

# **Children and young people's writing in school in 2025**

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In 2025, 28% of 11-year-olds in England left primary school unable to write at the expected level, a concerning indicator of the challenges facing writing education.<sup>1</sup> Outside the classroom, the picture is equally troubling. In 2025, our Annual Literacy Survey showed that only 1 in 4 (26.6%) children and young people reported enjoying writing in their free time, and just 1 in 10 (10.4%) said they wrote something daily for pleasure.<sup>2</sup> Both figures are the lowest recorded in the past 15 years, suggesting a deepening disengagement from writing as a meaningful or enjoyable activity.

At first glance, children and young people's enjoyment of writing in school appears somewhat more positive. Data from the Annual Literacy Survey showed that in 2025, 1 in 3 (33.5%) said that they enjoyed writing in school, which is more than those who reported enjoying writing in their free time.<sup>3</sup> However, this is overshadowed by a sharp decline over the past year: 53.6% said they enjoyed writing in school in 2024.<sup>4</sup> This represents a drop of 20.1 percentage points or, put differently, a 37% decrease in just one year, a striking fall that warrants closer investigation.

Given these trends in the wider research, we wanted to explore how children and young people experience writing in school in more detail. This report, based on a new survey focusing on writing in school, examines their perceptions of their emotional and cognitive engagement with writing, and their views on and engagement with writing instruction. By listening to their voices, we aimed to better understand the disconnect between writing as a curriculum requirement and writing as a personally meaningful practice. This, in turn, will offer insights that can help reimagine how writing is supported and valued in education today.

## Children and young people's writing in school in 2025

We asked **14,689 children and young people** aged 8 to 18 from **90 schools across the UK** how they felt about the writing they did in school between the beginning of May

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<sup>1</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-2-attainment-national-headlines/2024-25>

<sup>2</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/children-and-young-peoples-writing-in-2025/>

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished data from the Annual Literacy Survey 2025.

<sup>4</sup> [Clark, C., Picton, I., Cole, A., & Bonafede, F. \(2024\). Children and Young People's Writing in 2024. London: National Literacy Trust.](#)

and the middle of July 2025 (for details on the sample demographics, see Appendix).

### **Children and young people's experiences of writing in school**

This report shows a complex and varied picture of children and young people's experiences of writing in school. This section explores how children and young people experience writing in school, focusing on their enjoyment of it, how they rate their own ability, and the different reasons they give for writing.

#### **Writing enjoyment in school**

We asked children and young people how much they enjoyed writing in school:

- **2 in 5 (38.7%) enjoyed writing in school** either very much (10.3%) or quite a lot (28.4%).
- **Enjoyment of writing in school was not experienced equally:**
  - More girls (44.4%) than boys (33.5%) said that they enjoyed writing in school.
  - Enjoyment of writing in school decreased with age, with the lowest levels of enjoyment seen among those aged 14 to 16 (29.4%) and the highest among children aged 8 to 11 (49.5%). However, enjoyment increased slightly among those aged 16 to 18 (38.4%), suggesting that some positive engagement with writing may re-emerge over time.
  - Disadvantage didn't mean disengagement: more children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) said that they enjoyed writing in school (41.0%) compared with those who did not receive FSMs (37.3%).

#### **Self-perception of writing ability**

We also asked children and young people how good a writer they thought they were:

- **3 in 4 (73.4%) considered themselves to be either very good or good writers.** 1 in 5 didn't think they were very good (21.7%), and 1 in 12 (8.20%) believed they were not very good at all. 1 in 11 (9.10%) said they didn't know how good a writer they were.
- **Younger children and girls showed the highest level of self-reported ability.** However, fewer boys and those aged 14 to 16 rated themselves as good writers, suggesting a dip in self-perception during mid-adolescence. Socioeconomic status also plays a role. Children and young people eligible for FSMs rated their writing slightly lower than their non-FSM peers.
- **More of those who enjoyed writing at school also viewed themselves as good writers.** Nearly 9 in 10 (87.0%) children and young people who enjoyed writing in school thought of themselves as very good or good writers, compared with 1 in 2 (53.6%) of those who didn't enjoy writing in school.

## Why children and young people write in school

In addition to enjoyment and self-perceived ability, we wanted to better understand what motivated children and young people to write in school:

- **Many children and young people understood the purpose of school writing as shaped largely by external expectations**, with 2 in 5 (42.0%) children and young people telling us that they wrote simply because their teacher told them to.
- **Purpose-driven motivations were among the most commonly selected reasons for writing in school**. 2 in 5 (37.3%) children and young people wrote to improve their skills, 1 in 3 (36.7%) to achieve good marks, and 1 in 4 (22.0%) to note things down they didn't want to forget. Others **found personal value in school writing**, such as writing to express creativity (34.8%), explore ideas (34.0%), or manage emotions (23.5%). **Many also saw writing in school as a way to support learning and thinking**, such as helping them understand new concepts (24.4%), expand their vocabulary (24.8%), or clarify their thoughts (21.8%).
- **Girls and younger children aged 8 to 11 reported a broader range of motivations**. This includes both external motivations, such as improving skills or achieving good marks, and intrinsic or personal motivations, like expressing ideas, feeling creative, or helping themselves think.
- **Intrinsic and expressive motivations decreased with age**, with fewer of those aged 14 to 18 saying they wrote in school to feel creative, learn new things, or express their thoughts. Instead, writing became increasingly tied to academic goals, like getting good marks.
- **More of those who enjoyed writing in school reported a broad and varied range of reasons for doing it**, particularly those linked to creativity, self-expression and emotional wellbeing.
- **More children and young people who saw themselves as good writers were motivated by both academic goals and intrinsic factors**, such as creativity, curiosity and self-expression.

## Approaches to writing

### Self-perceptions of writing ability across stages of the writing process

We also asked children and young people how they viewed their own writing ability across the various stages of the process:

- **Self-perceived ability was highest when it came to coming up with ideas**, where nearly 3 in 4 (73.1%) children and young people rated themselves as either very good or good. Similarly, writing ideas down (64.8%) and making handwriting neat (63.0%) scored relatively highly.

- **Self-perceived ability began to decline in more structured or technical aspects of writing.** Fewer children and young people rated themselves as either very good or good when it came to planning ideas (60.3%), making ideas better (53.0%), and particularly in checking for mistakes (49.8%) or improving the flow and style of their writing (53.5%).
- **Self-perceived ability was lowest overall for sharing, performing or publishing writing.** 2 in 5 (42.9%) children and young people felt positively about this stage of the writing process.
- **Enjoyment of writing and self-perceived writing ability were closely linked to self-perceived ability across every stage of the writing process.**

### Approaches to writing tasks: Planning

Building on the broader question about abilities across stages of the writing process, we included a more focused item on planning strategies, allowing us to understand how participants approached writing tasks at the outset:

- **Planning habits were markedly skewed towards informal or intuitive approaches over more formal planning techniques.** The most common method was jotting down ideas, words or phrases freely, without worrying about structure or order (44.3%). **A considerable number (35.2%) didn't plan at all**, choosing instead to dive straight into writing. A greater number of those who didn't plan (39.9%) rated their writing ability as weaker. **More girls used structured planning strategies**, particularly jotting down ideas (50.5%) and creating ordered lists (32.2%). In contrast, **more boys tended to start writing without planning** (38.9%).
- **More children aged 8 to 11 used visual planning strategies** like drawing and creating diagrams (29.3%), while older age groups relied more heavily on jotting down ideas or making structured lists.
- **Those who enjoyed writing tended to engage more actively in planning.** More identified all the strategies. In contrast, more of those who didn't enjoy writing reported not planning at all (38.8% vs 29.5%), suggesting that disengagement may be linked to a lack of preparation or structure.
- **More of those who saw themselves as good writers used a range of planning techniques**, particularly jotting down ideas (48.7% vs 37.5%) and structured listing (33.7% vs 20.4%).

### Approaches to writing tasks: Composition

In addition to the earlier questions on planning, we asked children and young people about their composition strategies to explore how they developed their drafts:

- **Most children and young people (55.7%) said they preferred to start by writing freely**, without worrying about making mistakes, and then revisit their work later to make revisions.
- **Only a small group (16.3%) independently kept trying different things when stuck**, demonstrating that only a minority showed creative resilience, an exploratory mindset, and persistence in problem-solving. Over 2 in 5 (42.5%) stopped and thought, and 1 in 4 (24.4%) said they asked for help.
- **More of those who enjoyed writing persevered** and tried new strategies when they got stuck (20.1%) and fewer gave up (3.2%) compared with those who didn't enjoy writing (12.7%).
- **More of those who rated themselves as good writers favoured approaching composition freely (58.5%)**, and fewer relied on structured composition strategies like expanded bullet points (13.5%). Additionally, when they got stuck, they were more inclined to pause and reflect (45.0%) or try a new approach (19.0%).

### Attitudes and beliefs around writing in school

In addition to questions about writing abilities and strategies, we asked children and young people about their attitudes and beliefs around writing in school to gain deeper insight into their broader experiences and perspectives:

- **1 in 3 (33.5%) children and young people expressed worries about grammar, spelling and the possibility of making errors in their writing.** Nearly 3 in 10 (27.6%) reported **avoiding experimentation in their work** for fear it might go wrong, while others (24.6%) described **feeling discouraged from writing** altogether for similar reasons.
- **Writing-related anxieties were prominent for those who rated themselves as poor writers**, with 7 in 10 reporting that they found writing very difficult. However, a substantial percentage of **those who rated themselves as confident writers also reported these concerns**.
- Children and young people **who did not enjoy writing in school** consistently reported **higher levels of anxiety and fear-related attitudes**, with 4 in 5 reporting that they found writing very difficult, compared with 1 in 5 of those who enjoyed writing.
- **Many (48.5%) had a preference for clear, structured guidance** from teachers on how to plan and compose their writing. This gradually increased with age, peaking at 57.4% among those aged 16 to 18.
- **2 in 5 (43.5%) reported struggling** with time constraints and deciding what to write (41.6%), while 1 in 3 (36.8%) reported running out of ideas.
- **Choice mattered for many.** 50.0% said they would write more frequently if given greater choice over topics, and 37.7% if given fewer restrictions.

- **The link between self-perceived writing ability and creative ownership is pronounced.** Over 83% of very good or good writers agreed with each statement related to the creative ownership of their writing practice, while only 15-17% of those who rated themselves as poor writers did.
- **Beliefs around the value of writing emerged as particularly strong.** Most children and young people **considered writing to be a useful skill and important to learn**, and many expressed **enjoyment in improving their abilities**. Only a small minority **reported that they did not see the point in learning to write**, with 81.9% of those who didn't enjoy writing agreeing with this statement.
- **More of those who rated themselves as good writers** valued writing and writing-related learning. Conversely, over half of those who rated themselves as poor writers believed writing lacked purpose. **More older children and young people**, particularly those aged 16 to 18, viewed writing as a useful skill.

