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Changing life stories

everybody writes

Writing club resources

Primary School Version

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1. How to set up a writing club

Planning

Write down:

Your aim: who the club is for, what will the overall outcome be for them, etc.

Your objectives: How many sessions, how many children will be involved, the end product (e.g. a performance, a display, a newspaper) if there is to be one.

The outcomes: What will the club do for the children involved? How will they be changed? Will there be outcomes for the school as a whole?

Resources needed: This could include your time (and other's) and materials.

Actions to be taken: For example, drawing up an outline plan for the term's sessions. Who is to do the actions and by when?

How you will evaluate: For example the experience of participants; the quality of work produced. Evaluation can include the views of participants and teachers, and examples of work, perhaps with 'before' and 'after' samples. If you want to help children see that writing can be fun, you can evaluate this by asking them, at the start of the first session, to write down what they think writing would be if it were an item of clothing, or something to eat, or a piece of furniture, or a vehicle; repeat this at the end of the final session. For children with literacy problems, or with English as a second language, you could ask them to draw a picture instead.

Finding your members

As part of the planning stage decide if the club will be open to all or restricted to targeted children. This will determine whether you:

Publicise the group widely within school and invite people to sign up for it (this will probably attract only those who are keen writers already);

Specifically invite the targeted individuals. They may already be working as a group, for special tuition. If not, make it clear that this won't be like ordinary lessons – that the whole idea is to have fun;

Do both! It is important that you include your targeted pupils from the start. Once the club has formed, it may be difficult for new members to feel accepted.

Tips…

- Decide a maximum number of members for your club. No more than 12 would be ideal.
- Don't worry if you can't have after-school sessions, because of transport or other difficulties. A lunchtime session can be just as effective.
- Decide on a time period for your club. Make it clear that the club will run for a term or half a term, as appropriate. If it works you can carry on!

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- If you are starting a club for the first time, don't give it a name in your publicity. Let the members decide on a name in their first session – it helps develop ownership.

Planning writing club sessions

It's fine to keep a regular structure to your sessions. A suggested structure is:

- warm-up game (see Games)
- hear assignments
- writing exercise based on the topic to be covered in the next assignment.
- writing activity
- set assignment.

If you have only short sessions, omit either the exercise or the activity.

Tips…

- Although a regular structure makes participants feel comfortable, it's a good idea to vary it occasionally to prevent dullness.
- Encourage *constructive* criticism right from the start. What did we like about this piece? What might we have done differently? There is always something to be praised in a piece of writing, but children *know* when their pieces could be better.
- Constantly encourage editing and revision of work. All group exercises should include an element of editing. It's sometimes difficult for writers to accept that some parts of what they have written should be left out; take along a piece of your own and ask for the club's help in improving it, to show that this is ok. Use the editing exercises.
- Timing is crucial. Ensure that each participant's assignment is heard in each session. If you know that there will not be time for this, for example because you have set a longer assignment, then make it clear when you set the assignment that half of the pieces will be heard in the next session, and the rest the week after.
- Make sure that quieter members have their say. You will probably need to ask some children specifically what they thought of a piece, or for their ideas on a particular topic.
- Use concrete stimuli – bring things in: fruit and vegetables; pictures; interesting objects.
- Try to include some reading in each session – a poem, or a short prose extract. Terry Pratchett once gave this advice to young aspiring writers: "You should read and read and read until you are full to overflowing with ideas and words, and you just can't help but write them."
- Encourage reflection from the start. Ask if an assignment was easy or difficult, fun or boring, and why this was the case.

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- Have a *Great Words Graffiti* poster. Whenever any member of the club uses a word or phrase that is unfamiliar, or particularly adventurous or useful, allow them to write it up on the poster.
- Don't make assumptions! It's often thought that children find poetry boring. This is not the case; most of them know well the words of favourite songs, even though they may not have thought of them as poetry.

The first session

Plan your first session carefully. It's important that:

- the members think of the club as theirs;
- they perceive writing as something that is not only worth doing but enjoyable.

It's a good idea to start with a game or exercise. The first real writing exercise should be deciding on a name for the group. Use creative techniques, such as a word tree, for opening up possibilities, and decide democratically. You can suggest names, but your suggestions should be considered equally.

