# Writing in English, level 4
## Writing poetry – reflecting on personal experience

## Overview

This resource provides support to teach the skills and knowledge as students learn about expressing their ideas in a variety of text structures. It explores the ways writers communicate, with a specific focus on poetry and its associated language and structural features.

These materials use texts from the Ministry of Education's instructional series to support the curriculum learning and the writing tasks. The selected texts demonstrate how poetry can be used to reflect on personal experience.

See Teaching Writing in Years 7 and 8 for ways to improve the effectiveness of your teaching in writing to increase your students' rate of progress.

*School Journal
Level 4 October
2011*
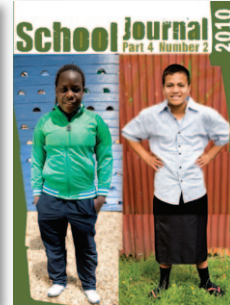
*School Journal
Part 4 Number 2
2010*

*School Journal
Level 4 March
2012*

## Three aspects of planning

When planning, consider:

- the big ideas that underpin the New Zealand Curriculum and the big ideas contained in the English curriculum
- the relevance of the topics and contexts for your students
- the learning strengths and needs of your students.

These three aspects of planning (curriculum, context, and the students' learning strengths and needs – see the diagram below) are integral and reciprocal. They naturally overlap, so learning tasks and activities address all three aspects. The point where the planning starts may vary.

**Students**

**Context**

**Curriculum**
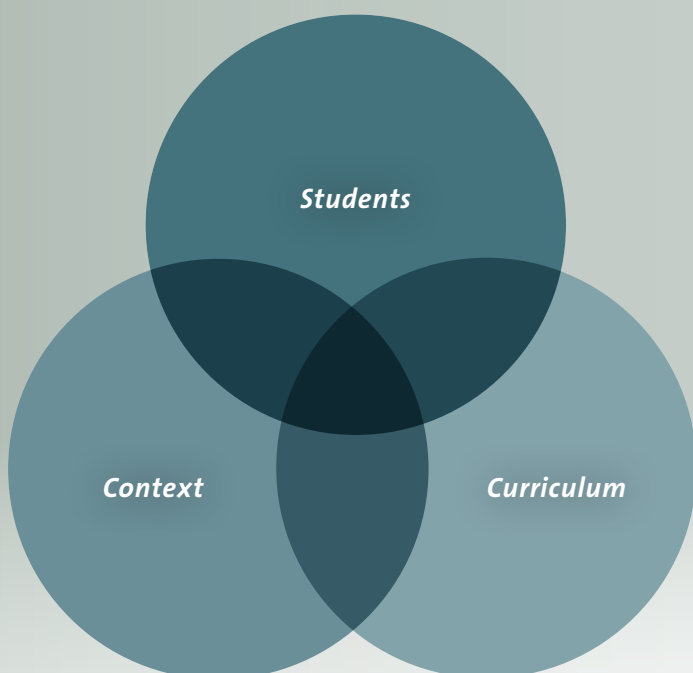
### Students' literacy strengths and needs

#### Writing
What skills and knowledge do my students bring to the learning?
What support will my students need to:

- think about, record, and communicate personal experiences?
- use appropriate structures and conventions
- craft and re-craft to achieve their purposes?

### Context *(for inquiry and learning)*

#### Using poetry to respond to experiences

**Big idea:** Poems allow writers to explore, reflect on, and communicate their thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

- Poems express personal experiences and thoughts.
- There are many ways that writers can use language and structures in poetry.
- Students can learn about writing poetry from reading and analysing the poems of others.

### Curriculum

#### English (Speaking, Writing, and Presenting)

- Purposes and audiences: Show an increasing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.
- Ideas: Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.
- Language features: Use a range of language features appropriately, showing an increasing understanding of their effects.
- Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

# Texts that show how poetry can be used to reflect on personal experience

## *School Journal, Level 4, October, 2011 – "Street Lights" by Ashleigh Young*
Relevant features:

- The poet uses a strikingly uneven stanza pattern and vivid descriptions to convey her feeling of homesickness. The final verses describe an unexpected visitor and hint that she may be taking a positive interest in her new city after all.

