# Write less but say more: developing literacy strategies through pupil consultation to improve written answers in GCSE History

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A Research & Development Project Submitted for the MSc in Learning & Teaching 2019

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# Write less but say more: developing literacy strategies through pupil consultation to improve written answers in GCSE History


## Abstract

This study aimed to improve the written answers of students in GCSE History, by enabling them to 'write less but say more'. The intention was to achieve this more effective way of writing by working collaboratively with students in order to develop effective literacy strategies across three years of GCSE study. There was also particular focus on high attaining students who have historically underachieved in my school.

The literature review investigated challenges for high attainers, literacy strategies in history lessons and using pupil consultation. This was followed by an initial investigation into the types of literacy and writing tasks done in different curriculum areas of the school and currently in history lessons. These elements were then combined in order to develop action research cycles using a range of interventions designed to help students develop their written answers. Throughout the project, student feedback, progress and opinion were used to guide the direction and nature of the interventions.

The project resulted in an improvement in both written responses and student confidence with writing. It also raised the complex emotional relationship between students and their written work which plays an important role in student success and failure in GCSE History.

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**List of Abbreviations**

GCSE- General Certificate of Secondary Education

HPA- high prior attaining students. My current school uses a combination of Primary school SAT scores, CAT scores taken in Year 7 and Key Stage 3 in school assessment data to organise students into high, medium and low bands.

MPA- medium prior attaining students.

LPA- low prior attaining students.

AQA- Assessment and Qualifications Alliance

PEE- point, evidence, explain: a commonly taught paragraph structure

EAL- students with English as an additional Language

PP- Pupil Premium students

SEN- students with special education needs

CAP- common assessment point: the term used for summative assessments in my school

NEU- National Education Union

**Introduction: School context and project rationale**

Recent GCSE reforms have coincided with a decline in results at my school, a secondary academy in England, with fewer students achieving a pass in GCSE History as well as fewer students achieving the top grades. The new GCSEs present multiple difficulties to students, requiring increased historical knowledge coupled with using that knowledge in a structured, ordered way within the time constraints of a formal exam. Reflecting on the last two years of teaching the new GCSE History course and talking to colleagues it is possible to highlight some initial problems which may explain why many students are failing to both pass and achieve the highest grades in the new GCSE History examinations. These are difficulties are as follows:

1) Students do not answer all of the questions in the examination because they run out of time
2) Students write too much for low mark questions and not enough for high mark questions
3) Students have lots of own knowledge about a topic but struggle to deploy this effectively
4) Students pick GCSE History because they enjoyed it in Key Stage Two and Key Stage Three but when they find the written work challenging at Key Stage Four they give up

All of these issues are focused on how students approach their written History work. However, writing is not an isolated, stand-alone activity and whilst all of these issues relate to writing, they implicate factors relating to pupil motivation. Therefore, it is important to recognise that students come to History lessons and Historical writing with different needs and desires. This means that consultation with pupils about their experiences and perception is a vital part of addressing these challenges. As such, this project will focus on using literacy strategies to

improve the quality of students' written answers, with the ultimate aim being for students to write in a more concise, question focused way within the boundary of time constraints. Given the low numbers of students achieving top grades in my school, the project will also have a particular focus on improving the written answers of those students with high previous attainment (HPA) as this is one cohort of students targeted by my school this academic year (2018/19). In particular, the school is concerned with improving the top grades of previously high achieving boys, as this was a group highlighted in the school's 2018 Ofsted inspection as not currently reaching their full potential.[1] These high prior attaining students have perhaps previously been forgotten in nationwide and school specific programmes which have tended to focus on improving the results of other priority groups. Therefore, it seems pertinent to focus this project on helping those with the highest target grades, whether boys or girls, to fulfil their potential by improving the way they write answers in History examinations.

There is significant literature available regarding developing and improving general literacy strategies from educational authors such as Didau (2014) as well as those such as Counsell (2004) and Caroll (2016) who have focused specifically on historical writing. These will feed into the action taken during the project. Furthermore, the interventions taken will also be informed by pupil consultation within History classes. This is an important aspect of the project because there is significant literature surrounding the benefits of pupils driving the way they learn in the classroom. For example, McIntyre and Rudduck stated that 'what schools do for pupils can be significantly enhanced through listening to pupil voices…if these voices influence what happens in the classroom' (2007: 25) and Younger et al have written about students wanting to change their learning patterns but 'not knowing how to' (2005: 9-10). As such, I am keen to develop literacy strategies in partnership with the students. I want to encourage them to share their ideas with me and to have an input into the design of the scheme

[1] The name of the school has been removed to protect anonymity.

of work. A key motivation for this to be a driver in my project is that many of the students I teach appear to be displaying traits of learned helplessness (Seligman and Maier, 1976), believing themselves to be unable to change the outcome of their school experience. This has resulted in many students appearing to give up during the GCSE History course. My hypothesis is that by putting on overt focus on writing and literacy by having students as active participants who reflect on their own work, as well as suggesting and trying out potential improvements, will cause their work to improve alongside whatever the literacy solutions are put in place.

## Literature review

Drawing on my contextual rationale I formulated the following questions to structure my review of the literature:

1) What challenges do students with high previous attainment face at secondary school?
2) What challenges do students with high previous attainment face in GCSE History?
3) What might be effective literacy strategies for improving writing in GCSE History?
4) What might be effective literacy strategies for improving the writing of high attaining pupils?
5) What might be the benefits be of pupil consultation to design literacy interventions in GCSE History?

In order to concisely investigate these questions, the literature review will be broken into three clear sections:

1) Challenges for high attainers: in secondary school and in History
2) Literacy and writing strategies: in History and for high attainers
3) The benefits and drawbacks of using pupil consultation in schools

**Challenges for high attainers: in secondary school and in History**

When writing her Teaching History article 'History as a foreign language', Simmonds observed that 'high attaining students had the tendency to waffle' (2016:41). As such, one of the clear challenges for high attaining students in History is their tendency to overwrite an answer. There is an inclination amongst students to write everything they know in relation to a topic and to dance around the question posed, when instead good historical writing in an exam context requires knowledge to be deployed concisely to answer the question. Simmonds linked this to Orwell's observation that formal writing doesn't necessarily mean trying to 'sound clever' and writers should 'never use a long word where a short one will do' (2013:19). As such, it seems that one of the problems high attaining students are faced with in historical writing is understanding what is required in their writing in order to achieve highly. Therefore, the title of this project which states students should 'write less but say more' seems perfectly aimed at the challenges of many high attaining students in historical writing.

In 2006, the Historical Association published an edition of Teaching History focused solely on high attainers in History. This was thirteen years ago and as such, some of the content is out of date, for example, much of the content uses the label 'gifted and talented' to describe students, a term no longer widely used in English secondary schools. Nevertheless, this editions' editorial, written by Wooley and McConnell raises some important issues for high attainers in the study of History in England's secondary schools. Firstly, who belongs to the category most able? This article describes it as being the top 7% (2006:2). However, this will vary between schools as there is no nationally used method across English schools for identifying the most able students. Wooley and McConnell (2006) also point out that ultimately teaching able students well, means teaching all students well. This principle is also often applied to the teaching of other groups of students in schools, such as those who are Pupil Premium. This therefore seems a sensible and pragmatic approach to planning the

interventions in this project. The editorial also highlights the teaching of most able students is often seen by classroom practitioners as being something that is done by schools working with external agencies, and so these students are pushed to achieve outside their classrooms rather than by their schools and teachers (2006). Therefore, this edition of Teaching History champions that great History teaching can take place within the classroom for high achieving students and others (2006). This also links to the fundamental aim of this project which is for all students' written answers to improve alongside a specific improvement for high attainers. This links to two common issues for the most able students, which is that often they are not given as much attention by teachers as low attaining students as well as that the opinions and ideas of able students are often not listened to in schools (Ofsted, 2013). As such, one of the aims of this project will be to give specific focus to the most able and to incorporate their voice into the literacy and writing of their History classrooms which can so often be overlooked by their teachers.

Whilst this study is not specifically concerned with gender, the data from the 2018 internal and external GCSE level examinations at my school reveals a clear gap between the achievement of high attaining male and female students. Boys performed less well across all five GCSE History classes in the 2018 Year 11 cohort. As such, a word must be said with regards to gender and being a high achiever in an English secondary school. When writing about 'raising boys' achievement', Younger et al noted that it is a common theme amongst high achieving boys to hold something of an 'arrogant…self-belief in their own ability' and a refusal to accept responsibility for their underachievement (2005:6-7). This is an important issue to raise because the challenges of written responses in History examinations for high attaining boys may be different to those of high attaining girls. Younger et al acknowledge that there are high attaining boys who acknowledge the importance of hard work, but that the culture of young men can often centre on the 'avoidance of failure' (2005:25). Namely that if

they do not try, they cannot be seen to fail. This, combined with the issue raised by a chapter in 'Failing Boys', edited by Epstein et al, which states that 'academic achievement has been feminine for a long time' (1998:29) and Francis' statement in 'Boys, Girls and Achievement' that the amount of focus given by teachers to helping boys improve their level of achievement 'is often at the expense of the girls' (2000:138) highlights that within the world of high achievers at secondary school there exist important distinctions and challenges between the genders.

As such, this project will need to give some consideration to the gender of those taking part in the investigation and how this may impact their attitude towards the literacy interventions. For example, Younger et al highlight that some boys show a 'lack of responsibility for their own learning' and instead believe it to be the 'teacher's responsibility' to get them good results (2005: 11). Much of the literature surrounding the differences between the genders is from the 1990s or 2000s and so is not completely up to date. Therefore, when I raised the possibility of this attitude existing amongst students at my school during a professional development session, many colleagues agreed it existed and others vehemently challenged it, saying this was an old-fashioned idea that no longer existed amongst boys. Nevertheless, if this lack of responsibility does exist amongst the young men in my classes, this may result in a lack of acceptance amongst the pupils of the student led approach which I am championing for this project. On the other hand, if this attitude is present, it also highlights the need for students to understand their own role in their learning and places importance on driving their learning forward. This makes pupil consultation a particularly valid design aspect in the approach of this project as previously high attaining boys will be encouraged to see the role they can play in driving improvements in their written work in History.

The final point in relation to the difficulties faced by high attaining students in History, arises following the 2018 summer exam season. AQA, the exam board taught for GCSE History at

my school, published a report offering some insight into the successes and challenges faced by students in the exams. A number of their observations match the problems outlined in my introduction and seem particularly relevant for students categorised as potential high achievers. This shows that the problems faced by my students are also problems reflected in the national picture. One of the observations raised in the AQA report (2019) is that students write far too much for the 4-mark questions in the exam. Throughout a number of question types, the exam board also highlights students' difficulties to match their extensive own knowledge to the specificity of the question posed. For example, an 8-mark question on the exam asks students to compare separate time eras for similarities. However, AQA's report highlights that many students also wrote about differences. Whilst giving a balanced answer may be the mark of a high achieving and insightful historian, it will earn such students no credit in this instance as they have not engaged with the key instruction words of the question (2018). There may an argument that emphasising the guidance given by the exam board rather than academic literature will result in this project creating interventions which teach students to pass the exam rather than develop as historical writers. I acknowledge that this is a concern, however given that this project was born from the problem of low academic achievement at GCSE, it seems that framing this project as helping students to understand and use the features of good written answers, rather than hoop jumping, at least partly resolves this difficulty.

AQA also acknowledged that the time requirements of both GCSE History exams in the summer exam season of 2018 were very tight. As such, in January 2019, AQA changed both exams to be 2 hours in length. Their rationale for this change was 'to give students more reading and thinking time' and that 'guidance on how much time students should write for each question type hasn't changed' (2019). Therefore, the idea of this project being to develop students' abilities to write less but say more is clearly a pertinent aim. This is for all students,

but particularly high achievers who have retained extensive own knowledge but who need to ensure they use it in a concise manner in their writing.

Overall, there are a variety of challenges high attainers face at school including their historical writing. Often the needs of these students are overlooked as other priority groups capture the teacher's attention, giving the pupil consultation aspect of this project pertinence. This is particularly true of boys who can be both overly confident about their work and reliant on the teacher to guide their achievement. This highlights that the project's analysis and conclusions may benefit by considering differences of gender despite a move in more recent literature away from this discussion. Furthermore, high attaining students often have a wealth of contextual knowledge and ideas about the past, but they are challenged when it comes to writing succinctly to the exact requirements of the question in the time provided. Therefore, the interventions put into place as part of this project will need to hold all of these elements in balance in order for all high attainers to achieve their potential in GCSE History.

**Literacy and writing strategies: in History and for high attainers**

The History education community has written extensively with regards to improving students written answers. This is often targeted at improving students' writing concerning a particular historical concept, such as using historical sources or causation. There is much to be drawn from this historically focused literature, regarding general literacy and writing strategies which may be of benefit to students, especially those aspiring to achieve a top grade.

Whilst my investigation will focus on GCSE level students, Christine Counsell's 2004 work on 'Analytical and discursive writing at Key Stage Three' is a useful starting point for a discussion regarding what is required when teachers ask students to put historical ideas onto the page. Counsell stated that there are 'several stages' between introducing students to historical information and asking them to write extended prose. These are as follows (i)

memory and concentration, (ii) relevance and selection, (iii) sorting, (iv) general and particular and (v) the language of discourse (2004: 15-16). If these are not recognised and taught, low attainment due to poor historical writing can become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' (2004:10). Counsell challenged a number of typical classroom strategies for improving writing, such as constantly using writing as a 'massive task at the end of a [lesson] sequence' (2004:35). Most importantly, Counsell asserts that when planning literacy strategies to use in History lessons, the chosen strategies must 'open up students' thinking' not 'close thinking down' (2015:40). Whilst Counsell's ideas are now over ten years old and aimed at writing at Key Stage Three, they form the foundation of tasks which will be relevant to teaching GCSE students.

A key piece of practitioner research by Simmonds focused on the 'painfully dull' writing of her Year 11 class (2016: 35). Her class had mastered the school wide literacy policy of a PEE (point, evidence, explain) paragraph, but this had resulted in students approaching writing in History as if they were writing in English (2016). This is a problem I am familiar with in GCSE History, especially when it comes to source and interpretation analysis which students often treat as an English exercise. Simmonds' (2016) highlighted three main target areas for her students, all of which appear relevant to the improvements required by my current GCSE historians. Simmonds, drawing on genre theory, wanted students' writing to sound more formal, be less rushed and more thought through and for them to stop wasting time and get straight to the point (2016: 38). All of which mirror the problems I have identified in my own students' writing. Simmonds drew some useful conclusions from her interventions which seem particularly pertinent to the design of my investigation. Firstly, she states the importance of consciously informing pupils that the purpose of the task was to improve their historical writing as opposed to hoping they absorb improved writing skills through 'osmosis' (2016: 40). This will also be one of the core principles of my intervention, as students need to understand both the purpose of the task to improve their literacy and why they are being

encouraged to approach their writing in a particular way. This is also connected to Simmonds' (2016) second finding, that some of her students were initially resistant to carrying out literacy tasks in History lessons, particularly as her intervention took place in Year 11 when her students were feeling the pressure of looming final exams. This therefore suggests my intervention should involve younger GCSE students which will provide ample time for good historical writing habits to be formed well ahead of any formal examination.

Didau's writing on literacy, much like Counsell, also focuses on the 'secret of making the implicit explicit' (2014:1) and many of the ideas he draws out mirror those of Counsell (2004) and Simmonds (2016). He emphasises that for most teaching practitioners, literacy teaching is done 'unthinkingly' (2014:1). This matches to Simmonds' (2016) argument that the teacher must always share with students their thinking and rationale behind teaching literacy in History. Didau argues there is a need for 'high impact, low effort' literacy in subject specific classrooms (2014:5). This connects to the project title of 'writing less but saying more' which requires effort to be rechannelled by students. Didau (2014) argues that effective talk is one of the main requirements for effective writing. He argues passionately for the importance of good oracy in lessons stating, 'it is much easier to write something down if you've already said it' (2014:71) and 'if you can say it you can write it' (2014:83). This is an idea also championed by Corbett and Strong (2011) throughout Primary School teaching. Although Didau did not always find this an easy task in his own lessons as later, when discussing good writing practice, he described his frustration at pupils 'capable of uttering profound thoughts' but who 'seemed unable to commit them to paper' (2014:86). This phenomenon of students who can talk about their ideas but not write about them is one which classroom teachers, encounter on a regular basis from students with a range of backgrounds and abilities. Therefore, the interventions in this project will contain an element of talking to improve writing but it will need clear steps for getting thoughts from students' mouths on to paper, as

well as making the process and purpose of writing more explicit for students, something both Counsell (2004) and Didau (2014) agree on.

Bakalis (2016) formed a similar argument to Woodcock (2005) when it came to the 'direct teaching of paragraph cohesion' (2016:18). She also promoted the notion that writing is 'part of the process of…thinking historically' and is not just a bolt on skill (2016:18). She also acknowledged the difficulties students and teachers face with talking for writing tasks, explaining that 'writing is not the same as speaking' but that talking is an important step to help rehearse thinking before getting ideas on to the page (2016:19). Much like Woodcock (2005), Bakalis argues that 'sometimes, it is only through writing that pupils work out what they think and know' (2016:19). Like Counsell (2004), Bakalis (2016) also challenges a common teaching habit of extended writing activities being stuck on to the end of lessons and lesson sequences rather than being an integrated lesson activity. Like other authors of issues around historical literacy, Bakalis also promoted the importance of teaching essay writing explicitly and in order to make students more reflective of their process (2016:26).

