

Unlock Writing Success Part 1: The Important Role of Oral Composition

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Writing presents a **hugely complex task** for our youngest learners. This series of blogs explores key messages from the [DfE Writing Framework](#) and [Ofsted's Strong Foundations in the First Year of School](#) report, emphasising why securing early writing skills is **crucial for a child's educational journey**. We are committed to **getting writing right** at WISE Academies Trust, and throughout this series you'll find an exploration of the pivotal areas we prioritise and a list of evidence-based resources from the [EEF's Early Years Evidence Store](#) to deepen your understanding. **In Part 1 we will explore the important role of oral composition.**

Oral Composition: Language as the Bedrock of Writing

Ofsted states simply: **"Language is the bedrock of thinking and learning. It should be a priority in the curriculum."** Before a child can write a sentence, they must be able to say it. Oral composition—the process of saying aloud what they want to write—is repeatedly emphasised as the mechanism for developing this skill.

Quality Over Quantity: Managing Cognitive Load

The DfE Writing Framework provides a critical warning: **Do not push children into lengthy writing tasks too early.** Instead, it advocates for a focus on **quality over length**.

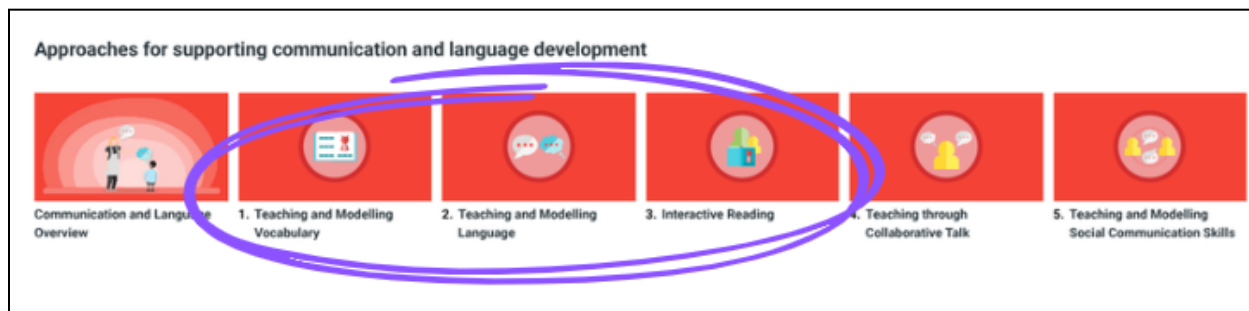
"Pupils should be encouraged to **compose orally while they are developing their transcription skills.**"

The guidance suggests that the *majority* of composition in the early years will be oral. Crucially, oral composition should be **taught separately** from transcription to effectively mitigate cognitive load. By delaying the physical demands of writing, we free the child's mind to focus entirely on generating high-quality ideas and structure.


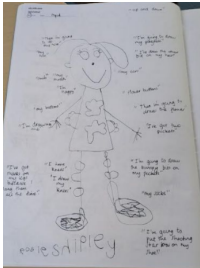

WISE Academies' Evidence-Based Progression


To ensure effective oral composition practice, WISE Academies provides educators with a progressional bank of activities, carefully sequenced from our 2-year-old provision through to Reception.

This progression is explicitly informed by the [EEF Early Years Evidence Store: Communication and Language](#). Evidence suggests that **'Teaching and Modelling Vocabulary,' 'Teaching and Modelling Language,' and 'Interactive Reading'** have the most positive outcomes on children's communication and language skills, which are **prerequisite for composition**.



See below for an example of some of the evidence-informed activities we have implemented.

