



# Setting the Baseline – Young People’s Writing in 2010

## Findings from the National Literacy Trust’s first annual survey 2010

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*Transforming Lives*

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## Executive summary

18,141 young people aged eight to 17 participated in this online survey in November and December 2010. While the survey focuses on young people's attitudes towards reading, writing and communication skills as well as technology use, this report centres exclusively on the writing aspect of the survey. More specifically, it explores how much young people enjoy writing, how good a writer they think they are, what they think makes a good writer, what types of genre they write and what they think about writing.

### Enjoyment of writing: Key findings

- Just under half of young people (47%) said that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot. Nearly 4 in 10 enjoyed writing a bit and 1 in 10 did not enjoy writing at all.
- Girls enjoyed writing significantly more than boys, with 6 in 10 girls and 4 in 10 boys saying that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot. Boys were nearly three times more likely than girls to say that they don't enjoy writing at all.
- KS2 pupils also enjoyed writing significantly more than KS3 who, in turn, enjoyed it more than KS4 pupils. While 6 in 10 KS2 pupils said that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot, only 4 in 10 KS3 or 3 in 10 KS4 pupils said so.
- There were no marked differences in the degree to which young people who receive FSMs (free school meals) and those who do not enjoy writing.
- There were also no marked differences in the degree to which young people who receive additional help at school and those who do not enjoy writing.
- Young people from Mixed, Asian or Black ethnic backgrounds enjoyed writing significantly more than young people from White ethnic backgrounds, with 4 in 10 young people from White backgrounds saying that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot compared with 5 in 10 young people from Mixed or Asian backgrounds and 6 in 10 young people from Black backgrounds.
- Enjoyment of writing was related to writing attainment, with young people who enjoy writing the most also being more likely to be above average writers for their age.

### Self-reported writing ability: Key findings

- Most young people rated themselves to be either average (50%) or very good writers (34%).
- Girls rated themselves as better writers than boys.
- KS2 pupils were more likely than KS3 and KS4 pupils to rate themselves as very good writers.
- Young people who do not receive FSMs rated themselves as better writers compared with their less privileged peers.
- Young people from White backgrounds rated themselves to be not very good writers. Young people from Black backgrounds were more likely than young people from other ethnic backgrounds to rate themselves to be very good writers.
- More young people who receive additional help at school compared with those who do not rate themselves to be not very good writers.

- Young people's views of their own writing ability generally mirrored their actual writing attainment. However, 1 in 4 young people who rated themselves to be very good writers overrated their actual writing ability.

### **Young people's writing frequency: Key findings**

- Young people write outside of class every day (27%) or a few times a week (28%). Only 6% never write outside of class.
- Girls write more frequently outside of class than boys, with 3 in 10 girls compared with 2 in 10 boys writing outside of class every day.
- Although more KS4 than KS3 or KS2 pupils write outside of class every day, the overall frequency with which young people write declines with age.
- There were no differences in terms of FSM uptake in the frequency with which young people write outside of class.
- Young people from Asian and Black ethnic backgrounds write more frequently outside of class than young people from Mixed or White backgrounds.
- There were no differences in the frequency with which young people who receive additional help at school and those who do not write outside of school.
- Those who wrote the most frequently outside of class are more likely to be writing above the level expected for their age.

### **Young people's formats of writing: Key findings**

- Technology-based formats, such as text messages and emails, are the types of writing that young people engaged in most frequently in a month. Reviews, essays and blogs were written least commonly in a month.
- More girls than boys write technology-based materials as well as letters, fiction and poems. They were also twice as likely to write song lyrics and three times as likely to keep a diary than boys.
- KS3 and KS4 pupils write more technology-based materials than KS2 pupils who write more song lyrics, diaries, letters, reviews, fiction and poems.
- Slightly more young people who do not receive FSMs compared with those who receive meals say that they write technology-based formats, such as text messages and emails. By contrast, a greater proportion of pupils who receive FSMs than non-FSM pupils write letters, poems and lyrics outside of class at least once a month.
- More young people from White backgrounds say that they write text messages and write on a social networking site. By contrast, more young people from Black backgrounds say that they write song lyrics, in a diary, letters, essays, reviews, fiction and poems at least once a month.
- Young people who do not receive help at school are more likely to write technology-based formats outside of class at least once a month compared with young people who receive help. By contrast, more young people who receive help say that they write letters and poems outside of class at least once a month.
- Writing certain materials outside of class – namely fiction, poems and reviews – is associated with slightly higher attainment.

## Young people's views on what it means to be a good writer: Key findings

- Most young people said that to be a good writer one has to enjoy writing (75%), use one's imagination (74%) and use punctuation correctly (66%). Knowing how to type (30%) and talking about writing (36%) were mentioned least frequently in terms of what makes a good writer.
- More girls than boys said that a good writer enjoys writing, uses his or her imagination, reads a lot, checks his or her work, tries things out and talks about writing. By contrast, more boys than girls believed that it is the technical aspects of writing that make one a good writer, with more boys than girls indicating that a good writer writes neatly, knows how to spell properly and knows how to type.
- More KS2 and KS3 than KS4 pupils say that a good writer checks their work, reads a lot, writes a lot, tries things out, writes neatly, talks about their writing and knows how to type. Conversely, more KS3 than KS2 and KS4 pupils say that a good writer enjoys writing, uses his or her imagination and uses punctuation correctly.
- More young people who do not receive FSMs compared to those who do said that a good writer uses his or her imagination, tries things out, uses punctuation correctly, checks his or her work, reads a lot and enjoys writing. By contrast, more young people who receive FSMs compared with those who do not say that a good writer knows how to type and writes neatly.
- Fewer young people from Black backgrounds said that a good writer uses his or her imagination and uses punctuation correctly, while they are more likely to believe that a good writer knows how to type than young people from the other ethnic background. Young people from White backgrounds are more likely to say that a good writer enjoys writing and knows how to spell properly compared with young people from the other ethnic backgrounds.
- More young people who do not receive additional help at school compared to those who do said that a good writer uses his or her imagination, tries things out, uses punctuation correctly, checks his or her work, reads a lot and enjoys writing. By contrast, more young people who receive additional help at school compared with those who do not say that a good writer knows how to type and writes neatly.
- Most of young people's perceptions of what makes a good writer followed the same pattern; about a sixth of those who hold certain beliefs write below the level expected for their age, about two-thirds write at the expected level and nearly a fifth write above the expected level.

## Young people's attitudes towards writing: Key findings

- Most young people held positive attitudes towards writing. 7 in 10 young people agreed with statement that writing is more fun when they can choose the topic and that their writing improves when they practise. 4 in 10 young people also agree that they will get a better job if they are good at writing. 3 in 10 young people also agree that writing is cool. However, 4 in 10 young people agree that they have trouble deciding what to write, while 1 young person in 10 agree that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class and 1 in 10 also agreed that they use "txt" speak in their writing at school.
- Girls tend to hold more positive attitudes towards writing than boys, being more likely to agree with statements that their writing improves when they practise. By contrast, boys are more likely to agree that reading is easier than writing, that girls enjoy writing more than boys do, that a pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who does not, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class and



that they write “txt” speak in class. However, more boys than girls agreed that they will get a better job if they write well.

- More KS2 pupils than their older counterparts agree that their writing improves when they practise, that they are a good writer compared with other students, and that it is easier to read than it is to write. However, KS2 pupils are also more likely than their older counterparts to view writing as a gendered activity, with more KS2 than KS3 or KS4 pupils agreeing with the statement that girls enjoy writing more than boys do. More KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils are also more likely to agree that they will get a better job if they are good at writing.
- A greater proportion of FSM pupils agree with the statement that girls enjoy writing more than boys do. More also agreed that they will get a better job if they can write well. Nearly twice as many FSM pupils compared with those who do not receive free meals also agree that they use “txt” speak in class. By contrast, more young people who do not receive FSMs than those who do agreed with the statement that writing is more fun when you can choose the topic.
- Young people from White backgrounds are more likely to agree that they have trouble deciding what to write than pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. However, fewer young people from White backgrounds agree that they use “txt” speak in class. By contrast, more young people from Mixed backgrounds agree that pupils who write well will get better marks, while fewer young people from Asian backgrounds agree that they enjoy writing more when they can choose the topic. Finally, more young people from Black backgrounds agree that writing is cool.
- More young people who receive help than those who do not agree that they have trouble deciding what to write, that girls enjoy writing more than boys, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class and that they use “txt” speak at school. However, more young people who receive help compared with those that do not agree that writing is cool and that they will get a better job if they write well.
- There were also some interesting relationships between attitudes towards writing and writing attainment. For example, a greater proportion of those who agree with the statement that writing is “cool” write above the level expected for their age compared with those who disagree with the statement.

