

ASSESSING WRITING

Ideas for Psychologists

Michele Blick and Robyn Stead
Registered Educational Psychologists



What do
Psychologists love
most?



You know it's a
good theory!

SIMPLE VIEW OF WRITING

- **Two necessary skills:**
 - Transcription,
 - Ideation (*text generation*)

THE NOT SO SIMPLE VIEW OF WRITING

Executive Function + Transcription+ Ideation

- Executive Function and Self Regulatory processes (attention, goal setting and reviewing)
- Working Memory considered to be central to these three components.
 - Working Memory is required for accessing long-term memory during planning and composing process and short-term memory during review.

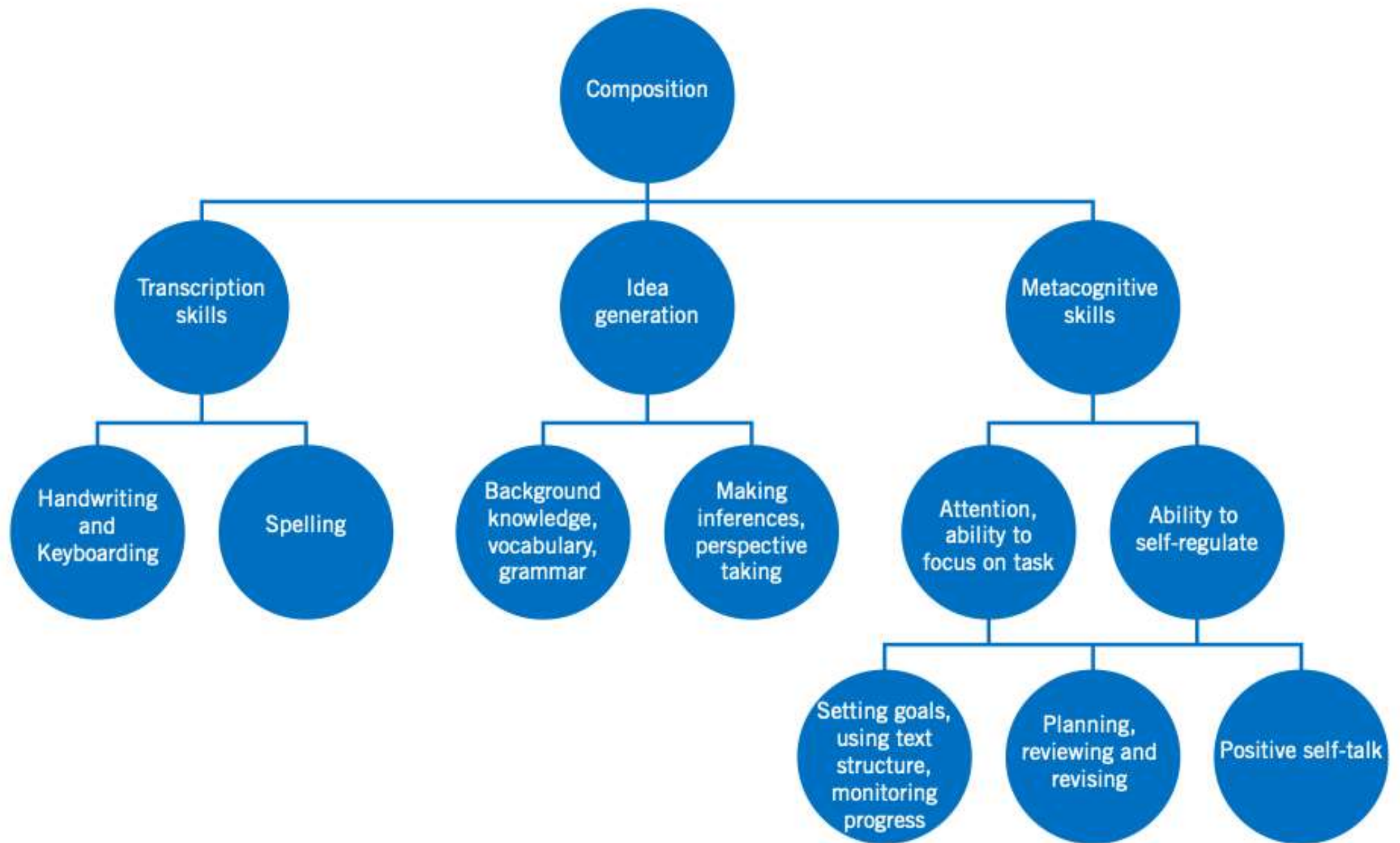


Figure 2. The not-so simple view of writing

TAKING A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

- ↪ Gross motor skills
- ↪ Fine motor skills

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

- ↪ Oral language, receptive and expressive and ability to understand discourse
- ↪ Reading, decoding, fluency, comprehension (literal and inferential)
- ↪ Writing



Let's get into
the practice
then!