This first session should include some real writing, too. A group poem or piece can help overcome anxieties by reducing individual responsibility for what is written, and will encourage group cohesion and supportiveness.

Younger writers often respond well to the feeling of belonging to a club and enjoy emblems that show their membership. Give each member a small notebook, and talk about carrying the notebook around and jotting down interesting words they hear, or ideas they have for pieces of writing.

At this stage, you might want to decide on a theme for the sessions. This can be a broad subject ("travel", for example, lends itself to many possibilities) or a genre. You may have already determined the theme, in which case you can introduce it now.

Finally, set an assignment. This should be short, relatively straightforward, and within the capabilities of all the members – but don't underestimate the creativity of your club members!

Running your writing club

Tips…

- Write an outline plan for the whole term (or half-term), making sure that you include any target areas of work.
- Write a more detailed session plan shortly before each session, taking into account the progress, learning and developments of the previous session.

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- Be prepared to abandon all plans if some creative opportunity arises – often the young people will have ideas that are better than yours.
- You will probably want your club to be sustainable. It does not have to run week after week; it might just be the spring term for year 5s, for example.
- Think of your own needs. If you grow tired of running the club, then the quality of the outcomes for the young people will diminish.
- Vary the assignments as much as possible, but keep them fairly short, so that they do not interfere with homework.
- Keep session start and end times punctual.
- Do all you can to make it fun! Encourage the feeling that this is a club.

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2. Games

Games and exercises can fill many functions – developing group relationships, energising the group, encouraging a sense of playfulness with words, showing the power of using all one's senses, encouraging the use of imagination, stimulating listening skills, and so on.

This section describes a selection of games that you can use as you wish, but do feel free to invent your own. The games are arranged in categories, but of course some can be useful in several ways. Most of the games are suitable for many age groups, with perhaps some modifications. Note that you can also use some of the exercises described in later sections as games.

Energising and ice-breaking games

Alphabetical order: Start with the group in a circle. Say that you are staying in your place; other members must rearrange themselves in alphabetical order of first name, clockwise, around you, as quickly as possible.

Birthday order: As above, but in chronological order of birth day and month.

Both of these can be varied – you might ask participants to do the first silently, or while acting a particular role. With younger children, ask them to arrange themselves in an alphabet snake, with the A's at one end and the Z's at the other; this is easier for them than seeing the alphabet as a circle.

What's in a name? Ask each person to think of a word or short phrase to describe themselves. For older participants, the word should start with the same letter as his or her first name; younger participants can think of any word. Alternatively, each participant could think of an animal beginning with the same letter as his / her first name; or a thing that's *like* them. In turn, each participant stand up and says, loudly and clearly, the descriptive word and their name.

Truth and lies: Each participant must say his / her name, and give two pieces of information about himself / herself. One piece of information must be true, and the other untrue. This is an exercise in using the imagination in a believable way!

Wordstrings: Participants stand in a circle. You say a word, and choose somebody to start. Each person in turn must think of a word that either starts with the last letter of the preceding word, or rhymes with the preceding word (e.g. a string might be: *chalk – walk – kite – elephant – table – able – ear – fear - ring,* etc.). If a person can't think of a word within 5 seconds, or says a word that has been used before, they are out, and must sit down. The last person left is (obviously) the winner. This is more suitable for participants aged 10 or over.

A to Z: Participants get into pairs. The leader gives a start letter and an end letter, and each pair must think of as many words as possible beginning with the start letter and ending with the end letter. Choose the letters carefully! This can be a disaster with randomly-selected letters. P and R work well; or R and T; or T and E, for example. If you want to mark this game, then each pair gets one point for any word they have thought of that any other pair

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has too; if they are the only pair with a given word, then they get as many points as there are letters in the word.

Group development games

Poses: In groups of 4-6, participants must form a pose suitable for a particular photograph – e.g. a holiday snap, a wedding, a rock band playing, the signing of an official treaty, etc. They must also give the photo a caption, as it might appear in a newspaper.

Shapeshifting: In groups of 4-6, participants must form themselves (as a group) into the shape of an object, for example a table, an elephant, a helicopter. Other groups must be able to recognise the shape. You can give a theme – for example, animals, or means of transport, or items of furniture, etc.

