

**National  
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Trust**

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# Children and young people's writing in 2024

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**National Literacy Trust**

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# Introduction

This report builds on our previous research to investigate how children and young people felt about writing in early 2024. It includes findings on how many enjoyed writing and how often they wrote in their free time, what motivated them to write and what they wrote. It explores responses by age, gender, socioeconomic background and geographical region. Additionally, we once again looked at how much children and young people enjoyed the writing they did at school.

In 2023, we declared a writing-for-pleasure crisis, reporting that only a third of children and young people aged 8 to 18 enjoyed writing in their free time. This was one of the lowest levels of writing enjoyment we had evidenced since 2010. In addition, only 1 in 5 children and young people told us that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2023. This was a decrease of over a quarter (28.5%) compared with 2010.

This sharp decline in 2023 continues a consistent downward trajectory, with a total loss of 12.2 percentage points over 13 years. Sadly, levels of writing enjoyment have continued to plummet in the past 12 months and they are now at an unprecedented low. Fewer than 3 in 10 children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us in 2024 that they enjoyed writing in their free time. This means that 7 in 10 children and young people reported that they didn't enjoy writing in their free time. Levels of writing frequency have also decreased dramatically, with the number of children and young people who told us that they wrote something daily in their free time halving over the past 12 months to just 1 in 9.

It is not only writing enjoyment and frequency that are at low points. Statutory assessment data show that in 2023, 71% of pupils aged 11 in England met the expected standard in writing. While this is slightly up from 69% in 2022, it is significantly down from 78% in 2019. This means that 29% of 11-year-olds in England left primary school in 2023 unable to write at the expected level, rising to 43% of disadvantaged children.

Our previous research has found that children and young people who enjoyed writing very much were seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with those who did not enjoy writing at all (50.3% vs 7.2%),

Clark, 2016<sup>1</sup>). We also know that for many children and young people, writing for pleasure brings many benefits, such as promoting mental wellbeing, social connection, creativity and self-expression.

This steep downward trend in writing engagement must therefore be a cause for concern and a call to action for all who work to promote social mobility and support children and young people's literacy, learning, personal growth and wellbeing.

The percentage of children and young people who write something in their free time on a daily basis has halved over the past 12 months to just 1 in 9 in 2024.

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## Method

### About the Annual Literacy Survey

The Annual Literacy Survey, run annually since 2010, includes questions about reading, writing and listening as well as about children and young people's home learning environment and access to resources at home. Questions about speaking were added to the survey in 2024. Other topical questions change each

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<sup>1</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/we-call-new-focus-writing-enjoyment-research-shows-sharp-drop-children-writing-outside-school/>

year, with the 2024 survey containing questions about generative artificial intelligence (AI).

We made three surveys available in 2024: one for children aged 5 to 8 (Year 1 to Year 4, or Primary 2 to Primary 5 for Scotland), one for children and young people aged 8 to 16 (Year 4 to Year 11, or Primary 5 to Secondary 5 for Scotland), and one for those aged 16 plus. The surveys contained similar questions but the one for the younger age group was shorter and more pictorial, while the one for those aged over 16 had additional questions more relevant for that age group.

The 2024 survey contained 23 questions for those aged 5 to 8, 48 questions for those aged 8 to 16, and 42 questions for those aged over 16. On occasion, the survey has also been conducted with schools that have also provided reading attainment data, allowing us to explore associations between reading engagement and skills. However, the main foci of the survey are the affective and behavioural aspects of reading, writing, speaking and listening, including young people's enjoyment, attitudes, behaviour, confidence and motivation, which we believe should be valued in their own right alongside any interaction with attainment.

Taking place from January to the middle of March every year, schools are recruited from autumn onwards through our networks, newsletters and social media followers, as well as through partner organisations like World Book Day and Renaissance. Participating schools receive a school-specific report as a thank you, which means they can compare their responses with national data when we publish the national reports.

## The 2024 sample

**76,131**

Children and young people aged 5 to 18 from the UK participated between 3 January and 14 March 2024.

### Gender

**48.6%** boy

**47.5%** girl

**3.3%** would rather not say

**0.6%** described themselves another way

### Age of respondents

**6.0%** 5 to 8 years

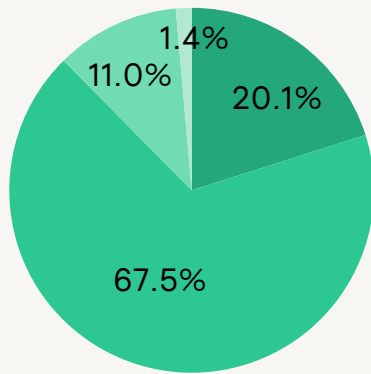
**26.8%** 8 to 11 years

**39.8%** 11 to 14 years

**24.0%** 14 to 16 years

**3.5%** 16 to 18 years

### Free School Meal (FSM) Status



■ FSM

■ Non-FSM

■ Don't know

■ Prefer not to say

**28.7%** 5-11s receiving FSMs

**17.6%** 11-18s receiving FSMs

**405**

Schools across the UK participated in 2024.

The demographic makeup of our 2024 sample was largely comparable to that of 2023 and previous samples (for more demographic information, see Appendix).

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## Key findings from 2024 include:

### Enjoying writing in free time

- Fewer than 3 in 10 (28.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed writing in their free time in 2024.
- Writing enjoyment levels have dropped by 18.1 percentage points in the past 14 years, with levels decreasing by 5.9 percentage points over the past year alone.
- Enjoying writing in free time was associated with gender, age and socioeconomic background: more girls than boys (34.6% vs. 22.1%), more children aged 5 to 8 (66.7%) and those aged 8 to 11 (47.4%) than those aged 11 to 14 (26.3%), those aged 14 to 16 (21.8%) and those aged 16 to 18 (23.1%), and more children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) than those who did not (34.2% vs. 26.1%) said that they enjoyed writing in their free time.
- Enjoyment levels dropped for all children and young people regardless of their background in 2024. However, the drop was particularly pronounced for boys aged 5 to 8, with levels decreasing by 11.9 percentage points between 2023 and 2024.
- In England, more children and young people from the North East (34.8%), West Midlands (32.9%), Yorkshire and the Humber (31.2%) and Greater London (30.8%) said that they enjoyed writing in their free time, while the smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they enjoyed writing came from the South East (24.2%).

### Enjoying writing in free time versus at school

- Twice as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed writing at school than in their free time in 2024 (53.6% vs. 28.7%).
- While there was a 5.9-percentage-point decrease in the percentage of children and young people who enjoyed writing in their free time over the

past year, there was a 9.7-percentage-point increase in the percentage of children and young people who enjoyed writing at school over this period.

- Both types of writing enjoyment were positively related ( $r = .365$ ). Indeed, 3 in 4 (73.2%) children and young people who enjoyed writing in their free time also enjoyed writing at school, while 2 in 5 (42.2%) children and young people who enjoyed writing at school also enjoyed writing in their free time.
- Enjoying writing at school was associated with the same demographic profiles as we saw for enjoying writing in free time, with more girls than boys (56.0% vs. 51.7%), more younger people than older (78.1% vs. 42.6%), and more children and young people who received FSMs than their non-FSM peers (57.3% vs. 51.5%) saying that they enjoyed writing at school.
- Reflecting regional differences in enjoying writing in their free time, more children and young people from the North East (61.8%), West Midlands (57.3%), Yorkshire and the Humber (55.0%) and Greater London (54.8%) said that they enjoyed writing at school, while the smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they enjoyed writing at school came from the South East (48.0%).

### Daily writing in free time

- Only 1 in 9 (11.1%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2024.
- Daily writing levels halved between 2023 and 2024 (19.3% to 11.1%).
- Slightly more girls than boys (13.3% vs. 8.6%), more children aged 5 to 8 (41.9%) and those aged 8 to 11 (23.6%) than those aged 11 to 14 (9.1%), those aged 14 to 16 (8.3%) and those aged 16 to 18 (12.3%), and more children and young people who received free school meals (FSMs) than those who did not (14.8% vs. 9.5%) said that they wrote in their free time daily.
- While daily writing declined across all groups in the past year, the drop was particularly pronounced for boys and girls aged 8 to 18 and, within that, for those aged 11 to 14 and 14 to 16.
- In terms of regions in England, more children and young people from the West Midlands (14.0%), the North East (13.7%), Yorkshire and the Humber (12.0%) and Greater London (12.0%) told us that they wrote something daily in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they wrote something daily in their free time came from the South East (8.6%).

