

Research and development of Pathways to Write

Pathways to Write is a text-based approach founded in a mastery-learning model. Key skills are taught and repeated; there are multiple opportunities to use and apply the skills until they can be mastered fully and applied in an extended context. This follows the processes around research in mathematics: “the idea/concept that all children need a deep understanding of what they are learning in order that they can recall it fluently, use it flexibly and apply it readily.” (NCETM).

Each unit follows a process of conceptual understanding (hook and purpose for writing), procedural fluency (a series of lessons where writing skills are taught and practised) and an opportunity for pupils to apply their skills in an extended context (Carpenter, 2018). Components of writing are developed rigorously throughout a unit before pupils are challenged to write composite tasks (Ofsted, 2024).

Each unit builds progressively and contributes to the programme as a whole: learning is broken down into “discrete units and presented in logical order. Pupils are required to demonstrate mastery of the learning from each unit before being allowed to move on to the next, with the assumption that all pupils will achieve this level of mastery if they are appropriately supported” (DfE, 2015). This ensures the full range of year group skills are acquired to meet age-related expectations.

Within each unit, pupils use and apply **Mastery keys** and **Feature keys**. **Mastery keys** are developed from the transcription, composition and grammar objectives from the *National Curriculum* (DfE, 2013). Throughout each unit, there are opportunities for incidental short-burst writing where pupils practise the **Mastery keys** that have been taught explicitly; they are then able to monitor their work and be self-reflective throughout. This fosters high quality feedback based on the recommendations of Dylan Wiliam (2011) who states, “feedback should cause thinking. It should be focused; it should relate to the learning goals that have been shared with the students...the whole purpose of feedback should be to increase the extent to which students are owners of their own learning.”

Feature keys help support pupils with ‘what writing in this genre looks like’. They focus on the vocabulary, structure and writing features required in each form. These were developed by applying knowledge and experience as well as referring to the ‘Text Types Guidance’ and ‘Progression and Pace Papers’ (DfES, 2006). These **Feature keys** guide pupils to produce final extended pieces of writing applying correct features of the form, alongside pupils’ knowledge of the purpose and audience of the writing.

To provide challenge and support writers working at the greater depth standard, suggestions for an adapted task are noted on each unit plan. Some of the incidental short-burst writing opportunities have suggested challenges for greater depth, as well as the final **Writeaway** outcome. The principles behind the greater depth tasks in **Pathways to Write** are based on giving pupils the opportunity to apply higher order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation and creativity (Anderson, Krathwohl and Bloom, 2001) whilst still working on the required year group **Mastery keys**. Pupils are challenged with writing from a different viewpoint, combining elements of different genres, or creating their own form of writing dependent on the purpose and audience.

What does the writing process look like in Pathways to Write?

“Writing can be thought of as a task made up of five stages: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Pupils should be taught each of these components and underlying strategies” (EEF, 2021).

The **Pathways to Write** process encompasses planning, drafting, proof-reading and editing. Each stage is taught alongside specific writing strategies to help pupils succeed at each step. Throughout the units, these stages are systematically taught, modelled and practised. To develop independence, writing strategies are introduced using the gradual release of responsibility model, as recommended in the *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2: Guidance Report* (EEF, 2021). By the time pupils reach the final extended piece of writing, known as the **Writeaway**, they are prepared to complete the process independently.



How are the texts chosen in Pathways to Write?

“When children’s personal responses are honoured and connections are made with the texts of popular culture and their interests, their involvement and pleasure in learning and writing increases” (Cremin, 2017).

