

BOYS' ACHIEVEMENT
IN WRITING
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Report on a Small Scale Study
for the
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

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1.0 Introduction

This report records the findings of a small scale study of boys' writing, which arose from continuing concern about boys' achievement in English.

Earlier work had made it clear that boys often favour those aspects of English which relate to non-fiction reading and information writing. This study set out to investigate two major factors:

- (a) the similarities and differences in boys' writing that might occur in different areas of the curriculum. There was a particular concern to compare boys' writing in English with their writing in other subjects, which might be more congenial to them.
- (b) the similarities and differences in boys' writing that might occur across a range of age groups (Years 3,5,8 and 10), as achievement examined across that range might offer more detail of the achievement pattern across subjects.

The scale of the study and the impossibility of controlling the sample tightly in terms of types of writing, conditions for writing, and pupils' ability meant from the start that any conclusions in the report would have to be tentative and might indicate some useful territory for further exploration and also some suggestions for classroom practice.

Schools invited to take part in providing pupils' work for the study were asked to provide work for three boys in appropriate year groups. The aim was to include in the sample normal classroom work, that might have been drafted and revised, but not subsequent fair copies produced for display.

The sample's ideal specification was drawn up on the basis of the need to:

- look at writing in a broad range of major curriculum areas which were equally appropriate to the four year groups selected;
- select subject areas where writing used for purposes of organisation, explanation and information was likely to be a major instrument of learning for pupils;
- and to analyse a balance of important types of writing within curriculum areas.

The ideal sample thus comprised eight pieces of work, including two pieces from each of English, Humanities, Science and Design Technology. The descriptors used for the types of writing were based in the appropriate National Curriculum programmes of study and, more particularly, in the series of curriculum pamphlets published by SCAA in 1997 (e.g. *Geography and the use of language*), which covered a wide range of subjects at both Key Stages 1/2 and Key Stage 3 levels.

The actual sample achieved is summarised in the table below:

English	A:1 prose piece: narrative, descriptive or personal experience B:1 prose piece: non-narrative - argument, persuasion, review etc.
Science	A:1 prose piece: writing to develop or organise ideas about living things, materials or processes B:1 prose piece: writing to explain or to instruct others or to develop an argument or theory

Design & Technology **A:1** prose piece: writing to develop or organise ideas about design proposals or within design evaluations
B:1 prose piece: writing to explain or to instruct others or to develop an argument or theory

Humanities **A:1** prose piece: writing to explore an issue or ideas - this might be done through discursive or descriptive writing or through devices such as writing in role
B:1 prose piece: writing to communicate knowledge and understanding using information and offering explanations.

	Yr 3 TOTAL SCRIPTS: 87			Yr 5 TOTAL SCRIPTS: 122			Yr 8 TOTAL SCRIPTS: 111			Yr 10 TOTAL SCRIPTS: 102			Totals TOTAL SCRIPTS: 422			
	TypA	Typ B	Oth	Typ A	Typ B	Oth	Typ A	Typ B	Oth	Typ A	Typ B	Oth	Typ A	Typ B	Oth	Ttl
EN	16	12	0	24	13	0	21	14	0	15	16	4	76	55	4	135
SC	0	0	26	13	9	16	16	10	2	10	0	13	39	19	57	115
DT	3	5	0	9	6	2	12	6	0	14	2	0	38	19	2	59
HU	10	15	0	9	7	14	15	8	7	10	9	9	44	39	30	113

(a) This shows that some schools were not able to provide examples of all the categories of writing by their pupils for which they were asked. This may be because of the limited timescale involved, the difficulty of identifying some of the categories or because the categories of writing, despite being based firmly in national curriculum requirements and recommendations, did not accord with the actual pattern of writing being done in some curriculum areas.

1.1 The Analysis

Six coding frames devised by QCA were used to analyse technical accuracy and certain whole text features in the scripts detailed above. These frames focused on: Spelling, Punctuation, Clause and Word Class Analysis, Paragraphing, use of Non-Standard English, and a Whole Text Analysis (Narrative or Non-Narrative). The coding frames are intended to provide quantitative data, with the exception of the Whole Text Analysis which is qualitative. In addition, coders were asked to complete a Script Overview Sheet for each script and a Pupil Overview Sheet for each pupil. These gave information about the context within which the script had been produced, and comments on strengths, weaknesses, EAL as a factor, links to topics or subjects, links to teaching context and response, and emergent issues for teaching. Six consultants were employed as a team of coders, and attended a training day organised by the lead consultant to prepare them for work with the coding frames.

2.0 Spelling and Some Related Comments on Vocabulary

The coding frame used in the study gives a total number of words spelt correctly out of 100, though in several instances the scripts did not provide 100 words. It was still possible to score accuracy as a percentage for individual pupils and for groups of pupils or scripts. The average sample size for Year 3 scripts was 63.41 words; for Year 5, 77.83 words; for Year 8, 97.86 words and 97.92 words for Year 10.

The frame secondly counts the incidence of certain types of spelling use: plural formation, past tense/participle formation, y+ ending, adverb formation (-ly), doubling consonants when adding inflections, vowel cluster formation to make the long *e* sound. The frame finally categorises errors by type of error. Some misspelt words could be coded under more than one type of error: in these cases, coders were trained

to include the word in both types. All coded uses and error types have been scored as percentages of the total sample (100 words or less for the individual pupil; the cumulative sample for groups of pupils or scripts).

2.1 Spelling accuracy and patterns of spelling error

The mean score for all pupils in all tasks was 94.24%.

In Year 3, the mean score for all pupils in all tasks was 90.34%.

In Year 5, the mean score for all pupils in all tasks was 91.91%.

In Year 8, the mean score for all pupils in all tasks was 96.60%.

In Year 10, the mean score for all pupils in all tasks was 98.09%.

Allowing for the reservations on the size and variables of the sample, this is a pattern of development which suggests that the year group samples were to some degree comparable in ability (at the average) in this aspect of writing. That speculation needs to be tested against the detail of the spelling error analysis.