## *School Journal, Part 4 Number 2, 2010 – "At a Fishing Settlement" by Alistair Campbell*
Relevant features:

- Campbell recalls an encounter with a woman and a stray dog while walking on a beach on a cold, rainy day. The poem uses rhyme and repetition as well as vivid descriptions of the setting to convey complex emotions.

## *School Journal, Level 4, March 2012 – "The Squash Club" by Hinemoana Baker*
Relevant features:

- Hinemoana Baker's short poem reflects on her childhood memory of waiting for her father while he played squash. In short, intense stanzas, she recalls the sights, feel, and smells of a time that seemed to go on forever.

## *Further information*

For further information about supporting the reading demands of this topic, see: **http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Teacher-needs/Instructional-Series**

For further support in planning, teaching, and differentiating students' writing at years 7 and 8, see: **http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Student-needs/National-Standards-Reading-and-Writing/Differentiation-between-the-writing-standards/Year-7-and-8**

| Texts | Text features and structure | Supporting strategies |
|---|---|---|
| *School Journal L4, Oct, 2011 – "Street Lights"* | - Unrhymed stanzas of unequal length<br>- Lines and stanzas arranged in a loose zigzag across the pages<br>- Intensely vivid use of metaphor, simile, and personification<br>- Vivid descriptions of "my new city" and evocation of homesickness for New Zealand<br>- Varied sentence lengths<br>- A transition in mood from anger through sadness to a possible change in the poet's attitude ("But early this morning"). | Support students to identify features they may wish to use in their own writing, such as the intense similes and metaphors, the personification, and the different ways the poet expresses her feelings.<br><br>Prompt students to identify the arc of emotion and to try this in their own writing. |
| *School Journal 4.2.2010 – "At a Fishing Settlement"* | - Twenty lines, mostly in rhymed couplets<br>- The combination of rhyme and sentences that carry over line breaks to give a distinctive rhythm when read aloud<br>- Description and evocation of a specific time and place<br>- The linking of the first and last couplet through the rhyme and the content ("that face", "that bare bitter place")<br>- The use of strong imagery to describe a "bare bitter place", including hyphenated adjectival phrases: "rain-blurred", "sea-battered", "wind-shuddering", "storm-whitened"<br>- The use of punctuation (semicolon, dash) to connect clauses in a complex sentence of five lines. | Students may need support to identify the use and effect of the vivid descriptions of place, weather, and mood.<br><br>Read the poem aloud and encourage the students to try different emphases as they read it, using the rhyme and sentence structures. Support them to explore how to use language features such as alliteration or assonance to strengthen rhythm and alter the emphases in their own writing. |
| *School Journal L4, Mar, 2012 – "The Squash Club"* | - Eight unrhymed stanzas of three lines each<br>- The use of poetic language features, such as internal rhyme ("piece … crease"), compressed imagery ("the warm hairdryer air"), and simile ("like my father's gearbag")<br>- Condensed sentences in which verbs may be omitted, such as "In the Ladies/dressing room/a blonde woman/drying her hair."<br>- Sentences split over two stanzas<br>- Two lines of dialogue (questions) indicated by italics, with an implied speaker. | Remind students of the features of poetry and how poems can be similar to or different from prose.<br><br>Students can read the poem aloud, trying out different pauses and links between sections to gain a feeling for the rhythms they may want in their own poetry.<br><br>Support students to identify the effect of condensing and/or implying ideas so they can use these in their own poetry. In particular, support students to identify techniques of "show, don't tell". |

## *Instructional Focus: Writing*

Begin by describing for your students the sort of writing they will be doing to support their learning. As a way of creating an authentic learning experience, students could then share these texts with the wider community by using an online publishing solution – for example, a wiki or a Google website.