### **The link between enjoying writing in their free time and daily writing in their free time**

- Children and young people who enjoyed writing in their free time were also more likely to write daily in their free time. This relationship was more pronounced in children and young people aged 8 to 18 compared with those aged 5 to 8 ( $r = .645$  vs  $r = .424$ ).

### **Writing motivation**

- 3 in 5 (59.1%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 (who wrote at least once a month) said that they wrote to be creative. A further 1 in 2 wrote to express their ideas and imagination (52.8%) or their thoughts and feelings (47.7%). Many also said that they wrote to support their mental wellbeing, with 2 in 5 (40.4%) writing to relax and 1 in 3 (33.1%) writing because it made them feel happy.
- As we found in 2023, in 2024 more girls than boys aged 8 to 18 wrote to be creative, to support their mental wellbeing or to feel connected, as did children aged 8 to 11, compared with their older peers. Additionally, more children and young people who received FSMs told us that they wrote to support their mental wellbeing and to foster social connections.

### **Attitudes towards writing**

- 44.0% of children and young people aged 8 to 18 struggled with deciding what to write, and 1 in 3 (36.8%) admitted that they only wrote when they had to. However, more than 2 in 5 (42.9%) told us that they continued writing even when they found it difficult. More than 1 in 3 (36.2%) also saw a link between their writing and their chances of getting a better job when they grow up.
- More boys (43.9%) than girls (30.2%) told us that they only wrote when they had to, while more girls (46.8%) than boys (41.3%) told us that they had trouble deciding what to write.
- More younger children told us that they struggled to decide what to write compared with their older peers. However, those in the youngest age group were more likely to say that they carried on writing even when they found it difficult.

### **Access to writing resources and support at home and in school**

- Almost all (94.9%) children aged 8 to 18 told us they had a pen and paper they could write on at home, and a high percentage (84.5%) said they had



a notebook. Around 4 in 5 also had their own desk or table (82.1%) or a quiet space to work, read or take time out (79.1%).

- Providing opportunities in school for children and young people to feel inspired to write can have a positive impact on writing enjoyment and frequency in their free time. More children and young people aged 8 to 16 who had taken part in creative writing groups, experienced storyteller visits or taken part in book groups told us they enjoyed writing and wrote daily in their free time compared with those who hadn't taken part in these activities. This was also the case for writing competitions, book fairs and author visits.

As we continue to record alarmingly low levels of writing enjoyment among children and young people, alongside increasingly compelling evidence on the benefits that writing for pleasure and regular writing have on children's writing attainment and wellbeing, urgent coordinated action is needed. It is now time to provide considered opportunities in and out of school that are aimed at reconnecting children and young people with the creative elements that transform writing into a pleasurable personal practice. Writing promotes self-expression and mental wellbeing, and it works as a tool to process struggles, make sense of the world and participate actively in civic life.

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# Writing in 2024

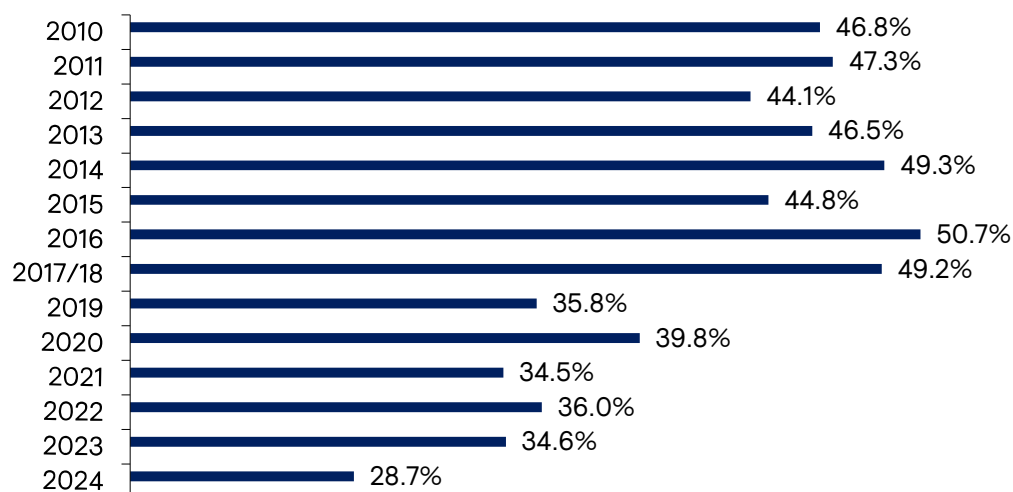
This report focuses on the writing children and young people do in their free time, although we also ask a question about the writing they do at school. Before they answered questions on writing, they were reminded that by writing we meant any writing they did on paper or on a screen.

## Enjoying writing in free time over time

Fewer than 3 in 10 (28.7%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us in 2024 that they enjoyed writing something in their free time.

Figure 1 shows levels of enjoying writing in free time for children and young people aged 8 to 18<sup>2</sup> over time. Levels of enjoying writing in free time in 2024 were at their lowest point since we began asking the question 14 years ago. Indeed, writing enjoyment levels have dropped by 18.1 percentage points since 2010, with levels decreasing by 5.9 percentage points over the past year alone.

**Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time either very much or quite a lot from 2010 to 2024**



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

### Writing enjoyment in 2024 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake

As shown in Figure 2, more girls than boys said that they enjoyed writing in their free time regardless of age. Overall writing enjoyment declined with age, with 2 in 3 children aged 5 to 8 telling us that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with fewer than 1 in 2 children aged 8 to 11, and 1 in 4 children and young people aged 11 to 14. Just 1 in 5 young people aged over 14 told us that they enjoyed writing in their free time. More children and young people receiving free school meals (FSMs), our proxy of socioeconomic background, told us that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers who didn't receive FSMs.

**Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time in 2024 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)**

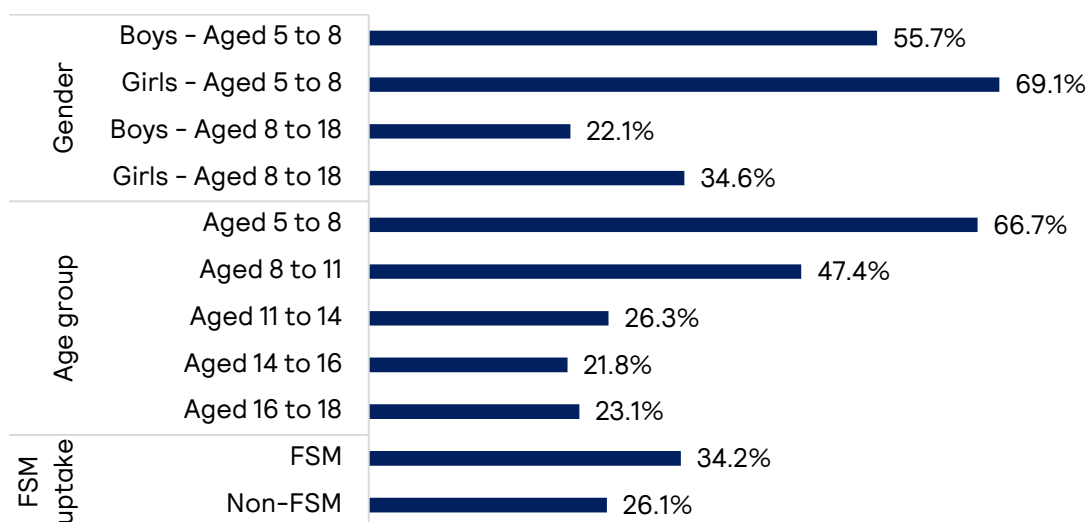


Table 1 shows that the decline in writing enjoyment cuts across all demographic groups. However, boys aged 5 to 8 showed a particularly large decline in writing enjoyment over the past year, with levels decreasing by 11.9 percentage points. This is double the drop among girls of that age or boys aged 8 to 18. Boys aged 5 to 8 are also the group to have lost their writing enjoyment the most when compared with 2020, with a drop of 14.4 percentage points over the last four years alone.

