

ROALD DAHL'S
Matilda
THE MUSICAL



**Editing,
Rewriting & Rehearsing**

Editing, Rewriting & Rehearsing

This final step allows students to put the finishing touches to their scenes with a view to rehearsing and performing them in class.

This pack has been designed to support and enrich students' writing experience in school. Through a selection of practical games and activities, students will build up an authentic experience of the **editing process** from the perspective of a writer preparing a script for rehearsal room to stage.

The resources can also act as stand-alone activities that can be adapted to other forms of writing in your school curriculum.

Useful Starting Points:

- If the students have performed in a play or musical before, ask them to consider how long this process was, from when they first saw the script to when they performed onstage.
- Explain that this is just the *rehearsal process*. The story of a play or stage musical starts a long time before rehearsals begin. It took four years of writing and re-writing before *Matilda The Musical* had its first performance in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2010. It then went through further rewrites before it opened in the West End two years later!
- Show the students the Wormwood scene in [Editing Scripts](#) on the [Rewriting](#) page of the website. As a group, discuss the changes you can spot between the two. *e.g. How has the script developed? What might be the reasons behind these changes?*

- Now watch the **Rewriting** films on the webpage. Writer, Dennis Kelly, says that Rewriting is **the most important element in writing:**

“I quite like that because it means that when I write the first thing, I don’t have to make it perfect, I’ve got time to make it better and better.” Dennis Kelly.

- Discuss the benefits of rewriting, including the following: *It helps make you more confident and strong as a writer. A writer knows they will always edit and re-write their work so it doesn’t matter how bad the first draft is, because it will always get better!*
- Ask the students to consider how different the rewriting process is in the theatre, compared to writing a story or a novel: No published writer submits a script or a novel that has not required any changes. However, in the theatre process, rewriting is the final step before *handing the script over to actors to get it up ‘on its feet’* and further explore what might need developing or changing.
- Explain to the students that when their scripts have been written and edited, they can then be performed in class. The writers will have the benefit of watching their scenes come to life and listening to feedback from other students.
- They are now ready to explore rewriting their scenes. These short, fun activities help students to think like a writer and songwriter. Students will learn to listen for mistakes as well as to see them on the page.

Re-Writing Resources:

1. Dictionary Games

Simple quick-fire games that enables students to think deeply about using the right language in context. These activities allows you and your students to explore when words are used appropriately, and to explore shades of meaning.

What you Need:

A large enough space for students to move around in easily.

Matilda School Resources: Re-Writing

A dictionary!

a) Dictionary Bodies

- Ask the students to find a space in the room to stand. Make sure there's enough room for them to be able to create shapes with their bodies.
- Remind the students of the Facial Expressions game they played from the Character pack. This was to find the most accurate exciting words to use with relish.
- Explain that you are going to give them a word and, when you say that word, they are to individually make a frozen image to express the meaning of that word. They must do this as quickly as possible and without talking. *(The words you use will have more than one meaning when said aloud, such as: Jam. Trip. Page. Box. Bat. Mummy. Banned. Bore. Knight. Reign. Revolting!)*
- After the students have made their first image of each word. Ask if they can think of another image to suit a different meaning of the same word.

b) Guess the Word

- Divide the class into two teams and ask each team to stand facing each other. Make sure each student has enough space to take a step forward and back.
- Explain to the class that good writers and songwriters choose their words carefully. Sometimes four words can be replaced with just one that expresses ideas with deeper clarity.
- Tell them that you are going to read out some 'dictionary' meanings - just read the meanings of the words, not the actual word itself. Ask the students to listen to the word's meaning and to think of one word that will fit the description.
- When you click your fingers -not before! - they must step forward as fast as they can, ready to give their word before anyone from another team. *(If you wish you can give the teams some time to talk so they can discuss possible answers, but it generally works most effectively if you encourage students to think in their heads about possible answers.)*

Matilda School Resources: Re-Writing

- If more than one student steps forward, the fastest goes first (they often move at exactly the same time so it is up to you to just make sure each team 'has a go').
- If the word they say is the same as any other student, that student steps back into place as that word is USED!
- You get one point for each correct new word (or synonym).