"In theory, there is no
difference between
theory and practice.
But in practice, there
is."

— Benjamin Brewster



ON TRACK VS OFF TRACK WRITING

Outcomes	On-track writing	Off-track writing
Main goal in writing	To see the big picture: plan, draft, critique, revise	To get something down on paper, fill up the space
Planning	Spend time planning, set goals to follow	No planning, just write, jump from idea to idea
Coverage of material	Generate more content than needed and then trim back	Generate very short amount of material with no detail
Revising, improving	Spend time revising and improving, substantive change	Use time to edit superficially, no revising, no substantive change
Presentation	Fluent and neat handwriting and accurate spelling	Slow handwriting, punctuation miscues, spelling miscues
Use of time	Put in time and effort	Put in minimal time, less than 10 minutes

What does the evidence say?

So what are the **best** things to do if we see children/young people struggling with writing?

What does this mean for our assessments?




FEEDBACK

High Effect Sizes

Effect sizes for Feedback from adults ranges from .80 to .88 in individual studies to an average effect size of .64.

Feedback has a high effect size

- An effect size of .4 is considered one years progress in learning.
- .22 effect size is the progress students make with minimal instruction.
- An effect size of .50 is medium or typical and .80 is considered a large effect size.
- Psychologists can provide information in their reports that provides ideas for effective feedback for teachers/parents/children and young people.



Thanks
Umm?

Where?

How?

Nice writing!
I like your tidy
handwriting!

Super
star
writing!

Use a
dictionary to
fix spelling
mistakes.

Don't
forget full
stops.

GOAL SETTING

High Effect Sizes

Effect sizes range from
.57 – 2.03 with an average
effect size of 1.03

Another aspect of writing that has high effect sizes.

- Psych assessment can contribute to the creation of effective goals for student writing.
- Goals can be focused on the product (how much to write, writing in paragraphs) or the process such as following a strategy (follow a specific structure for writing a narrative)

GROWTH MINDSET

Carol Dweck

Your choice of topic is very interesting. Can you add one more sentence describing the colour of the sea?

It's great to see you have mastered spelling xxx words. Next to work on are xx words.

My teacher has noticed my improvements. I can see my improvements. I know what to keep working on to learn how to be a good writer.

- Feedback and goal setting needs to support students to develop a Growth Mindset as opposed to a Fixed Mindset.

Fix spelling mistakes.

Write more.

I'm a poor writer. Not much I can do about that.



So how does this
apply to a typical
assessment?



When we are
assessing we need to
focus on multiple
aspects of writing
not just a standard
score.

We also need to
think about what
this means for
our
recommendations

SKILLS TO SUPPORT WRITING PERFORMANCE

These skills can be used to guide assessment
and intervention design.

- Generate and formulate ideas
- Planning
- Organise and sequence ideas
- Text organisation and style
- Graphomotor skills
- Range and selection of vocabulary
- Knowledge of grammar
- Use of punctuation
- Accurate spelling
- Monitor and evaluate writing
- Editing and revising
- Motivation, attention, metacognition, memory, self-regulation

TYPICAL TOOLS USED BY PSYCHS


- WISC-V
- One to one setting
- Duration of roughly 1-1.5 hrs
- WIAT-III
- One to one setting.
- Duration of roughly 1-1.5 hrs

These assessment tools are widely used by psychologists. However, there are many other assessment tools available that can be used instead. It is not always necessary to use a standardised assessment to gather pertinent information.

IN A ONE TO ONE TEST SETTING WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Rich information is collected when observing
behaviour.