**Table 1: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)**

		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Gender</b>	Boys aged 5 to 8	70.1%	62.5%	67.5%	67.6%	55.7%
	Girls aged 5 to 8	81.1%	71.7%	79.1%	76.6%	69.1%
	Boys aged 8 to 18	34.5%	32.1%	29.9%	28.9%	22.1%
	Girls aged 8 to 18	44.7%	42.3%	40.8%	39.5%	34.6%
<b>Age group</b>	Aged 5 to 8	75.6%	62.5%	72.9%	72.0%	66.7%
	Aged 8 to 11	53.4%	47.5%	52.0%	51.6%	47.4%
	Aged 11 to 14	38.7%	35.6%	34.9%	32.6%	26.3%
	Aged 14 to 16	29.3%	27.0%	26.6%	26.4%	21.8%
	Aged 16 to 18	33.3%	28.9%	30.9%	28.5%	23.1%
<b>FSM uptake</b>	FSM	44.9%	38.4%	40.8%	38.6%	34.2%
	Non-FSM	38.6%	33.6%	34.7%	32.9%	26.1%

### **Writing enjoyment by geographical region in England**

There were also differences in how much children and young people enjoyed writing in their free time depending on where in England they went to school. Figure 3 shows that more children and young people from the North East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, and Greater London said that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they enjoyed writing came from the South East.

**Figure 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time in 2024 by region in England**



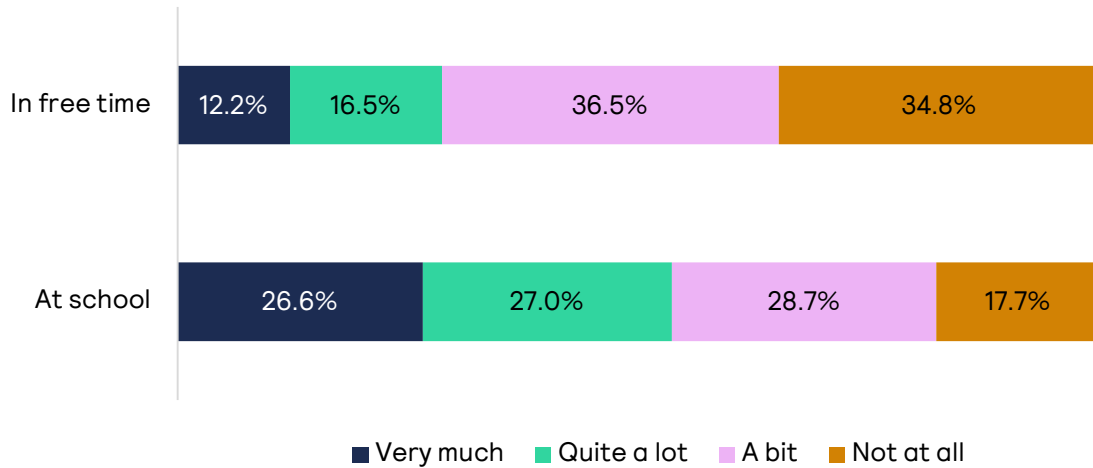
## Writing enjoyment in free time versus enjoyment of writing in school time

Since 2023, the Annual Literacy Survey has also included a question to see how children and young people’s enjoyment of writing in their free time compares with the writing they do at school.

Figure 4 shows that more children and young people aged 8 to 18 said that they enjoyed writing at school than in their free time. Indeed, twice as many children and young people told us that they enjoyed writing at school very much compared with the writing they did in their free time, and half as many said that they didn’t enjoy writing in school at all compared with writing in free time. Overall, 1 in 2 (53.6%) children and young people enjoyed writing at school either very much or quite a lot compared with fewer than 3 in 10 (28.7%) who enjoyed writing either very much or quite a lot in their free time.

It is worth noting that while there was a sharp decrease in the percentage of children and young people who told us that they enjoyed writing in their free time over the past year (-5.9 percentage points), there was a pronounced increase in the percentage of children and young people who enjoyed writing at school over the same period (+9.7 percentage points).

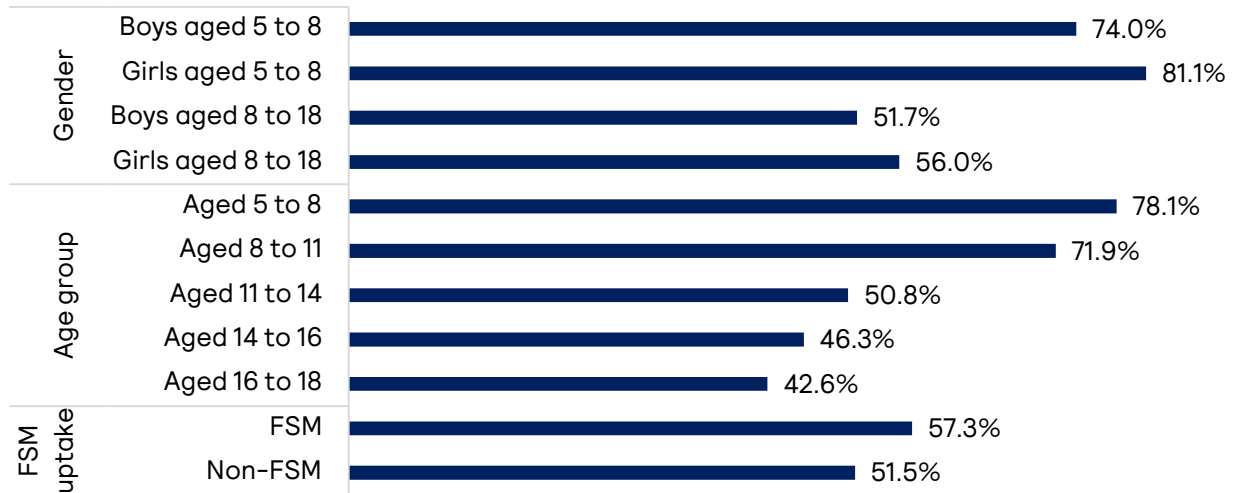
**Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing in 2023 in their free time versus at school**



Free-time writing and writing at school were only moderately positively correlated ( $r = .365$ ). Last year, this correlation had been much stronger ( $r = .538$ ), indicating that those who enjoyed writing in one setting also enjoyed writing in the other. Nonetheless, 3 in 4 (73.2%) children and young people who enjoyed writing in their free time also enjoyed writing at school in 2024, while 2 in 5 (42.2%) children and young people who enjoyed writing at school also enjoyed writing in their free time. What is perhaps worth noting is that this latter relationship was much stronger in 2023, with 3 in 5 (59.9%) children and young people who enjoyed writing at school also enjoying writing in their free time.

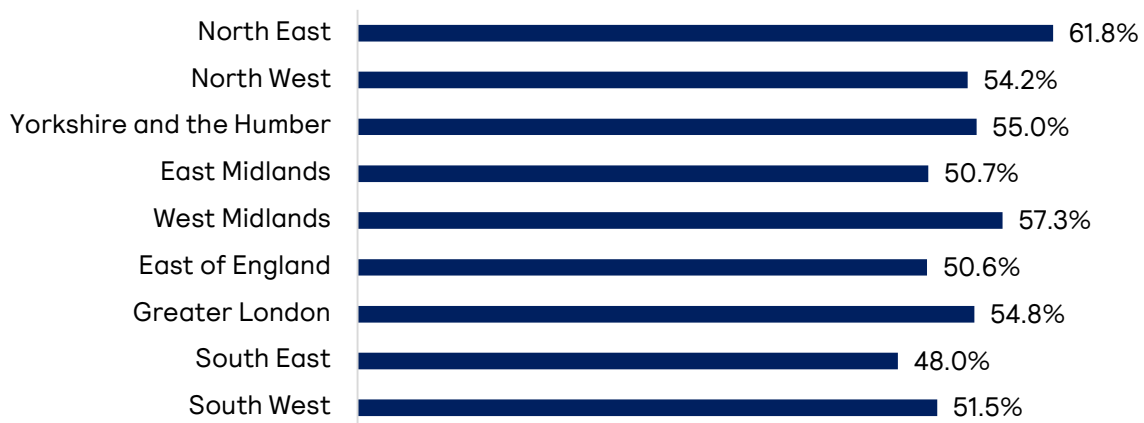
Figure 5 shows that enjoying writing at school is associated with the same demographic profiles as we saw for enjoying writing in free time, with more girls than boys, more younger people than older, and more children and young people who received FSMs than their non-FSM peers saying that they enjoyed writing at school.

**Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing at school in 2024 by gender, age group, and free-school-meal uptake**



There were also differences in enjoying writing at school depending on where in England the children and young people went to school. Figure 6 shows that more children and young people from the North East, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, and Greater London said that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they enjoyed writing again came from the South East. This maps directly onto the regional differences we saw earlier for enjoying writing in free time.

**Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing at school in 2024 by region in England**



## Daily writing in free time

Just 1 in 9 (11.1%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us that they wrote something in their free time on a daily basis in 2024.

Figure 7 shows levels of daily writing for children and young people aged 8 to 18<sup>3</sup> over the past 14 years. While daily writing levels improved a little between 2022 and 2023, they halved over the past year to an all-time low.

**Figure 7: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their spare time from 2010 to 2024**

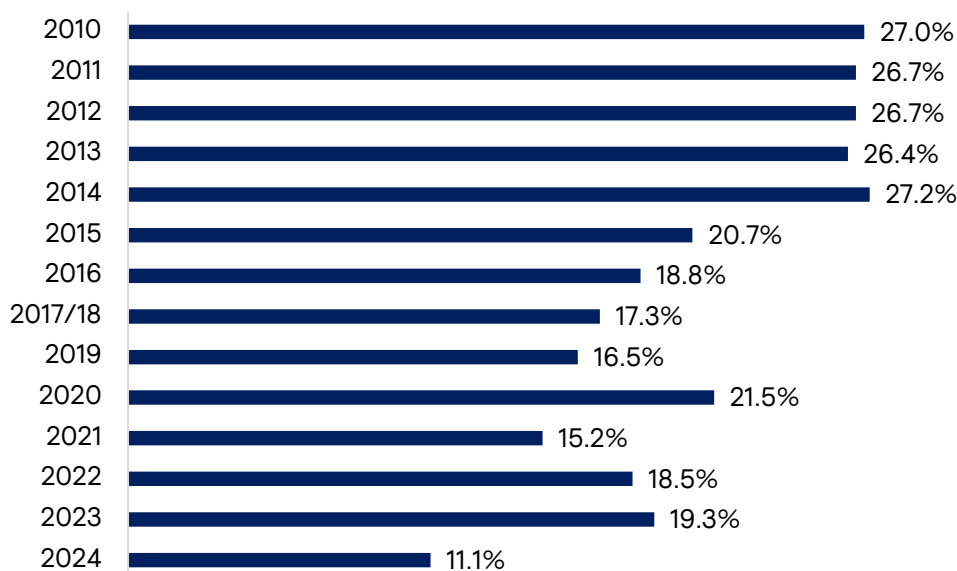
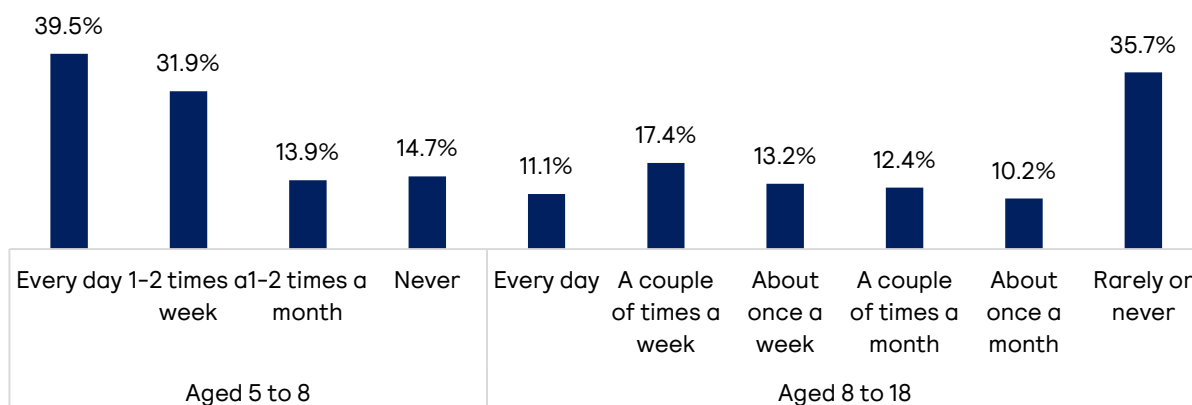


Figure 8 shows the frequency with which children and young people wrote in their free time in 2024 in more detail. As children aged 5 to 8 had different response options from their older peers, both are shown in this figure. It shows that almost four times as many children aged 5 to 8 said that they wrote something daily compared with their peers aged over 8, with more than 1 in 3 of the older age groups saying that they rarely or never wrote in their free time.

<sup>3</sup> We didn't start collecting information from 5- to 8-year-olds until 2019. For comparison-over-time purposes this analysis only contains data for children and young people aged 8 to 18.



**Figure 8: Frequency of writing in their free time for children aged 5 to 8 and children and young people aged 8 to 18 in 2024**



### The link between writing enjoyment and writing frequency

For those aged 8 to 18, there was a moderate to strong positive relationship between enjoying writing and writing frequency ( $r = .645$ ), indicating that those who enjoyed writing wrote more frequently in their free time. Indeed, as shown in Table 2, those children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing were six times more likely to do so daily compared with their peers who didn't enjoy writing. By contrast, half of the children and young people who told us that they didn't enjoy writing rarely or never wrote something in their free time.

**Table 2: Writing enjoyment by writing frequency in 2024 for children and young people aged 8 to 18**

	Daily	A couple of times a week	Once a week	A couple of times a month	Once a month	Rarely or never
<b>Enjoy writing</b>	27.3%	34.6%	17.2%	12.2%	4.6%	4.1%
<b>Don't enjoy writing</b>	4.5%	10.5%	11.5%	12.6%	12.5%	48.4%

The relationship between writing enjoyment and writing frequency was less strong for those aged 5 to 8 ( $r = .424$ ), but Table 3 shows that twice as many 5- to 8-year-olds who enjoyed writing also wrote something daily in their spare time compared with those who didn't enjoy writing.

