

How to accelerate writing

Evidence supports the use of a variety of effective teaching models and strategies to accelerate students' learning. This resource aims to discuss opportunities to accelerate writing in a secondary school setting.

What is accelerated learning?

- Accelerated learning is achieved through specific teaching strategies, learning conditions, or scaffolded supports that enable learners to acquire skills more rapidly than they would under 'usual teaching conditions'.¹
- Accelerated learning differs from general classroom teaching and traditional forms of remediation, which often involve not using current year-level content with students to focus on filling gaps from previous years. In contrast, accelerated learning emphasises consistently providing students with appropriate and current year-level materials/tasks/assignments, supplemented with scaffolds to make the work accessible.
- Accelerated learning relies heavily on continuous monitoring of student progress against benchmarks and progress indicators, ensuring that the learning process remains aligned with year-level expectations.
- For more information on acceleration see: [Accelerated Learning Resource](#).

This resource is based on the research report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and provided by the University of Canterbury. The full report can be found here: [Accelerating learning in Oral language, Reading, Writing, and Maths](#). The research on writing and spelling interventions reviewed in this report applies broadly to students experiencing writing difficulties, including but not limited to those with dysgraphia.

¹ [Accelerating learning in Oral language, Reading, Writing, and Maths](#). (Gillon et al., 2024, p. 13)

Common elements that facilitate accelerated learning

When planning an intervention programme to accelerate students there are several topic areas that need to be considered.

1. Explicit and systematic instruction

- Explicit and systematic instruction is highlighted as an important teaching approach. This includes teaching strategies such as front-loading small groups, so they are prepared for the universal classroom lesson, modelling, scaffolding learners' attempts, guided practice, and providing learners with immediate corrective feedback.
- Well-structured lesson plans, or detailed teaching guides, based on the research evidence, are common features of effective interventions.

2. Intensity and duration of support

- Small group interventions up to 4 or 5 times per week (with 20–30-minute teaching sessions) for a minimum of between 8–11 weeks were found to be effective for most learners.
- Longer interventions are not necessarily more effective than shorter length interventions but may have their place in more tailored interventions. Increasing intensity of teaching and longer interventions are necessary for children with more severe learning difficulties or complex learning needs.

3. Tiers of support

- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are advocated within the international scientific literature to ensure all children are successful in their learning. Three layers of learning support have been identified.

Tier 1	Universal (Te Matua)	This is evidence-based universal teaching for all children and involves strengthening inclusive environments, cultures, and practices, including teacher practice, curriculum design, and everyday routines and systems.
Tier 2	Targeted (Te Kāhui)	Targeted supports in small groups to accelerate learning for children identified as requiring additional teaching supports and to enhance children's participation, learning, and wellbeing.
Tier 3	Tailored (Te Arotahi)	Involves individualised support for children with greater learning challenges and provides more tailored supports to meet children's unique needs and contexts.

- The alignment of teaching strategies across these tiers of teaching may optimise children's learning potential, thus all tiers need to be considered when implementing an accelerated learning programme.

4. Incorporating technology

- Technology enhanced assessment and teaching approaches show promise. The study found that more research needs to be done in this area.
- Teaching that incorporates gamification can be effective, particularly for younger learners.

5. Professional Learning and Development

- Ongoing professional learning and development for educators is crucial to ensure the successful implementation of effective teaching strategies and is critical to the success of accelerated learning.
- It is important that this professional development is not in isolation, but that teachers are supported to integrate new learning into their daily teaching practices and have access to quality teaching resources.

Culturally responsive teaching practices

- Researchers recognise the importance of culturally responsive teaching approaches, particularly in relation to supporting learners' engagement and motivation.
- Research on culturally responsive teaching practices in New Zealand schools emphasises the importance of integrating Māori knowledge and perspectives across the curriculum.
- The development of respectful relationships and partnerships with Pacific families and their communities is important in enhancing achievement for Pacific learners.

Teacher professional learning and development (PLD) is critical to the success of accelerated learning.

Teaching methods

- The same types of explicit and systematic teaching strategies in phonic, phoneme awareness, oral language comprehension and vocabulary instruction that that accelerate children's reading also support children's writing development.
- Explicit and systematic code-based literacy interventions, especially those involving generating spellings of words and segmenting phonemes (the smallest sound in a word), are more effective at improving spelling outcomes than those less explicit interventions.

Explicit instruction	Systematic instruction
Explicit instruction is a structured, systematic, and direct teaching methodology where concepts are clearly explained, modelled, and practised rather than discovered. It minimises guesswork by breaking complex tasks into small, manageable steps and guides students until independent mastery is achieved. Key characteristics • Clear Objectives. Lessons begin by stating exactly what will be learned, why it is important, and how students know they have succeeded (success criteria). For further details see Accelerating progress in literacy – Teacher guidance. • Step-by-Step Modelling. Teachers demonstrate the skill while "thinking aloud" so students see exactly how to perform the task. • Supported Practice. The process follows a strict "<i>I do it, We do it, You do it</i>" progression to reduce cognitive overload. • Immediate Feedback. Teachers monitor progress closely, offering immediate affirmative and constructive feedback.	Systematic instruction is a structured, step-by-step teaching method where skills are broken down into logical, manageable parts and taught in a deliberate progression from simple to complex. It ensures students master foundational building blocks before advancing to more difficult concepts. Key components • Logical progression. Skills are taught in an intentional order, with each new concept building on previously mastered material. • Scaffolding. Teachers provide strong support initially and gradually provide less support as the students gain independence (I do, we do, you do). • Generalisation and maintenance. Lessons often include continuous practice and review to ensure students retain the skill and can apply it in different contexts.

How do systematic and explicit instruction differ?

These two terms are often used together, but they refer to different aspects of teaching:

- 'Systematic' dictates the **timing, order, and sequencing** of the curriculum (what gets taught and when).
- 'Explicit' refers to **how clearly the concept is taught**. Teachers use direct explanations, clear demonstrations, and leave nothing to chance.

Accelerated learning interventions for writing

- Skilled writing includes three key writing processes: planning, translating, and reviewing/revising. To complete this process, writers must:

1. **Generate text– select words and produce sentences and paragraphs to express ideas.**

2. **Transcribe – translate words, sentences, and paragraphs into print, requiring handwriting/typing and spelling.**

Both generating texts and transcribing are important to the overall quality and quantity of writing. When students struggle with one component of the writing process, such as spelling or handwriting, they use up their cognitive resources and struggle to engage with other components of the writing process such as word selection and sentence structure. Thus, writing interventions must target skills within each component (a multicomponent intervention) to improve overall writing development.

- Formative assessment to determine need is a vital part of accelerative writing practice prior to beginning a learning intervention and throughout. It is also important that student progress against benchmarks and progress indicators is continuously monitored and adjustments made accordingly to interventions. The learning process should remain aligned with year-level expectations.
- Writing interventions in the secondary school years should include explicitly teaching writing processes and strategies, structuring the writing process, and using word processing. Teachers should use a combination of acquisition and fluency interventions, such as self-regulated strategy development (SRSD), graphic organisers, timed practice, performance feedback, goal setting, and graphing, to improve the writing quality and fluency of students. Thus, accelerated learning interventions for writing should focus on the following:

Writing accelerated learning interventions:	Further information
1. Explicitly teach the writing process as well as parts of words, such as syllables, root words, prefixes, and suffixes, to help with spelling	Explicit and systematic code-based literacy interventions, especially those involving generating spellings of words and segmenting phonemes, are effective at improving spelling outcomes. Segmenting phonemes is the process of breaking a word down into its separate, individual sounds. Attempts to improve students' writing are only effective when explicit instruction of the writing process is provided.
2. Teach reading	Literacy programs that balance reading and writing instruction can enhance both reading and writing performance. See: How to accelerate reading.

3. Teach individual aspects of writing within the process of writing	Using an “occupation-as-means” approach, where the occupation (handwriting or spelling) is the medium of the intervention, is more effective than “occupation-as-ends” approaches that targets just the underlying component skills. Research shows that engaging directly in meaningful tasks is often more effective. Practising skills inside the task of writing teaches the brain how to perform for that specific job. Meaningful activities also increase a person’s desire to participate, which drives better neurological and functional outcomes.
4. Teach using strategy instruction, dictation, goal setting, and process writing.	Four specific writing interventions – strategy instruction, dictation, goal setting, and process writing – were found to have statistically significant positive effects on writing quality. See the table below for further details of each of these strategies.
5. Teach handwriting using timed transcription skills, handwriting treatments, and performance feedback.	Three specific handwriting interventions were particularly effective: handwriting focused on timed transcription skills, multicomponent handwriting treatments, and performance feedback. See the table below for further details of each these strategies.

Core teaching strategies that support accelerated writing

Teaching Strategies	Resources	Further reading
Provide timely, regular feedback. Performance feedback effectively improves writing fluency. This is the case even in languages where the relationship between the letters (graphemes) and the sounds (phonemes) are inconsistent or complex.	Resources to help with regular feedback include: Writing Acceleration Supports – Scribo is available through the Ministry of Education Shared Paragraph Writing Editing Checklists.	For more ideas see: Feedback - THE EDUCATION HUB How Do We Give Meaningful Feedback to Student Writers? Writers Who Care How to give peer feedback - Writing NSW Giving Feedback on Student Writing AdLit.

• Explicitly teach spelling. Explicit, linguistically-based spelling instruction that requires active reflection on and production of orthographic patterns.	Resources to help with the teaching of spelling include: • make-a-word cards. Create cards with letters and letter groupings (prefixes and suffixes). Give one set to each group. Challenge the groups to meet certain criteria. For example: Create the longest word, Use as many cards as you can, Create as many words as you can in a set time. At the end the groups must read their words. Prizes and competition will help with motivation for this activity. • Decoding New Words.pdf • Vocabulary Frames.pdf • Frayer Model - The Teacher Toolkit.	For more ideas see: • Teach spelling skills explicitly Inclusive Education • Teaching spelling: Powerful evidence-based practices – The Writing For Pleasure Centre • Taking the Guesswork out of Spelling...at HIGH SCHOOL! • How to teach spelling in high school.
• Provide handwriting instruction. Three specific handwriting interventions are particularly effective in improving writing fluency: – handwriting focused on timed transcription skills, – multicomponent handwriting treatments, and – performance feedback.	Resources to help with the teaching of handwriting include: • Timed transcription – Handwriting speed is a useful indicator of handwriting fluency. It measures how quickly a learner can produce a set amount of text under controlled conditions. A practical way to assess this is through a timed copying task: 1. Provide the learner with a short passage (no more than 50 words). 2. Ask them to copy it as neatly and quickly as possible. 3. Record the time taken and calculate letters per minute (LPM). For consistency, use a standard age-appropriate text. For more information about timed practice see: Teaching Handwriting. • Multicomponent handwriting treatments – Deals with fine motor skills and postural adjustments to aid writing. These may be aided by an occupational therapist once a child reaches secondary school. • Performance feedback – Information given to the learner about their performance relative to a learning goal or outcome. This can be given by the teacher, peers, parents & caregivers, computer programme, book, or experience. See: Shared Paragraph Writing and Editing Checklists. • Writing Acceleration Supports – Scribo is available through the Ministry of Education.	For more ideas see: • 12 Transcription Skills and How You Can Develop Them Indeed.com • Teaching Handwriting • Are you having trouble with Handwriting? We can help - Sensory Corner • Personalised feedback and annotated exemplars in the writing classroom: An experimental study in situ New Zealand Council for Educational Research • Feedback – ERO • How to integrate effective feedback into your classroom - THE EDUCATION HUB.

- **Use fluency and acquisition interventions.**

To improve the writing fluency of students, teachers should consider using both acquisition interventions like SRSD and graphic organisers, as well as fluency interventions with timed practice, performance feedback, and goal setting. Writing fluency focuses on developing smoothness and ease in writing, which is an essential part of broader writing development. Use of technology may help some students.

Resources to help with fluency interventions include:

- Timed practice – Handwriting speed is a useful indicator of handwriting fluency. See above or [Teaching Handwriting](#) for more information on timed practice.
- Performance feedback – Information given to the learner about their performance relative to a learning goal or outcome. This can be given by the teacher, peers, parents & caregivers, computer programme, book, or experience. See:
 - [Shared Paragraph Writing](#)
 - [Editing Checklists](#)
 - [Writing Acceleration Supports](#) – Scribo is available through the Ministry of Education.
- Goal setting – Personal goal setting is useful for language learners because it is motivating and makes learning more relevant. Students will be more likely to put in the work and achieve success if they have set the goal themselves and the goal is important or interesting for them. It is important that goals be SMART:
 - **S**pecific
 - **M**easurable
 - **A**greed (for example, in a "contract" between kaiako and ākonga)
 - **R**ealistic
 - **T**ime bound.

Part of goal-setting involves self-assessment because you need to know what you can do in order to work out what you would like to learn. Refer to [Ākonga and kaiako assessment checklists](#).