### What could ignite a desire to write in school?

Finally, we asked children and young people about factors that might inspire or motivate them to engage more with writing in school:

- **Freedom and autonomy were the strongest drivers of writing motivation in school.** Children and young people expressed the greatest enthusiasm for **having the freedom to choose what they wrote about (35.7%)**, to **decide on the form or style (29.8%)**, and to **express their own opinions** through the writing they do in school (27.7%).
- **The right kind of inspiration plays an important role** in motivating young writers. Many said that **reading books by their favourite authors (26.7%)** would help spark their interest in writing, suggesting that exposure to engaging literature can fuel creative ambition.
- **Relevant and relatable stimuli emerged as drivers.** Some highlighted the value of being given **an interesting prompt or topic to get started (16.5%)**. Additionally, some agreed that **seeing role models – people they admire – writing or speaking about writing** could be motivating (15.3%).
- **Children aged 8 to 11 were more motivated by nearly every motivational catalyst.** They were especially drawn to **reading their favourite authors (36.9%)**, **having the freedom to choose their topic (40.3%) or style (33.8%)**, and **opportunities to share** their writing (20.5%). They also responded strongly to **keeping an unmarked journal (17.3%)** and working with **authors (19.1%) or role models (21.0%)**.
- **Interest in both creative and structured writing opportunities dropped** as children moved into the 11 to 16 age brackets, and fewer children and young



people in these groups reported being motivated by the same catalysts as younger children.

- **More of those who receive FSMs reported higher motivation in areas tied to external inspiration and personal expression**, such as working with authors (14.4%), hearing from role models (17.8%), and sharing their writing (14.5%).
- **Writing enjoyment in school and self-perceived ability were closely associated with a broader motivational profile**, suggesting that enjoyment and self-efficacy enhanced receptivity to multiple catalysts for engagement. The most pronounced differences were around creative freedom and personal expression.

Taken together, these findings reveal a rich and complex picture of how children and young people experience writing in school. Enjoyment, confidence and motivation are closely intertwined, with those who feel positively about writing more likely to engage deeply, plan thoughtfully, and persevere through challenges. While many children and young people value writing and see its purpose, anxieties around correctness, lack of autonomy, and limited creative freedom can hinder engagement. Crucially, fostering choice, personal expression and meaningful inspiration, alongside supportive guidance, could help unlock writing's full potential as both a learning tool and a form of self-expression.

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## How many children and young people enjoy writing in school?

Nearly 2 in 5 (38.7%) children and young people told us that they enjoyed writing in school either very much or quite a lot (see Figure 1), which is slightly higher than the percentage (33.5%) who said this in a larger survey earlier this year<sup>5</sup>. 1 in 10 enjoyed writing in school very much, and nearly 3 in 10 enjoyed it quite a lot. Most (over 2 in 5, 45.8%) said that they only enjoyed it a bit, and nearly 1 in 6 didn't enjoy writing in school at all.

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<sup>5</sup> Unpublished data from the Annual Literacy Survey 2025.



**Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people enjoying writing in school very much, quite a lot, a bit and not at all in 2025.**

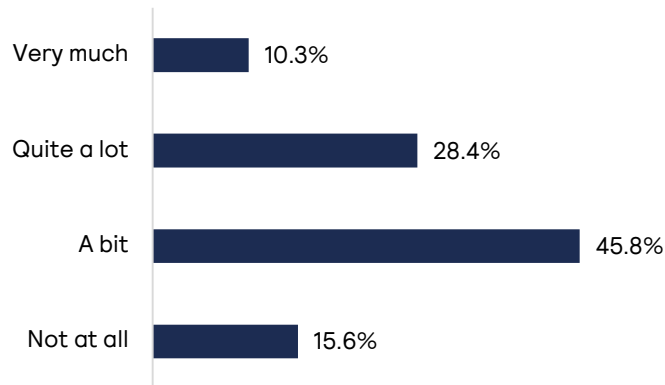
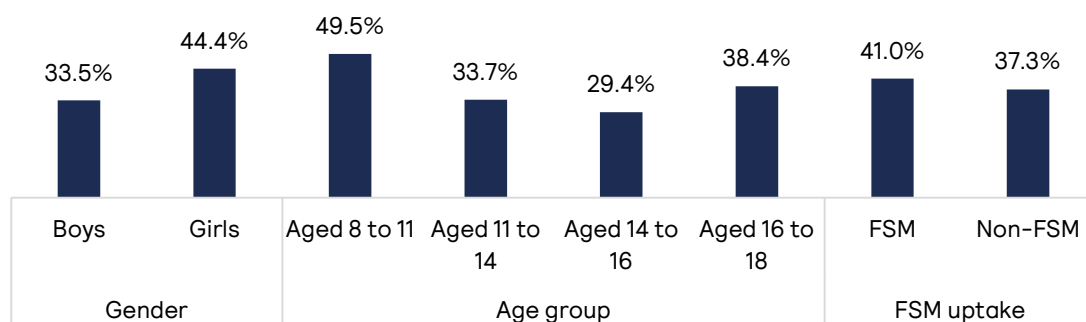


Figure 2 shows that enjoyment of writing in school is not experienced equally by all children and young people, with more girls than boys saying that they enjoyed writing in school. Similarly, more children aged 8 to 11 told us that they enjoyed writing in school compared with their older peers. It is worth noting that enjoyment drops through the teenage years, with the lowest levels seen among those aged 14 to 16. However, a slight increase in enjoyment among the oldest age group suggests that some positive engagement with writing may re-emerge over time. Looking at socioeconomic background, more children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) said that they enjoyed writing in school compared with those who did not receive FSMs, although the difference is relatively modest.

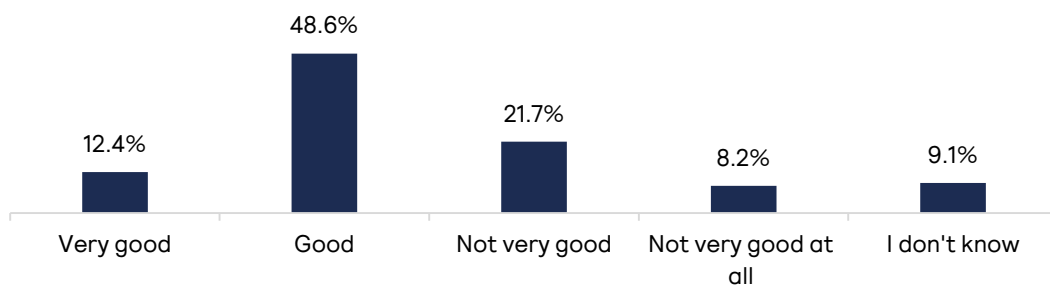
**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people enjoying writing by gender, age, and FSM uptake in 2025.**



## Children and young people's self-perceptions of their writing ability

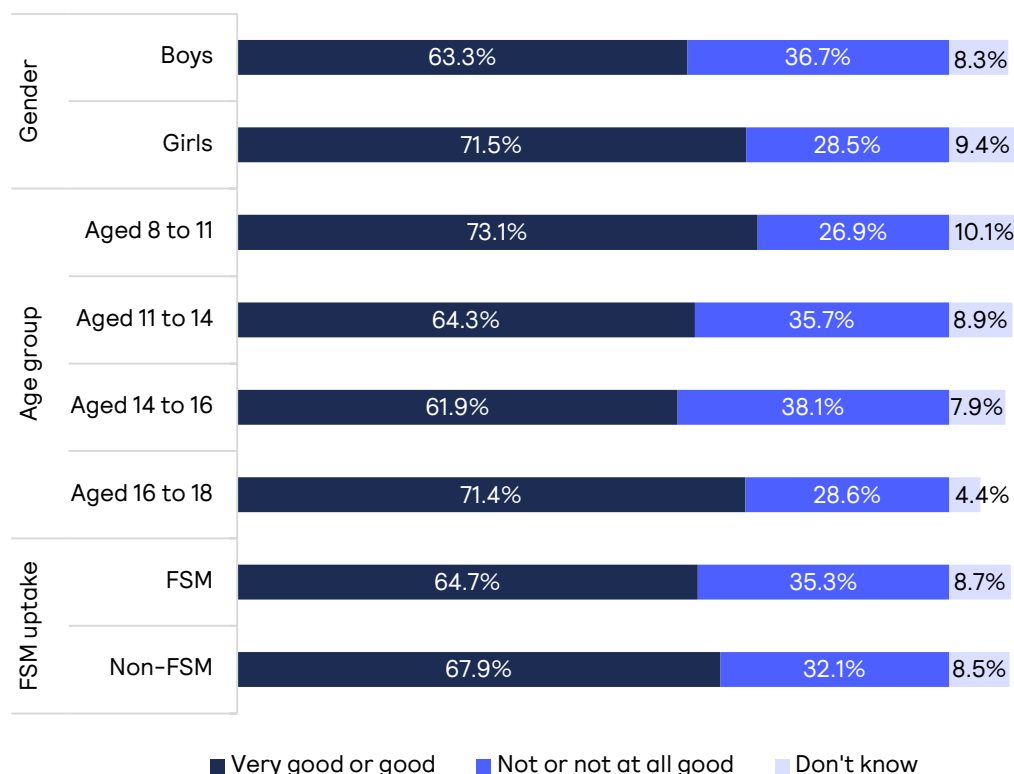
When we asked children and young people how good a writer they thought they were (see Figure 3), 3 in 5 told us that they considered themselves to be either very good or good writers. 1 in 5 felt they were not very good, and 1 in 12 believed they were not very good at all. 1 in 11 said they didn't know how good a writer they were.

**Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people who rated themselves as very good, good, not very good and not very good at all.**



While a large percentage of children and young people felt positively about their writing, younger children and girls showed the highest levels of self-perceived ability (see Figure 4). However, fewer boys and those aged 14 to 16 rated themselves as good writers, suggesting a dip in self-perception during mid-adolescence. Socioeconomic status also played a role, with those receiving FSMs rating their writing slightly lower than their non-FSM peers.

**Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people who rated themselves as very good or good, or not very good or not very good at all by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**



There was a positive, albeit moderate, relationship ( $r = .388$ ) between writing enjoyment in school and children and young people's perceptions of their writing ability, suggesting that those who enjoy writing more at school are also more likely to view themselves as good writers. Indeed, nearly 9 in 10 children and young people who enjoyed writing in school thought of themselves as very good or good writers compared with 1 in 2 of those who didn't enjoy writing in school (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage of children and young people who enjoy or do not enjoy writing, based on their self-perceived writing ability.**

	Very good or good writers	Not very good or not very good at all writers
Enjoy writing in school	87.0%	13.0%
Don't enjoy writing in school	53.6%	46.4%

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## Why children and young people write in school

Writing in school is often not framed as a self-directed activity but as something done to meet prescribed outcomes. The fact that 42.0% of children and young people told us that they write simply because their teacher tells them to highlights this dynamic. When we ask children and young people why they write in school, then their responses articulate what they perceive to be the purpose of school writing, an understanding shaped largely, but not solely, by external expectations and institutional goals.

Many children and young people, in fact, also bring their own personal, emotional and cognitive motivations to the writing they do in school. Exploring these perspectives reveals the diverse purposes school writing serves in their lives beyond meeting academic demands as a means to expressing themselves, thinking deeply and preparing for the future.

Purpose-driven motivations were among the most commonly selected reasons for writing in school (see Figure 5). 2 in 5 children and young people wrote to improve their skills, 1 in 3 to achieve good marks, and 1 in 4 to note things down they didn't want to forget. A notable number also saw writing as a pathway to better job opportunities in the future. This suggests that children and young people are aware of writing's role in both academic success and achieving their long-term goals.

Many children and young people also find personal value in school writing, such as writing to express creativity, explore ideas or manage emotions. Even within the structures and limitations of the school environment, this suggests that writing can still offer children and young people a valuable outlet for processing their thoughts and supporting their wellbeing, showing that personal meaning can emerge, even in externally directed tasks.

In addition, many children and young people described writing as a way to support learning and thinking, such as helping them understand new concepts, expand their vocabulary or clarify their thoughts. These responses highlight that children and young people recognise writing as a cognitive tool and also as a means to demonstrate comprehension and progress.