Human bingo: Participants are given a form listing various attributes with instructions on how to play the game (see below). Each person must write next to each feature the name of another person in the group who has this attribute. This is a particularly good game for a group whose members do not all know each other before the session, and of course you can change the list of attributes to make it more appropriate for the group.

> *You have 5 minutes to find somebody in the group who meets the description in each of the boxes below. Write the person's name in the appropriate square. You can have the same name for more than one description.*

Reads the Sun newspaper	*Has played bingo*	*Has created a website*	*Is wearing patterned socks*	*Likes dancing*
Owns a hamster	*Has been on a demonstration*	*Speaks Spanish*	*Has more than two brothers / sisters*	*Has pierced ears*
Rides a bike	*Can ice skate*	*Makes their own films*	*Has been to Africa*	*Hates computer game*
Works out	*Likes arguing*	*Has been sailing*	*Has red hair*	*Was born in December*

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Shutting up shop: Have prepared a set of cards, each with something that could be bought in a shop. These should be quite detailed, e.g. *red wrapping paper; a man's tie with blue spots; a hamster cage; a wooden broom handle,* etc.; but the level of difficulty can be varied according to age and abilities of the group. The group members get into pairs. One is the shopkeeper, and the other the shopper. Each shopper is given a card, and s/he must mime what is required. The shopkeepers in each pair must work out the object from the mime; they swap rôles for the next card. This is a good exercise to get participants to think about body language as a means of expression.

Wordplay games

Categorically: Give a time limit (1 or 2 minutes) and ask each participant to write down as many words as they can in the category you give them. This can be anything – words beginning with the letter P, or the two letters PO, or animals, or types of food… Participants will end up with lists of varying lengths, of course, but ask them each to give you a word from their list, and write them on the board until all the words have been written up. The resulting list will be huge, and a real confidence booster to participants who may feel that they are "no good with words".

Same-start story: In groups of two or three, participants must write a short story. The only restrictions are that each word must begin with the same letter of the alphabet, and that it must be grammatically correct. It probably won't make much sense, but it should have at least some consistency. Good letters to use are A, S, T, M. This is a good exercise for using different word types correctly.

Alphabet story: In groups of two or three, participants must write a short story. The restriction is that the first word must begin with an A, the second with a B, and so on. It should make some kind of sense, and be grammatically correct. You might want to allow a little flexibility with X (e.g. eXamine). When the story is written, each small group should perform it for the others. This is more suitable for participants of Key Stage 3 age and above.

Mary had a tiny sheep: In pairs, group members rewrite a nursery rhyme; in doing so, they must leave out one letter of the alphabet (e.g. 'l' in *Mary had a little lamb*). They must find synonyms or other ways of saying the same thing.

Imagination games

One at a time: Give the group a phrase to start a story (e.g. "On the best day of my life I..."). The participants must continue the story, but each person can give only the next word. Encourage them at the start to be as imaginative as possible; you don't want to hear that they bought a pizza and watched TV. They can be outrageous!

This is a rather difficult game, and participants who are forced to supply words such as *and, the, he, she, was,* etc. will feel disappointed; use this as an opportunity to stress the

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importance of using these words well – they are the glue joining the other words together. What the game shows, however, is that minds are constantly striving to plan ahead, and this should give more credence to any emphasis you want to put on planning writing.

In a slightly easier form of the game, participants have a ball; they give a phrase of the story and then throw the ball to another participant, who must continue with the next phrase.

Listening games

Sounds of silence: Ask participants to close their eyes and just listen. After a minute or so ask what they have heard; ask for more precise descriptions than they might usually give. For example, if somebody says "the door opening", ask questions until s/he says something like: "the scrape of the side of the door against the door frame".

Stand up, sit down: Explain that you are going to read a very short story. Participants are to start sitting down, and whenever you say a word beginning with T, stand up; next time you say a word beginning with a T, they should sit down unless it's the name of a person, or a place, or a day of the week. Then read the following:

Once upon a time there were three terrible thugs who lived in the trees. Two of them were twins, called Tim and Tom, and they always tried to do terrible things, especially on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Just think! So you had better do as you're told today, because it's Thursday today!

This is a good game to play with younger participants; physical activity is almost essential at regular intervals! You can make up similar stories yourself.

