

During year 9, a group of boys was selected by the literacy co-ordinator to be interviewed about how they approached extended writing tasks. These were boys who were considered to be able, but sometimes reluctant writers. In year 10, the boys were re-interviewed and then attended a workshop during which they were asked for their opinions about teaching and learning techniques which they felt promoted a helpful approach to extended writing across the curriculum. The following summary is an outline of the boys' views.

Extended Writing: what works?

Having a summary of relevant notes/key facts to hand – perhaps in the form of bullet points which the class collects together.

Explicit information about where information can be found – websites, names of study/revision guides (Learn Premium was mentioned).

Key words displayed; these are useful – but only if the class are reminded of them and they are explained. A list of more sophisticated vocabulary is also useful.

A structured plan for an assignment. Possibly a writing frame.

Previous' students work (though this can be intimidating if grade achieved by the standard is too high).

Teacher modelling of how to approach the assignment.

Quiet thinking time to formulate ideas.

Planning – and having a teacher check the plan to ensure that they're “on the right lines”.

Using the computer to draft.

Formative assessment. The draft marked before the re-draft is attempted.

Advice for year 9.

Learning to learn: find out about your preferred learning style and plan revision accordingly. Use eye-catching revision aids with pictures. Moving around, even acting, may be useful. Use the computer and make revision fun. Find revision games on the internet, but choose and use them wisely.

Revision books can be useful, but use them properly – don't just look at the pictures.

Student messages: I didn't do well in the SATs – do better than me! I felt bad in the exams because I knew I could have done them if I'd been better prepared.

Doing timed tests in class and going through them is very useful.

What I can do now that I couldn't do a year ago: using PEE; paying more attention to the structure of extended writing and using a wider range of punctuation; I'm more confident.

Get on top of homework and keep on top of it!

Revise early for the SATs not just at the last minute.

Don't rush the tests, take your time and plan your answers.

Work with concentration in class – it gets you higher grades.

Advice for teachers.

It's useful if teachers know what your preferred learning styles are – they can make use of that information in lessons.

Seating plans don't automatically work. Some people work better with friends. Others feel penalised for others' disruptive behaviour.

One to one time with a teacher is really useful.

Homework: don't set it for the next day; stick to the homework timetable; don't set homework when there's already a coursework assignment. Try to co-ordinate homework and coursework assignments between departments. No homework on Fridays? It helps you catch up at the weekend.

Having grade criteria sheets is really useful – what F, C, A look like.

Having more than one teacher in a big class would be really useful.

Small groups learn better together.

Give time warnings when we're writing: two minutes to go ... thirty seconds more ... finish the sentence you're writing.

“Chunking” down work into smaller tasks is helpful.

Draw attention to key words and change them regularly.

Explain what I have to do rather than doing it for me.