## An introduction to the Omnibus survey

We have been surveying children and young people on all sorts of literacy matters since 2005. This has given us great insight into the views and attitudes of youngsters on reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, home resources, role models, perception of themselves as readers as well as technology use.

However, what is still lacking in the attitudinal landscape in the UK is annual data on how young people feel about literacy to help us build a continuous picture of their attitudes year-on-year. It is the purpose of the National Literacy Trust Omnibus survey to plug this gap in the evidence base.

Combining previous National Literacy Trust survey topics, the Omnibus survey explores young people's attitudes towards reading, writing and communication skills as well as their technology use. More specifically, the key objectives of the Omnibus survey are to explore:

- Whether young people enjoy reading, how good they think they are at reading, how often they read and for how long, what type of materials they read outside of class, how many books they have in the home and what they think about reading
- Whether young people enjoy writing, how good a writer they think they are, what makes a good writer, what types of materials they write and what they think about writing
- What they think good communication skills are, how they feel about them and how important they are to succeed
- How often they use a computer and mobile phone and what for.

In addition to exploring children and young people's attitudes towards reading, writing, communication and technology use, we will also explore their link to attainment in a subsample of pupils for whom attainment data are available.

These objectives were further broken down into a number of questions. These included the following:

- Do reading enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socioeconomic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes differ according to gender, age, socioeconomic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- Do attitudes towards communication skills and their perceived importance differ according to gender, age, socioeconomic and ethnic background or educational needs?
- How is technology use related to gender, age, socioeconomic and ethnic background or educational needs?

### This report

Because of the broad scope of the survey, this report only outlines findings that relate to writing. Writing is an important issue in the UK today. While children's and young people's writing standards had plateaued between 2006 and 2009, levels had increased slightly in 2010.

However, writing is much more than just an educational issue – it is an essential skill that allows people to participate fully in today’s society and to contribute to the economy.

Previous research into the teaching of writing and effective writing strategies has mainly focused on the formal types of writing taught in schools. However, in today’s society writing takes many forms, including texting, instant messaging, blogging and emailing. The research evidence about these new forms of writing in the UK is fragmented and inconclusive. In particular, there is a lack of research looking at how much young people write, the different forms of writing that they engage in and their confidence in using these different forms of writing (for the first large-scale survey of young people’s views on writing see Clark and Dugdale, 2009).

Because of the centrality of writing in people’s lives, the survey provided us with areas that we wanted to explore annually. More specifically, it explores how much young people enjoy writing, how good they think they are, how often they write and what types of materials they write, what they think makes a good writer and how they feel about writing.

## Methodology

An invitation to participate in this online survey was sent out in National Literacy Trust newsletters at the beginning of September 2010. Schools were invited to express their interest to participate in one of three surveys:

- 1) A simple Omnibus survey (without attainment data or name field)
- 2) An amended Omnibus survey with two attainment questions for pupils to fill in
- 3) An amended Omnibus survey with a name field and schools were asked to send us the reading and writing attainment data for participating pupils

The basic online survey consisted of 33 questions exploring young people’s background, reading and writing enjoyment, behaviour and attitudes, attitudes towards communication skills and technology use. Due to the complexity of the questions and some concepts, schools were advised to restrict the age range of participating pupils to upper KS2 (9 to 11 years old) and older. However, some schools felt that their 8-year-olds would be able to deal with the complexity of the questions; hence the sample contains a proportion of 8-year-olds too.

148 schools expressed an interest in taking part in one of the three surveys. A link to the online survey alongside guidance notes for teachers was emailed to the schools at the beginning of November. The survey was online between 15 November and 10 December 2010. It took an average of 25 minutes for young people to complete the survey. Schools were offered a school-specific summary report as an incentive to take part.

### Participation rate

Overall, 18,141 pupils from 111 schools participated in our online survey, of which 100 were schools from England, three from Wales, three from Scotland and three from Northern Ireland. Two international English-speaking schools with a UK curriculum also took part. However, data from these schools are not included in the analyses in this report.

## Sample characteristics: Demography

Overall, 18,141 young people participated in this survey in November and December 2010. There was an almost equal gender split in the sample, with 48.2% of respondents being boys (N = 8,680) and 51.8% being girls (N = 9,320).

**Table 1** shows that the majority of pupils were 11, 12 and 13 years old. To investigate the impact of age, three broad categories were identified according to key stages: KS2, KS3 and KS4. The KS2 category (22%, N = 3,704) refers to pupils aged 7 to 11, KS3 (63%, N = 10,842) refers to pupils aged 11 to 14, while KS4 (15%, N = 2,543) applies to pupils aged 14 to 16.

**Table 1: Sample age**

	%	N		%	N
8	5.1	911	13	18.1	3,258
9	6.9	1,247	14	9.5	1,717
10	8.0	1,430	15	6.3	1,134
11	21.3	3,846	16	2.0	361
12	22.2	4,007	17	0.5	86

(based on N = 18,017)

The percentage of pupils who receive free school meals (FSM), which is frequently used in educational research as a crude indicator of socioeconomic background, was 13.8%. The percentages of FSM uptake in this study are lower than the national average for primary and secondary pupils (17% and 14% respectively; DfE 2010).

Using additional help at school as a crude indicator of educational needs, the percentage of young people who say that they receive help at school was 25.7%, which is slightly higher than the national average. According to DfE figures from 2010, 20.9% of young people have a SEN (special educational need: 2.7% with statement; 18.2% without statement).

When asked how they would describe their ethnic background, most pupils said that they were White British (72.3%, N = 11,381). The second and third most frequent ethnic categories in this sample were Asian or Asian British Pakistani (5.6%, N = 877) and White other (3.0%, N = 480).

See **Table 2** for a full breakdown of ethnic background.

**Table 2: Ethnic background**

	%	N
White British	72.3	11,381
White Irish	1.6	247
White Traveller	0.4	66
White Romany	0.8	127
White other	3.0	480
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	1.5	243
Mixed White and Black African	0.7	109

	%	N
Mixed White and Asian	1.4	218
Mixed other	2.1	328
Asian or Asian British Indian	2.2	348
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	5.6	877
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi	1.5	244
Asian or Asian British Chinese	0.6	100
Asian or Asian British Other	1.6	256
Black Caribbean	1.5	229
Black African	2.2	347
Black other	0.9	142

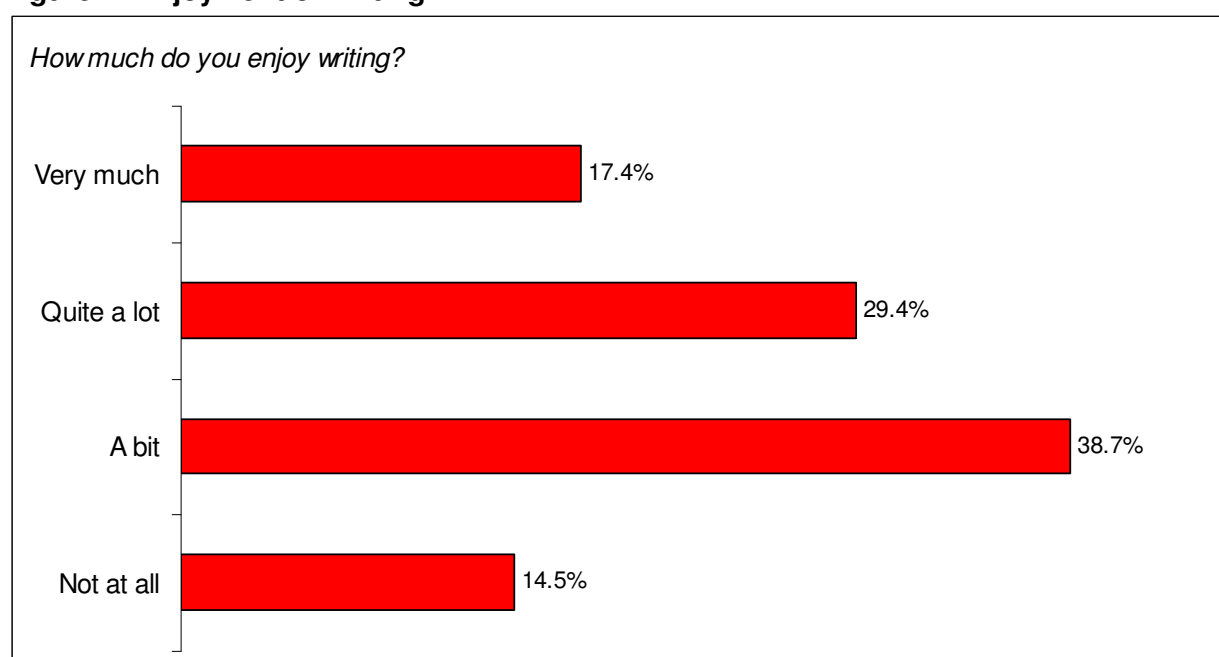
(based on N = 15,742)

To make comparisons by ethnic group meaningful, we combined the subcategories to form "White", "Mixed", "Asian" and "Black" background categories. While this crude categorisation may hide some important differences within ethnic backgrounds, it allowed for general differences to be obtained at this stage.