Overall, the responses reflect not just how children and young people engage with writing in school, but how they have come to understand the purpose of that writing, largely shaped by the demands of the curriculum and assessment, but with some space for personal ownership or agency.

**Figure 5: Children and young people's reasons for writing in school in 2025.**



Motivations for writing in school vary by gender, age group and FSM status (see Table 2), pointing to important differences in what drives children and young people to write in school. Across all listed motivations for writing, more girls than boys report each one, suggesting a broader and deeper engagement with writing overall. This includes both external motivations, such as improving skills or achieving good marks, and intrinsic or personal motivations like expressing ideas, feeling creative or helping themselves think. The gender gap is particularly striking when it comes to expressive and emotional drivers, with more girls saying they write in school to express their thoughts, to feel better or to be creative.

Younger children aged 8 to 11 report a broader range of motivations for writing in school, especially around learning new things and creative expression. As they get older, there is a noticeable drop in intrinsic and expressive motivations, with fewer of those aged 14 to 18 saying they write in school to feel creative, learn new things or express their thoughts. Instead, writing in school becomes increasingly tied to academic goals like getting good marks.

Children and young people who receive FSMs and their non-FSM peers report largely similar motivations, but there are some subtle differences. More FSM children and young people write in school to feel better, to help them think and to help them understand things, hinting at a stronger emotional or reflective connection to writing in school for some in this group. Slightly more of those not receiving FSMs cited academic motivations, such as getting good marks.

**Table 2: Children and young people's reasons for writing in school by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
To improve skills	34.5%	41.2%	45.4%	33.9%	29.9%	30.5%	36.6%	37.2%
To get good marks	35.9%	38.4%	33.4%	38.2%	37.3%	43.5%	32.4%	39.2%
To get a better job	26.7%	27.5%	32.0%	24.7%	22.0%	21.6%	27.3%	26.8%
To note things down	18.3%	26.0%	22.3%	21.3%	21.1%	38.4%	20.8%	22.5%
To feel creative	31.8%	38.0%	42.8%	31.9%	24.9%	26.7%	34.3%	34.0%
To express ideas	28.9%	39.7%	41.0%	31.4%	26.4%	27.9%	34.2%	33.5%
To express thoughts	17.2%	29.9%	27.3%	21.9%	19.7%	22.2%	24.7%	23.0%
To feel better	13.0%	17.4%	21.3%	12.7%	10.7%	8.9%	17.7%	13.8%
To learn new things	23.7%	28.0%	36.6%	20.8%	15.5%	21.9%	27.3%	24.4%
To learn new words	23.7%	26.2%	33.3%	21.6%	16.4%	13.7%	26.9%	23.7%
To understand better	22.4%	27.4%	29.8%	21.6%	21.5%	31.1%	27.0%	23.8%
To help me think	19.7%	24.0%	26.8%	19.4%	16.8%	28.9%	24.1%	20.9%

While demographic factors like gender, age and FSM uptake play a role in shaping writing behaviour, children and young people's motivations are also strongly influenced by their personal relationship with writing in school, particularly how much they enjoy it and how good a writer they think they are.

Table 3 shows that more children and young people who enjoy writing in school report a broad and varied range of reasons for doing it, particularly those linked to creativity, self-expression and emotional wellbeing. For them, writing in school is not just a task but a meaningful activity that helps them explore ideas, manage feelings and engage their imagination. In contrast, fewer of those who don't enjoy writing in school cite motivations overall and are more focused on external outcomes, such as getting good marks or future employment. This suggests that enjoyment is closely tied to a richer, more personal connection with writing in school, while disengagement narrows the perceived value of writing in school to something more functional or obligatory.

A similar pattern is seen when comparing those who see themselves as good writers with those who don't. More children and young people who see themselves

as good writers are motivated by both academic goals and intrinsic factors, such as creativity, curiosity and self-expression. They see writing in school as a tool for thinking and communicating, not just a means to achieve grades. By contrast, those who don't view themselves as strong writers report far fewer reasons for writing in school overall, with particularly low endorsement of expressive or creative motivations. This points to confidence as a key enabler of meaningful writing engagement in school, while low self-belief may limit both the reasons for writing and the satisfaction it brings.

**Table 3: Children and young people's reasons for writing in school by their writing enjoyment and their self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
To improve skills	54.0%	26.8%	45.2%	23.5%
To get good marks	43.5%	32.3%	42.3%	27.7%
To get a better job	33.5%	22.6%	31.1%	19.7%
To note things down	26.6%	19.0%	24.7%	17.2%
To feel creative	52.5%	23.6%	42.7%	20.7%
To express ideas	52.2%	22.6%	43.1%	18.4%
To express thoughts	36.8%	15.1%	29.2%	13.1%
To feel better	24.4%	9.6%	18.6%	9.6%
To learn new things	38.4%	17.6%	31.1%	15.7%
To learn new words	35.6%	18.0%	29.8%	16.3%
To understand better	35.3%	17.8%	29.6%	16.1%
To help me think	32.1%	15.4%	25.7%	15.2%



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## Children and young people's self-perceptions of their writing ability across stages of the writing process

In addition to asking children and young people to assess their overall writing ability, we wanted to better understand how they perceive their skills in specific stages of the writing process. Figure 6 highlights a nuanced picture revealing a marked decline in confidence as tasks become more technical or involve public sharing.

Self-perceived ability is highest when it comes to coming up with ideas, where nearly 3 in 4 children and young people rate themselves as either very good or good. Similarly, writing ideas down and making handwriting neat also scored relatively highly, suggesting that many young writers feel reasonably secure in generating and recording their thoughts in draft form.

However, self-perceived ability begins to decline in more structured or technical aspects of writing. Fewer children and young people rate themselves as either very good or good when it comes to planning ideas, making ideas better, and particularly in checking for mistakes or improving the flow and style of their writing. These areas appear to be the most challenging stages of the writing process, with fewer than half rating themselves as very good or good.

Self-perceived ability is lowest overall for sharing, performing or publishing writing. Fewer than half of the children and young people feel positively about this stage of the writing process, indicating a widespread hesitancy or discomfort with making their writing public. The findings could indicate that opportunities for children and young people to experience sharing their writing openly may be limited within school settings. It is also possible that doubts about the quality or value of their own work, along with fears of criticism or negative feedback, contribute to a lack of confidence in sharing it publicly. On the other hand, a preference for keeping writing private may also stem from the need for a safe space to build confidence and develop their skills.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while many children and young people feel relatively confident in generating ideas and transcribing their thoughts into draft form, fewer rate themselves as strong in the later stages of the writing process, particularly in editing, refining and sharing their work. These aspects are not only essential for developing effective writing but also play a key role in fostering a sense of ownership, pride and engagement with the act of writing.

**Figure 6: Children and young people's self-perception of their writing ability across different stages of the writing process.**

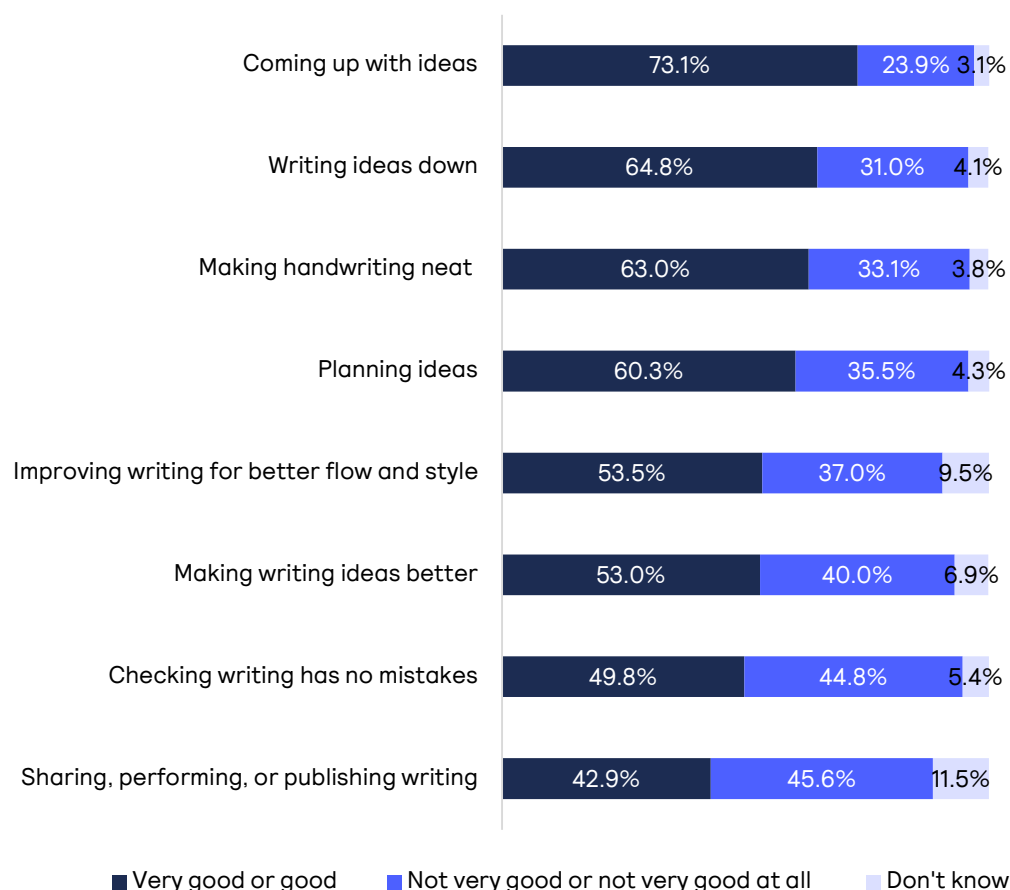


Table 4 looks at the percentage of children and young people who think they are either very good or good across various stages of the writing process, broken down by gender, age group and FSM uptake.

Gender differences are most pronounced in areas such as handwriting and writing ideas down, where more girls than boys rate themselves as either very good or good. However, when it comes to creative tasks and idea generation, boys and girls report similar levels of self-perceived ability.

Age-related trends show that more children aged 8 to 11 rate themselves positively in foundational writing skills and in sharing their writing. These self-perceptions tend to decline during early to mid-adolescence, particularly in areas such as planning, revising and sharing. Young people aged 16 to 18 show a modest rebound

in their perceived abilities, especially in idea generation and planning, suggesting that maturity or increased academic experience may positively influence self-perception.

While the differences between those who receive FSMs and those who do not are minor across the board, a slightly higher percentage of those who receive FSMs feel confident in sharing their writing.

**Table 4: Children and young people’s self-perceptions of their writing ability across different stages of the writing process by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
Coming up with ideas	74.7%	71.3%	74.2%	72.8%	69.0%	78.8%	72.4%	73.9%
Planning ideas	59.3%	61.9%	63.5%	58.6%	57.5%	67.3%	60.6%	60.5%
Writing ideas down	61.5%	69.3%	68.5%	63.1%	60.6%	72.4%	63.9%	65.5%
Making writing ideas better	52.7%	53.9%	57.5%	50.5%	51.0%	58.3%	52.6%	53.9%
Checking writing	47.5%	52.7%	51.6%	48.3%	51.6%	50.8%	48.9%	50.6%
Improving flow and style	50.8%	56.9%	59.5%	50.4%	50.1%	53.8%	52.7%	53.9%
Neat handwriting	53.2%	75.1%	70.7%	58.7%	61.4%	63.1%	62.5%	62.8%
Sharing writing	43.5%	42.5%	55.6%	37.7%	30.2%	36.2%	46.4%	41.9%

Table 5 shows that both enjoyment of writing and self-perceived writing ability are closely linked to self-perceived ability across every stage of the writing process. More children and young people who enjoy writing consistently rate themselves as either very good or good in all areas, from generating and planning ideas to editing and sharing their work. The difference is especially noticeable in more complex or evaluative tasks, such as improving flow and style, or making writing better, suggesting that enjoyment not only supports engagement but is also linked to self-perceived ability in aspects of writing that are more demanding and closely linked to feelings of pride and a sense of ownership over the writing process.

