

# Developing Writing Skills for GCSE English Resit Learners

## Important note

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## Course details

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <b>Title of content</b>    | <b>Developing Writing Skills for GCSE English Resit Learners</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Learning objectives</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explore how to embed deeper planning, structure and tone-awareness into your writing curriculum to improve learner outcomes</li><li>• Develop and apply teacher modelling and collaborative writing strategies to support learners' independence and confidence in non-fiction writing.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Description</b>         | <p>In this course, you'll explore how you can help GCSE English resit learners to plan, structure and develop more confident non-fiction writing.</p> <p>You'll consider how tone, audience and format influence exam success and discover how teacher modelling and collaborative writing can support progress. You'll also access practical strategies and resources to use with your learners right away.</p> <p>(This course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.)</p> |

|                               |                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Who's this course for?</b> | Educators working with learners who are re-sitting GCSE English |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|

## Course content

### Module 1: Planning and structuring non-fiction writing

#### Lesson: Welcome and introduction

##### Page: Welcome to the course

#### Welcome to 'Developing Writing Skills for GCSE English Resit Learners'

This short on-demand course was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and developed by the Education Training Foundation (ETF).

It's part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

#### What will you cover?

'Developing Writing Skills for GCSE English Resit Learners' is all about how to better support learners with the non-fiction writing process – from start to finish.

The course will provide bitesize advice and helpful links.

You should meet the following learning objectives:

- Explore how to embed deeper planning, structure and tone-awareness into your writing curriculum to improve learner outcomes
- Develop and apply teacher modelling and collaborative writing strategies to support learners' independence and confidence in non-fiction writing.

As you move through the course and discover new information, ideas and perspectives, you can refer to these objectives and check your progress against them.

#### Resources and media

The resources in this self-directed resource are available to use under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#) except where otherwise stated.

## Lesson: What's happening in this module?

### Page: Welcome to Module 1

#### Welcome to Module 1

This module focuses on practical ways to support learners with planning, structuring and writing non-fiction texts.

The strategies covered are particularly valuable for GCSE English learners – but they can be adapted across levels and contexts.

You'll explore:

- how to teach tone and audience in a way that builds confidence and exam-readiness
- practical planning strategies that help learners to generate and organise ideas
- ways to support learners in structuring non-fiction texts with clarity and purpose
- how to give effective feedback that encourages reflection and progress.

## Lesson: Getting started with non-fiction writing

### Page: Areas of difficulty

Non-fiction writing can be a major hurdle for many learners. The causes are complex – some learners haven't encountered real-world examples of the genres they're expected to produce in exams. Others feel overwhelmed by the number of decisions they must make at once: topic, structure, tone, audience, grammar and more.

Common difficulties include:

- not knowing where to start
- confusing formal and informal tone
- underdeveloped or overly brief responses
- disorganised paragraphs
- lack of clarity on what a good piece of writing *looks* like.

While some of these difficulties relate to learners' skills, others are rooted in a lack of confidence or motivation, or prior negative experiences of English.

It's crucial for teachers to unpick both the technical and the emotional barriers.

## Pause and reflect

Think of a recent piece of non-fiction writing your learners attempted.

- What did they find most difficult?
- How do you currently help them to overcome that?

## Page: Planning

Planning is often seen by learners as a formality – a hoop to jump through before ‘getting on with the writing’. But almost all writing benefits from planning – and for weaker or disengaged learners, planning is **the key scaffold** that helps them to access the whole task.

Planning tools should help learners to organise ideas, not overwhelm them. The key is to introduce simple, structured options and model their use clearly.

### Three useful planning tools

Here are three useful planning tools to trial with learners.

- **Spinning wheel**  
These wheel-shaped templates can be populated with a range of things and then ‘spun’ to generate tasks or topics for discussion. For example, you could fill them with activities, language or persuasive features. Consider [this example](#).
- **Mind maps**  
These commonly used tools resemble networks or webs spreading out from a central concept. They are great for learners who think in networks rather than lists. Consider [this example](#).
- **Lotus blossom planning**  
This model allows learners to break a central concept into sub concepts. The sub concepts are placed around the central concept like petals on a lotus flower. The model is ideal for expanding on a key theme with supporting ideas. Consider [this example](#).

Whichever tool you choose, consider creating a whole-class version and building it together. Invite learners to add their own ideas, colour code themes or draw links between points. Keep the class tool visible during the writing phase to support structure and coherence.

## Case study: Jamal’s journey with writing

### Jamal’s journey

For some learners, planning tools are just useful. In other cases, they enable struggling learners to gradually take more ownership over their writing and build confidence.