The pattern of errors across the four year groups is shown in the tables immediately below:

Percentages of the total of errors across the year group sample

Spelling errors	Year 3	Year 5	Year 8	Year 10
<i>phonetically plausible</i>	47.26%	48.11%	36.98%	31.52%
<i>omitted phonemes</i>	11.76%	15.77%	13.02%	10.91%
<i>homophones</i>	3.25%	2.96%	8.58%	10.30%
<i>other suffix formations</i>	0.20%	0.40%	2.66%	3.03%
<i>inversions</i>	4.46%	5.66%	6.80%	7.27%
<i>double consonants in middle of word</i>	4.06%	7.82%	5.92%	8.48%
<i>unstressed vowels</i>	0.61%	2.83%	1.18%	1.21%
<i>other errors</i>	28.40%	16.44%	24.85%	27.27%

The highest category of errors in each of the four year groups was the **phonetically plausible** group. In this category the writer has attempted to reproduce the sound of the work as he knows it, with a degree of accuracy at least capable of being recognised by the coder. Examples from scripts include: *thet*, *skwer*, *laik* (Year 3), *experement*, *staishon* (Year 5). Yet, considered across the age range, this type of spelling error drops from 4.22 words in 100 in Year 3 to 0.52 words in 100 in Year 10. Within Year 10 scripts, the highest incidence of this error in a single script is 6 words in 100 (two instances) with no other script scoring more than 3 in 100. In Year 3, a 15 and two 14s were recorded and the general incidence was much higher as indicated by the mean score. While there is clearly a minority of pupils who require a continuing reinforcement of spelling factors other than sound, a significant number of pupils appear to move quite successfully through this important early-stage strategy, which is essential to the development of independent spelling. Teaching strategies which are aimed at encouraging independent **trial** in this aspect, supported by the reinforcement of common **patterns** and by checking and learning from specific **error**, may prove appropriate overall.

Inversions, which indicate a problem with visual-auditory links in spelling, though they remain a persistent minor feature across the age ranges, appear to show a decline in terms of frequency of occurrence. This type of error is made only very occasionally by some pupils and rarely if ever by the majority. A teaching strategy which identifies

specific errors of this minor kind and follows up with specific and intensive reinforcement of the correct pattern would appear to be more appropriate than major programmes of preventive drill.

Homophone errors appear to offer a slight exception to the general picture of developmental improvement. With the exception of the Year 10 script sample, they show little change across the year groups and account for a greater proportion of errors made by the older pupils in the study. Further examination shows that 4 out of 17 such errors made by in a sample of 9988 words written by 18 boys were made by one writer. So a strategy of careful error pattern identification and intensive specific response appears to be the most appropriate and efficient.

The category of **other errors** accounts for the second highest incidence after the **phonetically plausible**. A wide range of errors is covered by this category. Examples include: the unlikely or partly-legible: *me* - for *made* (Year 5), *nec* - for *nice* (Year 3); missing letters (other than missing phonemes) or missing endings: *live* - for *lives* (Year 3); near-but-not-homophones: *looses* - for *loses* (Year 10). The pattern of distribution across this general **other errors** category changes with age, as the most implausible (and sometimes impenetrable) spellings largely disappear.

The pattern of use of spelling types (and incorrect use) across the four year groups is shown in the tables immediately below:

The errors shown as percentages of the total of uses of the particular type across the year group sample.

Spelling Type Errors	Year 3	Year 5	Year 8	Year 10
incorrect plural formation	14.34%	13.91%	5.24%	3.16%
incorrect past <i>-ed</i>	20.35%	9.55%	9.48%	5.80%
incorrect <i>Y+</i>	47.06%	36.11%	52.00%	20.00%
incorrect add <i>ly</i>	57.14%	16.67%	17.91%	13.24%
incorrect doubling of consonants	29.03%	50.00%	16.33%	15.38%
incorrect long <i>e</i> cluster	18.18%	13.56%	2.95%	6.36%

The pattern of errors shows a substantial level of error in the earlier stages of writing being modified to a significantly reduced level of error in the later stages of compulsory education. Yet the scores for incorrect use of the *y±* ending (e.g. *tries*, *stories*), of the adding of *-ly* to a base form to form an adverb, and of the doubling of consonants when adding inflections (e.g. *stop>stopping*) may give some concern in the Year 8 and Year 10 samples, where the percentage of incorrect use is consistently in double figures. However, the incidence in the sample is at a low level: for example, in Year 8, within the sample of 10,863 words, only 25 instances of the *y±* ending were recorded, of which 13 were incorrect. Only a much larger sample would provide a reliable picture, but it would still appear that some pupils in the later stages of secondary education are persisting in incorrect use of these relatively straightforward spelling types, each of which can be learned - with a high degree of applicability - by a simple set of learned spelling rules.

2.2 Patterns of spelling error across subjects

The data does not suggest that boys in the sample spell with more or less accuracy, because of the subject in which their writing is done. Nor is there any substantial evidence to suggest that different types of writing produce different levels of accuracy or patterns of error. This reading of the overall data is reinforced when one goes to the detail of particular kinds of error or of error in particular types of usage. For example **phonetically plausible** errors (the most common kind) are reasonably consistent in incidence across the subject areas.

	English	Design Tech	Science	Humanities
Year 3	3.41%	5.25%	4.65%	4.45%
Year 5	5.01%	3.40%	2.62%	3.58%
Year 8	1.14%	1.09%	1.04%	1.30%
Year 10	0.51%	0.20%	0.48%	0.75%
Overall	2.52%	2.48%	2.20%	2.52%

Spelling accuracy would appear in general to be, as one might expect of such an internalised factor, writer-specific rather than context-specific. Individual scripts do have variations which may relate to the level of teacher support, for example in giving a list of words on the blackboard or in a work-sheet.

The incidence of spelling errors in general can be related to many other factors, well documented in writing research. Coders in this study did draw attention in their comments on the range and sophistication of vocabulary used by pupils to elements of constraint (task- or pupil-imposed) and motivation.

As one might expect, the least confident writers work within a limited and largely monosyllabic vocabulary, needing the bridge to development to be built through motivation, independent strategies, and both general and task-specific support

Repetition of a limited range of words or particular phrasings is often an indication of a lack of confidence, offering the reassurance of what the writer knows he can do. This in some cases appears to be supportive. Yet such limitations can work against both attainment and progress in writing, where they are not balanced by other types of writing within other kinds of learning.

There are some scripts, particularly in Years 3 and 5, but also in some scripts in Years 8 and 10 when writing is one aspect of, for example, a diagram or design note, where a disciplined concentration on the exact words needed within that piece of learning is entirely appropriate.

3.0 Punctuation

As the sample of script for punctuation was a whole page of text, the actual size of the sample varied considerably as measured by the number of words. It was not therefore possible to give scores as a percentage of the sample. It has been possible to score the ratio of correct, incorrect and omitted uses of a particular feature, and this possibility has been used where the data appeared to be significant.

Sentence demarcation incidence across all age groups: percentages of correct, incorrect & omitted use

	English	DesignTech	Science	Humanities
Capital letter to start sentence - correct	88.01%	83.29%	86.87%	89.33%
<i>Capital letter omitted</i>	<i>11.99%</i>	<i>16.71%</i>	<i>13.13%</i>	<i>10.67%</i>
Full stop to end sentence - correct	79.99%	71.18%	78.54%	75.98%
Full stop incorrect	4.25%	3.43%	1.78%	4.21%
<i>Full stop omitted</i>	<i>15.75%</i>	<i>25.38%</i>	<i>19.68%</i>	<i>19.80%</i>

Given the variable nature of the sample for the punctuation coding frame (one page), the data above must be treated with some care. The nature of most of the writing in English and Humanities, when compared with Design Technology and Science, will probably explain the higher average number of sentences (in other words, here, word groupings deserving of a capital letter and a full stop) in those subject areas. We can also note that over all four subjects capital letters and full stops are used correctly in a range of 71-89%, with incorrect or omitted full stops accounting for an accuracy rate which is - across the board - significantly lower than that of capital letter use.

