viewpoint, altering the setting, creating a prequel or sequel, introducing new characters, or taking the plot in an entirely new direction.

Independent Application

Eventually, children reach the Independent Application stage, drawing on everything they have learned to make their own choices as writers.

CASE STUDY · YEAR 5, PENN WOOD PRIMARY, SLOUGH

From Icarus to Independent Writing



At Penn Wood Primary in Slough, one of our Talk for Writing Centres, a Year 5 class learned the story of Icarus as part of a unit on character flaws. The whole class learned the same model, yet their final stories went in very different directions. They were drawing on the model, their reading, the writing toolkit and everything else they had learned.

1

IMITATION

The class learned the story of Icarus as a model text for a unit on character flaws.

2

INNOVATION

They wrote a prequel and retold the story from a different perspective.

3

INDEPENDENCE

Each child created their own character flaw story, from jealous queens to the Grinch, many combining different genres.

> **A scaffold is useful as a starting point, but the purpose of the scaffold is that, in time, children should be able to write without it.**
>
> The skill of the teacher is in judging when children are ready to move further away from the model.

THIS APPROACH DRIVES RESULTS

Penn Wood's 2026 Year 6 writing results

In a school where 88% of pupils speak English as an additional language.

88% expected standard

16% greater depth

Planning for Independence

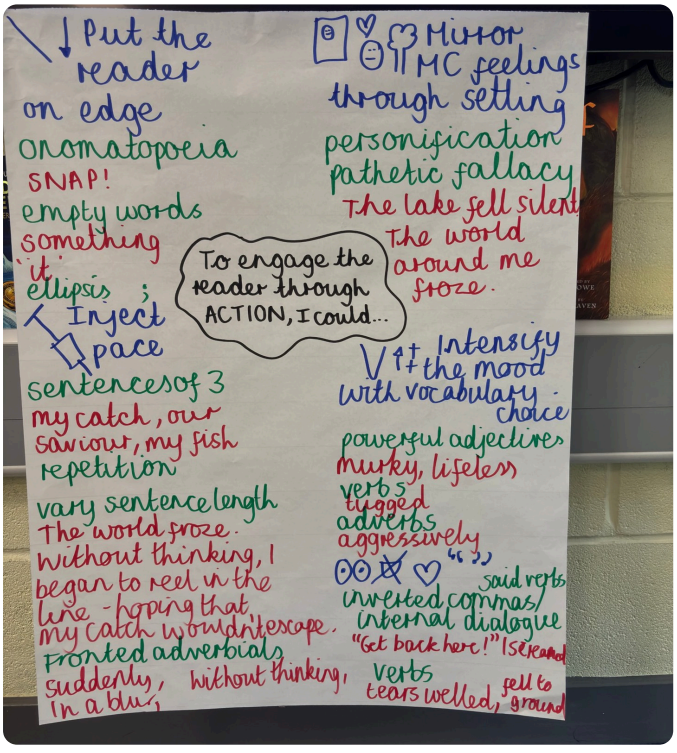
WHEN PLANNING A TALK FOR WRITING UNIT, START WITH THE QUESTION

What will the children be able to do independently as a result of this teaching?

Then plan how the scaffolding will change across the unit.

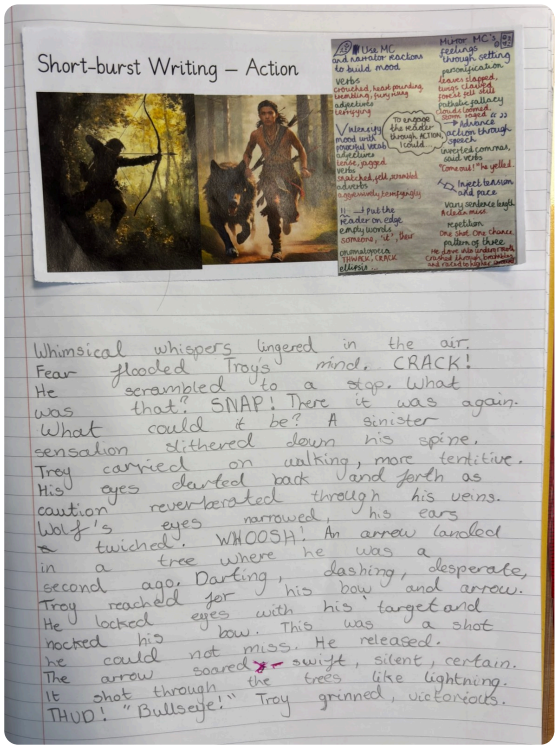
TOOLKITS ARE POSSIBILITIES

Toolkits should be banks of possibilities, never a tick list. At Penn Wood, toolkits are presented pictorially in a circle rather than a linear list, enabling children to view them as active options while removing barriers for pupils new to English.



The toolkit: options arranged around the aim, not a checklist.

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The toolkit in action: a pupil's short-burst writing.

> **In Talk for Writing, we teach techniques because they give children possibilities. We use model texts because children need excellent writing to learn from, shared writing to observe how a writer thinks and Innovation to transform what they know into something different.**

Handing Over the Decisions

As children become more experienced, we gradually hand over the decision-making until they are selecting from everything they have learned to create writing that is genuinely their own.



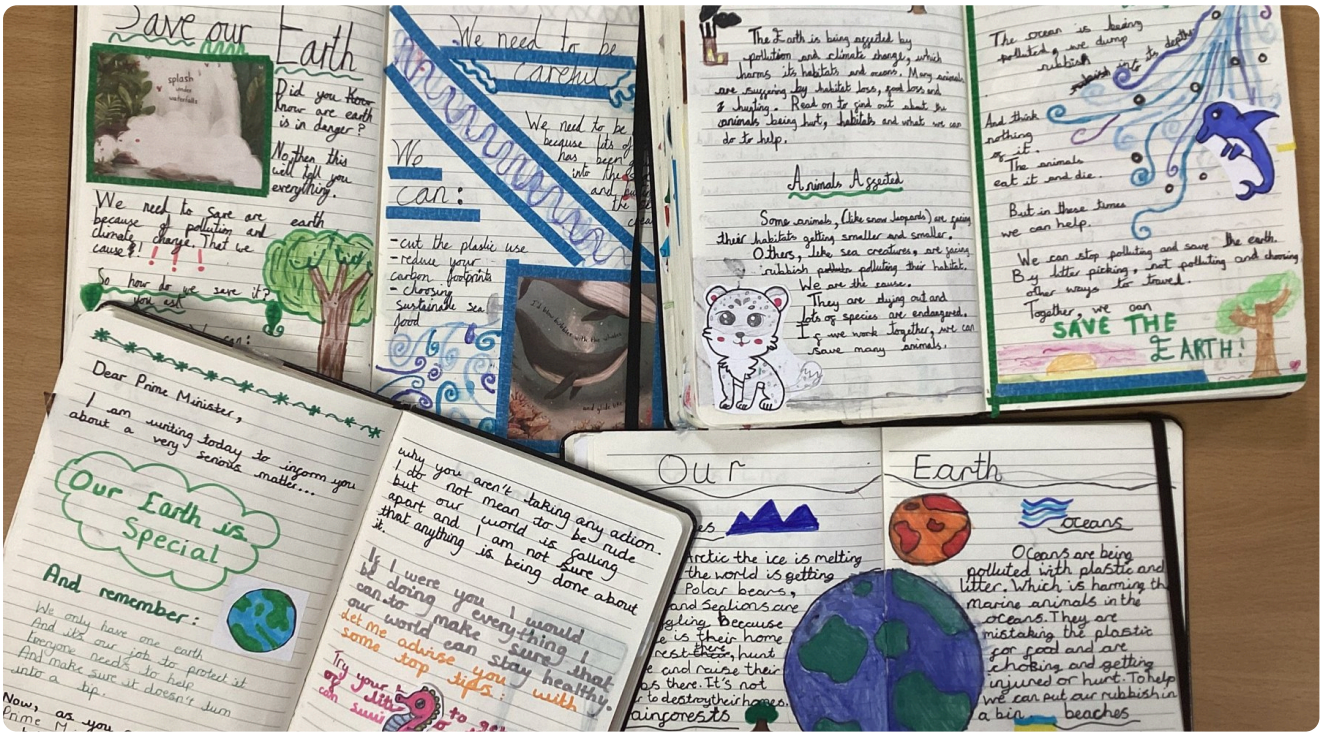
By Year 6, almost every child should be accustomed to embellishing, adapting and expanding upon the underlying pattern of a text type, drawing on diverse toolkits and wide reading so that their writing is completely independent. Indeed, they should not necessarily need a model at all; the only children in Year 6 who might still hug closely to a model are those with very complex needs or those entirely new to English.

> That has always been, and should always be, the ultimate destination for schools using Talk for Writing: truly independent writers.

The Crucial Role of Invention Writing

While structured units build core competence, true independence requires regular space for Invention units. Historically, primary education risked swinging too far toward heavy direction, leaving children with plenty of instruction but too few opportunities to write for their own purposes, develop their own styles, or explore their personal interests and obsessions.

Invention units strike the vital balance between teaching the craft of writing and giving children the freedom to express themselves.



Writing journals: each pupil chose their own form, from a letter to the Prime Minister to an information page.

Schools foster this through regular individual invention, such as personal writing journals introduced in Year 2 and carried through the school, where children respond to open-ended stimuli.

By engaging in frequent, low-stakes creative writing, children learn to take risks, discover their authentic voices and view writing as a powerful tool for self-expression rather than merely a school task.

OPEN-ENDED STIMULI FOR JOURNAL WRITING

- Location writing
- Curiosity boxes
- The arts
- Drama
- Cross-curricular topics

Independent Writers in Our Centres



2026 KS2 WRITING TEACHER ASSESSMENT

Briar Hill Primary
Northampton

100%
expected standard
(national 73%)

25%+
greater depth
(over double national)

59% of the 2026 Year 6 cohort were eligible for Pupil Premium, 64% spoke English as an additional language and 21% had special educational needs. Every one of those 58 pupils reached the expected standard in writing. More than a quarter wrote at greater depth, verified by external local authority moderation.

Montgomery Primary
Birmingham

93%
expected standard

41%
greater depth
(almost 3× national)

97% of the 2026 Year 6 cohort spoke English as an additional language and more than half were eligible for Pupil Premium. In writing, 93% reached the expected standard and 41% wrote at greater depth, almost three times the national average. Over the last three years, greater depth writing at Montgomery has averaged 36%.

You can visit any of our Centres to see this in action by contacting the school directly or attending their open mornings, all listed on our website.

talk4writing.com