

Children and young people's writing in 2022

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When we asked children and young people to tell us about their writing during the first lockdown in spring 2020¹, it became clear that for many it had been a time of increased creativity, with children writing everything from songs and stories to scripts, and some even beginning their own novels. Having more time to write freely had increased children's enjoyment of writing. However, for many others, the pandemic, its associated school closures and disrupted schooling had a less positive link with their writing, with writing enjoyment levels in 2021 dropping to the lowest level we have seen in over a decade. Writing enjoyment levels also continue to lag behind reading enjoyment levels year on year. All of this should be a cause for concern.

This report builds on our previous reports to highlight how children and young people felt about writing in early 2022, a period that coincided with the lifting of all lockdown restrictions in England and most other UK nations. It shows that children and young people's enjoyment of writing and their writing frequency recovered a little after 2021's all-time low. However, there is little to celebrate: just over 2 in 5 children enjoyed writing in 2022 and fewer than 1 in 5 wrote regularly in their free time.

To be clear, when we talk about writing, we are interested in the writing children and young people do in their free time, outside of school, the ways children and young people are able to express themselves in terms of their ideas and feelings, their creativity, their ability to communicate with others, and what motivates them to write in their free time. We are much less concerned with their spelling or handwriting.

¹ https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Writing_during_the_COVID-19_lockdown_report.pdf

Method

We conducted our latest Annual Literacy Survey between January and the end of March 2022. 70,403 children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 327 schools in England, Scotland and Wales participated in this online survey.

To capture more of the writing experiences and opinions of children and young people, the online survey also contained numerous open-text questions, which have been themed and analysed to help contextualise findings in this report.

Key findings from 2022 include:

Writing enjoyment

- 2 in 5 (40.3%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said that they enjoyed writing in their spare time.
 - Levels of writing enjoyment were higher in 2022 compared with the year before when we recorded the lowest level of writing enjoyment since we first asked this question in 2010.
 - Levels of writing enjoyment improved over the past year for most children and young people regardless of background, with the exception of secondary-aged children and young people where levels stagnated between 2021 and 2022.

Daily writing

- 1 in 5 (20.5%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 told us in early 2022 that they wrote something daily in their free time.
 - Daily writing levels increased between 2021 and 2022, after recording the lowest daily writing rate in 2021 since we began asking the question in 2010.
 - Daily writing levels increased amongst all children and young people regardless of background between 2021 and 2022.

The link between writing enjoyment and daily writing

- Children and young people who enjoyed writing were also more likely to write daily in their free time. However, this relationship was more pronounced in children and young people aged 8 to 18 compared with those aged 5 to 8.

Writing motivation

- 1 in 2 (49.9%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they write to be creative. A further 2 in 5 (45.3%) said that they write to express their ideas and imagination or their thoughts and feelings (41.4%). Many also said that they write to support their mental wellbeing, while 1 in 7 (15.3%) wrote to support causes and issues they care about.
 - More girls than boys aged 8 to 18 wrote to be creative, to support their mental wellbeing or to feel connected, as did children aged 8 to 11 compared with their older peers, although those aged 14 to 16 seemed to be the one group least likely to be motivated to write across the board.

- Writing continues to support children and young people’s mental wellbeing, with 1 in 3 (32.8%) children and young people saying that writing helps them relax and 1 in 4 (26.4%) writing because it makes them happy. 1 in 5 (19.8%) also said that writing helps them deal with problems.
- Other motivational themes also surfaced in the 38,000 comments we received on this topic from children and young people aged 8 to 18.

Writing formats

- 1 in 2 (50.5%) children aged 5 to 8 said that they write stories on paper in their free time, while 2 in 5 (43.3%) said that they write notes on paper. Far fewer children in this age group wrote stories or notes on a screen (e.g. tablet, laptop; around 13%).
 - Fewer children aged 5 to 8 wrote stories on a screen or notes on paper in 2022 compared with 2021, but the biggest difference was in terms of writing notes on paper, which saw a drop of over 12 percentage points over the past year. Slightly more children of this age group said in 2022 that they wrote stories on a screen compared with 2021.
 - More girls than boys said that they wrote stories and notes on paper, whereas the gender difference in writing these formats on a screen was much less pronounced.
- By far the most popular writing that children and young people aged 8 to 18 did in their free time was text/direct messages (90.4%) followed by in-game communications (83.0%). 1 in 4 (25.2%) said that they wrote fiction/short stories on paper in their free time, while 1 in 5 (19.0%) said that they wrote fiction on a screen.
 - More children and young people aged 8 to 18 wrote various formats on a screen or on paper in 2022 compared with the year before. In particular, more children and young people were writing reviews on paper, song lyrics on screens and poems on paper. However, far fewer children and young people wrote most of the exclusively on-screen formats in 2022, with emails being the biggest loser. Only blog/forum posts and podcasts showed a slight increase compared with the year before.
 - More girls than boys also said that they wrote personal/direct messages, emails, social media content and podcasts in their free time, while more boys than girls said that they wrote in-game communications, blog/forum posts and podcasts in their free time. More young people aged 14 and older said that they wrote personal/direct messages, emails or social media content than their younger peers, while more children and young people who don’t receive FSMs said that they wrote personal/direct messages or emails than their peers who receive FSMs.

Writing in 2022

Writing enjoyment

In early 2022, 2 in 5 (40.3%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 said that they enjoyed writing in their spare time either very much or quite a lot. However, nearly 1 in 5 said that they didn't enjoy writing at all and 2 in 5 only enjoyed writing a bit (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Levels of writing enjoyment for children and young people aged 5 to 18 in 2022

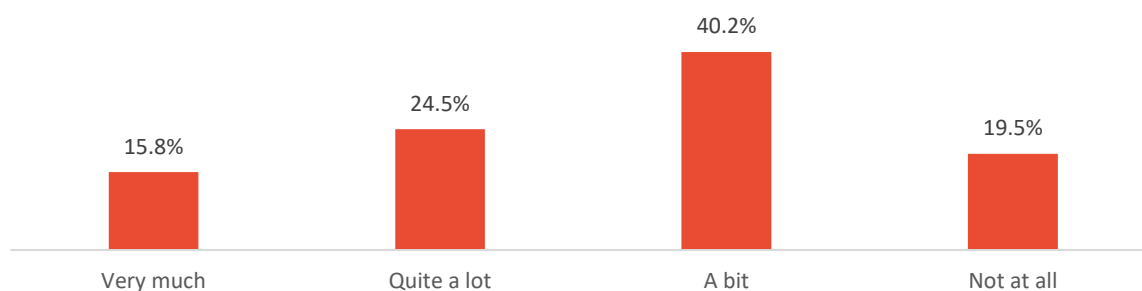
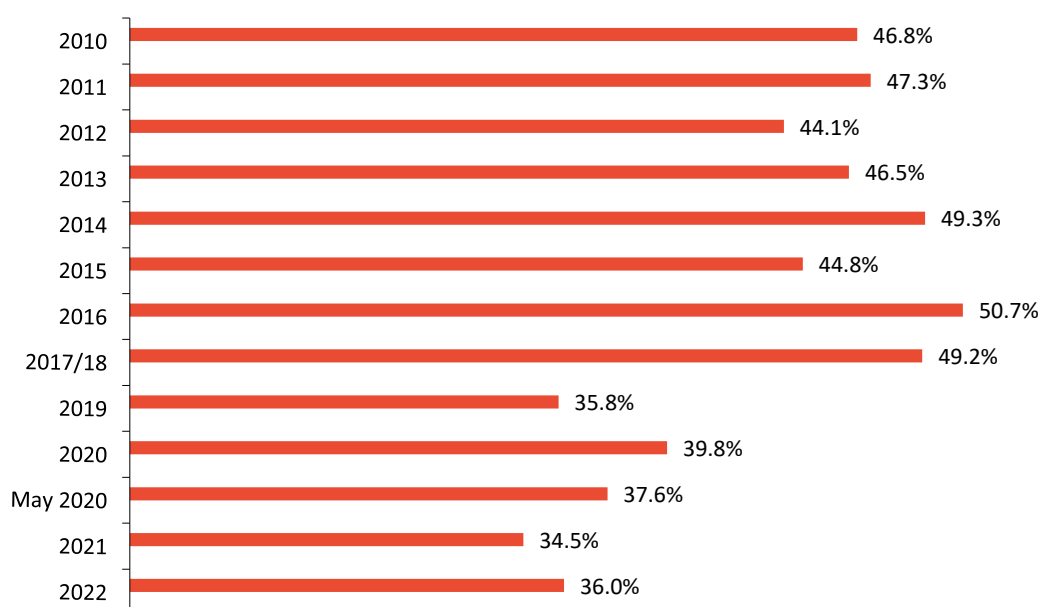


Figure 2 shows levels of writing enjoyment for children and young people aged 8 to 18² over time and shows that levels for this age group were higher in 2022 compared with the year before when we recorded the lowest level of writing enjoyment since we began asking the question in 2010 (see Figure 1).