This set of tables analyses the data within year groups and subjects in terms of accurate use of capital letters and full stops to demarcate sentences.

Y3	Y5	Y8	Y10	
English				
79.29%	75.71%	92.64%	96.33%	Caps correct
64.06%	64.13%	86.58%	92.86%	F/stop correct
Design Technology				
51.28%	69.64%	95.74%	97.67%	Caps correct
36.59%	60.00%	82.63%	86.57%	F/stop correct
Science				
69.80%	89.30%	91.22%	91.55%	Caps correct
66.89%	74.89%	81.75%	85.15%	F/stop correct
Humanities				
84.87%	83.40%	94.58%	91.86%	Caps correct
73.14%	68.09%	84.14%	76.36%	F/stop correct
Y3	Y5	Y8	Y10	

English, Science and DT all show a general pattern of improvement between Year 3 and Year 10 in the correct use of both capital letters and full stops. Humanities scripts show some less predictable variations with regard to correct use of the full stop. It is possible that these variations, together with other figures, notably the wider gap in DT between capital letter and full stop correctness, may result from the nature of the writing tasks undertaken. Continuous prose or a series of answers to questions, for older pupils, may be more likely to trigger the learned writing behaviour of *full stop*. *Capital letter* at sentence boundaries. More fragmentary text, which may have good reasons for its nature, may be likely, for some pupils at least, to lead to less attention being paid to the terminal marking of a note or statement. The evidence here is not sufficient to make this more than very tentative as a hypothesis, but it is possible to suggest that classroom practice in all subjects needs to pay attention to the appropriateness of sentence markers within the different types of writing used by

pupils. At the very least, pupils need a consistent code to follow and an understanding of why that particular code is appropriate in some contexts and not in others.

3.2 Internal sentence punctuation

The incidence of **proper nouns, which to be correct need to be capitalised**, is highest in all four year groups in English, is next highest overall in Humanities, most variable in Science, which has the third highest incidence overall, and consistently lowest in DT. That result, certainly for English and Humanities, is not surprising, as it reflects the nature and subject matter of much of the writing in these subjects. The picture on accuracy of use is more complex.

In general, incorrect use of capitals is much more frequent than omission, and in some cases may be a handwriting error rather than technically a punctuation error. Attention to the use of capital letters for proper nouns and their inappropriateness for other nouns could be justified across the subjects, given the overall rate of incorrect or omitted use.

The coding frame also assessed the use of the **comma** to separate items in a list, to demarcate clauses, and for parenthesis. Conclusions from such data would be very tentative indeed. Incorrect use of the comma within lists is infrequent, whereas omission is much more frequent: even by Year 10 one in every four listing commas is being omitted.

Omission also accounts for the greater part of the incorrect incidences of the comma used to demarcate clauses and used parenthetically. By Year 10 correct use of the comma to demarcate clauses only occurs in around 40% of the recorded instances, and correct use for parenthesis in only 38%. For both uses, omission accounts for over half the recorded instances in Year 10. But it is only from Year 8 that this level of correctness is being established.

3.3 The use of apostrophes

The incidence of the possessive apostrophe is at such a low level in the sample as a whole that it is not possible to draw out anything of statistical significance in terms of year group or subject comparisons. It can be noted that writing in English appears consistently to offer slightly more opportunities for its use across all the year groups. It can also be noted that increasing opportunity for use is also opportunity for error: in Year 10, the average success rate is less than a third of the total recorded, with omissions accounting for half.

The omissive apostrophe is managed more successfully within a higher level of incidence: a success rate of around 30% in Year 3 moves to around 40% in Year 5, and then to 80% in Years 8 and 10. For whatever reason, the relevant rule is applied much more effectively.

3.4 The punctuation of dialogue

Very little use of dialogue was recorded across the sample as a whole. No examples of its use in DT, only one example in Science and few in Humanities. Only in English were there examples of dialogue in each year group. The data offer some indication of accuracy improving with age, though speech layout is frequently omitted in all age groups. If this small sample is in any way typical of the general range of boys' writing across the age range, they will have few opportunities to become more skilled through practice in handling the current conventions of dialogue within their writing.

4.0 Non-Standard English

Non-standard usage was recorded on whole text samples. In general, such usage was very low across all age groups. On the evidence this is not an aspect of boys' writing that should concern teachers as a likely problem requiring preventive treatment.

There is no evidence of the incidence of recorded non-standard features decreasing with maturity, indeed in some categories the opposite is the case. It is important to note that the sample is the whole text and that these samples are generally significantly greater with older boys. One example of increased incidence with an older group is the **use of plural subject with singular verb or of singular subject with plural verb**. Year Ten boys overall show the highest incidence. The recorded instances are 35 in total across 102 scripts, and they come from the work of 12 of the 18 pupils in the sample, with no pupil giving more than 7 instances, and the majority between 1 and 3.

Non-standard irregular past tense forms occur at a low level and with little variation across the age-groups: in Year Three, 13 instances; in Year Five, 19 instances; in Year Eight, 9 instances; in Year Ten, 18 instances. **Non-standard use of prepositions** is not found in Year Three scripts, and there is only one instance in year Five scripts. Yet in Year Eight, there are 17 instances, and in Year Ten, 21. This is possibly an indication that this is an error that largely only transfers into writing from speech as boys grow in confidence in extensive use of their own voice and expression of their own views. Those pupils for whom non-standard use is a problem may well be helped in their usage by more confident mastery of the meta-language. Proof-reading strategies may also reduce errors of this kind.

The category showing the highest incidence of non-standard usage was the **other non-standard forms** category, which included stylistic clumsiness, but the range of items included is too wide to be useful for further analysis.

There were no significant differences in the use of non-standard features between the four subject areas in the sample for the study, other than in two areas. Recording of **other non-standard forms** showed a higher incidence in English and Humanities in all year groups, which may reflect the nature and extent of writing in these areas, as compared with DT and Science. Also, the suggestion above that **non-standard use of prepositions** was related to the development and extent of individual expression in older pupils gets some support from the fact that in Years Eight and Ten the highest incidence for this type of error is in English and Humanities scripts.

5.0 Clause and Word Class

This coding frame was based on the 100 word section of the text, and so usage and error were scored on a percentage basis. Clause co-ordination and subordination could cause particular difficulties in the scoring of some pupils' scripts. Finite clauses were counted, not non-finite formations, sometimes known as 'non-finite clauses'.