Similarly, more of those who see themselves as good writers rate themselves highly across all aspects of writing compared with those who do not. This is especially

pronounced in tasks that involve revision and refinement, such as checking work for accuracy or improving structure and style. Notably, the act of sharing writing also appears to be closely linked to both enjoyment and perceived ability. Children and young people who report lower levels of enjoyment or self-assessed ability tend to feel less comfortable making their writing public, suggesting that confidence and motivation may play a key role in whether they engage in this more vulnerable aspect of the writing process.

**Table 5: Children and young people’s self-perceptions of their writing ability across different stages of the writing process by their writing enjoyment and self-assessed writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
Coming up with ideas	85.2%	65.4%	83.1%	55.9%
Planning ideas	73.6%	51.9%	71.7%	41.7%
Writing ideas down	80.2%	55.2%	79.1%	40.6%
Making writing ideas better	71.1%	41.6%	68.2%	27.7%
Checking writing	61.5%	42.4%	60.2%	32.5%
Improving flow and style	71.2%	42.4%	69.6%	26.4%
Neat handwriting	72.7%	56.9%	73.8%	43.5%
Sharing writing	58.2%	33.3%	54.1%	24.2%

## Exploring young writers’ approaches to writing tasks: Planning

When we asked about specific strategies they use to help with planning their writing, children and young people’s responses highlight a diverse range of planning habits, markedly skewed towards informal or intuitive approaches over more formal planning techniques (see Figure 7). The most common method was jotting down ideas, words or phrases freely without worrying about structure or order. This suggests that many children and young people favour a more spontaneous approach to expressing their thoughts in writing, using planning as a catalyst for

creativity rather than a tool for rigid structure from the outset. A considerable number also reported that they didn't plan at all, choosing instead to dive straight into writing.

More structured techniques, such as creating detailed lists of ideas, were less common but they were still used by a notable percentage of children and young people. A smaller group reported using drawings or diagrams to map their ideas visually, indicating that although this strategy was less frequently adopted, it tended to appeal to more visual or imaginative thinkers.

**Figure 7: Children and young people's preferred planning strategies.**

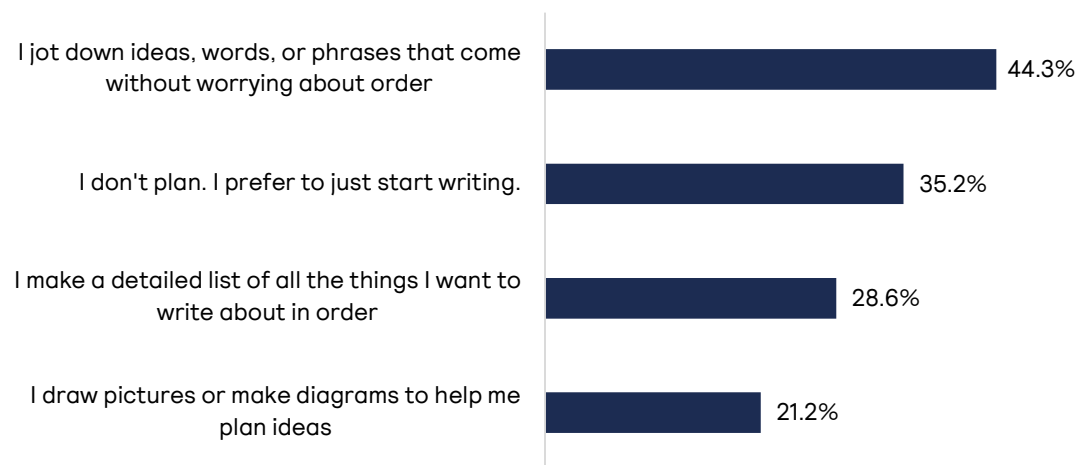


Table 6 explores children and young people's approach to the planning phase of writing, broken down by gender, age and FSM status.

More girls use structured planning strategies, particularly jotting down ideas and creating ordered lists. In contrast, more boys tend to start writing without planning, indicating a greater reliance on spontaneous or unstructured writing habits. Drawing as a planning method is used by both genders, but it remains a less common approach overall.

More children aged 8 to 11 use visual planning strategies such as drawing and creating diagrams, while older age groups rely more heavily on jotting down ideas or making structured lists. The tendency to write without any planning rises during early adolescence but then declines slightly in the oldest age group, suggesting a developmental shift towards more deliberate planning in the later years of secondary school.

When it comes to FSM status, more of those who receive FSMs use visual planning strategies, such as drawing or creating diagrams. In contrast, jotting down ideas and making ordered lists are both more commonly used by their non-FSM peers. The percentage who say they do not plan at all is similar across both groups.

**Table 6: Children and young people’s preferred planning strategies by gender, age and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
<b>Draw pictures/diagrams</b>	19.3%	22.4%	29.3%	18.1%	12.6%	13.0%	25.9%	18.8%
<b>Make an ordered list</b>	25.6%	32.2%	28.1%	28.3%	30.0%	37.1%	26.0%	29.7%
<b>Jot down ideas</b>	39.2%	50.5%	40.5%	45.5%	48.0%	54.0%	38.7%	46.5%
<b>Don’t plan</b>	38.9%	30.5%	32.3%	37.4%	33.9%	30.2%	35.4%	34.9%

Table 7 shows the link between writing enjoyment, self-perceived writing ability, and the preferred planning strategies employed by children and young people.

Those who enjoy writing tend to engage more actively in planning: more jot down ideas, make ordered lists and use visual strategies such as drawing or creating diagrams. In contrast, more of those who do not enjoy writing report not planning at all, suggesting that disengagement may be linked to a lack of preparation or structure.

A similar pattern appears when looking at self-perceived skill. More children and young people who see themselves as very good or good writers use a range of planning techniques, particularly jotting down ideas and structured listing. Similarly, a greater number of those who do not rate their writing ability highly tend to skip planning altogether.

Together, these findings suggest that both enjoyment and confidence are linked to a more deliberate and strategic approach to writing, while those who lack either are more inclined to begin writing without any planning, potentially reinforcing their negative perceptions of the writing process.

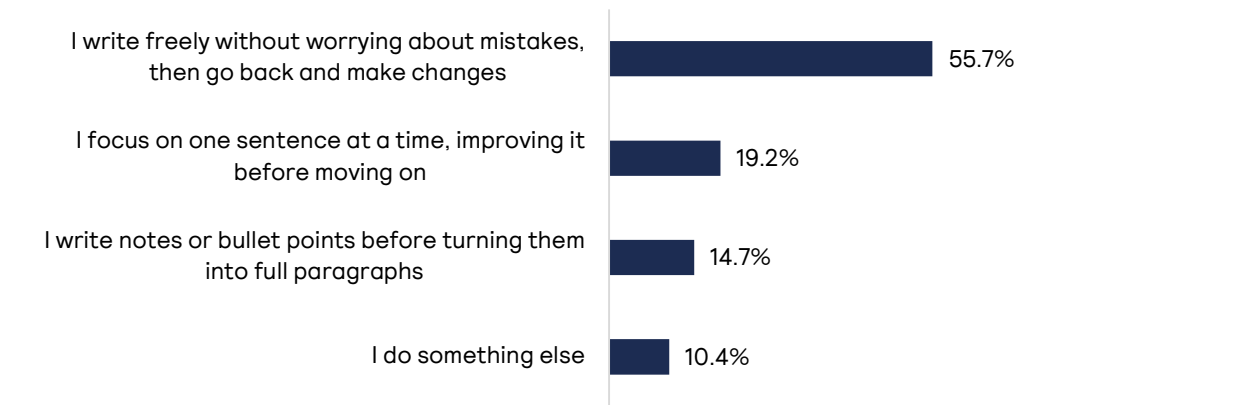
**Table 7: Children and young people’s preferred planning strategies by writing enjoyment and their self-assessed writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
Draw pictures/diagrams	24.0%	19.4%	21.8%	20.0%
Make an ordered list	35.8%	24.1%	33.7%	20.4%
Jot down ideas	49.6%	40.6%	48.7%	37.5%
Don't plan	29.5%	38.8%	32.2%	39.9%

## Exploring young writers’ approaches to writing tasks: Composition

When we asked how they usually liked to write, most children and young people said they preferred to start by writing freely, without worrying about making mistakes, and then revisit their work to make revisions (see Figure 8). This approach was the most widely favoured writing method by a significant margin. A smaller group preferred a more careful step-by-step approach, focusing on crafting and perfecting each sentence before moving on. Some chose to plan their ideas in the form of notes or bullet points before expanding them into full paragraphs. A minority reported using alternative strategies that didn’t fall into these categories. Overall, the findings highlight a strong inclination towards a more fluid and less structured approach to writing among young writers.

**Figure 8: Children and young people’s preferred composition strategies.**





Building on the previous section about composition strategies, children and young people’s insights into how they handle getting stuck offer additional insight into their writing behaviours (see Figure 9).

The most common response was to stop and think, chosen by over 2 in 5 children and young people . This indicates that many young writers pause to reflect when they encounter difficulties, an approach that may serve to complement and moderate the more common practice of writing freely followed by later revision. Around 1 in 4 said they asked for help, indicating a sizable percentage were comfortable seeking support when needed. At the same time, this reliance may point to a reduced sense of independence in navigating writing challenges.

A smaller group reported that they independently kept trying different things, demonstrating creative resilience, an exploratory mindset, and persistence in problem-solving. A minority gave up entirely or took an alternative route, which may indicate a lack of writerly independence, resilience, confidence and motivation.

Overall, most children and young people seem to approach writing and problem-solving with a notable degree of independence and flexibility, adapting their strategies based on the challenges they encounter.

**Figure 9: Children and young people’s preferred coping strategies for writing difficulties.**

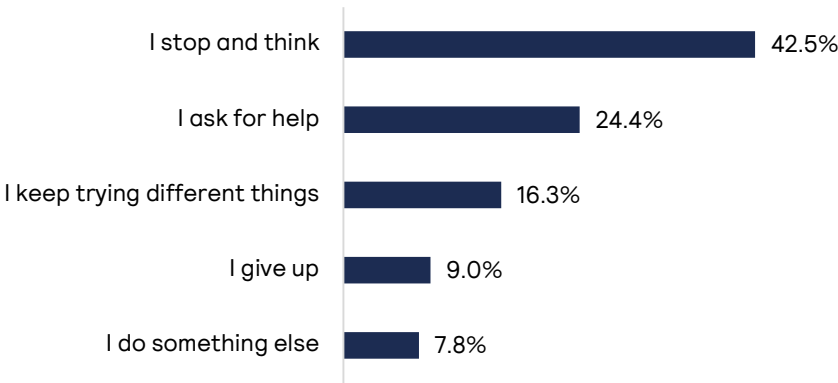


Table 8 explores children and young people’s composition strategies and how they handle getting stuck, broken down by gender, age group and FSM status.