Foster and Gadd (2013), argued that students faced a twin challenge of literacy and historical thinking in relation to writing about evidence. They argue that traditional guidance about structure, like PEE paragraphs, did nothing to address the students' lack of criteria for choosing evidence to support their ideas (2013:25). This scepticism regarding the utility of PEE paragraphs is also raised by Simmonds (2016:38). They all draw on the work of Evans and Pate (2007) which challenged teachers over reliance on writing frames in History lessons. They drew similar conclusions, stating it must not be assumed that low prior attainers need writing frames and high prior attainers do not (2007:28). They argue for scaffolding decisions to be made based on the needs of individual students (2007:28). Linking back to Didau's difficulties regarding talking for writing, Evans and Pate acknowledge that the 'oral and written word are inextricably linked' but that it is not always easy for students to move from

one to the other and that is why writing frames can be useful tools (2007:24). However, they emphasise the importance of scaffolding being used through a process of observation, analysis and the teacher really knowing their students' as individuals. This also provides a helpful reminder for the design of my project which will involve student consultation and an element of student choice so that pupils do not feel forced into using scaffolding that does not benefit them.

Didau (2014) goes on to champion a number of relevant and useful strategies for supporting better writing. The idea of nomilisation, using nouns rather than verbs to make writing more concise, is one in particular which has been taken and championed in the field of historical teaching by James Carroll (2016). Caroll focuses on causal writing but with relevance for general literacy strategies. Caroll's 2016 article is also written with regards to the sophistication required for A level writing. However, given that the focus of my intervention will be enabling students to access the highest GCSE grades, it seems logical that a Grade 9 student in the new, more rigorous GCSEs should be writing using some of the literacy and historical skills required at A level. Caroll is a champion of the process of nomilisation, as he was keen for his student's essays to read more like the work of historians (2016:23). Nomilisation was a process also used by both Didau (2014) and Simmonds (2106) to achieve the same end, encouraging students to make their written points more concise. The second aspect Caroll (2016) champions to improve his A level students' writing is reading more academic History. Didau (2014) also supports this, arguing if students know how the experts speak and write, they can model their own speech and writing in this style. This has long been a practice promoted at A level, but it seems it may also need to be introduced to high attainers at GCSE in order to access the top grades of 7, 8 and 9.

Woodcock (2005) wrote about the relationship between students' vocabulary and their ability to express historical concepts. Woodcock argued that introducing students to new vocabulary

would help them to both express and understand more complex historical ideas (2005:5). In doing so he questioned in part the ideas of Didau (2014) and Corbett (2011), namely that if you can say something you can write something (2014:71). Woodcock stated that the 'process of writing leads to more analytical ways of thinking' (2005:6) and that a 'difficulty with historical writing is a difficulty with History itself' (2005:6). He used word mats in History lessons for students of all ages and abilities to enable them to develop and articulate new ideas about the past. Woodcock also challenges the notion of 'History Channel' historians who 'tell' about the past, rather than provide 'explanation' (2005:9). This may also link back to my initial problem regarding students who enjoy History lower down the Key Stages where 'telling' about the past might be more commonplace but who then find the explanation required at the top level of GCSE to be both unexpected and challenging. Therefore, finding themselves being tempted to give up in History lessons.

Overall, drawing conclusions with regards to effective historical literacy and writing approaches for all students including those who are high attaining, involves some contradicting ideas but also some insightful findings. Scaffolding it seems, is not just for lower attaining students, but it cannot be used in a formulaic, recipe like way. In order for it to take effect, scaffolding must be used with the precise needs of the individual students at its core (Evans and Pate, 2007). It also appears, that good historical literacy will not happen overnight and implementing late stage interventions with Year 11 will reap little reward on results day (Simmonds, 2016). It is much better to incorporate good writing and literacy strategies through historical learning. Therefore, strategies such as reading the work of historians and removing long writing as a bolt on at the end of a lesson is something which should happen across secondary History teaching (Counsell, 2004). It is also clear that whilst there is some credence to the idea that 'if you can talk about it, you can write about it'(Woodcock, 2014:71), the practice of going from talking to writing is a complex one and needs careful consideration.

Finally, a clear commonality to take away from across the literature in order to drive this project, is that the more explicit the sharing of the rationale behind the intervention with the students, the more successful they will be. Osmosis is not an effective teaching tool (Simmonds, 2016). Whilst it will not be possible to use all of the strategies suggested in the literature during this project (further discussion on the choices made will be dealt with in the methodology section) the literature has served as a helpful starting point with which to collate a range of ideas to present to students and use during the intervention.

**The benefits of pupil consultation**

The literature so far has highlighted the importance of sharing with students the rationale and purpose of tasks and of ensuring learners are included in the decision making and thought processes of the classroom. Doing so will help students to explicitly understand the purpose and processes of writing in History. As such, there is a range of literature available to teachers wanting to include pupil voice and consultation in their institutions and classrooms. In their work 'Improving learning through consulting pupils', McIntyre and Rudduck (2007) have provided the groundwork for any teacher wanting to incorporate pupil feedback. They raise a number of ideas and benefits which explain why I am so keen to use pupil consultation as the driving force in the direction of the literacy strategies deployed in my project. Firstly, they emphasise how many teachers are impressed by 'how insightful students can be' (2007:145). This is particularly relevant to my project because my curriculum area has been trying to broach the issue of falling results for a number of years using teachers led ideas to drive the approaches. We need to readjust our thinking to see that the students are at the centre of the issue and therefore are the centre of the solution. McIntyre and Rudduck also state that consulting with students can develop their capacity to reflect and think about their own learning (2007). Enabling students to have an awareness of how they benefit from different learning and teaching techniques is important in the quest for independent learners. This is

particularly relevant for my setting as many students appear to be quite helpless when faced with a written task at GCSE level.

The benefits of pupil consultation are not just personal to the learner. McIntyre and Rudduck (2007) also champion that schools who consult pupils effectively, improve, not only teaching and learning, but also citizenship amongst pupils and 'encourage pupils to develop skills of diplomacy and of exercising political influence' (2007:144). As such, I am keen to use pupil consultation both for the benefits it might bring to learners in my classroom, but also to benefit other students in both the schools' historical and wider community.

Despite these plentiful benefits relating to pupil consultation, McIntyre and Rudduck (2007) also voice notes of caution. They warn that pupil consultation can only bring about these positive changes when it is carried out in an effective manner. They remind that samples of students need to be chosen carefully and it is often students who have been unsuccessful at school who teachers can learn most from (2007). This may seem at odds with the focus of my project being high attainers, however given that many of these high attainers are not meeting their full potential, the students included in my project do fit this category. They also emphasise that teachers must actually take on board what students say, otherwise pupil consultation can do the opposite of what has been intended (2007). This could lead to 'disillusionment' (2007:35). As such, my aim to use pupil consultation to drive the literacy strategies appears to be a sound one, but I must remain vigilant during the planning and implementation of the project to ensure that I am still listening to the feedback given by students and using it in the way which means their voices have been heard.

Tied together with my project's focus on pupil consultation is its implementation through cycles of action research. Whilst this will be discussed further in the methodology section, the work of John Elliott in 'Action Research for Educational Change' (1991) is pertinent to mention in conjunction with using pupil consultation. This is because action research forms a

process of 'continuing reflection' (1991:50). Therefore, the process of action research which involves redrafting and reforming classroom practice also means that pupil input can be reassessed throughout the project in a productive way which may not be as possible in other project designs. It is important that my project will combine pupil consultation and action research in a way that will enable students to input at all stages of the intervention and play a part in feeding into the subsequent stages of the project.

Overall, there are many benefits to incorporating student ideas into my interventions, but I will need to ensure this is carried out in a careful, inclusive way, that listens to the voices of students. I will also need to consider carefully how I gather my student feedback and who I choose to gather feedback from. All of these matters will have consequences which will impact the effectiveness of my intervention as well as the engagement and enjoyment of History for my students. By using action research, I will be able to regularly reflect on the feedback gleaned by consulting with my pupils and take immediate action to steer the course of the project. The intention is for this to allow students to see that their ideas and feedback are being incorporated and valued and this will motivate their engagement with both literacy and History at GCSE level.

**Principles drawn from the Literature to guide the intervention**

Having accessed a variety of literature relating to the different elements of my project, I am able to return to my initial problems and research questions in order to reflect on the key principles I will use in the design of my project. These are outlined below:

**Principle 1:** To provide often neglected higher attainers with tools and strategies for writing without disadvantaging others.

**Principle 2:** In meeting the content demands of the new GCSE, put an emphasis on enabling students to write in a focused and concise manner.

**Principle 3:** To provide students with a range of strategies and tools they can use in order to develop their historical writing.

**Principle 4:** Closely consult with the students throughout the process as way of including the disengaged and provide students with a sense of ownership in the school environment.

## Methodology and intervention design

### Initial research phase: aim

My in-school project began with an initial research phase, the main body of which was carried out in the November and December term of 2018. The main purpose of this phase was to discuss current practice around the school with regards to literacy and writing at GCSE level. I held these discussions with my Key Stage Four classes, made up of two classes of Year 9, one Year 10 and one Year 11. In total there were 103 students between the ages of 13 and 16 who took part in this initial research phase, as well as with colleagues both inside the History department and across the wider school. The intention for this was to establish a base line position on current literacy strategies and attitudes to writing before beginning the intervention stage in January 2019.

### Initial research phase: research methods

In order to carry out this initial research, I chose to do a combination of interviews and questionnaires because a key aspect of the project is pupil consultation. However, the review of the literature regarding pupil consultation had raised a number of areas of caution, so my intention was to both gather the baseline data, but also iron out any issues with data collection methods before my intervention began. Therefore, I designed a questionnaire, trying to keep it as short as possible since time in lessons, particularly at GCSE level is precious. Following Younger et al's (2005) suggestion that boys might not always accept responsibility for their

own learning, I was keen to understand my students' opinions and attitudes towards writing in History lessons at GCSE level. The questionnaire involved five questions focused on students' confidence when tackling written answers in GCSE History. Following the guidance given by Cohen et al (2003), a mixture of Likert scales and free text were used in order to provide data for student perspectives but also insight into pupil's opinions (see Appendix A for a full list of questions). The third question asked what strategies students might like to try in History in order to improve their writing, the results of this initial enquiry would then be used to outline the initial intervention cycle. I collated a range of strategies to present to students based on my reading of the literature. There were some ideas I chose to leave out, such as nomilisation, because I believed them to be too complicated to present to students in this format. I kept the strategies high level at this stage as I wanted to use the data gathered from this questionnaire as a guiding tool to design the interventions at a later stage. Students were presented with the list below and asked to tick as many as they would like to try:

**Figure 1: question three of initial student questionnaire**

| |
|---|
| Debates/discussions |
| Role plays/acting |
| Drawing pictures to explain ideas |
| Making diagrams to explain ideas |
| Starting sentences/writing frames |
| Analysing example answers |
| Marking each other's work |
| Your teacher to write exam answers when you do and share their writing |
| Guided marking of your own work |
| Time to talk your answers through before you write |

| |
|---|
| Taking longer in lessons to break down exactly what sentences and paragraphs should look like |
| Having time to re-write answers to improve them |
| Doing timed tasks so you know exactly how long to spend writing an answer |
| Help planning your answer and choosing information before you start writing |
| Other, please explain |

Before running the questionnaire formally, I tested it on a small group of Year 11 students to check the questions were phrased in a clear way and that students understood the project as well as the intended outcomes. As a Year 11 tutor, I ran this sample questionnaire with students in my form group who take GCSE History (none of whom are in my History class so are completely separate to the cohort of students involved in my project). I used their feedback and the guidance given around questionnaires in 'Research Methods in Education' (Cohen et at, 2007) to re-phrase some of the questions and layout of the questionnaire before deploying it with my Key Stage Four classes.

During November and December 2018, I introduced each of my Key Stage Four classes to the project (these classes will be referred to as 11Z, 10Z, 9X and 9Z but the real class codes have been changed to protect anonymity). I explained my aims regarding improving written answers to write less and say more. I also emphasised to students that this would be done through listening to their ideas. I asked each group to spend 10 minutes filling in the questionnaire, which was a useful activity as I realised that many students needed longer than this to properly reflect on their learning. As such, I would need to factor this into lesson time during the intervention stage. At this stage I did not carry out any recorded student interviews as the logistics become increasingly difficult to manage. This is because the term was also interrupted by Year 11 mock exams illustrating Simmonds' warning of the dangers of attempting late stage intervention with Year 11 where time is of the essence.

I also carried out interviews with colleagues from the History curriculum area and other subject departments within the school to find out more about what they are doing to improve students' written responses. I carried out interviews with the subject leader in History as well as the subject leader of Philosophy. I also held more informal conversations, due to time constraints, with teachers from other subject areas. All of the teachers I spoke with had been mentioned by name in the student questionnaires for doing something learners found helpful regarding written answers in their lessons. This was a worthwhile endeavour as collaboration and cross curricular working are not currently a big part of the culture at my school, which is based across two separate sites and has high levels of staff turnover which makes building relationships and collaborating across departments difficult.

The final piece of initial research involved taking part in a collaborative in-school professional development session which was based around increasing the engagement of boys in lessons. The session, designed by the subject leader for Geography, involved sharing a range of strategies for engaging boys and encouraging each staff member to trial one and report back. The successes and failures of these strategies would then be shared with staff across the school so more strategies for engaging boys could be implemented. I was one of the staff members asked to run these sessions and so I was able to collate feedback from other teachers regarding different strategies they had used in lessons, which were particularly useful for engaging students with their written work and could be used in this project.

**Initial research phase: findings**

I was immediately struck by the initial reactions of enthusiasm from my Key Stage Four classes with the idea that they might get to choose some of the lesson activities for themselves and for other groups. Students in all classes expressed both excitement and disbelief as they asked me 'are we actually going to try some of these?' This married with the ideas put forward

in the literature that collaborating with students can be very effective but only if you listen to their ideas (McIntyre and Rudduck, 2007:35).

The results of the initial research phase were intended to form the basis of the first intervention, with subsequent interventions being adjusted from the first cycle using my observations and student feedback. This initial investigation produced some interesting findings regarding what was perceived to be useful and what the students wanted to try more of in History lessons. Of the two year 9 classes taught, Year 9Z's most popular request was for more help to plan their answers before they started writing, closely followed by taking longer in lessons to break down sentence and paragraph structures. Year 9X's most popular idea was for debates and discussions as well as time to talk through answers before they started writing. Meanwhile, 10Z wanted more timed written tasks and starting sentences or writing frames. 11Z requested more debates, discussions and role plays (see Appendix B for a full list of results). As part of my action research cycles I would need to design an intervention that used some of these student ideas in conjunction with those from the literature.

All of the colleagues I spoke with mentioned how helpful it was to begin a collaboration process of talking with teachers from across different departments regarding writing techniques. This was beneficial in terms of knowing how other departments are approaching writing so teachers across the school can start to give consistent messages relating to writing techniques. It also highlighted key differences between approaches to writing across different subjects. This is particularly important as Counsell (2004) and Didau (2014) had raised in the literature the necessity of overtly signposting literacy and writing in lessons. I was also able to establish more about the different literacy techniques used across the school in order to consider if I could use them in a History lesson. For example, a number of students in 10Z had shared how useful they found the question approach mats they used in Philosophy. When I discussed this with the subject leader for Philosophy he walked me through the mat design

and use. Namely that, they are put on the desk during written questions and assessments to guide students through the structure and approach of exam questions. This clearly linked to discussion in the literature from Counsell (2004) around the stages required in good historical writing and that students need structures and guidance to help them approach their writing, rather than just being thrown into it. However, I was also aware that if I designed something similar to use in History lessons, Counsell had also cautioned it would need to open student thinking up, rather than close it down (2004:40).

**Action research phase: intervention design**

The initial research stage provided the starting point for my action research intervention cycles which were carried out between January and April 2019. Cycles of action research were the best fit for the nature of my project, as it would involve gathering constant feedback from the students in order to shape and change the nature of the interventions as the students progressed across the term. Action research also fit the purposes of the project because it's aim was to 'improve practice, not produce knowledge' (Elliott, 1991:49) by focusing on how students approached their written tasks in History. Cycles of action research also matched the third and fourth principles I had drawn from the literature as I wanted to trial a variety of different interventions and then revise their use in lessons using student feedback combined with my own ideas in a 'process of continuing reflection' (Elliott, 1991:50).

The first intervention cycle was designed to be used across both of my Year 9 classes, a total of 55 students. I chose these classes as they are in their first year of GCSE History and so it is of the utmost importance they get to grips with the requirements and features of good GCSE answers as soon as possible. Furthermore, Simmonds (2106) had raised in the literature the ineffectiveness of late stage intervention at GCSE. All students in the classes used the literacy strategies, but I had a particular interest in how certain students performed due to the priorities set out by my school. Despite Wooley and McConnell (2006) identifying high attaining

students as being the top 7% (2002:2), I decided to identify these students using my school's method for doing so, to be in line with the requirements of my institution. Therefore, my particular focus group become those with GCSE target grades of 7 or above.

