**Using LGfL to Support Reluctant Writers**

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**Introduction:**

Writing is a fundamental activity in every school. It is one of the 4 key components of communication and literacy along with:

* Speaking
* Listening
* Reading

Some children find writing more enjoyable and engaging than others. As teachers, our job is to involve all pupils in this process and to support the development of their own individual abilities.

There are a wide variety of reasons why children might be reluctant writers. For example:

* Those with physical impairments who find the activity itself challenging.
* Those with a range of learning difficulties who may find fundamental aspects, such as imagination, or word-finding, hard to achieve.
* Those who struggle with social, emotional and anxiety issues who may feel exposed or vulnerable when committing their thoughts to print.

Whilst reluctant writers may predominantly be boys, this is not universally true.

Across the LGfL, a wide range of resources are available for you and your pupils. We have curated a selection of these to prompt the imagination, offer starting points and provide appropriate support. This selection has been carefully chosen to provide access ideas for the wide range of needs that may be in your classroom. As a teacher, this can help you both support them better and save time when you’re planning.

For simplicity the resource links are grouped under the following headings however, as with all resources, each can be used creatively in so many more ways than those suggested.  Take the time to explore, try out and assess the potential of this selection and in each case decide how the activity might be useful in your teaching.

1. **Getting the writing on the page**
2. **Creative stimulus**
3. **Writing for a purpose**
4. **Writing for a real audience**
5. **Getting the writing on the page**

Some children know what they want to say but have difficulty getting the text on the page, whether because they are in the early stages of mark making, or they find the fine motor skills involved in writing difficult to achieve.

**Handwriting**

For some children, we need to think about the tools they are using whether this is technology or the choice of pen.  Starting from the basics, we need to look at how we choose a pen or pencil to write with.  We all make choices about the pen or pencil that we like to use.  Many adults have a ‘favourite’ pen that they like to use that they know ‘feels right’ and ‘writes smoothly’ ‘without effort’ across the page.  This combination, once identified, allows the user to write with the minimum of physical effort and therefore to write at greater length and with greater attention to content than if every movement is overly laborious.  Yet, in our classroom, many students have no choice as to the writing implement they use and many reluctant writers report that it is tiring; makes their hand hurt; and is too difficult.  Providing a selection of pens and pencils and encouraging students to try them out to find their ‘best fit’ will increase productivity and reduce physical effort.  Some new OT videos will be available on LGfL soon to support with handwriting warms ups and pencil grips.

When learning to create correct letter shapes, children require plenty of practice in order to embed the motor and sensory memory patterns so that these become instinctive.  [Busy Things](http://www.busythings.lgfl.net) offers a wide range of fun templates in the Literacy and Handwriting section so that routine letter formation practice can be offered quickly off screen in addition to the interactive, on-screen activities.

**Keyboarding and Alternatives**

For some, keyboarding is a follow-on skill from handwriting which will offer an additional route to the production of written work.  For others, especially those with physical barriers to learning, it may be their primary route to producing written content.  However it is arrived at, keyboarding can be perceived as ‘easier,’ so many reluctant writers will engage to a greater degree with a task, and be more productive.

Before a student can embark on keyboarding as a text entry skill, they must understand the actual keyboard and be able to quickly and instinctively locate the letters rather than searching and thus potentially losing their line of thought.  [Busy Things](http://www.busythings.lgfl.net) offers bright, engaging and fun keyboard skills and templates that allow the students to acquire the navigation knowledge without stressful failure attempts that can produce an additional barrier for the anxious child.

LGFL offers all their schools [WordQ SpeakQ](http://www.wordqspeakq.lgfl.net) which is a simple and effective literacy tool that helps young people who know what they want to say, but who have trouble with writing, grammar and spelling. It includes Word Prediction, Speech Recognition and Spoken Feedback and it can be installed on staff, pupil or school computers. When installed, the WordQ SpeakQ toolbar will appear, sitting on top of any programme, online or off.  Word prediction speeds up text entry by offering a set of suggestions for the next word in a pop up list. These can be spoken outloud and selected with a mouse click or from the number keys.

Office 365 has a variety of features for accessibility, increasing with every iteration.  The text to speech feature means students can have their work read back to them to check for mistakes, and the wide range of templates  provide a scaffold for writing, with  several of them offering inbuilt design especially for those with visual impairments.

**Knowing what to Write**

For so many students it is the actual initial ‘starting point’ that is the barrier to producing written text.  They need more than a title, or a question, to respond to.