## *Three learning processes*

The writing tasks described below relate to three learning processes:

1. drawing on experience

2. exploring structure and language

3. crafting and re-crafting.

## *1. Drawing on experience*

Formulating ideas usually happens early in writing, but it's not a linear process. Sometimes ideas take time to be revealed, and students may need to explore to find the idea they want to develop. This section shows how published poems can spur connections to personal experiences and how students may reflect on their thinking as they develop their ideas.

| *Writing demands* | *Prompts to support planning* |
|---|---|
| The writing demands when drawing on experience include:<br>• making connections between a poem and personal experiences<br>• identifying and listing personal experiences as possible topics<br>• evaluating and determining topics most likely to provide scope for poetry<br>• making decisions about topics, purposes, and audiences. | • What do my students already know about the purposes and audiences for poetry?<br>• Am I clear about what I want them to learn?<br>• What poems will give my students a wide variety of topics and styles?<br>• How can I motivate students to reflect on their own experiences to find suitable topics for their writing?<br>• Do some students need more support to reflect on their experiences and identify topics to write about? |

### Task: Students make connections and develop ideas

| *Students*<br>*Possible responses to the task* | *Teacher*<br>*Possible deliberate acts of teaching* |
|---|---|
| **Students make connections with ideas in published poems.** | **Model** the way you read a poem and make personal connections. |

*What personal connections can I make to these poems?*

| Poem | Experience | My connections |
|---|---|---|
| Street lights | Living in a new city<br>Feeling homesick | I hated Greytown when we moved here. I missed the city so much, but eventually I noticed some interesting things, like going past paddocks to see if new lambs had been born in the night. |

**What the writing shows**

The student is able to identify the experiences in the poem. She makes connections with her own experiences. The connections may relate to similar experiences or come from a feeling triggered by the poem.

Select a short poem and read it aloud. Identify the experience the poet has drawn on, and then think out loud about the personal connections you made. List your connections on a chart.

Repeat this with one or two more short poems, or ask a volunteer to do the same. Include poems from different cultures. Create opportunities for students to share poems and what they know about poetry from their own backgrounds and experiences, including poetry in languages other than English.

**Ask questions** to support the students to make connections.
• What experience has the poet described in the poem?
• What experiences of your own come to mind?
• Think about your connections: are you starting to formulate some ideas for writing? Write your ideas down and keep updating your list.

Students whose first language is not English may benefit from exploring ideas in their first language. If possible, provide opportunities for them to do so.

**Direct** students to use an exercise such as a guided visualisation (they close their eyes while you guide them through a past event, using all their senses) to develop connections with published poems.
• How has this exercise helped you to reflect on a personal experience you could use for writing? What other activities help you clarify ideas for writing? What blocks you?

*The students list and review their ideas, marking those to follow up.*

- ~~Arriving in Auckland~~
- ~~The airport~~
- ~~White faces, brown faces~~
- Uniforms, noise
- (First days at school)
- (Feeling scared and excited)
- <u>Different rules, different everything</u>: this is what I`ll focus on
- <u>Alone and lost</u>

I think I`ll write about how different things are here, and in particular, all the little rules no one tells you about. That`s what made me feel so lost for the first few weeks in NZ. I still have strong memories of these experiences even though I`ve been here for five years now. I`m really glad I had good English – it must be so hard for kids who don't understand the language as well as the rules. I`ll make a list of these rules and think of situations to illustrate them to help other new kids.

### What the writing shows

The student's list was relatively small and focused mainly on feelings associated with his experiences. His reflection shows he has a plan, along with a purpose and an audience.

**Prompt** students to identify, organise, and clarify ideas for writing. At the same time, model doing this from your own list of ideas.

- Think about the connections you've made and review your notes.
- Which ideas are NOT ones you want to follow up? Cross them out.
- Which ideas are "maybes"? Circle those.
- Which ideas (if any) are "definites"? Underline those.
- Why are some ideas more appealing than others?
- Write a brief explanation of the ideas you want to follow and give your reasons.