The first cycle of action research was designed to sit around the initial problems outlined at the start of this paper regarding my students' written work, as well as the ideas gathered during the initial research phase and the four principles I had drawn from the literature. I began with an idea raised in the initial research phase from an in school professional development session regarding engaging boys. The strategy suggested giving students 'speeding tickets' when they rushed tasks in lessons rather than completing them properly. I discussed this with my own subject leader in our interview as well as the four problems I had outlined in our students' writing. Using her feedback around the idea, I designed four 'tickets' that I would assign to students during lessons, depending on which of the four problems they were facing. The success shared by the subject leader for Philosophy of the writing mats he had used also emphasised that this approach would be accepted and used by the students. Furthermore, these tickets connected to many of the ideas put forward by the literature, such as Didau's promotion of interventions which were both high 'impact' and 'low effort' (2014:15) as well as Didau (2014) and Counsell's (2004) argument for the writing process to be made explicit rather than implicit to learners (2014:1). The cards and tickets I designed to start off the first invention cycle were aimed at drawing together all of these ideas and requirements. The problems identified in the initial hypotheses and their corresponding cards are outlined below, as well as a short explanation of how they match to the ideas drawn from the literature as part of principles 1 to 4. A full set of the cards can be found in Appendix C.

**Figure 2: initial intervention design**

| Card design | Relation to initial problem | Relation to research principle | Relation to literature |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hesitation Hazard | Students do not answer all of the questions in the examination because they run out of time | **Principle 1:** To provide often neglected higher attainers with tools and strategies for writing without disadvantaging others | Foster and Gadd's (2013) promotion of the notion that scaffolding needs to be chosen to fit the needs of the individual. |
| Speeding Ticket | Students write too much for low mark questions and not enough for high mark questions | **Principle 2:** In meeting the content demands of the new GCSE, put an emphasis on enabling students to write in a focused and concise manner. | Literature from the exam board (AQA, 2019) also highlighted this problem and promoted the idea of tools such as signposting points in order to write the required amount for each question. |
| Waffle Warning | Students have lots of own knowledge about a topic but struggle to deploy this effectively | **Principle 1:** To provide often neglected higher attainers with tools and strategies for writing without disadvantaging others<br><br>**Principle 3:** To provide students with a range of strategies and tools they can use in order to develop their historical writing. | Counsell (2004) raised the importance of helping learners to select relevant knowledge in order to be successful historical writers. Simmonds (2016) raised that high attaining students tend to 'waffle' in an attempt to sound clever and instead need support in order to select what is relevant to the question posed. |
| On Track | Students pick GCSE History because they enjoyed it in Key Stage Two and Key Stage Three but when they find the work challenging at Key | **Principle 4:** Closely consult with the students throughout the process as way of including the disengaged and unmotivated as well as to provide students with a | Younger et al (2005) regarding engaging boys, in particular, who are disengaged with learning and school culture. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Stage Four they give up | sense of ownership in the school environment. | |

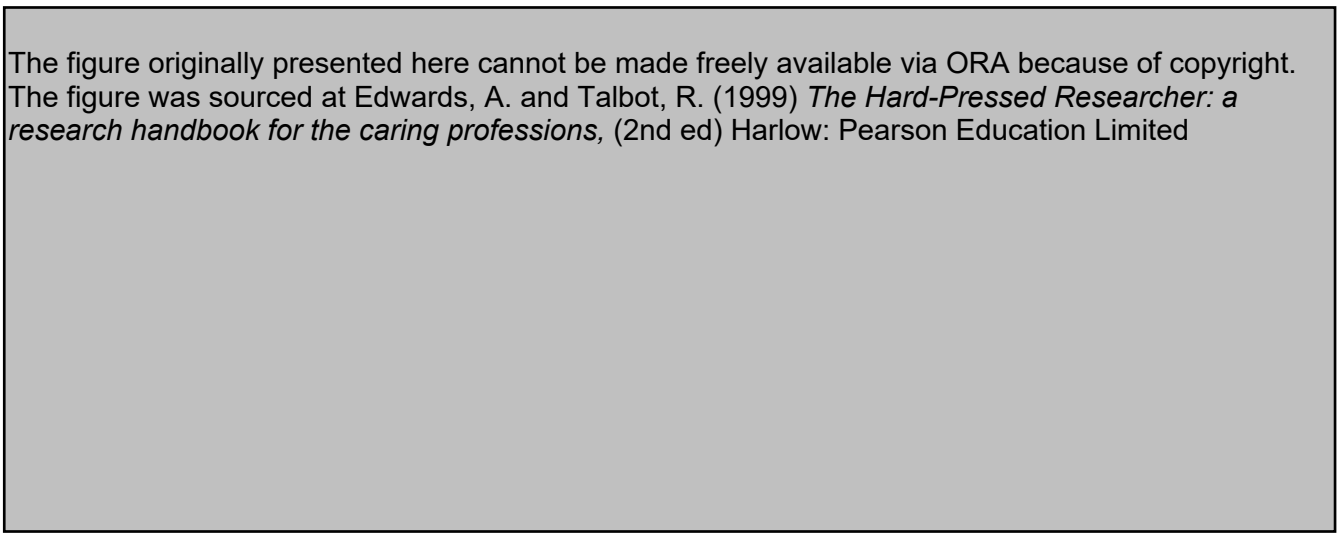
My initial intention was to use these cards in simple way. I would circulate the room during written tasks and place the pertinent card on students' desks. I anticipated this would then evolve and change for my subsequent intervention cycles. The ensuing action research cycles involved both using the cards in different ways as well as implementing alternative and complimentary literacy interventions based on the literature and student feedback. The three cycles of action research carried out as part of this intervention are outlined below and are loosely based on the stages of writing I adapted from Counsell (2004) as part of my literature review.

**Cycle 1: How can students understand and select the features of a good written GCSE answer?** The intervention began with me assigning the cards to students by circulating the room during written tasks. Students would use them to guide their writing of an exam question.

**Cycle 2: Will shifting responsibility engage students more positively using the features of a good written GCSE answer?** This involved incorporating the cards into feedback and review activities after students had carried out their writing as well as using cards to assess model answers.

**Cycle 3: How can good GCSE level writing develop in conjunction with good historical writing?** The cards were still used, alongside a range of other techniques such as class debates and step by step planning in order to help students get good GCSE answers onto the page.

**Figure 3: cycles of action research** (Edwards, 1999:63)




**Action research phase: data collection**

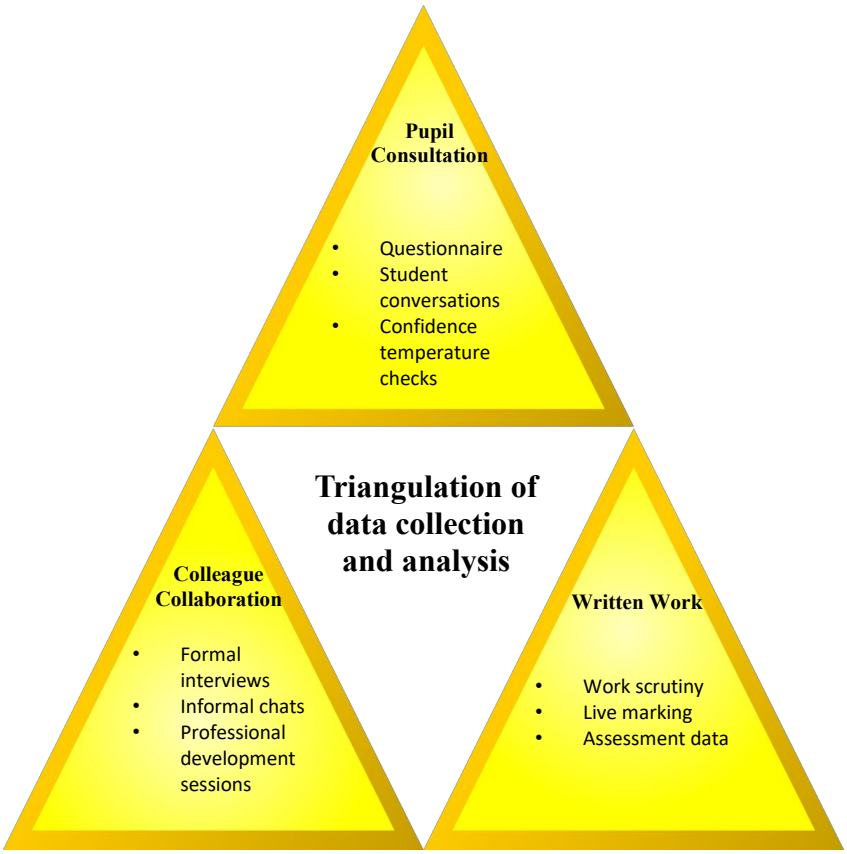
As both colleague collaboration and pupil consultation were critical elements of this project, I used a process of 'triangulation' (Elliott, 1991:82), in order to effectively gather a range of evidence relating to students' written work as well as pupil voice relating to the intervention cycles. This enabled me to access a full range of perspectives from students, student work and members of staff. I used three angles of data collection to gauge the effectiveness of the literacy interventions and in order to inform the direction of the next cycle of the intervention. These methods of data collection are listed below:

1) **Feedback from pupils**: this included questionnaires with Likert scales and free text passages to enable students to explain further as well as informal conversations with students regarding literacy interventions.

2) **Collaboration and sharing ideas with colleagues:** this was both within my department at team meetings and cross departmentally at professional development sessions.

3) **Scrutinies of written work and academic achievement:** I gathered levels and grades awarded to students in formative and summative assessments as well as analysing the features of students' written work.

**Figure 4: triangulation of data collection**




The only part of the data collection process which was not a normal aspect of my daily teaching, involved a Likert scale for students to rate their confidence regarding written answers. This was carried out before the first cycle of research began and after the final one had finished. Whilst not a perfect system for gathering information due to student respondents' ability to interpret confidence in their own way. For example, one student's decision to be an 8 out of 10 in confidence may not match another student's criteria for confidence (Cohen et al, 2007:327). I decided I would use it because the main element I wanted to measure was how much the students as an individual, as well as a cohort, moved up or down the scale. In this way it would not matter if their 8 out of 10 was different to their neighbours' rating because

they would be re-rating themselves using their own interpretation of the scale (see Appendix D for the scale given to students). I would then be able to compare confidence against achievement to assess whether the interventions led to an improvement in student writing.

**Ethical considerations**

By using these means of data collection, the majority of my data gathering process was done with students informally through my normal methods as a teacher. Therefore, it was neither time consuming nor caused the students any discomfort, whilst still giving a range of data and perspectives on the interventions as the cycles progressed.

Students were asked to provide their names on questionnaires because in order to analyse the data I needed to be able to establish their attainment level, gender and other useful indicators. I was careful to ensure that when collating and analysing data, the real names of students were stored separately in order to keep the identity of students anonymous. I also ensured the data was saved on a password protected document in order to ensure anonymity. When introducing the project and the questionnaire to students, I also shared my findings from the literature with them regarding the importance of sharing the purpose and rationale of my project as well as the importance of understanding they each had individual needs and requirements. Therefore, students were able to understand that sharing their names on the questionnaire was purely to ensure the project gave them the specific support they needed to improve their historical writing.

I applied for and received approval from my headteacher as part of the University's ethical approval process and I was comfortable that my project sat within the *modus operandi* of classroom practice. As such, one of my main ethical concerns when carrying out these interventions was centred on the fourth problem identified in the introduction to this project, surrounding my students' writing. Namely, that students pick GCSE History because they

enjoyed it in Key Stage Two and Key Stage Three but when they find the work challenging at Key Stage Four they give up. It was of utmost importance that the literacy strategies deployed across the action cycles did not serve to exacerbate this issue. I deliberately planned my intervention to mitigate the risk of students writing and engagement worsening. Firstly, I had chosen to include 10Z and 11Z in the initial baseline data research but not the action research intervention cycles. This is because I deemed it to be too close to Year 11s' real GCSE exams to risk deploying anything in lessons which might damage their confidence or confuse them. Whilst Year 10 are still over a year away from their final exams, I decided I would use the conclusions gleaned from this intervention and use the successful elements in my future planning for 10Z so as not to risk the progress they were making. Year 9 were the perfect candidates, as any successes would put them on the right path for the next three years and any missteps would have plenty of time left to reconcile and resolve. Furthermore, in terms of mitigating any disengagement with their study of History, all elements of gathering student feedback were optional. If students chose not to answer my questions or fill in the questionnaires that was their choice (Cohen et al, 2007: 317). Although, they could not opt out of the interventions themselves as these were carried out as lesson activities.

The final ethical consideration in relation to this project was the focus I had decided to put on high prior attaining students. First of all, the decision to focus on these students, as opposed to other groups, such as disadvantaged students was an important consideration. Particularly as disadvantaged students might be regarded as benefitting more from a project focused on improving written answers. However, high prior attainers had been picked out specifically by Ofsted as underperforming in my school, whilst the school had been praised for their recent successes in narrowing the gap for disadvantaged students. This showed my decision to focus on high attainers was linked to a greater need in the context of my school. Furthermore, the literature had emphasised the importance of any intervention aimed at advantaging one group,

not disadvantaging another and so I was aware that all students needed to benefit from the interventions being put in place. Finally, there is considerable awareness in the media and in schools of the pressures students and their mental health faces in the current education system which is very exam focused (NEU, 2019). With this in mind, I wanted to make sure that my emphasis on high prior attainers was not too obvious to the students as they did not need to know I was concerned about their underperformance in a climate when they already face a considerable amount of pressure regarding their academic success.

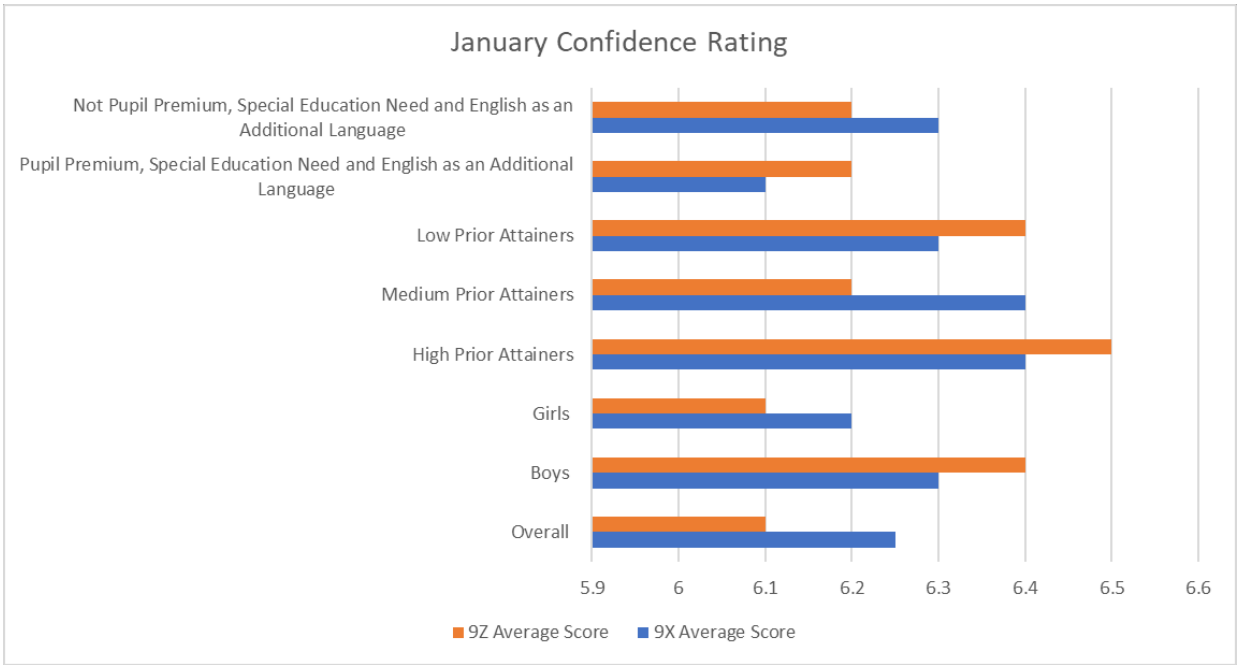
## Intervention analysis, findings and discussion

As outlined in the methodology section, the purpose of the literacy interventions was to help students to write less but say more and improve their written GCSE answers in History. These interventions were carried out using three cycles of action research which have been outlined above and which were driven by a range of literature, colleague collaboration and student voice. This section contains an analysis and discussion of the findings from the three intervention cycles.

Before beginning the first intervention I carried out a confidence check with my two Year 9 classes regarding how confident they felt with their writing in History. The results of this highlighted some interesting initial confidence indications. Both classes began with average confidence scores of around 6 out of 10. When the data was broken down between cohorts of students, there was a difference between the boys and girls in terms of confidence with boys appearing to be slightly more confident at writing in both classes. This is a direct contrast to the actual achievement of my year 9 classes, where girls achieve more highly in written assessments. For example, in the January assessment across both year 9 classes the girls average GCSE grade was 4.6 in comparison to the boys' average of 3.9. This links back to an issue raised in the literature which stated that high achieving boys can hold an ‘arrogant…self-belief’ (Younger et al, 2005: 6-7). There is a case to argue that this increased feeling of

confidence on the boys' part fixed their mindsets and left them not being as open to improving their work as the girls (Dweck, 2017:6). There were also differences across both classes between high prior attainers and low prior attainers with high achievers indicating they felt slightly more confident than low. None of these are particularly surprising outcomes given these gaps have all been highlighted as underachieving in GCSE exams by both my school and nationally.