The results can be powerful, as the following case study illustrates.

*“Jamal, a 17-year-old GCSE resit learner, often described himself as “bad at writing” and avoided extended tasks. He would start writing without planning and quickly run out of ideas, usually handing in only a few sentences.*

*With support, Jamal’s teacher introduced structured planning tools and modelled how to use them. At first, Jamal was sceptical, but when he tried a lotus blossom plan, he realised he could get his initial ideas on the page and branch out from them before starting to write.*

*Over time, scaffolding was gradually reduced, and Jamal began to take more ownership of structuring his ideas. By the middle of the year, he was producing longer, more confident pieces and admitted: “I used to just write whatever came into my head. Now I know how to plan and make it sound better.”*

## **Putting planning at the centre**

Here are three ways to make planning a more central, active part of your lessons.

- **Use model questions, not just model answers**  
Give learners plenty of exposure to appropriate questions and thought-provoking topics and spend time just *planning* responses before writing a word. This reduces pressure and increases familiarity with structures.
- **Visual planning tools**  
Try ‘planning grids’ or ‘point, evidence, explain, link (PEEL)’ columns to organise ideas. Learners with low literacy may benefit from colour coding or using images as prompts.
- **Plan collectively first**  
Co-planning as a class or in pairs models the process and gives learners a chance to hear others’ ideas. This can be a powerful motivator for reluctant writers.

## **Page: Scaffolding audience and tone**

Learners often struggle to write using an appropriate tone and formality – especially when writing articles, letters or speeches. They may also write in a tone they would use when speaking to a teacher or friend, not a wider audience.

To scaffold this, try using the following strategy.

### **The A.C.T. model**

- **Audience**  
Who am I writing for?
- **Context**  
What is the

- or purpose?
- **Tone**  
How formal/informal should my writing be?

For example, imagine you've asked your class to do the following:

*Write a letter to a headteacher about improving the school canteen.*

A learner using A.C.T. might note:

- **Audience:** Headteacher (adult in authority)
- **Context:** Complaint/suggestion
- **Tone:** Respectful, persuasive, informative

Providing structured prompts like this helps learners to develop tone-awareness and shifts their focus from simply 'getting ideas down' to tailoring their language for purpose and reader.

## Activity

Read the following prompt.

*Write a letter to your local MP explaining why your community needs more sports facilities.*

With this prompt in mind, answer each of the following questions.

### 1. What's the most effective way to help learners internalise the A.C.T. model over time?

- A. Use it only when assessing final drafts.
- B. Introduce it once, then let learners apply it independently.
- C. Embed it regularly in planning, drafting and peer review activities.
- D. Focus on correcting tone after the writing is complete.

### 2. A learner has identified the audience and context correctly in their writing but struggles with tone. What's the best next step?

- A. Provide model texts with different tones and ask the learner to compare them.
- B. Ask the learner to rewrite the letter.
- C. Focus on spelling and punctuation first.
- D. Tell the learner their tone is inappropriate.

## Answers

|   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | C - Repeated, embedded use helps learners develop tone-awareness as a habit, not just a one-off skill. The A.C.T. model is relevant to every text – so learners should even use it in their reading exam papers, as well as their writing ones. |
| 2 | A - Analysing models helps learners to see how tone shifts with audience and purpose, reinforcing the A.C.T. framework.                                                                                                                         |

## Page: Embedding structure through modelling

You may have taught structures like ‘point, evidence, explain, link (PEEL)’ or ‘5-paragraph essays’, but these are often too abstract for learners without ongoing modelling and practice.

Here are three other ways to deepen structural awareness.

- **Anchor paragraphs to points**

Give learners a model showing what each paragraph should achieve:

- Paragraph 1: Introduction to topic and argument
- Paragraph 2: Supporting point with example
- Paragraph 3: Counter-argument or alternative view
- Paragraph 4: Conclusion and personal stance

This clarity improves planning and avoids repetition or underdeveloped arguments.

- **Use visual outlines**

Try storyboards, flowcharts or paragraph frames. These help visual learners and learners with English as a second or additional language (sometimes referred to as ESOL learners) to sequence ideas before writing.

- **Highlight cohesion**

Teach paragraph openers and linking phrases such as:

- *“Firstly...”*
- *“On the other hand...”*
- *“This suggests that...”*

These give learners ‘connective banks’ to support their writing fluency.

### Activity

Which of the following helps learners to improve text structure?

