



PARENT TIPS

- **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**
- **Persuasive Writing Tips**



Want to help your child write better?

Seven Steps Writing Tips

Don't just check the spelling! Authors use seven techniques to make their writing more interesting. Try the Seven Steps 'quick tips' and fun writing ideas at home and help improve your child's writing.

How easy are the Seven Steps techniques?

Try our quiz on 'The Bear Story'.

Step 2: Sizzling Starts

Which story start is more interesting?

- I woke up that morning, got dressed and ate breakfast.
- The lock on the bear's cage looked old and the bear looked cross.

Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue

Which example is more dynamic?

- The teacher told us to stand back from the cage as the bear was growling loudly, but Jeremy didn't listen.
- 'Stand back,' said the teacher, but Jeremy didn't listen. Suddenly the bear growled loudly. 'Jeremy!' cried the teacher, 'get away from the bear. NOW!'

Step 5: Show, Don't Tell

Which sentence 'tells' and which 'shows'?

- I was really scared.
- My heart was thudding loudly in my chest and brain.

See, simple isn't it?

(Hint, the correct answers are all (b)!)

What are the Seven Steps?

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

Wishing you all creativity, confidence and success in writing.

Jen McVeity



- National Literacy Champion
- Churchill Fellow
- Author of over 20 books

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Step 1: Plan for Success

Seven Steps Writing Tips

Planning is a crucial first step when writing. The difficult part is getting children to do it!

It's hard to show people **how** to plan, so here's a quick method. Good stories (like movies, books, poems and even jokes) are all planned and they all have a similar structure. This is what it looks like:

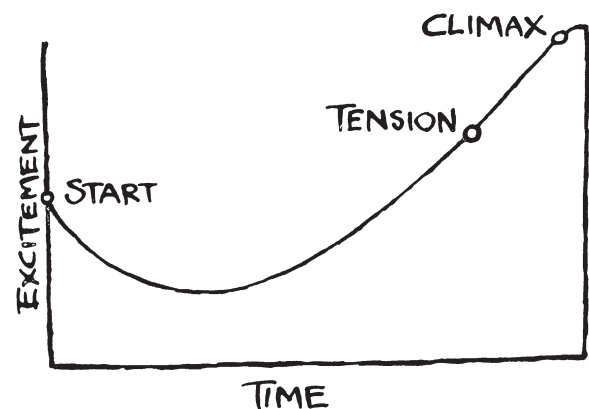
1. **Start with a bang** – start with an action scene or at a moment of change.
2. **Backfill** – the Who, What, Why is filled in while the story unfolds.
3. **Complication set-up** – the main problem or premise is introduced.
4. **Pebble** – the tension starts to build.
5. **Rock** – the tension increases.
6. **Boulder** – the final tension scene has the reader on the edge of their seat; the stakes are very high.
7. **Climax** – the character triumphs against all odds.
8. **Character resolution** – the character's inner story is wrapped up.

Once writers master this basic structure, they can plan more effectively and this will really improve their writing.

TOP TIP:

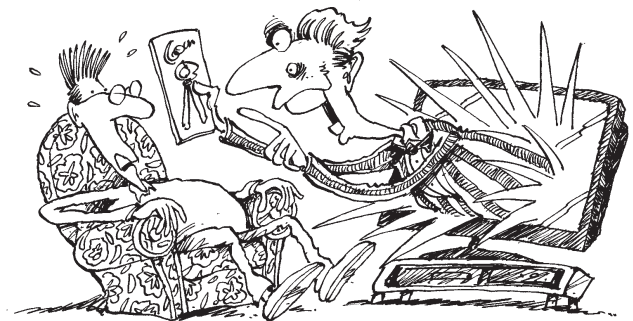
Think first, write second.

Draw a graph like this one and plot your stories out before you start writing.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Watch TV advertisements, the ones that 'tell a story'. In 30 seconds, some advertisements include a sizzling start, a tension scene and an exciting ending, exactly like the Story Graph.



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Step 2: Sizzling Starts

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Children often start their stories at the beginning of the day, the start of the week or even the first day of the school holidays. Encourage them to start where the action is or at a moment of change.

Before:

I leapt out of bed that morning and hurried to get dressed because today Dad was taking us to the zoo. I was really excited because they have this big monkey enclosure there and I am mad about monkeys. I also needed to get some really good photos for my science project.

After:

'Here,' I told my sister, 'hold my backpack. I'm just going to get a bit closer to the monkey's cage.'

A bit closer meant over the fence, past the 'No Entry' sign and right up to the wire.

'You're monkey mad,' said my sister.

Well, maybe I was, but I was also desperate for an 'A' in my latest science project. A picture of a cute monkey, smiling right at the camera, would make all the difference, right?

TOP TIP:

Start stories right where the action begins. Not in the morning, but at the zoo as the person sneaks up to the lion's cage, shiny earrings dangling in the sun, just waiting to be grabbed by a quick, sharp claw. This will make the story far more interesting.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Next time you are watching a movie with your children, see how the movie begins with lots of action to grab your attention. Action movies (e.g. James Bond) are especially good at this.



