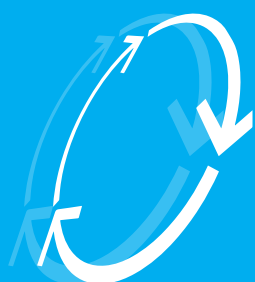
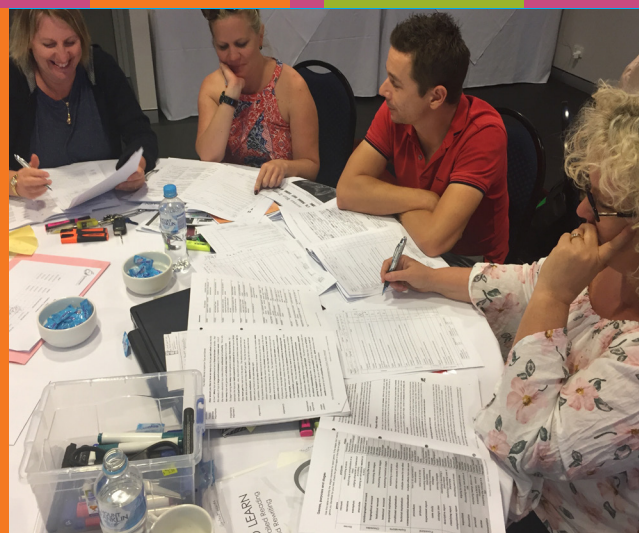


ASSESSING WRITING



3



READING TO LEARN

Accelerating learning and closing the gap



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book shows how to use the R2L Writing Assessment tool.

The assessment serves three functions:

- it enables you to see the progress your students are making, and how far they need to grow to achieve their grade standard
- it provides a record of achievement for students, their family and the school
- it shows what language resources and skills your students have, so that you can plan your teaching program, and explicitly discuss language and skills with them.

The R2L Writing Assessment is designed for these purposes. It shows exactly what language resources students are using, and gives a score so that their growth can be tracked from term to term.

The R2L writing assessment was developed in a national research project, and became the basis of the national Australian writing assessment, NAPLAN. The R2L assessment is more useful for teachers, as it shows your students' progress against standards for their school stage.

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ASSESSING YOUR STUDENTS' GROWTH

1. Select two students from the low, middle and top ranges in your class. These will be your target students, whose progress you will track through the year.
2. Collect and photocopy samples of their writing at the start of the year – if possible a story and factual text.
3. Go to the writing exemplar for their stage level - see Contents above. The exemplars are at the top standard for the end of each school stage. Read the exemplar and look at how it is scored for each criterion. Also look at the next exemplars above and below.
4. Now look at your students' 'pre' writing samples, and apply the assessment criteria. How close is it to the stage exemplar on each criterion?
5. If you are unsure about any criterion, look at the assessment rubric for the school stage. Where would your student's text fit on the progression points for that criterion?
6. Record the scores for each criterion on the assessment score sheet at the end of this book.
7. Compare the scores you have given for the low, middle and top students. Have you scored any too high or too low?
8. Then collect, photocopy and assess samples of their writing at the end of each term, recording their scores on the assessment score sheet. These 'post' writing samples should be a genre that you have taught them to read and write using R2L (not any old text!).

ASSESSING AGAINST STANDARDS

School stages are:

- kindergarten/prep
- junior primary Yr 1-2
- middle primary Yr 3-4
- upper primary Yr 5-6
- junior secondary Yr 7-8
- middle secondary Yr 9-10
- senior secondary Yr 11-12

If a student's writing meets a criterion at the highest level expected for her school stage, it will score 3. If there is no evidence of that criterion, it will score 0. If there is evidence but it is weak, it will score 1. If it is stronger but not at the top standard for the stage, it will score 2. So the maximum possible total score for a piece of writing is 42.

This simple scoring system provides an extremely accurate measure of a student's writing skills in relation to the standards for her school stage. Each stage is two years. A total score of around 35 is the expected standard at the end of the stage - the end of the second year. A score of around 30 is expected in the beginning of the second year, around 25 at the end of the first year, around 20 in the beginning of the first year. A score of 15 or less is below the standard for the school stage. A score of around 40 is above the expected standard.

Standards	approximate scores	
Below expected	around 15 or less	= 0 - 17
Beginning first year	around 20	= 18 - 22
End first year	around 25	= 23 - 27
Beginning second year	around 30	= 28 - 32
End second year	around 35	= 33 - 37
Above expected	around 40	= 38 - 42

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The Reading to Learn writing assessment is based on our model of language in social context, described in pages 32-24 in Book 1. The writing assessment uses 14 criteria at the levels of context, discourse, grammar and graphic features. Each criterion is given a score of 0-3. The scores are against the writing standards expected in the student's school stage.