**Direct** students to take their most promising ideas and use mind mapping or other strategies to add key words, thoughts, images, and details.

**Give feedback** on the students' use of:

- personal connections with published poems
- lists, mind maps, or other strategies for exploring ideas
- reflection to aid and support writing choices.

## 2. Exploring structure and language

The tasks in this section may be used as the students develop their poems. Some students may need strong support for exploring poetic language and structures. Encourage exploration and innovation, but not at the expense of achieving the purpose and producing satisfying writing.

| Writing demands | Prompts to support planning |
|---|---|
| The writing demands when exploring structure and language include:<br><br>• using their prior knowledge of a range of structures for writing poetry, including some use of innovation<br>• using their prior knowledge of language features and vocabulary appropriate to their purpose and audience<br>• a willingness to experiment and evaluate results. | • What do my students already know about the ways poetry can be structured?<br>• What language features are they familiar with? How well do they use them?<br>• How willing are the students to try out ideas and explore new ways of expressing their ideas?<br>• Am I clear about what I want the students to learn?<br>• How can I support and/or extend students to develop innovative structures and language features for poetry? |

## Task: Students make connections and develop ideas

| Students | Teacher |
|---|---|
| *Possible responses to the task* | *Possible deliberate acts of teaching* |

**Students**
*Possible responses to the task*

The Day my Dog Died
The day my dog died
I had weetbix for breakfast
I drank a glass of milk
I packed my schoolbag.

The day my dog died
Dad was running late
Mum had to take Emma to the doctor
I couldn't find my other sneaker.

The day my dog died
Someone left the gate open
A car was going too fast
And my crazy dog died.

At first I tried to write about the actual accident, but it sounded like a newspaper report. So I decided to show that it was just an ordinary day before this happened, and I used the same line to start every verse to emphasise how important this was. I've just used 4 lines in each verse because that keeps it tight and focused. I decided that in the first verse I'd say what I was doing, the next one is what others were doing, and the last one is what happened. I had to change the last verse a few times to make it work: I tried writing more details about what happened, but I think it's better like this. You can just imagine what happened.

### What the writing shows

The student has chosen a tight verse structure with repetition of the first line to emphasise the significance of the event. He lists the ordinary family activities, moving from himself to other family members and then to the wider world. He keeps the vocabulary straightforward to show an ordinary, busy family where a careless moment allowed the dog to run out onto the road. The student explains the decisions he made as he re-crafted the poem to achieve his purpose.

**Teacher**
*Possible deliberate acts of teaching*

**Prompt** the students to consider their choices as they write.

- Tell me why you used this stanza pattern. What effect does it achieve?
- Remember it's OK to use another poet's work as a model.
- Do poems need to rhyme? Consider using other features such as alliteration, assonance, internal rhyme, and rhythm.
- What details can help your audience understand what happened? Would a simile or metaphor help to describe this?

With the students, co-construct guidelines for giving feedback. Check that students feel safe sharing their work. Also have specific things to look for and give feedback on. Be careful with ELLs receiving feedback on first drafts if their work contains a lot of surface errors. It will be difficult for students to focus on more important aspects or to provide useful feedback.

**Explain** that by innovating on the structure of an existing poem, we can create a new poem. One way to do this is to set a "rule" such as starting every verse with the same line.

**Direct** the students to use this structure to write a poem collaboratively. For example, using the line "The day I started school", ask the students to add several verses.

Exploring and innovating on the structure of an existing poem and then co-constructing one together is particularly useful for ELLs because it provides opportunities to deal with the language and textual features they need support with. When using this approach with ELLs, you need to:

- identify the language demands of the text (for example, past simple and past continuous verb forms)
- identify the students' language learning needs
- select language features to focus on
- plan strategies for identifying, explaining, and practising the language within meaningful tasks and contexts
- give feedback on the students' use of language
- plan other opportunities in a range of contexts.

