

Children and young people's writing in 2025

Francesca Bonafede, Christina Clark, Irene Picton and
Aimee Cole

National Literacy Trust

Ross Young

University of Edinburgh

June 2025

Supported by



In 2024, we drew attention to a growing crisis in children and young people's engagement with writing, revealing a sustained decline in both their enjoyment of and participation in writing activities. A lack of pupil motivation was also perceived as a significant challenge in teaching writing in secondary schools, according to 1 in 4 (25%) teachers surveyed (EEF, 2024). While studies around the world have explored writing attitudes and motivation in specific contexts (e.g. [Zumbrunn et al., 2019](#); [Li et al., 2024](#)), long-term tracking of writing enjoyment and behaviours remains rare internationally. Our Annual Literacy Survey, conducted since 2010, provides one of the only sources of data able to capture these worrying downward trends over time.

Decreasing levels of writing enjoyment and engagement are not just concerning in isolation; they are closely mirrored by troubling attainment figures. Writing has emerged as the lowest-performing area in national assessments, even below mathematics. In 2024, 28% of 11-year-olds in England left primary school without meeting the expected standard in writing, rising sharply to 42% among disadvantaged pupils. These issues are not new; since 2015, statutory assessment data has shown little to no meaningful improvement in writing outcomes, highlighting how deeply embedded the challenge of children and young people's writing has become.

Building on the findings from 2024, this report takes a closer look at children and young people's experiences with writing in 2025 to understand what, if anything, has changed.

Children and young people's writing in 2025

We asked **114,970** children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 515 schools across the UK who took part in our Annual Literacy Survey how they felt about writing in 2025 (see **Appendix** for more information on methodology and sample). The findings show that the writing crisis identified in 2024 has continued into 2025.

Writing enjoyment in free time

In 2025, writing enjoyment has fallen to its lowest recorded level in 15 years. While boys and older children remain the least engaged, the sharpest declines over the past years have occurred among primary-aged children and girls, groups who have traditionally shown the strongest interest in writing. Enjoyment remains

higher among a group often assumed to be less engaged: pupils eligible for free school meals (FSMs).

- **Levels of writing enjoyment have almost halved over the past 15 years:** Only 1 in 4 (26.6%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said in 2025 that they enjoyed writing in their free time. This represents a drop of 20.2 percentage points since 2010, or expressed differently, 43% fewer children and young people today enjoy writing compared with 15 years ago.
- **Primary-aged children are losing enthusiasm fastest:** Enjoyment among this group dropped by 6 percentage points in just one year, with younger girls seeing the sharpest decline.
- **Disadvantage doesn't mean disinterest:** More children and young people receiving free school meals enjoyed writing than their non-FSM peers, a trend that has remained consistent over 15 years.
- **National and regional variations are minimal:** In 2025, slightly more children in Scotland (27.6%) enjoyed writing compared with England (26.7%), Wales (26.2%), and Northern Ireland (24.9%). Enjoyment was highest in the North East of England (34.3%) and lowest in the South East (22.7%).

Daily writing in free time

Daily writing habits have declined in parallel with enjoyment, reaching historically low levels. Just 1 in 10 children and young people now write something in their free time each day, marking a sustained downward trend. As with enjoyment, writing frequency declines steeply with age and is consistently higher among girls and pupils receiving free school meals. Encouragingly, children who enjoy writing are five times more likely to write daily than those who do not, highlighting the link between motivation and habit.

- **Only 1 in 10 (10.4%) wrote something daily in their free time in 2025.** While levels only dropped by 0.7 percentage points between 2024 and 2025, the overall picture is concerning. Daily writing levels have decreased by 16.6 percentage points over the past 15 years, or expressed differently, 61% fewer children and young people today write daily in their free time compared with 2010
- **Daily writing declines with age:** 38.6% of 5- to 8-year-olds write daily, compared with only 1 in 10 (ranging from 8.5% to 11.6%) for those aged 11 and older.
- **More FSM children and young people write every day:** 13.6% of FSM students write daily compared with 9.6% of their non-FSM peers.

- **More girls than boys write daily across all age groups**, though the gender gap has narrowed as writing rates have declined across the board.
- **Across the UK nations**, daily writing is most common in Wales (11.6%), followed by Northern Ireland (10.7%), Scotland (10.4%), and England (10.3%). Within England, the North East (13.9%), Yorkshire and the Humber (12.3%), and the East Midlands (12.0%) lead the way, while the South East (8.6%) records the lowest rate of daily writing.
- **Enjoyment drives habit**: Five times as many children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing wrote something daily compared with their peers who didn't enjoy writing (25.2% vs 5.0%).

