

Students' attitudes, interests and liking for a subject have a strong bearing on their achievement. The writing survey sought information from students about their curriculum preferences and perceptions of their achievement, using the same questions for both year 4 and year 8 students. It was administered to the students in a session that included both team and independent tasks (four students working together or individually on tasks, supported by a teacher). When it was introduced, all students were invited to ask for help with reading or writing.

The survey included five items which asked students to select options from a list, two items which invited students to write comments and fifteen items which asked students to record a rating response by circling their choice.

Students were asked what writing activities they liked most at school, choosing up to three responses from a list of six. The percentages of students choosing each option are summarised below, with comparative figures from 2002 in parentheses and 1998 in brackets.

Writing stories was clearly the most popular writing activity at school, in 2006, as in 2002 and 1998, at both year levels. Writing poetry has also retained quite high popularity at both year levels, along with writing letters for year 4 students. Writing in other school subjects became more popular between 1998 and 2002 at both year levels, but especially year 8, and that increase has been maintained in 2006.

Students were then asked what writing activities they liked to do in their own time, choosing their favourite activity from a list of eight options. The addition of two new options (text messages and emails) for the 2006 survey has resulted in dramatically changed preferences for year 8 students, almost half of whom indicated that writing text messages was their favourite writing activity in their own time. The effect was less dramatic for year 4 students, even though writing text messages was their second most popular writing activity in their own time. Writing letters, poems and diary entries were nominated as preferred activities by no more than five percent of year 8 students.



PREFERRED WRITING AT SCHOOL	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02) [98]	2006 (02) [98]
writing stories	73 (60) [72]	70 (60) [70]
writing poems	50 (52) [49]	45 (42) [46]
writing letters	50 (46) [51]	32 (31) [41]
keeping a diary	33 (33) [42]	20 (25) [25]
writing in science, social studies and other subjects	32 (33) [27]	39 (40) [29]
other	12 (16) [14]	19 (16) [14]

PREFERRED WRITING IN OWN TIME	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02) [98]	2006 (02) [98]
writing stories	33 (33) [36]	19 (27) [37]
writing text messages	16 (-) [-]	49 (-) [-]
writing letters	12 (16) [12]	4 (14) [14]
writing poems	10 (14) [16]	5 (15) [16]
writing in a diary	9 (14) [15]	4 (17) [12]
writing emails	8 (-) [-]	11 (-) [-]
writing about hobbies or sports	8 (10) [10]	5 (15) [8]
writing about science, social studies and other subjects	2 (3) [5]	2 (3) [3]

Asked what “people need to do to be good writers”, students could choose up to three things from a list of 10. There has been quite a high level of stability between 1998 and 2006. Compared to year 4 students, year 8 students placed more emphasis on liking writing and using their imagination and less emphasis on writing neatly.



Students were asked to write down what they needed to do to “get better in writing”. For each student, up to three distinct responses were coded and tallied under eight headings. There have been only modest changes between 1998 and 2006, and differences between the strategies of year 4 and year 8 students have remained quite small.

In a more narrowly focused question, students were asked to indicate what they usually did when they couldn’t spell a word they needed for writing. They could choose up to two things from a list of eight. The most popular strategy was to use a dictionary. Between 1998 and 2006, and at both year levels, the option of asking the teacher has declined noticeably in popularity, while guessing the spelling or making an attempt and then checking the correct spelling later have become more popular.



In the last question of this type, students were asked what they wrote on a computer. They could choose as many options as they liked from a list of seven. The percentages of students choosing each option in 2006 and 2002 are shown below (this question was not asked in 1998). Stories and emails were most popular, with stories more prominent at year 4 level and emails much more prominent among year 8 students. Writing letters or poems became markedly less common for year 8 students between 2002 and 2006.