## Young people's enjoyment of writing

Mirroring responses seen in enjoyment of reading (see our report: Clark, 2011), this sample of young people was divided when asked in a general question how much they enjoy writing (see **Figure 1**). Just under half of young people (46.8%) said that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot, while nearly 4 in 10 enjoyed writing a bit and 1 in 10 did not enjoy writing at all.

**Figure 1: Enjoyment of writing**



**Table 3** shows that **girls** enjoyed writing significantly more than **boys**, with 6 in 10 girls and 4 in 10 boys saying that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot. Boys were nearly three times more likely than girls to say that they don't enjoy writing at all.

**KS2** pupils also enjoyed writing significantly more than **KS3** who, in turn, enjoyed it more than **KS4** pupils. For example, while 6 in 10 KS2 pupils said that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot, only 4 in 10 KS3 or 3 in 10 KS4 pupils said so. By contrast, double the proportion of KS4 pupils compared with KS2 pupils said that they don't enjoy writing at all.

In line with previous surveys (Clark and Douglas, 2011; Clark and Dugdale, 2009), there were no marked differences in the degree to which young people who receive **FSMs** and those who do not enjoy writing.

Young people from Mixed, Asian or Black **ethnic backgrounds** enjoyed writing significantly more than young people from White ethnic backgrounds, with 4 in 10 young people from White backgrounds saying that they enjoy writing either very much or quite a lot compared with 5 in 10 young people from Mixed or Asian backgrounds and 6 in 10 young people from Black backgrounds.

Mirroring the pattern seen with regard to enjoyment of reading, there were also no marked differences in the degree to which young people who **receive additional help** at school and those who do not enjoy writing.

**Table 3: Enjoyment of writing by demographic background**

<i>How much do you enjoy writing?</i>				
	<i>Very much %</i>	<i>Quite a lot %</i>	<i>A bit %</i>	<i>Not at all %</i>
<b>Boys (N = 8,264)</b>	12.4	25.4	41.3	20.6
<b>Girls (N = 8,849)</b>	22.0	33.1	36.1	8.8
<b>KS2 (N = 3,426)</b>	28.7	32.3	29.7	9.3
<b>KS3 (N = 12,243)</b>	14.8	29.5	40.5	15.2
<b>KS4 (N = 1,458)</b>	12.7	21.6	45.2	20.5
<b>FSM (N = 2,335)</b>	20.9	26.0	37.9	15.2
<b>Non-FSM (N = 13,925)</b>	16.6	30.0	39.2	14.2
<b>White (N = 12,239)</b>	16.5	28.5	39.7	15.3
<b>Mixed (N = 893)</b>	22.6	30.5	34.8	12.1
<b>Asian (N = 1,810)</b>	19.7	35.0	35.0	10.3
<b>Black (N = 708)</b>	24.6	32.1	31.6	11.7
<b>Help (N = 4,373)</b>	20.9	27.3	37.6	14.2

## How much do you enjoy writing?

	<i>Very much</i> %	<i>Quite a lot</i> %	<i>A bit</i> %	<i>Not at all</i> %
<b>No help (N = 11,284)</b>	16.8	30.1	38.7	14.4

## Enjoyment of writing and writing attainment

Attainment data for writing were available for 5,320 **KS2** and **KS3** pupils. Since our attainment data contained a varied set of levels and spanned young people aged 9 to 14, we standardised the data to form three crude categories to be applied to all ages: below expected level for their age, at expected level for their age and above expected level for their age.

Over 8 in 10 young people write at the expected level for their age (65.3%) or above the expected level for their age (18.4%). However, 1 young person in 6 (16.3%) writes below the expected level for their age.

**Table 4** shows that there is a clear relationship between enjoyment of writing and writing attainment. Young people who enjoy writing very much are more likely to write above the level expected for their age, with over half of young people who enjoy writing very much writing above the expected level, two-fifths writing at the expected level and only 5% writing below the expected level for their age.

By contrast, of those young people who do not enjoy writing at all, over two-fifths write below the expected level, and nearly half write at the expected level. Only 8% of young people who do not enjoy writing at all write above the expected level for their age.

**Table 4: Enjoyment of writing and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Very much</b>	4.7	42.3	53.0
<b>Quite a lot</b>	6.2	75.2	18.6
<b>A bit</b>	19.0	74.4	6.6
<b>Not at all</b>	43.0	49.0	7.9

## Young people's self-perceived writing ability

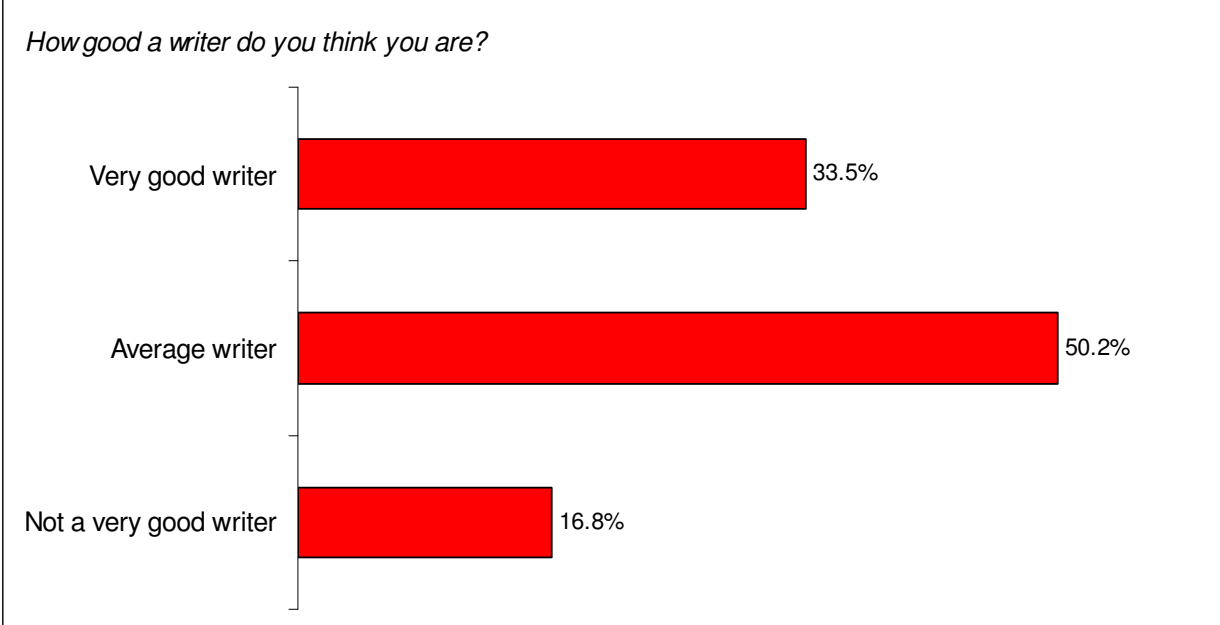
Young people were asked how good they think they are at writing. **Figure 2** shows that the majority of young people rated themselves as average writers. Overall, 8 in 10 young people rated themselves as either average or very good writers. However, 2 in 10 young people felt that they were not very good writers.

**Table 5** shows that in line with previous research (e.g. Clark and Douglas, 2011; Clark and Dugdale, 2009; Pajares and Valiante, 1999), **girls** judged themselves to be better writers than

**boys**. In particular, 2 in 10 boys compared with 1 in 10 girls rate themselves as not very good writers.

There was also a significant relationship between self-reported writing ability and **age**. Although more KS2 than KS4 pupils rated themselves as not very good writers, more KS2 pupils also rated themselves as very good writers.

