

Sevensteps



Sizzling Starts

The easiest way to improve students' writing



Welcome to the Seven Steps to Writing Success

Monday morning, your writing class.



Picture the scene: students are working on a writing task. It's noisy, and they're talking with excitement. Students cross the room to consult each other. Some of them have facts or character names pinned to their shirts. They're sharing ideas and writing pieces of text together. It's a hive of activity; students are confident, engaged and on task.

This is what a **Seven Steps** classroom looks like.

The Seven Steps Approach

How does Seven Steps get students excited about writing and rapidly improve their skills?

Seven Steps breaks down writing into seven key techniques that professional authors use (see page 1).

Students focus on just one Step at a time, which gives them a chance to understand, practise and master each individual skill - all before they try writing a whole text. This concept of chunking 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 SEVEN STEPS

Think of the Seven Steps as the building blocks to great writing. Isolating writing skills into individual steps ensures that students don't get bogged down or overwhelmed with writing a complete text. They gain confidence as they learn and master each building block, and then they put it all together to become creative and engaging writers.

Check out each of the Seven Steps below, and see how together they lay the foundations of an engaging story in any form – written, spoken or even visual.

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 / Endings with Impact

KEY TEACHING PRINCIPLES

What makes the Seven Steps successful in classrooms so quickly?

The techniques are based on the high level 'authorial' skills of writing. These have been systematised and simplified by Jen McVeity OAM, author and former teacher.

These techniques are then linked to top teaching strategies.

Best-practice pedagogy has a few key characteristics:

- There is a **slow** release of knowledge.
- It includes **explicit** teaching.
- It relies on plenty of **practice**.
- Students **speak** to write.
- It's **collaborative** and **engaging**.

These are the principles or the five 'secrets' that underpin the Seven Steps:

THE FIVE SECRETS

CHUNK
large tasks

REPETITION
makes muscle
memory

THINK
first, write
second

VERBAL
is vital

CONSISTENCY
creates change

More information about the Five Secrets can be found on our website at <https://sevenstepswriting.com/five-secrets-to-teaching-great-writing/>.



Step

2

Sizzling Starts

'The first sentence is the most exciting moment in the story, because I'm opening a door to the Unknown.'

– John Marsden, author of *Tomorrow, When the War Began*



Theory

You only have seven seconds to grab your reader's interest. So, start fast!

- Start with action.
- Start at a moment of change.
- Start with a sound.
- Use humour.
- Start with dialogue.
- Ask a question.
- Paint a word picture.



Top Techniques

Narrative

- Start with action or at a moment of change.
- Add backfill as the action unfolds.
- Go back to the live action – quickly.
- Backfill can be added after the Sizzling Start, e.g. in a separate scene or woven into the story.

Persuasive

- Engage the reader with dialogue, an anecdote or a rhetorical question.
- Reveal your position/side (you can allow your reader to infer meaning).
- Use persuasive devices to start bringing the reader on board.

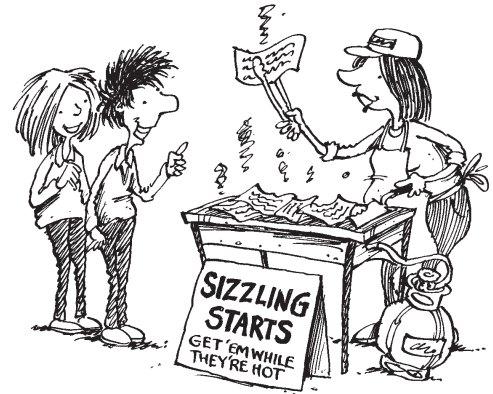
Informative

- Hook the reader with an enticing fact or action that introduces your topic.
- Paint word pictures, writing as if you are a witness.
- Start with a strong quote from an expert, or an interesting statistic or fact.

FIVE MINUTE FAST STARTS

Learning Intentions could include:

- Understand the importance of engaging the reader immediately.
- Know how to begin at a moment of change.
- Be able to use different techniques to hook the reader.
- Understand that a Sizzling Start can be used in all types of texts.



Write five **Sizzling Starts** in five minutes (yes, it is possible!) – one start per minute.

1. The crazy outback challenge with a \$500,000 prize. I can do it!

2. Ghosts really do exist.

3. The school excursion - and annoying Max found the enormous gold nugget.

4. He pushed the button and everything changed.

5. In an instant, everything started to slide across the room.



ACTION ACTIVITIES

Photo Fast Starts

Run the 'Five Minute Fast Starts' activity, but use photos rather than topics as the stimulus.

Show students five photos and get them to create FIVE starts in FIVE minutes (one per photo). Here's an example:

*'Nooooo!' I cried as they opened the door on the plane. 'No, no, I can't do this!!!'
There was a push and I was out the door, 3000 metres above the ground.
'Ahhh!' I screamed as I fell through the air. 'This is AMAZING.'*

**Sizzling Rewrite**

Read this example of a boring beginning to a recount:

My parents have friends who live in the country and are teachers. Mum went to school with the lady, her name is Marilyn. She wears colourful dresses and likes to sing a lot. We once went to their place for Christmas. There was a horse at their farm called Buttercup. One day we took a trip out to their cottage. We got up early because it was a long drive. We drove out of the city and kept driving and driving until my sister started kicking the driver's seat and Dad got grumpy.

