LEADERSHIP WRITING AUDIT:

Before investing in writing PD, ask yourself these 9 questions

Writing is one of the most important skills we can build in students – and one of the hardest to improve at a whole-school level.

But the research is consistent: the schools that improve are the ones with a whole-school approach and a passionate leader driving the change.

40% of Year 5 boys aren't writing at the expected standard *(NAPLAN 2025)*

85% of Year 9 students are writing below Year 7 level *(AERO 2022)*

FOR SCHOOL LEADERS FROM FOUNDATION–YEAR 10

	THE QUESTIONS TO ASK:	WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS:
1	***CHUNK LARGE TASKS*** Are we explicitly teaching writing skills before expecting students to write a whole text?	Chunking writing down into discrete, manageable skills taught one at a time reduces the cognitive load for students. Dylan Wiliam describes cognitive load theory as "the single most important thing for teachers to know." **When we overload students, learning stalls.** *Wiliam (cited in NWS CESE, 2017)*
2	***THINK FIRST, WRITE SECOND*** Are we teaching students how to generate ideas and plan their texts *before* they start writing?	Teaching planning strategies leads to significant gains in writing quality. **Good writing starts in the mind, not on the page**, yet most students are never explicitly taught how to think before they write. For all ability levels, planning makes a measurable difference. *Arrimada, Torrance & Fidalgo (2019): Lienemann et al (2006)*
3	***REPETITION BUILDS MUSCLE MEMORY*** How often are students practising specific writing skills each week?	Deliberate practice is the key to improving student performance. Occasional extended tasks don't develop writing skills. **Daily, focused practice** does. *Hattie (2009): Pinker (1997)*
4	***VERBAL IS VITAL*** How much structured talk is happening before students write?	**Speaking and listening are *"the roots of reading and writing."*** The classrooms where students are buzzing with ideas – sharing, debating, reading their work aloud – are the ones where writing improves fastest. *Rose (2006): Marzano et al (2001)*
5	***CONSISTENCY CREATES CHANGE*** Do your teachers and students have a shared understanding of what great writing looks like?	Whole-school improvement relies on **consistent language, expectations and practices across every classroom**. Without this, students start from scratch with each new teacher. *Kleinhenz & Fleming (2007): Lester, Allanson & Notar (2017)*
6	***AUTHORIAL TRUMPS SECRETARIAL*** When teachers give feedback on writing, do they focus on the skills that make the biggest impact?	**Good writing is about ideas, structure and voice.** NAPLAN reflects this – 8 of the 10 criteria focus on authorial skills (aka composition skills), yet most teacher feedback focuses on spelling and grammar.
7	***RISK-TAKING BUILDS CREATIVITY*** Do students feel comfortable taking creative risks when they write?	**Creativity is a skill, not a talent** – and schools can either build it or erode it. Students who are given permission to experiment, take risks and find their own voice grow faster as writers. NAPLAN rewards it too. *Robinson (2015)*
8	***CULTURE CREATES PASSION*** Do your students see writing as something they *get* to do, or something they *have* to do?	A positive writing culture is one where students feel **safe to take risks, experiment and find their voice**. When writing feels like a creative opportunity rather than a chore, engagement and outcomes improve.
9	***MASTER WRITING BEFORE AI*** Are the skills your students are building now ones that will serve them in an AI world?	The primary years are when voice, creative thinking and authorial confidence are formed. **Students need to know how to write before they can meaningfully use AI** as a tool to help them write.

Sevensteps to Writing Success

We've spent 20 years helping schools transform writing.
We'd love to help yours. Book in for a free chat: