



Sizzling Starts Transformation Challenge

Great writing begins with a Sizzling Start

We're excited you've joined our Sizzling Starts Transformation Challenge. Of all the Seven Steps, Step 2: Sizzling Starts® is the simplest, most creative and most fun.

In this Challenge, you'll find all the resources you need – including a training video, a classroom activity, writing samples and assessment resources – to help you learn, teach, apply and assess Step 2: Sizzling Starts.

So let's start transforming your students' writing!

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What are the Seven Steps?

The Seven Steps breaks writing down into seven core techniques:

- Step 1: Plan for Success
- Step 2: Sizzling Starts
- Step 3: Tightening Tension
- Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue
- Step 5: Show, Don't Tell
- Step 6: Ban the Boring
- Step 7: Exciting Endings

Each Step can be taught individually in less than 20 minutes a day. Importantly, Seven Steps teachers create a vibrant writing classroom where students are engaged and writing results rapidly improve!

Students focus on one Step at a time, which allows them to understand, practise and master each individual skill – all before they attempt to write a complete text. This chunking concept is modelled on the way we learn new skills in sport.

Taking small, manageable steps builds students' confidence and makes writing fun and achievable for all ability levels. Plus, it is so easy to implement!

The authorial side of writing

Seven Steps is different to many other writing programs in that it focuses on the authorial side of writing. Ask any professional author and they will tell you they don't think about spelling and grammar as they are creating. They know that original ideas, interesting characters, convincing dialogue, voice and tone all come first.

Why the Seven Steps?

Our mission is to transform writing for life. As Australia's largest educator of writing literacy, Seven Steps has trained over 45,000 teachers from over 4,530 schools in Australia. These teachers have inspired over 2 million students!

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Learn the theory

A story has about 60 seconds to grab the reader and make them want to read on. Find out how to start with a bang using a range of simple and effective techniques.

In this five-minute video, Jen McVeity, author and creator of the Seven Steps, demonstrates how to start with action or at a moment of change and shares some examples that clearly illustrate these techniques in action in narrative writing. She also explains how to use backfill to orient the reader with the Who, What, Where, When and Why.



Click on the thumbnail or the link below to watch the video.

<https://sevenstepswriting.wistia.com/medias/5kkkwki757>

Pre-test your students' writing

Before you start teaching Sizzling Starts, pre-test your students by having them write the start of a story on one of the following topics:

- The big secret
- A day at the zoo
- My teacher's a monster!

We recommend giving your students five minutes of thinking time and five minutes to write their opening paragraph. You may want to increase the writing time for beginner writers.

Use the test paper on page 10, which includes a quick survey to gauge how students feel about writing. This can be used to check if their levels of confidence and enjoyment are also improving.

Assess students' work using the Step 2: Sizzling Starts marking rubric on the marking sheet provided on page 11. This will give you an insight into your students' current writing abilities.

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

'Before and after' writing samples

The best way to learn is by seeing examples, so model what a Sizzling Start looks like using these 'before and after' writing samples.

Text Type/Topic	Before	After
Persuasive Do ghosts exist?	<i>I think ghosts do exist. Once my family were staying in a hotel room and it felt really creepy ...</i>	<p><i>Do ghosts exist? I'd never even thought about it until the night we stayed in the Glendowne Hotel.</i></p> <p><i>It had a swimming pool and a large screen TV – and a cold, cold feeling that seeped into you every time you walked into the room.</i></p> <p><i>We cranked the heater up to full, but no hope there. It was only later we found out the mayor of Glendowne had been murdered in the room just two weeks before ...</i></p>
Narrative The cranky tooth fairy	<i>Once there was a Tooth Fairy with a bad temper. She always went out and ...</i>	<p><i>'Whaaaaat ... Is that the fairy?' the little kid in the bed muttered.</i></p> <p><i>'No!' said the Tooth Fairy. 'Be quiet. And keep your eyes shut or you'll get no money for your tooth.'</i></p> <p><i>It was her 104th visit for the night and her wings hurt and she was definitely over eager little kids.</i></p>
Informative Left-handed people	<i>Over 10% of the population are left handed. However, most of the tools in our society are set up for right-handed people.</i>	<p><i>Are you a right-hander? Take this test.</i></p> <p><i>For one day, open every door – the car, classroom, house doors – with your left hand. See how the door swings the 'wrong' way? Tomorrow try cutting paper or using a computer mouse. Awkward, right? That's the world for 10% of us – the left-handers.</i></p>

Sizzling Starts top techniques

Here are some of our favourite Sizzling Starts techniques. Use the text and film examples provided to showcase the techniques to your students.

Technique	Text Example	Film Example
Start with action	<i>Five, four, three, two, ONE! The cameras were rolling and I was about to eat a cockroach.</i>	The Angry Birds Movie https://youtu.be/U-Fb_q4bNQY
Start at a moment of change	<i>All was going well on the hike until the heat wave happened. I was hot and sweaty and dying for a swim. Then I saw the river. And the sign: Warning! Crocodiles.</i>	Finding Nemo https://youtu.be/HG3L98NFyRo
Use humour	<i>Ever cheered for your footy team with a pie in one hand and a drink in the other? Don't. When that final goal happened, I wore both.</i>	How to Train Your Dragon 2 https://youtu.be/ZSKflxDUIpE
Start with a sound	<i>'Bzzzzzzz!' The sound of my alarm clock echoed in my ears as I struggled to wake up. I sat straight up in my bed! This was my BIG day and I had to be on time.</i>	Incredibles 2 https://youtu.be/6j0fyafI3w0
Start with dialogue	<i>'It's just a rat,' I said, breathing hard. 'Rats don't growl,' said Mike.</i>	The LEGO Batman Movie https://youtu.be/PPQbtDIMXmA
Make the reader curious	<i>The beach house was great, but then my cousins arrived with the bacon, the bricks and wearing their usual beanies.</i>	Inside Out https://youtu.be/NgnMBHV0

Now, complete the Sizzling Starts Action Activity on the next page with your class.

Step 2: Sizzling Starts Action Activity

Now that you know the Sizzling Starts theory, it's time to jump in with our most popular Action Activity – Five Minute Fast Starts.

This is one of the best ways to get your students practising the Sizzling Starts techniques and writing more creatively.

For accurate results, remember to test your students' writing prior to teaching Step 2: Sizzling Starts. You'll be amazed at the outcomes!

Action Activity: Five Minute Fast Starts

- Read out one of the topics from the table on page 7 and give students one minute to write a Sizzling Start.
- As soon as the minute is up, read out another topic and start the next minute.
- After five minutes, each student should have five different Sizzling Starts.
- Students form groups of 3–4 and share their favourite Sizzling Start.

Five Minute Fast Starts tips

Run this activity every day for an entire week to build up students' muscle memory.

Don't worry about neat handwriting or spelling just now. The goal is to capture creative ideas fast!

Don't ask students to share all of the Sizzling Starts they've written. Reading everything out doesn't give them the opportunity to make mistakes, play around with ideas or try new things that don't work.

Encourage students to share their favourite Sizzling Start in small groups. This will help them generate more ideas, develop concepts and learn from each other.

The idea is to practise, practise, practise. The more students do this, the easier it will get.



Five Minute Fast Starts topics

Year Level	Narrative	Informative	Persuasive
F-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A day at the beach • A dance show • Lunchtime fun • I swallowed my tooth • Playing with a pet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An interesting animal • Lunchtime game rules • Something blue • How to ride a bike • Where to find fruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes a good friend? • What makes a better pet – cats or dogs? • Everyone should learn to ... • Why my mum and dad are the greatest • Lunchtime is too short
3-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost getting caught • It's not fair • My grandparents ... • A holiday that ... • A fight with my parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordering at a restaurant • How to dance • A theme park • Importance of washing your hands • UFOs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekends should be longer • Why I should get more pocket money • Should parents always tell the truth to their children? • Mornings are better than evenings • If only I had (listened/done) ...
7-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My annoying habit • A time I got in trouble • The thing I fear most • I learn best when ... • A haunting dream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Australian Government • Causes and effects of air pollution • How your belongings are organised in your room • Electric cars • Why we work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest problem in education/our school is ... • An extra right kids should have • Our government needs to ... • Are rules always right? • I am now old enough to ...

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Assess and celebrate

After running the Five Minute Fast Starts Action Activity every day for a week, use the self-assessment rubric on page 12 to help your students evaluate their own progress.

Conference with students to identify whether they have mastered Step 2: Sizzling Starts or whether they need more practice to consolidate their understanding.

Post-test your students' writing

Once students have practised Step 2: Sizzling Starts for 1-2 weeks, post-test their writing using the test paper provided on page 10 to measure the improvement in their narrative writing skills, as well as their level of confidence and enjoyment.

Choose the same topic as for the pre-test (or one of a similar difficulty level) and mirror the pre-test conditions as closely as possible.

Mark students' work using the same rubric and marking sheet as before and compare the results.

Celebrate your students' writing success!

Reward your students with this Step 2: Sizzling Starts certificate (located at the end of this document). Share your students' success with your class, with your wider school community and with us!





Win a Seven Steps product of your choice

Share your most improved piece of student writing for a chance to win a Seven Steps product of your choice (up to the value of \$330). Learn our transformative approach to teaching writing at *Workshop One: Seven Steps to Transform Writing* (online or face-to-face) or with one of our comprehensive teaching manuals.



How to enter

1. Scan your most improved student's pre- and post-tests, along with their completed self-assessment form and the marking sheet.
2. Send your files to inspiration@sevenstepswriting.com using the subject line: Sizzling Starts Transformation Challenge. Please include your name, school and your student's year level.

“ Thank you for changing the way I teach writing and for making writing an enjoyable experience for the students!

Belinda Jerrett, Assistant Principal, NSW



Step 2: Sizzling Starts Marking Sheet

Student name: Date:

Topic:

Marking rubric

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Beginner	0-2 marks	The opening paragraph fails to engage the reader immediately.
Intermediate	3-5 marks	The opening paragraph is engaging and orients the reader.
Advanced	6-7 marks	The opening paragraph is well-developed and immediately engages the reader's interest, making them want to read more.

Pre-test

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Beginner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Advanced
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Comment:

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Post-test

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Beginner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Advanced
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Comment:

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Step 2: Sizzling Starts Self-Assessment

Look at each 'I can ...' statement and think about how you are doing. Tick the box that best describes your progress. You may have mastered some things, but there may be other things that you need more help with.

I can ...	☺	☺ ☺	☺ ☺ ☺
start with action or at a moment of change to throw the reader into the most interesting part of the story			
start with a sound to grab the reader's attention and signal action			
start with humour – laughter will engage the reader and make them want to keep reading			
start with dialogue to reveal information about the plot, characters or setting			
make the reader curious to draw them in and make them want to know more			
add backfill to orient the reader.			

Comments:



Congratulations

*for writing a **Sizzling Start**
that lit up the classroom!*

Teacher's signature



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