When it comes to composition strategies, boys show a stronger preference for writing freely, indicating a greater tendency to prioritise getting their ideas down over immediate refinement. In contrast, more girls favour creating bullet points that they then expand into full paragraphs, suggesting a slightly more structured

approach. When it comes to overcoming writerly difficulties, more boys stop and think or try out new strategies, while more girls tend to give up or do something else.

Writing freely is a consistently popular approach across all age groups, although its popularity declines slightly among the oldest age group who often turn to notes or bullet points, possibly in response to the growing emphasis on academic writing at this stage of their education.

As children get older, they increasingly favour stopping and thinking when they encounter difficulties. More of those aged 8 to 11 ask for help, while fewer of their older peers do so. The tendency to give up on the specific writing task peaks during early to mid-adolescence (aged 11 to 16), and then declines among the oldest age group, possibly reflecting greater resilience and more developed coping strategies by the end of secondary school.

Children and young people who receive FSMs and their non-FSM peers show broadly similar patterns in how they approach writing tasks and how they handle getting stuck. Writing freely is the most common composition strategy for both groups, with similar percentages for favouring structured planning approaches or bullet points. When facing difficulties, slightly more of those receiving FSMs seek help or say they give up on the writing task, while more of those not receiving FSMs pause and think through the difficulties. Overall, this suggests that writing behaviours and composition strategies are largely consistent across socioeconomic backgrounds, with only small variations in how children and young people navigate writerly challenges.

**Table 8: Children and young people's preferred composition strategies and coping strategies for writing difficulties by gender, age group, and FSM status.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8 to 11	11 to 14	14 to 16	16 to 18	FSM	Non-FSM
<b>Composition</b>								
<b>Write freely</b>	58.6%	52.3%	53.2%	57.4%	56.1%	46.8%	50.9%	57.6%
<b>One sentence at a time</b>	19.5%	19.5%	21.2%	17.8%	20.2%	20.3%	21.5%	18.5%
<b>Expanded notes/bullets</b>	11.6%	18.4%	11.5%	15.6%	17.8%	28.2%	15.3%	14.6%
<b>Something else</b>	10.3%	9.7%	14.0%	9.1%	5.9%	4.7%	12.3%	9.3%

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8 to 11	11 to 14	14 to 16	16 to 18	FSM	Non-FSM
<b>When stuck</b>								
<b>Try new things</b>	18.1%	14.2%	16.5%	16.1%	15.8%	20.6%	16.6%	16.4%
<b>Ask for help</b>	24.0%	25.7%	29.3%	22.5%	19.0%	18.9%	27.4%	23.3%
<b>Stop and think</b>	44.6%	40.5%	36.4%	44.5%	50.4%	52.0%	36.0%	45.1%
<b>Give up</b>	7.1%	10.6%	6.0%	10.8%	10.7%	4.4%	11.0%	8.4%
<b>Something else</b>	6.2%	9.0%	11.9%	6.1%	4.1%	4.1%	9.0%	6.8%

Table 9 looks at children and young people's composition strategies and how they handle getting stuck, broken down by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability. While there is only a slight difference in preferred composition strategies between those who enjoy writing and those who do not, more pronounced differences emerge in their responses to challenges. More of those who enjoy writing persevere and try new strategies when stuck, and fewer give up compared with those who do not enjoy writing. This suggests that enjoyment is closely linked to greater resilience and self-confidence when facing writerly difficulties, which may empower children and young people to persist, experiment with different strategies and ultimately approach obstacles with a more positive and proactive mindset.

More children and young people who rate themselves as very good or good writers favour writing freely, and fewer rely on structured composition strategies like expanded bullet points. When they get stuck, they are more inclined to pause and reflect or try a new approach – behaviours that reflect resilience and a sense of agency and ownership over the writing process. In contrast, more of those who see themselves as less-skilled writers give up when facing difficulty. These differences highlight a strong connection between self-confidence and both the choice of writing strategies and approaches to problem-solving, suggesting that greater confidence encourages more effective and flexible methods when tackling writing challenges.

**Table 9: Children and young people's preferred composition strategies and coping strategies for writing difficulties by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
<b>Composition</b>				
Write freely	57.6%	54.4%	58.5%	49.8%
One sentence at a time	21.0%	18.1%	19.5%	19.7%
Expanded notes/bullets	12.8%	15.9%	13.5%	17.3%
Something else	8.6%	11.6%	8.5%	13.1%
<b>When stuck</b>				
Try new things	20.1%	13.9%	19.0%	11.6%
Ask for help	24.5%	24.4%	24.1%	24.9%
Stop and think	43.7%	41.7%	45.0%	37.9%
Give up	3.2%	12.7%	4.2%	18.3%
Something else	8.6%	7.3%	7.7%	7.2%

## Attitudes and beliefs around writing in school

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements designed to explore the factors that influence how they view themselves as writers and how they engage with writing (see Figure 10). These statements were grouped into six thematic categories: anxiety and fear of failure, dependence, autonomy, creative ownership, value beliefs, and social engagement and community.

### Anxiety and fear of failure

Writing can evoke a sense of apprehension. The statements in this category referred to how young writers experience concerns about making mistakes or receiving negative evaluations. Around 1 in 3 children and young people expressed concerns about grammar, spelling and the possibility of making errors in their writing. Nearly 3 in 10 reported avoiding experimentation in their work for fear it

might go wrong, while others described feeling discouraged from writing altogether for similar reasons.

### **Dependence**

Some young writers showed a strong reliance on guidance, seeking support to navigate the writing process. The statements in this category referred to the degree to which a young writer relies on external structures and frameworks, feedback or approval when making decisions about their writing. Many children and young people expressed a preference for clear, structured guidance from teachers on how to plan and compose their writing. 2 in 5 also reported struggling with time constraints and deciding what to write, while 1 in 3 reported running out of ideas.

### **Autonomy**

For many, self-direction in writing shapes how they approach and persist with tasks. The statements in this category referred to the extent to which children and young people perceive themselves as having control, choice and self-direction in their writing activities. Many reported persisting with writing even when they found it challenging and said they would write more frequently if they were given greater choice over topics or they had fewer restrictive rules.

### **Creative ownership**

The experience of creating work that reflects oneself is central to how some children and young people perceive their efforts. These statements referred to the degree to which they perceive their work as originating from and reflecting their ideas, style and effort. Many reported that they felt like they were creating something new when writing and felt proud of expressing their own ideas.

### **Value beliefs**

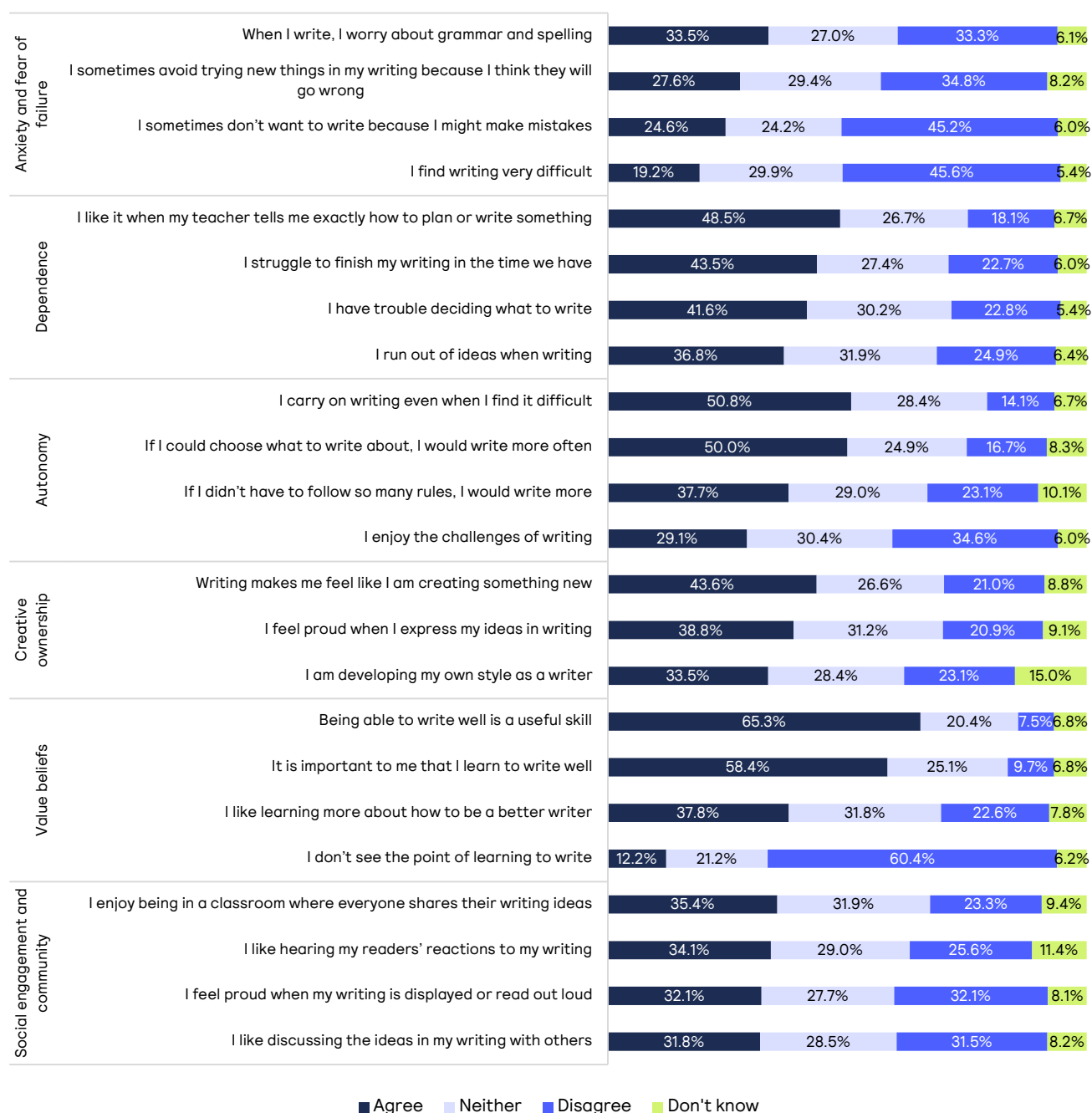
Children and young people's beliefs about the usefulness and significance of writing influence their motivation and engagement. The statements in this category referred to the importance or worth a young writer assigned to writing, including its relevance to personal, educational or future goals. Beliefs around the value of writing emerged as particularly strong. Most children and young people considered writing to be a useful skill and important to learn, and many expressed enjoyment in improving their abilities. Only a small minority reported that they did not see the point in learning to write.

### **Social engagement and community**

Connections with peers, teachers and audiences play a role in how children and young people participate in writing tasks and share their work. The statements in this category referred to the degree to which children and young people feel connected to, or actively participate in, groups that discuss, share or support

writing. Many expressed enjoyment in the collaborative aspects of writing, such as exchanging ideas, receiving feedback and having their work shared or read aloud. However, agreement with these statements tended to be slightly less pronounced.

**Figure 10: Children and young people's perspectives on a range of factors that shape their writing identity and writing practices.**



Tables 10 to 15 explore the same thematic categories broken down by gender, age group and FSM status.

### Anxiety and fear of failure

Girls reported slightly higher anxiety than boys across most statements (see Table 10). Looking at age-related trends, grammar and spelling anxiety increased slightly with age, peaking at over 1 in 3 for those aged 16 to 18. Similarly, avoidance of trying new things was most common among those aged 14 to 16.