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Step 3: Tightening Tension

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The tension scene comes just before the big climax at the end. In movies this is the scene of the soccer final, the exciting car chase or the heroine fighting for her life in a raging river. Great tension scenes should be strong and long.

We all know the tension scene in *Little Red Riding Hood*. Little Red Riding Hood arrives at the cottage and the wolf is in bed in Granny's clothes. Little Red Riding Hood (who obviously needs glasses!) says:

'Oh, Grandmother, what big ears you have!'

'All the better to hear you with.'

'Oh, Grandmother, what big eyes you have!'

'All the better to see you with.'

'Oh, Grandmother, what big hands you have!'

'All the better to hold you with.'

'Oh, Grandmother, what big teeth you have!'

'All the better to eat you with!'

See how the scene slowly builds up to be more and more dangerous – and thus frightening? We don't start with the teeth, we start with the ears and the wolf trying to coax Little Red Riding Hood to come nearer and nearer.

TOP TIP:

Emotion always takes time to build up, so in tension scenes remember to start small and 'escalate' to a powerful climax.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Read picture books with your children and look for tension scenes. Picture books are short, so it's easy to find where the all-important tension builds before the ending. Here are some suggestions to get you started: *The Gruffalo*, *Wombat Stew*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Hansel and Gretel*.

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Step 4: Dynamic Dialogue

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Don't tell anyone, but authors 'cheat' when they write – especially when they write dialogue. They cut to the chase to keep things interesting.

Normal conversations go like this:

'Hi.'

'Hi. How are you?'

'Good. And you?'

'Good.'

'I was thinking of going shopping.'

'Oh. What for?'

'My mother gave me some money for my birthday and I need a new jumper.'

'Sounds great. Count me in.'

In real life we often talk in clichés and ramble a lot. However, reading takes effort, so to keep things moving, writers cut straight to the action. For example:

'Hey, my mum gave me some money for my birthday. Want to go shopping?'

'Sounds great. Count me in.'

TOP TIP:

Give children a starting line to help them avoid the boring parts. For example, they could come up with a conversation between a ghost and a flying pig? Suggest where to begin: *'Hey! Watch where you're going!'*



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Tape a conversation at home. Listen to all the rambling, half-finished sentences and 'umms' and 'ers'. This is great proof that strong writing does not have to be based on real life.

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Step 5: Show, Don't Tell

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Our job as writers is to create pictures in the brains of our readers. That's what 'Show, Don't Tell' is all about.

For example:

Tell:

My brother is lazy.

Show:

'Your turn to do the dishes Tank,' said Mum.

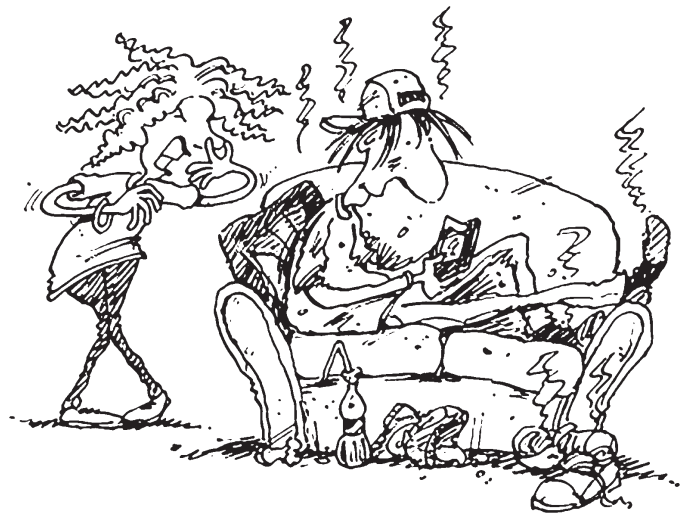
'Yeah, later,' he said yawning and turned the TV louder.

'No, now,' said Mum. She stood in the doorway, arms crossed. She knew "later" in Tank's mind meant somewhere between never and infinity. Once, as punishment, Mum put all the dishes and saucepans Tank had forgotten to wash on top of his bed. He just dumped them on the floor. A week later they were still there, a shoe in the spaghetti sauce, sweaty socks on the plates and a really bad smell wafting out the door.

Ah, now we 'see' it. It takes much longer to write, but our readers are far more convinced.

TOP TIP:

Encourage your children to 'prove' important things in order to really convince the reader. For example, what tells you Jake is a great friend? Answer: He ate the biscuits I made that tasted like wet cement.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Test how words form pictures in our minds by slowly reading these sentences aloud:

- The red poppies stood tall and cheerful in the glass vase.
- There's a baby elephant sleeping peacefully under the lemon tree in our garden.

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Step 6: Ban the Boring

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Why do children always fill their stories with boring details? How many of these have you read?