**Figure 5: Year 9 initial confidence scores**




The comments made by students to explain their initial confidence scores also highlight some interesting points. Many of the students raised the concern they feel when presented with a written task in lessons and a complete list of comments can be found in Appendix E. Student 9X8 stated *'I don't get high marks; I also feel a lot of pressure whilst writing'* and Student 9Z25 said *'I feel like I am under pressure when having to write in a short amount of time'*. These comments are not unsurprising given that part of the move from Key Stage Three includes the timed pressure of official examinations rather than in class assessments. A key revelation was that students seemed aware of their own weaknesses. Student 9Z22 commented

*'I often write non relevant things…which loses marks'* and 9Z4 stated, 'I write too slow (sic) and that makes it difficult', while 9X11 commented *'sometimes I don't know how to start the paragraph properly or use the appropriate words*.' These remarks reveal students' perceptions of the problems they experience with their writing, because the writing process has not been made explicit to them in the way that Counsell (2004) and Didau (2014) promote. Instead, students are left with a simplistic concept of their problems, for example writing too slowly. This early temperature check showed that I had missed a step in my initial in school research when I asked students to make suggestions about activities they would like to attempt. Whilst my decision to incorporate student voice was a made with the best intentions, this confidence check raised the question as to whether the students were best placed to make suggestions regarding literacy interventions if they did not have the knowledge I had gleaned from reading the available literature with regards to successful historical writing.

**Cycle 1: How can students understand and select the features of a good written GCSE answer?**

The first cycle of literacy intervention began in January 2019. As previously explained, cycle 1 involved assigning students one of the four cards outlined in the intervention design section. Each card was designed to focus on a particular feature of good writing. Having examined the range of responses students gave to receiving these cards as well as scrutinising the work they completed, I organised their reactions and responses to the intervention into four categories. A small minority of students were overtly negative, seeing no value in the cards. However, most students were positive but with a mixture of outcomes, which are colour coded in the table below.

**Figure 6: Year 9 response categories to intervention cards**

**Key**

| |
|---|
| Positive- made a change to writing independently using the card |
| Positive- needed extra support to make a change to their writing |
| Positive- but did not understand how to make a change to writing or vague about how they made the change |
| Negative-no change made to writing or card ignored or misunderstood the instructions it gave |

I used these colour coded categorise to organise the statements students made after receiving a card during a written task. A full list of colour coded student comments during cycle 1 can be found in Appendix F, however I have analysed their responses and reactions to the cards in the section below. Of the 55 students in my Year 9 classes, 33 shared their thoughts and reactions to receiving the cards during cycle 1.

Of students who chose to give feedback, 19 chose to give positive feedback to the cards. These students began to use the cards to think explicitly about the task and adapt their writing. In particular, the 'On Track' card received a positive, proactive response with 8 of the 11 students who received it responding in a positive way. Students stated the 'On Track' card either reassured them they were doing the task correctly or it helped them to make the work they were doing better. A typical reaction to receiving this card when writing an 8-mark written question in lesson time, comes from a middle prior attaining girl who recorded *'I was impressed with myself , when I was stuck it told me what to do, I used it to check my work over at the end'*. Many students recorded and responded that they liked receiving this card as it gave them a confidence boost that their writing was good and they felt comfortable with using the guidance on the card to further improve their written answer. This links back to my initial observations that many students display learned helplessness (Seligman and Maier, 1976) when finding written tasks challenging. However, as had been requested by 9Z and 10Z during

the initial investigation and suggested by Foster and Gadd (2013) in their quest for scaffolding targeted to the needs of individuals, this intervention provided learners with guidance to allow them to tackle problems in their writing themselves without relying on a teacher for the answer to their issue.

As already stated, student reactions to the cards being handed out during written tasks were not always positive. Of the 33 who responded to the cards, 14 students gave a negative reaction to receiving one. A number of students were resentful, even angry at this process. Some student reactions included throwing the cards on the floor or putting their heads on the desk. When I asked students to explain why these reactions, one boy stated, *'I did not pay attention to it'*. He was not alone in expressing this thought and when I suggested that the card might help him to improve his written work, if he read the guidance rather than ignoring it, he shrugged and said*, 'probably not'*. This exchange was one of number similar incidents, often, but not exclusively from previously low attaining students and boys who seemed to feel the cards were not there to help but were a public display of their inadequacies. This also links to learned helplessness (Seligman and Maier, 1976) and the ideas put forwards by Younger et al (2005) regarding some boys' unwillingness to take responsibility for their own learning. Another student stated *'I turned it over and read it, but I didn't find it helpful'* showing that students needed a greater awareness of the process and stages of writing, as expressed by Counsell (2004) in order to explicitly understand the writing process so they could make improvements. I decided the perceived negative nature of the cards was something I would need to quickly address during the next cycle in order for students to feel their feedback had been taken on board and to stop any further shutting down of student attitudes towards improving their writing in History.

In terms of HPA students and the cards there were also mixed outcomes. Through observations in lessons, it appeared that HPA students were more inclined to read the cards, but this did not

mean that they all found them useful. One of the highest attaining and studious girls reflected on receiving the 'On Track' card that *'it didn't help me because reading it took away from my writing time'*. Another girl recorded that it *'made me feel bad about my writing, like it's not good'*. Therefore, some of the negative reactions by HPA students also revealed that a stage had been missed with regards to helping students understand the process of writing and what they need to do to improve. Furthermore, when I marked the questions students had been tackling, HPA students were not able to use the cards to improve their writing enough to get top marks on these questions and were once again left feeling helpless, with no HPA student achieving more than 6 marks out of 8. On the other hand, of the 8 HPA students who responded to the cards, 5 gave positive responses and particularly in comparison to previously low and medium attaining students, they were able to articulate explicitly how they had acted to improve their writing, for example *'it helped me see how to improve my work by using the checklist on the back.'*

I reflected on both the positive and negative reactions to the cards during the first few attempts of using them in lessons and also raised the topic of the cards with a number of students across the two Year 9 classes. Student responses told me that they viewed writing in lessons as having high stakes and they did not trust my reassurances that they were not doing an assessment. During an informal conversation, one student said, *'all teachers say things aren't an assessment, but they record our scores anyway'*. Essentially students had a negative opinion of written work in History, and other subjects because they saw it all as being a test which they were scared of failing. They already did not feel confident or assured in their written abilities and many felt that receiving a card confirmed their worst fear, namely that they were too slow or didn't answer the question properly. The cards used in this way only reinforced their negative opinions of written work and their own abilities. However, I was also cognisant that Simmonds (2016) had raised that many of her students were initially resistant to change

and so I was not prepared to give up on the cards, however it did appear that they would need some adjustments.

I took these findings to my next departmental meeting and shared these reactions with my colleagues. My head of department was particularly surprised. We had discussed these cards initially as being a non-threatening, gentle way of keeping students on track. We wanted to support them when they got stuck in a way that did not involve verbally pointing that a student was not on the right track. However, this did not seem to be how the students viewed them. As such, I resolved that before I began my second cycle of action, I wanted to highlight the positive role of the 'On Track' card more in order to keep the majority of students in the class feeling positive about writing in GCSE History. As such, in the final week of this intervention cycle, I continued to hand out cards when students were writing, but based on the feedback given by the students, I only handed out the 'On Track' card. I gave it to students who had finished their writing within the given time frame, (usually 10 minutes for an 8-mark question). In the previous weeks these students might have received a 'Speeding Ticket' but this more positive reinforcement of receiving the 'On Track' card seemed to make students more receptive to guidance on the card. Students then the used the card as a checklist to see what they had included and what they could improve. I also gave the card to students who were not writing quickly enough, who might have received a 'Hesitation Hazard' card before. Once again this elicited a much more positive reaction, although these students were still not able to finish the two paragraphs in 10 minutes which is required in order to complete the GCSE exam within the time constrains given. Therefore, whilst this use of the 'On Track' cards in this way clearly made students feel more positive about their writing, it did not solve the problems within their writing, which is the overall aim of the project.

This left me with a number of areas with which to start developing the second literacy intervention cycle. Firstly, the intention of this cycle had been for students to begin to

understand and select features of good written answers with an overall aim for them to 'write less and say more'. Yet, it had become apparent to me that the process of writing was not yet explicit rather than implicit (Didau, 2014) because the students didn't have an awareness of ideas like Counsell's five steps (2004) as outlined in the literature review. Student feedback from the cards revealed that many did not know what to do to fix the problems being identified in their writing and not having knowledge of the writing process was part of the reason for this. Simultaneously, I needed to remind myself of the aims of my project, one of which was to listen to the students and use their ideas to guide the way written tasks were carried out. It seemed that my first cycle had not met this aim. Instead I had devised an intervention which hinged on me telling the students what they needed to do, when in fact, a more student led intervention was required. Although my intention with the cards was not to criticise the students but to guide them, students viewed any card but 'On Track' as a criticism. Therefore, I needed to adjust the cards and their use in order to seem more positive in the eyes of the students. Furthermore, my project was supposed to be enabling students to reach top level GCSE writing and so far the cards had not been of particular benefit to HPA students. Another important aspect of my project which had been overlooked in the intervention cycle was the idea, prevalent throughout the literature from Counsell (2004), Didau (2014) and Simmonds (2016), relating to the importance of explicitly sharing the purpose of the intervention with students. I had not achieved this and so was using the ineffective process of osmosis, which had been criticised by Simmonds (2016). As such, my students had viewed the cards as critical rather than helpful.

Despite this, there were also a number of positive outcomes for students from using the cards. There were students in both classes who had used them to understand the features of a good answer, such as incorporating specific examples, and were beginning to use this to recognise their mistakes and improve their writing. During written tasks I heard students describing

themselves as ‘hesitating’ or ‘waffling’ and discussing what they should do to resolve that issue. This certainly met my overall aim of students ‘saying more’ because they were beginning to talk about and explicitly understand the process of writing. This needed to be built on as the students’ and I moved into the next intervention cycle so they could use their new knowledge to help them to both ‘say more’ and ‘write less’.

**Cycle 2: Will shifting responsibility engage students more positively using the features of a good written GCSE answer?**

The aim of cycle 2 was to shift responsibility in order to engage students to take more ownership of written tasks and be part of the process of improving the structure of their writing. For this to happen, the students needed to utilise the cards in a more engaging manner, that showed them the aim was to help them to improve their writing not criticise it. The importance of principle 4, working closely with my students to promote engagement was at the forefront of mind (the four principles drawn from the literature can be found on page 23). As such, I was aware that in order for my students to remain positive and engaged with feeding into the literacy interventions I had to ensure they felt part of the project. Linking to principles 1 and 2 with regards to high attainers and the demands of the new GCSEs, I also used this cycle to make a small change to the ‘On Track’ card (see version 2 in Appendix C). This was aimed at enabling the HPA to lift their answers in order to achieve top marks. My head of department had recently attended a training day with the exam board which discussed top level answers being complex by making connections to reach a conclusion. As such, step 4 on the card was changed to read ‘Have you reached a complex and connected conclusion?’ and this was discussed in more depth during lessons.

With these intentions in mind, tied together with my overall aim for students to ‘write less but say more’, I changed the use of the cards for this cycle so that they were used as a feedback activity after students had completed their piece of writing. I reasoned this would remove some

of the threat and criticism students felt when receiving a card when they were writing. As such, I modified the design of the cards to make stickers which matched each of the four areas of improvement. I stuck the most appropriate sticker on to the students' work whenever I marked a piece of writing. When this work was returned to the student, they were given feedback time to use the corresponding card improve their written work. By using the cards in this manner, I found feedback activities became a much more positive experience for students. I encouraged students to tick or underline in their own work where they had used an element on the card. For example, writing two paragraphs for an 8-mark question, and if they could not find it in their work, then they needed to adjust or change their work.

Once again, I asked students to reflect and respond to the cards they received, and a full list of these reflections can be seen in Appendix G. These comments were more positive than in the previous cycle when cards had been handed out during the writing process, although fewer students chose to record responses than in cycle 1, revealing the disengagement that some felt. One medium attaining, male student who previously said he had 'forgotten' to use the cards when they were handed out, recorded that when the 'Waffle Warning' sticker was stuck onto his work he used the card in feedback time to *'realise my mistake and fix it'*. Another boy who had expressed his annoyance and anger at being given a 'Hesitation Hazard' card during cycle 1, told me in a rather shocked tone that when using a 'Waffle Warning' card in feedback time, *'it surprised me because I did find it helpful'.* As with the previous cycle, those students who received 'On Track' stickers as part of their feedback, responded positively when I discussed the feedback activity with them. One medium attaining girl stated that the 'On Track' card *'helped me to see how to get my work to the next level*'. Another recorded that *'the questions on the back helped me because I know it's good [her work] but I can do better'.* These comments were more in line with the proactive, growth mindset (Dweck, 2017:5) that I wanted

my students to have when approaching their writing in History and which was the aim of this cycle.

Through scrutinising the actions taken by students during these tasks and reflecting on the literature, it is possible to see that students were starting to move away from the disengagement Younger et al (2005) had been concerned with, in order to consider the features of a good written answer more clearly. An example of student work can be found in Appendix H, where the student has received a 'Waffle Warning' sticker and has used their feedback time to make annotations of improvements they need to make to their work. Through analysing this student's annotations it is possible to see that in their redraft they would successfully 'write less but say more' because they are intending to swap their inaccurate second point with regards to beggars stopping people from working with a more specific point, using topic specific vocabulary regarding 'scaremongering'. Therefore, they would meet the features of a good answer by making two well explained points. As well as this example, other students began to make a range of positive changes to their written work such as re-writing starting sentences to include question words, adding second paragraphs where they had not written enough and crossing out sentences and points that 'waffled' but added little value.

Encouragingly, the more students used the stickers and cards, the better they got at identifying what they needed to do to improve in their own answers, and many began to rely less on me to tell them what to do. This linked clearly to the ideas put forward by Foster and Gadd (2013) with regards to the greater success of individualised scaffolding and with Didau's (2014) promotion of interventions with students that were both low effort and high impact. It was also a clear success regarding the purpose of cycle 2 and revealed that by shifting responsibility on to the students, they had become engaged more positively using the features of a good written GCSE answer in order to 'write less but say more'.

However, whilst this task was a useful step in helping the students to use the cards to include features of a good answer retrospectively. Their original written work was not using the features of a good answer. These were only present after the writing had been done. In order for this 'shifting responsibility' strategy to be truly effective, students would need to carry forward the feedback from the cards into their subsequent written work and begin to write using the features on the card but without using the prompts on the card.

Furthermore, as I monitored the progress of the cycle (Edwards, 1999, 63) I did find that many of the disengaged students were still choosing both not to take any feedback actions and were not recording or sharing their reactions and responses to the intervention cards. Often these students were either low prior attainers or students showing signs of disengagement, which is interesting as the cards had first been devised to engage students as part of my Geography colleague's professional development sessions. As such, I decided once again to slightly alter the intervention during the cycle. Instead of marking their work and assigning a card, I devised a task which involved the students using the cards and stickers themselves to mark a model GCSE answer. They had to decide which stickers to place on the answer and give the author some actions to take based on the cards. This activity had a dual purpose since using model answers was one of the top five strategies 9Z had voted for in the initial research phase (for a reminder of these, see Appendix B). Furthermore, by marking and analysing a model answer, students would not feel threatened or criticised by the cards as it did not involve their own written responses. Through this activity, the purpose of cycle 2 would be met as responsibility would be shifted onto the learners as they engaged with the mark scheme and assessment objectives.

Students responded well to this task, they seemed to enjoy challenging the model answer provided and engaged well with suggesting ways it could be improved. Interestingly, when doing so, the majority of students used the language of the cards to suggest how the answer

could be developed. I had deliberately provided a model answer that was too long, and many students were quick to point out the answer was 'waffling' and put lines through unnecessary sentences and phrases. It was heartening to see, at this stage of the intervention cycles that students were starting to take on board the features of a good GCSE History answer. They were able to apply these features in order to critique someone else's answer. However, it seemed that the biggest challenge remained unresolved. Students were not applying these features to their own work. Overall, cycle 2 had successes and limitations. It was successful in terms of shifting responsibility onto students in order for them to become more engaged with the features of a good answer in order to 'write less and say more'. It had allowed students to get to grips with these features without feeling like their work was being critiqued. However, in order to achieve this, students had taken a step backwards as they had been reflecting on written work, rather than creating it. Therefore, the purpose of the next cycle needed to involve students using the features they now understood and applying them to improving and developing their own written responses.

On reflection, a logical next step at this stage would have been to engage students with work written by historians in order to analyse their work using the cards. This is an idea that Carroll (2016) had championed in the literature and would have had the potential to work effectively for the high prior attainers, as top-level GCSE work draws alongside the work previously required in A level History. Nevertheless, time constraints within the term and lesson planning restraints within the context of my school meant this wasn't possible as part of this intervention. This idea and how it might fit into a broader historical literacy progression model will be discussed further in the implications section of this project.

**Cycle 3: How can good GCSE level writing develop in conjunction with good Historical writing?**

Having reflected on the successes and failures of the previous interventions it appeared that earlier cycles had focused around the students' understanding of the features of a good answer and improving existing answers. At this stage of the intervention, there needed to be a focus on the production of good GCSE level responses, the time constraints of which require students to 'say more' but 'write less'. In an ideal world, the notion of a good GCSE written answer would be synonymous with a good historical written answer and the connection between these two ideas will be discussed further in the implications section. In order to do this, I recognised the cards could not be the sole method utilised. They certainly would play a role, but some of the other strategies students had identified during the literature review and initial research phase would be important too. This stage of the intervention cycle also coincided with my Year 9 classes' first exposure to writing at length at GCSE level. Up to this point students had only written 8-mark questions, but the final question on each of the four sections of the GCSE exam requires them to write an extended answer worth a maximum of 20 marks. Many students confided in me that they were concerned about their ability to write at this length in the timed conditions required. Therefore, as was the aim laid out by principles 2 and 3, this intervention cycle was focused on students using the features of a good GCSE answer they had been exposed to, in order to produce an extended piece of GCSE level writing which 'wrote less but said more'.