The fear of making mistakes remained relatively consistent across age groups, although it peaked slightly for those aged 14 to 16. In contrast, perceived difficulty in writing was highest among those aged 8 to 11 and declined steadily with age, reaching its lowest point for those aged 16 to 18.

Socioeconomic status also appeared to influence writing-related anxiety. Those who received FSMs consistently reported higher levels of anxiety and fear of failure than their non-FSM peers.

**Table 10: Children and young people’s perspectives on anxiety and failure by gender, age group and FSM uptake.<sup>6</sup>**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-
I worry about grammar and spelling	30.9%	36.3%	34.8%	32.4%	34.3%	37.2%	36.9%	32.8%
I avoid trying new things	25.7%	29.5%	27.5%	27.2%	32.0%	20.9%	33.0%	25.8%
I sometimes don’t want to write	22.2%	26.9%	26.9%	23.1%	25.4%	22.1%	30.9%	22.3%
I find writing very difficult	20.5%	17.5%	21.9%	18.0%	17.5%	11.5%	24.2%	17.4%

### Dependence

Girls consistently reported higher levels of dependence in writing tasks compared with boys (see Table 11).

Age-related patterns revealed a gradual increase in preference for teacher guidance, peaking at 57.4% among those aged 16 to 18. Similarly, difficulty finishing writing was most pronounced among those aged 14 to 16. When it comes to deciding

<sup>6</sup> See Figure 9 for the complete set of statements illustrating each attitude and psychosocial factor, with which participants indicated their agreement or disagreement. Shortened versions of these statements are shown in the tables for ease of reference.



what to write, the highest levels of uncertainty were for those aged 14 to 16, while the lowest were among those aged 16 to 18.

Socioeconomic status also plays a role, with those who receive FSMs showing slightly higher dependence across all measures.

**Table 11: Children and young people's perspectives on dependence by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
I like it when my teacher tells me how to plan or write	46.3%	52.4%	49.4%	46.4%	56.2%	57.4%	50.7%	48.5%
I struggle to finish	38.6%	48.4%	44.7%	41.8%	49.3%	45.0%	46.4%	42.7%
I run out of ideas	35.5%	38.2%	37.7%	36.0%	38.5%	35.3%	39.6%	35.5%
I have trouble deciding what to write	39.1%	44.3%	42.8%	40.4%	46.1%	34.8%	45.5%	40.6%

## Autonomy

Somewhat in contrast with the findings for the previous theme, girls' writing attitudes reveal a nuanced picture: while they showed greater dependence on teacher guidance and struggled more with initiating writing tasks, they also expressed a stronger desire for autonomy, wanting more choice and fewer constraints (see Table 12).

Enjoyment of writing challenges was low across both genders, with only a slight edge among girls.

Younger children and young people, particularly those aged 8 to 11, showed the strongest engagement across all statements. These responses declined steadily through adolescence, reaching their lowest point among those aged 14 to 16.

Socioeconomic status appeared to have minimal influence on children and young people' attitudes toward autonomy in writing, although more of those who received FSMs said they would write more if given greater choice or fewer rules compared with their non-FSM peers.

**Table 12: Children and young people's perspectives on autonomy by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM uptake	
	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
I carry on writing even when it's difficult	52.9%	49.1%	56.5%	48.4%	44.3%	48.6%	49.3%	51.4%
If I could choose what to write about	48.8%	51.0%	56.2%	47.0%	47.4%	38.7%	51.3%	49.7%
If I didn't have to follow so many rules	36.2%	38.7%	39.4%	37.2%	37.1%	27.8%	38.0%	37.9%
I enjoy the challenges of writing	28.2%	29.8%	38.3%	24.7%	21.2%	27.1%	32.1%	28.1%

### Creative ownership

More girls than boys associated writing with creativity (see Table 13). More also felt pride in their writing and felt that they were developing a personal writing style, indicating a stronger sense of writing identity.

Age trends were similar across statements, with a sense of creative ownership and pride declining steadily with age and reaching its lowest point among those aged 16 to 18. Younger children and young people felt more confident in that they were developing their own style, with a marked decline through adolescence and fewer in the older age groups feeling a sense of ownership over their writing.

More FSM children and young people than their non-FSM peers viewed writing as a creative process and felt that they were developing their own style, although the difference was modest.

**Table 13: Children and young people's perspectives on creative ownership by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
I am creating something new	40.6%	46.8%	52.5%	39.4%	37.7%	33.5%	45.6%	42.7%
I feel proud	35.3%	42.7%	48.4%	33.7%	33.5%	35.7%	42.8%	37.2%
I am developing my own style	30.0%	36.7%	41.3%	29.6%	27.7%	28.3%	34.8%	33.2%

## Value beliefs

Girls consistently placed more value on writing than boys (see Table 14). More saw writing as a useful skill, considered it important to learn to write well, and enjoyed learning how to improve. More boys, meanwhile, said they didn't see the point of learning to write.

More older children and young people, particularly those aged 16 to 18, viewed writing as a useful skill, indicating growing awareness of its relevance for future academic and professional contexts. However, enjoyment and personal investment in learning to write well were highest among younger children and young people and declined through adolescence.

Overall, socioeconomic status appeared to have a limited impact on children and young people's value-beliefs about writing. Slightly more of those who didn't receive FSMs believed that writing was a useful skill, while slightly more of those who received FSM said they didn't see the point of learning to write.

**Table 14: Children and young people's perspectives on value beliefs by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
Being able to write well is a useful skill	62.4%	69.3%	64.9%	64.4%	69.6%	79.8%	62.0%	67.3%
It is important that I learn to write well	54.8%	63.2%	63.8%	55.0%	58.0%	63.1%	57.9%	59.1%
I like learning more about being a writer	34.0%	42.1%	44.9%	33.6%	37.1%	35.1%	38.9%	37.4%
I don't see the point	14.9%	8.5%	12.5%	12.2%	12.4%	3.8%	15.0%	11.1%

## Social engagement and community

Girls consistently showed slightly higher levels of social engagement in writing (see Table 15). More enjoyed sharing writing ideas, hearing feedback, discussing their work, and feeling proud when their writing was displayed.

Younger children aged 8 to 11 were more engaged across all statements, with engagement dropping sharply during adolescence and only a slight recovery among those aged 16 to 18 in some areas.

Children and young people who received FSMs showed higher levels of social engagement than their non-FSM peers, particularly in enjoying shared writing environments and feeling proud when their writing was showcased.

**Table 15: Children and young people's perspectives on social engagement and community by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
I enjoy it when everyone shares writing ideas	33.7%	37.6%	47.0%	29.4%	28.1%	29.1%	38.4%	34.0%
I like hearing my readers' reactions	33.3%	34.9%	42.1%	30.0%	28.7%	28.8%	38.2%	33.0%
I feel proud when my writing is displayed or read out loud	30.7%	34.0%	44.9%	26.1%	20.5%	24.9%	38.2%	30.1%
I like discussing my writing ideas	30.9%	33.0%	38.5%	28.0%	29.2%	33.3%	33.5%	31.4%

Tables 16 to 21 explore the same attitudes and psychosocial factors broken down by writing enjoyment and self-perceived ability.

### **Anxiety and fear of failure**

Children and young people who did not enjoy writing in school consistently reported higher levels of anxiety and fear-related attitudes, with 4 in 5 reporting that they found writing very difficult, compared with 1 in 5 of those who enjoyed writing (see Table 16). Writing-related anxieties were also prominent for those who rated themselves as poor writers, with 7 in 10 reporting that they found writing very difficult. However, it is worth noting that a substantial percentage of those who rated themselves as confident writers also reported these concerns.

**Table 16: Children and young people's perspectives on anxiety and fear of failure by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.<sup>7</sup>**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
I worry about grammar and spelling	40.7%	59.3%	62.5%	37.5%
I avoid trying new things	30.0%	70.0%	52.8%	47.2%
I sometimes don't want to write	28.9%	71.1%	50.8%	49.2%
I find writing very difficult	19.1%	80.9%	30.4%	69.6%

## Dependence

More children and young people who did not enjoy writing expressed dependent behaviours and experienced writerly challenges (see Table 17). Children who saw themselves as very good or good writers often still reported dependent behaviours and challenges: 65.3% liked being told how to write, 60.7% struggled with time, and over half had difficulty deciding what to write or ran out of ideas.

**Table 17: Children and young people's perspectives on dependence by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
<b>Dependence</b>				
I like it when my teacher tells me how to plan or write	40.1%	59.9%	65.3%	34.7%
I struggle to finish	34.6%	65.4%	60.7%	39.3%
I have trouble deciding what to write	29.4%	70.6%	53.5%	46.5%
I run out of ideas	27.5%	72.5%	53.3%	46.7%

<sup>7</sup> See Figure 9 for the complete set of statements illustrating each attitude and psychosocial factor, with which participants indicated their agreement or disagreement. Shortened versions of these statements are shown in the table for ease of reference.

## Autonomy

Children and young people who enjoyed writing and those who did not showed similar levels of autonomous behaviours overall, but a much larger difference emerged in their enjoyment of challenges, highlighting it as a key factor in writing enjoyment (see Table 18). More of those who rated themselves as good writers, however, expressed autonomous attitudes compared with those who rated themselves as poor writers, with the greatest difference again in the challenge-focused statement.

**Table 18: Children and young people's perspectives on autonomy by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
I carry on writing even when it's difficult	49.6%	50.4%	78.7%	21.3%
If I could choose what to write about	47.8%	52.2%	75.3%	24.7%
If I didn't have to follow so many rules	42.8%	57.2%	72.4%	27.6%
I enjoy the challenges of writing	71.4%	28.6%	88.6%	11.4%

## Creative ownership

Around 60% of children who enjoyed writing reported a sense of creative ownership, but a notable proportion of those who did not enjoy writing also experienced it (see Table 19). The link between self-perceived writing ability and creative ownership was more pronounced. Over 83% of very good or good writers agreed with each statement, while only 15-17% of those who rated themselves as poor writers did.

**Table 19: Children and young people's perspectives on creative ownership by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
I am creating something new	60.3%	39.7%	83.2%	16.8%
I feel proud	60.7%	39.3%	84.4%	15.2%
I am developing my own style	59.4%	40.6%	84.8%	15.2%

## Value beliefs

Those who enjoyed writing and those who did not showed near-equal agreement in recognising writing as a useful life skill and the personal importance of learning to write well (see Table 20). However, enjoyment was more closely tied to a desire for skill development, and the most striking contrast appeared in not seeing the point in learning to write, with 81.9% of those who did not enjoy writing agreeing with this statement. More of those who rated themselves as good writers valued writing and writing-related learning. Conversely, over half of those who rated themselves as poor writers believed writing lacked purpose.

**Table 20: Children and young people's perspectives on value beliefs by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
Being able to write well is a useful skill	48.8%	51.2%	76.7%	23.3%
It is important that I learn to write well	51.7%	48.3%	77.8%	22.2%
I like learning more about being a writer	62.5%	37.5%	81.6%	18.4%
I don't see the point	18.1%	81.9%	45.5%	54.6%

## Social engagement and community

Writing enjoyment was linked to valuing its social aspects, although these were also important to many who did not enjoy writing (see Table 21). Positive self-perceived ability showed a much stronger connection to socially engaged writing practices.