Many of the resources offered by LGfL give opportunities for writing that has a clear starting point and structure, for example [Cookit!](http://www.cookit.lgfl.net) Takes the students into the world of menus and ‘foodie’ reviews.  The [FairyTales](http://www.fairytales.lgfl.net/)  activities can be explore interactively, then form the basis of a written exercise.  The [Widgit](http://www.widgit.lgfl.net) symbol selection can be used to create a story sequence of memory prompts to enable a student to recreate a rehearsed story in writing independently.

They might also engage more readily if they have a choice of ways to respond to a task. [JiT](http://www.jit.lgfl.net) is a complete set of online tools to support writing.  The interface is not only visually engaging but everything is at hand making its usability a rewarding experience for younger children.  **Write** offers word banks to support not only spelling and vocabulary but additionally to prompt and spark ideas.  **Paint** provides the facility to add illustrations, or indeed to respond to a question in pictorial form.  **Animate** offers a structure that not only supports creative storytelling but encourages collaboration, through storyboarding and scripting.   **Mix** allows the combination of work produced in the elements of JiT to create a rich final product, one that ‘looks good,’ that they feel proud of.

**2. Creative stimulus**

Often the  most difficult part of the writing process is not finding the words, putting them down, and getting the technicalities of grammar and spelling right, but in knowing what to say in the first place. It is a problem even professional writers encounter - think of ‘writer’s block.’

Our first role, then, is in helping learners generate ideas to make their own. Ideas that they want to get down and share. LGfL  provides many rich materials that can be used as starting points, to encourage creativity and stimulate the imagination. Take, for instance, [Audio Network.](http://www.audio.lgfl.net)

This is a bank of tens of thousands of copyright free (for schools)  music tracks that can help to create a mood, to evoke feelings, and  to help foster an atmosphere within the classroom.  If we were writing about daybreak, or new beginnings, we might play Sunlight by David O’Brien (one of 34 tracks tagged with ‘dawn’) then ask pupils what the composer is trying to present in music. They might suggest the sound of birdsong, the rays of sunshine through the trees, the light spreading across the landscape, flower buds opening and animals stirring. In this way they begin to envisage the scene and build the vocabulary to use.

For building tension before a critical moment we could use Day of Conflict by Terry Devine-King which has a tone reminiscent of scenes of high drama from films  like Indiana Jones, designed to create a sense of impending action - ideal to help elicit an appropriate emotional state of heightened awareness and sensitivity to an environment.

Then there is the [LGFL image bank](https://imagebank.lgfl.org.uk/), a collection of high quality resources from across many of our national collections. If we wanted to write about exploration, for instance, we might use the images from “Heart of the Great Alone,” a photographic display of the Antarctic expeditions of Scott and Shackleton. At one level we could describe what we see, the conditions, the clothing, the scenery, we might ask for adjectives to develop these - bleak, freezing, hostile - then go on to think about feelings, such as triumph, despair, courage. This is both a non-fiction activity, describing the evidence in front of us, as well as an exercise in empathy, thinking about the about the people in the photos and how it must have felt to be there.

Images are helpful for many writing activities. In thinking about fashion over the ages we could visit a number of collections of famous artists to see what was worn and when. We might then consider not only what it looked like, but what it felt like to the touch, or to wear. We could think about what we wear now and how it compares. Or what period of history we would choose to dress ourselves in, and why. Again, this could simply be descriptive, but the challenge might be in thinking about self-image and behaviour, how would dressing in a particular way make you feel about  yourself? What does a particular style say about you? Then and now.

Another source of contemporary evidence is the [Guardian Archive,](https://guardian.lgfl.org.uk/) a rich resource that can be approached in many ways. We might look at contemporary accounts of significant events, the first moon landing perhaps, or, again, Shackleton’s Antarctic exploration. But we could also think about how news reporting has changed, not just the layout of the page, but also the language, and even the medium, from text heavy print with few images to modern media, with emojis, gifs and videos. How would a contemporary news story be written up a hundred years ago? What’s the longest sentence we could write to describe something that now might be covered by an icon?

An even more immediate way of connecting learners with events than considering contemporary sources such as newspapers and images is to immerse them in a situation. LGFL has developed several [augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) resources](http://www.ar.lgfl.net). These include a World War 1 trench where they can get a sense of what it would be like waiting to ‘go over the top,’ or for the next shell to land. Then there are the Egyptian or Mayan pyramid resources, a useful way to compare and contrast how two ancient civilisations thousands of miles, and several hundred years apart, created structures with some similarities. We might even compare them to today’s buildings, and ask what we create now that might compare in scale and purpose.

