Teaching reading and writing with Aboriginal children

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This chapter outlines a set of strategies for teaching reading and writing in school, that have been proven to rapidly accelerate the learning of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, at all year levels. The strategies have been developed with teachers, in the professional learning program *Reading to Learn* (Rose, 2015; Rose & Martin, 2012). They include techniques for teaching beginning reading and writing in the early years, and for integrating reading and writing with curriculum study in primary and secondary school.

The strategies are carefully designed to close the gap between the most and least successful students in any class, at the same time as they accelerate the learning of all students. They are designed to be integrated with teaching the school curriculum, at all year levels, as part of normal classroom practice, and they may also be used for additional support with individuals and groups.

The chapter covers the following:

- The importance of literacy for Aboriginal students
- Why we need to change teaching practices to meet Aboriginal children's needs
- The importance of teaching all students at the same level
- Reading and writing in the early years
- Teaching reading and writing across the curriculum

The importance of literacy for Aboriginal students

| Key margin point 1: Too many Aboriginal students leave school early or finish with low outcomes, particularly in rural and remote communities. |

Literacy is perhaps the greatest single challenge for teachers of Aboriginal children. In all years of school, average literacy levels for Aboriginal students are far lower than the average levels for Australian students as a whole. In remote community schools, literacy levels have been consistently three to eight years behind national averages, according to national, state and territory assessments. These statistics have serious consequences for the education of Aboriginal children, for their future opportunities, and the future of their communities.

In the primary school, it is possible for teachers to manage students with weak literacy, as long as classroom activities are not too difficult for them. But it is not possible for any student to handle the secondary school curriculum with weak English literacy skills, unless it is modified to a low level. As a result, too many Aboriginal students leave school early or finish with low outcomes, particularly in rural and remote communities.

Aboriginal parents and communities are very concerned about these literacy problems, and their concerns are reflected in the Aboriginal education policies at all levels of government.
Box 4.1: The importance of English literacy

Chris Japangardi Poulson, an Indigenous teacher in the central Australian community of Yuendumu explains why English literacy is essential.

English is important, it is the language of the world outside the community. We need Aboriginal teachers, managers, storekeepers, lawyers and doctors - in every area of life we need to have Aboriginal people in there doing the jobs for themselves and for any of these jobs they need English. School which does not give priority to teaching English is failing to train leaders for the future. At the moment not enough English is taught in school and because of this there are many Aboriginal people who cannot get work of any kind (Japangardi Poulson, 1988).

Why do ordinary teaching practices fail for many Aboriginal students?

Several reasons are commonly put forward for the low literacy and outcomes of Aboriginal students. The most frequently cited are that Aboriginal children speak a different language or different dialect of English (‘Aboriginal English’) at home, and that many do not attend school regularly.

These are both valid reasons for differences between some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, but they do not explain the large gulf in literacy and learning outcomes. One third of Australians come from non-English speaking backgrounds, but average literacy levels for these students are not far behind national averages. It is true that attendance levels for some Aboriginal students are lower than for other students, but this does not explain the low literacy of students who do attend regularly.

The trouble is that these explanations locate the source of Aboriginal students’ difficulties outside the school, and so divert attention from the practices of the school that might contribute to the problem, and to possible solutions. If we are serious about addressing the needs of Aboriginal students, then we must look at our own practices in the classroom, and how we can change our practices to meet our Aboriginal students’ needs (Rose, 1999, 2011).

So why is it that ordinary teaching practices fail for many Aboriginal students, when they appear to work for other students? Regardless of all other differences in language and culture that children bring to school, the most significant for school learning is their experience of reading with parents in the home.

Children from literate middle class families spend around 1000 hours in parent-child reading before they start school, giving them tremendous preparation for learning in school (Adams, 1990). These children get immediate benefit from the standard junior primary literacy practices such as alphabet, sound-letter (phonics) and sight word drills, as well as shared book reading, group and individual reading practice, and story writing. They soon become independent readers and successful writers, and start reading for pleasure as well as learning. The tradition of parent-child reading is very recent in western societies. It has evolved alongside the literacy practices of the primary school, so that the two work together to provide middle class children with a foundation for success.

Many Aboriginal children, on the other hand, come from families whose traditions are handed down orally, and where there may be relatively little parent-child reading in the
home. When they start school, these children may not be as well prepared for the literacy practices of the early years, and therefore do not get the same benefits. There is a gap between what standard teaching practices can do, and the needs of many Aboriginal students, so that they do not become independent readers as quickly as other students. For example, literacy assessments have shown that Aboriginal children in Year 3 in NSW are already 19 months behind state averages (New South Wales Department of Education and Training and New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated, 2004c, p. 22).

If a student is not reading independently with understanding and engagement by the end of Year 2-3, they will not be ready for the demands of the upper primary years, which are focused on learning from reading, and writing across subject areas. In an urban or rural classroom these students may be left far behind in class learning activities. In remote community schools, where a majority of students are well behind, classes often become reduced to low level activities such as busywork sheets (Folds, 1987).

**Why we need to change teaching practices to meet Aboriginal children’s needs**

Key margin point 2: *Reading to Learn* strategies are carefully designed to close the gap between the most and least successful students in any class, at the same time as they accelerate the learning of all students.

The literacy outcomes for Aboriginal children most emphatically does not mean that they have a so-called ‘deficit’ in their language skills. What it does mean is that they come to school with differences in the cultural practices of their families. The most significant difference with children from literate middle class families is in the reading practices in the home. To address this difference, we need teaching strategies that give all students the reading and writing skills they need to succeed.

It is important to note that this does not only apply to Aboriginal students, but to a large number of students who are not successful in our school system, as literacy assessments consistently show, and every teacher knows. As most Aboriginal students are in classes with a majority of non-Aboriginal students, addressing the needs of Aboriginal students means that we must address the needs of all other students at the same time.

For these reasons, the literacy teaching strategies described in this chapter are deliberately focused, not so much on the differences of individual students or groups of students, but on the tasks of reading and writing that all students need to learn, and how to teach them. They were first developed to meet the needs of Aboriginal students and their teachers (Rose, Gray & Cowey, 1999), but they are equally useful for all students and teachers in all classrooms (Rose, 2011, 2015, Rose & Acevedo, 2006, Rose & Martin, 2013).

All teaching practices provide some measure of support for student learning. The strategies described here provide more intensive support for learning skills in reading and writing. They are carefully designed to provide this support at the points where it is needed most. They are not intended to replace everything that teachers already do, but there are several differences with common teaching practices. In reading this chapter it is important to keep a critical eye out for these differences, and consider the points where you might choose to use these strategies.
The importance of teaching all students to do the same tasks

A fundamental issue that all teachers work with is the differences in so-called ‘ability levels’ of students in every class. A major part of these differences comes down to literacy, in particular abilities in reading with understanding, and learning from reading.