With a wealth of texts out there, it is important to have a clear understanding of the texts that underpin **Pathways to Write**. Barrs and Cork (2001) noted that in KS2, traditional tales, stories containing “poeticised speech” and emotionally powerful texts were the kinds of literature that supported KS2 writers. **Pathways to Write** books are chosen primarily on their literary merit and have strong (and age appropriate) grammar examples, engaging images and the right amount of new vocabulary. Whilst engaging with these texts, pupils experience “mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors” (Sims Bishop, 1990) and “see themselves reflected in what they read and to have the opportunity to investigate other lives, worlds and perspectives” (Johns-Shepherd, 2016). The texts chosen have scope for a range of writing and support the grammar objectives within the programme. Each unit provides a real purpose for writing as “stepping inside texts imaginatively fosters children’s creative capacity as writers, and writing in role increases authenticity and a sense of audience” (Cremin, 2017).

Why is oracy such an important feature of Pathways to Write?

As stated by James Britton (1970), “Reading and writing float on a sea of talk”; therefore, oracy is a golden thread running through all the **Pathways Literacy** programmes. The research that underpinned the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2003) is still hugely relevant today and was an influential source in the creation of **Pathways to Write**. Spoken language is integrated into **Pathways to Write** in a progressive way that develops pupils’ ability to communicate effectively so that they are talking to learn as well as learning to talk. This is echoed in work undertaken by Mercer and Dawes (2018) who state, “Ways of talking shape ways of thinking, and ways of thinking are expressed in ways of talking.” Many of the drama, group discussion, speaking and listening activities from the Primary National Strategy (DfES, 2003) have been incorporated into the units to ensure that pupils are immersed in stories and characters, can articulate their thoughts and use exploratory talk to develop their ideas and write effectively for a range of purposes.

How does Pathways to Write develop pupils' vocabulary?

Alongside key writing skills, **Pathways to Write** builds in extensive opportunities to develop and apply vocabulary. The EEF summarises the key strategies for teaching vocabulary and modelling language that the programme follows (Reynolds, 2023). Vocabulary specific to each text and unit is identified, both tier 2 and tier 3 words (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013) alongside wordlist vocabulary (DfE, 2013). This ensures coverage across the year and supports teachers to identify words that need explicit teaching. **Pathways to Write** develops word depth by creating a planned approach to clarifying words and meaningful, repeated exposure to them through engaging and purposeful activities, as recommended in *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1*, *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2* (EEF, 2021) and *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* (Quigley, 2018).

How is early writing developed in EYFS and KS1?

"When you read texts, you show that print carries meaning. When you write, you explain what decisions you are making in your mind, so children understand how they share thoughts, ideas and feelings" (DfE, 2022).

In EYFS, **Pathways to Write** is introduced through engaging picture books with different skills for 3- and 4-year-olds and children in reception based on guidance from Development Matters (DfE, 2023). Through a structured sequence of learning, children develop essential skills such as oracy, listening and an awareness that their marks or writing hold meaning. A key focus of **Pathways to Write** in EYFS is to develop children to become better communicators. "Oral language skills are fundamental to children's learning, thinking and emotional wellbeing" (EEF, 2018). In line with this, **Pathways to Write** places a priority on developing communication and language through focused provision activities and embedding the characteristics of effective learning into daily practice.

When pupils move into Y1, there is a focus on pupils developing key foundational knowledge. This includes developing transcription skills and knowledge of language (vocabulary, grammar and syntax) as stated in *Telling the Story: the English subject report* (Ofsted, 2024). The process within **Pathways to Write** allows for the repeated practice of these skills through the mastery approach alongside opportunities for oral composition leading to fluent application. Once pupils are fluent and secure with these skills, they are ready to produce extended pieces of writing independently. This will continue to build throughout Y2 as new skills are introduced.

Pathways to Write is constantly evolving and adapting to the educational climate. Latest research and pedagogy drive reflection to ensure that the programme remains a relevant and high-quality product to support the teaching of English.

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Research and development of Pathways to Read

Pathways to Read is a whole-class reading programme based on high-quality texts and a mastery approach. It supports the teaching of reading comprehension skills and develops reading fluency. Key skills are taught and repeated; there are multiple opportunities to use and apply the skills until they can be mastered fully and applied in independent reading. This follows the processes around research in mathematics: “the idea/concept that all children need a deep understanding of what they are learning in order that they can recall it fluently, use it flexibly and apply it readily” (NCETM).