**Table 3: Writing enjoyment by writing frequency in 2024 for children aged 5 to 8**

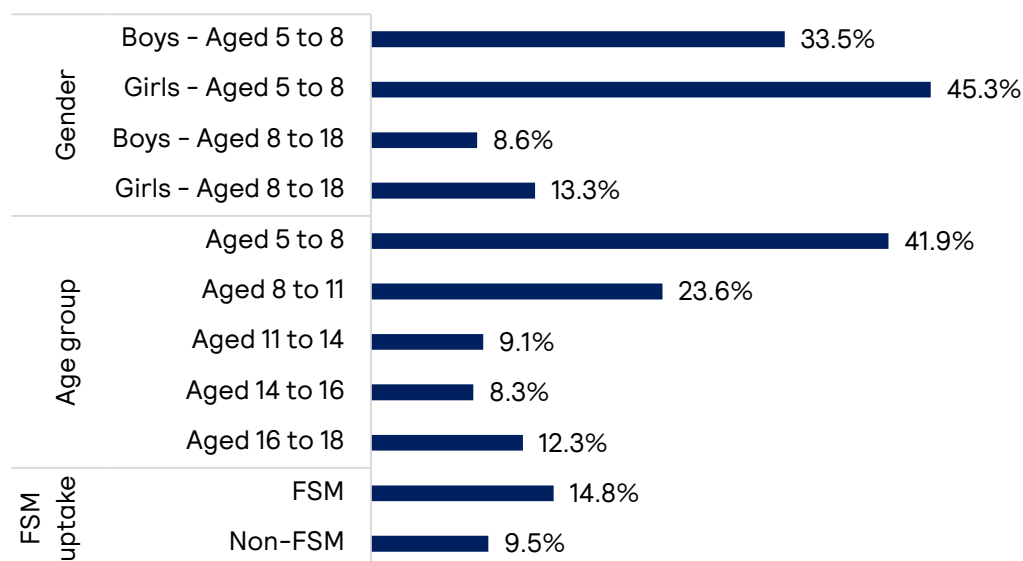
	Daily	1-2 times a week	1-2 times a month	Never
Enjoy writing	50.4%	32.7%	10.6%	6.2%
Don't enjoy writing	21.1%	31.1%	19.2%	28.6%

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

More girls than boys said that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2023, regardless of whether they were aged 5 to 8 or 8 to 18 (see Figure 9). However, the gender gap in daily writing for those aged 8 to 18 is half that of those aged 5 to 8 (4.7 vs. 11.8 percentage points).

As with writing enjoyment, levels of daily writing decreased with age, with four times as many children aged 5 to 8 saying that they wrote something in their free time daily compared with those aged over 11. Not only did more children and young people who received FSMs say that they enjoyed writing, more also said that they wrote something daily in their free time compared with their peers who didn't receive FSMs.

**Figure 9: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who said that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2023 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake (8 to 18s only)**



As shown in Table 4, daily writing declined in all children and young people between 2023 and 2024 regardless of their background. However, some of the decreases were more pronounced than others. With the exception of those aged 14 to 16, daily writing levels increased across the board between 2021 and 2023 before declining in 2024.

**Table 4: Percentage of children and young people who wrote something daily in their free time in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake**

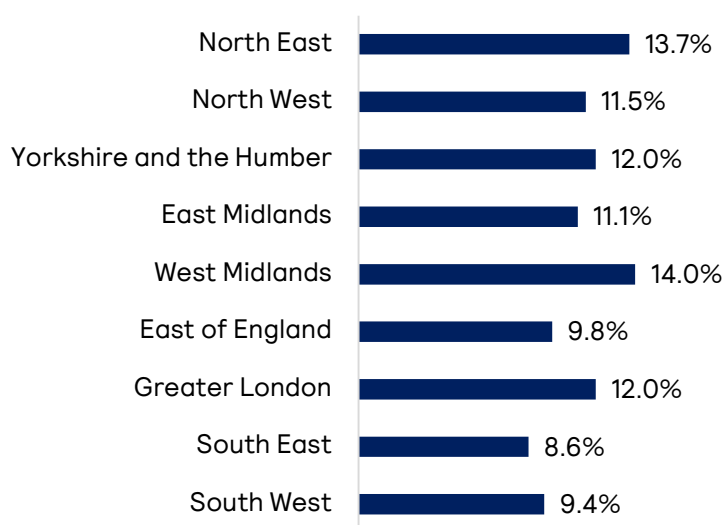
		2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Gender</b>	Boys aged 5 to 8	36.6%	30.4%	33.0%	35.2%	33.5%
	Girls aged 5 to 8	48.2%	45.2%	46.0%	47.5%	45.3%
	Boys aged 8 to 18	18.8%	12.6%	15.8%	16.5%	8.6%
	Girls aged 8 to 18	23.8%	17.4%	20.7%	22.1%	13.3%
<b>Age group</b>	Aged 5 to 8	42.4%	38.1%	39.6%	41.3%	41.9%
	Aged 8 to 11	24.7%	23.3%	24.1%	28.2%	23.6%
	Aged 11 to 14	21.6%	15.9%	18.7%	18.8%	9.1%
	Aged 14 to 16	18.5%	10.9%	13.8%	13.7%	8.3%
	Aged 16 to 18	15.4%	9.9%	11.6%	12.3%	12.3%
<b>FSM</b>	FSM	24.2%	18.5%	22.3%	23.6%	14.8%
	Non-FSM	21.0%	14.3%	17.5%	17.9%	9.5%

### Daily writing by geographical region in England

There were also differences in daily writing by regions in England (see Figure 10), with more children and young people from the West Midlands, the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and Greater London telling us that they wrote something daily in their free time compared with their peers in other regions. The

smallest percentage of children and young people who said that they wrote something daily in their free time came from the South East.

**Figure 10: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their free time in 2024 by region in England**



## Writing motivation

In 2024 we again asked children and young people what motivated them to write. We grouped the motivations to write into three categories: the creative writer<sup>4</sup>, the mindful writer<sup>5</sup>, and the social writer<sup>6</sup>.

Starting with the creative writer, of those who told us that they wrote in their free time at least once a month<sup>7</sup>, nearly 3 in 5 (59.1%) wrote because it made them feel creative, while around 1 in 2 wrote because it helped them express their

<sup>4</sup> Combined three statements (see Figure 11). Cronbach's alpha = .810 Those in the top quartile were described as the creative writers ( $n = 17,513$ , 44.7%).

<sup>5</sup> Combined five statements (see Figure 11). Cronbach's alpha = .823. Those in the top quartile were described as mindful writers ( $n = 15,944$ , 40.7%).

<sup>6</sup> Combined two statements (see Figure 1). Cronbach's alpha = .577. Those who selected either of these statements were described as the social writers ( $n = 10,617$ , 27.1%).

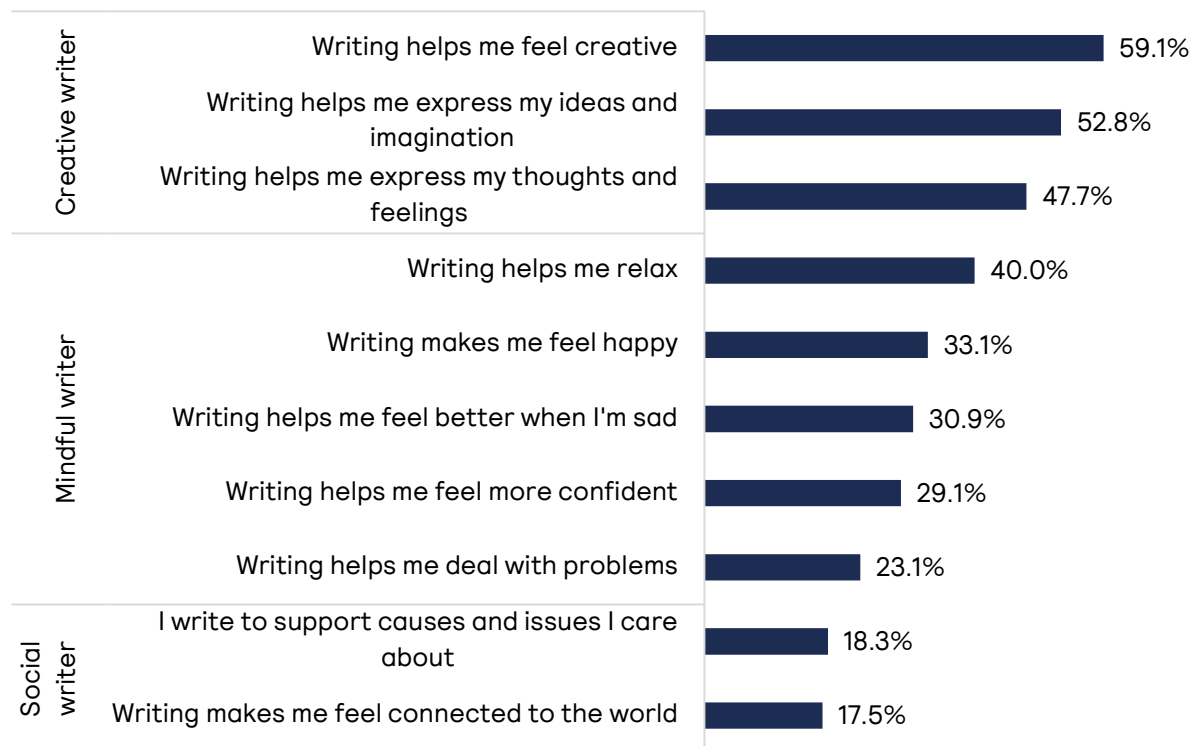
<sup>7</sup>  $n = 39,207$

ideas and imagination (52.8%), and their thoughts and feelings (47.7%; see Figure 11).