There are two common approaches to this issue in schools. One is to teach to the curriculum, and aim classroom activities and learning tasks at a level that successful or average students can achieve. This is a traditional approach, and is predominant in secondary schools, where teachers are obliged to teach to the curriculum in their subject areas. The problem with this approach is that weaker students often cannot keep up and fall further behind through the school years.

Key margin point 3: Jean Piaget (1896-1980) thought that learning was an individual cognitive process that happened in fixed steps, irrespective of children’s backgrounds. Piaget’s ideas have been used to justify so-called ‘ability differences’ between children, and teaching practices like ‘process writing’ that do not help Aboriginal children to improve their literacy skills.

Another approach is to teach to the assessed ‘ability levels’ of individuals or groups of students, giving students different learning tasks according to their abilities. This is a common practice in primary schools. It is based on a theory that students must learn one step at a time, promoted by the French psychologist Jean Piaget. The problem with this approach is that less successful students are given lower level activities than more successful students, and so progress more slowly. It is intended to avoid making weaker students feel like failures, but over time they still fall further and further behind the more successful students.

Neither approach is helpful in itself for Aboriginal students, who are often in the less successful group in a class. The third alternative is to provide all students with sufficient support to do the same high level tasks. This approach is based on the theory that learning occurs when a teacher supports or ‘scaffolds’ students to do tasks that are well beyond their independent abilities, that originates with the social psychologist Lev Vygotsky.

Key margin point 4: By observing mothers teaching their children, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) recognised that learning is a social process. He considered that learning takes place in the zone between what children can do independently, and what they can do with the support of a teacher, which he famously called the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky’s ideas are gradually replacing Piaget’s in current teaching theory.

The strategies described here are based on this approach. They are designed to give all students the support they need to do the reading and writing tasks expected of their age and grade level. With these strategies there is no need to give low level texts or low level tasks to weaker students, because the teacher supports all students in a class to read and write the same texts. It is the understanding of language outlined above, combined with the techniques described below, that enables us to do this.
Reading and writing stories in the early years

Teaching Aboriginal children to read and write stories is critically important for their development as learners in school. It is also a ideal entry point for developing literacy, as all children love stories, and story telling is a central part of Aboriginal oral culture.

The strategies for teaching reading and writing in the early years of school include five steps. This sequence of steps is designed to prepare students to independently read and write stories successfully.

The first step is the common early years practice of Shared Book Reading, in which the teacher supports children to understand and say the words in a big book story. We then use a set of intensive strategies that support all children to recognise the words in sentences from the story, until they can read them independently. They are then supported to spell the words from these sentences, by breaking them down into their letter patterns. Once they can spell the words, they practise writing the sentences from the story, to develop fluent writing skills. Finally they practise writing new stories using the same language patterns as the reading story.

Using these strategies, all children can be taught to start reading and writing within one hour of practice, but they should be used continually to build up their independent reading and writing skills. Let’s now look at each step in more detail.

Shared Book Reading

Key margin point 5: Early years teachers are expert at engaging children in stories, explaining, using pictures and activities, and encouraging all children to say the words.

In Shared Book Reading, early years teachers tell the children what the story is about as they read through it, using the pictures. This is also what parents do as they read with young children. If children enjoy the story, parents will read and talk about it over and over again. Early years teachers also read a book many times in Shared Book Reading, until the children know it really well and can recite many of the sentences in it.

This is also what parents do in oral cultures, including Aboriginal Australian cultures, telling a story repeatedly in terms that children understand until they know it well. It is because of this cultural preparation that Shared Book Reading usually works very well with Aboriginal children, even when their first language is not English.

As early years teachers are expert at engaging children in stories, explaining, using pictures and activities, and encouraging all children to say the words, Aboriginal children typically love the activity and come to know the story well after a couple of weeks of Shared Book Reading. The trick is to then get them all reading the story independently.
Ideally at least two weeks should be spent with each book on *Shared Book Reading* and the following activities, so that the children are really familiar with it. It is fine to introduce other books during this time, but the intensive work on each book is the most powerful strategy for accelerating their literacy.

To make sure that all children in the class get the most benefit from *Shared Book Reading*, have them sitting on the floor in front of you, and the easel holding the big book of the story. If you don’t have a big book, make one by copying the book’s pages onto A3 size paper, and laminate them if possible. If you are using an electronic board, it must be low enough that you and the children can point at the pictures. If it is not low enough, use an easel and big book instead.

Before reading the story the first time, tell the story in simple words by pointing at the pictures, and describing what is happening. Get all the children to repeat significant words and names aloud. You can also ask children if they can see what you have said, and to come up and point at things in the pictures. The point of this is so they thoroughly understand what is going on before the story is read, and can already say some of its important words. Then you can go back and read the story, pointing to the pictures again, so the children recognise the relation between the story and what you have told them before.
Engaging and praising all children

Key margin point 6: All children in the class should be continually successful and praised for each task they do. We can achieve this by preparing them for each task, addressing children by name, and praising their success.

Throughout these and other activities, it is essential to continually praise all children in the class for each task they do. This is because of the close relation between learning and emotion. If children are praised, their good feelings enhance learning, engagement and good behaviour. In contrast, if they are not praised, or their answers are wrong, or their behaviour is admonished, their capacity for learning and engagement is reduced, often resulting in poor behaviour.

When you ask questions of the class, be careful not to ask questions that children can’t answer easily. The easiest questions to answer are simply giving back what you have just told them. For example, you can ask them to say and point to things in the pictures that you have pointed out before. You can also ask what else they can see in the pictures, things you have said about them, and what they know about them. As you read the story, and children become familiar with it, you can keep asking them to say things they know about it.

These kinds of questions and answers continually affirm children, at the same time as reinforcing and deepening their understanding, and their ability to say the words in the story. Eventually, they will be able to say a lot of story along with you as you re-read it aloud, particularly the parts that are most exciting and most repeated. For this reason, it is good to use pictures books with repeated elements, such as songs, rhymes or repeated lines.

It is also critically important to make sure that every child is regularly and equally praised for answering questions. This has major implications for some common classroom practices. For example, the common practice of asking questions of the whole class ensures that a few children are more likely to answer correctly and get most of the praise. Furthermore, the practice of ‘hands-up’ and choosing children to answer turns answering into a competition. This ensures that the most enthusiastic children always put their hands up, while the least confident children are least likely to put hands up and be chosen.

This does not mean that you never use hands-up, but that it is used judiciously, when all children are likely to participate actively. The most effective way to continually engage and praise all children, and manage the class at the same time, is to ask children by name, without hands-up. By this means you can address questions to any child, and praise their answers. If they know they will always be praised, and nobody knows who will be asked, it is a strong motivation to pay attention. If a child is not attending when they need to, or they are a weaker student, these are the very students to ask questions of.