E.g. Description: 'this is a feeling someone might have when they are always looking on the dark side of things. They think that bad things always happen to them'. Words/Synonyms: 'negative', 'pessimistic', 'grumpy'.

OR: Description: 'this is a feeling we have when we don't feel quite right about something that has happened or is going to happen'. Words/Synonyms: 'anxious', 'concern', 'uncertainty', 'worry'.

- You and the rest of the students are welcome to challenge the choice of vocabulary, so students have to think hard about their word choices to receive points.
- As a more effective part of the rewriting process, you can pick words that have been used incorrectly or inappropriately by your students at some point in their writing.

e.g. a student might have used the word 'petrified' when a character might only be a bit worried. They might have used the word because they think it is powerful and sounds good. But in this case, 'petrified' would be too strong.
- The subtleties in the shades of meaning for synonyms can be explored meaningfully in this game.

2. Mrs Robust's Mistakes

Encourages students to consider the ways in which different characters might react to an event and to recognise when a piece of writing doesn't 'sound right'.

- Divide the students into two teams standing together in a circle.

- Explain that this time, you will be reading out **phrases** from the work of a teacher called Mrs Robust. Mrs Robust is a teacher who came to work for Miss Trunchbull but didn't last very long as her grammar was often incorrect. (*You can use mistakes that your students have made in their own writing as the game is about Mrs Robust's mistakes and not be assigned to individual students.*)
- The rules are just like the Dictionary game 'Guess the Word'. Each team listens to the phrase and when you click your fingers, students can step forward to identify the problem or correct it.

Example 1:

Miss Robust says: "Before I worked for Miss Trunchbull, I didn't have nothing."

Mistake - use of a double negative.

Example 2:

Miss Robust says: I should of spoken up to Miss Trunchbull but I was too afraid.

Mistake - not using contracted form of 'should have' which sounds similar to 'should of' when spoken out loud.

Extension:

- To begin with, it is best to keep the game quick-fire and just ask students to give spoken responses. They need to get used to hearing a mistake and understanding when something doesn't sound right – possibly more than if it doesn't look right. However, as the activity develops, you can introduce pens and paper so students can further explore effective improvements in the writing.
- Students will enjoy correcting 'Mrs Robust's' mistakes and will often offer very creative variations. E.g. they will often be keen to change the sentence so that it is more descriptive as well as expressing the meaning more clearly.

3. Punctuation in Action

Students learn about punctuation by experiencing its' rhythm and how it makes them feel. When students have understood how to play this game, they can also use this approach to check their own writing.

How it Works:

- Ask students to walk around the room. When you call out a particular type of punctuation, they are to stop in the following ways:

Full stop: Stop with feet together and hands by sides

Comma: Pause, then carry on walking in the same direction

Exclamation mark: Stop and clap hands

Ellipsis: Take three slow steps and on the last step freeze into a dramatic pose

Semi-colon: Pause and then carry on walking in a different direction

Question mark: Stop and create a questioning gesture *e.g. hunched shoulders*

- Use as many or as few punctuations marks as you wish, depending on the age and ability of your students.
- Try some different combinations that might occur when a writer is trying to create a particular effect. *e.g. Three question marks in a row / Seven full stops / A question mark and an exclamation mark.*
- After playing this game for a while, gather as a group to discuss the following:
 - We used three question marks in a row. What is the effect of this?
 - I called out a semicolon followed by three commas and then a full stop. When might a writer punctuate in this way and why?
 - I called out seven full stops and nothing else. How did this make you feel when you were playing the game?