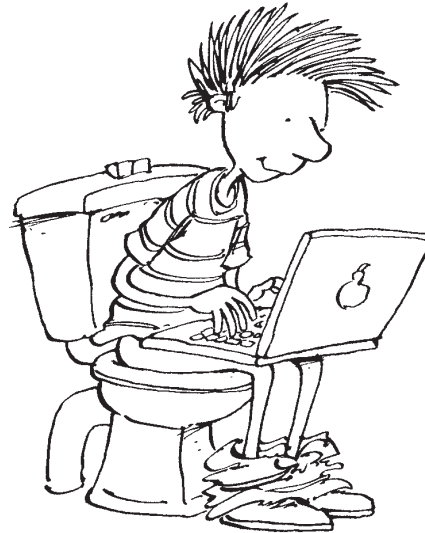
- **Food fetishes:**
We were at Disneyworld and we got to eat hamburgers with chips and a big thick milkshake. I had two whole bottles of Coke and my sister had...
- **Bedroom boredom:**
I woke up that morning and leapt out of bed and put on my best jeans and a jumper and then cleaned my teeth and put on my shoes...
- **Trapped in travel:**
In the bus on the way to the swimming carnival we waved at the cars and Mark made us sing really boring songs and then we put our streamers through the windows and...

It's called 'warm-up' writing because people start with the safe and familiar. Professional authors know this – some authors even cut out the first few chapters when editing, so their book jumps straight into the action.

TOP TIP:

We often learn more about what kids ate on the way to the zoo than what happened when the lion escaped. So simply tell children to cut out the boring bits: no beds, no bus trips, no boring lists of friends or food.

(See also Step 1: Sizzling Starts)



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Watch movies and see how few 'boring bits' they use. They rarely show people using the toilet, brushing their teeth or blow-drying their hair. Even stranger, notice how people never seem to travel, they just arrive.

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Step 7: Exciting Endings

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A common problem with childrens' stories is they end on an anticlimax.

For example, in this sports story Belinda begs to join the volleyball team, but she isn't very good. Jackie the captain helps her and gradually a friendship forms. At match point in the final game, Belinda sets a perfect ball to Jackie. Here's the last sentence:

Jackie jumped high, hope giving her strength and she hit the ball hard. It landed right in the corner. They'd won! Then they all went home to bed.

Why has the writer tacked on that last line? The answer is they feel something is missing, but they don't know what. We need to show young writers that there are often two parts to ending a story – the action climax and the 'inner' story. The story is not just about volleyball; it needs a celebration of the friendship that has grown between the two girls. For example:

'We did it! We won!' Everyone was yelling and hugging each other. Jackie just turned and looked at Belinda.

'Great set,' she said. Belinda laughed.

'Great hit,' she said.

At last she really was part of the team.

TOP TIP:

Solve the action part of the story (like winning the final game), but also allow for the characters and their inner journey to be celebrated too.

ACTION ACTIVITY:

Many authors actually come up with the ending first and then figure out the story by working backwards. Here's a fun ending: Crocodiles don't like flyspray. Try brainstorming with your children what the story could be. You can be as crazy as you like!



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What is Persuasive Writing?

Seven Steps Writing Tips

You may have heard the term **Persuasive Writing** in relation to **NAPLAN**, but what exactly is it and how does it differ from **Narrative Writing**?

A persuasive text is designed to convey the writer's point of view. It could be formal or informal and could draw on the writer's personal experience or demonstrate acquired knowledge about a particular subject or issue.

The main structural components of the persuasive text are:

- introduction
- 3–5 body paragraphs (arguments)
- conclusion.

There are different styles of persuasive topics which require different types of response:

- arguing for or against a statement, e.g. Cats are better than dogs.
- advertising or recommending something, e.g. your school, a great book, a particular sport, etc.

Narrative and persuasive texts are quite distinct from one another because of their aim or purpose. A narrative text aims to tell a story, while the purpose of a persuasive text is to put forward a point of view about a particular topic and actively persuade.

TOP TIP:

Use the introduction and the conclusion wisely. Don't just repeat what you are going to say in your body paragraphs. A Sizzling Start and an Ending with Impact are essential if you want to persuade the reader.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Collect your junk mail and discuss the purpose of each item with your children. What are they trying to persuade you to do? What do they all have in common? Do they have a Sizzling Start or headline to catch your interest?

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Persuasive Writing and the Seven Steps

Seven Steps Writing Tips

The Seven Steps can be applied to any text type including Persuasive Writing. Here's how...

- **Plan for Success:** Brainstorm lots of ideas about the topic before you put pen to paper. If there are two sides, brainstorm ideas both for and against and then pick a side.
- **Sizzling Starts:** The introduction needs to engage the reader AND convey your point of view.
- **Tightening Tension:** Select and order your arguments carefully to build the momentum.
- **Dynamic Dialogue:** Support your arguments with quotations to help convince the reader.
- **Show, Don't Tell:** Show your reader the important things rather than just stating facts.
- **Ban the Boring:** Ditch weak ideas and avoid standard phrases.
- **Endings with Impact:** This is your last chance to persuade the reader, be inspiring!

TOP TIP:

Brainstorming ideas and then selecting and ordering your strongest arguments is the key to a powerful piece of Persuasive Writing.



ACTION ACTIVITY:

Pick a magazine or newspaper article you have read this week. Read the first paragraph aloud to your children. What is the author's point of view? How do we know? The author won't necessarily have stated their point of view overtly (e.g. I think...), advanced writers know how to let readers infer meaning.

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