For advice on using images to stimulate story telling The [Exploring Storytelling site](https://content.lgfl.org.uk/secure/wholestory/) has some very useful advice to help your pupils get started. Using several examples, including many  from amongst LGFL resources, video clips explain how we might engage them with images, and from there how they can turn this into a story of their own. Also included are downloadable ‘Story Ingredient’ cards. By combining actions, settings, emotions, and secrets learners can put together the ingredients for their own narratives, building the various elements, then structuring them before they begin to write.

**3. Writing for a purpose**

One of the barriers to writing for some pupils is understanding why they are being asked to write at all. How is the activity more than just an exercise in putting words down in order? By providing a context with which they can connect they can approach the task in a more positive way.

Throughout the LGFL resources are examples of just such an approach. In [Switched on Science,](http://www.sos.lgfl.net) for instance, we could ask them to describe experiments, or processes. The Power it Up unit in year 4 asks them to describe a circuit for an alarm on a cat flap, in year 5 with We’re Evolving we might ask learners to design an animal for a hostile environment, or to speculate on what adaptations human beings could usefully have for modern life, such as longer, thinner thumbs to make texting easier.

There are also examples of writing in real life contexts, such as the Police Reports of an abandoned car or a missing child in [Talking Stories 2](https://content.lgfl.org.uk/secure/stories2/). You might also watch some of the recipe videos there before writing your own. By using the [Cookit!](http://www.cookit.lgfl.net) site learners could post their recipes for others to follow, too, or to provide feedback on those they have cooked.

Often our starting point is stories we have read. In [Talking Stories 3](http://www.stories3.lgfl.net) there are several ways in which we can  do this, re-creating the story using our own words in thought and speech bubbles, as in A Trip in the Car. With The Wishing Tree a professional story teller tells the story, then pupils are provided with the resources necessary to plan and retell it. And in The Parrots and the Raja the story can be recreated by them as they listen to it being told, using interactive tools on screen, or downloaded printouts, or even both.

In many of these examples pupils are writing in formats that are perhaps different from the usual classroom formats, an approach which can, in itself, support reluctant writers as they are provided with a different challenge.

[Super Action Comic Book Maker,](http://www.superaction.lgfl.net) for example, provides the resources to create a story about superheroes in London in the style of a comic book. Whilst in [Picture Book Maker](http://www.picturebook.lgfl.net) a similar approach is taken to creating a book for young children. This latter can provide a particularly engaging and purposeful activity by asking older pupils to write for younger ones. For those who are struggling with literacy this can mean writing at a level they are comfortable with, for an audience that they know and understand.

**4. Writing for a real audience**

A reluctant writer may be engaged to participate more fully with an activity or task involving writing if they can see the direct need for something to be produced in order for others to read.  The sense of audience often creates a framework for ideas and a direction towards structure that a very open topic title doesn’t offer.

Technology works so well to complement this as not only does it offer the opportunity to edit; to produce readable script and a variety of multimedia end-products - it also takes the potential audience across the globe  if desired.

Reaching a worldwide audience is extremely motivating for many and blogging is an ideal format for this.  An individual, or class, blog,  can be promoted via social media and comments can arrive from across the planet.  Watching students react to such comments really shows the power of this approach and the consequent effects on their writing efforts as they respond, clarify, improve and extend their work.  [j2Webby](http://www.j2webby.lgfl.net) is a perfect starting point for blogging and available through LGfL.  This award winning tool is built on WordPress, moderated by the teacher before posting.  Equally, all comments received are again moderated by the teacher before becoming visible to others.

At a simpler level, postcard templates in [Busythings](http://www.busythings.lgfl.net) allow a simple structure to produce writing with a defined purpose.  The nature of postcards is that the message area is small, so the written output demands of the task are not arduous or daunting.  Postcards can be printed and posted so the sequence of lesson activity can be carried through to show exactly how postcards carry information from the sender to the recipient.

[App Maker offers](http://www.appmaker.lgfl.net) an extremely motivating format for engaging the reluctant writer as the pride involved in having ‘ownership’ of an app is considerable given the power of the app market and mobile technology currently.  This LGfL resource allows students to combine writing with other media such as graphics, photos and video to create apps in response to a variety of topics.  Once again, a real task gives the writing has an intrinsic value, with completed apps published within LGfL for others to see, or downloaded to a  mobile device.

LGfL offers [a Podcasting service](http://www.podcast.lgfl.net) which operates as a complete web-based environment for hosting, creating and managing podcast channels and episodes. These can be recorded and edited within LGfL, or created offline and then uploaded,  to be hosted and shared via LGfL.   They offer many writing opportunities, with planning, researching, scripting, casting, editing, and marketing, through flyers, posters, tweets and posts.