- Level of engagement and participation in conversation.
- Oral language – sophisticated or simple?
- Attention span and focus – how long can the child attend to the task?
- Speech patterns – clear or evidence of difficulties?
- How long does it take for the child to begin the task?
- Sitting position, need to move and/or fidget.
- Self-concept as a learner – how does child describe self as a writer?
- Fine motor skills.
- Response when making a mistake.
- Self-correct? Self-monitor output?
- Use of time.
- Background experiences and knowledge.
- Skills and strategy use.
- Willingness to begin a task and persevere.
- Motivation.



Excellent. I can't wait to meet this new person and try these new activities. This will be fun!

They said what! I have to spend 3 hours with this stranger doing school work!!!

WIAT-III LISTENING COMPREHENSION

- Receptive vocabulary
- Oral discourse

Things to consider:

- Literacy progression from a developmental perspective.
- Simple and not so Simple theory of writing.
- What does the student's voice/utterances sound like?
- What is their behaviour telling you?

WIAT-III EARLY READING SKILLS

- What skills do they have related to understanding written text?
- Words matched to objects
- Sound letter correlation
- Sequencing of sounds
- Analyse any errors item by item.

WIAT-III WORD READING AND PSEUDOWORD READING

- What kind of word reading knowledge do they have?
- Fluency
- Decoding skills
- Error analysis look at each item
- Transcription

WIAT-III ORAL EXPRESSION

- Expressive Vocabulary
- Oral Word Fluency
- Sentence Repetition
- Ideation
- Can the student access the vocabulary needed to write successfully?
- Do they know the words they need to know to write well?
- Can they retrieve them?

WIAT-III READING COMPREHENSION AND ORAL READING FLUENCY

- How do they answer literal and inferential comprehension questions.
- What does their oral reading sound like?
- Are they fluent in their ability to read aloud?
- Ideation

WIAT-III ALPHABET WRITING

- Sequencing
- Letter direction
- Pencil grip
- Handwriting and letter shape
- Transcription
- Ideation
- Sequencing difficulties may be indicative of some difficulty organising ideas which is key to writing well.

WIAT-III SPELLING

- Has the student learned to spell enough words correctly to write effectively?
- What is their pencil grip like?
- Do they push too hard or not hard enough to create legible writing?
- Error analysis of individual items to pinpoint areas of difficulty
- Transcription
- Ideation
- Executive Function
- Working Memory

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT TOOLS

- Junior Oral Screening Test (JOST)
- Concepts about print (CAP)
- BURT (word recognition)
- South Australian Spelling Test (SAST), Schonell
- Bryant Test of Basic Decoding Skills (1975)
- Gough-Kastler-Roper Phonemic Awareness Test
- Alphabet sound and letter identification
- Alphabet writing (knowledge, formation, speed)
- PATOSS (Handwriting speed)
- Writing sample
- Criterion Test of Basic Skills

WISC-V FSIQ

- Broad look at cognitive ability
- Helps to understand where to pitch lessons.
- What is the mixture of required skills?
- From functional writing skills to more sophisticated ideation where are the transcription skills in relation to this?
- Essential transcription and ideations skills for the individual.

WISC-V, INDEX LEVEL ANALYSIS

- Verbal Comprehension
- Visual Spatial Index
- Working Memory
- Processing Speed Index
- VCI - Supports thinking about ideation
- VSI - Transcription may be difficult. If the student is very sensitive to failure this may show up in Block Design. The student can see that they are unable to complete the correct design. Similarly they will be able to see that they are struggling with writing.
- WMI, PSI Insights into difficulties in WMI and PSI help us to think about how best to scaffold these students to overcome or ameliorate these difficulties.

RUBRICS

- Key indicators of what is important
- Include aspects of transcription, ideation, working memory and executive function.
- <https://literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/The-Structure-of-the-Progressions/The-first-year?q=node/11>
- <https://e-asttle.tki.org.nz/Teacher-resources/Marking-resources-for-e-asTTle-writing#Marking>
- Self created rubrics

IDEAS FOR INTERVENTION

- **Purpose:** To support the student's learning by providing feedback and recommendations for students, teachers and whānau.
- Explicit and individual
- Uses accessible language
- Identifies goals to support next steps in the development of the student's writing skills
- Builds on strengths and interests
- Practical, thus easily integrated into a teaching plan
- Realistic based on available resources
- Scaffolded so that the student is working within their zone of proximal development
- Based on current evidence base