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing either very much or quite a lot from 2010 to 2022³



² We didn't start collecting information from 5- to 8-year-olds until 2019. For comparison-over-time purposes this analysis only contains data for children and young people aged 8 to 18

³ For comparison purposes, this graph only contains data for children and young people aged 8 to 18

Writing enjoyment by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake

Who enjoyed writing in 2022? As shown in Figure 3, more girls than boys said that they enjoy writing in their free time⁴, with over 2 in 5 girls saying this compared with 1 in 3 boys. Writing enjoyment also declined with age, with twice as many 5- to 8-year-olds saying that they enjoy writing compared with those aged 16 and over. More children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs), our proxy of socioeconomic background, said that they enjoy writing in their spare time compared with their peers who didn't receive FSMs.

Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed writing in 2022 by gender, age group, and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)

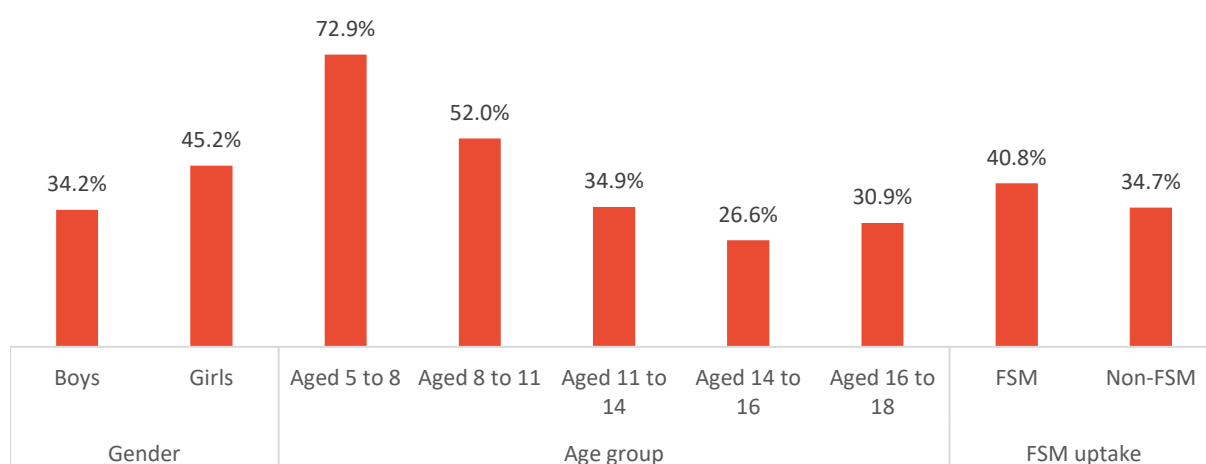
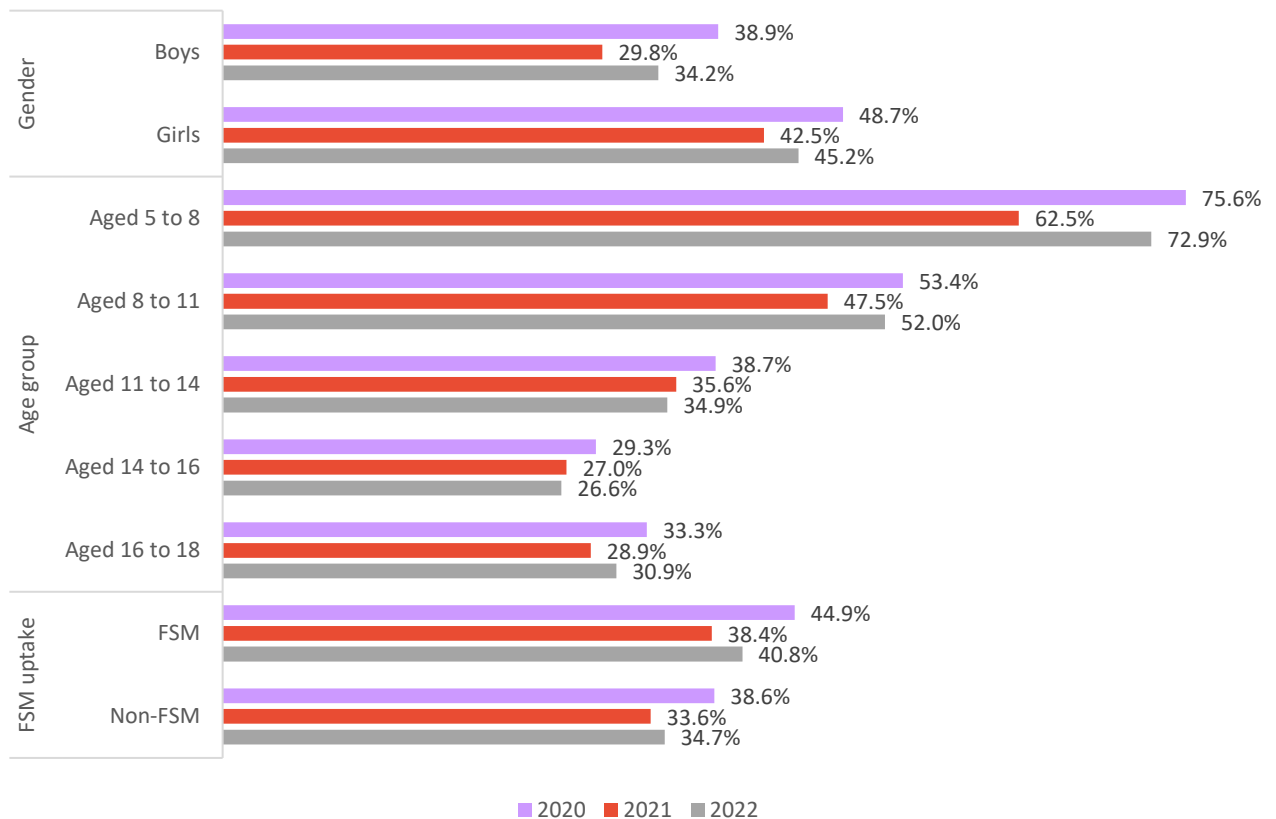


Figure 4 shows that the pandemic had an impact on writing enjoyment across children and young people regardless of their background, with fewer children and young people saying that they enjoyed writing in early 2021 compared with early 2020 irrespective of their gender, age or FSM uptake status. However, our data from early 2022 show that levels recovered somewhat across most groups, with the exception of certain age groups. While writing enjoyment levels almost recovered to 2020 levels for primary school children (i.e. those aged 5 to 8 and those aged 8 to 11), levels for those aged 11 and older have stagnated instead. However, these are also the groups that saw much less of a fall in writing enjoyment levels during 2021.

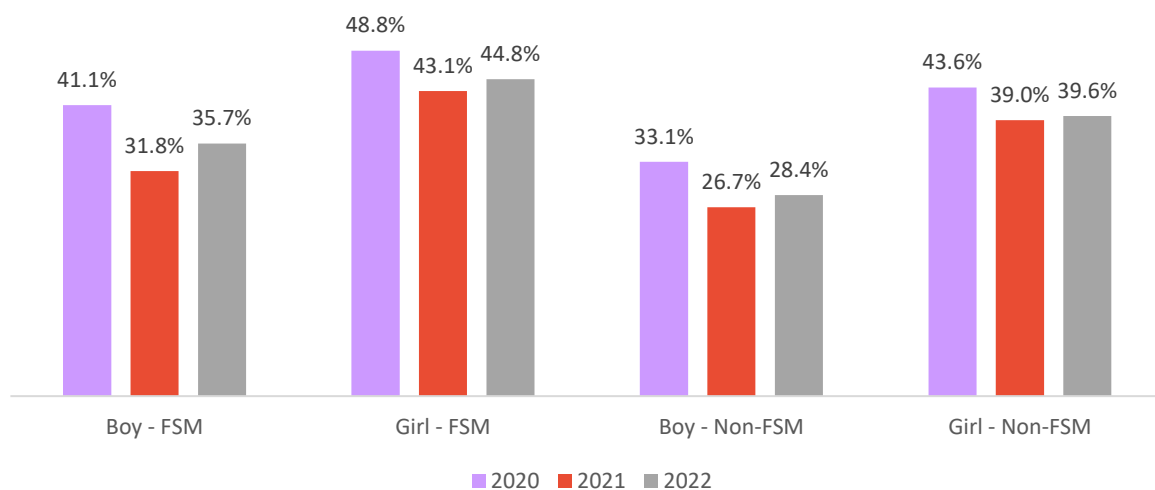
⁴ Boys: 45.7% (n = 32,156), girls: 48.1% (n = 33,848). 3.3% (n = 2,306) didn't want to specify their gender and 2.9% (n = 2,093) describe themselves another way. Aged 5 to 8 = 9.2% (n = 6,444); aged 8 to 11 = 13.0% (n = 11,135); aged 11 to 14 = 57.3% (n = 40,325); aged 14 to 16 = 14.1% (n = 9,913); aged 16 to 18 = 3.7% (n = 2,586). For those aged 8 to 18 only: FSM: 14.9% (n = 9,274); non-FSM: 74.9% (n = 46,586); didn't want to say: 1.4% (n = 851); didn't know: 8.8% (n = 5,482). The demographic make-up of our 2022 sample is comparable to that of our 2021 sample.

Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed writing in 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



Boys who received FSMs saw a particularly pronounced drop in writing enjoyment levels between 2020 and 2021. Figure 5 explores their writing enjoyment in 2022 and shows that levels bounced back somewhat in early 2022.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing in early 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender and free-school-meal uptake

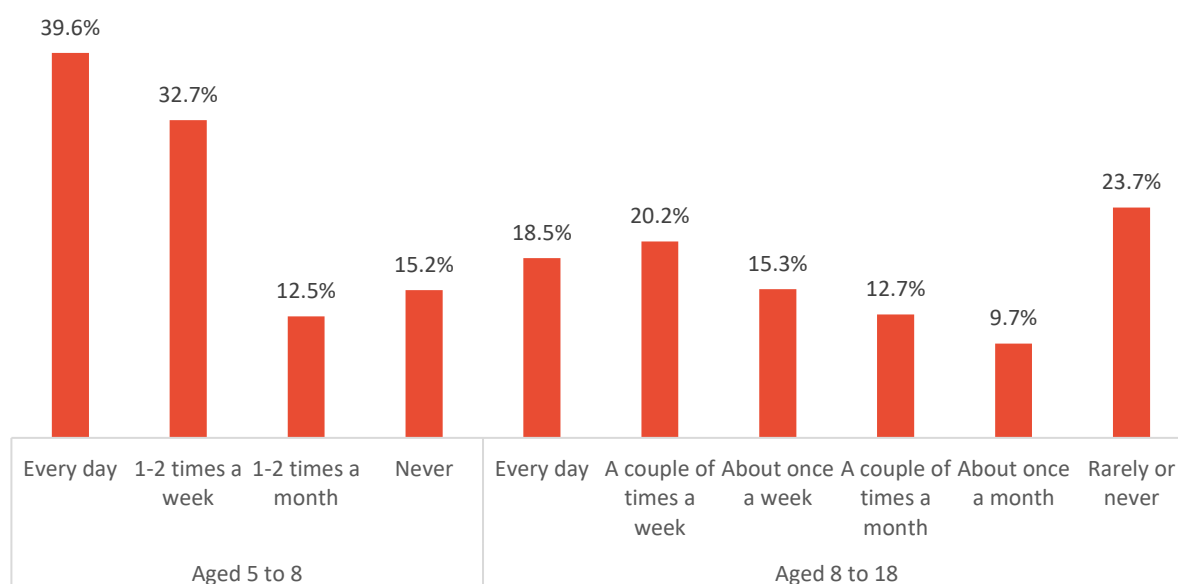


Daily writing

1 in 5 (20.9%) children and young people aged 5 to 18 told us in early 2020 that they wrote something in their spare time every day.

Figure 6 shows the frequency with which children and young people wrote in their spare time in early 2022. As children aged 5 to 8 had different response options from their older peers, both are shown in this figure. It shows that twice as many children aged 5 to 8 said that they write something daily compared with their peers aged 8+, with nearly 1 in 4 of them saying that they rarely or never write in their spare time.

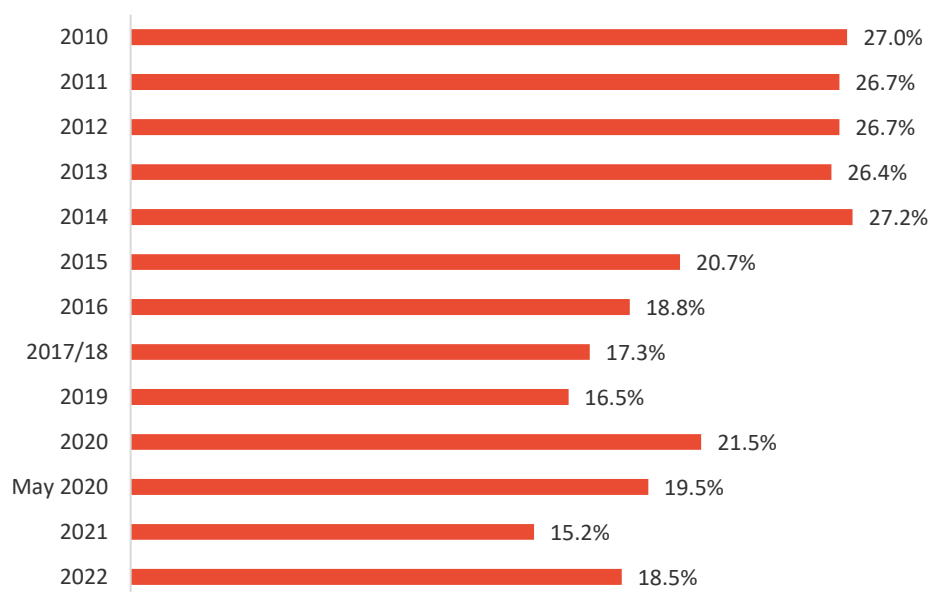
Figure 6: Frequency of writing in their spare time for children aged 5 to 8 and children and young people aged 8 to 18 in 2022



How do these levels compare over time? Figure 7 shows levels of daily writing for children and young people aged 8 to 18⁵ over the past 12 years and shows that daily writing levels increased for this age group in 2022 compared with the year before when we recorded the lowest level of daily writing since we began asking the question in 2010.

⁵ We didn't start collecting information from 5- to 8-year-olds until 2019. For comparison-over-time purposes this analysis only contains data for children and young people aged 8 to 18

Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their spare time from 2010 to 2022



The link between writing enjoyment and writing frequency

For those aged 8 to 18, there was a moderate positive relationship between enjoying writing and writing frequency ($r = .556$), indicating that those who enjoy writing also do it more frequently in their free time. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, those children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoy writing are three times more likely to do so daily compared with their peers who don't enjoy writing.

Table 1: Writing enjoyment x writing frequency in 2022 for children and young people aged 8 to 18

	Daily	A couple of times a week	Once a week	A couple of times a month	Once a month	Rarely or never
Enjoy writing	36.9%	32.2%	14.8%	7.4%	3.6%	5.1%
Don't enjoy writing	12.1%	14.0%	15.6%	13.3%	12.9%	32.0%

The relationship between writing enjoyment and writing frequency was less strong for those aged 5 to 8 ($r = .382$), but Table 2 shows that nonetheless over twice as many 5- to 8-year-olds who enjoyed writing also wrote something daily in their spare time compared with those who didn't enjoy writing.

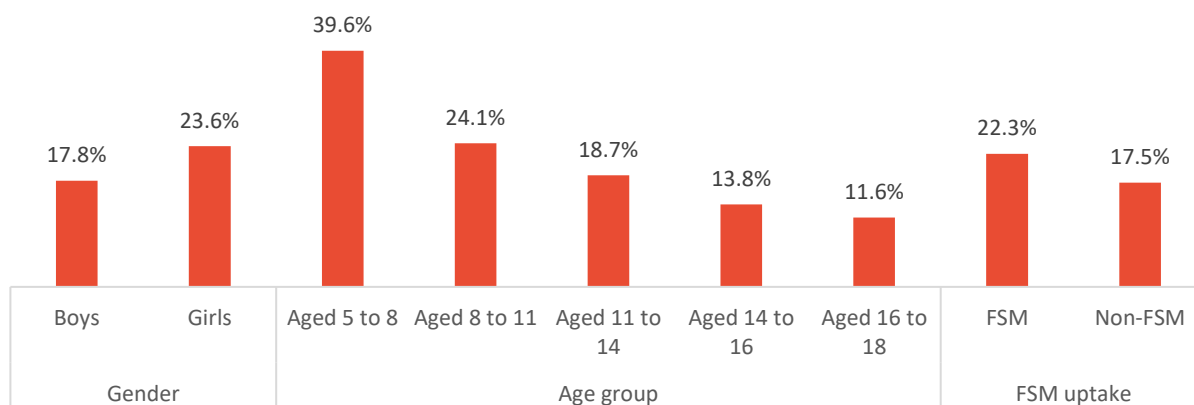
Table 2: Writing enjoyment x writing frequency in 2022 for children aged 5 to 8