**Figure 2: Self-perceived writing ability**



Mirroring findings from previous surveys, non-**FSM** pupils in the present study reported to be better writers than FSM pupils.

There were differences between **ethnic groups** in the self-reported level of writing ability. More young people from White than from the other backgrounds rated themselves as not very good writers. Instead, they were more likely to rate themselves as average writers compared with young people from other ethnic backgrounds. Young people from Black backgrounds were more likely than young people from other backgrounds to rate themselves as very good writers.

More young people who **receive additional help** at school compared with those who do not rate themselves as not very good writers.

**Table 5: Self-reported writing ability by demographic background**

	<i>Not a very good writer</i> %	<i>Average writer</i> %	<i>Very good writer</i> %
<b>Boys (N = 8,264)</b>	19.2	50.7	30.0
<b>Girls (N = 8,849)</b>	13.4	49.8	36.6
<b>KS2 (N = 3,426)</b>	16.8	42.3	40.9
<b>KS3 (N = 12,243)</b>	16.3	52.2	31.4



	<i>Not a very good writer</i> %	<i>Average writer</i> %	<i>Very good writer</i> %
<b>KS4 (N = 1,458)</b>	14.2	52.4	33.3
<b>FSM (N = 2,335)</b>	20.6	47.3	32.1
<b>Non-FSM (N = 13,925)</b>	15.1	51.3	33.8
<b>White (N = 12,239)</b>	16.3	51.6	32.1
<b>Mixed (N = 893)</b>	14.1	47.3	38.7
<b>Asian (N = 1,810)</b>	15.0	46.2	38.8
<b>Black (N = 708)</b>	13.0	43.0	44.0
<b>Help (N = 4,373)</b>	22.6	47.9	29.5
<b>No help (N = 11,284)</b>	13.3	50.9	35.7

## Self-perceived writing ability and writing attainment

**Table 6** shows that young people's own perceptions of their writing ability generally tend to mirror their actual writing attainment. Of those who did not rate themselves as very good writers, three-quarters write below the level expected for their age, while a quarter actually write at the expected level. However, 1 in 4 young people who rated themselves to be very good writers over-estimated their actual writing ability.

**Table 6: Self-perceived writing ability and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

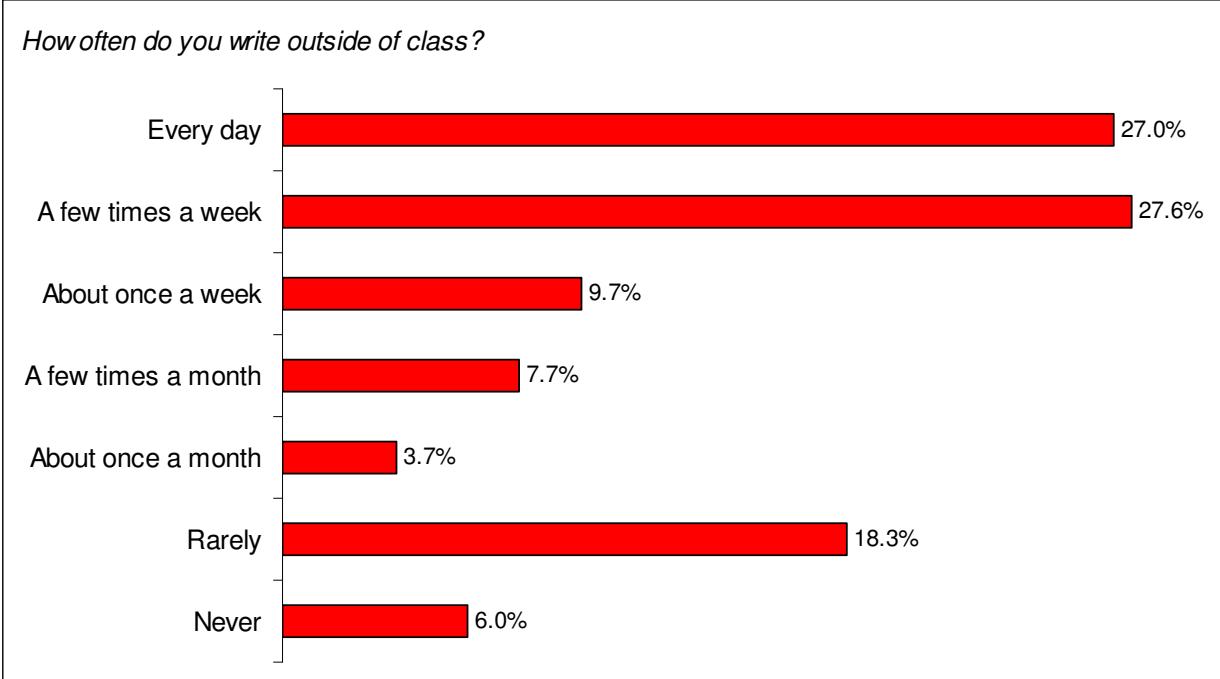
	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Not a very good writer</b>	75.3	24.7	0.0
<b>Average writer</b>	26.3	69.7	4.0
<b>Very good writer</b>	0.4	43.5	56.1

## Young people's writing frequency

The majority of young people wrote every day or two to three times a week (see **Figure 3**). However, 18.3% said that they rarely write, while 6.0% said that they never write outside of class or write anything other than for homework.

**Table 7** shows that **girls** wrote significantly more frequently outside of class than **boys**, with 3 in 10 girls compared with 2 in 10 boys writing outside of class every day. Boys were twice more likely than girls to say that they never write outside of class.

**Figure 3: Writing frequency outside of class**



With the exception of writing being done outside of class every day, which showed that slightly more **KS4** than **KS3** and **KS2** pupils write daily, the frequency with which young people write outside of class declines with age. Overall, 2 in 10 KS3 and KS4 compared with 1 in 10 KS2 pupils say that they rarely write outside of class.

There were no marked differences by **FSM** uptake in the frequency with which young people write outside of class.

There was also a relationship between writing frequency and **ethnic background**, with young people from Asian and Black backgrounds writing significantly more frequently outside of class than young people from the other two ethnicities. Young people from White backgrounds wrote the least frequently and were more likely to say that they write rarely compared with young people from the other ethnic backgrounds.

There were no differences in the frequency with which young people who **receive additional help** at school and those who do not write outside of school.

**Table 7: Writing frequency outside of class by demographic background**

	<i>Every day</i>	<i>A few times a week</i>	<i>About once a week</i>	<i>A few times a month</i>	<i>About once a month</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Boys (N = 8,264)</b>	21.5	26.2	9.6	8.1	4.2	22.0	8.4
<b>Girls (N = 8,849)</b>	32.3	28.8	9.7	7.3	3.3	15.0	3.7

	<i>Every day</i> %	<i>A few times a week</i> %	<i>About once a week</i> %	<i>A few times a month</i> %	<i>About once a month</i> %	<i>Rarely</i> %	<i>Never</i> %
<b>KS2 (N = 3,426)</b>	26.2	28.1	12.3	8.6	3.1	14.8	6.8
<b>KS3 (N = 12,243)</b>	27.1	27.9	9.1	7.7	3.9	18.8	5.5
<b>KS4 (N = 1,458)</b>	28.2	23.8	7.9	6.0	3.9	22.5	7.6
<b>FSM (N = 2,335)</b>	30.3	26.7	8.3	7.1	3.1	18.1	6.5
<b>Non-FSM (N = 13,925)</b>	26.6	27.8	9.9	7.8	3.8	18.5	5.6
<b>White (N = 12,239)</b>	26.4	27.3	9.6	7.8	3.8	19.4	5.8
<b>Mixed (N = 893)</b>	27.2	28.1	11.0	8.5	3.7	16.5	5.0
<b>Asian (N = 1,810)</b>	31.0	30.4	9.2	6.5	3.6	13.6	5.7
<b>Black (N = 708)</b>	31.7	26.3	9.9	8.3	2.4	15.1	6.3
<b>Help (N = 4,373)</b>	26.9	27.7	9.3	7.5	3.5	17.7	7.5
<b>No help (N = 11,284)</b>	27.3	27.5	9.6	7.8	3.7	18.5	5.4

## Writing frequency and writing attainment

The frequency with which young people write is related to their writing skills. **Table 8** shows that nearly 3 in 10 of young people who write every day write above the level expected for their age, while another 6 in 10 write at the expected level.

The proportion of young people who are in the highest achievement category declines as the frequency with which they write outside of class declines. While 29% of young people who write every day write above the level expected for their age, only 5 to 10% of young people who write rarely or never write at that level. Overall, 4 in 10 of those who never write outside of class write below the level expected for their age, while 6 in 10 write at the expected level.

**Table 8: Writing frequency and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

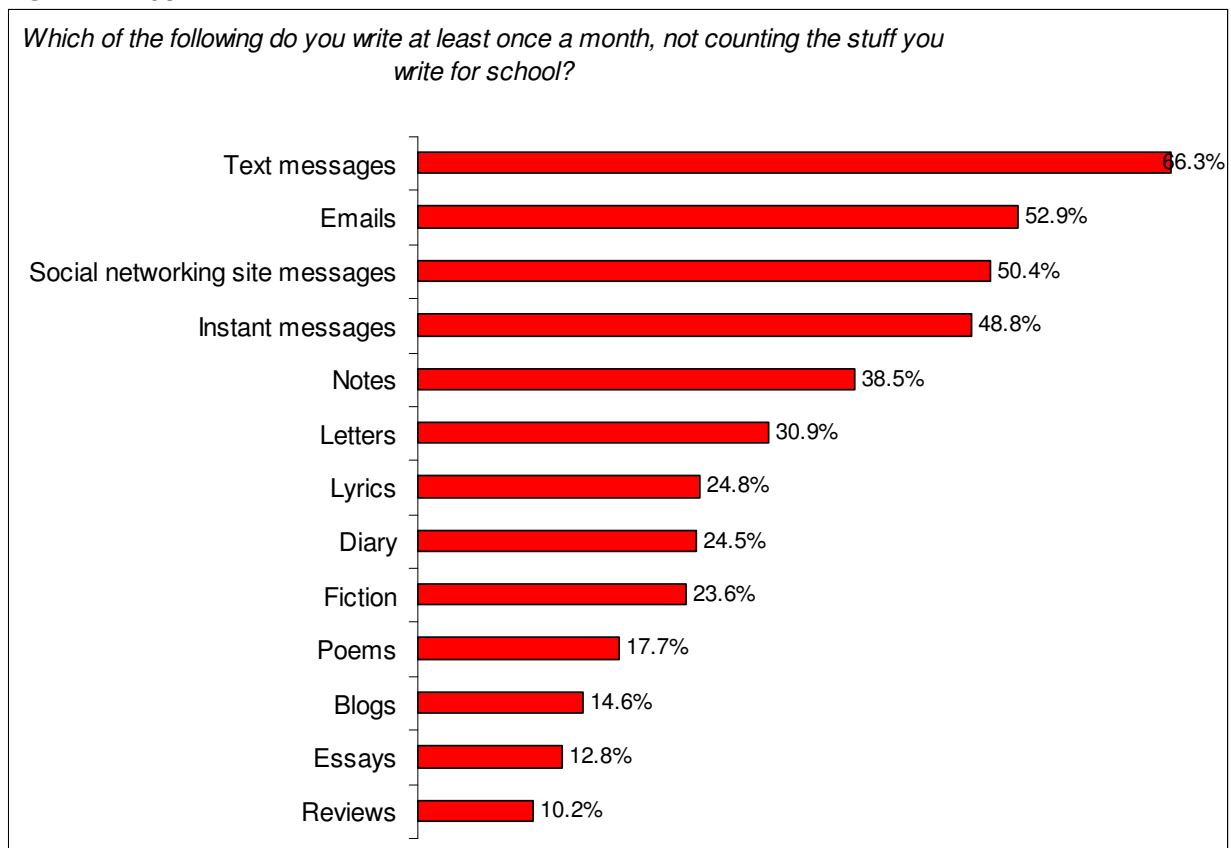
	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Every day</b>	9.7	61.8	28.5
<b>A few times a week</b>	11.6	69.3	19.2
<b>About once a week</b>	14.2	71.9	13.9
<b>A few times a month</b>	15.5	71.5	13.0

	<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>About once a month</b>	18.4	69.1	12.4
<b>Rarely</b>	26.3	64.4	9.3
<b>Never</b>	38.8	56.4	4.8

## Young people's formats of writing

Technology-based formats of writing, such as text messages, emails and notes on a social networking site, were the types of writing that most young people engaged in in a month (see **Figure 4**). Reviews, essays and blogs were written by the smallest proportion of young people in a month.

**Figure 4: Types of materials written outside of class at least once a month**



**Boys and girls** wrote a range of materials to differing degrees outside of class (see **Table 9**), with more girls than boys saying that they write the following at least once a month: text messages, emails, messages on social networking sites, instant messages, notes, letters, fiction and poems. Perhaps the biggest differences exist with regard to song lyrics and keeping a diary, with twice as many girls as boys saying that they write song lyrics outside of

**Table 9: Types of materials written at least once a month by demographic background**

	<i>Boys (N = 8,264)</i>	<i>Girls (N = 8,849)</i>	<i>KS2 (N = 3,426)</i>	<i>KS3 (N = 12,243)</i>	<i>KS4 (N = 1,458)</i>	<i>FSM (N = 2,335)</i>	<i>NFSM (N = 13,925)</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Text messages</b>	60.6	71.9	37.2	73.6	76.0	60.7	68.8
<b>Emails</b>	47.5	58.2	38.2	56.9	56.5	49.7	54.5
<b>Social networking site</b>	46.6	54.3	22.9	56.7	65.0	45.7	52.6
<b>Instant messages</b>	41.9	55.5	23.5	54.8	59.9	45.7	50.6
<b>Notes</b>	28.1	48.5	36.4	40.0	33.3	35.4	39.6
<b>Letters</b>	26.4	35.3	47.9	27.7	18.7	34.7	30.1
<b>Lyrics</b>	16.4	32.6	29.3	24.2	20.1	28.7	24.1
<b>Diary</b>	11.6	36.5	35.2	22.7	15.1	25.3	24.3
<b>Fiction</b>	19.6	27.3	36.5	21.4	12.4	23.1	23.5
<b>Poems</b>	13.3	22.0	35.4	13.9	8.9	21.8	16.6
<b>Blogs</b>	13.7	15.5	12.3	15.2	15.1	15.5	14.6
<b>Essays</b>	13.3	12.5	8.9	12.7	25.5	12.7	13.1
<b>Reviews</b>	10.6	9.9	14.3	9.3	8.6	10.6	10.1

**Table 9 continued: Types of materials written at least once a month by demographic background**

	<i>White</i> (N = 12,239)	<i>Mixed</i> (N = 893)	<i>Asian</i> (N = 1,810)	<i>Black</i> (N = 708)	<i>Help</i> (N = 4,373)	<i>No help</i> (N = 11,284)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Text messages</b>	72.2	66.7	62.3	64.5	56.3	71.9
<b>Emails</b>	56.0	55.8	56.5	55.4	45.4	57.4
<b>Social networking site</b>	55.6	50.7	43.6	50.3	39.7	56.2
<b>Instant messages</b>	51.7	53.1	53.1	51.0	38.0	54.7
<b>Notes</b>	40.9	41.1	40.5	40.3	33.4	41.6
<b>Letters</b>	32.2	33.3	33.0	37.5	37.3	29.0
<b>Lyrics</b>	25.3	30.7	25.6	36.9	25.7	24.7
<b>Diary</b>	24.8	27.3	29.5	32.3	24.6	25.0
<b>Fiction</b>	24.3	27.2	26.8	31.9	24.1	23.9
<b>Poems</b>	16.9	22.8	23.8	30.2	23.0	16.0
<b>Blogs</b>	15.6	13.1	14.5	16.7	14.1	15.2
<b>Essays</b>	12.2	15.1	18.3	23.3	11.4	14.0
<b>Reviews</b>	9.9	12.4	14.6	17.0	10.7	10.2

class and three times as many girls as boys saying that they write in a diary. Materials that were associated more with school, i.e. essays, reviews, reports, showed no gender difference.

There were also several differences in the extent to which **KS2, KS3 or KS4 pupils** engaged in a variety of writing formats at least once a month, particularly with respect to technology-based types of writing such as text messages, emails and instant messages, with KS3 and KS4 pupils writing these types of formats more than KS2 pupils. For example, KS3 and KS4 pupils were twice as likely to write text messages and instant messages compared with KS2 pupils. This is perhaps unsurprising considering that access to technology is more prevalent in older pupils (see Clark and Douglas, 2011). KS4 pupils are also nearly three times more likely to write essays outside of class than KS2 pupils. By contrast, more KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils say that they write lyrics, in a diary, letters, reviews, fiction and poems.

