



Assessment and the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale

High quality teaching starts with effective assessment and embeds assessment for learning across the curriculum.

Big Writing as an approach to teaching and raising standards in writing grew out of the development of a set of criteria for the effective teacher assessment of writing, now known as the **Oxford Writing Criterion Scale (OWCS)**. The VCOP skills and basic skills on which *Big Writing* focuses are those identified through the assessment process using the OWCS as having the most impact on children's progress in writing, which is why *Big Writing* is so effective; it focuses on the skills which transform 'ordinary' writing into increasingly sophisticated, 'higher level' writing.

The OWCS provides comprehensive support for accurate, objective assessment of writing, breaking down children's writing development into small steps so that it is easy to identify the point they have reached and what they need to do next in order to progress. It is organized into a series of Standards that map to the primary year groups, from Standard 1 (Reception/P1) through to Standard 7 (Year 6/P7).

The Oxford Writing Criterion Scale and the 2014 National Curriculum in England

The Oxford Writing Criterion Scale has been matched to the yearly expectations of the 2014 National Curriculum, so that teachers can assess, track and report pupil attainment and progress against these expectations, and can do so consistently across a school. Crucially, it provides full support for teachers in assessing pupils without the use of National Curriculum Levels.

The Oxford Writing Criterion Scale and other UK Curricula

Schools outside of England, or those not following the National Curriculum in England, can also use the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale with confidence. That is because it is based on a deep understanding of progression in writing and the skills children need to master along the way, and goes far beyond simply 'ticking the boxes' of the 2014 National Curriculum in England. The **OWCS** is a curriculum-neutral assessment tool that sets high expectations for all children and draws on best practice and expert subject knowledge. For schools in Wales and Scotland customized versions are available that reflect the individualism of their curricula.

Summative Assessment

In Reception, when children are at the beginning of their journey to becoming writers, ongoing observation is the most appropriate form of assessment; formal assessments are recommended from Year 1 onwards. The OWCS should, therefore, be used as a tracking device; whenever there are opportunities for observing children working on areas that involve writing, for example using signage to locate things, sharing stories, 'writing' their name or other mark-making, learning letter shapes and the alphabet, etc. the teacher should use the relevant standard to record achievement as the skills become secure. The OWCS may also be used to plan targeted activities for the recording of information that is less frequently observed.



Towards the end of each term, teachers should review the progress made by each child against the OWCS to determine whether they are **Developing**, **Secure** or **Advanced** against the expectations of their year group and to plan the next term's teaching accordingly.

In *Big Writing* it is recommended that, from Year 1 onwards, schools carry out a summative assessment of children's writing each term to provide information about what they can do and what they need to do next to make progress. Pupils complete a piece of unsupported writing that is then assessed using the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale. This assessment determines whether each child is **Developing**, **Secure** or **Advanced** against national expectations for their year group and, over time, the termly assessment evidence provides a very clear picture of the progress children are making in writing. It also helps to quickly identify children falling behind or progressing rapidly beyond expectations.

Assessment for Learning

Big Writing is all about involving pupils in their learning by sharing the 'secret garden' of assessment with them. Thus:

- These are the few new skills you need to learn to immediately improve your writing.
- I will teach you these skills and help you to practise them.
- If you use these new skills – as well as those you already have – regularly in your writing you will become a better writer.
- Then, we'll look at some more new skills that will make you even better...

The termly, formal assessments provide a clear 'snapshot' of pupil achievement and progress but, more importantly, these assessments show teachers, children and parents exactly what a child can do and what they need to do next in order to make progress. In particular, they can flag up skills that really should be secure at a given point, such as use of full stops and capital letters or poor spelling of high frequency words. Teachers can then use this evidence to inform immediate next steps (over the next 2–3 weeks) as well as medium and long-term targets for all pupils and to inform their teaching of writing across the curriculum. Furthermore, teachers are able to identify which skills are required for one pupil only and thus require one-to-one coaching, which can be addressed with a small group and which are whole class issues.

Extended pieces of writing produced in the weekly Big Write – and/or at other times during the week – should be marked against children's two or three immediate targets, not against the whole Oxford Writing Criterion Scale. This allows teachers and pupils – through discussion and peer-review of marked writing – to ensure children are making progress as a result of targeted teaching, and to revise targets once learning is secure. It also allows for regular praise and celebration of targets achieved, making it highly motivating for children.