5.1 Clause Structure

Incidence of coded items as percentage of 100 word (or less) sample

	Y3	Y5	Y8	Y10
English				
finite verbs	16.38%	15.28%	12.57%	14.51%
co-ordinating devices	3.68%	3.43%	3.11%	3.69%
subordinate clauses	2.59%	2.36%	3.26%	3.80%
tense error	0.32%	0.16%	0.11%	0.23%
non-lexical main verbs	0.92%	0.57%	0.94%	0.83%

Design Technology				
finite verbs	10.71%	13.01%	11.79%	11.91%
co-ordinating devices	2.31%	2.24%	3.95%	3.19%
subordinate clauses	1.68%	2.73%	2.86%	2.21%
tense error	0.21%	0.33%	0.17%	0.00%
non-lexical main verbs	0.84%	0.17%	0.34%	0.33%
Science				
finite verbs	14.40%	13.61%	11.39%	11.91%
co-ordinating devices	2.39%	2.95%	2.49%	2.52%
subordinate clauses	2.71%	2.77%	3.13%	3.39%
tense error	0.32%	0.04%	0.07%	0.17%
non-lexical main verbs	0.52%	0.85%	0.78%	0.17%
Humanities				
finite verbs	14.31%	14.36%	12.94%	9.81%
co-ordinating devices	2.56%	2.87%	3.41%	1.92%
subordinate clauses	2.19%	2.12%	4.13%	2.30%
tense error	1.10%	0.46%	0.10%	0.00%
non-lexical main verbs	1.16%	0.50%	0.61%	0.57%

The range in average incidence in the use of finite verbs within the year group/subject categories is not large (9.81% to 16.38%), but the range is much greater at the level of the individual script. In Year 5 English scripts, for example, the range was from 6 in a script of 97 words which was a 'Wanted' poster to 21 in a full 100 word sample which was a fictional narrative. The consistently higher average incidence in English scripts might relate to a weighting of narrative scripts. The lowest figure in the table above is for Year 10 Humanities and might appear to relate to the disappearance of narrative form in this sample when compared to the use of narrative modes in younger age groups.

The examples analysed from narrative texts suggest that, though there is no simple developmental line which can be traced through incidence of finite verbs, their incidence at levels well above the average is worth investigation at the level of the individual pupil and needs to be checked against sentence/clause variety and management.

Writing assignments in any subject that allow the writer to fall into the traps of comma splicing, over-reliance on repeated co-ordinators and the related strings of finite verbs are also those that allow for the development of more complex sentences and effective use of subordinate clauses. As understanding and explanation increase in their complexity, this ought to be reflected to some extent in the increasing incidence of complex sentences. The table on page 11 offers some evidence for this overall, though there are curious variations, particularly in Humanities scripts, where the incidence of subordinate clauses in Year 10 is very close to the figures for Years 3 and 5 and only just over half that for Year 8. Scrutiny of the data suggests that the 30 Year 8 scripts contain a much higher proportion of tasks that would encourage more complex and continuous prose than do the 28 Year 10 scripts. These are small samples and do not allow for more than tentative conclusions, but it would be a matter for concern within an individual school's provision for writing development if the overall pattern of writing opportunity was closing down, perhaps as a result of assessment pressures, on regular linkage between the complexities of understanding, argument, analysis on the one hand and those of spoken and written language on the other.

Two points need to be made to balance against that need for opportunities for more complex writing opportunities. The first is that fitness for purpose will often require relatively simple structures in the interest of clarity. The second is that many pupils across the age range of the study continue to need supportive structures, which are appropriate either for a particular task or as a stage towards more complex written outcomes. This may be a particular need for boys.

5.2 Tense formation and non-lexical verbs

Errors in sequencing tenses show a low incidence across the range of scripts in all four subject areas and all four age-groups. The youngest pupils make the most errors. By Year 10 the overall incidence is very low. Of the 30 errors in tenses made across all the 87 Year 3 scripts (a sample total of some 5,500 words), 7 come from one History script. This is a series of one-sentence answers to questions and the pupil in several of them has used the present rather than the past tense. The coder was technically correct to see these instances as errors, but we can not be sure what convention the teacher's questions were using. Other than that, no Year 3 script has more than 4 instances in the 100 word sample.

The Year 5 sample (almost 9,500 words from 122 scripts) gives only 21 tense errors in total, no individual script sample giving more than 3 - again a History set of answers to questions, where interpretation has perhaps been very strict. Year 8 script samples give 12 tense errors in a sample of almost 11,000 words. Year 10 script samples give 12 tense errors in a sample of almost 10,000 words. 7 of these are in scripts from one pupil, for whom English is an additional language.

Non-lexical verb use, as indicated in the table on page 11, is low in incidence and with fluctuations that make it difficult to draw any safe conclusions as to the pattern of

incidence. There appears to be a slightly higher use in narrative pieces overall, but this is just as likely to be a quirk given the size of the sample.

5.3 Word class usage

The frequency of use of abstract nouns would be expected to increase with maturity and the study data, even in a small sample, meets that expectation in terms of a broad comparison between the primary groups and the secondary groups. Abstract nouns as a percentage of all nouns are:

- Year 3: 8.4%
- Year 5: 10.6%
- Year 8: 21.6%
- Year 10: 18.5%

We can break these figures down further into subject categories:

	English	DT	Science	Humanities
Year 3	12.2%	3.4%	6.7%	8.4%
Year 5	8.9%	6.6%	13.9%	15.3%
Year 8	14.0%	13.8%	25.2%	30.3%
Year 10	18.2%	17.6%	14.7%	22.5%

Possible anomalies here (for example, the dip in Year 10 Science and Humanities) would need to be explored across a larger and more closely-focused sample. The expectation would be that there would be a rise in the proportion of abstract nouns to all noun use in these subject areas as studies developed towards GCSE standards. Investigation into particular scripts suggests that much depends on the nature of the task undertaken, rather than a high incidence of abstract nouns acting as an indicator of better understanding or higher achievement.

Abstract nouns referring to emotions barely figure in the sample. As would be expected, they appear more frequently in English scripts than elsewhere. Most of the very few English instances in Year 10 occur in one script sample from a literature essay comparing the experience of conflict in three poems. Such writing does need to be able to handle emotional concepts as generalisations, to move beyond the particular. Equally narrative of a mature and challenging kind requires a command of that level of abstraction for appropriate and telling use. Of the 35 English script samples in Year 10, only 4 included 1 or more abstract nouns referring to emotion. It should also be noted that 40 of the 95 abstract nouns of all kinds in the sample were from 3 of the 35 English scripts. A search through all Year 10 samples across all four subject areas (based on individual script scores of 10+ abstract nouns) shows that 113 out of the total 326 abstract nouns recorded by coders come from only 8 of the 102 scripts, and from 5 of the 18 students, one of whom is responsible for 50 of that 113.