Many children and young people also told us that they wrote to support their mental wellbeing – the mindful writer. 2 in 5 (40.4%) wrote to relax, while 1 in 3 (33.1%) wrote because it made them feel happy. Around 3 in 10 wrote to feel better when they were sad (30.9%) or to feel more confident (29.1%), and just less than 1 in 4 (23.1%) wrote to help deal with problems.

Fewer children and young people wrote for social purposes, with more than 1 in 6 writing to support causes and issues they cared about (18.3%) or to feel connected to the world (17.5%)

**Figure 11: Children and young people’s reasons for writing in 2024**



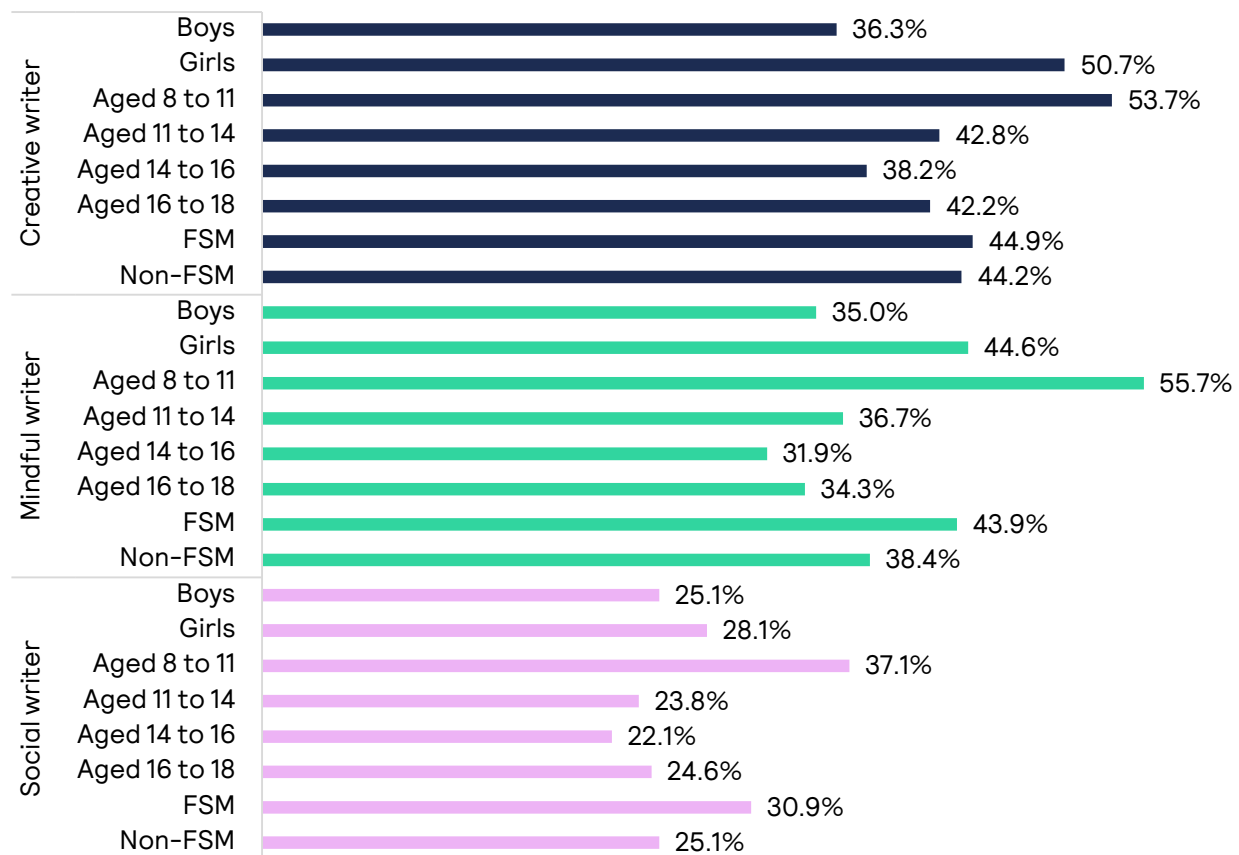
We also looked at the percentage of children and young people<sup>8</sup> within different demographic groups who were creative, mindful or social writers. Overall, as shown in Figure 12, there were large differences by gender, with more girls than

<sup>8</sup> Again, of those who told us that they wrote at least once a month,  $n = 39,207$ .

boys writing for creative (50.7% vs 36.3%) and mindful (44.6% vs 35.0%) purposes. The differences for the social writer were much smaller, with a similar percentage of girls (28.1%) and boys (25.1%) writing to support social connections. Looking by age, more children aged 8 to 11 were creative (53.7%), mindful (55.7%) and social (37.1%) writers compared with their older peers.

Finally, there were some differences by free-school-meal uptake, with more children and young people who received free school meals fitting into the mindful (43.9% vs 38.4%) and social (30.9% vs 25.1%) writer categories compared with their peers who did not receive free school meals. The differences for the creative writer were very small, with a similar percentage of those who did (44.9%) and did not (44.2%) receive free school meals writing for creative purposes.

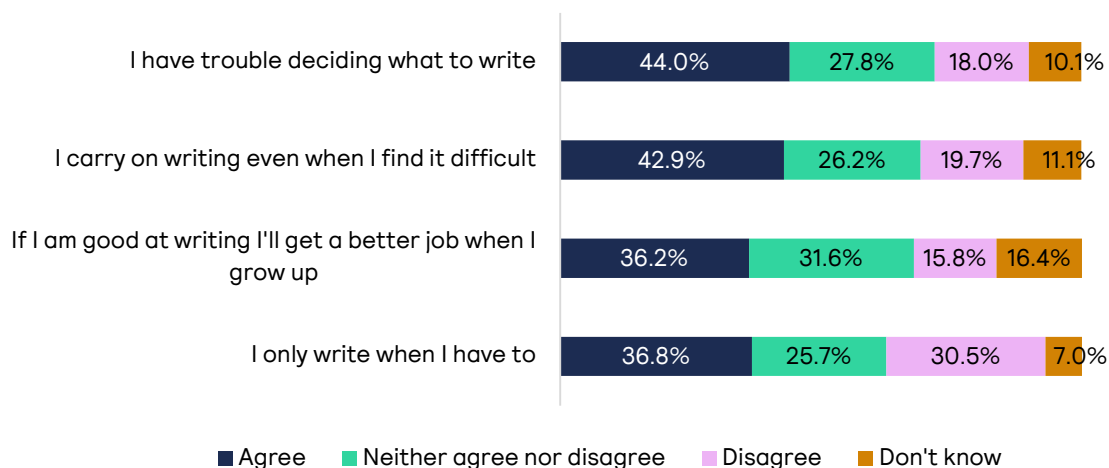
**Figure 12: Being a creative, mindful or social writer in 2024 by gender, age group and FSM uptake**



## Writing attitudes

We also asked children and young people about some of their attitudes towards writing (see Figure 13). 2 in 5 (42.9%) told us that they carried on writing even when they found it difficult, and more than 1 in 3 (36.2%) agreed that if they were good at writing, they would get a better job when they grow up. However, more than 2 in 5 (44.0%) told us that they had trouble deciding what to write, and more than 1 in 3 (36.8%) admitted that they only wrote when they had to.

**Figure 13: What children and young people aged 8 to 18 think about writing in 2024**



As shown in Table 3, more boys (43.9%) than girls (30.2%) told us that they only wrote when they had to, while more girls (46.8%) than boys (41.3%) told us that they had trouble deciding what to write. A similar percentage of boys and girls told us that they carried on writing even when they found it difficult (42.7% vs 43.6%) and that they saw a link between writing skills and getting a better job in the future (35.5% vs 37.3%).