The first strategy in this cycle was aimed particularly at 9X, a class who contained a high proportion of disengaged young men, with high or medium prior attainment. The very group that Younger et al (2005) had highlighted as needing support with motivation and engagement with learning. During the initial investigation this class had told me that they wanted to try verbal literacy strategies such as debates and talking through their answers. This linked back

to the issue highlighted during cycle 1 that students needed a clearer idea of the writing process before being asked to offer suggestions. As such, some of the boys who were particularly passionate about this activity envisaged how much they would enjoy role playing but lacked any real understanding of how it was going to help them with their writing. Therefore, the students' perception of the purpose of this task as being fun and my understanding based on the literature of Didau (2014) and others that successful talk would lead to successful writing immediately made my purpose for this task and their purpose at odds.

For the Elizabethan England paper (AQA, paper 2), the extended writing question is a 16-mark question on the historic environment. As such this cycle of the intervention was focused on the the Globe Theatre. The first talking literacy strategy used was a debate. The intention was to enable Year 9 to practise talking through an historic argument. This was based on Didau's (2014) concept that effective talk makes it easier to write. With this in mind, I posed to the students the question 'Was the Globe Theatre the greatest cultural achievement of the Elizabethan Age?' Having spent a lesson gathering information on the various cultural accomplishments of the Elizabethans, students then planned the points they would make in pairs during the debate, with one arguing for and the other against the statement. They then held mini debates with their neighbour before dividing into teams and holding the debate as a class. I ran the activity in this way in order to gradually build the students' confidence around speaking by giving them time to talk through their ideas. This was important because Bakalis (2016) had warned of the complexity and differences between talking and writing and that the latter should not just be bolted to the end of a lesson. This activity captured the interest of many of the boys who hadn't been engaged with written tasks up to this point. They enjoyed the debate and showed themselves able to argue effectively using historic evidence and information. Many in the class also continued to use the language of the cards, I overheard a number of students challenging their peers for 'waffling' or 'hesitating'. Whilst this was a

positive step for some of the disengaged young men, the activity was not engaged with or enjoyed by many of the young women in the class who did not want to speak in front of the peers. This links back to the literature in which Francis (2000) had warned of strategies aimed at engaging boys, alienating girls. On the other hand, the debating activity had been the specific request of many of the high and medium prior attaining boys in this particular class and the purpose of my project had been to listen to their ideas and incorporate them into lesson activities. Although, as discussed, the process I had put in place for this was not always as effective as I had intended. Therefore, I decided on a compromise. It seemed that the talking through ideas aspect worked effectively for the majority of students, whilst the public speaking element which attracted the boys was not worth the cost of losing the girls. As such, I altered this approach with the other Year 9 class. In subsequent lessons with both classes, the students spent more time talking through answers and questioning each other's arguments but in pairs or groups rather than publicly. As Didau (2014) had argued the activity was important because if you can say something you have a better chance of being able to write about it. It also met with the projects aim of helping students to 'say more' as they were able to see which points and examples were most effective in their debates.

I developed the cycle further to combine the concept of talking through an answer with one of the challenges students of all attainment across both classes were most vocal about. That is, starting a written answer. This problem linked back to Foster and Gadd's (2013) need for scaffolding which targeted the individual needs of students. This stage of the intervention involved students talking through their starting sentences, using the words in the question, before they put pen to paper. This was a basic task but it proved effective for some students and it occurred to me, contrary to Counsell (2004) and Didau's (2014) need for the implicit to be made explicit, I had never actually taught students how to turn the question into a sentence and had incorrectly assumed they would know how to do this. The students would read out

the question together, for example 'Explain why theatre was so popular in Elizabethan England'. Students would then practise saying the first sentence of their answer by turning the question into a sentence, such as 'One-way theatres were popular in Elizabethan England was….'. I would encourage them to practise their sentences out loud, to themselves, to me or to their partner and to do this every time we tackled a question in lesson time. When they had finished their written answer, students would then use the 'On Track' card to ensure they had followed its guidance for features of a good answer, namely, 'Does each paragraph start and end with a sentence that answers the question?' This combination of enabling students to both talk their answers through and utilise the cards to check they had met all features of a good answer began to boost the confidence of many students. Those who had received 'Hesitation Hazards' for not starting their answers or those who received 'Waffle Warnings' for not answering the question, were helped to say more whilst writing less as they knew each paragraph would be question focused. Although this goes against Simmonds (2016) who challenged repetitive chanting in lessons, I certainly found it effective in boosting student confidence with starting their answers as well as the quality of the answers. Appendix J contains an example of student work which successfully uses clear starting sentences to direct the points made in each paragraph in order to achieve a top-level answer. This answer was written by student 9X8, whose initial confidence rating had been 4 out of 10 because *'I don't know how to start my sentences and often write too much about the wrong thing'.* Therefore, whilst simple this intervention made a clear impact on both the quality of written work as well as the student's confidence. In her final confidence check she rated herself a 7 out of 10 and stated *'Practising starting sentences has really helped me to get higher marks'*. This linked positively back to Didau's (2014) argument that if students can talk about it, they can write about it and meets principles 2 and 3 which I had outlined with regards to giving students a range of tools with which to meet the demands of the new GCSE exams.

The intervention cycle developed further through students expanding the skills they had developed when talking through their points and starting sentences, in order to plan their answers before they began writing. This also matched 9Z's initial request which was to spend more time breaking down and planning answers before writing. Thus began a few weeks of guided highlighting, annotating and talking through answers. Before attempting a written answer, I encouraged students to highlight the key question words and plan their answers using contextual knowledge. I also devised a question 'walk through' lesson on a particularly tricky question type on the Elizabethan paper, which involved analysing historical interpretations. This also linked to my increasing awareness that in order for this intervention to be successful in the long term, it would need to link to a broader progression model for History students across their secondary school experience which would enable students to explicitly understand the requirements for good historical writing in relation to different historical concepts. This will be discussed in more depth during the implications section.

Drawing on principle 4 which centred on using student insight and feedback to design interventions in order increase learner engagement, as well as colleague collaboration, the lesson intervention I devised was borrowed from the English department. It had been one of the devices a number of students had mentioned they liked in other lessons during the initial research phase. I spoke to a member of the English department and went to observe their version of this lesson which was being run for a Year 11 GCSE English Language question. I then altered the process to work for the Elizabethan England interpretations question, a particularly challenging question type for my Year 9 students. I led the students step by step through the approach to the question, by highlighting key question words and annotating the interpretation passage (see Appendix K for an annotated student example). I did two lessons in successive weeks using this approach on different interpretations relating to different topics

before then releasing Year 9 from the strict step by step guidance to let them write their own answer.

When students came to write their response, they were far more confident. This lesson came shortly before Year 9 parents evening and a number of students raised in front of their parents how helpful they had found the process and how much it had boosted their confidence on that particular question type. Students found the step by step approach a useful way to get started if they were hesitating or to stay focused if they were waffling and so it met the aims of my project for students to 'write less but say more'. An example of a student written answer can be found in Appendix K and clearly shows the student has a grasp both of the general features of a good answer, such as question focused starting sentences but also an understanding of how to tackle an historical interpretation. The student is able to successfully test the points made in the interpretation with specific own knowledge and they even attempt a complex, conclusion comment which states 'the most convincing aspect' which would increase this student's marks. As such, they have successfully 'said more' and 'written less' by writing in a concise, question focused manner in timed conditions. Although this activity appears to be in direct contrast to Counsell's point in the literature that tasks should 'open up' student thinking to be most effective (2004:40), this intervention is also typical of the restraints I was working within in the context of my school, which promoted step by step teaching due to the pressure with regards to improving exam results.

Overall, cycle 3 of the project was an interesting stage in relation to my aim to encourage students to write less but say more in their GCSE History work. I broke away from the constraints of the earlier intervention cycles which been based on the cards and began to incorporate more of the student requested activities. This approach benefitted the students who had requested certain activities but in some cases alienated those who had not. Nevertheless, many students began to feel more confident about their writing in History. However, a

minority continued to be disengaged with the process and began to protest that not only were they bored with the Elizabethan topic but also with 'all the writing' they felt they were doing in History lessons. I realised that my project, which aimed at listening to students in order to promote engagement, also needed an element of filtering the constructive from the destructive student feedback. However, the students that were protesting needed their voices to be heard. I fed their opinions back to my colleagues in the History department and we have begun to revise and shorten the Elizabethan scheme of work for next year. Furthermore, as the interventions had progressed it became increasingly plain that in order for them to have maximum impact, the fundamentals of my findings from the literature needed to have been shared more explicitly with students from the outset in order for student consultation to have been as effective as possible. Furthermore, with regards to the aims of this cycle, students were writing good GCSE answers but techniques such as step by step answers meant this was not necessarily good Historical writing. This will be discussed in more depth during the implications section.

## Conclusions and implications

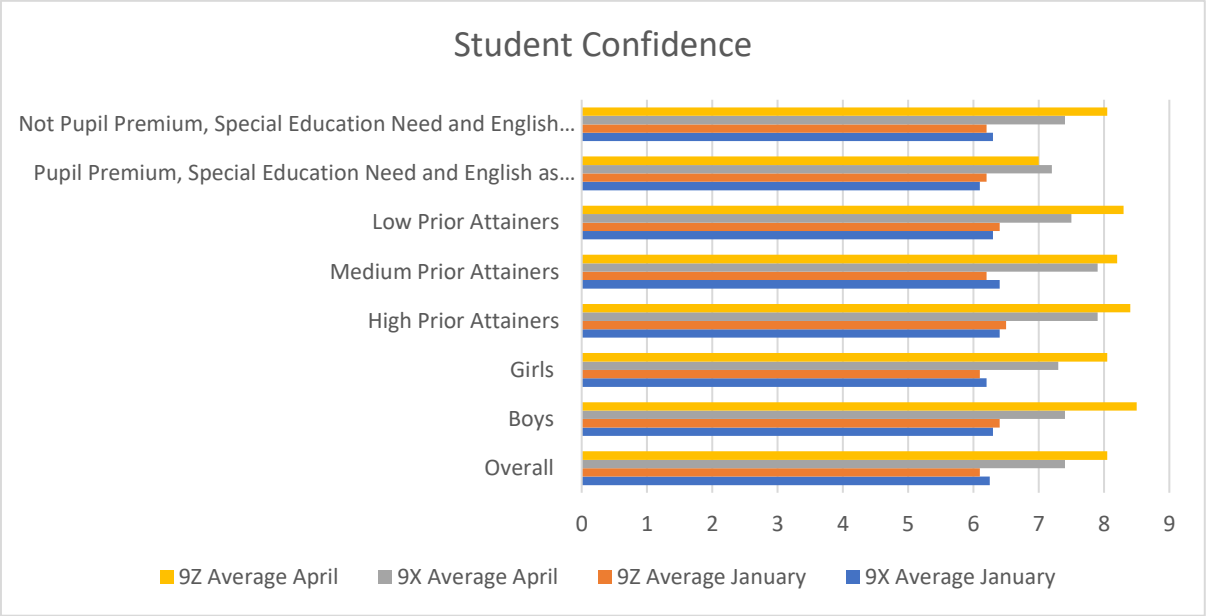
### Intervention effectiveness

When reflecting on the effectiveness of this project and its aim for students to 'write less but say more', it is pertinent to consider principle 2, regarding improving GCSE outcomes. Student assessment data is a useful measurement tool to consider this. During the spring term, students did two formal assessments, one in January and one in April. In the January assessment, 9X achieved 50% Grades 4-9, 38% Grades 5-9 and 7% Grades 7-9 and before Easter they received 46% Grades 4-9, 42% Grades 5-9 and 4% Grades 7-9. This shows a drop in passing grades although a small increase in those achieving the 'good' benchmark of a Grade 5, showing the middle attainers in particular benefitted from the last cycle of literacy intervention. The slightly lower percentage of passing grades and top grades may also be

accounted for due to the inclusion in the final assessment of a 20-mark question whilst the earlier test contained only 8-mark questions. There is stark contrast in comparing these results between 9X and 9Z. In the January assessment 9Z achieved 85% Grades 4-9, 52 % Grades 5-9 and 19% Grades 7-9, meanwhile before Easter they improved even further to achieve an outstanding 89% Grades 4-9, 85% Grades 5-9 and 37% Grades 7-9. These are the highest grades any of my classes have achieved in any assessment during the last three years of teaching the new format GCSE. Of course, these grades do not exclusively reflect the effectiveness of the literacy interventions. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions and suggest some viable hypotheses from these results.

At the end of the final intervention cycle, reflecting on the success of principle 3 and the effectiveness of giving students a range of literacy strategies to use, I asked students to return to their initial confidence checks and consider on how confident they felt after a term of focused literacy interventions in History lessons (see Appendix D for the questions and Appendix I for the complete results). The students' confidence reflections by the beginning of April are an interesting contrast to those taken at the start of January. The average final confidence scores of both classes show a significant positive increase in students' attitude and confidence with writing in History. 9Z's average confidence score increased almost 2 rating points from 6.1 to 8.05, whilst 9X's average score had also improved, but by a narrower margin, starting at 6.25 in January and ending on 7.4 in April, this is positive increase of almost 1.2 points.

**Figure 7: a comparison of student confidence scores before and after the interventions**




These student reflection confidence results raise a number of interesting questions, contrasts and conclusions. Firstly, the overall patterns remain the same between the initial and final confidence check. Therefore, as was the project's intention, all groups of students had increased in confidence between January and April. A gap remained between the confidence of boys and girls as well as high prior attainers and low. Therefore, it appears that this overt focus on writing and inclusion of pupil consultation has done little to narrow these gaps, although this was not the aim of the project. The second contrast is the difference in confidence gains made between the two classes. The average confidence increase of 9Z was almost 1.95 points, this is in contrast to 9X, who increased but only by 1.15 points. Therefore, 9X's confidence started higher, but ended lower than 9Z. This could be related to a number of points, for example this class has more boys whilst the other has more girls. Furthermore, boys typically identified as being more confident with their written work in History at the outset in both classes. It may be too simplistic to relate these polarised successes to the old adage that girls are better at writing that boys, but my experience of working with these classes certainly seems to show this. Therefore, this project has appeared to reflect the problems raised in the

literature about some of differences of gender and appears to have not been particularly successful in reconciling this problem. On the other hand, this may not show that girls are better at writing than boys, but that they were more bought into trying different strategies and understanding that succeeding at writing is a work in progress. Perhaps, by using pupil consultation to include the strategies suggested, the boys expected instant success and felt disheartened when they did not immediately improve their written answers. As such, having taken part in the project, these boys came to recognise that historical writing is much more complex than they had first understood it to be. This reveals the extremely challenging nature of putting an explicit focus on historical writing and that it had a big effect on student confidence. However, by also providing students with more tools to tackle writing, the quality of GCSE answers did improve.

The students' explanations and reasons for their confidence scores also raise some interesting observations (a complete list is available in Appendix I). The vast majority of students in both classes reflected positively on the range of writing technique activities and literacy strategies used across the project. Student 9X14 commented *'talking through answers has made me feel much more confident'* and student 9Z23 shared that now she *'know[s] how to structure [her] paragraphs correctly'.* As such, the overt focus on writing and the inclusion of student ideas in activities has clearly provided many students with tools to tackle GCSE written answers more confidently. However, there is still a lot of progress to be made. A number of students in 9Z, although rating themselves as feeling more confident, still show a lack of confidence and helplessness in some of their comments. Student 9Z8 stated *'I find it easier when we go through the answer first'* and 9Z7 said *'Miss is helping me with how to start my sentences'.* On the other hand, these students are still only in Year 9 and still have two years to develop their writing. 9X reveal a few more overtly negative responses regarding their thoughts and perspectives at the end of the project. 9X2 shared *'it is boring and I can't write for that long*

*anyway'* and student 9X19 stated *'I was more confident before'*. Although, this second comment may not be as concerning as it first appears. A number of students in this class, initially stated themselves as feeling very confident with written answers but their written work was not actually that good. Therefore, this project has highlighted to many students the complex requirements of a good written answer and so a drop in confidence has happened in conjunction with an improvement in the quality of students' writing. Overall, the students' comments help to make sense of the apparent improvement in confidence showed by the rating scales and highlight that students are certainly aware that they have a range of techniques and strategies at their fingertips when tackling written work in History examinations.

The project did not just have an impact on student confidence and perception of their written work. The final pieces of work the students produced at the end of literacy intervention paint a particularly positive picture. In the first week of term back after the Easter holidays, students wrote an 8-mark question under timed conditions in lessons and without access to the guidance cards. Through reflecting on the lesson and the subsequent work scrutiny, I was particularly pleased by the outcome. Students were able to write two paragraphs in the timed conditions. Students used the question words to start their sentences and students used specific examples to support their points. Furthermore, there was very little complaining about the task. Students clearly felt empowered and confident to give it a go. When I pointed out to the students, how well they had done, at the end of the task, they appeared visibly pleased and proud of themselves. An example of written work from this task can be found in Appendix L. The answer is well organised, each point uses the key question words in order to be question focused and uses a range of specific own knowledge. The complex conclusion paragraph which acknowledges the convincing and less convincing aspects would certainly enable this student to access a top mark.

**Intervention reflection**

I began my project with a clear aim, I wanted to improve written answers in GCSE History, particularly those of high prior attainers, by enabling students to 'write less but say more'. Therefore, it is appropriate to reflect on the successes of the project as well as factors that limited its success.