This led to a further investigation which scored the mean incidence of abstract nouns per 100 word sample for each Year 10 student in the study across the range of their script samples. Given that schools were requested if possible to offer scripts from lower, middle and higher ability groupings, the figures are presented in school groupings:

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5	School 6

Student A	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.5	0.8
Student B	2.0	1.0	2.2	1.8	7.0	2.2
Student C	4.0	1.8	3.8	2.3	11.0	2.3

A similar check was then done on Year 8, with consistent numbering of schools where they had provided scripts in both of these year groups. School 4 only provided a sample in Year 10, School 7 in Year 8.

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 5	School 6	School 7
Student A	1.0	0.9	3.0	2.5	2.3	1.1
Student B	1.7	1.6	4.1	6.0	2.8	1.4
Student C	7.7	5.2	7.4	7.5	7.7	1.6

There seem to be issues here about the relationship between the use of abstract nouns and modes of writing across the curriculum with students' perceived ability and actual development as writers that would be worth further study with particular focus on the element of deliberate teaching and encouragement of this level of conceptual vocabulary. This might have particular significance for boys' development.

Adjectives and adverbs (which include words or phrases with the relevant function) might also be expected to be an indicator of increased maturity and writing competence. The analysis done by the coding team shows that incidence (as a percentage of text in the 100 word samples) was as follows:

	Y3	Y5	Y8	Y10
adjectives	7.90%	8.51%	8.19%	8.85%
adverbs	5.55%	6.90%	6.25%	6.40%

Although there is some increase from Year 3 into later groups, it is neither considerable nor consistent. A more detailed presentation by subject area follows:

Adjectives

	English	DT	Science	Humanities
Year 3	7.14%	10.50%	7.68%	8.22%
Year 5	7.78%	12.51%	7.89%	8.16%
Year 8	8.06%	7.90%	8.23%	8.50%
Year 10	7.23%	8.59%	8.87%	11.13%
Across years	7.55%	9.88%	8.17%	9.00%

Adverbs

	English	DT	Science	Humanities
Year 3	5.51%	6.30%	5.94%	4.99%
Year 5	7.84%	6.05%	6.57%	6.45%
Year 8	6.77%	7.16%	5.55%	5.73%
Year 10	6.74%	6.38%	6.39%	5.96%
Across years	6.72%	6.47%	6.11%	5.96%

Two general points arise which may be important for boys' development as writers. The first is that opportunities for experiment and practice in the use of these important categories which effectively define characteristics, actions and intentions are fairly equally available across the range of curriculum areas, so that teaching that focuses on their use could and should make deliberate use of this range in order to build on

pupils' strengths and interests. In Key Stages 1 and 2 in particular that point needs to be taken into account when devising the balance between English time and focus and other curriculum activity. If boys are less keen on English because of inferior performance and poor self image, it may be important to extend their writing skills and related grammatical understanding under curriculum 'banners' to which they will more readily rally. English must not become the 'skills' box, while Science, Technology and Humanities become 'content' boxes. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there are important considerations for the use within English of texts and writing contexts from other curriculum areas and for the language/learning development which needs to be integral to specialist teaching in all subjects.

The second and related point relates to the data's apparent indication that extension and elaboration in the use of adjectives and adverbs does not happen to the degree that might be expected. That indication must be treated with considerable caution, given both the limitations of the sample and the natural limitations of prose structures and style. There will be a limit to the number of adjectives and adverbs any hundred words can bear without deterioration of meaning, effectiveness or seriousness. It may be that extension is more a matter of the **range** of adjectives and adverbs used than of the number used. Nevertheless there may be a place for more deliberate teaching, appropriate to subject and task contexts, of useful and effective words in these categories. Such teaching, related to the points made above about abstract nouns, could be of considerable benefit to young male writers, especially when clearly related to particular purposes, topics and modes of writing.

6.0 Paragraphing

Analysis of paragraphing was conducted on the whole text. It can therefore be related to the whole text analysis, as well as checking the level of effectiveness of paragraph use as a device for structuring writing. Use of other layout devices is also indicated on the coding returns, as is evidence on the use of topic sentences or theme statements as introductions to paragraphs and on the use of conjuncts which are largely applicable to non-narrative writing. Fuller analysis below will indicate that the nature of a significant number of scripts was such that paragraphing was not a feature (often a matter of immaturity as a writer) or that, although other layout devices were used, these were often prescribed by teachers in order to guide pupils in giving brief factual answers or statements.

It was often difficult to determine if a particular piece's paragraphing or related structural devices was a direct response to a format set, for example by the teacher's questions on a work-sheet, or was a deliberate writing choice by the pupil.

The starting point for the discussion of paragraphing and the data from the study is this table below which indicates the average number of paragraphs (based on whole scripts) in year group and subject categories. These figures exclude any piece where paragraphing was not present, and the discussion will later turn to such pieces.

The overall picture is one of development, with paragraphing becoming a significant feature of writing, when the length of pieces gets greater and the writer attempts greater control over their shape and sequence. This table does not attempt any qualitative judgement on the paragraphing, but the figures tell the basic story, which is what one would expect.

	English	DT	Science	Humanities	All subjects
Year 3	1.41	1.33	1.75	2.23	1.73
Year 5	1.91	2.00	2.37	1.35	1.91
Year 8	5.70	3.15	3.59	3.33	4.29
Year 10	7.88	7.36	5.31	5.00	6.66
All Year Groups	4.22	3.46	3.25	2.98	

Further investigation then focused on year group and subject patterns to clarify what was happening within this developmental drift. In the scoring system used, a score of 1 was used to identify a piece of writing written in continuous prose which had no internal paragraph breaks. Given the relative brevity of much writing by younger pupils, one would expect much of the writing in Year 3 to be at this level. 30 of the 87 Year 3 scripts were one-paragraph pieces, while a further 42 pieces were coded *Not applicable*. In some cases, this coding indicated that the writing was integral to a diagram or a set of label, but the majority of such codings indicated numbered answers to questions. Within the remaining scripts, just over half have two paragraphs. The evidence is that most of these Year 3 pupils are writing to learned or imposed external structures when they achieve the technical appearance of paragraphing.

The interesting question is to what degree the structures imposed or offered appear to be helping the development that will eventually lead to independent paragraphing skills. One coder noted some general conclusions arising from the coding exercise in Years 3 and 5:

boys will insist on giving short and undeveloped responses to everything unless given specific guidelines on how to develop an answer and what to include. More successful pieces seem to be ones where a structure is given, but not a structure which is too confining or restrictive. Prompts on how to develop a response/ point of view / description would be useful for most of them, as well as assistance in finding a voice for each genre. Perhaps the teaching of specific phrases and examples of how to use new vocabulary would help in this respect.

The large number of pieces in the sample which rely on a question/answer formula or use some other device such as given sub-headings suggest that teachers in this age group perceive a need for structure also.

