

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. The questions were the same for year 4 and year 8 students. The survey was administered to the students in a session which included both team and independent tasks (four students working together or individually on tasks, supported by a teacher). The questions were read to year 4 students, and also to individual year 8 students who requested this help. Writing help was available if requested.

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

Responses to eight rating items are presented in separate tables for Year 4 (p58) and year 8 students (p59). The results show that, 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, about how they felt their teachers and parents viewed their writing abilities, and about how good they believed themselves to be at spelling. 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.

Students were asked what writing activities they liked most at school, choosing up to three responses from a list. Their responses are summarised below,

ACTIVITY	% responses	
	y4	y8
writing stories	72	70
writing letters	51	41
writing poems	49	46
keeping a diary	42	25
writing about science, social studies and other subjects	27	29
other (write what it is)	14	14

Writing stories was clearly most popular at both levels. Keeping a diary dropped in popularity markedly from year 4 to year 8.

Students were also asked to indicate what "people need to do to be good writers". They could choose up to three things from a list of ten. Their responses are shown below.

THINGS NEEDED	% responses	
	y4	y8
use their imagination	56	68
be willing to try things out	36	27
learn how to use punctuation	33	35
go back and check their work	25	20
write neatly	25	10
know how to spell words	23	12
read a lot	22	13
write lots	21	15
like writing	17	38
talk about their work with others	13	8

The most notable changes from year 4 to year 8 are the greatly increased emphasis on needing to “like writing” and the reduced emphasis on needing to “write neatly”.

Students were asked who else reads what they write, and how often. Teachers topped the list, reading “heaps” or “quite a lot” for 76% of year 4 students and 73% of year 8 students. Parents came next at both levels, but with a marked drop from year 4 to year 8 (52% and 34% respectively). Friends were third, at 30% for year 4 and 32% for year 8. Brothers and sisters came last, at 17% for year 4 and 9% for year 8.

When students were asked to indicate which of seven things they most liked writing in their own time, “stories” was the clear winner. The pattern was very similar for both year levels.

ACTIVITY	% responses	
	y4	y8
stories	36	37
poems	16	16
a diary	15	12
letters	12	14
writing about hobbies or sports	10	8
writing about science, social studies and other subjects	5	3
writing my opinion about something	1	4

YEAR 4 STUDENTS WRITING SURVEY

1. How much do you like writing at school?

<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>not at all</i>
45	27	20	8

2. How good do you think you are at writing?

				<i>don't know</i>
39	37	11	4	9

3. How good does your teacher think you are at writing?

40	29	6	3	22
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4. How good does your Mum or Dad think you are at writing?

68	17	4	2	9
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5. How much do you like writing in your own time (not at school)?

35	25	23	17
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6. How good do you think you are at spelling?

30	48	16	6
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7. How often do you write things like stories, poems or letters at school?

<i>most days</i>	<i>2 – 3 times a week</i>	<i>about once a week</i>	<i>hardly ever</i>
44	23	16	17

8. How often do you read to others what you write?

<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>
18	20	54	8

YEAR 8 STUDENTS WRITING SURVEY

1. How much do you like writing at school?

<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>a little</i>	<i>not at all</i>
15	45	36	4

2. How good do you think you are at writing?

				<i>don't know</i>
13	51	21	4	11

3. How good does your teacher think you are at writing?

14	33	14	5	34
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4. How good does your Mum or Dad think you are at writing?

29	30	11	5	25
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5. How much do you like writing in your own time (not at school)?

14	26	35	25
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6. How good do you think you are at spelling?

18	43	29	10
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7. How often do you write things like stories, poems or letters at school?

<i>most days</i>	<i>2 – 3 times a week</i>	<i>about once a week</i>	<i>hardly ever</i>
19	31	30	20

8. How often do you read to others what you write?

<i>heaps</i>	<i>quite a lot</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>
8	19	62	11