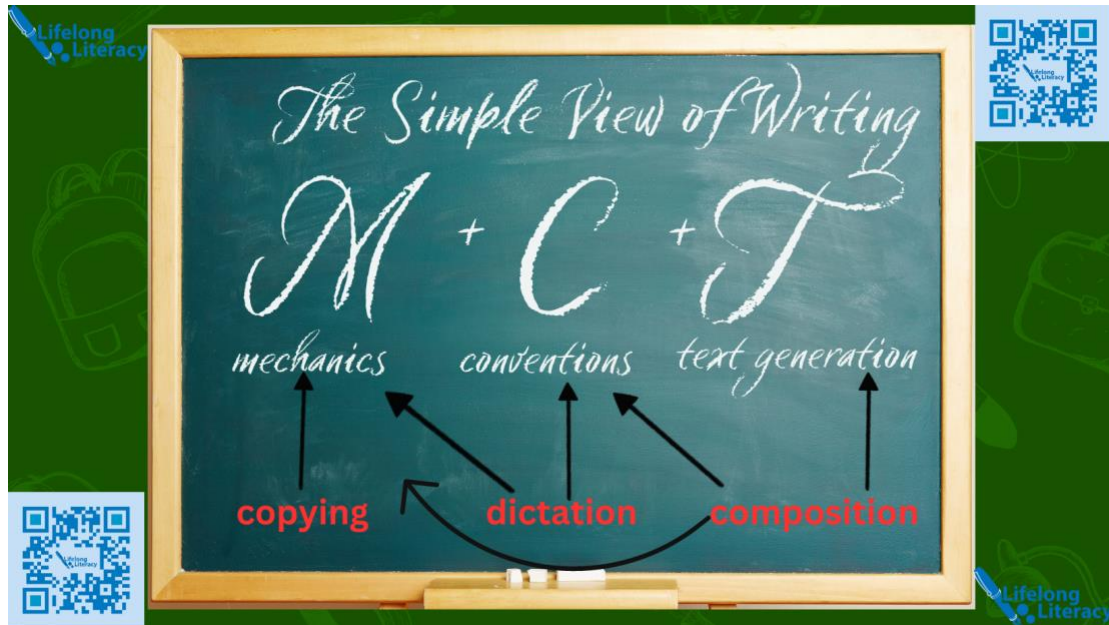


# The 21 Day Writing Challenge



The components of writing

## Rationale

A habit is:

- a fixed way of thinking
- through previous repetition
- of a mental experience.

There is research which indicates that it takes at least 21 days to make or break a habit. The actual number varies greatly, depending on the subject, but 21 days is a good starting point.

Children whose literacy is developing typically, form habits that help them continue to progress and become increasingly proficient at writing. They scribble, write, take notes and copy text in many different contexts. For instance, how often have you seen children drawing pictures and putting words into the mouths of their characters? Have you ever received notes from children? These are all habits that typically developing children have. The act of composing or copying is something they do with frequency.

Children who struggle with literacy form habits to avoid practice or miss out on opportunities to form habits that help them progress.

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This happens because they are stuck at the foundational levels of literacy acquisition (i.e. phonological awareness and phonics). The act of composing or copying is something they avoid or do infrequently.

Habitual writing has a 'multiplier effect' on children's skills. Those who practice get better and better. Those who don't, continue to make slow progress.

This challenge is a way of allowing striving students to access the multiplier effect that habitual writing gives.

It is not intended to take the place of formal, expert intervention, but instead, is designed as a scaffolded booster to help form the habit of writing.



### **Further study**

Join Lyn Stone and a worldwide community of educators as we walk through the components of writing. [The Writing for Life](#) online course is an on-demand, self-paced online course that gives you six hours of professional learning.

## The process

Students are given an exercise book and a Challenge Chart. Each session, they choose an activity from the Chart, they do the activity and then they record it on the chart.

There are three levels:

### 1. Copying

(Writing minus conventions and text generation)

Students copy from a given text (usually no more than 5 sentences). If possible, they are timed and the goal is to beat their time BUT to remain as accurate as possible. Their accuracy score is derived from the total number of words minus the total number of errors and expressed as a percentage.

This is the most heavily scaffolded activity. It helps to develop their working memory for words and symbols, and gives them exposure to good quality writing and punctuation.

### 2. Dictation

(Writing minus text generation)

Students have a passage read to them and must write this down.

This is not timed but still requires an accuracy score.

Errors are recorded and stored for specialist work in their spelling books. For instance, if the child misspells *write*, this information is passed on to the person in charge of building the student's word bank for study during specialist intervention.

### 3. Composition

(Writing including all components of writing, i.e. mechanics, conventions, and text generation)

The student chooses a word (either a misspelled one or one from their existing word bank) and orally composes a sentence.

The teacher asks if there are any words that they need help with and gives assistance where due.

Attention to capitals and punctuation is a must.

## Some helpful tips

- Columns are limited to having five full at a time. Once a column reaches five full spaces, it is no longer a choice until the other columns have caught up. This directs the student to do the harder tasks as well as the easier ones.
- Choose three different areas of the Writing Challenge exercise book for each different activity. For example, copying can be at the front, dictation can be in the middle and composition can be at the back. This helps everyone keep track of progress.
- Choose texts that are at least one year below grade level for copying.
- Choose texts that are at least two years below grade level for dictation.
- Give feedback after every exercise and talk about strategies to aid improvement (e.g. looking for and remembering elements such as prefixes and suffixes as opposed to transcribing letter by letter when copying, slowing down when being dictated to etc.).
- Train students to note several things during these exercises:
  1. Date (very important for progress monitoring)
  2. Which exercise they are doing (i.e. is it copying, dictation or composition?)
  3. What score did they get? Are they trying to beat a personal best (PB)? What is their clearly stated goal?

## \_\_\_\_\_'s Writing Chart

Days	Copying	Dictation	Composition
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			