**Table 9** also shows that there are some significant differences between pupils who receive **FSMs** and those who do not in the frequency with which they engage in certain types of writing. It shows that while slightly more young people who do not receive FSMs compared with those who receive meals say that they write technology-based formats such as text messages and emails, a greater proportion of pupils who receive FSMs than non-FSM pupils write letters, poems and lyrics outside of class at least once a month.

There are several differences in the types of formats that were written by young people from different **ethnic backgrounds** at least once a month. More young people from White backgrounds than from the other three ethnic backgrounds say that they write text messages and write on a social networking site. By contrast, more young people from Black backgrounds say that they write song lyrics, in a diary, letters, essays, reviews, fiction and poems at least once a month.

Young people who do not **receive help at school** are more likely to write technology-based formats outside of class at least once a month compared with young people who receive help. This is at least partly explained by the greater access to computers by young people who do not receive help (81% versus 73%; unpublished data). By contrast, more young people who receive help say that they write letters and poems outside of class at least once a month.

**Type of writing done outside of class and writing attainment**

**Table 10** shows that there are certain materials that were associated with higher writing attainment. These are writing poems, fiction and reviews outside of class.

**Table 10: Types of materials written outside of class at least once a month and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

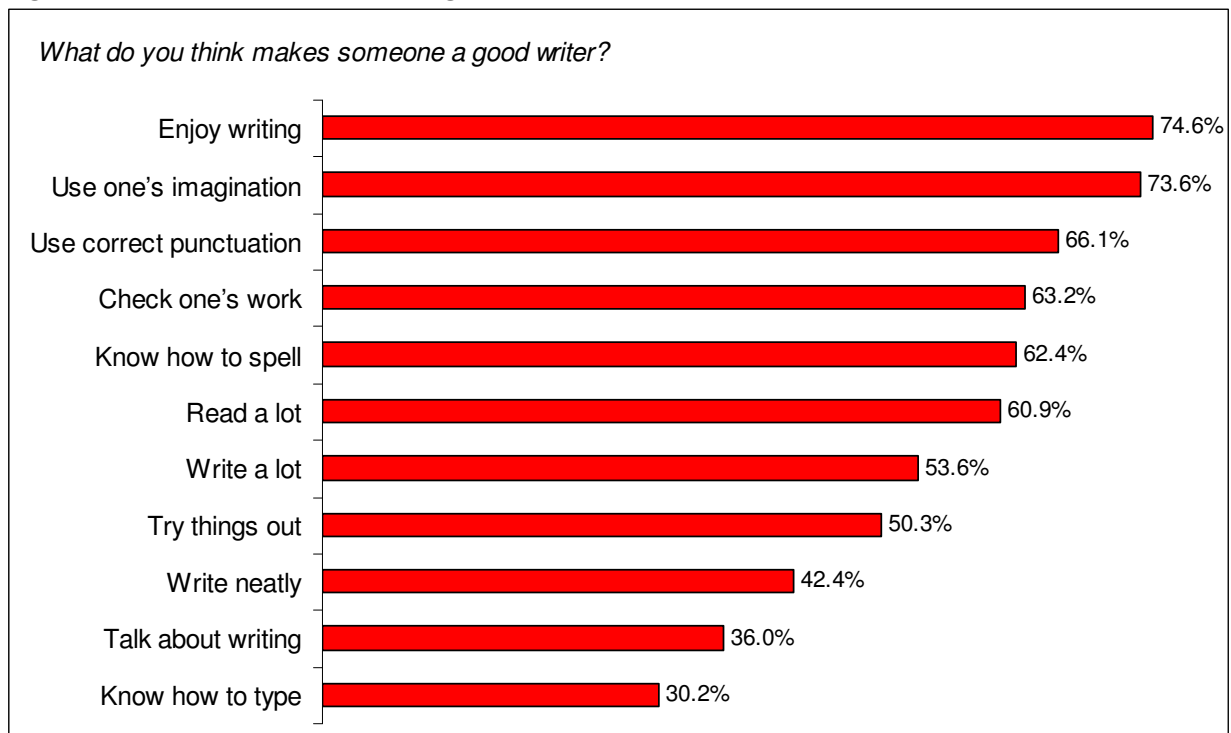
	<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>Text messages</b>	14.5	68.4	17.1
<b>Emails</b>	13.8	67.1	19.0
<b>Social networking site</b>	14.2	68.7	17.1
<b>Instant messages</b>	13.5	68.8	17.6
<b>Notes</b>	11.7	66.9	21.4

	<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>Letters</b>	12.9	62.0	25.1
<b>Lyrics</b>	12.8	62.9	24.4
<b>Diary</b>	10.8	61.8	27.4
<b>Fiction</b>	8.9	60.7	30.4
<b>Poems</b>	11.9	55.8	32.5
<b>Blogs</b>	14.1	63.1	22.8
<b>Essays</b>	9.6	63.4	27.0
<b>Reviews</b>	10.3	58.8	30.9

## Young people's views on what it means to be a good writer

**Figure 5** illustrates that most young people said that to be a good writer one has to enjoy writing (75%), use one's imagination (74%) and use punctuation correctly (66%). Knowing how to type (30%) and talking about writing (36%) were mentioned least frequently in terms of what makes a good writer.

**Figure 5: What it means to be a good writer**





**Table 11: What makes a good writer by demographic background**

	<i>Boys</i> (N = 8,264)	<i>Girls</i> (N = 8,849)	<i>KS2</i> (N = 3,426)	<i>KS3</i> (N = 12,243)	<i>KS4</i> (N = 1,458)	<i>FSM</i> (N = 2,335)	<i>NFSM</i> (N = 13925)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Enjoy writing</b>	70.5	78.8	71.2	76.5	70.0	68.9	76.3
<b>Use one's imagination</b>	68.3	78.9	66.4	76.2	72.1	65.1	76.0
<b>Use correct punctuation</b>	65.3	67.2	62.4	67.8	63.9	59.0	68.1
<b>Check one's work</b>	60.3	66.2	62.2	64.9	54.3	57.9	64.8
<b>Know how to spell</b>	64.1	61.0	60.8	63.3	61.0	60.2	63.3
<b>Read a lot</b>	58.5	63.4	61.5	62.5	48.9	56.5	62.1
<b>Write a lot</b>	54.4	53.1	59.9	53.2	44.5	54.1	53.6
<b>Try things out</b>	46.6	53.9	50.9	51.5	41.2	46.0	51.5
<b>Write neatly</b>	46.0	39.2	50.0	41.4	34.7	45.1	41.9
<b>Talk about writing</b>	34.6	37.3	38.9	36.1	29.7	37.2	35.9
<b>Know how to type</b>	32.2	28.3	35.1	29.5	25.4	38.0	29.1

**Table 11 continued: What makes a good writer by demographic background**

	<i>White</i> (N = 12,239)	<i>Mixed</i> (N = 893)	<i>Asian</i> (N = 1,810)	<i>Black</i> (N = 708)	<i>Help</i> (N = 4,373)	<i>No help</i> (N = 11,284)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Enjoy writing</b>	81.1	78.1	77.5	75.3	69.7	78.2
<b>Use one's imagination</b>	80.2	79.0	77.0	72.3	64.1	79.2
<b>Use correct punctuation</b>	72.0	69.2	69.7	64.5	59.5	70.2
<b>Check one's work</b>	68.5	69.6	67.3	65.7	58.0	66.8
<b>Know how to spell</b>	67.9	64.1	64.5	63.6	61.3	63.7
<b>Read a lot</b>	65.3	66.9	66.1	67.3	58.6	63.0
<b>Write a lot</b>	57.6	57.2	56.5	57.7	55.2	53.8
<b>Try things out</b>	54.7	56.6	50.7	53.6	45.9	53.2
<b>Write neatly</b>	45.4	44.0	47.1	45.7	46.0	41.3
<b>Talk about writing</b>	38.4	38.8	40.7	37.9	37.0	36.3
<b>Know how to type</b>	32.3	34.2	31.0	36.6	34.6	28.6

More **girls than boys** said that a good writer enjoys writing, uses his or her imagination, reads a lot, checks his or her work, tries things out and talks about writing (see **Table 11**). By contrast, more boys than girls believed that it is the technical aspects of writing that make one a good writer, with more boys than girls indicating that a good writer writes neatly, knows how to spell properly and knows how to type.

There were also several **age differences** in what it means to be a good writer, though there were not any clear patterns. More KS2 and KS3 than KS4 pupils say that a good writer checks their work, reads a lot, writes a lot, tries things out, writes neatly, talks about their writing and knows how to type. More KS3 than KS2 and KS4 pupils say that a good writer enjoys writing, uses his or her imagination and uses punctuation correctly.

