

ILLUSTRATING THE WRITING STANDARD

'Why Do Onions Make You Cry?'

By the end of year 4, students are required to create a variety of texts in order to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information across the curriculum. To meet the standard, students draw on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for writing described in the Literacy Learning Progressions for students at this level.

This example is placed at "By the end of year 4" because it demonstrates that the student is meeting the writing demands of the curriculum at level 2. The student has used a simple text structure to respond to the task, has included mostly relevant content (with some detail), has used complex sentences (with some errors), and has chosen some specific nouns, verbs, and adjectives to convey ideas and information.

The students in this year 4 class are involved in a science investigation into plants and their different properties. Each student has selected a plant from their everyday life to research. Their task is to write a clear explanation (including some detail and some topic-specific vocabulary) of how their chosen plant affects people.

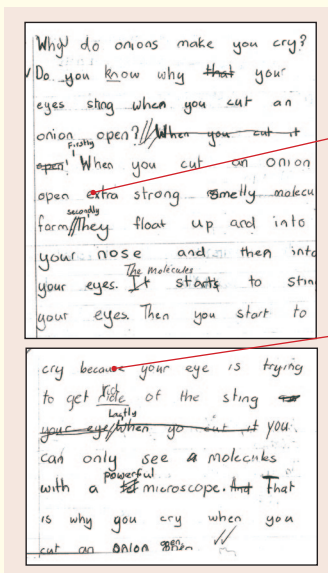
The following example illustrates aspects of the task and text and demonstrates how a student engages with both task and text to meet the writing demands of the curriculum. A number of such examples would be used to inform the overall teacher judgment for this student.

Transcript: 'Why Do Onions Make You Cry?'

Why do onions make you cry? Do you know why your eyes sting when you cut an onion open?

Firstly When you cut an onion open extra strong smelly molecules form.

The student uses what she knows about the text form (explanation) that is appropriate to her purpose for writing and composes her text around the straightforward structure of an introduction, body, and conclusion. In her introduction, the student engages her readers with the topic by posing two topic-specific questions. She anticipates the reader's prior knowledge and selects these questions deliberately to connect with the reader's experiences of "crying" when onions are cut up. She makes this experience come alive for the reader through strategic use of the verb "sting".



The student writes simple and complex sentences of varying lengths and with varying beginnings. She outlines in sequence and in some detail exactly what happens when you cut up an onion. She uses vocabulary relevant to her explanatory purpose for writing ("why", "because"). She also uses some technical vocabulary relevant to the topic ("molecules", "microscope") and some descriptive vocabulary to help convey meaning clearly to the reader ("extra strong smelly", "powerful"). All of her sentences are grammatically correct, and she corrects her spelling as she recrafts her text ("ride" to "rid").

The student uses several other strategies to help the reader. She uses personal pronouns ("you", "your") several times to help the reader relate to the text, and she indicates the sequence of events by using some simple sequencing words ("Firstly", "Secondly", "Then", "Lastly"). She has inserted three of these into the text during the recrafting stage, suggesting that she identified a need to make the sequence clearer for the reader. The student has also attempted to help the reader comprehend the main points by dividing the text into four paragraphs during this recrafting stage. She has, however, not been completely successful in doing this – her final paragraph incorporates part of the body of the text with her conclusion.

Secondly They float up and into your nose and then into your eyes It starts to sting your eyes. Then you start to cry because your eye is trying to get rid of the sting.

Lastly you can only see molecules with a powerful microscope. That is why you cry when you cut an onion open.

Overall, the student has successfully created a sequence of events to explain why onions make you cry, but she has not clarified how one of her facts ("Lastly you can only see molecules with a powerful microscope") fits into the sequence (or how it relates to her purpose for writing). She concludes the text with a complex sentence that links directly to the questions asked in her introduction.