As with last year (see Clark et al., 2023), deciding what to write was more of an issue for younger children, with more children aged 8 to 11 selecting this (48.4%) compared with those aged 11 to 14 (44.6%), 14 to 16 (40.6%) and 16 to 18 (35.8%). However, those in the youngest age group were more likely to say that they carried on writing even when they found it difficult (61.3%) compared with their older peers.

Differences by FSM status were small across the writing attitude statements. However, slightly more of those who received free school meals agreed that they carried on writing even when they found it difficult (46.4%) compared with their peers who didn't receive free school meals (41.0%).

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

		“I have trouble deciding what to write”	“I carry on writing even when I find it difficult”	“If I am good at writing I’ll get a better job when I grow up”	“I only write when I have to”
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	41.3%	42.7%	35.5%	43.9%
	Girls	46.8%	43.6%	37.3%	30.2%
<b>Age group</b>	Aged 8 to 11	48.4%	61.3%	43.0%	30.5%
	Aged 11 to 14	44.6%	40.6%	34.5%	36.3%
	Aged 14 to 16	40.6%	33.6%	33.0%	41.9%
	Aged 16 to 18	35.8%	28.7%	39.4%	43.1%
<b>FSM status</b>	FSM	46.1%	46.4%	37.4%	35.9%
	Non-FSM	43.2%	41.0%	36.0%	37.8%

## Access to writing resources and support at home and in school

Alongside writing attitudes and motivation, we wanted to explore how environmental factors, such as access to resources, inspiration and support at home and in school, might influence writing engagement. Children and young people were asked about access to writing materials (pen and paper and notebook) and other resources, such as a desk or table of their own to write, draw or do homework, or a quiet space where they can work, read or take time out. Almost all (94.9%) children aged 8 to 18 told us they had a pen and paper they could write on at home, and a high percentage (84.5%) said they had a notebook.



Around 4 in 5 also had their own desk or table (82.1%) or a quiet space to work, read or take time out (79.1%).

As shown in Table 4, more girls than boys said they had access to all these resources. The differences were relatively slight (less than 5 percentage points) in relation to pen and paper, desk or table and a quiet space. However, there was a 16.8-percentage-point gap in relation to notebooks, with more than 9 in 10 (92.8%) girls saying they had one compared with 3 in 4 (76.0%) boys.

Access to resources also varied with age, with the biggest differences relating to access to a desk or table and a quiet space. Fewer children aged 8 to 11 said they had access to both a desk or table and quiet space compared with older age groups. For example, while 3 in 4 (75.9%) children aged 8 to 11 had a desk or table they could use at home, this increased to more than 4 in 5 (85.1%) for young people aged 16 to 18.

Differences by FSM status were also evident in relation to access to a desk or table and a quiet space. For example, 3 in 4 (75.2%) children and young people who received FSMs said they had access to a desk compared with more than 4 in 5 (84.8%) of their peers who did not receive FSMs, a gap of 9.7 percentage points.

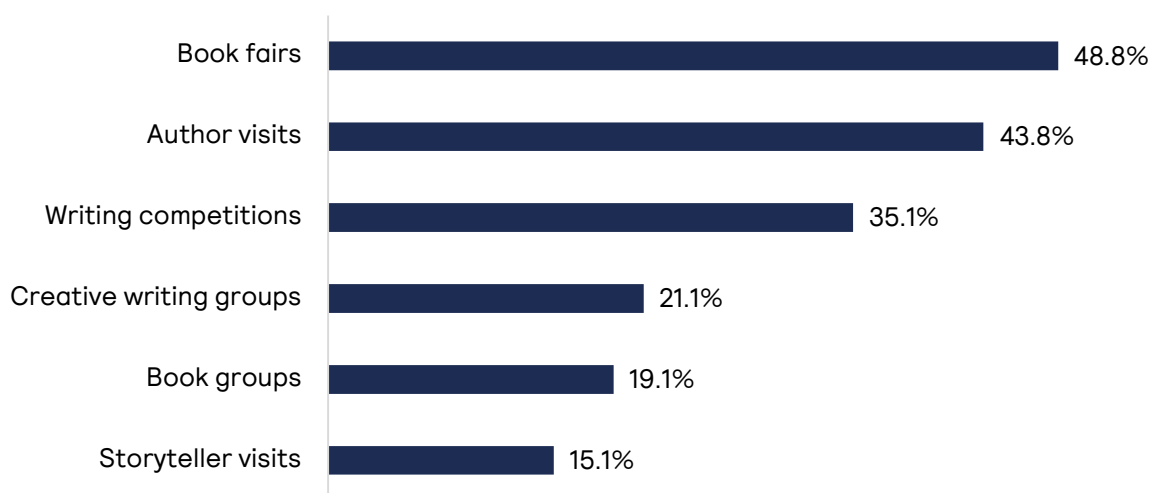
**Table 4: Access to resources by gender, age group and FSM uptake of those aged 8 to 18**

		Pen and paper	Notebook	Desk or table	Quiet space
<b>Gender</b>	Boys	93.0%	76.0%	80.4%	76.9%
	Girls	97.0%	92.8%	84.1%	81.7%
<b>Age Group</b>	Aged 8 to 11	94.1%	83.8%	75.9%	76.6%
	Aged 11 to 14	95.3%	84.5%	83.8%	79.2%
	Aged 14 to 16	94.7%	84.2%	84.1%	80.3%
	Aged 16 to 18	96.6%	91.2%	85.1%	86.1%
<b>FSM Status</b>	FSM	91.6%	80.7%	75.2%	76.2%
	Non-FSM	96.0%	85.9%	84.8%	81.9%

In addition to providing a supportive home writing environment, providing opportunities for children and young people to feel inspired to write at school can have a positive impact on their enjoyment and frequency of writing in their free time.

We asked a subset of children aged 8 to 16<sup>9</sup> about whether they had taken part in various creative opportunities at school. Figure 14 shows that the most popular opportunities were book fairs, with 1 in 2 (48.8%) saying they had taken part. More than 2 in 5 (43.8%) had experienced an author visit, and 1 in 3 (35.1%) had taken part in a writing competition. Fewer had taken part in creative-writing groups (21.1%), book groups (19.1%) and storyteller visits (15.1%).

**Figure 14: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 16 who had taken part in various creative opportunities at school**