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3. Exercises and activities

The writing exercises and activities in this section can be used to develop skills in many areas of writing, but for convenience they are grouped according to the particular element they most support.

Character development

There are several techniques for building characters. Some suggestions are given below, but again, you will probably come up with your own ideas.

Random characters: If participants have an idea for a character already then that's fine. If they haven't, then get each person to write the name or identity of a person on a piece of paper, collect them in, and distribute them randomly. These can be names (*Auntie Margaret)*, or occupations (*the village shopkeeper; the caretaker)*, or identities giving a distinguishing feature (*the man who lives in our shed; the boy with red hair; my sister's new baby)*, or even an animal (*my pet boa constrictor; the dog with three legs).*

Questions, questions: Now ask questions about the character. Here is a list of possible questions:

what has s/he never done or experienced?

what was his/her best friend like at school?

how does s/he eat meals?

what is his/her favourite food?

what is his/her favourite colour?

what was his/her most embarrassing moment?

what is the most important thing in his/her life?

what is his/her secret ambition, something s/he wants really badly?

what is his/her weakness?

what is s/he afraid of?

what is there about the character that is unexpected?

what incident happened in his/her childhood?

what do his/her friends / relatives / colleagues think about him/her?

This exercise can tell the writer a lot about the character. Encourage the participants to be imaginative in this, and to give lots of detail. For example, in answer to *how does s/he eat meals?*, the answer shouldn't just be *sitting at a table*, but, for example, *sitting at a table with a place laid carefully, and a neatly folded napkin, with a vase of dried flowers in front of the placemat.*

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Pants: Another way to do this is to ask participants to draw a pair of pants (or any other item of clothing, if this is thought a little personal). Then participants are asked who would wear the pants, and why, and if they always wear these pants or wear different ones for different occasions; this can lead on to some of the questions given above.

Picture gallery: Have a collection of photographs of people. These can be postcards, or cut out of magazines or newspapers. Ask each participant to choose a photograph and then describe the character, using the questions above as a basis.

Any of the above exercises can be done as a group or individually.

A day in the life: Participants should write a short piece describing a day, or part of a day, in the life of their character – but during the day something unexpected happens. This will be in the third person. Alternatively, they can write a diary entry, obviously in the first person. Or both!

Personification: In the session, talk about personification, asking the group to say how it feels to be, for example, a light bulb (it's boring; it's lonely; you just hang around all the time; nobody touches you until you're dead…). Ask them to write a piece in the first person as if they were an everyday object. For younger writers, you might want to give a list of objects to choose from.

Remind participants about the important principle of *show don't tell.* A character can be described far more effectively be describing his / her actions, and allowing these to show the reader what the character is like, how he/she is feeling etc.

Plot development

Many inexperienced writers say that they can't think of good plots. It's sometimes said that a good story should follow a plan such as the following:

Opening; development; conflict / problem; climax; resolution; conclusion.

While this is a useful pattern, there is a danger that if it is overstressed, writing can become formulaic. Do stress, however, the importance of beginnings and endings. A beginning should catch the reader's attention immediately, and make him / her want to read on. The ending of a story can be final and conclusive, or it can be enigmatic, leaving the reader wondering; but it must be the right sort of ending for that particular story.

There are lots of exercises to help give ideas for plot development.

Props: Take a couple of props into the session – for example, a briefcase or rucksack and a cheque book. Then ask questions: Who does the bag belong to? What's in it? Where is the bag now? How did it get there? Who owns the chequebook? How could the chequebook and the case be linked together?

Encourage imaginative answers, and show how a plot can be developed.

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Picture gallery: Take in photographs of places, objects, and people. Ask participants to choose any three photographs and suggest ways in which they could be joined together to form a story.

Dropped words: This is a speedwriting exercise, more suitable for older or more experienced participants. Have ready a selection of words – you might like to take these from a poem. Read the first two words on the list, and ask participants to write a sentence including both words. They must then continue writing; at intervals you read another word, which must be incorporated into the speedwriting piece. Ask some participants to read their pieces aloud.

Beginnings and endings: Ask each participant to write the first sentence of a story – this can be any sentence they want – on a piece of paper. Then ask them to write the last sentence of a story on another piece of paper. Collect them in, and give each participant a first and last sentence. Their job is to write a story linking the two.