Resources to help with acquisition interventions include:

- Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) – Designed to enhance students' abilities through six structured stages of learning: Develop

For more ideas see:

- [Te Whakaipurangi Rauemi – Examples of ākonga goal setting](#)
- [Refine and support goal setting | Inclusive Education](#).

	background knowledge, Discuss it, Model it, Memorize it, Support it, Establish independent practice. The process allows students to revisit and strengthen their understanding while moving at their own pace. A central feature of SRSD for writing is its focus on modelling, using the “I do, we do, you do” approach. • Graphic Organisers.	• About the Method Self-Regulated Strategy Development Writing • Support processing and organisation Inclusive Education • Venn diagrams Assessment Resource Banks.
• Use scaffolds and writing supports. Procedures for scaffolding or supporting students, like peer assistance, pre-writing, process writing, and strategy instruction, are effective for improving writing quality.	Resources to help with scaffolds and writing supports include: • Acronyms • Graphic Organisers • Templates • Writing Frames • Sentence starters.	For more ideas see: • Writing – ESOL teaching strategies • Provide writing supports for literacy in NCEA Inclusive Education • Effective writing instruction - THE EDUCATION HUB (whilst aimed at Years 3–8 it has useful content for older students) • Sentence-starters • Kōrero Mai! Sentence Starters Resource Ako Panuku.

‘Writing and spelling skills are crucial to students’ overall literacy development and success in school...Further, a lack of writing proficiency can have a serious impact on later success in school, employment, and life’.²

² [Accelerating learning in Oral language, Reading, Writing, and Maths](#). (Gillon et al., 2024, p. 44)

He Awa Whiria - Braiding the knowledge streams

He awa whiria is a metaphor for considering the relationship between Māori and non-Māori (predominantly Western) streams of knowledge.

Understanding and knowing the learner's cultural and educational background as well as the integration of intervention strategies that address ecological and psychological influences on students' reading and writing development are important.

Ecological and psychological influences on spelling and writing development include the home environment, cultural and language environment, motivation, and attitudes. Understanding these ecological influences helps teachers and parents create supportive environments that foster effective spelling and writing development.

- **Home Environment.**

Parents who read to their children, provide books, and engage in literacy activities create a rich literacy environment that supports spelling and writing development.³ Family socioeconomic status impacts resources available to support literacy development, such as access to books, educational materials, and extracurricular activities. Exposure to a rich and varied vocabulary in both spoken and written forms can enhance spelling and writing development.⁴

- **Cultural and Language Environment.**

Communities that value and promote literacy often have higher levels of literacy among their members. Cultural practices such as storytelling and shared reading can also support literacy development, including spelling and writing development. Further, learning multiple languages can influence spelling and writing skills. While it can provide cognitive benefits and enhance metalinguistic awareness, it can also present challenges in managing different spelling rules and conventions.⁵

- **Individual Factors.**

Individual differences in memory, attention, phonological awareness, and language processing can impact spelling and writing development.⁶ Motivation and attitudes are also important. A positive attitude towards reading and writing and intrinsic motivation to engage in literacy activities can drive the development of these skills.⁷

³ Niklas, F, Wirth, A, Mues, A, & Birtwistle, E (2023) Development in the context of the home literacy environment. In Y Ye, T Inoue, U Maurer, & C McBride (Eds), Routledge international handbook of visual-motor skills, handwriting, and spelling: Theory, research, and practice (pp 366–378), Routledge

⁴ [Accelerating learning in Oral language, Reading, Writing, and Maths](#). (Gillon et al., 2024, p. 44)

⁵ Zhang, S, Prykanowski, D A, & Koppenhaver, D A. (2022). Reading comprehension instruction for students with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis Exceptional Children, 88(3), 271–292

⁶ Expanding the developmental models of writing: A direct and indirect effects model of developmental writing (DIEW) Journal of educational psychology, 109(1), 35.

⁷ Graham, S (2007) A meta-analysis of writing instruction for adolescent students Journal of Educational Psychology, 99(3), 445–476.

How to create a lesson to support the acceleration of writing

- This lesson aims to demonstrate how to accelerate writing in any subject. The expected piece of writing will be ‘at-the-level’ of the curriculum for this class.
- This lesson uses a systematic instruction approach and provides a logical progression and scaffolding. This lesson has been separated into the following manageable parts to reduce cognitive load and support motivation (as well as simplifying planning for the teacher):
 - 10 mins starter activity
 - 10 mins teaching time
 - 30 mins class activity (typically broken into 2–3 parts such as individual task, joint task, feedback)
 - 5–10 mins closing activity.
- This lesson also has clear explicit instruction goals that uses supported practice following the process of “I do, we do, you do”.