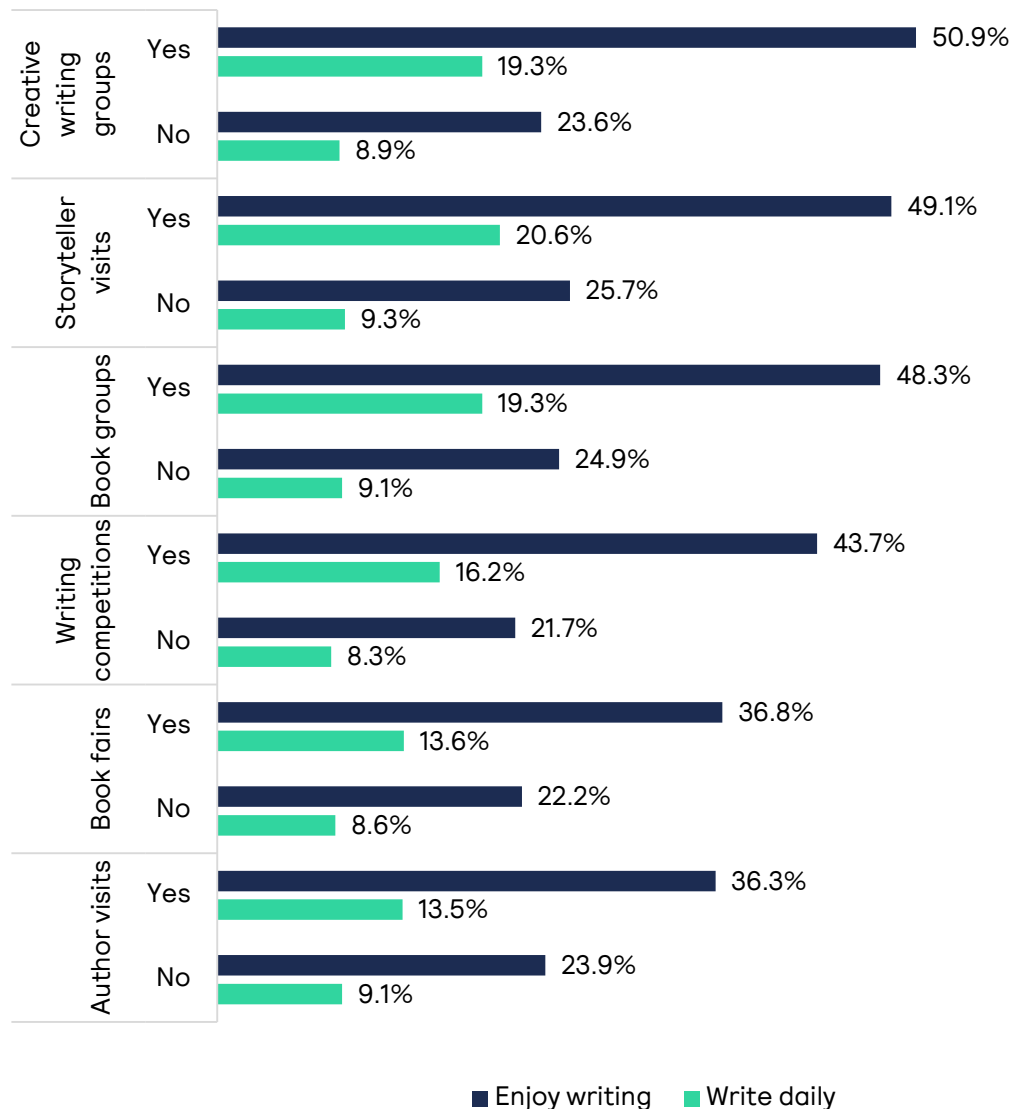


As shown in Figure 15, more children and young people aged 8 to 16 who had taken part in creative-writing groups, experienced storyteller visits or taken part in book groups said they enjoyed writing and wrote daily in their free time compared with those who hadn't taken part in these activities. This was also the case for writing competitions, book fairs and author visits.

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<sup>9</sup> n = 66,371

**Figure 15: Percentage of children and young people enjoying writing and writing daily in their spare time, by various creative opportunities at school**



## Summary and discussion

The downward trend of children and young people’s enjoyment of writing has taken us to the lowest level we have ever recorded, with an alarming loss of 18.1 percentage points over the past 14 years. In 2024, we find writing enjoyment levels are at an unprecedented low, with 7 in 10 children and young people aged 8

to 18 reporting that they don't enjoy writing in their free time. Enjoyment levels dropped for all children and young people; however, the drop was particularly pronounced for boys aged 5 to 8, with levels decreasing by 11.9 percentage points. The worrying series of lows recorded since 2017 (with the modest recovery in 2020 as an isolated, although significant, case study), and the sharp decline in writing attainment that continues to be recorded post-pandemic by statutory assessment data, suggest that we must prepare to live with the long-term consequences of this evolving crisis. Extraordinary action must now be taken.

In 2024, more children and young people who received FSMs said that they enjoyed writing in their free time than their non-FSM peers (34.2% vs. 26.1%) and they were also more likely to write daily in their free time (14.8% vs. 9.5%). This 14-year trend has remained steady in the face of three recessions, a global pandemic and the unprecedented cost-of-living crisis that profoundly impacted families and exacerbated pressures on schools. Additionally, this year we recorded that more children and young people who received FSMs enjoyed writing at school (57.3% vs. 51.5%) and, crucially, were motivated to write in their free time to support their mental wellbeing and to foster social connections.

These compelling findings must inform action and investment in cultivating and supporting the writing-for-pleasure practices of disadvantaged children and young people as well as motivating and inspiring reluctant disadvantaged writers to explore writing-for-pleasure practices.

Children and young people who wrote at least once a month told us in 2024 that they wrote to be creative, to express their ideas and imagination or their thoughts and feelings, to support their mental wellbeing, to relax and, remarkably, because it made them feel happy. Responses highlight the vital role writing for pleasure plays in the lives of young writers, allowing them to express their interior lives and support their mental wellbeing through developing a personal writing practice.

Yet a considerable 44.0% of children and young people said that they struggled with deciding what to write, and 1 in 3 admitted that they only wrote when they had to. Inspiring children and young people to want to write remains a challenge, although taking part in creative-writing groups, having experienced a storyteller or an author visit, attending book groups and book fairs, and entering writing competitions featured as significant sources of inspiration for young writers. Further research in this area, and increased awareness of what motivates young writers to write for pleasure and the many benefits it can bring, should inform the

development of novel pedagogical approaches aimed at galvanising reluctant writers, encompassing their peers' motivations. Additionally, investment is needed in efforts to provide more such opportunities through evaluated programmatic interventions that may inspire reluctant writers to experiment with writing-for-pleasure practices.

Inspired by last year's findings, this report also featured insights on levels of writing enjoyment in free time versus levels of writing enjoyment at school, thereby exposing a compelling situation. In 2024, nearly twice as many children and young people said they enjoyed writing at school than in their free time (53.6% vs. 28.7%).

The open-ended comments that accompanied last year's findings featured a stark contrast between the appreciation of prescriptive structures and teachers' support for those who enjoyed writing in school, versus the dislike of time constraints of lessons, assessments, prescribed topics, and the lack of freedom in choosing a writing style for those who didn't find writing in school enjoyable.

While it can be reassuring to see an increase in the enjoyment of writing at school, it is important to reflect alongside existing findings and qualitative insights provided by the open-ended comments. This developing trend continues to highlight children and young people moving away from the creative elements intrinsic to writing-for-pleasure practices, as we know that children and young people who take up the challenges of the blank page, self-chosen styles and topics go on to develop personal writing practices that inspire them to write in their free time and for pleasure. We also know that children and young people who do not write for pleasure may miss out on the many benefits writing for pleasure brings: opportunities to care for their own mental wellbeing, self-expression, processing struggles, making sense of the world, and participating actively in civic life. We will continue to investigate this trend to expand our evidence base and produce novel insights into the relationship between the decline of writing enjoyment in free time and the increase of writing enjoyment in school.

Overall, this report shows that it is now time to provide considered changes in policy and in-school opportunities aimed at reconnecting children and young people with the creative elements that transform writing into a personal pleasurable practice that empowers them to become fully integrated human

beings with a rich individual interior life that they can express through their writing.

At the National Literacy Trust, we will continue to:

- **Support** schools to develop writing-for-pleasure practices with the view that every young person is a writer.
- **Explore** programmatic approaches to supporting writing for pleasure based on the best available evidence with the ambition to produce ground-breaking pedagogical insights.
- **Expand** the evidence base by conducting further research into writing for pleasure and seeking innovative research partnerships.

## Appendix: Further demographic information

### Region in England

**8.9%** North East

**13.1%** East of England

**12.1%** North West

**10.6%** Greater London

**9.5%** Yorkshire and the Humber

**14.0%** South East

**8.4%** East Midlands

**10.7%** South West

**12.7%** West Midlands

**22.1%**

of schools had low  
FSM uptake  
( $< 12.6\%$ ).

**48.9%**

of schools had  
average FSM uptake  
( $12.7\%$  to  $28.2\%$ ).

**29.0%**

of schools had high  
FSM uptake  
( $> 28.3\%$ ).

### School location

**67.7%** Urban

**16.6%** Rural

**9.6%** Coastal

### Type of school

**55.4%** Academy

**5.1%** Foundation school

**19.4%** Community school

**5.1%** Free school

**2.3%** Other independent school

**0.1%** PRU

**4.9%** Voluntary aided

**1.5%** Voluntary controlled

**1.2%** Other

## About the National Literacy Trust

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

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

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