- Students might respond to this last question by saying ‘a bit bored’ which is exactly what we want them to recognise. If their writing is full of full stops and no other form of punctuation, it may not be as interesting as it could be.
- Once students get used to the punctuation actions, explain that you are going to read out some lines from a play. This time they need to listen for your pauses, decide what the punctuation might be, and respond in the appropriate way.
- Explain that sometimes there might be more than one possible type of punctuation – this makes the game more interesting and introduces opportunities for discussion. *Their responses may not be what is written down but they could still be correct!*
- Now ask the students to use dialogue from their own scene. Explain that they are going to read the dialogue out loud to themselves and, when they reach any punctuation they have used, they must use the corresponding actions.
- Give them a good few minutes to explore this, then gather to discuss the following:
 - Did anyone reach the other end of the classroom without a stop or a change of direction? Perhaps their sentences are too long and do not include enough punctuation!
 - Did anyone repeat the same actions too often? Maybe they need to look at different uses of punctuation in their lines, especially when different characters are speaking.
 - Did some characters use certain punctuation points more than others? How helpful is this for the actors? How does it help the scene?
- Discuss what it was like to tune into the sound of their writing as well as how it looked. The more they are able to recognise when their ‘writer’s voice’ doesn’t sound right, the more accurate their grammar will become. Explain they are now approaching the *rehearsal period* where they can listen to their peers reading their scripts out loud, just like a professional writer in the theatre!

4. Writing Stage Directions

A simple example of how stage directions are used.

- Discuss the use of the term 'Stage Directions'. What are their function? *e.g. to tell the actors and director about the setting of the scene and about action that happens in it.*
- Show the students the layout of a play script on the [Editing](#) page of the Rewriting Site. Here, they can see the stage directions that Dennis Kelly wrote, and this example below will help them to understand how to use them effectively.
- Here is an example of a stage direction from *Matilda The Musical*:

The Wormwood's living room. Mr. Wormwood is on the phone. Suddenly there is a scream. He panics and turns around. Mrs Wormwood (the source of the scream) stands horrified, staring at Matilda, who sits reading a book.

- Ask the students what these stage directions tell them:
 1. We are in the Wormwoods' living room
 2. Mr Wormwood is talking on the phone
 3. Mrs Wormwood screams
- Thanks to the stage directions, the director and actors know the place or location where the action is happening and that the atmosphere is tense.
- Now look at the next bit of the scene. It carries on with the following dialogue:

Mrs Wormwood:

Harry!

Mr Wormwood:

Hang on.

Mrs Wormwood:

Look at this, she's reading a book. That's not normal for a five year old. I think she might be an idiot.

- Note that the stage directions don't tell actors how to speak their lines. It doesn't say for example:

Mrs Wormwood (screaming at the top of her voice):

Harry!

- Most writers choose not to write stage directions before the actors' lines. That's because it is the actor's job to decide how they feel and how to say their lines. If the writer has written well-rounded characters, exciting lines and a great plot, they will have done a lot of work towards helping the actors make their decisions.
- Remind the students that Dennis Kelly talks about how the actor playing Miss Trunchbull had a completely different voice to the one he had imagined.

"One of the lessons you learn as a playwright is the thing that's in your head will never ever ever exist, you'll never ever see it because it's in your head!"

- Dennis Kelly in Handing it Over (part 3, Rewriting Film)

5. The First Reading!

The students speak the scripts out loud, giving the writers their first chance to hear their work off the page, spoken by someone else.

- As a group, explain that *Matilda the Musical* writers, Dennis and Tim, handed their script and songs over to Matthew Warchus, the director, whose job it was to interpret the musical and make it come to life on stage.
- Explain that this stage of their script-writing process is a good time for them to hear other classmates read their scene aloud.

- At this point, it is a good idea to discuss what the group understands by positive feedback and constructive criticism. It is important to give the writers positive feedback at all times, to encourage their work and think of ways to help them make it clearer and better, rather than just pointing out what you think are mistakes!
- Divide the class into groups so each group contains the script-writer(s) and the right number of actors for the script.
- Get each group to form a small circle. Ask the actors to choose one part and then read the script aloud as a group, either seated on chairs or standing but for now, they are just reading, not acting out the script with movement.
- Remind the writers that they may want to read stage directions or one of the actors can do this. Add that it is a good idea for the writers to take notes about what they hear so they don't forget any changes or rewrites they want to make.
- After this first reading, get the group to discuss anything they don't understand. Are there any lines or words that don't make sense to the actors? Explain that this is the first step of rewriting in rehearsal for writers. This is when they can check that their lines and words make sense or if they need a little more explanation or expression.
- Now ask the writers to assign a role to each of the actors. At this point, the writer can choose to give the actors their character backstories for additional information. Then get the groups to read the script again. Was this 2nd reading clearer?