Whilst time consuming to capture student voice, it did prove fruitful and productive to ask students for feedback and to follow student guidance. When finding out how they felt about writing and feedback, it became clear how much writing affects many students' confidence and self-esteem. As a teacher, I will be far more cognisant in the future of how my feedback can impact the self-esteem of young people in my care. Whilst the overall confidence of students with regards to writing did improve during the project, many pupils worried every time they approached a written answer. This lack of confidence also held many students back and made it difficult for them to engage with activities such as the cards, which required students to be self-reflective. Nevertheless, enabling students to grow in resilience and independence with regards to their writing has been a strength of this project. By April, many students proved themselves better able to produce work of a higher quality and check their work more effectively. Whilst taking student feedback into consideration and making learners part of the process of guiding the activities they carry out in lessons, this must be matched with the expertise of teachers and educational research in order to be effective. The project would have been more effective if I had shared with students more of my findings from the literature, such as Counsell's five steps for writing (2004) before asking them to vote on strategies they wanted to try in lessons.

Principle 1 and the progress of HPA students also needs to be addressed considering there are such stark differences between the two classes. In the second assessment 9X had just 4% achieve a grade 7-9 but in 9Z, it was 37% of students. Therefore, it appears the project

approach and literacy strategies were neither particularly effective nor ineffective at pushing the achievement of higher attaining students. This difference could be explained by any one of the differences outlined above. However, these students are only in their first year of GCSE study and I am hopeful that high attaining students have increased their understanding of the features of a good answer through this project. They may not yet be able to do all of elements required, but they do have an awareness of the features required to 'write less but say more' in exam conditions. Furthermore, the time constraints of this intervention, which ran for one term as part of a Masters level project, mean that it is not yet fully possible to gauge the long term implications of the interventions carried out with students as their GCSE level writing will continue to develop over the next two years.

The final element of the project to be considered is principle 3 regarding the effectiveness of the literacy strategies themselves as well as the element of colleague collaboration. During the spring term at school I was part of a team of teachers delivering Professional Development sessions to other staff members about engaging disengaged learners, with a particular focus on boys. During my delivery of one of these sessions I discussed my interventions using the cards and staff from both the Art and Modern Foreign Language departments were really keen to find out more about what I was doing and trial it in their own lessons. Both departments have promised to keep me updated as to how these cards work for them, which will be really interesting as they are both very different disciplines to History. I have also been sharing my progress with the History department and we have decided that next year, every History teacher will have their own set of 'On Track' cards and these will be rolled out across Key Stage Four classes to be used in a variety of ways. As mentioned at the end of cycle 3, as a department we have also acted on other areas, aside from writing and literacy that students fed back about. This was emphasised as a key aspect during the literature, as students need to feel their voices are being heard (McIntyre and Ruddock, 20015). Therefore, as during the project

many students lamented with the length of the Elizabethan England scheme of work, my Head of Department has begun to review and condense this for the next academic year.

To conclude, this project has wielded some positive results for my Year 9 students in terms of enabling them to 'write less but say more'. As hypothesised at the start of the project and championed by Didau (2014) and Counsell (2004) this is probably down to an explicit focus on writing and literacy as well as the literacy strategies themselves. Also, individual student successes varied greatly depending on how much they bought into the project. Those who were willing to try new things and take on board feedback ultimately achieved more in terms of developing their writing by choosing to engage actively with the project. This is true of high prior attaining students, but also for students of all abilities. As my classes move into Year 10 there continues to be work needed in terms of the student literacy and historical writing, but also in terms of holding or recapturing student engagement with GCSE History. A more focused approach on pupil consultation by both listening to students and acting on their feedback about other aspects of the course will be one way of achieving this aim.

**Project limitations and implications for future teaching**

Having reached the end of this project it is important to acknowledge how I might move forward with the work carried out. Firstly, the project's focus on student consultation made it clear that student resilience, confidence and self-esteem are intrinsically connected to their writing. This is an area which needs further investigation, particularly given a recent poll by the teaching union NEU (2019) and the headlines on GCSE results day in August 2019 (The Guardian, 2019) in which teachers and school leaders raised concerns around students, particularly at the lower end, refusing to sit the new GCSE exams due to their perceived level of difficulty.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge that the interventions implemented as part of this project were constrained by the culture of teaching and learning of my institution. There is a distinct focus on teaching to maximise achievement in public examinations and unfortunately, this does not necessarily always fit with the ideals of teaching a subject like History. As such, I ultimately created a serious of interventions which were aimed at students accessing higher grades at GCSE, but I have not necessarily opened their historical thinking up in a way that Counsell (2004) and other authors in the literature might champion. However, the work done in this project will be really important for creating a wider progression model of historical writing, carried out from Year 7 to GCSE. This progression model will include elements which were not possible to include in a Masters level project, with interventions carried out in time restraints of a few months. With more time to plan and carry out interventions, this progression model will enable students, starting in Year 7, to engage with the different requirements of historical writing. This will include an overt focus on the different concepts within historical thinking, such as interpretations or causation. With an explicit focus on these concepts, an understanding of the five stages of writing put forward by Counsell (2004) and more engagement with the writing of Historians as championed by Carroll (2016) students would then enter Year 9 and their first stage of GCSE better equipped to make suggestions for developing their own writing. This progression model would give students an explicit understanding of how historical writing works for different concepts. Students could then take what they learn from being consulted in Year 9 to the later years of their GCSE study with a more developed understanding of what works for them in order to get their thoughts on to the page. This approach would help to marry some of the difficulties encountered in this project, particularly with regards to the differences between good historical writing and achieving highly at GCSE. This broader progression model would produce historians who can better achieve both outcomes and ultimately say more historically, by writing less in examined conditions.

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**List of Appendices**

**Appendix A: initial investigation questionnaire**

**Questionnaire for KS4 students**

Year Group: _____ Name: _____

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible by reflecting on your GCSE History lessons since the start of Year 9.

1) I feel confident when writing exam answers in GCSE History

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |

Explain your choice
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2) We often do activities in History lessons which help me to get better at writing exam answers

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |

If you can, describe a recent activity or something which has helped your writing **improve** in History e.g. responding to feedback given on your work
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3) Tick any of the following activities which you would like to do more of or be included in lessons to help to improve your writing:

| | |
|---|---|
| Debates/discussions | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Role plays/acting | |
| Drawing pictures to explain ideas | |
| Making diagrams to explain ideas | |
| Starting sentences/writing frames | |
| Analysing example answers | |
| Marking each other's work | |
| Your teacher to write exam answers when you do and share their writing | |
| Guided marking of your own work | |
| Time to talk your answers through before you write | |
| Taking longer in lessons to break down exactly what sentences and paragraphs should look like | |
| Having time to re-write answers to improve them | |
| Doing timed tasks so you know exactly how long to spend writing an answer | |
| Help planning your answer and choosing information before you start writing | |
| Other, please explain. | |

4) What do you do in other subjects e.g. English, Geography or Philosophy which helps you to write and improve your answers which you'd like to do in History? Please describe it below:

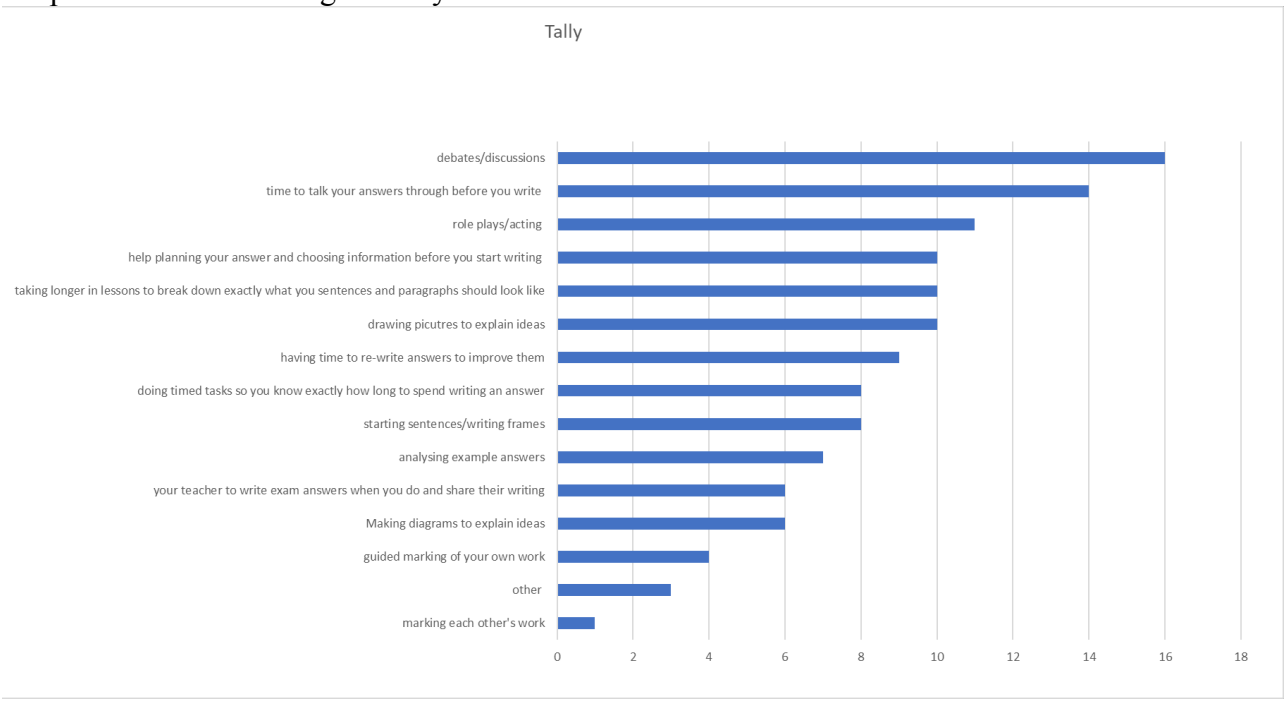
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**5)** If you could give some advice to a student in Year 9 who has just started their GCSE History about writing exam answers in History, what would it be?

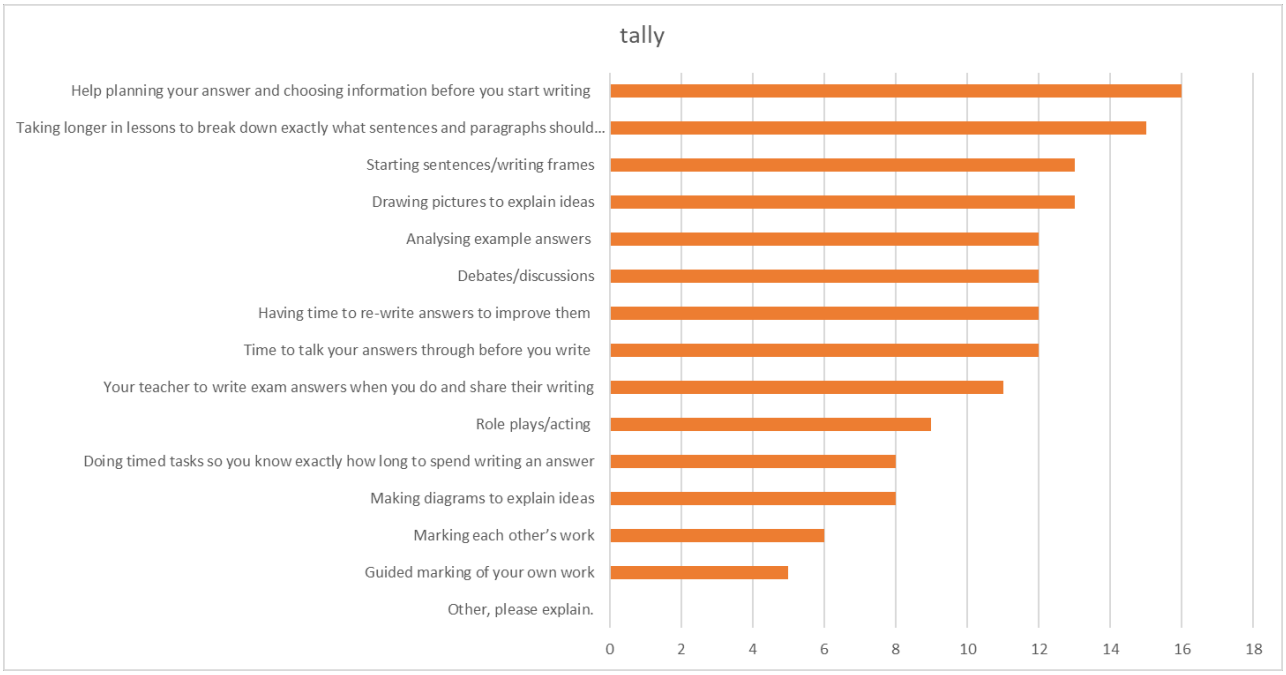
_____
_____
_____
_____

## Appendix B: results from question three of initial investigation questionnaire

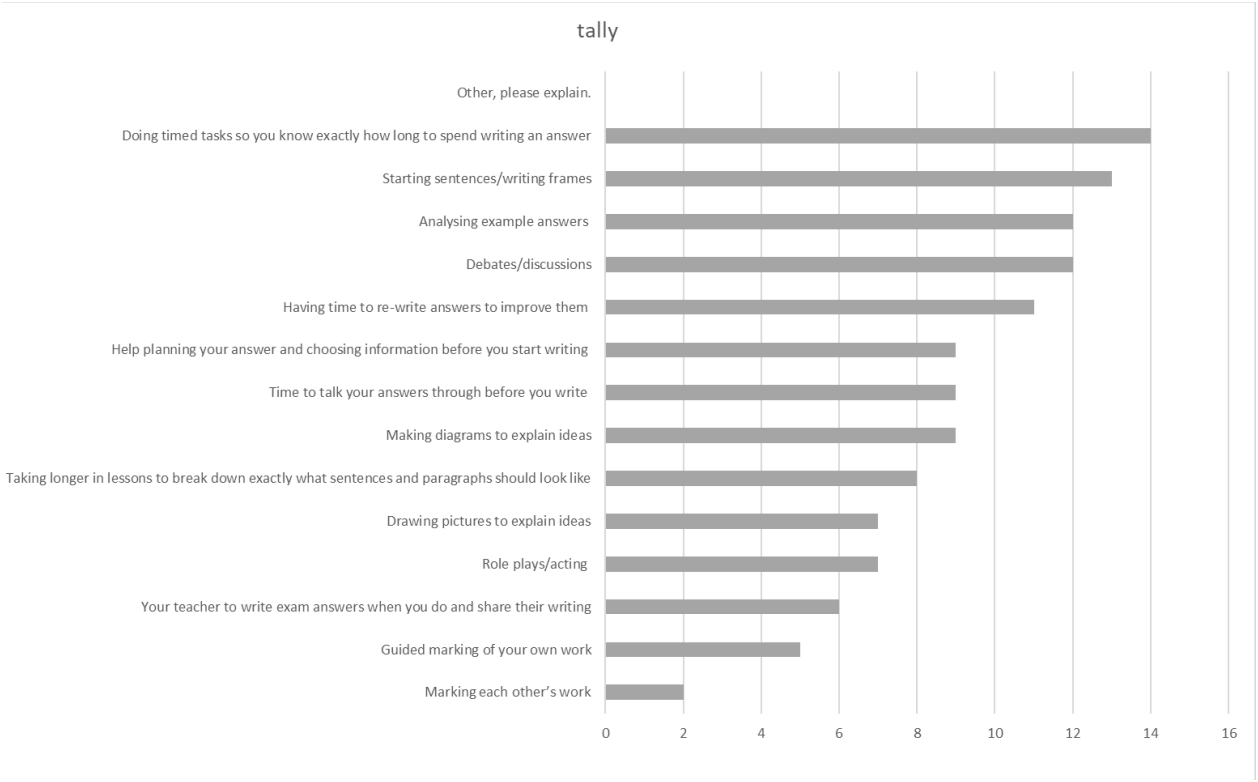
9X preferences for strategies to try in lessons



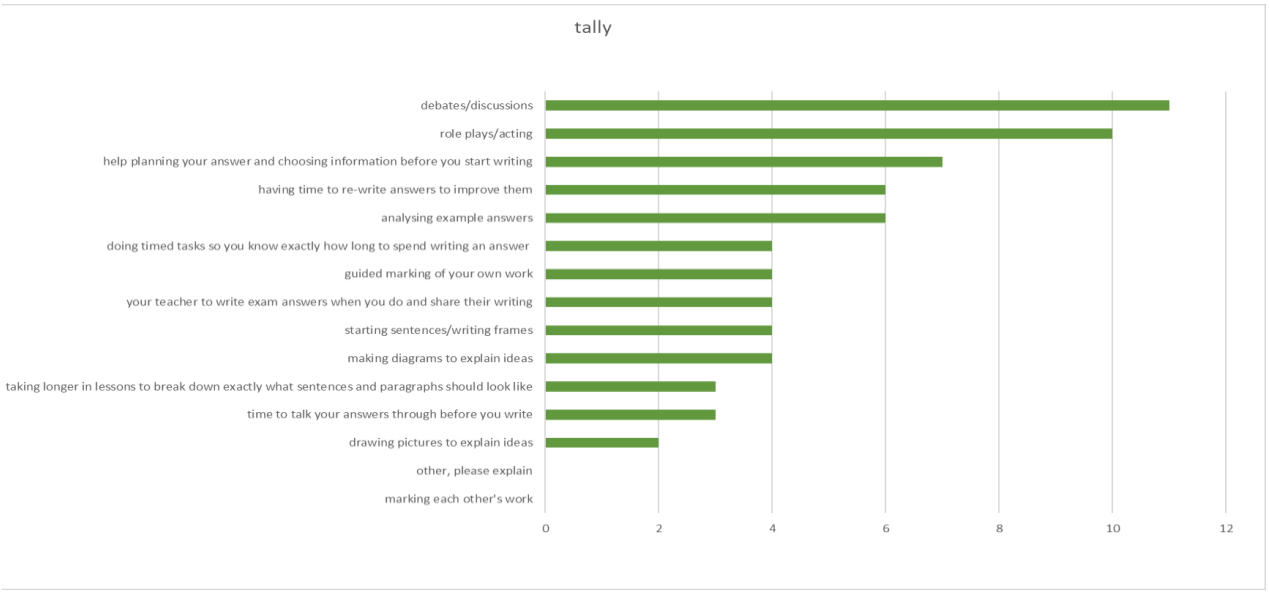

9Z preferences for strategies to try in lessons



## 10Z preferences for strategies to try in lessons

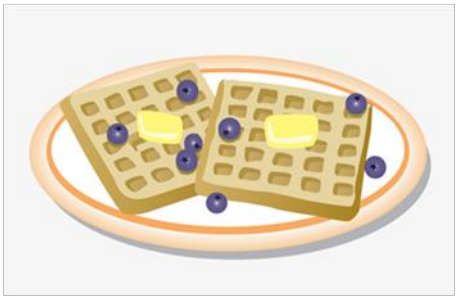



## 11Z preferences for strategies to try in lessons



**Appendix C: intervention cards**

# Waffle Warning



You've written a lot but it's not all relevant or question focused. How can you change your approach?