	Daily	1-2 times a week	1-2 times a month	Never
Enjoy writing	46.8%	33.9%	10.5%	8.9%
Don't enjoy writing	20.3%	29.5%	17.9%	32.3%

Daily writing by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake

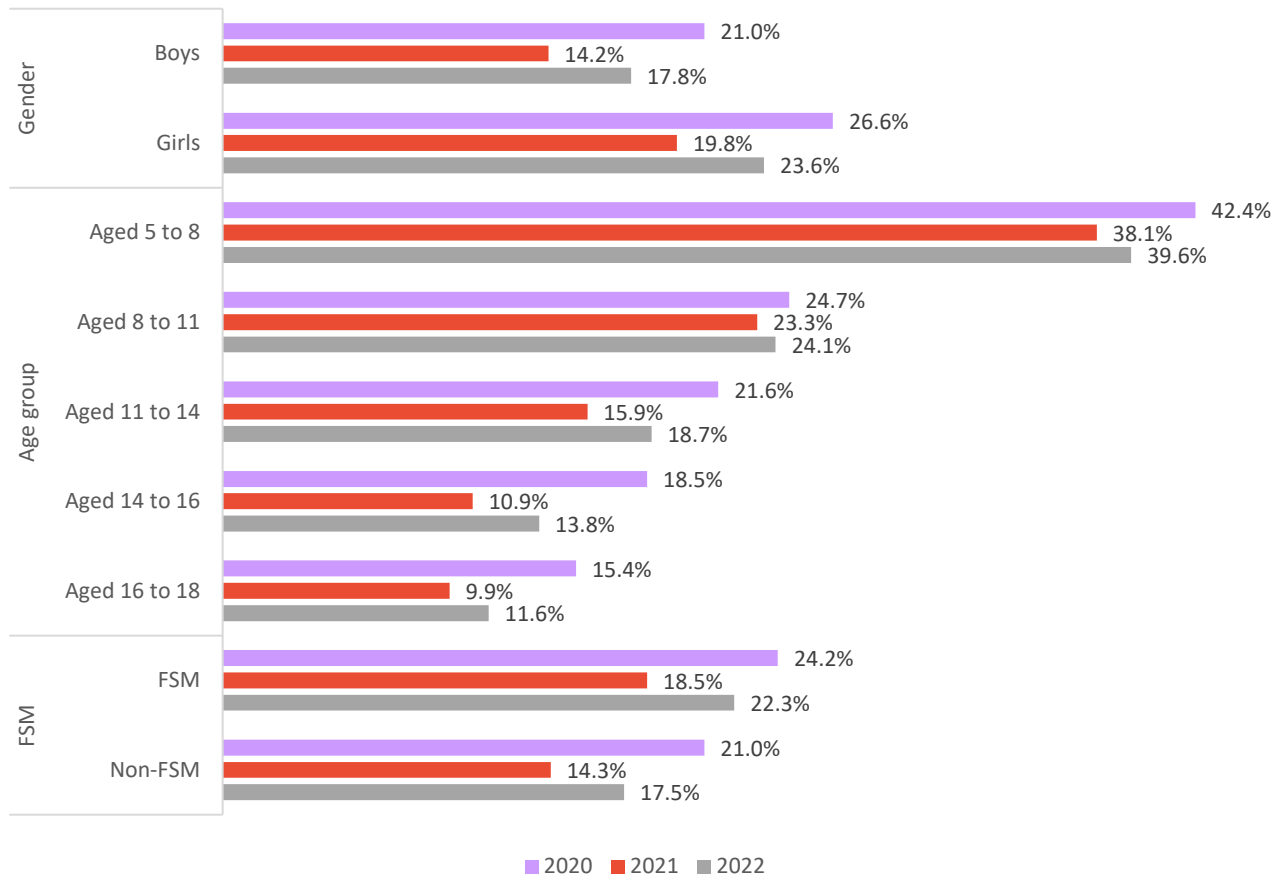
More girls than boys said in 2022 that they wrote something daily in their free time (see Figure 8). As with writing enjoyment, levels of daily writing decrease with age, with nearly four times as many children aged 5 to 8 saying that they write something in their spare time daily compared with those aged over 14. Not only do more children and young people who receive FSMs say that they enjoy writing, more also say that they write something daily in their free time compared with their peers who don't receive FSMs.

Figure 8: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who said that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2022 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)



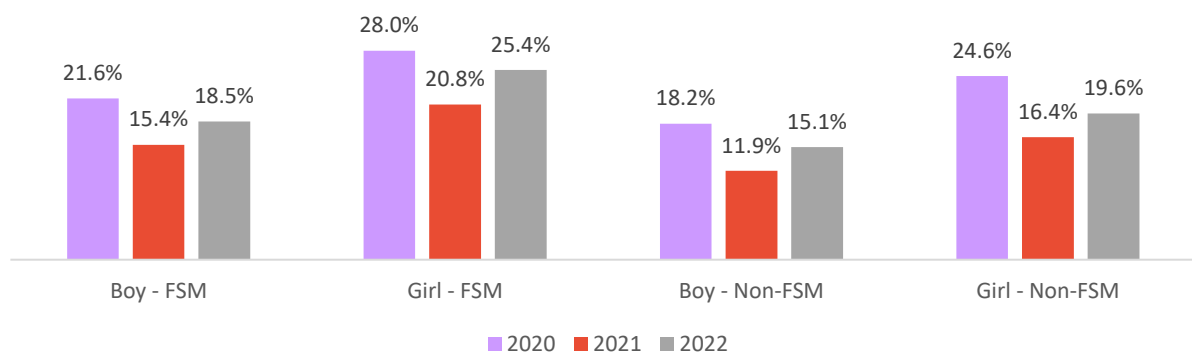
As shown in Figure 9, daily writing declined in all children and young people between 2020 and 2021 regardless of their background. Across the board, daily writing levels recovered somewhat between 2020 and 2021. However, the increase in daily writing was more marked in some groups than in others, which means that some of the gaps between groups changed. For example, the increase in daily writing was more pronounced in those attending secondary school (aged 11 +) compared with those attending primary schools.

Figure 9: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their free time in early 2020, during the spring lockdown in 2020, and in early 2021 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake



In 2021 we were particularly interested in looking at the interplay between gender and FSM uptake and we found that the year between 2020 and 2021 had a detrimental impact on daily writing levels regardless of children’s gender and whether or not they received FSMs. However, Figure 10 shows that by 2022 daily writing rates had recovered, again regardless of gender or FSM status.

Figure 10: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their free time in early 2020, 2021 and 2022 by gender and free-school-meal uptake



Why children and young people are writing (or not)

We also asked children and young people aged 8 to 18 to reflect on the reasons why they write. Of those who write in their free time at least once a month⁶, 1 in 2 write because it helps them feel creative (see Figure 11). Over 2 in 5 also write to express their ideas and imagination and to express their thoughts and feelings. Writing to support mental wellbeing is also an important motivation for children and young people to write in their free time, with 3 in 10 saying that they write because it helps them relax, and 1 in 4 saying they write because it makes them feel happy or feel more confident. Finally, 1 in 7 write to support causes and issues they care about, and 1 in 6 write because it makes them feel connected to the world.

Figure 11: Children and young people's reasons for writing in 2022



We also wanted to know how writing motivations differ by background. To this end, we conceptually grouped our 10 writing motivation items to form three categories: the creative writer⁷, the mindful writer⁸ and the social writer⁹. Figure 12 shows that more girls than boys are creative, mindful or social writers, while more children aged 8 to 11 are creative, mindful or social writers compared with their older peers, although those aged 14 to 16 seem to be the one group least likely to be either creative, mindful or social writers. Finally, there was very little difference in terms of FSM uptake and being a creative writer. However, more children and young people who receive FSMs said that they are mindful or social writers compared with their peers who don't receive FSMs.