But of course your questions must be carefully phrased so that each child can answer (more or less) correctly and be praised. One way to do this is to prepare for the question, by giving an easy clue, or reminding the class of something they already know. For example, you can remind them of an element of the story, then ask a child to come out and point at it, or you can ask them something they already know. If the child did not hear or understand the question, you can repeat or rephrase it. One thing you should never do, if they can’t answer, is to ask another child, as this only reinforces the feeling of failure. If they can’t answer straight away, you must think of a way to make it easier for them. If they don’t give
you the exact answer, you can still praise them and rephrase it correctly for everyone to hear.

Using Shared Book Reading to teach reading and writing

Key margin point 7: Enjoying, understanding, and being able to say the sentences in Shared Reading books is the best context for children to learn how to read and write. Practising these skills with real texts is far more effective than teaching skills in isolation.

It is widely assumed that children must be able to recognise each letter in the alphabet, and the sounds they make, before they can read written words. It is also assumed that children must be able to recognise so-called ‘sight words’ before they can read a sentence. Both of these assumptions are simply untrue. In fact, children can easily read words in the sequence of a familiar sentence before they learn to spell them, and this is far more effective starting point for learning reading and writing.

Instead, the usual memory drills in the alphabet, phonics and sight words impose enormous learning tasks on very young children before they are allowed to make meaning from texts. Firstly, children are expected to memorise the letters of the alphabet, their names, and the ‘sounds’ each letter is supposed to make on its own. As individual letters are meaningless symbols, this is a large and difficult memory task. Moreover, the so-called ‘sounds’ of letters are usually not the sounds they make in actual words. In fact, they are really just a second set of letter names that children must memorise. These letter ‘sounds’ can be highly misleading, especially when children are told to ‘sound out’ words, and they try sounding them letter-by-letter. This simply imposes an extra load on many children, impeding many children from reading for meaning.

Secondly, the letters of the Roman alphabet do not match all the sounds of the English language, so the English spelling system includes many combinations of letters to cover the other sounds. So, in addition to memorising individual letters, children are expected to memorise letter combinations in ‘phonics’ programs. Again, as these letter combinations are meaningless out of context, this is another large and difficult memory task. Moreover, the sounds that letter combinations make depend on the words they are in and their position in the word. For example, can you think of how many different sounds ‘ou’ makes in different words?

Thirdly, children are expected to memorise dozens of so-called ‘sight words’, that are the most common written words. These are common because they are ‘function’ or ‘structure’ words, that organise the grammatical structures of sentences, words like ‘the’, ‘were’, ‘there’ and so on. Just like letters and letter combinations, these words are meaningless when taken out of a sentence. They are only meaningful in combination with ‘content’ words that express the meaning of the sentence. So memorising sight words is yet another meaningless memory task that children must struggle with.

In fact, the most effective way to teach all children to read and write is to practise recognising, saying and spelling the words that they already know and understand in sentences from Shared Book Reading, and then to practise writing the sentences. The reason this is most effective is that nearly all of reading is about recognising meaning, and ‘decoding’ letters in words is only a small part of reading.
This should be obvious from seeing how children learn their mother tongues. No mother would consider teaching her child to memorise the sounds of the language, and the common structure words, before they learnt how to mean. Rather we exchange meanings with children from the very beginning, long before they start to talk for themselves, then we continually guide them to construct meanings together, constantly praising and rarely correcting them. Children learn all the components of language in the process of communicating with the people around them.

For the same reason, learning to read and write should start with the pleasurable shared activity of reading stories together. This is how reading starts for children in literate families with their parents, and this is why Shared Book Reading is such an important activity for all young children in school, particularly children from oral cultural backgrounds. Enjoying, understanding, and being able to say the sentences in the shared reading book is the best context for children to learn how to read and write.

Once children can understand and say the words in a sentence, as the teacher reads it aloud, they can easily be shown how to recognise the same words in the written sentence. They can do this because they know the sequence of spoken words in the sentence. If they are shown how to recognise each written word in the sentence, by repeatedly pointing and saying them, they will soon be able to accurately point and say the words themselves. In other words, they have ‘one-for-one word recognition’ between the spoken and written words. This is possible, firstly because they know the sequence of meanings, and secondly because each word in the sequence looks different, with different lengths, and starting and ending with different letters. It is easier if the sentence is written in big letters on a strip of cardboard.

Once children can accurately point and say all the words in the sentence, it can be cut up into its individual words, and children can play with mixing them up and putting them together until they are thoroughly familiar with each word. When they can recognise each word on its own, words can be cut up into their letter patterns, and children can practise spelling them. Once they can spell all the words, they can practise writing the whole sentence.

These activities can be repeated with as many sentences in a shared reading book as you wish. They can then be repeated with sentences from the next reading book, and so on. In this way, all children very quickly learn to read and write. There is no need to teach the alphabet, letter combinations, or sight words separately from learning to read and write the stories, because every letter, every letter pattern, and every structure word will soon be practised in the context of meaningful sentences. By these means, as children build up their knowledge of written language they will soon be able to read for themselves, and write stories of their own. Every child will be able to independently read and write within the first year of school. In contrast, with standard literacy practices, many Aboriginal children are still not able to read and write independently after three years of school (Rose, Gray & Cowey 1999).
Recognising words and making sentences: four steps

Key margin point 8: Recognising words in Shared Reading books is the essential first step to children independently reading and writing. For many Aboriginal children it is the missing link between Shared Book Reading and letter-sound knowledge.

We use the following four techniques to rapidly teach children to recognise each word in familiar sentences. The children do not need to spell the words yet, but they can recognise the words because they can say them, they know what they mean, and they can see differences between them, such as first and last letters. This is done using cardboard strips so the children can point and cut up the words easily.

Each of these activities should start with the whole class, on the floor in front of the easel, with the teacher seated alongside the easel, so you can help children to point and cut up the words. Position the cardboard sentence strip on the easel, and invite all the children in turn to come out in turn, to point and say the words as the whole class reads along, and then to cut up and manipulate the words.

Once each child has had a turn with the whole class, the activities can be repeated in groups of children, directed by the teacher, either on the floor or at desks. This means the children must learn to cooperate in groups, taking turns to point, read, cut up and manipulate the words. The benefits are that the activities are fun and much easier if the whole group is helping. It also makes it easier for the teacher to direct, watch, and help each group.

Step 1: Recognising each word in the sentence

The teacher shows the children how to recognise each word as they read it, by pointing to the words and saying them as they read.

Read the sentence two or three times, point slowly and say the words clearly, so the children can follow you. You can hold their hand and point to each word as you and the child say them together. Do this two or three times until the child is pointing to the words and saying them at the same time. Then the child can point to each word themselves as they say the words.

They can do this because they know the meanings of the words and their sequence in the sentence. As they point and say, they are learning to distinguish each written word, and they are starting to recognise differences between each word in the sentence, such as their first and last letters.
Step 2: Cutting up word groups

Key margin point 9: An important part of reading and writing is recognising the chunks of meaning in each sentence, expressed by groups of words – who or what it’s about, what they are doing, where, when, how.