Beliefs of what makes a good writer also differed according to **socioeconomic background**. More young people who do not receive FSMs compared to those who do said that a good writer uses his or her imagination, tries things out, uses punctuation correctly, checks his or her work, reads a lot and enjoys writing. By contrast, more young people who receive FSMs compared with those who do not say that a good writer knows how to type and writes neatly.

There were a few differences on what makes a good writer by **ethnic background**. Fewer young people from Black backgrounds compared with the other three ethnic backgrounds said that a good writer uses his or her imagination and uses punctuation correctly, while they are more likely to believe that a good writer knows how to type than young people from the other ethnic background. Young people from White backgrounds are more likely to say that a good writer enjoys writing and knows how to spell properly compared with young people from the other ethnic backgrounds.

Differences also exist in perceptions of what makes someone a good writer by whether young people **receive additional help** at school or not. More young people who do not receive help compared to those who do said that a good writer uses his or her imagination, tries things out, uses punctuation correctly, checks his or her work, reads a lot and enjoys writing. By contrast, more young people who receive additional help at school compared with those who do not say that a good writer knows how to type and writes neatly.

**What makes a good writer and writing attainment**

**Table 12** shows that some perceptions of what makes a good writer were associated with *slightly* higher proportions of writing attainment, namely that a good writer knows how to type, talks about writing and tries things out.

However, most of young people’s perceptions of what makes a good writer followed the same pattern, with about a sixth of those who hold certain beliefs writing below the level expected for their age, about two-thirds writing at the expected level and nearly a fifth writing above the expected level.

**Table 12: What makes a good writer and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

	<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Enjoy writing</b>	14.4	66.5	19.2
<b>Use one’s imagination</b>	13.3	67.5	19.2

	<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>Use correct punctuation</b>	14.1	67.3	18.7
<b>Check one's work</b>	13.8	67.0	19.2
<b>Know how to spell</b>	15.9	65.7	18.4
<b>Read a lot</b>	14.6	66.1	19.3
<b>Write a lot</b>	16.3	64.0	19.7
<b>Try things out</b>	13.2	65.8	21.1
<b>Write neatly</b>	17.4	63.5	19.1
<b>Talk about writing</b>	14.0	63.0	22.1
<b>Know how to type</b>	16.9	60.8	22.3

## Young people's attitudes towards writing

When the young people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with various statements about writing, some interesting trends emerged, with attitudes towards writing generally being positive (see **Figure 6**).

7 in 10 young people agreed with statements that writing is more fun when they can choose the topic and that their writing improves when they practise. Half of young people also agreed that a pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who does not and that it is easier to read than it is to write. However, 4 in 10 young people agree that they have trouble deciding what to write.

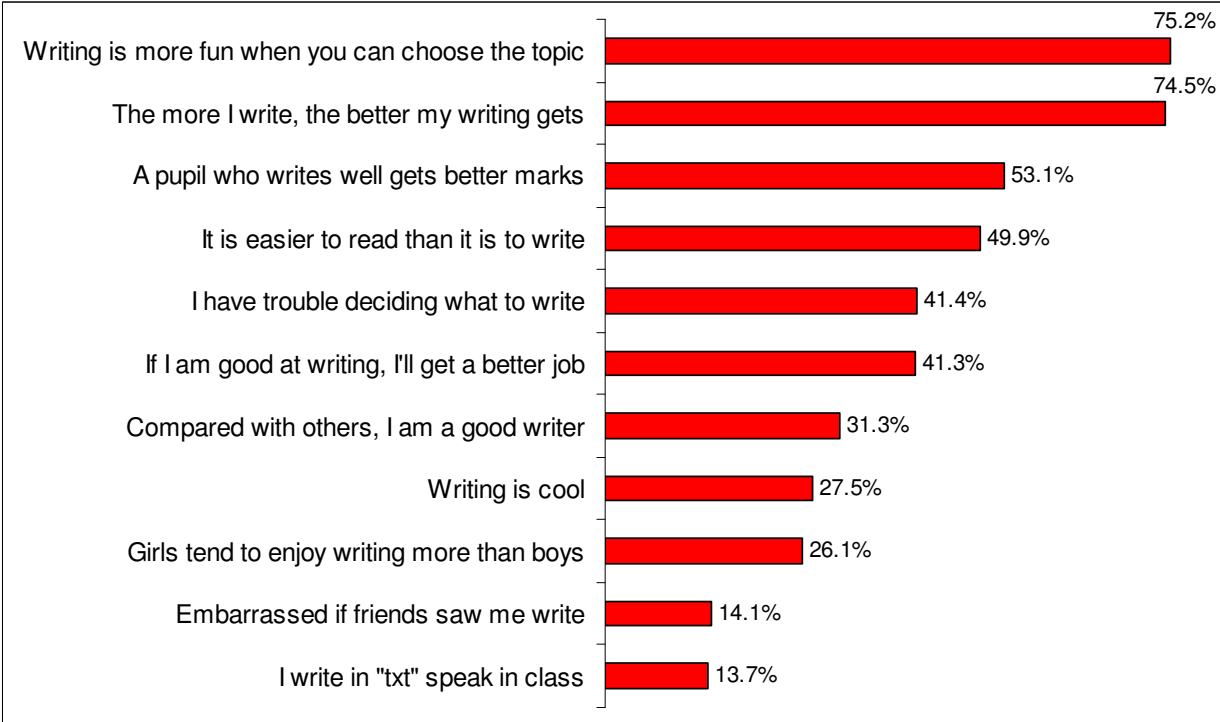
4 in 10 young people agree that they will get a better job if they are good at writing. 3 in 10 young people also agree that writing is cool. However, 1 in 10 young people agreed that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class; while 1 in 10 also agreed that they use "txt" speak in their writing at school.

**Table 13** shows that there are a few differences in the way that **boys** and **girls** feel about writing. Overall, girls are more likely to agree with statement that their writing improves when they practise. By contrast, boys are more likely to agree that reading is easier than writing, that girls enjoy writing more than boys do, that a pupil who writes well gets better marks than someone who does not, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class and that they write "txt" speak in class. However, more boys than girls agreed that they will get a better job if they write well.

There are some marked differences in attitudes towards writing depending on **age**. More KS2 pupils than their older counterparts agree that their writing improves when they practise, that they are a good writer compared with other students, and that it is easier to read than it is to write. However, KS2 pupils are also more likely than their older counterparts to view writing as

a gendered activity, with more KS2 than KS3 or KS4 pupils agreeing with the statement that girls enjoy writing more than boys do. More KS2 than KS3 and KS4 pupils are also more likely to agree that they will get a better job if they are good at writing.

**Figure 6: Percentage agreement with items assessing attitudes towards writing**



**Table 13** also shows that socioeconomic background, in terms of **FSM uptake**, is also related to some attitudes towards writing. A greater proportion of FSM pupils compared with those who do not receive FSMs agree with the statement that girls enjoy writing more than boys do. More also agreed that they will get a better job if they can write well. Nearly twice as many FSM pupils compared with those who do not receive meals also agreed that they use “txt” speak in class. By contrast, more young people who do not receive FSMs than those who do agreed with the statement that writing is more fun when you can choose the topic.

Young people from different **ethnic backgrounds** held slightly different attitudes towards writing. For example, White young people are more likely to agree that they have trouble deciding what to write than pupils from other ethnic backgrounds. However, fewer young people from White than from the other ethnic backgrounds agree that they use “txt” speak in class. By contrast, more young people from Mixed backgrounds agree that pupils who write well will get better marks, while fewer young people from Asian backgrounds agree that they enjoy writing more when they can choose the topic. Finally, more young people from Black than from the other backgrounds agree that they are good writers compared with other pupils in their class and that they think writing is cool.

There are also some differences between young people who **receive additional help** at school and those not receiving help in their attitudes towards writing: more young people who receive help than those who do not agree that they have trouble deciding what to write, that girls enjoy writing more than boys, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class and that they use “txt” speak at school. However, more young people who receive help compared with those that do not agree that writing is cool and that they will get a better job if they write well.