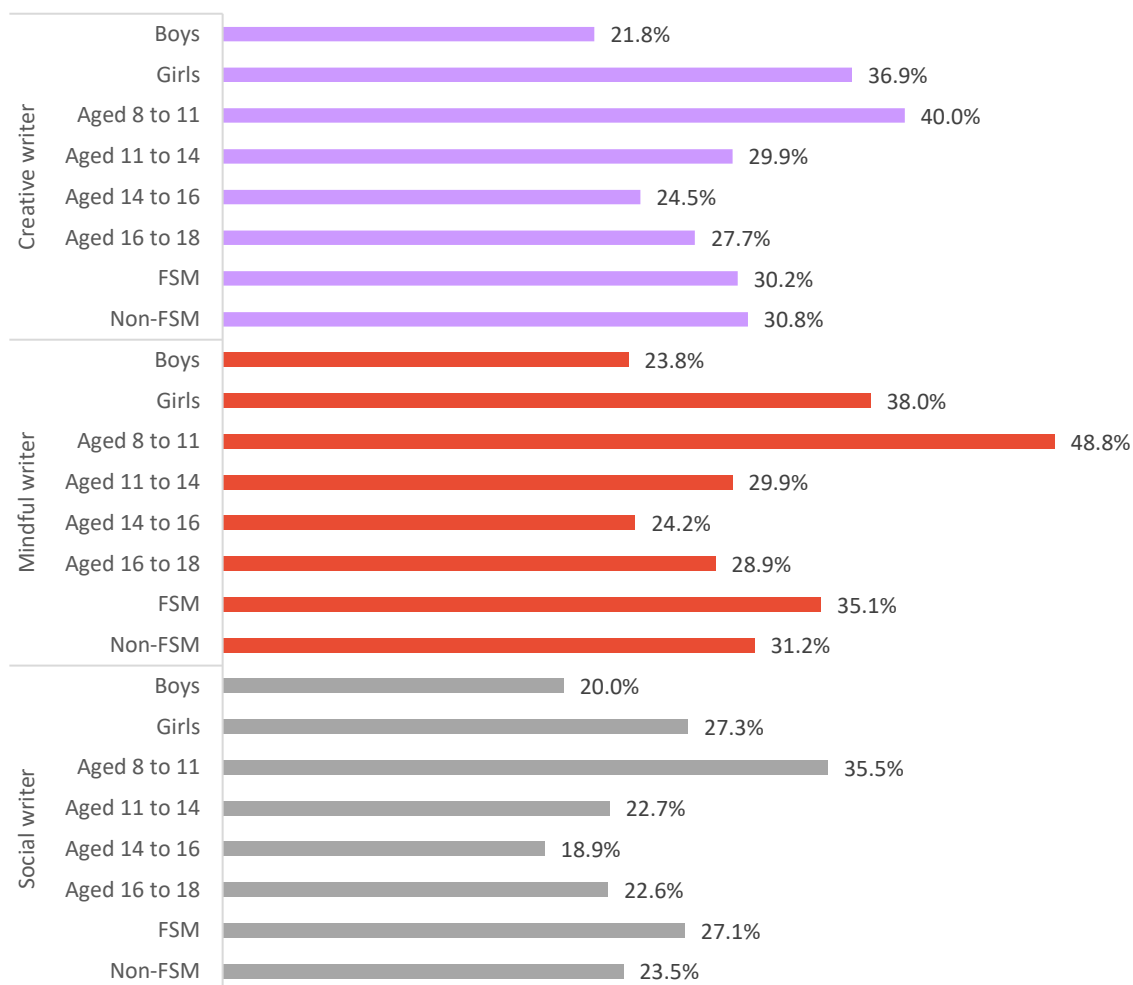
⁶ n = 47,438

⁷ Combining three items: Writing helps me feel creative, thoughts, imagination. Cronbach's alpha = .843. Top quartile of responses being described here as the creative writer (30.8%)

⁸ Combining five items: relax, happy, confident, problems, sad. Cronbach's alpha = .840. Top quartile of responses being described here as the mindful writer (32.2%)

⁹ Combining two items: connected, causes. Cronbach's alpha = .582. Top two categories combined to describe the social writer (24.3%)

Figure 12: Being a creative, mindful or social writer in 2022 by gender, age group and FSM uptake



We also invited children and young people to tell us in their own words why they write or don't write. Other motivational themes also surfaced in the 38,000 comments that we received on this topic from children and young people aged 8 to 18. For example, some children and young people shared that they use writing as a form of escapism:

Writing creates a whole other world that allows you to escape this one (Girl, Y10)

Writing makes me feel relaxed and immersive, making me feel like I'm in another world (Girl, Y12)

I write to create my own world that I control and I can make anything happen in (Boy, Y10)

Interestingly, pride was often a motivator for writing. Although sharing their writing with their family and friends and getting a positive response was often a good incentive, some felt proud of themselves regardless of whether their writing was shared with others. Indeed, they said:

I write because I feel better after writing something down and I want to make myself feel proud of the work I do (Girl, Y7)

It makes me proud reading it to my family and coming up with scenarios and creating a story (Girl, Y9)

Poetry and writing in general have boosted my confidence, made me feel proud of myself, and had a great impact on my life (Boy, Y7)

I write to feel proud of myself of the work I have achieved (Boy, Y6)

Writing to hone literacy skills was mentioned regularly. Children and young people were often motivated to write to help with things such as their spelling, handwriting and vocabulary:

I write because it is fun and it makes my spelling better (Girl, Y8)

I write because it helps me with my English and practices my handwriting (Boy, Y8)

I write because it helps with my learning and I enjoy it (Girl, Y8)

The reason I write is to speed up writing speed (Boy, Y10)

Writing was also often used as a form of introspection, helping children and young people to understand things such as emotions, concepts, or other people:

I write...as it helps me understand what I am feeling (I describe myself another way, Y11)

Writing can help you to understand your emotions (Girl, Y10)

I enjoy writing about other people, it helps me understand and connect with different nationalities and people (Girl, Y8)

I write to... understand new concepts (Girl, Y9)

I write because it helps me to understand others and become socialized (Boy, Y6)

Children and young people often mentioned that they were inspired to write by various mediums, including other books they have read, their surroundings, or movies:

I am inspired by books that I read (Girl, Y8)

I write because I'm inspired by certain things (like my surroundings or prompts I see online) (I describe myself another way, Y11)

I write because I get inspired by movies and other books (Girl, Y6)

I am inspired by authors (Girl, Y9)

As well as being inspired, some children and young people shared that they write to inspire others:

I like to write to inspire kids like me – books can be really boring sometimes and I just want to make cool [books] that will make people want to read (Girl, Y8)

I write to inspire people (Girl, Y5)

I write to inspire others to do great things and not be held back by their problems (Boy, Y7)

Some children and young people also told us that they write because it is important for their future, either to get a good job or because they want to write professionally:

I write because when you are older you will have to write to get a good job (Boy, Y5)

I also write because I dream of being an author when I'm older (Girl, Y7)

I write non-fiction stories as well as song lyrics because it's my passion and it involves the career I wish to pursue in the future (Girl, Y10)

Why children and young people aren't motivated to write

We were also interested in finding out children and young people's reasons for not writing. Some told us about their struggles with not knowing what to write. Interestingly, some of the children and young people who told us that they struggle with their inspiration were keen readers who read a lot, suggesting that there isn't a clear-cut link between being a reader and a writer:

I don't write stories or blogs because I can't find the right things to write. I don't like writing stories and blogs because I don't have much of an imagination (Girl, Y7 who enjoys reading very much and reads daily)

I don't write too much because I find it hard to come up with things to write and lose concentration halfway (Girl, Y7, who enjoys reading quite a lot and reads daily)

I don't write in my free time because I don't know what to write about and it takes a lot of effort (Boy, Y6, enjoys reading a bit and reads about once a month)

Additionally, and perhaps unexpectedly, many children and young people also told us that they don't write because they find it too hard:

I don't write because I struggle a lot with transferring thoughts to paper and I get very stressed and frustrated with myself (Girl, Y12, enjoys reading very much and reads daily)

I do not write as I am not very good at it (Boy, Y8, enjoys reading quite a lot and reads once a week)

I don't write because I find it difficult (Boy, Y8, enjoys reading a bit and reads about once a month)

I'm not too confident in my writing skills so I stick to reading (Girl, Y13, enjoys reading very much and reads daily)

While others don't write because they simply find it boring and would rather do something else:

Writing is boring and takes up time (Boy, Y10)

I find it difficult and boring (Girl, Y9)

I do not write because I find it boring compared to other things (Boy, Y8)

Finally, a few children and young people shared that their home environment acts as a barrier. We know from our survey that nearly 1 in 5 (18.6%) children and young people said that they don't have a quiet space at home where they can work, read or take time out. Indeed, some children and young people shared that they lacked a (quiet) space to write:

I don't really write as much at home because it's quite hard to find a quiet spot (Girl, Y7)

I don't write because there are things I'd rather do and I don't have the space (Girl, Y8)

I don't have a lot of space to write (Girl, Y7)

I don't write because there is no space to write on a table (Girl, Y4)

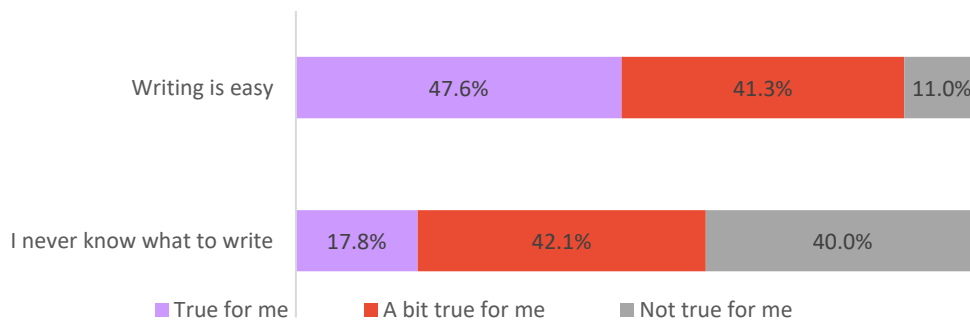
What children and young people think about writing

In 2022, we asked children and young people to agree or disagree with a few statements to see what they think about some aspects of writing.