Once all children can say and point to each word in the sentence accurately, they are ready to start pointing at each group of words in the sentence and cutting them off. For example, the following sentence consists of four groups of words – who it’s about, what he was, what kind of man he was, and the connecting word ‘was’:

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Mr Creep the crook was a bad man.
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Ask the children to say the first group of words in the sentence and point to them.

You can use ‘wh’ words to help with the meaning – such as who or what it’s about, what they are doing, where, when and how. Just remember that these are not questions to test children! Instead, think about how to help children do the task. For example, you could say ‘It starts by saying who it’s about. Can you see who it’s about?’ In this way, you help children to recognise the words instead of testing their knowledge. Do not say ‘Can you find the words?’, because this makes children think they have to search for words in the sentence, which makes the task harder. Instead, always start from the beginning of the sentence, and tell children exactly where to look – it starts, then, next, at the end.

When the children point and say the words, always praise them. Then they cut the words off the cardboard strip, put the words back in the sentence, and read the sentence again.

Ask them to point to the next word group in the sentence and cut them off. Do the same for the last word group in the sentence. Then the children put the sentence back.
together. Ask them to say the words as they put them down. Then they can say the whole sentence to themselves, to help them remember the sequence of words.

**Figure 4.3: Cutting up words and groups**

**Step 3: Making sentences**

Children now get more practice in recognising the words by mixing up the cards, and putting the sentence back together again. This helps children to recognise the chunks of meaning that make up a sentence – **who and what it’s about, what they are doing, where, when, how**. Each of these meaning chunks is expressed by a group of words. When we read aloud these meaning chunks shape the rhythm of our reading. For example, here are some meaning chunks in a familiar sentence: *Rosie / the hen // went // for a walk // across the yard*. Each slash marks a meaning chunk, and double slashes mark a break in rhythm. Do you think you could identify these kinds of meaning chunks in sentences?

While you guide the class to cut up the word groups, it’s very important to allow the children to put them back together themselves, as much as possible. You can help them by re-reading the sentence together and showing them how to check for meaning. Let the children point themselves as they read the words. Keep doing this until all children can put the sentence back together accurately, and read it.

Then the children can play with changing the order of word groups in the sentence, such as *a bad man / was / the crook / Mr Creep, or for a walk / across the yard / went / the hen / Rosie*. The new sentences can make sense or nonsense, which you can talk about together. It’s best for children to do this in groups, and then read the different ideas with the whole class, and praise them. It’s fun and an important step towards creating new sentences in writing.

Next, guide the class to cut up the word groups into individual words, such as *a bad man*. Again, the children play the same games of mixing, putting together and reading. This reinforces their word recognition, and helps them to see the functions of each word in the
sentence, which you can talk about together. Putting the words into different orders helps to see which word combinations make sense and which don’t.

However, it’s important not to do these re-arranging activities and discussions too soon. At the very beginning, it’s enough for children to put the sentences back together, and then go on to spelling and writing practice. But once they have a few of these skills, they can start playing with word orders.

**Step 4: Recognising words in and out of the sentence**

Once all children can put the sentence back together, check that they can recognise each word by itself, first in the sentence, and then out of the sentence. This is necessary before going on to spelling, as children must be able to recognise a word before they are ready to practise its spelling patterns.

Name each of the content words and ask children to point to it in the sentence. This shows that they can recognise each word in the sequence of the sentence. Then take these words out of the sentence, and ask children to name it. This shows that they can recognise the words on their own.

Do this first with content words such as *creep, crook, bad, man,* that have specific meanings. It may not work as well with structure words such as *Mr, the, a, was,* because these do not have a specific meaning content, so it is harder for children to recognise and remember them outside of the sentence. These structure words can be practised in Sentence Writing, when you guide children to write the whole sentence. Structure words are much easier to recognise and remember in the sequence of the sentence. (This is why memorising ‘sight words’ out of context is hard for many children.)

**Spelling and Forming Letters**

Key margin point 10: Children can only understand sound-letter matches in the English spelling system after they can recognise words in sentences. Long experience shows that teaching phonics and phonemic awareness in isolation does not help Aboriginal children, unless they can already recognise and understand whole words.

Once you are sure that children can recognise all the words in the sentence, you can teach them to spell some of these words. This is done by showing children how to cut up words into their letter patterns, and how to write these letter patterns and words. You can also show them how to form letters accurately as they practise spelling.

Children practise spelling the words they know by cutting them up into their letter patterns. Show the children how to cut up words into groups of letters, by holding the word and guiding a child to cut it, then show the pattern to the whole class.

**Box 4.2**

The basic unit of the English spelling system is written syllables. Each written word consists of one syllable, such as *crook,* more than one syllables, such as *cat, eat, pill, ar.* Each syllable consists of one or two letter patterns. These are the initial consonants, called Onset, and the remainder, called Rhyme (or Rime), such as *cr* and *ok.* (Some syllables have no Onset.) It is usually easy to see the Onset and Rhyme patterns in a syllable, because they are common in other words, although some are trickier.
The first step in cutting up letter patterns is to cut off prefixes and suffixes, such as crooked or swimming. Keep patterns like double letters together. If there is more than one syllable in the word, cut them off, such as grumble. If there are two letter patterns in the syllable, cut them up, such as grumb or crook. If the word is very simple, such as dog, there is no need to cut it up. More information about letter patterns is given later in this chapter.

When you show the class the letter pattern, they practise writing it on their own whiteboards, each letter pattern in turn. This makes it easier for them to remember each letter pattern at a time, before they try writing the whole word. (If the word is very simple they can practise the whole word.) Show them the pattern, then turn over the card and let them write it from memory. Then show the card again and let them check it for themselves. They can correct it if necessary. Once they have it right, they can write it three or more times to remember it.

When they can remember each letter pattern they can write the whole word. Show them the word first, then turn over the card and let them write it from memory. Then let the children check their spelling for themselves, without telling them that they have made mistakes. Let them check the word, say it again out loud, correct it if necessary, and practise writing it again.

These practices help children to recognise and remember spelling patterns easily. They are supported by knowing the words well, and motivated to want to write them. Showing and letting them self-correct keeps them feeling good about themselves, as they are never told they are wrong, and teaches them skills in self-correction.

Figure 4.4: Spelling and forming letters

You can use this technique to teach letter formation from the very start of school. Later, if children have problems forming letters, you can show them how to write the letters.
properly. For example, show them how to keep the pen on the board and go ‘down-up-and around’ or ‘around-up-and down’. This is important to prevent or correct common problems such as starting letters from the bottom or backwards.

Watch what each child is doing and show them on your own board. It is far more effective for children to watch you forming the letter, and then copy you, than trying to do it themselves from activity sheets. You can do this with the whole class sitting in front of you on the floor. Demonstrate on your own board, and then watch the weaker students in particular. Later, when they are practising at their desks you can sit beside them and help.

