

Explicit vs Metacognitive writing instruction: A teacher choices trial

Improving Sentence Writing in Year 3 and 4 - an EEF-Funded Trial for Primary Schools

School information sheet

This is an opportunity for primary schools to contribute to high-profile and nationally recognised Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)-funded research while receiving a £200 participation payment and ready-to-use materials that aim to improve writing instruction. The 12-week project provides a focus on re-teaching sentence combining, helping teachers address writing gaps before they become embedded later in Key Stage 2.

What are the approaches about?

This trial will test two different approaches to **re-teaching sentence-combining** (the process of joining shorter sentences together): using **explicit instruction** or **metacognitive strategies**. Explicit instruction helps pupils master sentence-combining techniques through clear modelling and structured practice. Metacognitive strategies help pupils think about their sentence-combining choices and improve how they plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing.

Why sentence combining?

Teaching sentence-combining can help pupils improve their confidence and fluency in writing and is recommended in the Department for Education's (DfE) 2025 national writing framework. However, there is limited evidence on whether it is most effective to re-teach it via structured explicit instruction or using metacognitive strategies.

Why should my school take part?

This is your opportunity to:

- contribute to **high-quality, nationally recognised EEF-funded research**
- be part of research that values and tests **real classroom practice**
- support staff to take part in **practical and relevant research**
- help prevent writing difficulties becoming embedded later in KS2
- receive **£200 overall** as a thank you for supporting data collection activities

What does the evaluation involve?

This is a randomised controlled trial (RCT), meaning that within each participating school, one Year 3 class and one Year 4 class will each be randomly allocated to a different approach (explicit or metacognitive writing instruction). Classes will deliver their approach in at least three 15-25-minute re-teaching sessions per week over a 12-week period (January-April 2027), using guidance materials provided by the evaluation team.

The evaluation activities include:

- Distributing parent information and opt-out forms
- Schools sharing pupil and staff data (see the [privacy notice](#) for what will be shared and why)
- All Year 3 and 4 pupils in the participating class taking part in a 15-20-minute writing task, overseen by their teacher (baseline testing)
- Participating Year 3 and 4 teachers completing 2-3-minute survey every two weeks during delivery
- All Year 3 and 4 pupils taking part in a 30-minute writing task after delivery finishes, overseen by their teacher (endline testing)

Ten schools will be invited to take part in in-person case study visits. This includes a researcher observing two sessions during the visit (one on explicit instruction and the other

on metacognitive strategies) and interviewing observed teachers. Teachers from non-case study schools may also be invited to do an online group discussion with other teachers.

Participation by teachers is voluntary, and teachers may withdraw from the trial and evaluation activities at any time if they wish to do so.

Who can take part?

The trial is open to state primary schools across England who:

- have at least 20 pupils in all Year 3 and 4 classes
- are not participating in another Year 3 and 4 literacy project funded by the EEF

In schools with more than one Year 3 and 4 class, one class will be randomly selected to participate in the research.

Are there any costs involved?

Participating schools will receive an implementation guide to help them deliver sessions free of charge. As a thank you for overseeing testing and for supporting the evaluation, schools will also receive £100 after baseline and £100 after endline testing.

Schools that host an in-person visit by the evaluation team will receive a separate thank-you payment of £100 following completion of the visit.

What is the timeline for this project?

Summer term 2026	Schools recruited and onboarded onto the trial
Autumn term 2026	Schools oversee Year 3 and Year 4 pupils completing a writing task (baseline testing)
Autumn term 2026	Year 3 and Year 4 classes randomly allocated to 1. Metacognitive group or 2. Explicit instruction group. Year 3 and Year 4 classes in each school are allocated to a different approach
Spring term 2027	£100 payment to schools
Spring Term 2027	Year 3 and Year 4 classes implement their allocated approach for 12 weeks
Summer Term 2027	Schools oversee Year 3 and Year 4 pupils completing a writing task (endline testing)
Summer Term 2027	£100 payment to schools
Autumn Term 2027	Evaluation findings published

Who is running the trial?

This study is funded by the EEF. The evaluation is being carried out by **Oxford MeasurEd** and **Navigator Insight** (formerly Qa Research). Oxford MeasurEd is responsible for trial design, analysis, reporting, and research with teachers. Navigator Insight oversees school recruitment and coordinating testing in schools.

How will data be used?

Oxford MeasurEd and Navigator Insight will treat all data securely, confidentially, and in accordance with data protection law. Personal data will be collected and used to conduct the evaluation, with pseudonymised data being shared for archiving and further research at the end of the project. Your school, staff, and pupils will not be identified in any report arising from the research. For further information, see the privacy notice for the evaluation which is available [here](#).

Interested in participating?

Questions about the approaches and the evaluation? Please contact the Oxford MeasurEd team at:
Teacher.choices-evaluation@oxfordmeasured.co.uk

Questions about school recruitment and baseline and endline testing? Please contact a member of the Navigator Insights team at:
teacherchoices@navigator-insight.co.uk

Register your interest [here](#)