The purpose of recording what has been learned is common to a number of the scripts in Science and Design Technology, where formal patterns of recording what has been done often appear far too fixed for the developmental stage of the pupils working within them. This does not appear to be a matter of the teacher choosing carefully an appropriate frame to encourage and support writing in a particular context, but rather one of accepting that there are certain given ways of adult writing in these subjects and starting on these early. There is much less evidence of the flexible use of writing frames, key words, starter phrases in a pattern, such as have been advocated in recent years, in particular within the Nuffield Exeter EXEL Project. This is also the case in Year 5 scripts, where again some 80% of the scripts are one-paragraph or non-paragraph pieces. Over half the pieces in Science and Design Technology used structures where paragraphs were not applicable, just under half in Humanities, and only 4 out of 37 in English.

Where writing frames are used in the sample, this is restricted to English and the spread of the idea of the 'writing frame' has already produced some textbook and

work-sheet material which restricts rather than encourages writing development, at least for some pupils.

Year 8 shows a considerable increase in the incidence of paragraph use. The average figure for English scripts would have been nearer 4.5 than 5.7, had it not been for one piece of fiction with a great deal of dialogue. Even so English scripts produced more paragraphs on average than the scripts from other subjects. Topic sentences appear consistently or occasionally in about half of these English scripts, and conjuncts or other patterning in 11 of the 35 scripts. The ability to paragraph seems very closely allied with the competent use of the important linguistic markers of argument: *for example, on the other hand*.

There are similar developments in the other subjects, though the increase is not as marked. In Science, for example, 11 of the 28 scripts use structures where paragraphs are not required. In those scripts that do paragraph in some fashion, only half use any topic sentences and few show any use of conjuncts. More typical would be a piece where for example the sub-headings indicate categories, which are defined and related to pictures.

Paragraphing continues to develop as a feature of boys' writing in Year 10 scripts.

Year 10	Number N/A* out of total	Range	Average	Appropriate	Partially appropriate	Inappropriate	Absent
English	3/35	1-22	7.88	15/32	12/32	1/32	4/32
DT	5/16	1-16	7.36	7/11	3/11	0/11	1/11
Science	7/23	1-10	5.31	13/16	1/16	1/16	1/16
Humanities	13/28	1-13	5.00	8/15	6/15	0/15	1/15

*N/A: marked by coder as *non-applicable* (paragraphing is not appropriate)

These figures indicate that paragraph handling by Year 10 students is well on the way to being at least competent overall, though there is still a good deal to learn across the cohort. There might be some surprise at the high level (almost 50%) of the Humanities scripts being ones where paragraph use was coded as *non-applicable*. 9 of the 13 were short written answers to teachers' questions, and the others were writing in note form. This may reflect a greater use of writing at this point to instil or check content knowledge: that very tentative hypothesis would need to be checked against a much wider group of Year 10 Humanities scripts from classwork and homework, but it does suggest a variance between actuality and the range of writing opportunities in Humanities recommended to schools.

Typical of the writers in this selection who are beginning to get hold of the idea of paragraphing, but have only a basic and still insecure grasp is the inconsistent marking of paragraphs in continuous prose. Uncertainty of structure may reflect an insecure grasp of the taught points, and it is indicated in the fluctuating use of topic sentences. Students appear to need a good deal more teaching and practice before they can use paragraphing in a confident way, particularly in a piece that requires the sinew of argument.

Given the right kind of support and preparation, pupils can move beyond insecure and very basic competence to a use of prose to arrange information, develop argument and confidently internalise specialist expertise. But, to do this, he requires more than the outline shape of the writing task. If paragraph openers and sequencers and a wider range of logical connectives are not in his repertoire and these are not provided by prompts and related direct teaching, important opportunities for learning within

subjects and learning writing skills applicable in many other contexts are closed to him.

7.0 Whole Text Features

Coders were required to comment on aspects of the whole text with regard to Opening, Closing, Writer/reader relationship, Coherence and Cohesion, and Idiom (i.e. instances of unidiomatic usage). In this area of coding, the study relies on the coders' judgements on the quality of texts in their contexts and has no quantitative data to offer. The summary that follows draws on the coders' identification of features and their observations on these and illustrates general points with some particular examples. Given the nature of the study, these comments attempt to move across the age-groups in an attempt to identify key developmental points for boys who are becoming writers with more or less success.

7.1 Year Three

Earlier comments have been made on the fragmentary nature of some texts, and in several cases it has proved inappropriate to analyse texts as *whole texts*, when they have been anything but that. What is immediately clear is that narrative, whatever its problems for some boys, provides most of the best examples of successful textual organisation across the range of ability. The genre model is clearly well embedded in terms of openings, the writer-reader relationship is easily assumed in the pattern of the omniscient authorial voice, and the sequence of incidents provides at least a basic patterning to hold the text together. Closings are less successful. This relates to the immaturity of the narrative style and the expectation of the reader for some kind of authorial 'overlay' on incident.

More successful are narratives which are modelled much more closely on a known story, for example in a retelling or in the addition of an additional section. Here the young writers have much to rely on and learn from, and imitation often proves surprisingly effective.

Some other writing in English shows a less confident management of textual type, often where the most obvious features have been taught, but other critical features have not been taught or internalised. Book reviews and letters are common examples. Several book reviews begin well enough with a focus on theme, character, narrative problem, but then move into brief outline re-telling, before ending with recommendations that seem to have been taught as effective formulae and appear to be tacked on.

More capable Year Three writers can handle the book review more fluently, but there are several who appear to benefit from more detailed preparation or taught structure, which is about the focus and shape of the whole text, not just about beginnings and ends. The more successful versions will focus more on the writer's perceptions as reader of the book than on the difficult and vague notion of an unknown reader of book reviews using phrases such as: *My favourite characters are...and I liked the bit where*

The letter genre offers parallel examples where the ability to manage layout does not always relate to any understanding of appropriate tone or assumed readership, any sense of *talking to*. The demands seem to need to be kept more specific, for example, by using a series of numbered sentences to organise the material.

In Humanities scripts, retellings sometimes have the strengths noted above for English, but can also lose their writers in a welter of detail. There is much more sense of purposeful writing when the task is more focused. So an advertisement for *the best gladater thieter in the weld* can deal effectively with the notion of a reader and give direct instructions about the use of the *fum*, up or down. Another interesting example is some History work on Boudicca where shared reading of an information book and of some numbered statements prepared by the teacher has led on to individual completion of a sequence of sentence stems, which has allowed one less able pupil to complete the information sequence accurately and with some sense of involvement.

In Design Technology there is evidence of Year Three pupils learning simple and effective techniques for instructions on *how to make*, the relationship with the reader being relatively direct and easy to comprehend. In many pieces, there is little sense of a reader to whom the text is directed, and the teacher, who is recognised to be the actual reader, is already known to know all the context. The result is a frequent lack of focus on what the reader needs to know to make sense of the text and sometimes a confusion of registers, as in some Science writing where the impersonal register, the personal account and reference to a generalised *you* intermingle.