Once they can form the letter accurately, let them practise doing it many times. They can always rub out and do it again if they need to. Once they can write the first letter pattern well, they can practise writing the next letter pattern. Then they can write the whole word. You can always show them the letter patterns again to help them remember.

**Figure 4.5: Guiding letter forming**

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**Sentence Writing**

When the children can spell all the content words in one or more sentences, they can practise writing the sentences. The purpose of this activity is to practice the skills of writing fluently, including hand writing, spelling, and checking that they have not missed out words, until these skills are automatic.

Once they can spell all the main words in the sentence, you can help them to write the whole sentence, by showing them the other words. You can give more help by writing some words for them, and letting them write the rest.
Then do the Word Recognition and Spelling activities for the next sentence in the story. Then they can write this whole sentence. Soon they will be able to write whole pages of their Shared Reading books. Each time they do this they will learn to recognise and write more and more words. More than this, they will develop skills in recognising words and meanings in general. They will now be starting to read independently.

**Rewriting stories**

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**Key margin point 11:** Writing new stories is a very complex task. We should not push children to write stories of their own until they have mastered the skills in reading and writing. Then we can support them to write, using what they have learnt from reading.

Once spelling and writing are becoming automatic skills, we can support children to start writing new stories. This is done by following the sentence patterns of the shared reading book very closely, but using new content, including characters, events, descriptions and so on.

After practising Sentence Writing on several stories, so that the children are starting to read independently, and have learnt to recognise and spell many words, they can start writing new stories together with the class. Use the same sentence patterns of the Shared Reading story that they have learnt to write, with new content.

Start by brainstorming new characters, events and settings for the story, that will fit into the patterns of the Shared Reading story. Put the Shared Reading story up as a model on a sentence maker or enlarge it on the projector. Point to each of the elements - characters, setting, events – and discuss what new ones we could write about. Guide the children towards ideas that will fit into the same story patterns, and write as many ideas as you can on the board. The class then chooses which ones they want for the Joint Rewrite. (The first times you may choose, until the children understand the activity.)

Then start writing the new sentences on the board, using the new content. For example, *Harry the horse went for a gallop across the paddock.* Importantly, before you start writing, decide exactly what you are going to write!

The teacher can start writing each sentence on the class whiteboard, and then get children to come out in turns and write words that they know. Then the teacher can write words they don’t know, to practice spelling later. As the class writes, they can keep brainstorming new elements to fit into the patterns of the Shared Reading story.

Once this activity has been practised several times, children can start writing their own stories, again following the patterns of the Shared Reading story, but with new characters and events that they have thought of themselves.
Reading and writing factual texts in the early years

Key margin point 12: We can use familiar activities to teach beginning reading and writing, by planning exactly what to say at each step of the activity, and writing it down.

All over the world the texts that children first learn to read and write are usually stories, because they are a type of text that all children are familiar with. Because they are already familiar with the text patterns of stories, we only have to tell them what happens in a story to help them understand it when we read it to them. But there are other types of texts that children are also familiar with, that can be used to start teaching reading and writing across the curriculum. One of these types is procedures for doing activities, another is explanations for how things happen.

Procedures consist of a series of steps in an activity, such as a recipe for cooking, or a manual for operating technology. Written procedures tell people who can already read how to do the activity. But we can teach children to read and write a procedure by first teaching it to them orally. When they are thoroughly familiar with the words in each step of the procedure, we can teach them to read and write it, as we do for the sentences in stories.

Using procedures to teach reading and writing

The first stage in teaching procedures is to choose an activity that you can do again and again with the children, such as a simple cooking activity. Examples are making toast, preparing morning tea, or putting toys away, because they involve a few simple steps, and can be done many times in one sitting.

Plan the lesson by writing down the steps in the procedure, in words that you can use with the children. This lesson plan is important because you must use exactly the same words for each step, every time you do the activity, so you need to plan what you are going to say.

Each time you do the activity, say the same words for each step. After you have done this two or three times, start asking the children what to do next. They will start giving back to you the words you have used for each step. Make sure to ask each child in the class, always praise them for whatever they say, and then repeat the exact words for the step yourself, so they keep hearing the correct words.

Once you are confident that all the children can say the words in each step of the procedure, you can begin the activities of Recognising Words and Sentence Making with them, followed by Spelling and Sentence Writing, by writing each step on cardboard strips. Do one step at a time, until all the children can read and write it successfully. Then support them to write the whole procedure on their boards, and then in their writing books.

You can also make big books of the activities, by laminating enlarged photographs of each step. You can write each step in a laminated strip, and attach a Velcro strip. Children then practise sticking the right sentences under the photographs, and reading them.

Teaching explanations can follow similar steps, but with explanations the class observes an activity happening again and again, such as eggs hatching, silkworms making cocoons, flowers opening, or tadpoles becoming frogs. Again the same words are spoken each time for each step, until all children can say them, and they then practise reading and writing them.
One way of involving Aboriginal parents, and bringing the culture into the school, is to ask them to come in and teach an activity that they know well, such as cooking johnny cakes or damper. Photograph each step, and then write a sentence for each step. This can be used for reading and writing in the same way. There are also lots of videos available on the web that show Aboriginal cultural activities, that you can use in the same way. Plan the lesson by writing the steps, then watch the video several times, using the words you have planned.

**Teaching reading and writing across the curriculum**

| Key margin point 13: Teaching skills in reading and writing should be embedded in learning the curriculum at all year levels. We must teach students how to learn the curriculum through reading, and how to write what they have learnt for assessment. |

The principle of systematically supporting students to succeed with each component of reading and writing tasks, one step at a time, can be applied at all levels of school, across the curriculum. The following teaching sequence is carefully designed to give all students this support in five stages.

1. **Preparing before Reading**: the teacher gives a step-by-step oral summary of what will happen in a text, which is then read aloud and discussed.

2. **Detailed Reading**: the teacher supports all students to read each sentence in a passage from the reading text.

3. **Intensive Strategies**: students practice foundation literacy skills with sentences from the Detailed Reading passage, using Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing (discussed above for Early Years).

4. **Rewriting**: the teacher supports the class to write a new passage, that is patterned on the passage from Detailed Reading (discussed above for Early Years).

5. **Joint Construction**: the teacher supports the class to write a whole text, using the knowledge they have learnt from the preceding strategies. Students then practice writing whole texts themselves with the teacher’s guidance, until they are ready to write independently.

These strategies enable all students in a class to read and write texts expected of their year level. There is no need to use lower level texts, as the strategies enable all students to engage with challenging texts.

All of these strategies are learning activities, not assessment tasks. The teacher’s role in all of them is essential, to show, guide and support students to do each activity successfully, until they are ready for independent tasks. Only then do we ask students to read and write independently, and assess what they have learnt. The assessment then shows us how well we have taught them.