**Table 13: Percentage agreement with items assessing attitudes towards writing by demographic background**

	<i>Boys</i> (N = 8,264)	<i>Girls</i> (N = 8,849)	<i>KS2</i> (N = 3,426)	<i>KS3</i> (N = 12,243)	<i>KS4</i> (N = 1,458)	<i>FSM</i> (N = 2,335)	<i>NFSM</i> (N = 13925)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Writing is more fun when you can choose the topic</b>	75.6	74.8	78.4	75.6	65.3	71.7	76.0
<b>The more I write, the better my writing gets</b>	72.9	76.0	85.0	73.0	61.7	74.8	74.6
<b>A pupil who writes well gets better marks</b>	57.9	48.8	55.8	52.6	51.0	54.7	53.1
<b>It is easier to read than it is to write</b>	56.4	43.8	55.4	48.8	45.6	47.8	50.2
<b>I have trouble deciding what to write</b>	42.9	40.0	42.5	40.7	45.5	43.0	40.9
<b>If I am good at writing, I'll get a better job</b>	44.7	38.1	54.9	38.5	32.7	47.2	40.2
<b>Compared with others, I am a good writer</b>	33.1	29.6	42.5	28.5	28.9	34.0	30.9
<b>Writing is cool</b>	23.1	31.5	48.8	22.6	18.3	30.8	26.4
<b>Girls tend to enjoy writing more than boys</b>	32.0	20.6	32.2	24.7	23.5	31.7	24.8
<b>I would be embarrassed if friends saw me write</b>	17.8	10.8	16.7	13.7	11.2	16.3	13.4
<b>I write in "txt" speak in class</b>	16.0	11.5	16.9	13.1	11.2	21.6	12.3

**Table 13: Percentage agreement with items assessing attitudes towards writing by demographic background**

	<i>White</i> (N = 12,239)	<i>Mixed</i> (N = 893)	<i>Asian</i> (N = 1,810)	<i>Black</i> (N = 708)	<i>Help</i> (N = 4,373)	<i>No help</i> (N = 11,284)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Writing is more fun when you can choose the topic</b>	76.5	77.9	69.1	74.8	74.7	76.2
<b>The more I write, the better my writing gets</b>	74.1	75.8	77.0	77.3	77.6	74.0
<b>A pupil who writes well gets better marks</b>	52.9	57.8	53.9	52.0	55.1	52.8
<b>It is easier to read than it is to write</b>	49.3	49.3	54.3	49.2	52.1	49.4
<b>I have trouble deciding what to write</b>	43.4	37.7	32.3	32.0	46.7	39.4
<b>If I am good at writing, I'll get a better job</b>	40.4	44.0	45.7	43.7	49.8	38.4
<b>Compared with others, I am a good writer</b>	30.6	35.8	32.3	38.7	31.3	32.2
<b>Writing is cool</b>	25.8	34.1	32.6	39.3	35.6	24.9
<b>Girls tend to enjoy writing more than boys</b>	26.1	24.7	26.1	27.5	32.3	23.6
<b>I would be embarrassed if friends saw me write</b>	14.3	12.4	12.9	12.5	18.1	12.7
<b>I write in "txt" speak in class</b>	12.8	15.9	17.3	17.1	19.6	11.4

## Attitudes towards writing and writing attainment

**Table 14** highlights some interesting relationships between attitudes towards writing and writing attainment. For example, a greater proportion of those who agree with the statements that writing is more fun when one can choose the topic, that their writing improves the more they write, that compared to others they write well and that writing is cool write above the level expected for their age compared with those who disagree with these statements.

Conversely, a greater proportion of those who agree with the statements that they have trouble deciding what to write, that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write and that they write in “txt” speak in class write below the level expected for their age compared with those who disagree with those statements.

**Table 14: Percentage agreement and disagreement with attitudinal items and writing attainment (N = 5,320)**

		<i>Below expected level</i> %	<i>At expected level</i> %	<i>Above expected level</i> %
<b>Writing is more fun when you can choose the topic</b>	Agreement	13.5	67.2	19.3
	Disagreement	27.7	55.5	16.9
<b>The more I write, the better my writing gets</b>	Agreement	12.5	67.0	20.6
	Disagreement	34.3	53.2	12.5
<b>A pupil who writes well gets better marks</b>	Agreement	15.7	65.1	19.1
	Disagreement	17.1	63.6	19.2
<b>It is easier to read than it is to write</b>	Agreement	18.4	67.4	14.2
	Disagreement	14.5	61.4	24.1
<b>I have trouble deciding what to write</b>	Agreement	23.0	65.1	11.9
	Disagreement	8.0	61.3	30.7
<b>Compared with others, I am a good writer</b>	Agreement	6.2	55.6	38.1
	Disagreement	43.1	51.5	5.4
<b>Writing is cool</b>	Agreement	8.4	55.9	35.7
	Disagreement	26.7	64.3	9.0
<b>Girls tend to enjoy writing more than boys</b>	Agreement	19.8	60.3	19.8
	Disagreement	13.5	65.7	20.8



		<i>Below expected level %</i>	<i>At expected level %</i>	<i>Above expected level %</i>
<b>I would be embarrassed if friends saw me write</b>	Agreement	23.6	58.3	18.1
	Disagreement	13.1	66.1	20.8
<b>If I'm good at writing it means I'll get a better job when I grow up</b>	Agreement	15.2	61.9	22.9
	Disagreement	13.2	71.0	15.8
<b>I write in "txt" speak in class</b>	Agreement	21.0	58.5	20.6
	Disagreement	12.7	68.5	18.8

## Summing up

Regarding young people's writing in 2010, this survey has shown that:

- 5 in 10 young people enjoy writing either "very much" or "quite a lot"
- 8 in 10 young people rate themselves as either average or very good writers
- 3 in 10 young people write outside of class every day, with another 3 in 10 writing something a few times a week
- Technology-based formats are most commonly written by a large margin, followed by notes and letters
- When asked what it means to be a good writer most young people believed it means enjoying writing, using one's imagination and using punctuation correctly. The technical skills of writing neatly and knowing how to type figure less prominently
- Most young people thought positively about writing. Only 1 in 10 would feel embarrassed if their friends saw them write. However, 4 in 10 also say that they have trouble deciding what to write.

There were clear relationships between each of these and writing attainment, with those who enjoy writing more rating themselves to be better writers, writing more frequently, thinking positively about writing and also achieving more highly in writing.

### Writing and gender

Girls not only enjoyed writing more than boys but they also rated themselves as better writers. Girls also wrote more frequently outside of class. Compared to boys, girls tend to write more technology-based formats, such as emails, text messages and messages on social networking sites, as well as in a diary or song lyrics. Girls were more likely than boys to emphasise aspects such as enjoyment and imagination as qualities that make a good writer. By contrast, boys were more likely than girls to stress the importance of technical aspects of writing, such as writing neatly and knowing how to spell and type. Finally, girls thought more positively about writing than boys, with more boys than girls agreeing with the statement that they would be embarrassed if their friends saw them write outside of class. However, boys were more likely than girls to see the utilitarian aspect of writing, namely that it will help them get a better job.

## Writing and age

Writing appears to be more prevalent in younger than older pupils in terms of their enjoyment of writing, their writing frequency and their attitudes towards writing. However, when asked what makes a good writer younger pupils tend to emphasise the technical aspects of writing more, while older pupils (most likely because they have mastered those skills) tend to believe that more abstract aspects of writing, such as imagination, are more important to make a good writer.

## Writing and FSM uptake

While there were numerous socioeconomic differences in terms of young people's reading (see Clark, 2011), there were noticeably fewer differences by FSM uptake when it comes to writing. For example, there were no differences in terms of young people's enjoyment of writing and the frequency with which they engage in writing outside of class. However, young people who receive FSM tend to be less confident about their writing. For example, they see themselves as slightly worse writers compared with young people who do not receive FSM and they tend to emphasise the technical aspects of writing more when asked what makes a good writer, which again suggests a lack of confidence in their own skills.

## Writing and ethnic background

The relationships between writing and ethnic background were complex. At a crude brushstroke, compared with young people from other ethnic backgrounds, young people from White backgrounds enjoy writing less, rate themselves as worse writers and write less frequently. They are also more likely to say that they have trouble deciding what to write. However, while young people from White backgrounds tend to write more text messages in a month they also are less likely to say that they use "txt" speak in class. By contrast, young people from Black backgrounds enjoy writing the most, rate themselves as the best writers, write more frequently and write a greater variety of formats.

## Writing and educational needs

Using additional help at school as a crude indicator of educational need, we found that young people who receive additional help at school feel less confident about their writing than young people who do not receive any help. At the same time, however, they are more likely to believe that they will get a better job if they write well. Overall, there were no differences between young people who receive additional help and those who do not in terms of their enjoyment of writing and the frequency with which they engage in writing outside of school.

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