In pairs, students brainstorm ways that they could rewrite this opening as a Sizzling Start. They pick their favourite idea and get two minutes to write their Sizzling Start. Share a few of the best examples with the class. Can students identify which technique has been used in each instance?

Three-Word Starts

Provide students with three random words and challenge them to use all three words in a Sizzling Start.

For example: director/highway/professor

'Let's hit the highway!' yelled the distinguished professor of European history, slamming her foot on the pedal. The director and I locked eyes – shooting this historical drama was going to be fun!



You can come up with the words yourself, or visit the Random Word Generator web page (<https://randomwordgenerator.com>) and set the word number to 3. Choose words to suit the age and stage of your class.

Repeat the activity several times with different sets of random words to get students' creative ideas flowing.

For more Action Activities, take a look in our manuals and on *Teacher Hub*.

TEXTS DEMONSTRATING STEP 2: SIZZLING STARTS

Use these exemplars to show students the Step 2 techniques in action. For more extensive lists of texts and videos covering all Steps and text types, sign up for a free trial of *Teacher Hub*.

Title	Author	Example	Target Audience
Falling Angels	Colin Thompson	Starts at a moment of change: <i>The first time Sally flew was before she could even crawl.</i>	Lower primary
I'm Australian Too	Mem Fox Ronojoy Ghosh (illustrator)	Starts with a question: <i>I'm Australian! How about you?</i>	Lower primary
Stolen Girl	Trina Saffioti Norma MacDonald (illustrator)	Starts with action: <i>She wakes to the sound of the bell ringing and stumbles out of bed.</i>	Lower and middle primary
Landing with Wings	Trace Balla	Starts at a moment of change: <i>Dear tea-tree-by-the-sea, It's the middle of the night and I've just got up to write, because as soon as I close my eyes there's a stampede of thoughts going on in my head. We're moving to the goldfields tomorrow and I'm not sure I want to go ...</i>	Middle primary
Yes I Can!	Abdi Aden Pawel Nowaca (illustrator)	Starts with humour: <i>I am four years old, and my favourite place is sitting on my grandma's knee. She is feeding me the best bits of the food she is eating.</i>	Middle primary
This Small Blue Dot	Zeno Sworder	Starts by making the reader curious: <i>Welcome to Earth. There's a lot of strange stuff going on out there, but here are some of the things I've worked out so far.</i>	Middle primary
Strangers on Country	Dave Hartley & Kirsty Murray Dub Leffler (illustrator)	Starts with action: <i>One afternoon just on dusk, when the dugong were feeding in the grass beds close to the shoreline, there came a shout from the beach.</i>	Upper primary
The Thing About Oliver	Deborah Kelly	Starts with action: <i>It's half past four in the morning and Oliver is still screaming.</i>	Upper primary
One Minute's Silence	David Metzenthen Michael Camilleri (illustrator)	Starts with a word picture: <i>In one minute's silence ... you can imagine the grinding in your guts as the ironbark bows of the Australian boats bumped the stony shore of Gallipoli on the twenty-fifth of April, 1915 ...</i>	Upper primary
Everything I've Never Said	Samantha Wheeler	Starts by making the reader curious: <i>My sister, Nic, keeps secrets. Big secrets. Like the talent show.</i>	Upper primary
The Mediterranean	Armin Greder	Starts with action: <i>After he had finished drowning, his body sank slowly to the bottom, where the fish were waiting.</i>	Secondary
Unforgotten	Tohby Riddle	Starts by making the reader curious: <i>Nobody knows where they come from. But they come.</i>	Secondary



Get off to a Sizzling Start with Teacher Hub

Want us to walk you through rolling Sizzling Starts out in your classroom? Sign up for a free Teacher Hub trial to access the Step 2: Sizzling Starts module in the Narrative Writing Course. It gives you a complete plan you can easily implement to skyrocket your students' writing and engagement in just a couple of weeks!

What's Teacher Hub?

Teacher Hub is an online platform that's home to the Seven Steps. Here you'll find:

- Bite-sized, actionable professional learning on demand.
- 100s of curriculum-aligned teaching resources you and your students will love.
- Easy-to-use tools for stress-free planning and assessment.

Teacher Hub will help you:

- Feel clear and confident, with a simple plan for teaching writing that gets results fast.
- Ditch the overwork and overwhelm, with evidence-based resources and tools at your fingertips.
- Create a writing classroom that's abuzz with collaboration and creative thinking – and make a real difference in your students' lives.



**Start your free Teacher Hub trial
(No credit card required)**



I love the accessibility and amazing range of resources on offer. The Seven Steps approach has revolutionised my teaching of writing. I feel so much more equipped and confident.

Nicole Gorrie, Mount Annan Christian College