THINGS NEEDED BY GOOD WRITERS	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02) [98]	2006 (02) [98]
use their imagination	57 (51) [56]	79 (66) [68]
be willing to try things out	36 (40) [36]	32 (29) [27]
go back and check their work	33 (24) [25]	31 (20) [20]
learn how to use punctuation	29 (26) [33]	39 (31) [35]
know how to spell words	25 (20) [23]	19 (15) [12]
write neatly	25 (24) [25]	11 (8) [10]
read a lot	23 (19) [22]	16 (12) [13]
talk about their work with others	19 (15) [13]	6 (8) [8]
like writing	16 (19) [17]	41 (35) [38]
write lots	13 (14) [21]	13 (12) [15]

NEED TO DO TO GET BETTER	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02) [98]	2006 (02) [98]
spelling	26 (17) [24]	22 (27) [27]
neatness	25 (29) [17]	17 (21) [17]
punctuation	16 (12) [11]	20 (20) [21]
increase ideas/resources	16 (18) [16]	28 (20) [20]
write more often	14 (14) [19]	14 (15) [18]
editing/checking	7 (9) [6]	8 (7) [6]
understanding mechanics/grammar	5 (8) [2]	11 (8) [4]
enjoyment	3 (2) [0]	4 (3) [1]

SPELLING STRATEGY	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02) [98]	2006 (02) [98]
use a dictionary	56 (56) [62]	55 (54) [60]
try, then check out later	29 (14) [16]	27 (15) [17]
sound out the word	28 (33) [33]	21 (22) [18]
guess	26 (12) [15]	21 (16) [16]
ask the teacher	17 (25) [34]	14 (18) [30]
ask a friend	12 (16) [19]	30 (23) [27]
use another word	5 (6) [4]	7 (9) [9]
use computer spell checker	3 (2) [-]	7 (5) [-]

WRITING ACTIVITY ON COMPUTER	year 4	year 8
	2006 (02)	2006 (02)
stories	59 (59)	45 (46)
emails	44 (48)	72 (69)
letters	36 (41)	31 (43)
poems	30 (32)	16 (25)
a diary	17 (16)	8 (10)
writing about hobbies or sports	16 (16)	17 (18)
writing in science, social studies and other subjects	12 (11)	19 (21)

YEAR 4 : WRITING SURVEY 2006 (2002) (1998)

	<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>not at all</i>	
1. How much do you like writing at school?	40 (36) [45]	32 (32) [27]	23 (25) [20]	5 (7) [8]	
	😊	😊	😐	😞	<i>don't know</i>
2. How good do you think you are at writing?	39 (38) [39]	44 (46) [37]	7 (12) [11]	3 (4) [4]	7 (-) [9]
3. How good does your teacher think you are at writing?	30 (40) [40]	40 (48) [29]	8 (10) [6]	2 (2) [3]	20 (-) [22]
4. How good does your Mum or Dad think you are at writing?	61 (72) [69]	21 (20) [16]	5 (6) [4]	2 (2) [2]	11 (-) [9]
	😊	😊	😐	😞	
5. How much do you like writing in your own time (not at school)?	43 (29) [34]	24 (27) [26]	18 (25) [23]	15 (19) [17]	
6. How good do you think you are at spelling?	32 (31) [30]	46 (48) [48]	17 (16) [16]	5 (5) [6]	
	<i>most days</i>	<i>2-3 times a week</i>	<i>about once a week</i>	<i>hardly ever</i>	
7. How often do you write things like stories, poems or letters at school?	40 (41) [44]	29 (24) [23]	19 (20) [16]	12 (15) [17]	
	<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	
8. How often do you read to others what you write?	17 (17) [18]	22 (17) [20]	55 (58) [54]	6 (8) [8]	
Who else reads what you write?					
9. teacher	44 (45) [52]	36 (29) [26]	18 (23) [20]	2 (3) [2]	
10. parent	25 (25) [28]	27 (23) [27]	39 (41) [37]	9 (11) [8]	
11. brother/sister	11 (8) [11]	8 (9) [8]	29 (24) [29]	52 (59) [52]	
12. friend	9 (10) [14]	21 (19) [21]	50 (47) [44]	20 (24) [21]	
13. other	20 (19) [19]	17 (16) [16]	36 (36) [34]	27 (29) [31]	
14. How often do you write using a computer at school?	13 (12) [-]	19 (16) [-]	56 (56) [-]	12 (16) [-]	
15. How often do you write using a computer at home?	30 (26) [-]	20 (20) [-]	31 (27) [-]	19 (27) [-]	