Each unit builds progressively and contributes to the programme as a whole: “A rigorous and sequential approach to the reading curriculum develops pupils’ fluency, confidence and enjoyment in reading” (DfE, 2024). Within each unit, pupils use and apply skills called the **Mastery keys**. These have been selected from the reading section of the national curriculum (DfE, 2013), with the full range of year group skills covered to meet age-related expectations. Throughout each unit, the **Mastery keys** are taught explicitly, and pupils have multiple opportunities to practise and apply them. This repeated structure “over time builds pupils’ reading fluency, linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world, and does not limit them to responding to exam-style questions” (DfE, 2024).

How are the texts chosen in **Pathways to Read**?

As Doug Lemov (2016) states, there is a need to “consider not just whether each book students read is “good” but what the totality of the texts [teachers] choose for students accomplishes.” Across KS1 and KS2, pupils are introduced to a range of fiction, non-fiction and poetry to ensure their primary school reading diet is varied and rich. **Pathways to Read** books are chosen primarily on their literary merit, engaging images, appropriate word reading pitch and the right amount of new vocabulary. Ofsted’s *Telling the Story* report urges that schools should “choose texts for study in English first and foremost on literary merit” (DfE, 2024).

In terms of pitch, “it is important to consider how a text may extend pupils’ reading comprehension capabilities: too easy and pupils do not need to use the strategies, too hard and they cannot understand the text” (EEF, 2021). Therefore, complexity of language and theme develops over time as do the **Mastery keys**. Whilst engaging with these texts, pupils will experience “mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors” (Sims Bishop, 1990) so that they see themselves reflected in what they read and “have the opportunity to investigate other lives, worlds and perspectives” (Johns-Shepherd, 2020). The texts are matched appropriately to the **Mastery keys** so there is plenty of opportunity to practise and master them. For schools that also use **Pathways to Write**, there is a direct link with the texts used so that learning is connected across the curriculum. This is supported by Hirsch’s research, “that children must develop deep knowledge of both the ‘word and the world’, and in so doing will build greater reading comprehension abilities” (Hirsch, 2003).

How does **Pathways to Read** develop reading fluency?

“As children gain fluency, their motivation increases: they start to enjoy reading more and are willing to do more of it” (DfE, 2023). The EEF has defined reading fluency as “reading with accuracy (reading words correctly), automaticity (reading words at an appropriate speed without great effort) and prosody (appropriate expression, stress and intonation)” (EEF, 2021). A growing bank of evidence suggests that developing fluency is key to supporting pupils in becoming competent readers. Fluency is considered to be a bridge from word recognition to comprehension (Green, 2021).

Within **Pathways to Read**, teachers are given clear instructions on how to model fluency effectively, considering pace, smoothness, phrasing and expression. This is particularly effective in supporting those pupils who are not keeping up with the curriculum (DfE, 2013) as pupils are able to hear the text modelled fluently first, supported by their peers or repeating reading. Pupils are then given the opportunity to practise explicit

fluency strategies in pairs before reading independently. This aligns with the EEF's recommendation of a Gradual Release of Responsibility approach (EEF, 2021).

How does **Pathways to Read** meet the needs of all learners?

Unit by unit, year by year, texts used within **Pathways to Read** become increasingly more challenging and the mastery skills progress. However, the programme also supports pupils who are not keeping up with the curriculum through “flexible grouping, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies [and] explicit instruction” (EEF, 2021).



The *Progression in Reading Skills* document supports teachers in how to adapt their questioning to challenge and support all pupils and target individuals' needs. This document will aid in supporting pupils with lower prior attainment who “may particularly benefit from being explicitly taught reading comprehension strategies” (EEF, 2021). This would run alongside a catch-up programme of phonics, but it is important that pupils who participate in catch-up phonics should be supported to develop reading comprehension strategies using books pitched at their age-group standard. This follows DfE (2013) guidance, which states that “as far as possible, these pupils should follow the...programme of study in terms of listening to new books, hearing and learning new vocabulary and grammatical structures, and discussing these”.