Children aged 5 to 8

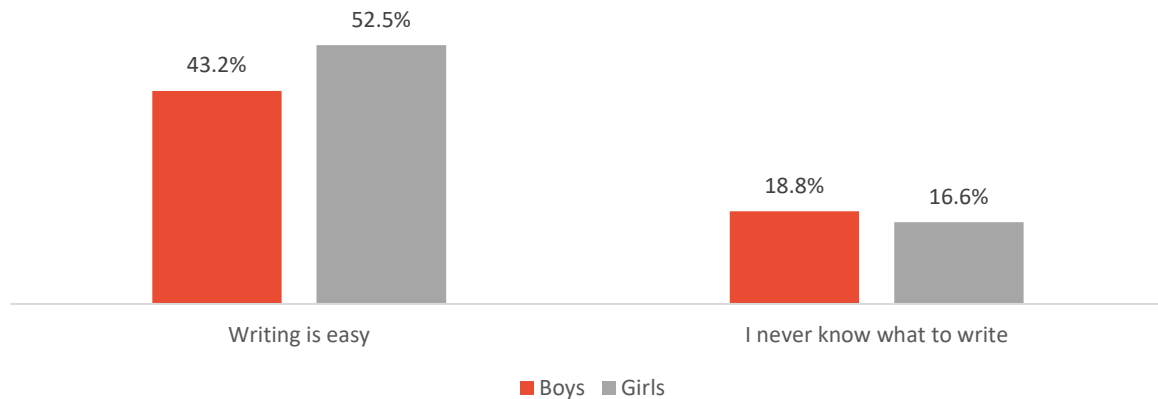
Children aged 5 to 8 were asked to share their views on two different statements about writing. As Figure 13 shows, nearly 1 in 2 said that writing is easy for them. Only 1 in 10 children aged 5 to 8 didn't think that this statement was true for them. Only 1 in 6 said that they never know what to write, a percentage that is nearly three times lower than that for their older peers who agreed that they have trouble deciding what to write (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: What children and young people aged 5 to 8 think about writing in 2022



For those aged 5 to 8, we can only break down views about writing by gender. As Figure 14 shows, more girls than boys in this age group told us that they think that writing is easy, while there was little difference by gender in how children of this age felt about knowing what to write.

Figure 14: Percentage agreement with writing attitude statements by gender for those aged 5 to 8



Children and young people aged 8 to 18

Encouragingly, even though a large percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 struggle with deciding what to write (see Figure 15), 2 in 5 continue writing even when they find it difficult. 2 in 5 also see a link between their writing and their chances of getting a better job when they grow up. However, only 3 in 10 think that writing is cool and 2 in 5 admit that they only write when they have to.

Figure 15: What children and young people aged 8 to 18 think about writing in 2022

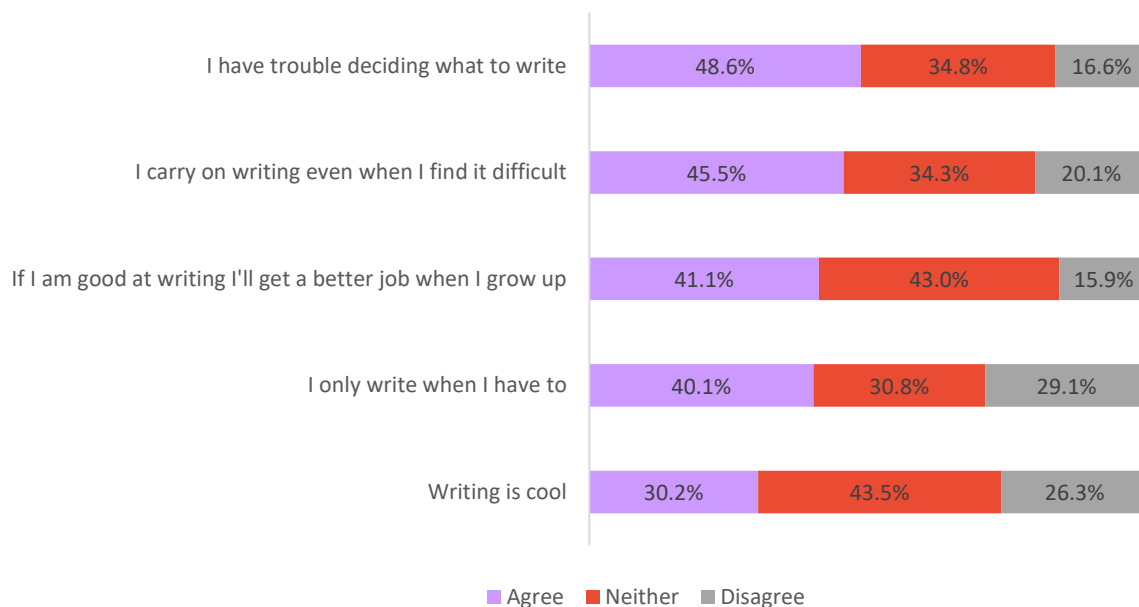


Table 3 shows that more girls than boys said that writing is cool and fewer said that they only write when they have to. However, more girls than boys said that they have trouble deciding what to write. Deciding what to write also appears to be more of an issue for the youngest age group, with more children aged 8 to 11 than those aged 16 to 18 saying this. By contrast, fewer children aged 8 to 11 said that they only write when they have to and more said that they persevere with their writing even it gets difficult, that writing is cool and that if they are good writer they will get a better job when they grow up than their older peers. Overall, there were fewer differences in how children and young people who receive FSMs responded compared with their non-FSM peers, with the exception of more FSM children and young people saying that they carry on writing when it is difficult compared with their non-FSM peers.

Table 3: Percentage agreement with writing attitude statements by gender, age group and FSM uptake of those aged 8 to 18

	I have trouble deciding what to write	I carry on writing even when it is difficult	If I am good at writing I will get a better job	I only write when I have to	Writing is cool
Boys	45.5%	44.9%	40.7%	48.2%	23.1%
Girls	51.3%	46.7%	41.8%	33.6%	35.7%
Aged 8 to 11	51.0%	63.6%	48.4%	33.0%	47.2%
Aged 11 to 14	48.6%	44.7%	40.5%	40.1%	27.1%
Aged 14 to 16	47.6%	33.2%	35.5%	46.8%	24.4%
Aged 16 to 18	43.5%	32.6%	42.4%	42.3%	36.9%
FSM	50.8%	49.6%	42.2%	40.1%	33.6%
Non-FSM	48.0%	44.3%	41.0%	40.5%	29.1%

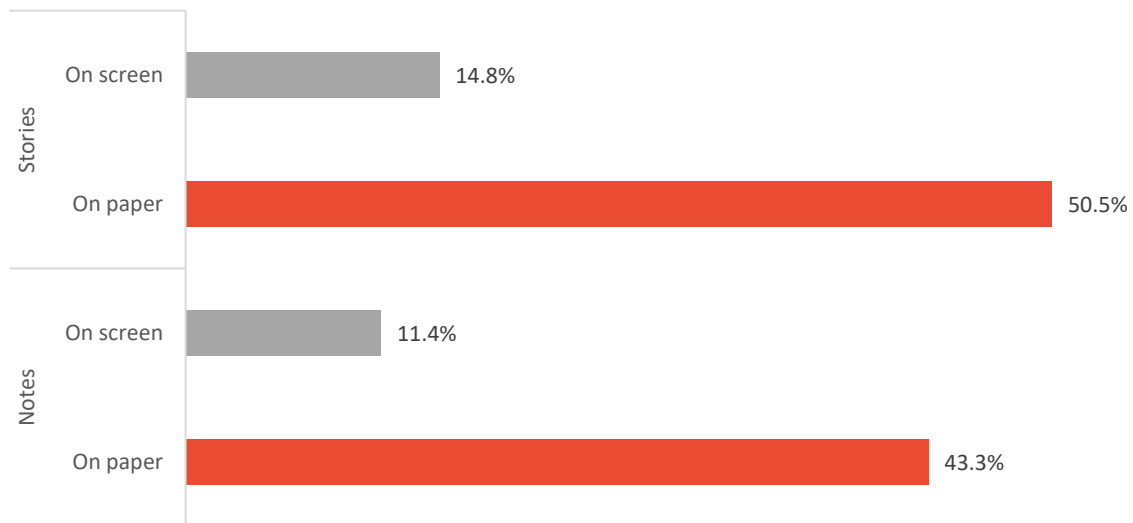
Writing formats

Children aged 5 to 8

Children aged 5 to 8 were asked whether they write certain formats either on paper or on a screen in their free time¹⁰. Figure 16 shows that 1 in 2 children in this age group said that they write stories on paper in their free time, while 1 in 7 also said that they write stories on a screen. Additionally, over 2 in 5 said that they write notes on paper, whereas only 1 in 8 of this age group said that they write notes on a screen.