- A. Writing without planning to sound more natural
- B. Using linking phrases like “Furthermore” or “In contrast”
- C. Skipping introductions and starting with examples

## Answer

B - Linking phrases like “Furthermore” or “In contrast” can be really useful.

## Pause and reflect

- What structural scaffolds do you already use with your learners?
- How could you adapt these to suit learners with lower confidence or literacy levels?

## Page: Making feedback meaningful

When giving feedback on non-fiction writing, it’s tempting to focus on surface features such as:

- missing capital letters
- full stops
- spelling mistakes.

However, to move learners forward, feedback needs to be **focused, developmental and manageable**. One powerful method is the 1-1-1 approach.

## The 1-1-1 approach

In this feedback approach, you suggest:

- 1 thing that was done well (eg “clear opening paragraph”)
- 1 area for development (eg “needs more persuasive techniques”)
- 1 next step (eg “try using rhetorical questions in your second paragraph”).

This keeps the feedback focused and avoids overwhelming learners with long lists of corrections.

Incorporate feedback into lesson routines with **DIRT (dedicated improvement and reflection time)**, where learners act directly on their targets – eg rewriting a paragraph or redrafting their intro.

## Activity

**Read each feedback comment below and decide if they are 'helpful' or 'unhelpful'.**

- "Your tone is engaging but casual for a formal letter—try replacing slang with professional language and consider removing contractions."
- "Re-write your first paragraph"

- "You've made strong points but consider whether your audience would relate to your examples. Try including references they can resonate with."
- "You've explained your viewpoint well, but to persuade your audience, you need to address counterarguments and explain why your position is stronger."
- "You need to write more"
- "Your tone is passionate, which suits the purpose—now refine it by removing repetition"

## Answers

|                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Your tone is engaging but casual for a formal letter—try replacing slang with professional language and consider removing contractions."              | <b>Helpful</b><br>This feedback is helpful as it provides specific guidance on tone and language, with actionable suggestions.                                               |
| "Re-write your first paragraph"                                                                                                                        | <b>Unhelpful</b><br>This feedback comment is unhelpful. It is vague and lacks guidance on how the learner can improve their writing.                                         |
| "You've made strong points but consider whether your audience would relate to your examples. Try including references they can resonate with."         | <b>Helpful</b><br>This feedback comment is helpful as it encourages awareness of the audience and provides a clear next step.                                                |
| "You've explained your viewpoint well, but to persuade your audience, you need to address counterarguments and explain why your position is stronger." | <b>Helpful</b><br>This feedback comment is helpful as it offers insight into persuasive writing techniques and provides a clear next step.                                   |
| "You need to write more"                                                                                                                               | <b>Unhelpful</b><br>This feedback comment is unhelpful. It doesn't explain what the learner should write more about or explain why their current response is insufficient.   |
| "Your tone is passionate, which suits the purpose—now refine it by removing repetition"                                                                | <b>Helpful</b><br>This feedback comment is helpful as it explores what the learner has done well in their writing so far and also provides a clear next step for refinement. |

## Pause and reflect

Think of a piece of writing you've recently received from a learner.

- How could you use the 1-1-1 method to provide feedback?

- What would the next step be?
- How could you build time into your lesson to make this improvement?

### Page: Using artificial intelligence to support writing practice

Before you reach the end of the module, watch the video below.

It explores how you might use artificial intelligence (AI) tools like CoPilot, Gemini and ChatGPT to help GCSE English resit learners practise their writing skills.

As you watch, note any ideas you could develop and/or try with your learners.

**Video:** <https://youtu.be/GKdeNcJr0pU>

(Please note: The AI tools used and mentioned in this video and throughout this course are just examples. Their inclusion is not intended as an endorsement.)

### Lesson: Review your learning

### Page: Well done

#### Well done – you’ve reached the end of Module 1

In this module, you explored four vital aspects of supporting non-fiction writing:

- embedding planning as a core skill
- teaching tone and audience using simple scaffolds
- structuring responses for clarity and cohesion
- how to give clear, simple feedback that encourages improvement and progress.

On the next page, you’ll have the opportunity to review the tools recommended during this module – and some additional reading.