How does **Pathways to Read** support reading for pleasure?

“When children’s personal responses are honoured and connections are made with the texts of popular culture and their interests, their involvement and pleasure in learning and writing increases” (Cremin, 2017).

A vast amount of research has been carried out on the importance of instilling a love of reading, particularly since the publication of the DfE’s research evidence on reading for pleasure (DfE, 2012). Evidence from recent PIRLS surveys (DfE, 2021) also shows that independent, choice-led reading was a strong predictor - not just of reading attainment but also broader educational achievement. In England, children who reported that they like reading attained significantly higher on average than those who reported that they did not like it (PIRLS, 2021). As such, developing a love of reading is a cornerstone of **Pathways to Read**: from the choice of rich, engaging texts to the weekly session that is devoted to book talk and reading for pleasure. The use of real books and a variety of styles of fiction and non-fiction is paramount in supporting budding readers to foster a love of books and reading.

Why is oracy such an important feature of **Pathways to Read**?

James Britton said “reading and writing float on a sea of talk” (Britton, 1970), a concept echoed by the national curriculum (DfE, 2013) which states “pupils should be taught to participate in discussion about books, poems and other works that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say” (DfE, 2013). Therefore, oracy is a golden thread running through all the **Pathways Literacy** programmes. Spoken language is integrated progressively so pupils may develop their ability to communicate effectively, talking to learn whilst also learning to talk through drama, group discussion, speaking and listening

activities. This ensures that pupils are immersed in stories and characters, can articulate their thoughts and use exploratory talk to develop their ideas.

How does Pathways to Read develop pupils' vocabulary?

Alongside key reading skills, **Pathways to Read** builds in extensive opportunities to develop and apply vocabulary. As Alex Quigley says, teachers must have an “awareness of choosing the right words to teach,” and investigate meaning with pupils before reading a text (Quigley, 2018). In every **Pathways to Read** unit, specific tier 2 and 3 vocabulary is identified (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2013) and time to investigate these words is built into the planning. This ensures coverage across the year and supports teachers in identifying words that need explicit teaching. This planned approach to clarifying words and the meaningful, repeated exposure through engaging and purposeful activities is recommended by the EEF in their guidance report of 2021.

How is early reading developed?

Approaches to develop early reading should be integrated successfully alongside developing communication and language. In EYFS and Year 1, phonics should be taught systematically and rigorously to support pupils to master word reading. A key component of **Pathways to Read** in KS1 is the continued focus on accuracy with decoding so that pupils develop their fluency, which is “the bridge from phonics to word study and comprehension” (Rasinski, 2022). Reading fluently allows pupils to redirect their cognitive resources from decoding to comprehending the text (Green, 2021).

Pathways to Read follows a structured sequence of learning: pupils develop early reading skills, make predictions, learn new vocabulary, answer retrieval questions and make inferences. In Year 2, a whole-class and grouped reading model is recommended to ensure pupils work in groups matched to their word reading ability. Group sessions allow for the modelling of key strategies and the application of targeted support. This builds on the models used in SSP programmes. It supports pupils to develop their confidence and fluency with a text matched to their GPC knowledge without losing exposure to high-quality texts through the shared sessions. “During Year 2, teachers should continue to focus on establishing pupils’ accurate and speedy word-reading skills.... The sooner that pupils can read well and do so frequently, the sooner they will be able to increase their vocabulary, comprehension and their knowledge across the wider curriculum” (DfE, 2013). In **Pathways to Read**, pupils will also have the opportunity for repeated practice of mastery skills which will continue to build throughout KS2 as new skills are introduced.

Pathways to Read is constantly evolving and adapting to the educational climate. The latest research and pedagogy drive reflection to ensure that the programme remains a relevant and high-quality product to support the teaching of reading in primary schools.

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