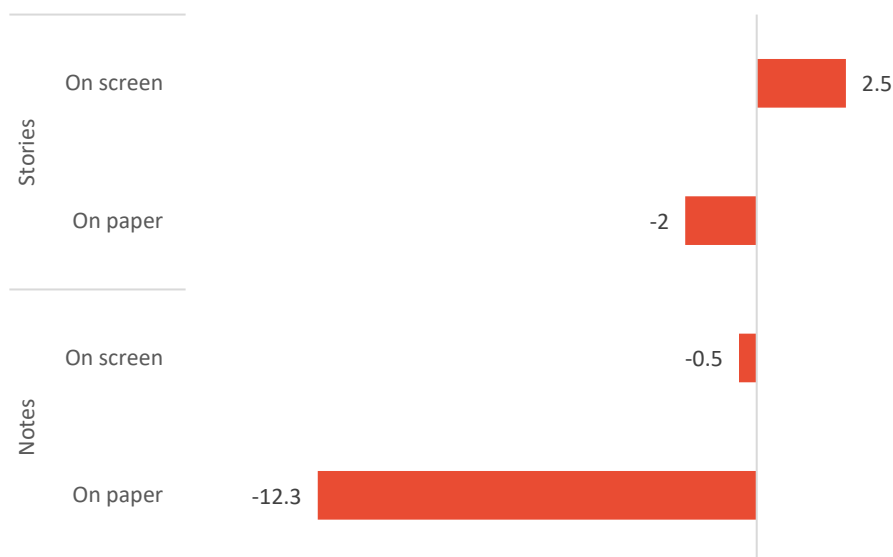
¹⁰ They were also asked about writing in a diary and writing letters but insight on these will be published in separate reports.

Figure 16: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 writing stories and notes in their free time either on a screen or on paper in 2022



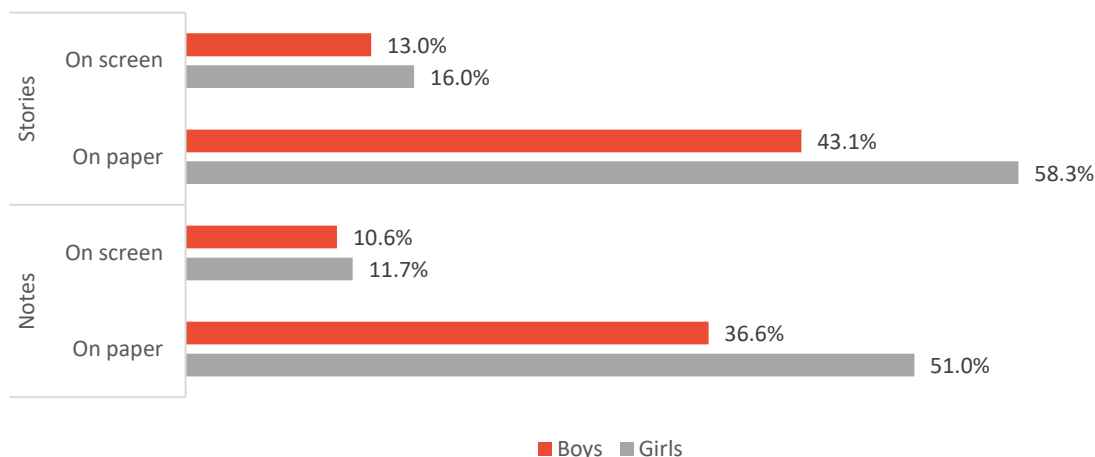
Fewer children aged 5 to 8 wrote stories on a screen or notes on paper in 2022 compared with 2021 (see Figure 17) but the biggest difference was in terms of writing notes on paper, which saw a drop of more than 12 percentage points over the past year. Slightly more children in this age group said in 2022 that they wrote stories on a screen compared with 2021.

Figure 17: Percentage-point difference in various formats being written either on a screen or on paper by children aged 5 to 8 between 2021 and 2022



For those aged 5 to 8 we can only break down formats being written in their free time by gender (see Figure 18). More girls than boys said that they write stories and notes on paper, whereas the gender difference in writing these formats on a screen is much less pronounced.

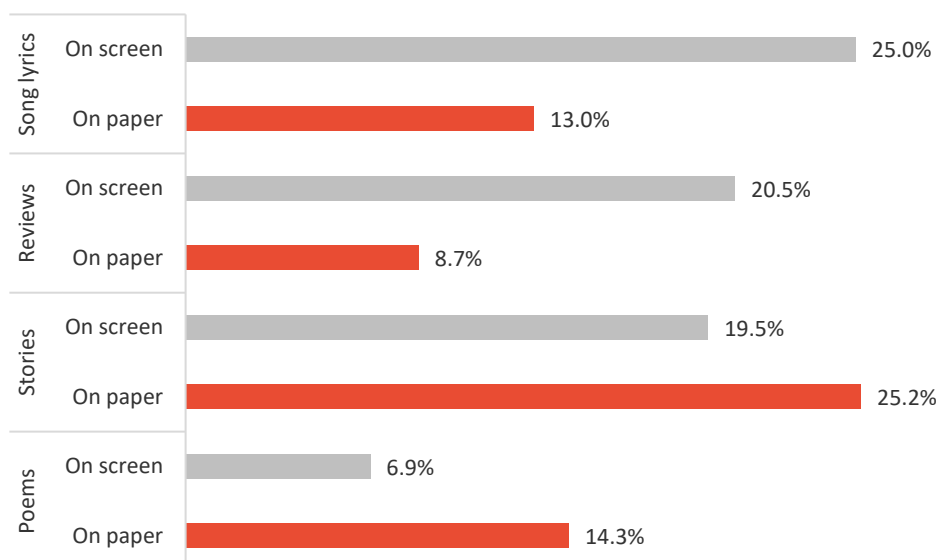
Figure 18: Percentage of children aged 5 to 8 writing stories and notes in their free time either on a screen or on paper in 2022 by gender



Children and young people aged 8 to 18

When asked about the writing they do in their spare time at least once a month¹¹, 1 in 4 children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they write song lyrics on a screen, with 1 in 5 also saying that they write reviews or fiction/short stories on a screen (see Figure 19). Fewer children and young people said that they write song lyrics on paper. However, 1 in 4 children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they write fiction/short stories on paper. Overall, poems were least frequently written by this cohort of children and young people, both on a screen or on paper.

Figure 19: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats in their free time either on a screen or on paper in 2022



¹¹ We also asked children and young people whether they write diaries or letters in their spare time. Findings on those formats of writing will be released in separate reports.

Some children and young people told us about their preference for writing on screens, with some saying that they found it easier than writing on paper:

I prefer to write on devices because it's easier to do so and my hands don't hurt as much and I feel like I'd get bored if I were to write on paper (Boy, Y9)

I usually write it on my phone or laptop because I can save it to an account without having to know where the paper is (Boy, Y8)

I prefer to write on [a] phone because it's easier and quicker (Girl, Y7)

It's really hard to write on paper because you will do a lot of changing and it takes longer but on devices you don't really need to run anything, you can just delete. And you also have auto-correct (Boy, Y7)

We also asked whether children and young people write a variety of exclusively on-screen formats. As Figure 20 shows, most children and young people say that they write personal/direct messages in their free time, followed by over 4 in 5 who say that they also write texts or other messages with family and friends while playing video games. Around 2 in 3 write emails and social media content in their free time, while only around 1 in 10 write blog/forum posts or podcasts in their spare time.