Responses to the 15 rating items are presented in separate tables for year 4 and year 8 students. There have been no large changes between 1998 and 2006, at either year level. The most interesting change for year 4 students is an increase in reported enjoyment of writing in their own time (question 5). For year 8 students, there have been modest declines in enjoyment of writing at school and in the percentage of students who report

that their teacher reads their writing frequently. At both year levels, there has been little change in the reported use of computers for writing at school or at home – about 30 percent of year 4 students and 40 percent of year 8 students said that they used a computer for writing at school “heaps” or “quite a lot”. The corresponding percentages for writing on a computer at home were 50 and 60 percent.



YEAR 8 WRITING SURVEY 2006 (2002) (1998)

	<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>not at all</i>	
1. How much do you like writing at school?	12 (13) [15]	35 (40) [45]	46 (40) [36]	7 (7) [4]	
	😊	😊	😐	😞	<i>don't know</i>
2. How good do you think you are at writing?	10 (14) [13]	54 (56) [51]	23 (25) [21]	5 (5) [4]	8 (-) [11]
3. How good does your teacher think you are at writing?	11 (19) [14]	39 (58) [33]	16 (20) [14]	4 (3) [5]	30 (-) [34]
4. How good does your Mum or Dad think you are at writing?	26 (36) [29]	36 (46) [30]	13 (16) [11]	2 (2) [5]	23 (-) [25]
	😊	😊	😐	😞	
5. How much do you like writing in your own time (not at school)?	11 (16) [14]	20 (22) [26]	37 (36) [35]	32 (26) [25]	
6. How good do you think you are at spelling?	23 (25) [18]	44 (43) [43]	26 (22) [29]	7 (10) [10]	
	<i>most days</i>	<i>2-3 times a week</i>	<i>about once a week</i>	<i>hardly ever</i>	
7. How often do you write things like stories, poems or letters at school?	21 (21) [19]	29 (26) [31]	32 (35) [30]	18 (18) [20]	
	<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	
8. How often do you read to others what you write?	5 (7) [8]	16 (16) [19]	64 (67) [62]	15 (10) [11]	
Who else reads what you write?					
9. teacher	25 (34) [33]	43 (39) [45]	30 (24) [20]	2 (3) [2]	
10. parent	10 (13) [13]	23 (30) [25]	55 (47) [53]	12 (10) [9]	
11. brother/sister	3 (5) [5]	4 (7) [6]	30 (32) [34]	63 (56) [55]	
12. friend	6 (13) [13]	26 (23) [27]	53 (52) [47]	15 (12) [13]	
13. other	6 (9) [14]	11 (13) [15]	35 (43) [37]	48 (35) [35]	
14. How often do you write using a computer at school?	11 (11) [-]	28 (24) [-]	56 (56) [-]	5 (9) [-]	
15. How often do you write using a computer at home?	28 (33) [-]	32 (28) [-]	27 (24) [-]	13 (15) [-]	

Compared to year 4 students, fewer year 8 students were highly positive about doing writing at school, about how good they believed themselves to be at writing, and about how they felt their teachers and parents viewed their writing abilities. Year 8 students also reported fewer opportunities in school to write “things like stories, poems or letters” and lower enthusiasm for writing in their own time. These differences may, at least in part, reflect the

well-known tendency of students to get more jaded about schoolwork as they get older. Such patterns have been found repeatedly in our other national monitoring surveys. Another influential factor may be that the emphasis on various types of writing tasks shifts between year 4 and year 8, with more creative opportunities at year 4 and substantial volumes of more formal writing required by year 8.