### Page: Further resources

#### Links from this module

- [Tekhnologic | The Spinning Wheel 2018](#)
- [ReadWriteThink | Essay Map](#)
- [VisualParadigm Online | Lotus Blossom Technique Ideation Guide](#)
- [HMH | Free Graphic Organizer Templates \(including planning grids\)](#)
- [Studiosity | How to structure paragraphs using the PEEL method](#)

#### Additional reading

- [BBC Bitesize | Non-fiction writing](#)

- [BBC Bitesize | Writing non-fiction - AQA](#)
  - [EEF | Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools](#)
  - [Sage Journals | Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. \(2007\): \*The Power of Feedback\*](#)
  - William, D. (2011), *Embedded Formative Assessment* – Highly regarded book on formative feedback and classroom strategies. Available via libraries or online booksellers.
  - Myhill, D. (2018), *Grammar as Choice: Writing and Metalinguistic Development* – Discusses the relationship between grammar, structure and writing development. Available via university libraries or research platforms.
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## Module 2: Modelling and collaboration to improve writing skills

### Lesson: What's happening in this module?

#### Page: Welcome to Module 2

#### Welcome to Module 2

This module builds on the ideas in Module 1. It'll help you to support learners by modelling the writing process and incorporating structured collaboration into your lessons.

The ideas covered are particularly valuable for GCSE English resit learners – but they can be adapted across levels and contexts.

You'll explore:

- why modelling is such an effective strategy for improving writing
- how to model the writing process in manageable, purposeful stages
- ways to use structured collaboration to build learner confidence
- how to gradually shift responsibility from teacher to learner.

### Lesson: Incorporating modelling into lessons

#### Page: What is modelling?

Modelling is more than showing learners a finished piece of writing.

Effective modelling makes the writing process **visible** by:

- thinking aloud
- showing decision making
- revisiting and revising ideas in real time.

A good model doesn't just demonstrate success – it shows the **messiness** of writing: how sentences are improved, how structure evolves and how tone is adjusted.

This is especially important for learners who struggle with where or how to begin. By hearing a teacher articulate their thoughts, learners begin to internalise those habits themselves.

### Pause and reflect

- What do your learners *assume* about writing?
- Do they see it as a linear, neat process – or a flexible, evolving one?

### Page: Thinking aloud

The '**thinking aloud**' part of modelling helps learners to hear the internal monologue of a skilled writer.

This demystifies expert thinking. It also supports learners to be aware of how they learn and manage their own learning (known as 'metacognition').

Here's how to do it effectively.

1. **Choose a short task**  
(eg writing an introduction paragraph)
2. **Begin by reading the prompt aloud**
3. **Verbalise your thoughts**  
"I want to make this persuasive, so I'll start with a rhetorical question..."
4. **Show your decision making**  
Highlight word choices, sentence decisions and changes.
5. **Keep it authentic**  
It's fine to hesitate or revise!

Consider using a visualiser or screen share so learners can see the writing appear as you talk.

### Activity

Why might it be helpful for a teacher to revise a sentence 'live'?

A. It shows how a finished text should look

- B. It reveals the writer's decision-making process
- C. It avoids any confusion by not editing in real time

### Answer

B - 'think-alouds' like this are helpful because they reveal the writer's decision-making process.

### Pause and reflect

Choose a recent writing task you've taught.

- What sentence or paragraph could you model in real time?
- Think of 3 'think aloud' prompts you could use while modelling it.

### Page: From 'I do' to 'you do' – the gradual release model

The '**I do – We do – You do**' approach (also known as *gradual release*) is a powerful structure for building learner independence.

The aim of this approach is to move through each stage while gradually building learner independence.

Consider the following table, which outlines the approach in a bit more detail.

| Stage  | Role        | Focus                                             |
|--------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| I do   | Teacher-led | Direct modelling and explicit thinking aloud      |
| We do  | Shared      | Guided practice with learner input                |
| You do | Independent | Learners try independently, using prior scaffolds |

This structure aligns closely with **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development**: learners progress when given the right support *at the right time* (Tes, 2024).

### Activity

You're observing a teacher. The teacher has just finished modelling a persuasive writing task. Without further input, she asks the learners to begin their independent writing.

What stage of the writing process is missing in this lesson?

- A. We do (shared writing)
- B. Differentiated marking
- C. Reading aloud before writing

### Answer

B - shared writing bridges the gap between modelling and independent writing. It helps learners to internalise strategies with teacher support.

## References

Tes (2024), 'How Lev Vygotsky helps teachers to plan lessons today' [online]. Available from: <https://www.tes.com/magazine/teaching-learning/general/who-is-lev-vygotsky-zone-of-proximal-development> Accessed 21 August 2026].

## Page: Collaborative writing in the 'We do' phase

During the shared 'We do' stage, collaborative writing offers rich opportunities for dialogue, modelling and negotiation.

Benefits include:

- reducing learner anxiety
- modelling sentence structure and paragraphing
- encouraging peer explanation and critical thinking.