Person, place, thing, emotion: Ask each participant to write, on separate pieces of paper, the name or identity of a character (see character development exercises above), a place, an object, and a feeling. Collect these in and give to each participant one of each category. They must write a story connecting the person, place, thing and feeling. However, the end result is what is important here; stress to participants that if they find while they are writing that they don't need any of the prompts then they can omit them.

Coming alive: Ask participants to imagine a statue that comes to life on the stroke of midnight each New Year's Eve, and can move around for one hour. What happens? Who does it meet? Does the statue return to its plinth?

Research: The importance of imagination in writing stories is obvious. However, nearly all fiction has some reference to fact; modern writers often incorporate huge amounts of factual material in their work. If facts are wrong, this will alienate any knowledgeable readers, and so it's important to do the necessary research to get facts right.

Ask participants to write a piece based on something true – the second world war, the secret life of cats, a single-handed yacht journey. The development of the story can be as imaginative as they like, but they should take this opportunity to practise their research skills. This is so much easier with the web, and all young people have access to computers now. Point out that there is free Internet access at all local libraries!

Writing dialogue

It's difficult to get dialogue right. If real speech is written down, it can be bitty and incoherent, but if we write what people mean, rather than what they say, it often appears unrealistic. Encourage participants to listen to people talking, and then go and write down the conversation in a way that is realistic but not incomprehensible.

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Picture gallery: Bring in photographs of people (see character exercises above). Ask participants in pairs to choose two photographs, and write a conversation between them.

Body parts: Ask participants to write a dialogue between themselves and one of their body parts. You will often get feet complaining!

Two characters in search…: Ask each participant to write the name or identity of two persons or animals on separate pieces of paper. Collect these in, and hand them out randomly, two to each participant. Their job is to write a conversation between the two characters which tells the story of how they met, and what their relationship is to each other now.

Description

Description is what is often thought of as the boring bits of a story, but some description can be vital, to give background, or set the scene, or develop tension.

Tips…

- In describing action, use strong verbs. A good verb is far more effective than an ordinary verb with an adverb.
- Use short sentences to increase tension. Varying the length of sentences makes the writing more interesting and moves the reader on from one point to another.
- Use imagery in description – but not too much! A good image brings writing to life; too many images and it's like eating a whole bag of sweets.
- Use all your senses. Most people describe what they see, but using the other senses as well adds richness to writing. The sense of smell is our oldest, and if a writer can get readers to think of how something smells then s/he can reach emotions in a powerful way.
- Use tenses well. Using the pluperfect is difficult, and should generally be avoided. Using the present tense adds immediacy, and it is appropriate sometimes to shift from the past to the present, but too much tense shifting can confuse and irritate readers.

Take two onions: This is an exercise for developing the use of all the senses. Bring two onions into the session. Hand them round, and ask participants to look carefully at them, and to feel the texture of the skin. Then cut one in half, and slice the other into rings. Pass them round again, asking participants to think about the smell and taste, and the sound made when the onion was cut. Ask participants to write a piece describing the onion as if they have never seen one before, using as many senses as possible in the description, They can develop this into speculation as to its origin – did it grow on a tree? Was it manufactured? Is it an egg of some sort? – and purpose. There are plenty of possibilities for imagery in this.

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Litter-ature (sorry!): Another senses exercise. Ask each participant to imagine a piece of litter. Ask one participant to say what his/her piece of litter is, and ask questions about it: what does it smell like? feel like? look like? sound like (it could be kicked, or blown along by the wind)? What would it taste like? Who might taste it? How did it get where it was? Then get participants into groups of four or five. Each group must choose a piece of litter. Each participant in group writes a sentence on one of the questions (i.e. each sense, or the origin of the piece of litter). The group as a whole assembles the sentences into a cohesive structure; they can change any of the sentences to fit in better. Each group reads their finished piece to the other groups (or you, if there are only a few members in the group).

This is also a good editing exercise.

Unmentionables: have a set of cards with the names of everyday objects – light bulb, paper clip, bar of chocolate, etc. Each person takes a card and has to describe it so that the others can guess what it is, *but* they must not mention the name of the object or what it is used for.