Time	Activity	Teaching instruction	Why this activity?	How does this support writing acceleration?
10mins	Starter Activity – Spelling	Choose a keyword that came up last lesson – preferably one you think they may have struggled with. Write the word on the board. Discuss the origins of the word. Ask students to write the word in their books and identify how many syllables the word has. What is the root word? What is the prefix and the suffix? What do they think the word means? Ask students to use either the prefix, suffix, or root word (they can choose), and write as many words as they can think of using that part of the word in a certain time, e.g. 2 mins. Feedback as a class, correcting any words that may be incorrect.	Note: This will be an activity you have done at the start of other lessons, so the process is very familiar to students, thus time has not been taken to explain the process in this lesson. Doing an activity regularly makes the activity all about the word and less about the process as it will be familiar to them. Spelling should be done in context of the lessons rather than in isolation. Choosing a keyword and using the correct vocabulary, such as ‘root word’ and ‘prefix’, make secondary school students feel like the lesson is at their level and not being dumbed down. This is an opportunity to front-load words that might be used this lesson, so students find there is less cognitive load.	• Explicitly teaching spelling decreases cognitive load when students write. • Immediate corrective feedback is given.

10mins	Teaching Activity – Explicit teaching	Put your advanced organiser on the board. Talk the students through the lesson objectives and what they will learn. Explicitly teach the content knowledge students require for this lesson. This involves step-by-step modelling where you will demonstrate the skill while "thinking aloud" so students see exactly how to perform the task. For this activity, a poem will be read, and parts of the meaning and structure will be explicitly taught. This will later be supported by the writing activity you have prepared.	Lessons should have clear objectives that state exactly what will be learned, why it is important and how students know they have succeeded. Content needs to be intentionally taught and not left to chance. Explicitly teaching the content prior to writing helps reduce the cognitive load on students when they come to write.	• Lessons should have clear objectives and students should know what success in a lesson looks like. • Explicit teaching ensures concepts are clearly explained, modelled, and practised rather than discovered. It minimises guesswork by breaking complex tasks into small, manageable steps.
30mins	Class Activity – 1. Sentence starters	Give students a list of pre-prepared questions about the poem with sentence starters that you have prepared. The purpose of the starters for this lesson is to revise the material that you have just taught and check understanding. • “I Do” – Complete the first question using the starter you have provided. Allow the class to copy your answer into their notes as the example.	It is often difficult for students to begin a sentence. This can make it appear like they are not on task or do not understand but they may simply be finding it difficult to access the words to express their answer. Providing sentence starters takes the pressure off and gives them a nudge in the right direction. To check they understand what is expected of them, you complete the first starter on the board.	• Explicitly teaching students the strategies that help them to understand how to write supports their longer-term writing goals.

		• “We do” – Ask for a volunteer to answer the next question using the starter provided. Take suggestions from the class to write on the board and construct an answer. Guide the class to the correct answers with Questioning. • “You do” – Students complete the remaining questions individually.	Modelling a task cuts down on all the talk from students asking, ‘What do we do?’. If you show them what to do, check they have the right idea, and then slowly release them to work by themselves, there is more chance of a task being successful and the skills being learned.	• Providing a slow-release strategy of ‘I do, we do, you do’ reduces cognitive load and helps to build student confidence and self-reliance.
	2. Discuss and question	Note: If you observe that not all students are ready to be released you may choose to have a small group doing “We do” with you and then each other for the whole activity. Discuss answers and question the thinking as you go, correcting errors.	A discussion of the answers provides feedback to the teacher on progress and is an opportunity to correct any misunderstandings that may have occurred along the way, in a timely manner.	• Scaffolding. Teachers provide strong support initially and gradually provide less support as the students gain independence (I do, we do, you do).
5-10mins	Closing Activity – Timed transcription	Ask students to write in their books as you dictate the passage you have prepared for them. You will set the timer (big enough for the whole class to see) and when they are finished writing they will record their score next to their writing. They should then enter this time into the chart they have prepared of other times and compare the time, noting why they think they improved or not and any issues they had under the comments section. Go through the lesson objectives with the class to ensure they have been met.	This will be a task that students are familiar with, so you will not have to explain the process. Showing the students that they have met the objectives of the lesson allows them to feel success and gain confidence.	• Small, repeated practice of timed transcription will help students to enhance writing fluency.