Self-perceptions of writing ability

While enjoyment and frequency have declined, most children and young people still feel confident in their writing abilities. Two thirds describe themselves as good or very good writers, a figure that has held steady since 2024. However, this does not strongly predict whether children write regularly or enjoy the act of writing, suggesting that self-perceived ability alone is not enough to sustain writing habits.

- **Two thirds (63%) of 8- to 18-year-olds consider themselves good or very good writers**, a figure that has remained stable since 2024.
- **More girls and younger children rate themselves as good writers**. However, unlike enjoyment and frequency, more non-FSM pupils report their writing abilities to be very good or good than FSM pupils.
- **Self-perceived ability is not closely linked to writing habits**. The correlation between writing enjoyment and self-perceived ability is weak ($r = .316$), as is the link between self-perceived ability and writing frequency ($r = .278$).

Why children and young people write

Children and young people are drawn to writing for a range of reasons, with creativity, self-expression, and curiosity standing out as core motivators. These are especially prominent among those who enjoy writing, but even less-engaged groups cite practical or reflective reasons for committing words to the page. Social motivations, such as writing to connect with others or express opinions, remain rare across all groups.

- **Creativity leads the way**: 48.7% write to be creative, 45.8% to express imagination, and 40.8% to explore thoughts and feelings.

- **Writing supports wellbeing:** 37.0% write to relax, and 31.4% say it makes them feel happy.
- **Writing also fuels learning:** 39.3% use writing to support thinking, 26.5% to learn new words, and 23.1% to explore new ideas.
- **Social writing falls behind:** only 21.1% write to communicate with others, and just 14.7% write to feel connected to the world.

Motivations for writing differ sharply depending on children and young people's enjoyment levels but, even among those less engaged, important drivers persist:

- **Those who enjoy writing** are driven by creativity, emotion and exploration, with strong intellectual and reflective motives.
- **Those who don't enjoy writing** still engage with it for practical purposes: 43.9% write to note things down, and 35.8% do so to improve their skills. Creative and emotional motivations are far less common in this group. Social motivations, such as writing to connect with others or share views, are even less common.

Gateways into writing: How to reignite interest

Even among those who don't enjoy writing, there are clear signs of what might spark re-engagement. Having more autonomy and choosing their own topics or formats appears to be especially motivating, as does responding to inspiring prompts or writing about personal experiences. These drivers are particularly effective with younger children, suggesting an opportunity for early intervention. Teenagers, by contrast, are harder to reach and tend to respond less strongly to both creative and social motivators.

- **Choice matters most:** 35.2% of children who enjoy writing 'a bit' say choosing their own topic would encourage them to write more.
- **Freedom to choose form also fuels motivation:** 29.0% are encouraged by being able to choose the writing style.
- **Inspiring prompts and memorable experiences** are key drivers, especially among younger children.
- **Teenagers are harder to reach:** those aged 14+ are less responsive to most motivators, particularly social ones, although personal relevance continues to have some impact.
- **Girls identify more motivators than boys,** especially creative options like private journals and expressive prompts.
- **FSM and non-FSM children show similar motivators,** suggesting that factors such as personal relevance and autonomy play a more significant

role in motivation than socioeconomic status. This emphasises that strategies for engagement based on these factors can appeal to all students, regardless of their background.

What and how children and young people write

Despite declining enjoyment, many children and young people continue to engage with writing in diverse ways. While paper remains the main format for reflective writing, screens dominate when it comes to song lyrics, scripts and reviews, especially among less enthusiastic writers.

Even children who say they don't enjoy writing still often choose to write in their free time, typically in formats that reflect their interests in music, media or personal storytelling. Girls continue to write more than boys across almost every format, although fan fiction stands out as a rare area of equal engagement.

- **Paper remained the preferred medium for reflective writing:** among those who enjoyed writing, 45.9% wrote diary entries and 41.1% wrote letters.
- **Formats that lend themselves to digital and multimedia consumption were popular:** among those who enjoyed writing, 27.6% wrote song lyrics, 24.3% wrote scripts, and 23.9% wrote reviews (on screen).
- **Even disengaged writers engage creatively:** among those who didn't enjoy writing, 16.6% wrote song lyrics and 13.1% wrote scripts.
- **Freewriting was popular** among those who enjoyed writing: 32.7% engaged with freewriting on screen and 48.7% on paper.
- **More girls write across all formats**, especially diaries (three times as many as boys).
- **Fan fiction** is one of the few genres where boys and girls engage at similar rates.
- **Younger children use a wider range of formats**, especially paper-based, while older teens focus more on screen-based and review writing.