Wotifitsa: This is an exercise in developing imagery, but it is a very powerful tool to use in all forms of writing, and can be used with people of almost any age – it certainly works with nine-year-olds. Ask the group to choose an emotion or feeling. Explain that to say *he was angry* is almost meaningless to a reader, but that the emotion can be portrayed much more strongly if it's turned into concrete images.

Ask, using anger as an example: if anger was a piece of furniture, what would it be? a piece of clothing? food? weather? a means of transport? something growing? Don't allow bare answers, but ask for detail – for example, if somebody says *a sports car*, ask what colour? where?

Write all the suggestions on a board, and then help the group shape these into a poem. The group can suggest which image should come first and last, and then the sequence in between. The word for the emotion being described (here, anger) should not appear anywhere in the finished poem. Some images will be left out; explain that this is not because they are bad, but because they don't fit into this piece – participants can use them elsewhere! Again, this is a good editing exercise.

Tense it up: Ask participants to use short sentences to make an ordinary event (e.g. walking to school) seem more tense and perhaps even threatening.

Me as a: Ask participants to write a piece describing themselves using the Wotifitsa technique.

Editing and criticism

It's not difficult, really, to write a story or a poem or a factual piece. What can be difficult is making it good, as good as it can be, and this is where editing is vital. For may people, the art of creation is very personal, and there is a belief that what they have done is perfect.

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Many teachers are wary of criticising the creative work of young people from the belief that this can damage their enthusiasm; this hesitation to criticise comes from the best motives, and is hard to avoid. But young people are not fools; very often they know that their pieces are not as good as they might be. If a child writes a poem, and is asked *which bit do you like best?* and *which bit do you think could work better?* they will almost always choose the same phrases or lines that the practitioner would choose.

We all want to be proud of what we do. It is up to the session leader to ensure that criticism is constructive and results in a better piece of writing – *always.* If a young person says *I've finished!* and there are no crossings out in their work, then say that it can't be finished until he/she has changed something. Stress that the first copy of anything is a draft, and that at least two attempts will always be needed before any piece of writing is finished.

Explain very carefully the purposes of constructive criticism. Make it clear that everything that is said or written in a session is of worth, but that what you want to do is make their writing as good as it can possibly be.

Line 'em up: In small groups, decide on a theme (e.g. friendship, exams, etc.). Hand out pieces of paper with a start word or phrase (e.g. *although, whenever, if, despite, after, before,* etc.), one to each person. Each person writes one line on the theme, starting with the word they have been given. Each sub-group then assembles the members' lines into a poem or piece. They can change lines, or omit them completely, in order to get the best result. This is a good exercise in editing.

All my own work: Take in a piece of your own writing. This should be a very short prose piece, or a poem. Display a copy printed out large, and ask for help in putting it right. Say it is a draft, and that while you are happy with some bits (and say which) you think the rest needs improvement. Ask for suggestions, and make them on the printed piece – cross phrases out, add new ones, until the group as a whole thinks it's finished; then read out the draft and the final version, and say that you are much happier with the revised version.

With a little help from my friends: The next stage is to get the group into pairs. Ask each participant to read a piece to the other person in the pair; the listener must say something he/she really liked about the piece, and something that he/she thinks could be improved. The pair then changes rôles. You might need to give some examples of comments in praise and constructively critical comments before the group is split into pairs.

DIY: Ask each participant to read a short piece aloud (this exercise might need to be spread over several sessions). Often, reading aloud highlights clunkiness in the writing. The participant must then say which phrases they were particularly pleased with, and what they would change in the piece.

Cut! Ask each participant to write a short piece on a theme, with a word count limit – say, 500 words. Then say that the word count limit has been reduced to 350 words, and get participants to cut their pieces to the shorter length. Often the result will be tauter, stronger writing.

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4. Evaluating

We are often called upon to evaluate sessions, but evaluation can be a continuation of the creativity that has been encouraged through the session to be evaluated.

Creative evaluation

You can ask for creative evaluations at the end of sessions. For example, an evaluation using a metaphor or simile; or in a rhyming couplet; or a cartoon…

These are some examples of creative evaluations (not all good ones!) received from young people:

"I feel like a flower opening up in spring."

"It made me feel like drizzle on a hillside in the middle of winter."

"I feel like a kitten sitting on a warm rug soaking up the glowing rays from the just-revealed sun of knowledge."

