



Research, Design and Summary

Seven Steps to Writing Success

Qualifications of Course Author

Jen McVeity (BA, MA Prelim, Did ED)

- Jen is the author of over 20 books for children. Her books are multi-award winning (including NY Library Best Books List) and have been published in five countries. Dreamcatcher was set as a set text in over 100 Australian schools.
- A Maths and English teacher for ten years she served on both regional and state curriculum committees.
- Awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2003, Jen showcased the books of 40 Australian authors to USA publishers. The publishing contracts and networks established during that time have greatly increased the USA-Australian publishing connections.
- In 2006-7 Jen served as a National Literacy Champion in Australia.
- A highly acclaimed and sought after keynote speaker, Jen has presented the principals of the Seven Steps to writers in six countries and nine USA states. She has spoken to over half a million people in ten years.
- For nine years, Jen was the Australian head of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. This is the largest writing organization in the world.
- She was the first Australian ever elected to their international Board of Directors. Other members include Judy Blume, Bruce Coville and the editor of Harry Potter, Arthur Levine.
- 2003-5 Jen was elected Chair of the International Board.
- The *Seven Steps to Writing Success* was created in 2004 to engage students in writing and to simplify the teaching of writing. The program is based on four 'best practice' pedagogy principles and seven effective author techniques. Over 5000 teachers a year are trained in the program.



The programs offer quality design and delivery

The *Seven Steps to Writing Success* course represents exemplary design and delivery.

The content of the course is reflective of the expertise and experience of course developer Jen McVeity as both an educator and published author. Her deep understanding of writing ensures a rich knowledge base to the course, while her educational background informs the course's practicality, accessibility and concern for quality pedagogy. The course is highly relevant to all teachers from K-12 as instruction in writing is core business for educators and tied to current educational literacy priorities.

Organised according to the Seven Steps, the course is clear and well-structured, building upon teachers' pre-existing knowledge and skills. Exemplifying features of effective professional learning, it encourages professional collaboration, discussion and sharing, models "best practice" classroom activities for supporting student writing and engages participants in active tasks. The course takes an innovative approach to teaching writing and is presented in a fun, lively manner that maximises participant engagement and learning. It also equips participants with a collection of high-quality resources to aid learning during the session as well as supporting in-school implementation and further professional development beyond the workshop. A highly informative website, offering a wealth of free resources and a monthly email newsletter, also add to the richness of this course.

The emphasis on student talking, group brainstorming and short, practical, engaging activities is consistent with "best practice" in teaching boys, indigenous students and ESL (EAL/D) learners as well as the broader student cohort. To ensure relevance to a wide range of KLAs and applicability to future NAPLAN testing, both narrative and persuasive writing is addressed in the course. Schools who have previously undertaken the *Seven Steps to Writing Success* course have indicated significant gains in NAPLAN writing results in subsequent years.



Research basis of the course.

Seven Steps to Writing Success is primarily based upon the expertise of course developer Jen McVeity as both an educator and published author. Her work as both a teacher and as an award-winning professional writer informed a conceptualisation of teaching writing as a seven-step program as explicated in this course; a deep understanding of both writing and teaching practice is reflected in this professional learning activity. The seven steps were derived from McVeity's identification of the most common weaknesses in student writing and her expertise in assisting students to overcome these. "Best practice" in classroom instruction is evident in the course's insistence on highly engaging student activities, pair and group work, chunking work into manageable components, an emphasis on thinking and talking before writing, and practice and repetition of learned skills to attain mastery. The course draws upon the work of Hammond & Gibbons (2001) in stressing the importance of talk as a scaffold for writing for all students, but particularly those from ESL (EAL/D) backgrounds and those with learning difficulties. The success of the course, in terms of both participant evaluations of its value as professional development and its positive impact on student writing achievement, attest to the sound conceptual, theoretical and pedagogical bases of this course.

The course is also underpinned by recent research into effective modes of professional learning as referenced by authors such as Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995), Cardno (2005) and Hunzicker (2011). According to such researchers, teacher development opportunities that have most impact upon changed practice and student improvement are those that involve "reflection and experimentation" (Darling-Hammond et al, 1995), are "collaborative, active and interactive" and are "instructionally focused... with an emphasis on student learning outcomes" (Hunzicker, 2011). *Seven Steps to Writing Success* incorporates all of these components: in a course that is framed by instructional improvement for student writing achievement, participants reflect upon current teaching practice and student writing achievement, experiment with different writing activities and strategies and collaborate with others in practical, interactive activities, sharing and discussion.

