Developing stronger writers

- ➢ Pupils learn to write well firstly through exposure to beautiful writing, then by sharpening their awareness of how language choices can affect meaning and have an impact on the reader. This is the purpose of grammar: understanding how language can be manipulated to achieve different ends.
- ➢ The best writers in a school are avid readers. One reason for this is their access to language from the vast library in their heads, acquired through years of reading and being read to. The strongest writers have a turn of phrase that appears more 'natural' than the application of grammatical structures learned in class: consciously or otherwise, they are selecting from language models gained through immersion and imitation.
- ➢ From the very beginning of a writing sequence, long before pupils set pen to paper, let them know the purpose of their final outcome. All forms of writing should have a purpose and an audience, as the examples below show:
  - o Story and poetry anthologies to be read by a wider audience eg in class, in other classes, in school libraries, in public libraries, online
  - o Themed anthologies for the school fete
  - o Playscripts to be given to others to work from (ie don't perform from own script!)
  - o Information writing based on topics to be shared with other pupils (eg WWII topic: half the pupils research and write about evacuees, the other half about rationing)
  - o Instructions to be given to others to follow
  - o Persuasive letters to be sent to people who will respond and act
  - o Recounts of visits and events to go on the school website or a display for visitors in the main entrance of the school.

Key principles

- ➢ Language is something to delight in and to take risks with.
- ➢ How we use language will have a profound effect on our audience.
- ➢ Both text and language structures are acquired through reading, whether consciously or unconsciously.
- ➢ Original writing depends on pupils combining their playful, risk-taking attitude to language with the rich models they have acquired, and applying these to new contexts.
- ➢ Pupils can be taught to develop a disciplined approach to editing and redrafting for a defined purpose and audience.

Games to try:

Grandma's chocolate cake

This game has been passed down orally from generation to generation, and can be applied to different contexts across the curriculum.

Pupils can explore (and enjoy) how meaning can be altered in a sentence, depending solely on where the speaker places emphasis.

> ❝ | *I didn't eat Grandma's chocolate cake.*

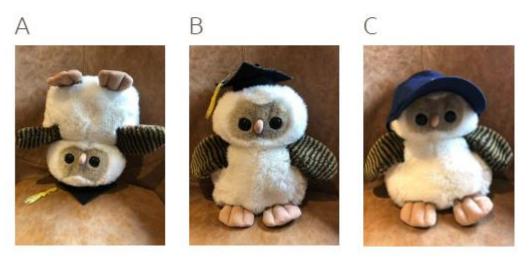|	
I didn't eat Grandma's chocolate cake.	- ? -
I *didn't* eat Grandma's chocolate cake.	- ? -
I didn't *eat* Grandma's chocolate cake.	- ? -
I didn't eat *Grandma's* chocolate cake.	- ? -
I didn't eat Grandma's *chocolate* cake.	- ? -
I didn't eat Grandma's chocolate *cake*.	- ? -

Try it out

Choose an object or image, and assign it a simple noun phrase eg 'the owl'.

Put the noun phrase in a sentence:

" | *I stared at the owl.*

Display multiple variations of the same owl:

A
B
C

Ask pupils to expand the noun phrase 'the owl' so that it is clear which one they are each staring at.
The goal of this activity is for pupils to describe their chosen image or object in such a way that there is no doubt which they have chosen. When they say or read aloud the sentence they have created, the rest of the group have to work out which one was being described.

You may have different versions of the object or image. For example:

A
B
C

Every word counts

Create a six-word sentence, and attach a number to each word, in order:

① **②** **③** **④** **⑤** **⑥**
She jumped on a flying dragon.

First, consider the story: Who might she be? Why is she jumping on the flying dragon?

With each throw of the dice, consider a range of alternative words that will work in the sentence and carefully examine how each alteration changes the meaning.

Once pupils have experienced this, you can introduce grammatical terminology for the sentence; they will learn the correct labels over time, but focus stays on manipulating meaning.

① **②** **③** **④** **⑤** **⑥**
She jumped on a flying dragon.

① Pronoun		**④** Determiner	
② Verb		**⑤** Adjective	
③ Preposition		**⑥** Noun	

Now, if you throw a two, say, 'Change the verb'.

Rich Texts

<u>Are you celebrating reading?</u>

Review the reading displays in your classroom:

- Do they celebrate personal reading?
- Do they facilitate book recommendations?
- Do they make reading seem an accessible and attractive pastime?
- Do they challenge readers to try new texts?

<u>Great checklist for rich texts:</u>

How do you identify and select rich texts for your school? The following list, developed by teachers in East Sussex, outlines some characteristics of rich texts. You can use this checklist when completing the 'In practice' activity below.

- ☐ Meets reading and writing needs of the class
- ☐ Chosen to engage and enthuse your pupils
- ☐ A more challenging read than any reader in the class would access independently
- ☐ Bears and rewards re-reading
- ☐ Offers a range of grammatical, structural and language features worth exploring
- ☐ Enjoyed by teacher
- ☐ Allows teaching of a range of reading strategies
- ☐ Delivers reading for pleasure
- ☐ Reflects 'big issues' and prompts discussion of social, cultural and historical questions
- ☐ Provides multiple opportunities for writing in a range of genres
- ☐ Offers engagement with the author – in person or via social media

- Author engagement – could conversations be opened up with local or favourite authors?

<u>Linking Reading and Writing</u>

- Take one descriptive sentence from a text – pick it apart in terms of what it is telling you, what effect do the verbs have? What questions does this sentence leave us with? What can we learn about character/setting through this sentence?
- Go back to sentence-level work to allow children to really consider the impact of language choice.
- Use short extracts to discuss author choice – what does he/she want us to learn and/or question? What does he/she want us to think and feel? How have their choices enabled that to happen?

<u>Reading Talk</u>

prompt_grid.pdf   prompt_icons.pdf   inside_out.pdf

Non-fiction texts

Ideally, the non-fiction texts you choose will add value to the wider reading experience. For example, they might provide:

- information to contextualise the fiction you are reading
- a good example of a text type you want pupils to write
- vocabulary that can be magpied and used by pupils in their own writing.

Poetry

Poems are some of the greatest rich texts for classroom use. They are also often short, with a lot of meaning wrapped up in a few words. They present a reading challenge too, with vocabulary to discover and inferences to unravel.