**Table 21: Children and young people's perspectives on social engagement and community by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
I enjoy it when everyone shares their writing ideas	58.7%	41.3%	80.8%	19.2%
I like hearing my readers' reactions	57.4%	42.6%	82.1%	17.9%
I feel proud when my writing is displayed or read out loud	59.6%	40.4%	84.2%	15.8%
I like discussing my writing ideas	56.8%	43.2%	80.7%	19.3%



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## What could ignite a desire to write in school?

### Possible motivators

To better understand how to support children and young people's motivation to write in school, we asked them what, if anything, would make them want to write. Their responses offer valuable insight into the conditions and experiences that nurture genuine engagement with writing, highlighting what helps children and young people feel motivated, confident and personally connected to the writing they do in school.

Freedom and autonomy emerged as the strongest drivers of writing motivation in school (see Figure 11). Children and young people expressed the greatest enthusiasm for having the freedom to choose what they write about, to decide on the form or style, and to express their own opinions through the writing they do in school. These preferences highlight a clear desire for ownership over their writing, suggesting that when children and young people feel in control of their writerly choices, they are more likely to engage meaningfully and confidently with the writing process.

The right kind of inspiration also played an important role in motivating young writers. Many children and young people said that reading books by their favourite authors would help spark their interest in writing, suggesting that exposure to engaging literature can fuel creative ambition. Others highlighted the value of being given an interesting prompt or topic to get started, pointing to the importance of relevant stimuli. Additionally, some mentioned that seeing role models – people they admire – writing or speaking about writing could be motivating, indicating that visible examples of passionate writers can help foster a sense of possibility and aspiration.

A smaller number were motivated by more personal or social factors, such as the ability to keep their writing private and share it with others. Some were drawn to writing through opportunities to reflect on memorable experiences, work with real authors or by having a specific purpose for their writing.

The findings indicate that cultivating environments that prioritise autonomy, relevance and meaningful engagement, both personal and social, may be instrumental in fostering young people's motivation to write in school.

**Figure 11: Key factors that would ignite a desire to write in school.**

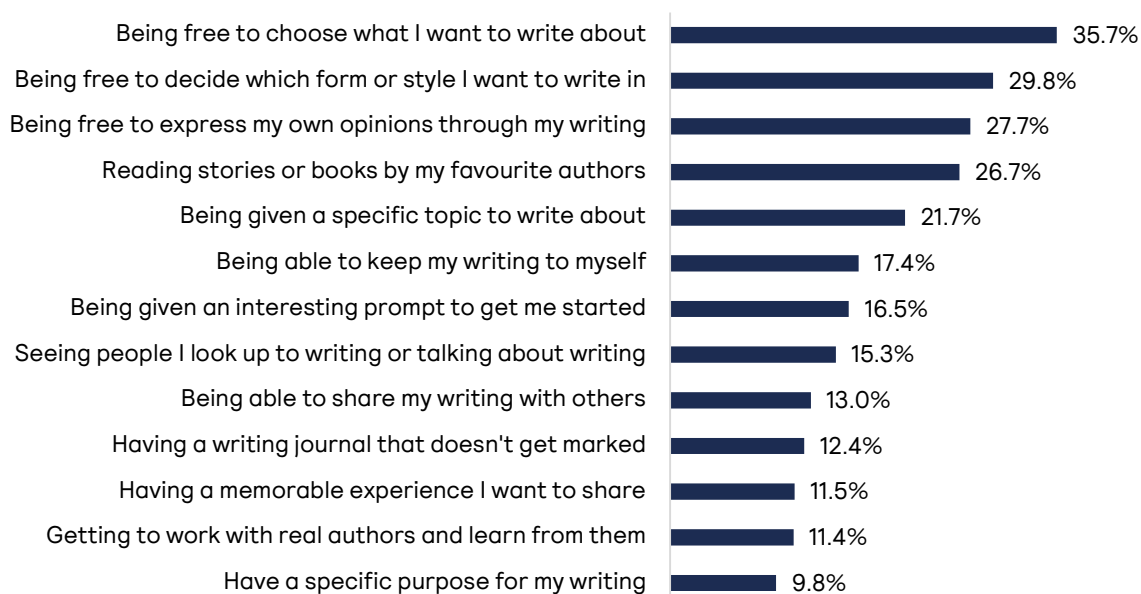


Table 22 highlights that the gender gap in writing motivation was wide and consistent, with girls connecting more strongly to a broader range of catalysts for motivation. The most striking differences were around creative and expressive freedom, with more girls than boys being motivated by being able to choose what or how they wrote, or by having the freedom to express their opinions through the writing they did in school. They were also more inspired by personal and reflective elements, such as keeping a writing journal that wasn't marked, or writing for themselves. While boys showed some interest in factors, such as working with authors, these still trailed behind the levels reported by girls.

Children aged 8 to 11 were more motivated by nearly every motivational catalyst. They were especially drawn to reading their favourite authors, having the freedom to choose their topic or style, and opportunities to share or reflect through writing. They also responded strongly to keeping an unmarked journal and external inspiration, such as working with authors or role models. As children move into the 11 to 16 age brackets, motivation generally declined. Interest in both creative and structured writing opportunities dropped, and fewer children and young people in these groups reported being motivated by the same catalysts as younger children. While writing motivation generally declined through early to mid-adolescence, those aged 16 to 18 showed signs of renewed engagement in several areas. Compared with those aged 14 to 16, more older teens were motivated by reading their favourite authors, being given a specific topic, role models, and especially having a specific purpose for writing or responding to an interesting prompt. This

suggests that as children and young people mature, the factors that initiate and sustain their motivation to write tend to evolve, reflecting shifts in their personal, cognitive and social development.

While the differences between those who received FSMs and those who didn't were generally small, a few consistent patterns emerged. More of those who received FSMs reported higher motivation in areas tied to external inspiration and personal expression, such as working with authors, hearing from role models, sharing their writing, and writing for themselves or to reflect on a memorable experience. More also said they were motivated by having a specific purpose for their writing. In contrast, those who did not receive FSMs were more motivated by having a choice of topic or style, and by being given an interesting prompt.

**Table 22: Key factors that would ignite a desire to write in school by gender, age group and FSM uptake.**

	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8–11	11–14	14–16	16–18	FSM	Non-FSM
Being free to choose topic	31.4%	40.7%	40.3%	34.4%	28.1%	30.5%	34.3%	36.0%
Being free to choose style	25.2%	34.8%	33.8%	28.7%	23.9%	20.6%	28.1%	30.3%
Being free to express opinions	22.4%	33.4%	30.7%	26.3%	26.0%	25.7%	27.4%	28.0%
Reading favourite authors	21.6%	32.3%	36.9%	22.3%	17.1%	20.0%	26.3%	26.1%
Being given topic	19.5%	24.7%	24.3%	20.7%	17.8%	23.2%	20.9%	22.0%
Writing for oneself	13.6%	21.3%	19.0%	17.0%	14.8%	14.6%	17.8%	17.1%
Getting interesting prompt	13.3%	20.2%	15.5%	16.8%	17.7%	19.7%	14.3%	17.7%
Role models talking about writing	13.5%	17.1%	21.0%	12.5%	11.8%	14.3%	17.8%	14.3%
Sharing writing	11.5%	14.6%	20.5%	9.6%	7.0%	7.9%	14.5%	12.2%
Having a writing journal not marked	7.6%	17.3%	17.3%	10.4%	8.1%	7.3%	12.3%	11.8%
Memorable experience to share	9.7%	13.5%	14.7%	9.9%	9.9%	10.5%	11.8%	11.3%
Working with authors	10.7%	12.0%	19.1%	7.9%	5.8%	6.7%	14.4%	9.9%
Having a purpose	8.6%	10.9%	11.3%	9.0%	8.4%	14.0%	10.5%	9.7%

Table 23 shows that writing enjoyment in school was closely associated with a broader motivational profile. Children and young people who reported enjoying writing in school were more likely to identify with a broader range of motivational factors, suggesting that enjoyment may enhance receptivity to multiple catalysts for engagement.

The most pronounced differences were around creative freedom and personal expression, such as being able to choose their topic and style or express their opinions. More who enjoyed writing in school were also motivated by finding inspiration in books by their favourite authors, sharing their writing, being given an interesting prompt, and real-world writerly role models. In contrast, fewer of those who did not enjoy writing were motivated by any of these factors, suggesting a more limited or disengaged relationship with writing overall. Among those who did not enjoy writing, freedom of choosing topics and form and the opportunity to express opinions in their writing ranked as the highest motivational catalysts.

Self-perceived ability was also closely associated with a broader motivational profile. Children and young people who rated themselves as very good or good writers were more likely to identify with a broader range of motivational factors.

The most significant differences lie in areas tied to creative freedom and self-expression, including choosing their topic or style and expressing their opinions. More were also encouraged by finding inspiration in books by their favourite authors, opportunities to share their writing or engaging with real-world writerly role models. Those who rated their writing ability as not good or not good at all associated with a narrower motivational profile. This suggests that self-perceived writing ability is closely linked to a student's openness to engage with writing experiences and opportunities, particularly those that offer choice, creativity or connection to personal relevance.

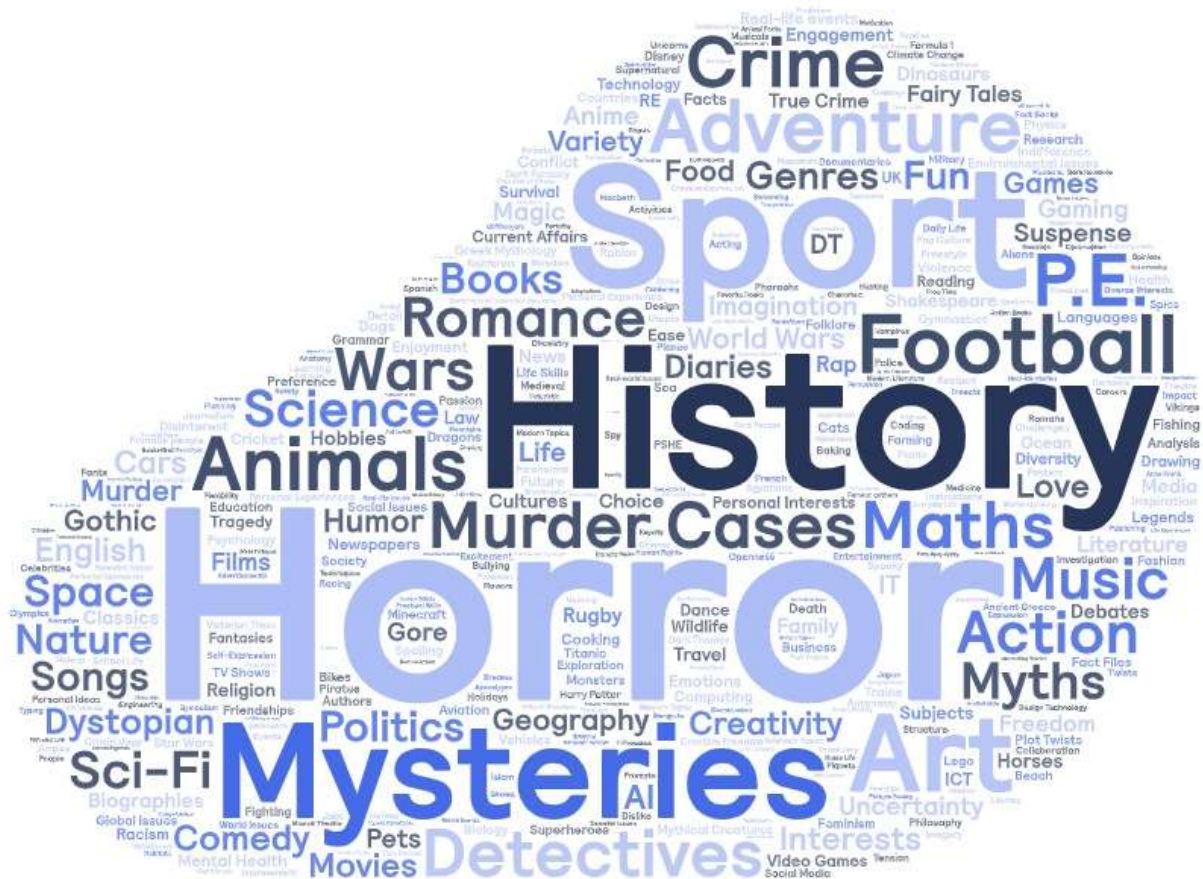
**Table 23: Key factors that would ignite a desire to write in school by writing enjoyment and self-perceived writing ability.**