This is especially important for Aboriginal students. You should not make students read or write on their own until you have taught them how. This practice simply ranks students on their so-called ‘ability’, making unsuccessful students feel like failures, and disengaging them from school. If you use these strategies for guiding your students’ learning, you will make them successful and engage them in school learning, and also make teaching a pleasurable job.
Figure 4.6 shows the sequence as a diagram, including the scale of text used for each strategy, and the learning focus for each step. Now let’s look at each of these steps in more detail.

**Figure 4.6: Reading to Learn teaching sequence**

Preparing and reading | Detailed Reading | Intensive Strategies | Joint Rewriting | Joint Construction
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
whole texts | short passages | sentences | short passages | whole texts

**Preparing before Reading**

*Preparing before Reading* fulfils a similar function to *Shared Book Reading* with older grades. It prepares all students to follow a text with general understanding as it is read aloud. This is done by:

- providing the background knowledge students need to understand the text
- briefly explaining what it is about
- summarising the sequence in which it unfolds, i.e. what happens, in terms that all students can all understand.

This can be done in a few minutes before reading, or it may involve activities that introduce students to a topic in the curriculum. The crucial part of *Preparing before Reading* is summarising how the text unfolds, as this enables all students to follow the text as it is read, without struggling to work out what is going on.

If the text is a story or a chapter of a novel, summarise what will happen and read the whole story. If it is a factual text, you may need to read it paragraph-by-paragraph. Give a brief overview of the text, then a brief preview of each paragraph before reading it. After reading the paragraph you can guide students to highlight key information and discuss it. Then do the same for the next paragraph.

Often you can use visual images to help prepare for reading, as early years teachers use the pictures in a shared reading book. The important point is that the visual images match the sequence of meanings in the text. A good strategy is to give students a copy of the same images that you project on the board. You can label the images as you discuss them,
with words that are used in the text. Get the students to say these words aloud and write them on their copies. In this way they will understand these words when the text is read.

When preparing and reading together, with students of any age, the same management issues apply as we discussed above for the early years. The goals are to make difficult tasks as easy and pleasurable as possible, and give equal success and praise to all students. For example, avoid asking questions that children cannot answer successfully; instead prepare your questions carefully, and ask students by name, so that they all get turns to be successful and praised. Use success and praise to manage your students’ attention and behaviour. They are by far the most effective classroom management strategies.

**Planning and programming Preparing for Reading**

To Prepare before Reading effectively, you must plan by looking closely at the texts you choose to read, to see how the text unfolds, and think about how to summarise it so that all students will understand.

Preparing and reading texts should be a daily activity in the primary school. It should become the main way that you teach the curriculum content, because it gives students skills in learning from reading, at the same time as learning the curriculum. So every day you should be reading a story or a factual text together, for at least 20 minutes. In the secondary school, Preparing and reading should also become the main way that you teach the curriculum content. You should start every lesson with 20 minutes of reading together, and then do other activities.

To plan for paragraph-by-paragraph reading, read the text closely and highlight the key information that the students will highlight. Then make a note about the topic of each paragraph, to preview before reading it.

**Detailed Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key margin point 14: Detailed Reading supports all students to read a text with complete comprehension and fluency, by guiding them to identify chunks of meaning in each sentence, and discussing what they mean.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Detailed Reading is the turbocharged engine of Reading to Learn. If it is done well, it enables every student to read a passage of text with full comprehension and fluency, no matter what their level of reading skills. It takes practice to become confident with teaching Detailed Reading, but it will transform your teaching skills and student outcomes.

Once a text has been prepared and read with the class, a short passage is selected, in which students are supported to read each sentence, by telling them what each word or group of words means, which they then read. (Let’s refer to words or groups of words as ‘wordings’.) Students are prepared to read each wording by means of three preparation cues:

- a summary of the meaning of the whole sentence in commonsense terms, which the teacher then reads aloud
- a position cue that tells learners where to look for the wording
- the meaning of the wording in general or commonsense terms.
Students then have to reason from the meaning cue to the actual wording on the page. Students are always affirmed for identifying the wording, which they then mark by highlighting or underlining.

For example, here is a sentence from the novel *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*. In this passage a policeman has come to take the Aboriginal girls away from their family. The policeman has just appeared at the family’s camp: *Fear and anxiety swept over them when they realised that the fateful day they had been dreading had come at last.*

This sentence is difficult because it includes a metaphor: *Fear and anxiety swept over them*, and three more unfamiliar wordings: *the fateful day, dreading, and come at last*. So it is essential to tell students what the sentence means before reading it to them, as follows.

Teacher: *In next sentence, the family reacts to seeing the policeman. They are so frightened it’s like a wave of fear sweeping over them, because they have been expecting this terrible day to come, and they realise the girls will be taken from them. Now look at the sentence while I read it to you.*

After reading the sentence, we prepare students to identify each wording in turn. We prepare, then ask one student to tell us the words, praise them, and discuss its meaning, as follows. Each of these little cycles is shown in a box, with a number.

**Box 4.3 Detailed Reading lesson**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>Emma:</th>
<th>Jenny:</th>
<th>David:</th>
<th>Katy:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Now that sentence starts with the two feelings they had.</em> Billy, can you see what those two feelings were?</td>
<td><em>Swept over them</em></td>
<td><em>Realised</em></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td><em>Come at last</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fear and anxiety</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fear and anxiety</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fear and anxiety</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Exactly right. Everyone highlight <em>Fear and anxiety</em>. Anxiety means they were worried.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>That’s right, highlight <em>realised</em>. Realised means they didn’t know before, but now they knew.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>That’s right, highlight <em>fateful day</em>. Highlight <em>fateful day</em>.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>Emma, can you see what the Fear and anxiety did?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Then there’s a word that means they understood.</em> Jenny, can you see that word? <em>Fear and anxiety swept over them when they…</em></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Next, David, can you see what kind of day they realised?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Then there’s a word that means they’d been fearing that day.</em> Bobby, can you see that word?</td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Fateful day</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>Katy, can you see what the fateful day had done?</em></td>
<td><em>Come at last</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Come at last</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Excellent, highlight <em>come at last</em>. When we say something has come at last, it means we always expected it to happen. So the family always expected this day to come.</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So what happened on that day, Shanara?

The policeman came

Exactly, he came to take their daughters away. And how did they feel?

Fear and anxiety, dreading

That's right. So that was their reaction when they saw the policeman.

In each of these little cycles the teacher tells the meaning of the words, and where to look, e.g. ‘that sentence starts with the **two feelings**’, ‘what the fear and anxiety **did**’, ‘then there’s a word that means they **understood**’. Then she asks each student by name ‘can you see the words’. The task is simply to read and say the words, not to search or guess the answer. In cycle 3 she makes it even easier by reading up to the words ‘Fear and anxiety swept over them when they…’

Because the teacher has prepared so carefully, the answers are always right, so she praises the student and tells the class exactly what words to highlight. Although just one student answers at a time, all the other students also identify the words. The teacher then elaborates their meaning. Sometimes this is defining words: ‘anxiety means they were worried’, ‘fate is something you expect to happen’. Sometimes it is explaining meanings: ‘their feelings were so strong it was like a wave or a flood sweeping over them’. Other times it is asking a student for their knowledge: ‘so what happened on that day, Shanara?’, or asking the whole class: ‘and how did they feel? – fear and anxiety, dreading’. Because everyone understands, they can all participate in the conversation.