## Waffle Warning 

1) What are the important question words? Have you used these to start sentences and paragraphs?
2) How many marks is the question worth? 4 marks=1 paragraph.
3) Re-read your answer, have you answered the question asked or just written everything you know about the topic?

**Take Action based on your answers to the questions above.**

# Speeding Ticket



You've rushed your written task and now it's not your best work. What can you change or correct to improve it?

## Speeding Ticket 

1) How many marks is the question worth? You need to spend 1 minute writing for every mark in the question.
2) Is your handwriting legible? Have you used correct grammar and spelling.
3) Is your answer filled with precise evidence and examples? Names, dates, events. Back your points up!

**Take Action based on your answers to the questions above.**

## Hesitation Hazard



You've not started writing yet and that means you might run out of time. What can you use to help you to get started?

## Hesitation Hazard



1) Re-read the instructions on the board/sheet. What exactly have you been asked to do?
2) What are the important question words? How can you rephrase these to make a starting sentence?
3) How many marks is the question worth? 4 marks=1 paragraph=4 minutes of writing.

**Take Action based on your answers to the questions above.**

**Version 1**

## On Track



Your writing is question focused, relevant and you've written the suggested amount. Keep up the good written work!

## On Track



**Your writing is good, but how can you make it better? Take action using the questions below.**

1) 4 marks=1 paragraph. Do you have the correct amount?
2) Does each paragraph start and end with a sentence that answers the question?
3) Is your answer filled with precise evidence and examples? Names, dates, events. Back your points up!
4) Have you reached a judgement or conclusion which answers the question?

**Version 2**

## On Track



Your writing is question focused, relevant and you've written the suggested amount. Keep up the good written work!

## On Track

**Your writing is good, but how can you make it better? Take action using the questions below.**

1) 4 marks=1 paragraph. Do you have the correct amount?
2) Does each paragraph start and end with a sentence that answers the question?
3) Is your answer filled with precise evidence and examples? Names, dates, events. Back your points up!
4) Have you reached a complex and connected conclusion'?

**Appendix D: confidence scale questionnaire**

Name:

**Initial Question**

**Year 9: Writing exam answers in History**

How confident do you feel about writing exam question answers in History (1 is not confident at all, 10 is really confident)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Explain your choice

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**End of project**

**Year 9: Writing exam answers in History**

What literacy strategy have you been using in History over the last few weeks?_____
_____
_____

How confident do you feel about writing exam question answers in History now you've used this literacy strategy (1 is not confident at all, 10 is really confident)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Explain your choice

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

**Appendix E: confidence scale questionnaire results**

**9Z**

| Student | Gender | Initial confidence rating | Reason given |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z1 | M | 6 | I don't know |
| 9Z2 | F | 5 | Sometimes I don't know what to talk about |
| 9Z3 | M | 5 | Hard because English is not my first language |
| 9Z4 | M | 7 | I write too slow and that makes it difficult |
| 9Z5 | F | 5 | I am confident but I need to get better at it |
| 9Z6 | F | 7 | I feel confident but not really confident |
| 9Z7 | M | 5 | I know how to start my answer and to explain when miss helps with starting sentences |
| 9Z8 | M | 8 | Sometimes I don't use evidence like dates to back up my point |
| 9Z9 | F | 5 | It's very hard to explain because I don't have the vocabulary (EAL student) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z10 | F | 10 | |
| 9Z11 | M | 8 | As long as I have planned my answers and the points I am going to write about. However I struggle with extending my answers and sometimes I go off topic. |
| 9Z12 | M | 8 | I am confident with writing exam answers and I have done well so far |
| 9Z13 | M | 7 | |
| 9Z14 | F | 7 | I am confident with what I need to write however I am not always sure how to or in what order |
| 9Z15 | M | 5 | If I do practise questions it gives me practise and knowledge |
| 9Z16 | F | 6 | I need more practise |
| 9Z17 | F | 6 | With more practise I can do better |
| 9Z18 | M | 5 | I can answer the asked question clearly but I need to use different sentences structures and expand my vocabulary |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z19 | F | | |
| 9Z20 | F | 6 | |
| 9Z21 | F | 3 | I'm not good at writing exam questions I never know how to start and continue it and make it good quality, including all information |
| 9Z22 | M | 5 | I often write non relevant things the exams which loses marks |
| 9Z23 | F | 7 | I can write an explanation for a question but sometimes I get stuck on what to write |
| 9Z24 | F | 6 | |
| 9Z25 | F | 5 | I feel like I am under pressure when having to write in a short amount of time |

**9X**

| **Student** | **Gender** | **Initial confidence rating** | **Reason given** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X1 | F | 5 | |
| 9X2 | M | 6 | |
| 9X3 | M | 6 | I feel I can write but I need better explanation and more detail |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X4 | M | 7 | Sometimes I don't know some of the techniques to write a history exam |
| 9X5 | F | 7 | I feel confident when I write but maybe a bit more practise will help |
| 9X6 | M | 5 | Because I write lots of good answers but I don't get given the marks |
| 9X7 | F | 8 | I am confident with the subject |
| 9X8 | F | 4 | I don't know how to start my sentences and often write too much about the wrong thing because of this I don't get high marks I also feel a lot of pressure whilst writing |
| 9X9 | F | 2 | I don't have much self-confidence. i always feel a lot of pressure and like I'm not doing well. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X10 | M | 8 | I feel confident with the structure with paragraphs however to feel confident with the actual facts I could make more notes. |
| 9X11 | M | 7 | I feel confident but sometimes I don't know how to start the paragraph properly or use the appropriate words. |
| 9X12 | M | 7 | |
| 9X13 | M | 9 | I feel confident but not too confident |
| 9X14 | M | 5 | Sometimes it's easy and sometimes it's difficult |
| 9X15 | F | 8 | I don't find it worrying |
| 9X16 | M | 7 | I am confident but I'm stuck on how to start the paragraph or work out what it's about |
| 9X17 | F | 7 | I'm okay but need to improve to get a good mark. I know I can do it I just need to cut down on messing around. |
| 9X18 | M | 2 | I don't know how to structure my answers |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X19 | M | 8 | I can answer some questions, but I struggle sometimes how to start off my paragraphs and answer the questions |
| 9X20 | M | 7 | Normally I am a very confident person but sometimes I worry I won't remember the dates |

## Appendix F: student comments after receiving cards

### Key

Positive- made a change to writing independently using the card

Positive- needed extra support to make a change to their writing

Positive- but did not understand how to make a change to writing or vague about how they made the change

Negative-no change made to writing or card ignored or misunderstood the instructions it gave

## Cycle 1

| Card received | Student G | Student pr | PP, SEN or EAL | Cycle | Student reflection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Waffle Warning | F | HPA | Y | 1 | it made me feel bad about my writing, like I wasn't good |
| Waffle Warning | F | MPA | N | 1 | helpful because it told me what to do |
| Waffle Warning | F | HPA | N | 1 | I was not expecting it as I feel like my knowledge of history is improving |
| Waffle Warning | M | HPA | N | 1 | it helped me see how to improve my work by using the checklist on the back |
| Waffle Warning | F | LPA | N | 1 | it was helpful |
| Waffle Warning | M | MPA | N | 1 | I used it to help me |
| Waffle Warning | M | MPA | N | 1 | not effective |
| Waffle Warning | F | MPA | N | 1 | I used the card to highlight key words in my answer to improve it |
| Waffle Warning | M | MPA | N | 1 | I responded to the card so I can do better next time |
| Waffle Warning | M | MPA | N | 1 | I did not pay attention to it |
| Waffle Warning | F | MPA | N | 1 | it helped me to realise I need to focus on what the questions asking and I need to make clear points which link to the question |
| Speeding Ticket | M | LPA | Y | 1 | it helped me slow down and check the question |
| Speeding Ticket | F | HPA | Y | 1 | I didn't use it because I was using the time on my watch and that was different to the time on the board in the classroom |
| Speeding Ticket | M | MPA | N | 1 | not effective |
| Hesitation Hazard | F | MPA | N | 1 | I started writing after receiving the card and it helped me get started |
| Hesitation Hazard | F | HPA | N | 1 | I helped me get back on track when I got stuck |
| Hesitation Hazard | F | LPA | Y | 1 | I ignored it |
| Hesitation Hazard | F | MPA | N | 1 | I was talking but I was still doing my work |
| Hesitation Hazard | M | LPA | N | 1 | I found it very annoying and ignored it. It is not suitable for us |
| Hesitation Hazard | M | LPA | Y | 1 | I ignored it |
| Hesitation Hazard | F | MPA | N | 1 | I was confused because I had started the task but it helped get on with it later |
| Hesitation Hazard | M | LPA | Y | 1 | I didn't use it at all but I read it through |
| On Track | M | MPA | Y | 1 | I didn't turn it over and forgot it was a thing |
| On Track | F | HPA | N | 1 | As soon as you gave me the card I looked at it and felt fine with it. I felt it was useful as I could see where I was. When I looked at the back it helped me write faster. |
| On Track | F | LPA | Y | 1 | I found it helpful |
| On Track | F | HPA | Y | 1 | it didn't help me because reading it took away from my writing time however it gave me reassurance I was doing well |
| On Track | F | MPA | Y | 1 | I turned it over and read it but I didn't find it helpful |
| On Track | F | MPA | N | 1 | I found it helpful |
| On Track | F | MPA | N | 1 | it made me happy |
| On Track | F | MPA | N | 1 | I was impressed with myself , when I was stuck it told me what to do, I used it to check my work over at the end |
| On Track | M | MPA | N | 1 | I read what I could do to improve |
| On Track | F | MPA | N | 1 | it helped me answer my question in lots of detail |
| On Track | F | MPA | N | 1 | I did the work I was meant to do and I finished it |

## Appendix G: student comments after receiving cards

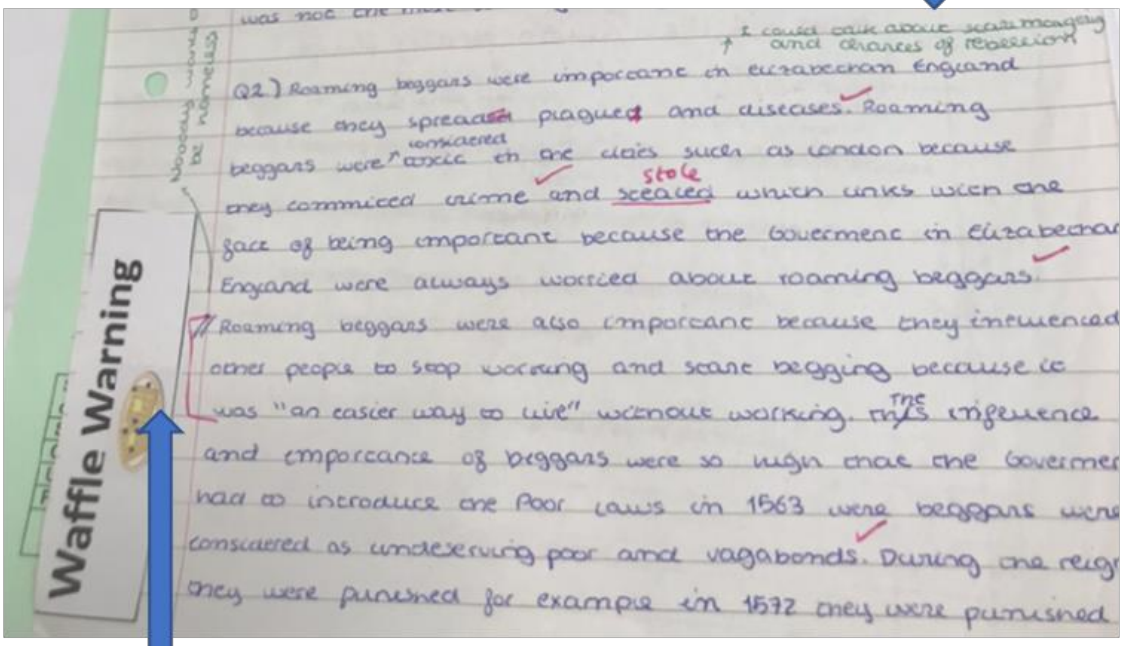
## Cycle 2

| Card received | Student G | Student pr | PP, SEN or EAL | Cycle | Student reflection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Waffle Warning** | M | MPA | Y | 2 | I realised my mistake and fixed it |
| **Waffle Warning** | M | LPA | N | 2 | It surprised me because I did find it helpful |
| **Waffle Warning** | F | MPA | Y | 2 | it helped me to understand what to do to improve |
| **Speeding Ticket** | F | LPA | N | 2 | it was helpful |
| **Hesitation Hazard** | F | MPA | N | 2 | At least I wasn't waffling |
| **Hesitation Hazard** | M | MPA | N | 2 | it helped me ask for help |
| **Hesitation Hazard** | F | LPA | N | 2 | it was helpful |
| **On Track** | M | MPA | Y | 2 | I used it and it helped |
| **On Track** | F | MPA | N | 2 | good because I wrote a lot |
| **On Track** | F | MPA | N | 2 | I found it helpful ,it gave me useful reminders |
| **On Track** | M | LPA | Y | 2 | I used it and it actually helped |
| **On Track** | F | MPA | N | 2 | I was impressed as it helped me, because I knew it was good but that I could do better, the questions on the back helped me |
| **On Track** | M | HPA | N | 2 | it helped me see how to get my work to the next level |
| **On Track** | F | MPA | Y | 2 | I read it and tried to follow the instructions, I used the checklist to check my work |
| **On Track** | M | LPA | Y | 2 | I used it to check I had done everything I was meant to |

**Appendix H: example of student work having used the cards and stickers in a feedback task**

The student has answered an 8-mark question 'Explain why roaming beggars were important in Elizabethan England'. The mark scheme requires two well explained points for top marks.

Green pen annotation showing that the student has used the guidance on the card and has established a more accurate and specific piece of own knowledge to be used in their re-draft.