	Enjoyment		Self-perceived ability	
	Enjoy	Don't enjoy	Very good or good	Not or not at all good
Being free to choose topic	49.8%	26.8%	43.5%	21.9%
Being free to choose style	43.4%	21.2%	37.0%	16.8%
Being free to express opinions	40.8%	19.5%	34.5%	16.0%
Reading favourite authors	42.0%	17.0%	33.8%	14.3%
Being given topic	30.5%	16.1%	26.0%	14.1%
Writing for oneself	22.5%	14.2%	19.9%	13.1%
Getting interesting prompt	25.2%	11.1%	21.1%	8.8%
Role models talking about writing	23.4%	10.3%	18.9%	9.6%
Sharing writing	23.0%	6.7%	17.8%	4.6%
Having a writing journal not marked	17.2%	9.4%	14.6%	8.5%
Memorable experience to share	17.8%	7.6%	14.6%	6.3%
Working with authors	17.7%	7.4%	14.5%	6.4%
Having a purpose	14.7%	6.7%	12.5%	5.2%

### **Topics children and young people would like to write about**

When asked what they would most like to write about at school if they could choose (see Figure 12), children and young people revealed a strong preference for topics that were exciting, emotionally resonant and personally meaningful. The most popular choices (horror, history, mysteries, sport, adventure, murder cases and football) reflect a strong appetite for drama, suspense and imaginative storytelling. Many were drawn to speculative and thrilling genres that allow them to explore fear, danger and alternative realities, while others showed a fascination with crime, justice and investigative narratives that offer moral complexity and resolution.

**Figure 12: A word cloud showing the topics children and young people would most like to write about at school if they had the freedom to choose.**



Alongside these, children and young people also expressed interest in writing about personal experiences, cultural passions like music, gaming and anime, and real-world issues such as politics and current events. Academic subjects like history, maths, science, geography and physical education were also frequently chosen, showing that children and young people enjoy writing about what they learn at school and aspects of school life.

Overall, the findings highlight that young writers are most motivated when the content feels relevant, and when writing allows them to explore both the world around them and the worlds they imagine.



We also asked children and young people what types of writing they would most like to learn about at school (see Figure 13). Findings showed an overwhelming preference for creative forms. The most popular choices (fantasy, poetry, detective fiction, creative writing, lyrics, script writing and fiction) highlight a desire to engage with imaginatively rich genres that often reflect their personal interests and media influences.

**Figure 13: A word cloud showing the types of writing children and young people would most like to learn about at school if they had the freedom to choose.**



Fantasy and genre-based writing stood out, with children and young people drawn to suspenseful and escapist storytelling. Poetry and lyrics were also highly favoured, suggesting a strong interest in rhythm, emotion and personal expression. Many children and young people expressed a preference for creative forms, such as fiction, freewriting or descriptive forms, while others were excited by forms inspired by visual media, such as comics, manga and graphic novels.

There was notable enthusiasm for writing intended for performance, like scripts and speeches, as well as traditional narrative forms such as stories, short stories and novels.

While creative writing dominated, children and young people also valued learning how to write for real-world purposes, including non-fiction texts, persuasive texts and news articles, showing a desire to express opinions and reflect on current affairs.

Alongside functional and creative writing, they also showed interest in more introspective and emotionally grounded forms. Diary entries and personal narratives were both selected, indicating a desire to reflect on lived experience, identity and emotion rooted in real life. Overall, these findings show that young writers are most engaged when they can explore forms that connect to their lives, passions, opinions and the media they enjoy.

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## Discussion

The findings painted a nuanced picture of children and young people's experiences of writing in school and the broader emotional landscape in which they were asked to write. While findings highlighted pockets of positive engagement, the overall trends pointed to some disconnect between writing as a curriculum requirement and writing as a personally meaningful activity.

### **The disconnect between writing as a skill and writing as a practice**

Most children and young people saw writing as an important skill, but many also felt anxious about it and wanted more personal connection in their writing. This gap between how they value writing and how they experience it helps us to think about whether and when writing instruction supports or limits their growth as writers. The decline in writing enjoyment in school with age was particularly telling of this tension. Such erosion of writing enjoyment through adolescence may reflect increasing academic pressures but also a narrowing of opportunities for self-expression in a system that increasingly prioritises technical proficiency and assessment as children and young people move through phases.

Gender and socioeconomic differences further complicate the picture. Boys consistently reported lower enjoyment and perceived writing as less valuable, while girls reported stronger writing identities and greater emotional investment, confirming that gendered perceptions shape attitudes toward writing.



Challenging deficit-based assumptions, children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) reported slightly higher enjoyment of writing and showed a stronger emotional connection to it, often writing to process their thoughts and feelings. Their writing behaviours were broadly similar to their non-FSM peers, although they favoured visual planning and reported higher levels of anxiety and dependence. They also demonstrated greater social engagement, particularly in collaborative writing and when their work was shared. These findings suggest that while socioeconomic status has a limited impact on core writing attitudes and practices, it does shape the emotional and social dimensions of writing for FSM children and young people, highlighting the importance of inclusive pedagogies that recognise and respond to these nuanced needs.

### **Navigating enjoyment, ability, anxiety and agency**

The relationship between self-perceived ability and writing enjoyment is both intuitive and troubling. It suggests that those who struggle not only lack confidence but also the emotional investment that might help them improve. Children and young people who did not rate themselves as good writers reported fewer reasons for writing, particularly those tied to creativity or self-expression. On the other hand, more of those who enjoyed writing identified with a broad range of motivational factors, reinforcing that enjoyment is a catalyst to deeper engagement and more resilient writing identities.

Insights into planning and composition strategies led to valuable discoveries about how children and young people navigated writing tasks. The dominance of informal but intuitive approaches, especially among boys and those who enjoyed writing, suggests that rigid formulaic approaches may be at odds with how many young people prefer to think and write. Additionally, the fact that those who did not enjoy writing were more likely to avoid planning altogether suggests that their disengagement with writing tasks could be linked to a lack of access to and an awareness of strategies that make writing feel more relevant and manageable. This overwhelming preference for experimenting with ideas and strategies, writing freely and revising at a later stage, suggests that this is an approach that should be recognised, supported and facilitated in school settings.

Writing-related anxieties appeared widespread, with around a third of children and young people expressing concerns about grammar, spelling and making mistakes. Even the most confident writers reported fears of making mistakes, of being judged and of not meeting expectations, suggesting that the culture of writing in schools may place excessive emphasis on accuracy and oversight rather than exploration and growth.

Perhaps the most helpful finding for shaping more exploratory and growth-oriented writing environments was the strong desire for freedom and choice. When asked what would make children and young people want to write, they overwhelmingly pointed to agency as the ability to choose topics, styles and purposes that matter to them. Rather than a rejection of structure or instruction, this emerged as a plea for relevance and voice. Notably, the data also revealed a need for clear, structured guidance, which, considered alongside the desire for agency, suggests a preference for a type of scaffolding that empowers and facilitates rather than stifles and constrains.

Considering these findings, it is important to reflect on why children and young people's self-perceived abilities were highest when it comes to generating ideas and recording them in writing, but how few felt capable when planning ideas, refining content, checking for mistakes and improving the flow and style of their writing. When considered alongside preferences for more informal planning and composition approaches, widespread writing-related anxiety, and a strong desire for greater agency, this pattern suggests that the more technical aspects of writing may benefit from being reoriented. Rather than being anxiety-driven exercises, editing and proofreading could be approached as purposeful, engaging activities that help young writers make their writing meaningful. By focusing on improving readability for a carefully self-chosen audience and refining the flow and style of their work to deliver messages that are personally significant, children and young people can experience a sense of ownership, transforming these technical aspects into opportunities for creativity, reflection and deeper learning.

### **Reimagining the emotional landscape of writing in school**

While it is reassuring to see that children and young people recognised the practical value of writing, the most powerful catalysts for engagement were tied to intrinsic value, such as personal relevance and emotional resonance. To create environments informed by these findings, where pupils are invited to bring their identities into school-based writing practices, we must embrace pedagogies centred on writing's intrinsic value. This means:

- Creating safe writing environments through reflective and adaptive practices that are supportive of experimentation and error to help mitigate fear of failure.
- Recognising and validating diverse writing strategies, including a range of visual and intuitive planning and composition approaches to support different writerly aptitudes.
- Fostering writing identity through building in opportunities for creative expression and personal voice that are sustained throughout adolescence to maintain a sense of ownership and pride in writing.

### **In sum**

Overall, this report compels us to reconsider writing instruction, not just in terms of pedagogy but in terms of the emotional landscape of the writing classroom. It suggests that some aspects of the national writing curriculum appear increasingly misaligned with the needs and motivations of young writers. It also highlights that writing in school is most meaningful when it is rooted in connection to self, to others and to the world, and experienced in its power to engage, heal, provoke thought and foster identity. This should not be interpreted as a call to abandon rigour and structure, but to reframe them. Self-expression and agency do not preclude accuracy, rather, they invite children and young people to see writing as a personal practice and a craft worth mastering because it belongs to them. Ultimately, school-based writing should not be exclusively about producing perfect texts but about cultivating young writers who are invested, confident, curious and socially connected.

While the findings do not offer easy answers, they show us a path towards reimagining writing instruction as a space of possibility, where every child and young person can discover what writing can do for them, and why it matters.

## Acknowledgements

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Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

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## Appendix

### About the writing in school survey

The survey contained 25 questions and explored children and young people's writing practices in school, focusing on their motivation, attitudes, confidence, and writer identities. It examined how children and young people engage with writing tasks and the behaviours that shape their participation, aiming to build a clearer picture of how school environments influence young writers.

The survey was live from the beginning of May to the middle of July 2025, and schools were recruited from March 2025 onwards through our networks, newsletters and social media followers, as well as through partner organisations.

Participating schools received a school-specific report as thanks, allowing them to compare their results with national findings once the overall report is published.

14,689 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from 90 schools across the UK took part in the survey.

### Sample description

Of 14,689 respondents, 7,420 (50.5%) were boys; 6,698 (45.6%) were girls; 330 (2.2%) would rather not say; and 241 (1.6%) described themselves another way.

4,901 (33.4%) were aged 8 to 11; 8,089 (55.1%) were aged 11 to 14; 1,384 (9.4%) were aged 14 to 16; and 315 (2.1%) were aged 16 to 18.

2,796 (19.0%) told us they received Free School Meals (FSMs); 9,870 (67.2%) told us they didn't receive FSMs; 1,801 (12.3%) didn't know; and 222 (1.5%) didn't want to say.



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