

Writing - using the 5Ws

Once a student can write one simple sentence of 3 to 6 words, independently (language, spelling, ideas, etc) then we ask them to write more.

The 5Ws is a shorthand term for the 5 questions we teach a student to ask themselves when learning to write more. The 5W questions are:

WHO?

WHAT?

WHEN?

WHERE?

WHY?

The 5Ws can be used to support students to write richer sentences and to be more aware of the information others might need to understand their writing. Students can also use them to write multiple sentences or to work on a paragraph within a larger topic.

It is really important that the 5Ws are questions that the student asks themselves. If you are prompting the student, make sure you only ask the basic question. Do not add anything to it, or you may reduce their developing autonomy as a writer. For example if a student is writing about going to the park on the weekend, they can learn to ask themselves “who” and then write about the “who” that is relevant to them. However, if the person supporting them asks “who did you go with?” we may change the direction of their writing. If left without the extra prompt they might have wanted to write about who they saw at the park or who didn’t come to the park – not who they went with.

Writing - using the 5Ws

We also want the student to learn to ask themselves the 5Ws so that ultimately they learn to write independently.

As with all conventional writers, you would begin every writing session by writing yourself at the same level that the student is learning to write at e.g. an expanded sentence, or three sentences. This is called a mini-lesson. Pick a topic that is similar to the student's topic - and then think out loud about using the 5ws to come up with ideas.

Who	
What	When
Where	Why

You can use a chart like this one to make your planning visible to students. If you are modelling an expanded sentence, then you might only use two or three of the 5Ws - and it is great to model this for students. If you are modelling three or more sentences then you would use all of the 5Ws.

As you use the 5Ws yourself, make sure you model that you can use them in any order. You could cut up the visual to demonstrate this - or you could do your planning on post-it notes and move them around as you think out loud. Once you have written at the level the student is learning to write at, then it is their turn.

If needed, encourage them to plan their writing before they start - and have a student-teacher conference around this. They can use a similar chart to the one above. Once they have finished their planning, then ask them to write. Be specific about how much they should write - although they are always welcome to write more!

Writing - using the 5Ws

Resources you can download to support the introduction of the 5Ws.

Planning
Graphic of the
5ws for printing

Electronic fillable
version of the
planning Graphic
of the 5ws

Writing More
graphic