71.2 Year Five

Here scripts show some signs of development, and the more able writers are increasingly capable of managing more complex textual organisation. Many issues remain, and there is little evidence in the sample of a consistent and generally agreed pattern of writing development. The emphasis in setting assignments is still on the use of an accepted type of writing task (the work-sheet, the science experiment report, the letter in role) and only very occasionally on explicit attention to particular needs and techniques. Yet Year Five boys are increasingly needing to handle quite complicated information and are attempting more ambitious narratives, descriptions and explanations. These increased demands on writing competence lead to some successes, some ambitious failures and much writing that operates at a level some way below the probable level of class discussion and debate.

7.3 Year Eight

Pupils' scripts in Year Eight generally reflect the increasing specialisation of the curriculum, which is taught by a wider range of teachers who may or may not co-operate in developing written English. This specialisation also involves them with ever-increasing amounts of information to be managed and understood. Individual pupils in some cases were perceived by coders to make greater efforts in English than in other subjects or vice-versa. Certainly there can be wide variations in the quality of the writing from particular pupils, especially ones in the middle range of ability, but there was no significant evidence across the sample of an overall pattern. Much in fact depends on the nature of the tasks set and the amount of time and attention given to writing, whatever the subject. Tentative conclusions are:

- that some boys in this age group can respond negatively to a low level of teacher expectation with regard to writing (as opposed to content);
- that there is a continuing need for teacher direction on specific format, register and readership within challenging assignments;

- that many boys can improve the quality of their writing significantly if more time is given to planning, check-reading and re-drafting writing.

The range of attainment also widens with these older boys. The most able move with relative ease into ambitious pieces of writing and, where re-drafting is encouraged or allowed, deal well with most of their initial errors. The least able continue with the problems indicated in Year Five scripts, and often the writing tasks set seem to add little to their learning in the subject or to their experience as writers.

Information and communication technology (ICT) becomes more evident in use, with a greater number of pieces being word-processed or desk-top-published. Generally this seems to encourage boys of this age to write more, but it does not of itself improve the whole text qualities under investigation.

In both narrative and essay-type non-narrative pieces, of which there are more, the growing control evident in Year Five scripts continues to strengthen. Opening sections are mostly effective and closure is generally achieved in such pieces. In narrative this is often signalled by a deliberate verbal twist at the end, which adds humour or a sinister touch. In non-narrative work, particularly that concerned with the presentation of information, closure is more perfunctory. The script comes to an end with the last piece of information and there is no habit of or requirement for summary or reflection. There is also a more confident sense of the writer-reader relationship with more consistent use of appropriate devices, such as the aside in narrative, and through the development of viewpoint in argumentative pieces. A number of pieces, particularly in Geography in this sample, are intended as the outcomes of lengthy project work, and carry at least the outline structure of a chapter format and pamphlet presentation.

Some pupils have problems with consistency in the use of an appropriate register in Science, moving from the passive to the active voice and 'you'. Expectations on this seem to vary across the schools.

7.4 Year Ten

At this stage of schooling, the lack of background for many of the scripts becomes a problem when complex information is being processed for and by pupils in preparation for external examinations. In some scripts it is far from clear what is copied from dictation, blackboard or book and what is the pupil's own formulation. The further complication is in the more obvious direction of pupils' own writing to either course work, often much more extensive than most of the Year Eight scripts, or shorter pieces which are test-like in their nature or are clearly examination preparation.

Given those constraints, the sample of scripts shows the continuing traits remarked on above. There is a widening of the gap between the most capable and the least capable writers. Some pupils are now able to handle a range of genres comfortably and with skill, while others continue to experience problems. Many pupils still benefit from some prescription of format by their teacher, suggesting that this type of support, if appropriately matched, remains essential to the progress of the majority of boys in many areas of writing. This is equally true whether the work is being done for external assessment or is writing to assist the learning and retention of factual information. Also important is explicit attention to appropriate register and stylistic convention.

The use of a particular form of writing, without preparation and support, guarantees as little as the focus on a particular topic.

Some scripts show evidence of highly appropriate support being offered. One school Science department uses a pre-printed work-sheet for the reporting of pupils' experiments. The headings are standard for the Science scripts seen in this sample, which is of interest given the variations in younger age-groups. But in this case the abstract headings are sub-titled by a key question or questions to the pupil:

These scripts, with their focus on learning, are very different in their effect on writing to some of the course work project reports, in particular some within Design Technology, where the sheer magnitude of the enterprise seems to lead to a deterioration in the quality of the writing. For at least some pupils at this stage of education, the complexity of such a report appears to be too much for them, and there is little or no opportunity for pupil and teacher to work together on specific issues of register, tone or presentation.

Three boys in the Year Ten sample give some evidence that works against the stereotypes of boys and writing. This might encourage greater scrutiny of teachers' expectations in relation to what boys actually write in school and how those expectations translate into a classroom culture. One, in a character study, shows the ability to empathise with a young female character:

Two others show boys thoughtfully and openly engaging in reflection on their feelings for and relationships with particular girls. This is not a matter of bravado: they have been encouraged to feel that writing is important to personal learning, even in this most interesting, difficult and unaccredited area.

8.0 Classroom Issues in Summary

8.1. Analysis: schools might find it helpful to sample the range of writing being required of pupils across the curriculum and measure this both against National Curriculum requirements and recommendations and against their own literacy development planning and targets.

8.2. Analysis: schools might find it helpful to sample the performance of individual pupils for diagnostic purposes and of whole groups for purposes of monitoring curriculum provision and of measuring progress and attainment in writing.

8.3. Analysis: schools might be helped in such analysis by access to a sampling instrument similar to the set of coding frames used in this and other QCA investigations and perhaps derived from that set of frames, though modified for particular school-based purposes.

8.4. Analysis: for the purposes of analysis of the writing of groups of pupils or of inter-group comparisons, schools might also be aided by the provision of customised software or spreadsheets, which could easily transform raw data into useful comparative information.

8.5. Spelling: phonetically based: teaching strategies which are aimed at encouraging independent **trial** in this aspect, supported by the reinforcement of

common **patterns** and by checking and learning from specific **error**, would appear to be appropriate.

8.6. Spelling: inversions: a teaching strategy which identifies specific errors of this minor kind and follows up with specific and intensive reinforcement of the correct pattern would appear to be more appropriate than major programmes of preventive drill.

8.7. Spelling: homophone errors: a strategy of careful error pattern identification and intensive specific response appears to be the most appropriate and efficient in all the age groups investigated.

8.8. Spelling: general: there is evidence of the need for a general approach to teaching specific spellings systematically, particularly in ways connected with meaning and with the specialist and context-probable/useful vocabulary appropriate to a specific writing focus.

8.9. Spelling: the y ending (e.g. *tries, stories*), of the adding of -ly to a base form to form an adverb, and of the doubling of consonants when adding inflections (e.g. *stop>stopping*): schools should work to eliminate incorrect use of these relatively straightforward spelling types, particularly where they persist into secondary education, by teaching and reinforcing simple and highly applicable spelling rules.

