The Five Secrets to Teaching Great Writing

The Five Secrets that underpin the Seven Steps are based on best-practice pedagogy and supported by years of educational research. Find out more about these underlying principles in the research links below.

The Five Secrets	Summary of Research	Further Reading
CHUNK LARGE TASKS	**Gradual release of responsibility** – the gradual release model is broadly recognised as a successful approach for moving classroom instruction from teacher-centred, whole-group delivery to student-centred collaboration and independent practice. Sometimes referred to as 'I do, we do, you do', this model proposes a plan of instruction that includes demonstration, prompt, and practice. Doug Fisher and Nancy Frey (2008) took the model a step further: 'I do it, we do it, you do it together, you do it on your own'. This additional step provides more support for students as they move from guided instruction to group work, and on to independent learning.	Pearson, P.D. & Gallagher, M. (1983). *The instruction of reading comprehension. Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 8(3), 317–345. Retrieved from www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/17939/ctrstreadtechrepv01983i00297_opt.pdf Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2008). *Better learning through structured teaching: A framework for the gradual release of responsibility*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
	Scaffolding – Educational (or Instructional) Scaffolding is a teaching method that enables students to learn and master new skills through a gradual shedding of outside assistance. It involves breaking tasks into smaller, more manageable parts to suit the individual needs of the learner. Most people trace this concept back to Lev Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the 'zone of proximal development'. However, the term scaffold, as applied to learning situations, was first coined by researchers David Wood (Nottingham), Jerome Bruner (Oxford) and Gail Ross (Harvard) in their 1976 report, 'The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving'.	Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Wood, D., Bruner, J.S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 89–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x
	Cognitive load theory – Dylan Wiliam has described cognitive load theory as 'the single most important thing for teachers to know'. If a student's working memory is overloaded, there is a risk that they will not understand the content being taught and that their learning will be slow and/or ineffective. Cognitive load theory provides support for explicit models of instruction.	New South Wales. Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2017). *Cognitive load theory: Research that teachers really need to understand*. Retrieved from www.cese.nsw.gov.au//images/stories/PDF/cognitive-load-theory-VR_AA3.pdf
	Explicit instruction – According to Archer and Hughes (2011), 'Instructional delivery is characterized by clear descriptions and demonstrations of a skill, followed by supported practice and timely feedback'. John Fleming (2014, 2015) says that 'for any learning activity to be effective it has to be taught step by step'. Using explicit instruction techniques in the classroom, he found that if you break skills up step by step, students will pick it up and can achieve far greater results.	Archer, A. & Hughes, C. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. Meloney, D. (Presenter). (2014, Jun 6). *Teaching methods Episode 1: Explicit instruction with John Fleming* [Audio podcast with transcript]. Retrieved from www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/teaching-methods Meloney, D. (Presenter). (2015, Sep 25). *Teaching methods: John Fleming – explicit instruction myths and strategies* [Audio podcast with transcript]. Retrieved from www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/john-fleming-explicit-instruction-myths-and-strategies