When the poem is finished, ask the students to evaluate it in relation to the purpose.

- Did the structure help you to express your experience of starting school? Why or why not?

**Ask questions** to support students as they innovate to write poems about a personal experience.

- What is your purpose? How will the structure you've chosen help you achieve this?
- How does the structure support the meaning of your poem?
- What language features will fit well with the structure and topic you've chosen?
- How well have your choices worked in relation to your purposes?

**Give feedback** on the students' use of:

- a structure that helps them to achieve their purpose
- vocabulary choices and language features that help meet their purposes
- peer collaboration and/or feedback to maintain motivation and keep ideas flowing.

## 3. Crafting and re-crafting

The students craft and re-craft as they explore their ideas and express them in poetry. They take time to revise and try different structures, checking that they have achieved the purpose and effect they aimed for. They continue to use feedback and to reflect on their knowledge about writing poetry.

| Writing demands | Prompts to support planning |
|---|---|
| The writing demands when exploring structure and language include: <br><br> • willingness to write, delete, rewrite, and make structural changes <br> • seeking and using feedback on the effectiveness of their writing choices <br> • applying what they learn to continuously improve their poetry. | • How can I support the students to develop their ability to evaluate their writing decisions? <br> • What technical knowledge (for example, of grammar, sentence construction, language features, and vocabulary) do I need to teach? <br> • What training or support do my students need to give and receive feedback? <br> • What publishing options are available for the students' work? |

## Task: Students re-craft their writing

| Students <br> *Possible responses to the task* | Teacher <br> *Possible deliberate acts of teaching* |
|---|---|
| Orca <br> ~~This morning~~ *Last week* I saw <br> a pod of orca <br> ~~mooching slowly along~~ *cruising* the Wellington coastline. <br><br> They ~~scooted~~ *mooched* past my beach <br> tumbling like babies <br> in love with the water and the sun ~~and the day~~. <br><br> Their shiny skin sparkled <br> Their fins dipped and rose as I <br> caught my bus with the orca. | **Ask questions**, **prompt**, or **explain** technical points to support the students. <br><br> • Has your poem captured your experience in the way you intended? If not, what changes can you make? <br> • How can you link the experiences through each part of the poem? <br> • Try replacing a generalised verb, such as "walked", with a verb that has strong connotations. For example, using "slunk" or "strode" will convey a lot more meaning than "walked". <br> • Have you considered reordering the verses? Try it and see if that gives your poem more impact. <br> • What resources (such as published poems, rhyming and regular dictionaries, a thesaurus, or examples of figurative language) could help you make choices about structures, language features, and vocabulary? |

### What the writing shows

The student started with a sentence about the orca he saw on his way to school. He played with the sentence, finally creating an unrhymed poem of three verses of three lines each. Each verse is a complete sentence with a separate idea. The student changed the line breaks to focus attention on key information "a pod of orca", "tumbling like babies", "caught my bus". Earlier versions showed he experimented with several verbs and similes before settling for the final choices. The verbs help capture the orcas' movements. The simile "tumbling like babies" adds descriptive detail. The final verse with its compressed image ("I caught my bus with the orca") implies that the writer understands that both he and the orca must go on with their very different lives.

**Prompt** the students to proofread for publishing.

• Not all writing has to be published. If you do want to publish, make sure you've proofread carefully.
• Ask your writing partners to help if necessary and use a proofreading checklist.

Remember that sometimes ELLs do not have the language knowledge to correct their errors. It is important to provide opportunities for them to do this, but be aware that at times they need clear explanations of their errors and of how to correct them.

**Give feedback** to help the students evaluate their use of poetry to record experiences.

• Your poem shows how an ordinary day can take a dramatic turn. It gave me an immediate understanding of what a shock this was.
• You've turned a long story into a poem of only twenty lines, but the tight structure and precise language conveys the experience much more powerfully.
• The description of the sights, sounds, and smells painted a clear picture of the event.