CONTEXT You should make quick judgements about these context criteria.

Purpose	How appropriate and well-developed is the genre for the writing purpose?	0-3
Staging	Does it go through appropriate stages, and how well is each stage developed? Label each stage in the text.	0-3
Phases	A well-organised text goes through a logical sequence of steps. Phases are the steps that a text goes through (within each stage!). Each phase may be a paragraph or a few sentences long. Identify and mark the phases in the text. How well organised is the sequence of phases in the text?	0-3
Field	How well does the writer understand and explain the field in factual texts, construct the plot, settings and characters in stories, or describe the issues in arguments?	0-3
Tenor	How well does the writer engage the reader in stories, persuade in arguments, or objectively inform in factual texts?	0-3
Mode	How highly written is the language for the school stage? Is it too spoken?	0-3

DISCOURSE Discourse criteria should be marked in the text, to give an accurate picture.

Lexis	Lexis is the word choices that writers use to build the field of a text. They are the content words, and the relations between these lexical words from sentence to sentence. Mark the lexical words the writer uses. What are the writer's lexical resources? How well is lexis used to construct the field?	0-3
Appraisal	Appraisal is the word choices that writers use to evaluate. They include feelings, judgements of people, appreciations of things, and words that amplify and diminish. Mark the appraisal words the writer uses. What are the writer's appraisal resources? How well is appraisal used to engage, persuade, evaluate?	0-3
Conjunction	Conjunction is the logical relations between sentences, and within sentences. Mark the conjunctions the writer uses. Logical relations may also be implicit. Is there a clear logical relation between all sentences?	0-3
Reference	Reference is the words that are used to keep track of people and things through a text, including pronouns, articles, demonstratives (this, that), comparatives (each, all, same, other). Mark all the reference words. Is it clear who or what is referred to in each sentence?	0-3

GRAMMAR You should make quick judgements about grammar and graphic criteria.

	Are the grammatical conventions of written English used accurately? Is there an appropriate variety of sentence and word group structures for the school stage, or is it too simple?	0-3
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GRAPHIC FEATURES

Spelling	How accurately spelt are core words (frequent) and non-core words (less frequent)?	0-3
Punctuation	How appropriately and accurately is punctuation used?	0-3
Presentation	Are paragraphs used? How legible is the writing? Is the layout clear? Are illustrations/diagrams used appropriately?	0-3

NOTE: Genre, field, tenor and mode are expressed by patterns of language in a text - field by lexis and conjunction; tenor by appraisal; mode by reference and grammar.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS FOR DIFFERENT GENRES

In the process of assessing a piece of writing, we need to ask ourselves a series of questions according to each of the assessment criteria. Questions that summarise the thrust of each criteria for stories, factual texts, arguments and text responses are given in the following tables.

Stories

PURPOSE	Is the story genre appropriate for the writer's purpose?
STAGING	Does it go through appropriate stages for the genre?
PHASES	Are story phases used creatively to build problems and reactions, and to describe, comment, reflect?
FIELD	Is the story plot imaginative, interesting and coherent?
TENOR	Is the reader engaged with characters' reactions and reflections?
MODE	Is the creative use of literate descriptive language and metaphors appropriate for the level?
LEXIS	Are people, things and places followed through coherently to build up context?
APPRAISAL	Conscious control of appraisal, such as feelings, judgements of people and appreciation of things and places.
CONJUNCTION	Are logical relations between each step clear, e.g. shifts back and forward in time, comparisons, cause?
REFERENCE	Is it clear who or what is referred to, e.g. in dialogue?

Factual texts

PURPOSE	Is the factual genre appropriate for the writing task?
STAGING	Does it go through appropriate stages for the genre?
PHASES	Is each stage organised in appropriate phases for the genre and field?
FIELD	How well does the writer understand and explain the topic?
TENOR	Is it appropriately objective?
MODE	Is there an appropriate use of technical and abstract language?
LEXIS	Is the field well constructed by sequences of lexical items?
APPRAISAL	Is appraisal used judiciously to evaluate things, processes and relations? (If no appraisal score 2, as it is simply factual.)
CONJUNCTION	Are logical relations between each step clear, e.g. time, comparisons, cause? (Note: conjunction is often implicit, particularly in reports.)
REFERENCE	Is it clear who or what is referred to?