**Engaging all students in Detailed Reading**

Crucially the teacher usually starts by giving information to the students, rather than asking a question. This is very important for less successful students, who often experience teacher questions as tests that they continually fail. As a result these students can suffer stress that leads to behaviours such as withdrawing from classroom interaction or disruptive behaviour.

This problem can be particularly acute for Aboriginal students. It is a common experience of teachers in Aboriginal community schools for students to refuse to answer their questions. This can lead to breakdowns in communication, so that teachers often resort to unchallenging individuated activities such as busywork sheets, to maintain order in the classroom (Rose, Gray & Cowey, 1999).

The problem is overcome, by first telling the students what the words mean and then asking them to say the words in the sentence. This question is not a test of their knowledge, but a learning task that every student can succeed with. Because the students have done the mental work themselves, to read the words from the teacher’s cue, they can now read the words with understanding, and will transfer this understanding to similar reading contexts.

**Planning and programming Detailed Reading**

Detailed Reading should be done at least 2 or 3 times a week in primary classes, and at least once a week in the secondary. Twenty or thirty minutes can be spent on Detailed Reading in a lesson. Crucially it takes careful preparation by the teacher, to plan exactly what wordings to discuss with the students, and how to prepare and elaborate each wording.
Before the lesson you must choose an ideal passage to work on. It should be an important passage from the text, and a challenging one to read. There is no point in doing all this work on a text that is too easy - it will soon get boring. Photocopy and enlarge the passage for the students, and for your lesson plan.

For your lesson plan, highlight the wordings you want the students to highlight. Between the lines write little notes for how you will prepare students to identify the words. Underneath the text, make some dot points for what you will elaborate. Here is an example for the above sentence.

### 4.4 Detailed Reading lesson plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 feelings</th>
<th>what they did</th>
<th>understood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear and anxiety</td>
<td>swept over them when they realised that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kind of day</td>
<td>fearing</td>
<td>what it did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the fateful day they had been dreading had come at last.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- anxiety = worried, • like a wave or flood, • fate = expected, • dreading, • come at last = expected

### Intensive Strategies for more intensive support

After Detailed Reading on a short passage, you can provide more intensive support for students to build their foundations skills in reading and writing, using Sentence Making, Spelling and Sentence Writing. These were described above for the early years, and can be adjusted for working with students at different year levels, using different types of texts.

With Sentence Making, you may write a sentence, or a whole paragraph from the Detailed Reading passage on cardboard strips. Sentence Making should be done in groups, up to of 5 or 6 students. So write a set of strips for each group. Eight strips can be cut lengthwise from a sheet of standard school cardboard, by folding it lengthwise 3 times. Write the words large enough to be easily cut up and manipulated.

For older students, Sentence Making 1) intensifies the discussion of meanings and wordings from Detailed Reading, 2) enables students to manipulate wordings to create new sentences, 3) leads to spelling as individual words are cut out. In Sentence Making activities the learners are taking greater control of the reading and writing process. You guide the whole class to cut up sentences into word groups, and the students manipulate them together.

The Spelling activities are the same described for early years above, but older children can often handle larger chunks of words at a time. You should still cut spelling words into their letter patterns, but you can often show the class the whole word to practise on their boards. However, weaker students may need to be shown one letter pattern at a time, to help them remember. At each step, they observe the letter pattern or word, write it from memory, and then check for themselves if they are correct, in order to encourage self-correction (‘Look-cover-write-check’). They then write the letter pattern or word three or more times to fix it in their memory, for automatic recall in Sentence Writing.

There are four levels of spelling patterns you can show students to rapidly improve their spelling, using words they know from the texts you are reading: 1) compound words, 2) word endings and beginnings (suffixes and prefixes), 3) multiple syllables (multisyllabic...
4) Onset and Rhyme (Rime). Most spelling patterns are obvious, but some are harder to judge. A general rule is to look for groups of letters that are regular common patterns. You can download a useful list of Onset and Rhyme patterns at www.wilkinsfarago.com.au/PDFs/Reading_Spelling_Lists.pdf

Sentence Writing supports students to practise writing long stretches of meaningful text, without the load of inventing a story for themselves, planning how to write it, thinking of the words to use, and knowing how to spell them. Once all learners can automatically spell most of the words in the paragraph, they can practise writing the whole paragraph from memory on their boards.

To support them to do so, put the sentences on a smartboard or sentence maker. As you read it together, turn over most of the words. Get the weaker students to come out and turn over spelling words (and others they already know), as the whole class reads them. Leave just a few structure words, like *a, the, then*, etc, as a framework to help them recall the sequence of meanings.

When they have finished writing, the words can be turned back over for the students to check their wording, spelling and punctuation for themselves. All children enjoy this activity, which can be made a competitive game, at the same time as it rapidly improves their writing skills.

Planning and programming Intensive Strategies

These intensive strategies should be a daily practice in the primary school, as they are so effective at building foundation skills. You do not need additional spelling, phonics or handwriting activities. If your school uses these kinds of programs, you can still use them as a guide, but use the Intensive Strategies as your teaching technique.

Joint Rewriting

Key margin point 15: Writing begins only after all students can read a passage with fluency and comprehension. This provides powerful support for students to write successfully.

Once all students can read a passage with fluency and comprehension, they prepare to write a new text that is patterned closely on it. There are two approaches to Joint Rewriting, depending on the type of text:

- **Stories, arguments and text responses**: the class brainstorms new content for a text that will use the same literary or persuasive language patterns as the Detailed Reading passage. The teacher guides the class to write a new text with the same sentence patterns. This provides very powerful support for all students to borrow the sophisticated language resources of accomplished authors.

- **Factual texts**: students write up the wordings they have highlighted in Detailed Reading, as dot point notes on the board. The teacher guides the class to write a new text using these notes. The new sentences will be closer to what students would write themselves.

  In both cases, students take turns to write on the board, as the class and teacher say the words to write. This is very important as it prepares students for writing their own texts, actively involves the whole class, and enables you to see what problems students have, and
give them help. Weak writers may just a write a few words, but every student should get a chance to participate.

For stories, you should have the text passage projected, so you can point to each wording in turn, and discuss how to rewrite it in the new text. For factual texts, the notes should be on one side of the board, so you can point to them and discuss how to rewrite them in the new text.

As always, this is not a test, but a learning activity that you are guiding. You can ask the class what to say, but always give them as much help as they need to come up with the new wordings. One way to help is to start the sentence yourself, so students can see what to do next.