8.10. Spelling: the least confident writers: these pupils appear to benefit from general motivation for the writing task, from known strategies for independent attempts at spelling and for checking those attempts, and from both general and task-specific teacher support, for example by class preparation of a word-list suitable for the topic.

8.11. Punctuation: sentence markers in different writing contexts: classroom practice in all subjects needs to pay attention to the appropriateness of sentence markers within the different types of writing used by pupils. At the very least, pupils need a consistent code to follow and an understanding of why that particular code is appropriate in some contexts and not in others.

8.12. Punctuation: the use of capital letters for proper nouns: attention to the use of capital letters for proper nouns and their inappropriateness for other nouns could be worthwhile across the curriculum, given the overall rate of incorrect or omitted use.

8.13. Punctuation: the use of the comma to separate items in a list, to demarcate clauses, and for parenthesis: given the overall rate of omitted use, attention to this aspect of punctuation for efficient and meaningful reading could be worthwhile across the curriculum.

8.14. Punctuation: dialogue: if pupils are to learn acceptable conventions for presenting and punctuating dialogue, schools should consider what conventions to use and build relevant practice into the fabric of writing opportunities across the curriculum.

- 8.15.Non-standard usage:** teachers' time appears to be most effectively spent on support to individual pupils, based on their actual writing mistakes. Pupils' training in proof-reading will also help reduce this kind of writing error.
- 8.16.Development of complex sentences:** schools' provision for writing development needs to ensure that the overall pattern of writing opportunity and challenge includes regular linkage between the complexities of understanding, argument, analysis on the one hand and those of spoken and written language on the other.
- 8.17.Levels of use of finite verbs:** incidence at levels well above the average is worth investigation with regard to the individual pupil and needs to be checked against the variety and management of clauses and sentences.
- 8.18.Word class usage: abstract nouns:** secondary schools might usefully analyse the incidence of abstract nouns in their pupils' writing and the relationship of this both to the modes of writing in use across the curriculum and to students' perceived ability. This might have particular significance for boys' development, and might suggest the consideration of deliberate teaching and encouragement of this level of conceptual vocabulary.
- 8.19.Word class usage: adverbs and adjectives 1:** Opportunities for experiment and practice in the use of these important categories which effectively define characteristics, actions and intentions are fairly equally available across the range of curriculum areas. So teaching should make deliberate use of this range in order to build on pupils' strengths and interests. In Key Stages 1 and 2 in particular that point needs to be taken into account when devising the balance between English time and other curriculum activity. If boys are less keen on English because of inferior performance and poor self image, it may be important to extend their writing skills and related grammatical understanding under curriculum 'banners' to which they will more readily rally. English must not become the 'skills' box, while Science, Technology and Humanities become 'content' boxes. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there are important considerations for the use within English of texts and writing contexts from other curriculum areas and for the language/learning development which needs to be integral to specialist teaching in all subjects.
- 8.20.Word class usage: adverbs and adjectives 2:** the study suggests that extension and elaboration in the use of adjectives and adverbs does not happen to the degree that might be expected. That indication must be treated with considerable caution, given both the limitations of the sample and the natural limitations of prose structures and style. There will be a limit to the number of adjectives and adverbs any hundred words can bear without deterioration of meaning, effectiveness or seriousness. It may be that extension is more a matter of the **range** of adjectives and adverbs used than of the number used. Nevertheless there may be a place for more deliberate teaching, appropriate to subject and task contexts, of useful and effective words in these categories. Such teaching, related to the points made above about abstract nouns, could be of considerable benefit to boys, especially when clearly related to particular purposes, topics and modes of writing.

8.21. Fitness for purpose in writing tasks: some writing tasks, for reasons of learning, memorising and presentation, will often require relatively simple structures in the interest of clarity.

8.22. Models and frames for writing tasks: many pupils across the age range of the study need supportive structures, frameworks and models, which are appropriate either for a particular task or as a stage towards more complex written outcomes. This may be a particular need for boys, who often appear to give short and undeveloped responses unless working within specific guidelines on how to develop an answer and what to include. The issue for teachers is how to provide this kind of support without constraining pupils' energies and ability and without blunting the necessary element of challenge of the task. Prompts on how to develop a response (or point of view or description etc.) may be useful for most of them, as well as assistance in finding a voice for each genre. Perhaps the teaching of specific phrases and examples of how to use new vocabulary would also help in this respect. Regular procedures for re-drafting with an emphasis on structure rather than surface features might also contribute to boys' achievement in writing.

8.23. Models and frames for writing tasks: questions and answers: the success or otherwise of teacher questions which require pupil responses depends very much on the type and to some extent the sequencing of those questions. Is the writing being done to reinforce and develop learning, to check on accuracy of recall, to record what has been learned? Does the pupil share that understanding of the task explicitly? What are the implications for, for example, presentation?

8.24. Models and frames for writing tasks: paragraphing: boys, given the right kind of support and preparation, can move beyond insecure and very basic competence to a confident use of prose to arrange information, develop argument and internalise specialist expertise. To do this, they require more than the outline shape of the writing task. Many will need help in the form of the planning of sub-headings, which can signal paragraph structure. A range of suitable paragraph 'openers' and 'sequencers' and a range of logical connectives need to be provided by direct teaching and by prompts in planning and drafting. Tasks related to popular media offer excellent opportunities for exploring links between genre and format/layout. ICT programs, especially those for desktop publishing, can allow for speedy and authentic alternatives to be tried and compared.

8.25. Models and frames for writing tasks: use of National Literacy Strategy procedures: secondary school specialist departments could learn some useful lessons about exploring genre models and their particular qualities from the NLS procedures being developed in the primary sector, in which the sequence of *modelling>discussion>key features targeted>drafting process* is strong and shows evidence of being effective.

8.26. Models and frames for writing tasks: use of established formats: across the whole age range of the study, boys clearly benefit from explicit attention to the nature of these formats and from supportive 'glosses' (such as headings followed by specific lead questions or focus statements). The focus and shape of the whole text, the appropriate register, the intended or imagined reader: all of these need to be clear. In some cases, they will be *given*, in others open for discussion and decision. They always need to be explicit. There is also a place for teaching

appropriate key verbal signals. *Once upon a time* and *consequently* are equally important in their different contexts. Planning, check-reading and re-drafting of writing continue to be important to the quality of achievement across all the subjects investigated.

8.27. Notes and labelling of diagrams etc.: particularly in the secondary age range, pupils' writing is often required to clarify their learning of key points and provide them with a basis for revision and retention. Pupils need to be taught and need to experiment with effective conventions for writing and presentation in this kind of work, again with explicit attention to models and their features, with prompts and with time for planning and drafting.

8.28. Personal writing: boys, particularly in the secondary years, need a classroom culture and appropriately protected opportunities for reflective writing which may contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.