Arguments

PURPOSE	Is the argument genre appropriate for the writer's purpose?
STAGING	Does it go through appropriate stages for the genre?
PHASES	Are there appropriate phases of description, grounds, examples, evidence, explanation, evaluation, conclusions?
FIELD	Does it describe the issue, context, points of view coherently?
TENOR	Is the argument both convincing and objective?
MODE	Is there an appropriate level of descriptive and persuasive resources?
LEXIS	Are lexical choices used coherently to describe the issue, context, points of view?
APPRAISAL	Is a range of appraisals used to evaluate issues and points of view, and to source attitudes?
CONJUNCTION	Are logical relations used to construct arguments with internal contrast, consequence, time?
REFERENCE	Is it clear who or what is referred to?

Text responses

PURPOSE	Is the response genre appropriate for the essay question?
STAGING	Does it go through appropriate stages for the genre?
PHASES	Is it organised in phases that evaluate, describe and interpret the text?
FIELD	Does the writer describe the text coherently (and identify its message)?
TENOR	Does the writer use a range of resources to evaluate the text and message?
MODE	Is the use of evaluative resources appropriate for the level?
LEXIS	Uses lexical choices coherently to describe the text.
APPRAISAL	Uses an appropriate range of appraisal, judging characters and appreciating text and techniques.
CONJUNCTION	Are logical relations between each step clear?
REFERENCE	Is it clear who or what is referred to?

Grammar and graphic features are general across all genres, as shown here.

GRAMMAR	Are the grammatical conventions of written English used accurately? Is there an appropriate variety of sentence and word group structures for the school stage, or is it too simple?
SPELLING	How accurately spelt are core words and non-core words?
PUNCTUATION	How appropriately and accurately is punctuation used?
PRESENTATION	Are paragraphs used? How legible is the writing? Is the layout clear? Are illustrations/diagrams used appropriately?

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA IN MORE DETAIL

The assessment criteria are explained here in more detail. The context criteria - genre, field, tenor, mode - were discussed on pages 32-24 in Book 1. Here we will look more closely at discourse, grammar and graphic features.

Discourse is the sequences of meanings in a text as it unfolds, and the ways these meanings are tied together. These are the resources of language with which a writer constructs the field, tenor, mode and genre of a text. For this reason they are very important criteria to focus on in assessment, and the key patterns to focus on in teaching reading and writing. Discourse patterns are described in detail in Book 8: Patterns in Texts.

Lexis

Lexis is the words and relations between words that construct the field of the text as it unfolds. Lexical words are often known as 'content' words, that represent people, things, places, qualities and concepts. Relations between lexical words are known as lexical relations. There are five types of lexical relations, including:

Very importantly lexical meanings are expressed more often by two or more words together than by single words.

When we assess lexis we are looking for two things. One is the use of factual terms in factual or persuasive texts, or descriptive wordings in story writing. The other is the way these wordings are used to build up the field as the text unfolds, whether this is the factual field in factual or persuasive texts or the plot, characterisation or descriptions in story writing.

Appraisal

Appraisal describes how attitudes are expressed, including feelings (happy, sad),

judgements of people (kind, cruel), and appreciation of things (interesting, boring). Appraisals can be positive or negative. They can be amplified or diminished (stronger or weaker). And the source of the attitude can come from the writer, the characters in the story, other people, or can even include the reader.

In stories, authors use appraisals extensively to engage the reader by expressing feelings, judging characters' behaviour and appreciating things and places in descriptions.

By contrast there is usually little appraisal in factual texts, except for words like usually, some, may, which indicate that a statement is not always true, that there are exceptions to a rule or category. This is often an important feature in factual writing that students need to be aware of.

In persuasive texts there may be a lot of appraisal, especially judgements of people or institutions, or appreciations of ideas. But appraisal in persuasive texts is usually stated objectively, with words like it is widely acknowledged, it has been suggested, etc. These are difficult resources for students to learn, and require lots of demonstration and practice to use them in writing.

Conjunction

Conjunction is the logical relationships between sentences and between phrases. These logical relationships are often expressed by a conjunction word such as and, similarly, then or because, but they are also often implicit, for the reader to infer. The important thing is that the logical relation is clear to the reader. In assessing conjunction we need to judge whether logical relations between sentences are clear to the reader, and whether they clearly construct the logic of the text, whether this is a succession of events in a story, a sequence of causes and effects in an explanation, or a logical sequence of reasoning in a persuasive text.