This course also offers opportunities for the context-based, sustained professional learning advocated by Cardno (2005) and others as trained staff return to their schools empowered to lead the implementation of the Seven Steps in their faculties, Stages or schools and continue their learning through the *Seven Steps to Writing Success* Teacher Manuals, e-newsletter, website and contacts.



References

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Summary of the course

This course trains teachers in the *Seven Steps to Writing Success* framework for the effective teaching of writing, deriving from the weaknesses most frequently encountered in students' written work. The course is founded upon the principle of chunking writing into discrete, teachable elements of which students attain mastery through repetition. Emphasis is given to the importance of talking, brainstorming and planning before writing, encouraging group and paired approaches – with reference throughout to ESL (EAL/D), LD and young students for whom this scaffolding is particularly important. Brain theory, examining alpha (subconscious, creative) and beta (conscious, logical) brain waves is included to support teachers in facilitating a fun, creative approach to teaching writing through their classroom environment and activities. *Seven Steps to Writing Success* also utilises the experience and expertise of the author of over 20 books who developed the course. Participants are provided with documents and insights from the writing and publishing process that illustrate various steps throughout the course.

The seven steps that form the course are:

- 1) Plan for Success
- 2) Sizzling Starts
- 3) Tightening Tension
- 4) Dynamic Dialogue
- 5) Show, Don't Tell
- 6) Ban the Boring
- 7) Endings with Impact.

For each of the seven steps, participants: are introduced to the theory underpinning it; experience fun, practical classroom activities that model those to be used with students; engage with numerous examples and applications of the step across a range of text types; and are presented with a number of classroom activities and suggested lesson sequences to guide the implementation of the step back in the classroom. The course utilises "before" and "after" examples to illustrate how common student writing weaknesses can be addressed through teaching and learning in the relevant step. Participants are continually encouraged to reflect upon their own students' writing and how they will use the seven steps to foster improvement.

In Step 1 (Plan for Success), teachers are introduced to the story graph through explanation and illustrative examples and are shown how to use it to guide students' planning for narrative or persuasive texts. They participate in a practical group activity brainstorming and planning for either a narrative or a persuasive writing task and share this with another group. They are shown actual examples of planning from published authors' work.

seven steps



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Step 2 (Sizzling Starts) sees participants learn about starting stories at a moment of impact and backfilling to provide context. In a modelled classroom exercise, they practise writing a number of effective beginnings in a short time frame and share with their group. They consider a number of examples of effective orientations from literary and media texts and how engaging beginnings are rewarded in NAPLAN.

In Step 3 (Tightening Tension), teachers examine powerful tension scenes in film, literature and speeches and learn about the rule of three, the manipulation of time and the utilisation of description incorporating six senses as important techniques to increase the richness of student writing. They experience a fun group activity writing a tension scene using six-sense description.

Step 4 (Dynamic Dialogue) provides participants with an understanding of levels of conversation and the three functions of dialogue in texts. In pairs, they undertake a fast-paced, engaging classroom exercise in which they build a written dialogue from a provocative opening line.

In Step 5 (Show, Don't Tell), teachers learn about the role of prioritising the specific over the general to create more convincing writing in both narrative and persuasive texts and see this exemplified in a range of media texts. Participants engage in a fun group activity composing a convincing persuasive text that "shows" rather than "tells" and share their work with another group.

Step 6 (Ban the Boring Bits) involves an exploration of the "routine" elements that weaken students' writing and provides advice on remedying this through teacher training in different types of editing and feedback. They see actual examples of edits from authors' work. Participants read some student writing and offer advice for improvement.

In Step 7 (Endings with Impact), teachers are introduced to ways to improve students' narrative and persuasive text endings through better planning using the story graph. They consider examples of effective endings in media texts and planning for endings in authors' manuscripts.

Following this, the key course concepts are reinforced and participants apply the seven steps to a final fun group activity involving the composition of an entertaining recount.