EEF Approach & Definition	2-Year-Olds (Exploration & Connection)	Nursery (Ages 3-4) (Structure & Expansion)	Reception (Ages 4-5) (Fluency & Independence)
<p>1. Teaching and Modelling Vocabulary (Systematic introduction and reinforcement of new words)</p>	<p>Core Rhymes: Use highly repetitive rhymes and songs to ensure high exposure to and reinforcement of key functional words and sounds. Adult models and prompts imitation of single, high-impact words (e.g., <i>squashy</i>, <i>fast</i>).</p>	<p>Core Rhyme Substitution Games: Sing familiar rhymes, missing out key words for children to recall. Introduce variations (e.g., Old MacDonald) to model how new vocabulary fits into existing sentence structures.</p> 	<p>Topic Talk: Systematically introduce and model new descriptive and academic vocabulary relevant to focused topics (e.g., "enormous," "investigate") for children to use in their own verbal compositions.</p>
<p>2. Teaching and Modelling Language (Explicitly supporting children's understanding of sentence structures and grammar.)</p>	<p>Basic Labelling & Expansion: Encourage children to add meaning to their marks or simple gestures (e.g., "Look! Big!"). The adult acknowledges and echoes the meaning back using a full, grammatically correct sentence to model structure.</p>	<p>Adult Scribing/Transcription: The child draws a picture, and the adult transcribes <i>exactly</i> what the child says about it. This clearly models that spoken language can be captured as complete, written sentences. (This links to our 'Scribble Matters' approach - - see our case study for more information).</p> 	<p>Orally Rehearse Complex Sentences: Educator to model composing a sentence for children to transcribe. Routinely prompt children to orally rehearse the full sentence (three times) before attempting transcription. This builds fluency, reduces cognitive burden and consolidates the verbal model.</p>
<p>3. Interactive Reading (Adults engage children in high-quality dialogue during shared reading, asking open-ended questions.)</p>	<p>Refrain & Simple Retell: Encourage children to join in with predictable repeated refrains (building aural memory for text structure). Use photographs from home to encourage simple, basic event recounting.</p>	<p>Predicting & Character: Encourage children to suggest what might happen next in a story. Facilitate talk about character feelings and motivations, leading to more elaborate and structured verbal responses and retells.</p> 	<p>Narrative Extension & Composition: Encourage children to make up new stories or alternative endings to match pictures in wordless books or prompts. The focus is on structuring a logical plot flow with a clear beginning, problem, and resolution.</p>

Take a moment to reflect  Consider your daily practice and the crucial role of oracy:

- How often do you give children the opportunity to develop their **oral composition/language skills separately to writing?** (e.g. time to plan and rehearse ideas without the immediate pressure of holding a pencil).
- During a **dictated writing task** what immediate impact would structured **oral rehearsal** (saying the whole sentence three times) have on reducing their **cognitive frustration** and errors?

This deliberate focus on fluent oral composition, alongside the development of **automatic transcription** (our focus in Part 2!), creates the **strongest foundation** for our youngest writers. We give them the tools to navigate the complex world of writing, ensuring that their creative ideas can eventually flow freely and accurately onto the page.

If you would like to explore the WISE Academies writing strategy in greater detail, please join our webinar: '**Unlock Early Writing Success: A Practical Approach with WISE Academies**'. The session takes place on **Wednesday, January 14th, 3:30 pm - 5:00 pm**. Further details and booking information are available [here](#).

Further Reading List

This reading list compiles the key guidance documents and foundational research models that support the explicit teaching of oral composition discussed in this blog.

- **Department for Education (DfE).** (2025) *The Writing Framework (Non-Statutory Guidance)*.
 - Source: [The writing framework - GOV.UK](#)
- **Ofsted.** (2024) *Strong foundations in the first years of school*.
 - Source: [Strong foundations in the first years of school - GOV.UK](#)
- **Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).** *Early Years Evidence Store: Communication and Language*.
 - Source: [EEF Early Years Evidence Store: Communication and Language](#)
- **Great North Early Years Stronger Practice Hub.** (2025) *Case Study: Scribble Matters – Integrating Drawing and Oral Language in Early Years*
 - Source: [GNEYSPPH Resource Section](#)