**Individual Rewriting**

Before students are expected to write independently, a further stage of preparation is to practise rewriting the same text as they have rewritten jointly, with as much help as they need from you.

For factual texts this may involve erasing the joint text from the board, but leaving the notes, which students use to write their own text. For stories, arguments or text responses, students now have two models - the original reading and the joint text - to practise using the same language patterns with their own content, which may be partly derived from the earlier brainstorming activity.

In both cases more experienced students are able to practise independently, allowing the teacher to provide more support for weaker students.

**Planning and programming Rewriting**

You should plan to do a Rewrite each time you do Detailed Reading, in other words 2 or 3 times a week in primary and once a week in secondary. Teachers usually plan for about 20 minutes of Joint Rewriting and 20 minutes of Individual Rewriting. Once students have developed some skills, you can start the Rewrite together, and they finish on their own or in groups.

**Joint Construction**

The function of Joint and Individual Rewriting is to practise using the written language that students learn from reading. The teacher’s role in guiding this practice is essential. But teachers must also guide students to write whole texts, whether these are stories, factual texts, arguments or text responses. This strategy is known as Joint Construction.

Some students are able to write whole texts successfully with minimal guidance. These students are usually those with lots of experience in reading, and learning from reading. Students who don’t have this experience often struggle to write successful texts, and this applies especially to many Aboriginal students. So it is essential that you show your students how to write whole texts, using what they have learnt from the reading activities.

Joint Construction means that you and the class construct whole texts together. You show them how to organise the text, and help them to construct each sentence, as they take turns to scribe on the board, and the class discusses what to say and how to say it.
To guide the text’s organisation, you need to know how different types of texts (or ‘genres’) are constructed. For example, a narrative is a story that involves a major complication that the characters resolve, so its stages are Orientation, Complication and Resolution. A biography recounts the stages of a person’s life, so its stages are Orientation and Life Stages. An information report classifies things and describes them, so its stages are Classification and Description. For more information about the structure of different genres in school, go to www.readingtolearn.com.au and order the teaching resources.

For writing stories, arguments and text responses, you need excellent model texts at an appropriate level for the school stage. Many good models can be found in the Reading to Learn resources, and in the websites of ACARA and the NSW Board of Studies. Give the students a copy of the model text, and project it on the board. As you discuss the model, label its structure on the board, and students write the labels on their own copies. You and the class then write a new text, following exactly the same structure as the model, but with new content. The model should still be projected so you can point to it as you write the new text.

For writing factual texts, the students first write notes from reading on the board, the same as in Joint Rewriting. The notes for Joint Construction come from the information you highlighted in paragraph-by-paragraph reading. The notes may come from one text, or from multiple texts. The notes must be organised into groups that give the structure of the new text, and given labels. Students can also write the notes and labels in their books. If the notes come from one text, they can be written on the board and then labelled. If they come from multiple sources, you can write headings first, and write notes under each heading. You and the class then write a new text, using the notes and the same structure that you have labelled.

**Planning and programming Joint Construction**

Joint Construction prepares students for assessment tasks that require writing whole texts. Joint Construction of a whole text can take 40-60 minutes, so it is not done every day. After each Joint Construction, students should have a chance to practise the same task with your guidance, as discussed for Individual Rewriting, before the assessment task. Again, once students have developed some skills, you can start writing together, and they finish on their own.

You should do 1 or 2 Joint Constructions for each independent writing task, to ensure that all students will succeed. In the primary school, students are usually expected to write a longer text every 2 or 3 weeks. If you do a Joint Construction each week, using the same genre but a different model text, they will have lots of resources for the assessment task. In the secondary school, longer texts are usually written every 4-5 weeks. You should do at least one Joint Construction to prepare your students for this.
Independent Writing

Key margin point 16: We can be confident that all students have been adequately prepared to write successfully, by the preceding five stages of reading and writing together.

All these stages of preparation enable all students to successfully write new texts, using what they have learnt in the preceding stages. This is the task on which students are assessed, whether it is a research task in society and environment, a report in science or an essay in English. The independent task may be in a new field or about a new literary text, but it will be the same type of text, using many of the same language patterns that have been practised in the preceding stages. Crucially the teacher can be confident that all students have been adequately prepared to complete the task successfully. Assessments will then provide a clear measure of how successful the teaching activities have been.

Summary

This chapter has outlined five sets of strategies that can be used to support Aboriginal and other students to read and write successfully. Each set of strategies build on current teaching practices, but provide more intensive scaffolding support so that all students can be successful.

Strategies for reading and writing in the early years build on the standard practice of Shared Book Reading, to enable all students to read the book independently, spell its words, and write stories using its language patterns. These techniques are extended to reading and writing factual texts, by practising and writing procedures that early years teachers often do with their students.

Strategies for the middle years give more intensive support for students to read texts in the curriculum, by preparing them before reading the whole text, and then reading short passages together in detail. This Detailed Reading then becomes the basis for writing successful texts that are patterned closely on the reading passages.

We have tried to show how each set of strategies works, and why they provide more support than standard teaching practices, but we have not provided detailed arguments for why you should use them with Aboriginal students. However this discussion is provided in the teaching resources available from http://www.readingtolearn.com.au, in the book Learning to Write, Reading to Learn (Rose & Martin 2012), and in many reports and papers available on the Reading to Learn website. You can also watch videos of demonstration lessons on this website, and on the website of the NSW Board of Studies at http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/7-10-literacy-numeracy/

Some of the strategies can be quite difficult to use at first, and require some practice to make them work effectively, particularly the Detailed Reading strategies for the middle years. But the outcomes of persistent practice are well worth the effort, as many teachers have found in the Reading to Learn program.
Revision Activities

The following revision activities are designed to help you remember and reflect on the teaching strategies described in this chapter. The answers to each question can be found in the relevant sections of the chapter.

The reading and writing task

What are the seven levels of patterns in texts?
Name each of the four dimensions of context, and define them briefly.
Why should we teach reading from the top down?
What are some differences between spoken and written language?

Reading and writing the early years

Write a brief summary of each of the steps.

- Shared Book Reading
- Recognising Words
- Making Sentences
- Spelling and Forming Letters
- Sentence Writing
- Rewriting Stories

Reading and writing factual texts in the early years

Choose a simple activity and write a procedure for it, in words you could use with young children. There should be about six steps, with one sentence for each step. Number your steps.

Teaching reading and writing across the curriculum

Name the five stages in the Reading to Learn teaching sequence
What are the three elements of Preparing before Reading?
In Detailed Reading, what are the three preparation cues that the teacher gives students?
After students have identified a wording, what are the three ways it can be elaborated?
In Joint Rewriting, what are differences between writing factual texts and stories?
Why is it important to practise Individual Rewriting, before Independent Writing?

Strategies for more intensive support

Write a brief summary of the intensive strategies

- Sentence Making
- Spelling
- Sentence Writing
References