Waffle warning given for a point made here which lacks the accuracy and specific own knowledge required by the exam board for two developed points to have successfully been made

**Appendix I: student comments to explain their final confidence rating**

**9Z**

| Student | Gender | Final confidence rating | Reason given |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z1 | M | 6 | I don't know |
| 9Z2 | F | 6 | I know how to use paragraphs; I know how to use evidence |
| 9Z3 | M | 8 | Listening to the teacher helps |
| 9Z4 | M | 8 | My writing is still bad but it's easier to focus on improving it now and I'm working on better answers |
| 9Z5 | F | 9 | I have become more confident with structure of answers |
| 9Z6 | F | 9 | Because I know how to pick apart the question and statement and I know how to find what I could use in the answer |
| 9Z7 | M | 9 | Miss is helping me with how to start my sentences |
| 9Z8 | M | 10 | I find it easier when we go through the answer first |
| 9Z9 | F | 7 | I found the cards really helpful |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z10 | F | 10 | Everything |
| 9Z11 | M | 8 | If I plan first it's easier, 20 markers are a struggle |
| 9Z12 | M | 10 | Annotating and highlighting are really helpful so I know what I need to write |
| 9Z13 | M | 8 | I feel more confident |
| 9Z14 | F | 9 | Annotating so I can visually see what I'm writing and what order. Also having a specific amount of time to write helps |
| 9Z15 | M | 8 | I have many more revision notes and information in my book |
| 9Z16 | F | 9 | We have practised a lot more and Miss has helped with sentence starters and how to plan our answers |
| 9Z17 | F | | |
| 9Z18 | M | 7 | I use more quotes and different sentence structures |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9Z19 | F | | I find it a lot easier however I find it confusing at times |
| 9Z20 | F | 6 | I don't know |
| 9Z21 | F | 3 | I just don't feel confident at writing |
| 9Z22 | M | 8 | I feel a little more confident |
| 9Z23 | F | 9 | I know how to structure my paragraphs correctly |
| 9Z24 | F | | |
| 9Z25 | F | | |

**9X**

| **Student** | **Gender** | **Final confidence rating** | **Reason given** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X1 | F | | |
| 9X2 | M | 1 | It is boring and I can't write for that long anyway |
| 9X3 | M | 8 | I feel I can write an answer to an exam question, but I need more dates and in depth ideas |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X4 | M | 9 | All the work this term has helped me get better at writing answers |
| 9X5 | F | | |
| 9X6 | M | 8 | Because we have taken time to highlight the important in the question and we had 10 mins to answer one question and I made many revision cards |
| 9X7 | F | | |
| 9X8 | F | 7 | Practising starting sentences has really helped me to get higher marks |
| 9X9 | F | 4 | Practising exam answers has really helped. So has looking at example answers that are worth the highest marks as I feel I can use them as a template for my own answers. They help me understand what I need to write. |

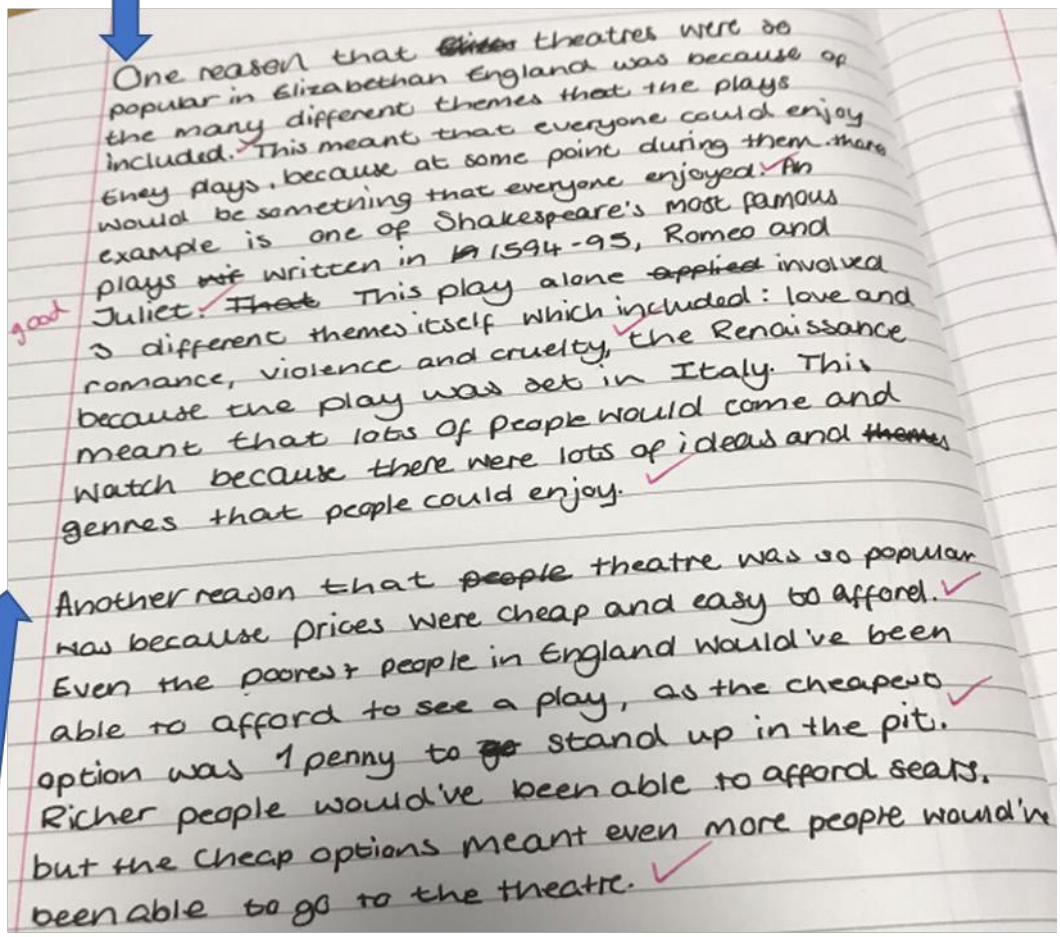
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X10 | M | 9 | We have done more things to help me feel confident. For example, practising exam questions. Going through the CAPs and looking at example paragraphs. |
| 9X11 | M | 9 | I feel much more confident now I know how to structure the paragraphs |
| 9X12 | M | 7 | I understand some of it |
| 9X13 | M | 10 | Talking through answers has made me feel much more confident |
| 9X14 | M | 7 | Fairly confident but I still find it hard to remember things |
| 9X15 | F | 10 | I'm just confident |
| 9X16 | M | 8 | We have gone over a lot more exam questions step by step and we highlighted key information |
| 9X17 | F | 7 | I haven't done anything useful |
| 9X18 | M | 4 | Annotating the questions is helpful |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9X19 | M | 8 | I was more confident before |
| 9X20 | M | 10 | I'm very confident, on the last question we did in lessons I got 7/8 which is really good |

**Appendix J: example of student writing during cycle 3 after practising sentence starters**

The question posed asked 'Explain why theatre was so popular in Elizabethan England' and was worth 8 marks, requiring two developed points.

The student has clearly used the words in the question to make a starting sentence which guides them towards making a developed point. The phrase 'one reason' also implies an awareness that a second point is required.



One reason that ~~Elizabethan~~ theatres were so popular in Elizabethan England was because of the many different themes that the plays included. This meant that everyone could enjoy they plays, because at some point during them there would be something that everyone enjoyed. An example is one of Shakespeare's most famous plays ~~not~~ written in 1594-95, Romeo and Juliet. ~~That~~ This play alone ~~applied~~ involved 3 different themes itself which included: love and romance, violence and cruelty, the Renaissance because the play was set in Italy. This meant that lots of people would come and watch because there were lots of ideas and ~~themes~~ genres that people could enjoy.

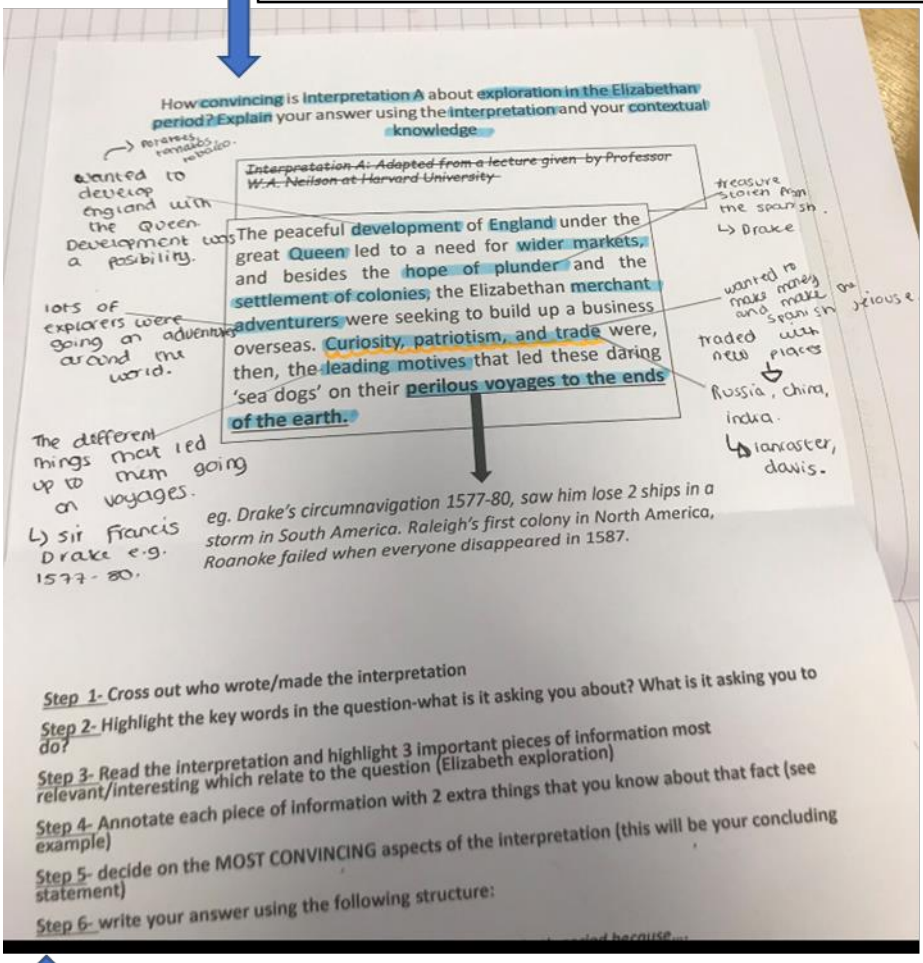
good

Another reason that ~~people~~ theatre was so popular was because prices were cheap and easy to afford. Even the poorest people in England would've been able to afford to see a play, as the cheapest option was 1 penny to ~~go~~ stand up in the pit. Richer people would've been able to afford seats, but the cheap options meant even more people would've been able to go to the theatre.

The second paragraph is also clearly signposted by re-using the question words into order to create an answer with 2 question focused points as is required by the exam board to achieve full marks.

**Appendix K: Step by step exam writing question activity and student work**

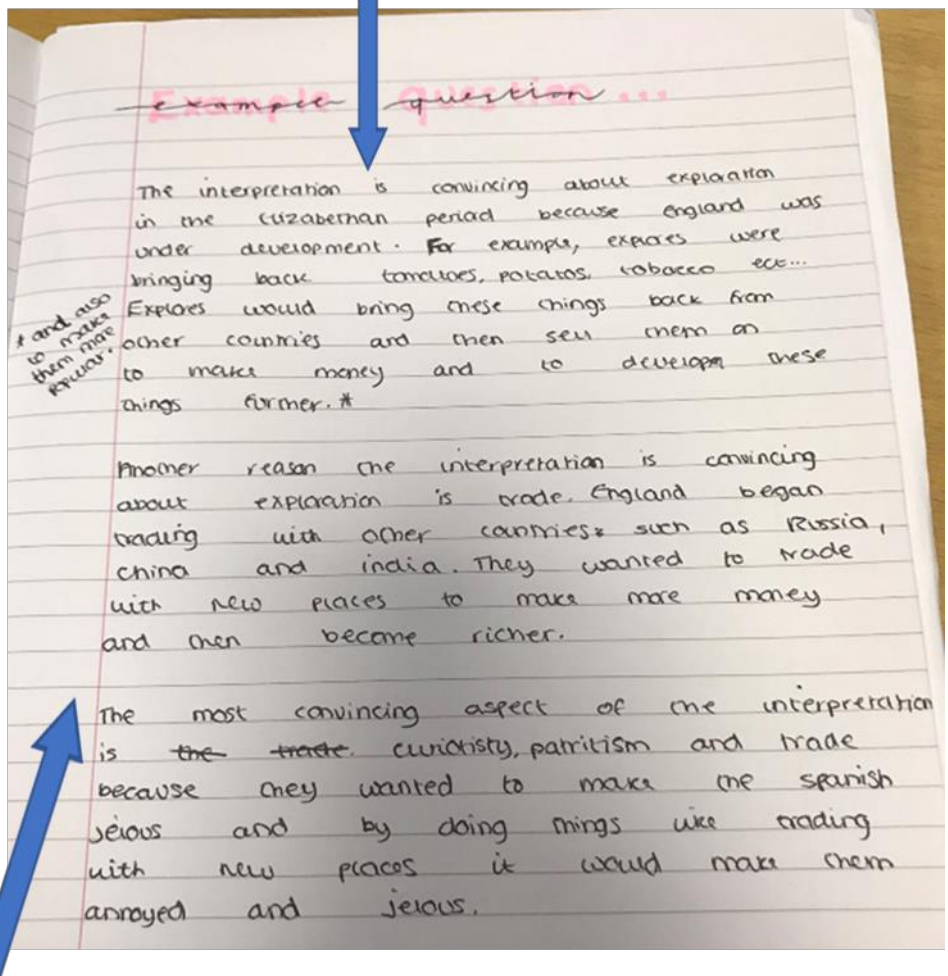
The question tackled by the students as this piece of writing was an 8 mark interpretation question about Elizabethan explorers. Students need 2 developed points and a conclusion.




Clear evidence for student engaging with steps 1-4 in order to successfully plan a response which contains features of a good written answer.

Students were provided with an outline of the steps they should follow in order to be successful with this question.

As practised in previous interventions and cycles, the student as used the question words to make their starting sentence and so avoided waffling. They have written the correct amount in the required time and so have neither sped nor hesitated.



~~Example question...~~

The interpretation is convincing about explanation in the Elizabethan period because England was under development. For example, explores were bringing back tomatoes, potatos, tobacco ecc... Explores would bring these things back from other countries and then sell them on to make money and to develop these things further.*

* and also to make them more popular.

Another reason the interpretation is convincing about explanation is trade. England began trading with other countries such as Russia, china and india. They wanted to trade with new places to make more money and then become richer.

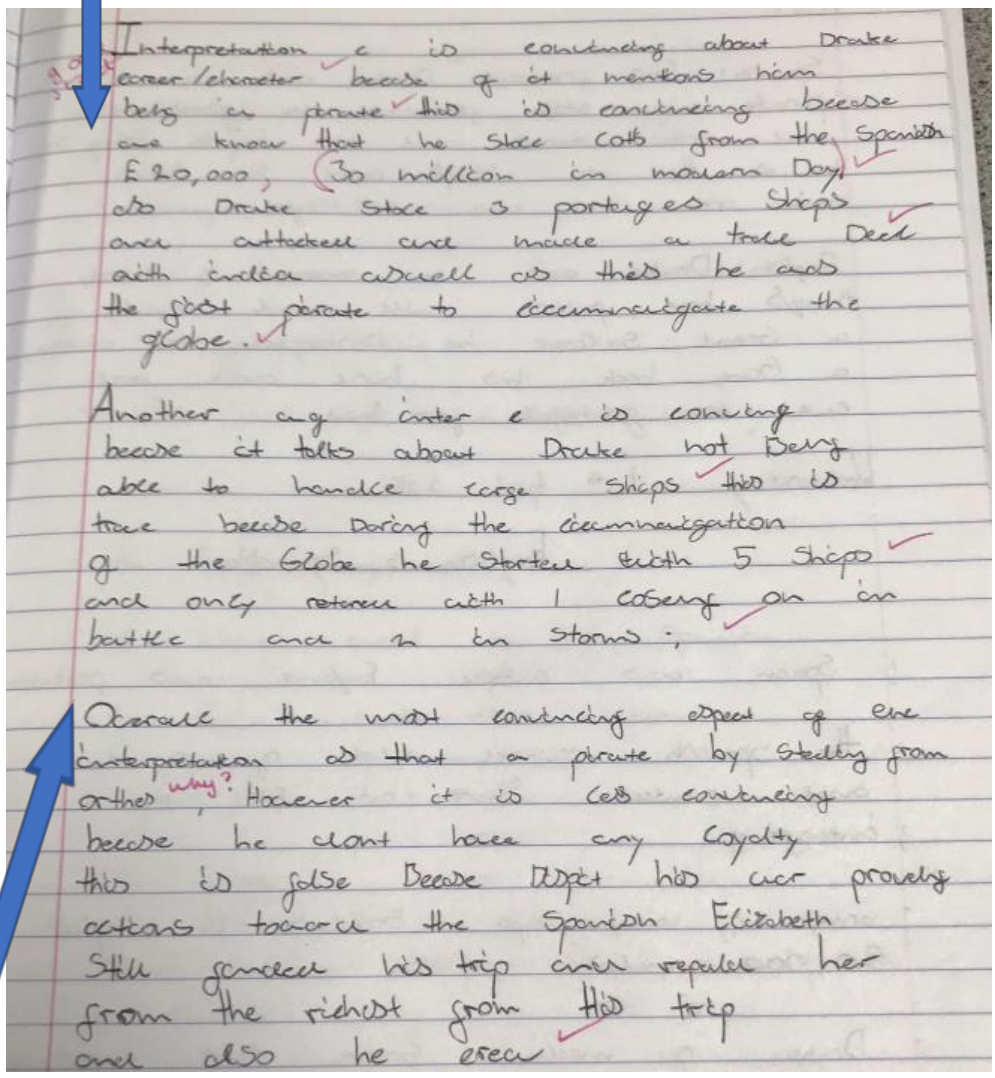
The most convincing aspect of the interpretation is ~~the trade~~. curiosity, patritism and trade because they wanted to make the spanish jelous and by doing things like trading with new places it would make them annoyed and jelous.

The conclusion shows an attempt by the student to reach a complex and connected paragraph (as outlined by the On Track card) by deciding on the most convincing aspect.

**Appendix L: Example of student work at the end of the intervention cycles**

The question tackled by the students as their final piece of writing during the intervention was an 8-mark interpretation question about the career and character of Sir Francis Drake. Students need 2 developed points and a conclusion.

This final piece of writing was tackled by students without having access to the cards or any other particular guidance on my part. It is clear to see that the answer is well structured, question focused and uses specific own knowledge.



Interpretation c is convincing about Drake career/character because of it mentions him being a pirate this is convincing because we know that he stole coins from the Spanish £20,000, (30 million in modern Day) also Drake stole 3 portuguese ships were attacked and made a trade Deal with India as well as this he was the first pirate to circumnavigate the globe.

Another way inter e is convincing because it talks about Drake not being able to handle large ships this is true because during the circumnavigation of the Globe he started with 5 ships and only returned with 1 losing on in battle and in storms.

Overall the most convincing aspect of the interpretation is that a pirate by stealing from others why? However it is less convincing because he didn't have any loyalty this is false Because despite his over proudly actions towards the Spanish Elizabeth still granted his trip over regular her from the richest from his trip and also he creat

This student has successfully made a complex conclusion which considers the convincing and less convincing aspects of the interpretation by testing it against their own knowledge