

# Quality of Ideas

The PILNA 2021 writing assessment asked students to write an original story based on either of two prompts provided. These stories were rated against several areas, one of which was the student's quality of ideas. This area measures the quality of the students' ideas and how well those ideas have been developed to produce an interesting story.

Students' quality of ideas were rated on a scale ranging from code 1, indicating a very brief attempt at a story idea with no real substance, to code 8, where the writing shows interesting/original ideas, details that enhance the story, and characters that are distinctive or well developed. Code 0 is also assigned when there is insufficient evidence to assess student ideas.

Students who scored code 4 or below at best demonstrated that they understood the basic requirements of the task and, at the lowest assessable level (code 1), showed only an attempt at beginning a story or description that didn't communicate anything of substance.

67% of year four students and 48% of year six students scored code 4 or below in quality of ideas. The highest proportion of year four students scored code 3 and the highest proportion of year six students scored code 4. Most students were not able to put together a simple story based on the prompts given.

In contrast, this means that about 30% of year four students and 50% of year six students produced stories that ranged from simple storylines relating to the prompts to well-sequenced stories that entertain and effectively incorporate the prompts.

Students may need support to develop good quality stories or to communicate these in a written format.

## How can teachers support learning in this area?

Addressing how these types of questions are taught in schools may increase student performance in this area in future. Teaching practices need to focus on increasing students' abilities to both develop and communicate good quality ideas. Below, SPC present some ways that teachers might support learning in this area.

1. Practice story writing by putting students in small groups and getting them to build a story one line at a time. Give each group the starting line of a story that sets out a key aspect of that story, such as an event. Each student in the group adds to the plot of the story (a sentence describing what happens next). The last student in the group must try and finish the story. The group then adds details to make the ideas more interesting. They may decide to change the events to improve the story. Give support to less proficient writers or ask more proficient writers in the group to offer assistance. Ask groups to swap their stories and discuss the merits of the other groups' ideas.
2. Practice developing ideas by putting students in small groups and getting them to turn an image into a story. Give each group an image that shows an event, such as a birthday party or a bicycle accident. Ask students in the groups to describe the image, and then develop ideas based on the image to turn the image into a story. This can be achieved by encouraging students in the groups to ask what, where, who, how and why questions. Depending on their

proficiency levels, students can either make note of the key events to tell their story to the class or write down the story in its entirety.

3. Practice story sequencing and development by preparing flash cards of the plot details of several different stories. Give these cards out to small groups or individual students and ask them to sequence the story from beginning to end. Students hold the cards up in the order of their choice and ask the rest of the class to read the story. The class should be encouraged to ask questions or suggest a change.