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REPETITION BUILDS MUSCLE MEMORY	**Deliberate practice** – According to Hattie (2009), deliberate practice is the key to improving student performance. Deliberate practice involves specific teaching of a skill, making the success criteria explicit, and giving feedback to reduce the gap between student performance and success criteria. He also discusses the critical importance of techniques such as *rehearsal* and *review*.	Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement.* Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
	Memory – According to Pinker (1997/2009), our brains will logically access memories that are useful, that have been repeated, and that require the least effort. Because memory works this way, it is imperative to provide students with the necessary repetition to ensure that memories become easier to access.	Pinker, S. (1997). *How the mind works.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. Reprinted 2009.
	Recalling information – According to research by Richard Mayer (1983), recall of conceptual principles and related information increases sharply with repetition.	Mayer, R.E. (1983). Can you repeat that? Qualitative effects of repetition and advance organizers on learning from science prose. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75(1), 40–49. *https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.75.1.40*
THINK FIRST, WRITE SECOND	**Prewriting strategies** – According to Kellogg (1990), by introducing discrete pre-planning or 'stop and think' activities into the writing process, students can separate the processing of higher-level text features from word and sentence production, thus reducing potential competition.	Kellogg, R.T. (1990). Effectiveness of prewriting strategies as a function of task demands. *American Journal of Psychology*, 103(3), 327–342. *https://doi.org/10.2307/1423213*
	Planning strategies – Findings of a study conducted with first-grade writers suggest that teaching planning strategies can lead to significant gains in text structure and overall quality of narrative and persuasive writing. Students' stories were more coherent, had better structure, included more sophisticated narrative content (the Episode measure) and were rated as having higher overall quality than those produced by students in the control group.	Arrimada, M., Torrance, M. & Fidalgo, R. (2019). Effects of teaching planning strategies to first-grade writers. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(4), 670–688. *https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12251*
	This is also true for struggling writers as demonstrated by a study conducted with second-grade writers, including children with disabilities. Instruction had a positive impact on students' writing, as their stories were longer, more complete, and, with the exception of one student, qualitatively better.	Lienemann, T.O., Graham, S., Leader-Janssen, B. & Reid, R. (2006). Improving the writing performance of struggling writers in second grade. *Journal of Special Education*, 40(2), 66–78. *https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669060400020301*
	The writing wheel – Scott and Vitale's writing wheel breaks the writing process down into the following stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. The prewriting stage takes up almost half the wheel, and includes planning, goal-setting and organising.	Scott, B.J., & Vitale, M.R. (2003). Teaching the writing process to students with LD. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 38(4), 220–224. *https://doi.org/10.1177/105345120303800404*

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VERBAL IS VITAL	**Cooperative learning** – According to Marzano (2001), cooperative learning allows students to develop a shared understanding of outcomes and opportunities to interact with peers, reflect on new knowledge, process learning through discussion, and listen with peers. Therefore, teachers must create learning environments where students work in small groups and are engaged in deep learning through discussions in those groups.	Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J., & Pollock, J.E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
	The reader in the writer – Barrs and Cork (2001) researched the links between literature and writing development in a Year 5 classroom and found that skilful reading aloud within the classroom improved students' writing. They also found that traditional tales, many of which have an oral basis, 'have a particularly important role to play in children's narrative education, providing a bridge from oracy to literacy for young children'. Hearing texts read aloud better enabled students to mimic the literary patterns, structures and techniques in their own writing.	Barrs, M. & Cork, V. (2001). *The reader in the writer.* London: Centre for Language in Primary Education.
	Speaking and listening – According to the Rose review (2006), 'listening and speaking are the roots of reading and writing'. The report stressed the 'importance of children learning cooperatively in language-rich contexts'. The key recommendation was that 'greater attention should be given to the development of children's speaking and listening skills because they provide the foundation for high quality phonic work'.	Rose, J, (2006). *Independent review of the teaching of early reading: Final report.* Department for Education and Skills, UK. Retrieved from *https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf*
CONSISTENCY CREATES CHANGE	**Consistent routines** – John Fleming (2007) campaigns for a strong and consistent routine being witnessed in all classrooms: one that begins with an explanation to students of the lesson intent and includes fast-paced warm-ups focused on core content, explicit teaching using a simple process of 'I do, we do, you do', and constant revision and reinforcement. Routines within a school and in the classroom provide the right environment for learning to take place. For these routines to be effective, they must be practised consistently (Lester, Allanson & Notar, 2017).	Kleinhenz, E. & Fleming, J. (2007). *Towards a moving school: Developing a professional learning and performance culture.* Camberwell, Vic: ACER Press. Lester, R.R., Allanson, P.B. & Notar, C.E. (2017). Routines are the foundation of classroom management. *Education, 137*(4), 398–412.