6. Getting it on it's Feet

- Ask the groups to work out where the audience will be sitting. This will affect where they enter and position themselves onstage.
- Ask them to also decide how the actors should start the scene: are they sitting, standing, does someone walk into the scene? *Is this information in the script already? How much do they need to work out for themselves? Which information does the writer need to add? Or is*

there too much instruction, leaving the actors and director no decisions to make themselves?

- Now ask them to consider the stage setting. E.g If the play is set in a classroom, where is the board? Where is the door? *Do the stage directions help the actors understand where they are and what's happening in the scene?*
- Using all this information, ask the group to act out the scene for the first time. Again, remind the writers that they can take notes of anything they'd like to change (if any).
- When they are finished, invite the writers to ask the actors to give their positive feedback on the following:
 - Do the characters seem believable?
 - Can they understand what their characters are saying and why they are speaking?
 - Does the plot make sense to them?
- Get the actors to play the scene is played. Explain that this time, at any point during this rehearsal, the writers can call out 'STOP THINK!' When they do, the actors have to freeze and say what their character is thinking at that moment. *If an actor doesn't know what their character is thinking, the writer can ask: is it because the script isn't clear? And if so, what do they think the character might say instead?*
- Now it's time to add the crucial ingredient - an audience. Get each group to perform their scene one by one, using the rest of the group as an audience. Afterwards, ask the audience for positive feedback such as:
 - Did the characters seem believable?
 - Was the plot gripping: did it have a good beginning, middle and end?
 - Did they want to know what happened next – were they left wanting more?
 - If they could suggest one thing to develop, what would it be?

Reflection:

- Now the students have had a chance to hear and see their work performed by actors, discuss how they feel as writers: *Frustrated? Excited? Anxious?* Most writers feel all of

these things! They have worked hard to create their finished product: their play or musical. But of course, in the theatre, the work isn't truly finished until it is performed in front of an audience. And even then, changes can be made.

- Revisit Dennis Kelly's advice in the Rewriting film as a group. He sees rewriting as a positive thing. Discuss why this is such an important attitude to have as a writer, covering the following points:
 - Knowing that you can make your writing better afterwards, takes away any anxiety or nerves about *writing a lot of brilliant stuff straight away*. It allows you to just dive in and take the first step and write something. The rewrites will only make it better.
 - Writing can be a solitary experience, it is important to keep a positive attitude to support yourself throughout your work.
 - You may get challenging feedback. Understanding the rewriting process is a step towards knowing how to handle other people's ideas and criticism.
- Discuss the importance of deadline. Just like a student is given a deadline for their homework, many writers are given deadlines: a period of time in which they must produce a song, a scene or a draft of a play. Why might deadlines be good?
 - A deadline for each step of the process helps break the task down into smaller, manageable pieces. So you don't feel the pressure of producing the whole thing on one go. You can pace yourself.

Extension:

- Now the students have seen their scenes acted out they can re draft their scripts until they are ready to be performed.
- At this stage, you may decide to perform these scenes to a wider audience: other classes and teachers or indeed family and friends, together with costume, props, maybe even programmes and a set. This will involve introducing students to the other roles in the theatre: e.g. designers, stage managers for example.
- A great amount can be achieved in theatre, even with limited resources and budget. If you do decide to do this with your scenes, it will allow your writers to see the end product of their

Matilda School Resources: Re-Writing

work - to really appreciate the entire creative process from having your initial idea to watching a full-blown production that started in your head and on the page.

As Tim Minchin says:

“When you get real actors and singers singing your songs it’s one of the most exciting things ever. That day when I heard all those songs for the first time was the best day of my entire life.”

(Handing It Over, part 3 Rewriting)