## Collaborative writing techniques

Consider the following collaborative writing techniques.

- **Teacher scribing**  
Take learner suggestions and write them up live, choosing the best examples and explaining your choices.
- **Pair writing**  
Ask learners to co-construct one paragraph together, discussing tone, vocabulary and structure.
- **Jigsaw writing**  
Assign different sections of a text (eg intro, main argument, conclusion) to different pairs or groups. Then compile the parts together and edit as a class.

## Page: Creating a 'writer's toolkit' with your class

Strong modelling is supported by a clear toolkit – a shared set of criteria or features that define what 'good' writing looks like.

Why not build your own toolkit with learners? You could take the following steps.

- **Co-create**  
After analysing a model text, co-create a checklist of successful features: sentence starters, rhetorical devices, paragraph structure, etc.
- **Display**  
Display this checklist in the classroom or on learners' handouts.
- **Refer**  
Refer back to it during planning, modelling and feedback stages.

This reinforces consistency and gives learners a resource to turn to during independent writing.

In your toolkit, you might include elements such as:

- rhetorical questions or bold openings
- discourse markers to guide arguments
- formal tone throughout
- clear paragraph transitions.

### Pause and reflect

What toolkit elements would help your learners to improve their writing the most?

## Page: Modelling common mistakes

Sometimes, the most powerful modelling comes from showing what *not* to do.

Try modelling:

- a piece with a weak tone or vague language
- a disorganised paragraph
- a short, underdeveloped answer.

Then invite learners to critique it using your toolkit. This develops analytical skills and helps them to spot similar issues in their own work.

### Page: Planning for independent writing

Once you've modelled and practised collaboratively, learners are ready for **supported independence**.

This doesn't mean leaving them to it and withdrawing all input – you can still provide structure by:

- reminding them of the A.C.T. acronym (audience, context, tone)
- providing sentence stems or paragraph frames
- encouraging peer drafting or idea sharing before writing

To monitor learning:

- collect short writing samples (eg introductions) before a full response
- use mini-whiteboards or shared documents to check structure during the task
- use dedicated improvement and reflection time (DIRT) after feedback to deepen learning.

### Pause and reflect

- How do you currently support learners to move from group work to independent writing?
- Where could you build in more structure or feedback?

## Lesson: Review your learning

### Page: Congratulations

**Congratulations – you've nearly reached the end of 'Developing Writing Skills for GCSE English Resit Learners'**

In Module 2, you explored:

- what effective modelling looks like
- how to structure learning using the 'I do – We do – You do' approach

- techniques for collaborative writing
- how to help learners transition to independence.

Remember: your role isn't just to teach writing – it's also to model how to think *like a writer*. By sharing your thought processes, building routines and structuring shared practice, you help your learners build lasting confidence.

## Learning objectives

Over the past two modules, you've covered the following learning objectives:

- Explore how to embed deeper planning, structure and tone-awareness into your writing curriculum to improve learner outcomes
- Develop and apply teacher modelling and collaborative writing strategies to support learners' independence and confidence in non-fiction writing.

## What next?

Remember: this course is part of the 16–19 English GCSE Resit CPD offer, which aims to transform how English is taught and experienced in post-16 settings. The content is built on a foundation of research, practitioner insight and learner voices.

## Page: Further resources

### Links from this module

[Tes | How Lev Vygotsky helps teachers to plan lessons today](#)

### Further reading

- **EEF | Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning**  
Practical guidance on how modelling thinking processes supports learner metacognition.
- **Rosenshine | Principles of Instruction (PDF)**  
Clear and concise research summary highlighting the effectiveness of modelling and scaffolding in classroom practice.
- **Vygotsky, L. S. (1978), *Mind in Society***  
Seminal work introducing the Zone of Proximal Development and the social foundations of learning. Available via libraries or online booksellers.

## Page: Action planning

Now that you have completed the course, what will you do next?

Use this page to set yourself short- and long-term targets relating to any part of this course.

Professional development is an ongoing process. Making time to reflect on and refine how you work can be really challenging – but it is time well spent. Creating a simple plan will help you to embed what you have learnt and set a timescale for your next steps.

| Target | What will I do to achieve my target? | Who might help me? | When will I achieve it? |
|--------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
|        |                                      |                    |                         |
|        |                                      |                    |                         |
|        |                                      |                    |                         |

Remember: this is a process for you. It might be helpful to share some of your thinking with colleagues, a mentor or a line manager at an appraisal – but, first and foremost, an action plan should reflect what you feel is important.