Figure 20: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various exclusively on-screen formats in their free time in 2022

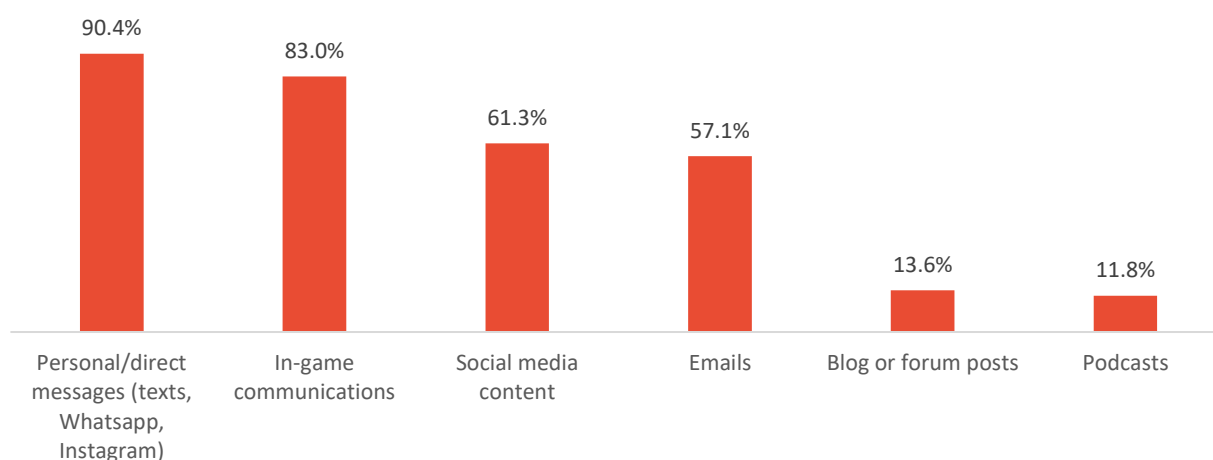


Figure 21 shows that in 2022, more children and young people aged 8 to 18 wrote various formats on a screen or on paper compared with the year before. In particular, more children and young people said in 2022 that they were writing reviews on paper, song lyrics on a screen, and poems on paper. However, far fewer children and young people wrote most of the exclusively on-screen formats in 2022, with emails being the biggest loser. Only blog/forum posts and podcasts showed a slight increase compared with the year before.

Figure 21: Percentage-point difference in various formats being written either on a screen or on paper between 2021 and 2022

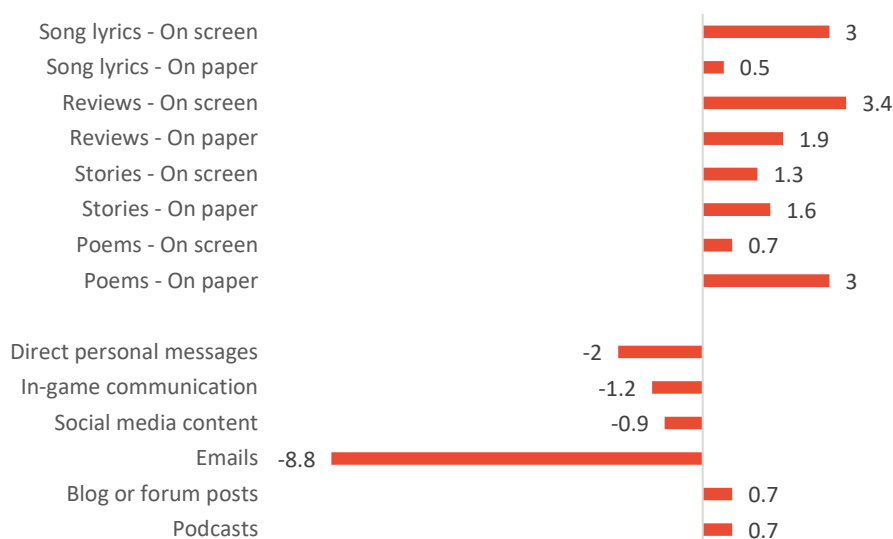


Table 4 shows that, across the board, more girls than boys said that they write any of the formats either on a screen or on paper in their free time. Similarly, more children aged 8 to 18 and those who receive FSMs said that they read these formats both on a screen or on paper than their older peers or those who don't receive FSMs.

Table 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats in their free time either on a screen or on paper in 2022 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

	Song lyrics		Reviews		Stories		Poems	
	On screen	On paper	On screen	On paper	On screen	On paper	On screen	On paper
Boys	23.1%	8.4%	19.5%	7.2%	15.5%	21.1%	5.3%	10.7%
Girls	27.1%	16.7%	21.1%	10.1%	21.4%	28.5%	7.9%	17.4%
Aged 8 to 11	34.3%	19.6%	25.9%	13.4%	23.8%	37.4%	12.1%	25.4%
Aged 11 to 14	26.1%	13.0%	20.2%	8.9%	19.7%	26.1%	6.2%	13.6%
Aged 14 to 16	18.1%	8.3%	17.3%	4.7%	15.6%	13.6%	5.2%	8.3%
Aged 16 to 18	13.4%	6.8%	17.9%	4.4%	14.2%	9.4%	6.2%	7.5%
FSM	33.4%	14.2%	24.1%	10.2%	23.0%	26.7%	9.7%	16.6%
Non-FSM	23.5%	12.5%	19.7%	8.2%	18.5%	24.4%	6.2%	13.4%

More girls than boys also said that they write personal/direct messages, emails, social media content and podcasts in their free time (see Table 5). Conversely, more boys than girls said that they write in-game communications, blog/forum posts and podcasts in their free time.

With the exception of podcasts and blog/forum posts, more young people aged 14 and older said that they write personal/direct messages, emails or social media content than their younger peers. In-game communications are most frequently written by those aged 11 to 14 and those aged 14 to 16, followed by those aged 8 to 11. Fewer young people aged 16 to 18 said that they write in-game communications in their free time.

Overall, more children and young people who don't receive FSMs said that they write personal/direct messages or emails than their peers who receive FSMs. In turn, slightly more children and young people who receive FSMs said that they write any of the other formats compared with their peers who don't receive FSMs.

Table 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various exclusively on-screen formats in their free time in 2022 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

	Personal / direct messages	Emails	Blog / forum posts	Social media content	Podcasts	In-game communications
Boys	88.1%	55.3%	14.1%	58.4%	13.9%	87.3%
Girls	92.6%	58.9%	12.7%	63.8%	9.6%	78.9%
Aged 8 to 11	67.9%	31.3%	15.6%	44.8%	14.4%	76.4%
Aged 11 to 14	94.0%	58.1%	13.3%	64.5%	11.5%	85.4%
Aged 14 to 16	95.9%	70.5%	12.8%	63.7%	10.1%	81.4%
Aged 16 to 18	96.8%	89.4%	14.8%	62.4%	11.7%	73.0%
FSM	87.3%	52.6%	16.3%	66.0%	14.2%	85.0%
Non-FSM	92.1%	59.7%	13.1%	61.0%	11.3%	82.8%

To sum up

While it is reassuring to see children and young people's enjoyment of writing and their writing frequency bouncing back a little after 2021's all-time low, it is still a concern that only just over 2 in 5 children enjoy writing and that fewer than 1 in 5 write regularly in their free time. Both these figures declined sharply five years ago and have not recovered. It is well documented that enjoyment of writing and regular writing can help improve children's writing attainment and their wellbeing, and our research during the first national lockdown in 2020 clearly demonstrated the sense of connection writing can provide. A concerted national effort to improve children's engagement with writing is needed.

The findings in this report clearly outline the barriers children and young people face when writing, which can be summarised as: lacking inspiration, lacking confidence in their writing ability, prioritising different activities, not having an appropriate environment, and limited opportunities for writing on a screen. Increased awareness of these barriers is enormously helpful for planning the ways we can overcome them. We have also been able to group together the reasons children and young people choose to write, which may help us in structuring approaches to writing that encompass many of their interests. Providing opportunities for a broad writing diet that includes writing for creativity, mindfulness, social connection and social change may be especially helpful in overcoming the barriers to writing outlined here.

Children and young people receiving free school meals are consistently more likely to enjoy writing than their more affluent peers. This challenges the trend we have become familiar with in terms of the education attainment gap. We want to understand this connection better and it is heartening to see that children receiving FSMs are just as likely to enjoy creative writing as their more affluent peers and even more likely to write for their wellbeing, social connection or social change. This delivers a clear mandate to provide more opportunities for children experiencing financial disadvantage to engage with writing in these ways.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic, it is clear that a focus on writing is required. Further, children and young people are clearly telling us why they might choose to engage in writing and some of the barriers they face when writing. It's now time to address them.

About the National Literacy Trust

Our charity is dedicated to improving the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of those who need it most, giving them the best possible chance of success in school, work and life. We run Literacy Hubs and campaigns in communities where low levels of literacy and social mobility are seriously impacting people's lives. We support schools and early years settings to deliver outstanding literacy provision, and we campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians, businesses and parents. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy and drive our interventions.

Literacy is a vital element of action against poverty and our work changes life stories.

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