"This meeting made me feel like a jug into which knowledge was being poured."

Impact evaluation

If you are working with a targeted group, you will probably want to assess the impact of the club on its members. Ensure that you have samples of their written work from before the first session; take samples at the end of the club's period of activity, and, ideally, ask an independent assessor to examine the samples.

However, improvements in writing ability are not the only evidence of impact. Make notes immediately after each session; record comments such as *I wish writing was like this in class* or *Nobody's ever wanted to put anything I've written in a book before* or *Please can we write more this week?*

Ask class teachers for evidence in changes in behaviour – is a club member more likely to put his/ her hand up in class, or want to read his / her work out? Has his / her handwriting improved? It may be that for the first time, a club member can see the point in making what s/he has written legible.

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5. Sharing the club's work

Maintaining enthusiasm for writing can be difficult if there is no obvious point to it all, and sharing the club's work can give this focus. You can share work in a number of ways:

- Upload the content to a digital platform or publish an anthology through Amazon;
- produce a booklet with at least one piece from each member of the group. These could be sold, with proceeds going to charity;
- put on a reading, for other school pupils – perhaps just one year group;
- invite families and friends into a session for a reading of work;
- make a display with the best pieces, to be positioned somewhere where everyone who comes to the school will see it.

If you choose a reading as a means of sharing work, then it's vital that members are properly prepared. They will need careful training in performance skills, and plenty of practice. This is not just to boost their confidence, but also to ensure that the work gets the best possible presentation. If any members are really uncomfortable about reading in public, they should be under no obligation to do so; you or another members can read their pieces for them.

6. Sustaining your group

You will probably want your club to be sustainable. This does not mean that it has to run week after week, term after term; a sustainable club might be one that is run only in the spring term for year 5s, for example.

Sustaining a writing club can sometimes be difficult – but bear in mind the tips also mentioned elsewhere:

- Decide on the length of time your club is to run. If it just half a term, it's less likely that enthusiasm will wane; it's probable that the members will ask if the club can continue for the rest of the term.
- Think of your own needs as well as those of the participants. If you grow tired of running the club, then the quality of the outcomes for the young people will diminish.
- Vary the assignments as much as possible, and keep them fairly short, so that they do not interfere with homework or other activities in which the members might be involved.
- Keep session start and end times punctual, and have a fixed, regular time for club sessions.
- Do all you can to make it fun! Encourage the feeling that this is a club.

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7. Managing problems

There are many potential problems! Think in advance what you will do about them – this is just risk management – but don't worry. Be confident that the club is enjoyable; members are not doing you a favour by coming along. Some common challenges are:

The group is dominated by one individual.

Allow this member to have their say, but quite firmly tell them when it is somebody else's turn. If s/he continues to make things difficult for everyone, talk to him / her outside of the group, pointing out the effect their behaviour has on others. If this means that they leave the group, then this has to be accepted; the loss of one member is preferable to the loss of the majority.

Other school activities take precedence over club sessions, so that it is difficult to get a consistent meeting time and attendance.

Obviously the first step is to discuss this in a staff meeting. If you can't get anywhere, then don't worry about it. Make the club fun to come to, and your members will attend when and how they can.

Sessions always seem too short!

Good. They should do. What's important is:

- everybody has a chance to present their work;
- you have enough time to give clear details about the next assignment.
- Everything else you do is a bonus.

I'm running out of ideas.

Get your group to help you. Have one session which is purely for planning – ask for ideas about a theme, and what sort of things they might want to do. Make it clear that ideas don't have to be sensible – a wildly impractical idea can often be made to work. Also, look for guidance – there are many books about teaching creative writing. However, if the problem is really that you feel stale, then give the club a break – just leave it for a term or half a term, to let ideas form in your mind. It's a good idea to use a period such as this to do some writing yourself.

My members are drifting away.

Find out why. It may be that they have too many other activities; or they feel that they have spent enough time on writing and need a change. In this case, your club has probably reached the end of its natural life. This is not a failure, but a very typical pattern of activities with young people. Plan a celebration to mark the end of the club and invite all your members, past and present, so that they don't see it as a failure either. You can always start the club again next year.

One of the children wrote about abuse, but in a fictional context.

This should always be treated seriously. Follow your school's safeguarding policy.

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