This year's data reveal a notable decline in both writing enjoyment and frequency among younger children, especially those aged 8 to 11, who have traditionally been among the most engaged. Girls, too, have seen sharper declines in writing enjoyment than boys in recent years. While boys and older students continue to show the lowest overall engagement, the relative rate of change has been more modest for these groups, largely because they started from a lower baseline.

Although writing enjoyment and daily writing have decreased over time, our data also point to areas of resilience and interest. Many young people still view themselves as capable writers, and a wide range of motivations – especially creativity, emotional expression and curiosity – continue to shape writing habits. These drivers are particularly evident among children who enjoy writing, but even those who are less engaged report practical or reflective reasons for writing. Social motivations, like writing to connect with others or support causes, are much less common across all groups.

This report doesn't just chart the decline; it sheds light on opportunities for (re)engagement. Many children and young people who don't enjoy writing still recognise motivators that could draw them back in, such as being able to choose their own topics, select their writing style, or respond to inspiring prompts. Furthermore, while some groups, particularly teenagers, are less responsive to these motivators, younger children appear more open to re-engagement, suggesting a potential window for early intervention.

Format preferences also offer insights: while paper remains the primary medium for reflective and narrative writing, digital writing (such as song lyrics, reviews or scripts) plays an important role, especially among less enthusiastic writers. Importantly, even among those who don't enjoy writing, many still choose to write in their free time, often through formats connected to music, media and personal communication.

Taken together, the findings point to a complex picture. While long-term trends indicate a decline in writing enjoyment and habit, the data also reveal areas of possibility. By understanding what motivates young writers, and offering more opportunities for autonomy, creativity and expression, there may be meaningful ways to support a broader and more positive culture of writing.

Writing in 2025

This report focuses on the writing that children and young people do during their free time. Our findings on school-based writing will be covered in a separate report.

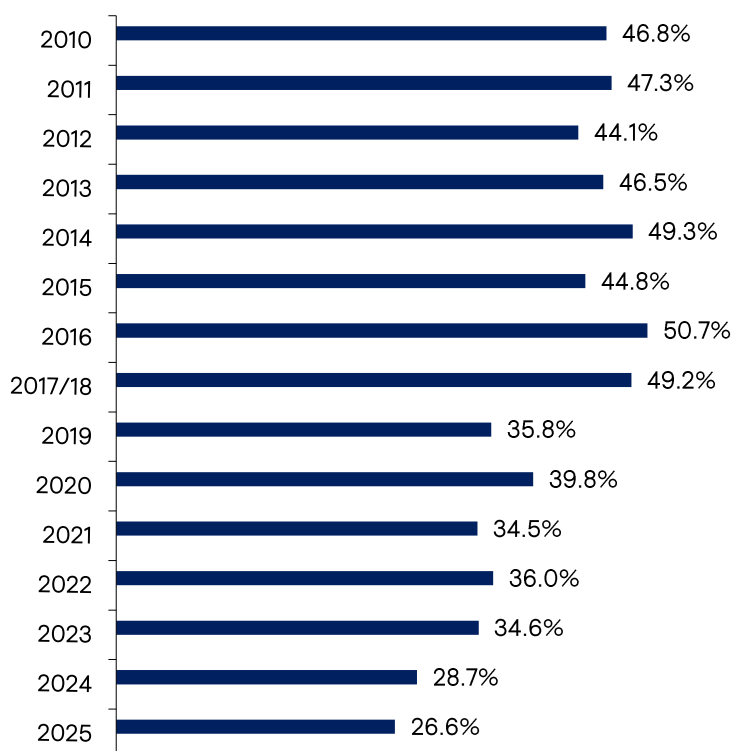
Before responding to the questions on writing, children and young people were reminded that writing referred to any writing they did outside of their homework, whether on paper or on a screen.

Writing enjoyment in free time

In 2025, just 1 in 4 (26.6%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 said they enjoyed writing in their free time, with 9.9% enjoying it ‘very much’ and 16.8% enjoying it ‘quite a lot’. Nearly 2 in 5 (37.9%) reported enjoying writing ‘a bit’, while 1 in 3 (35.4%) stated they didn’t enjoy it at all.

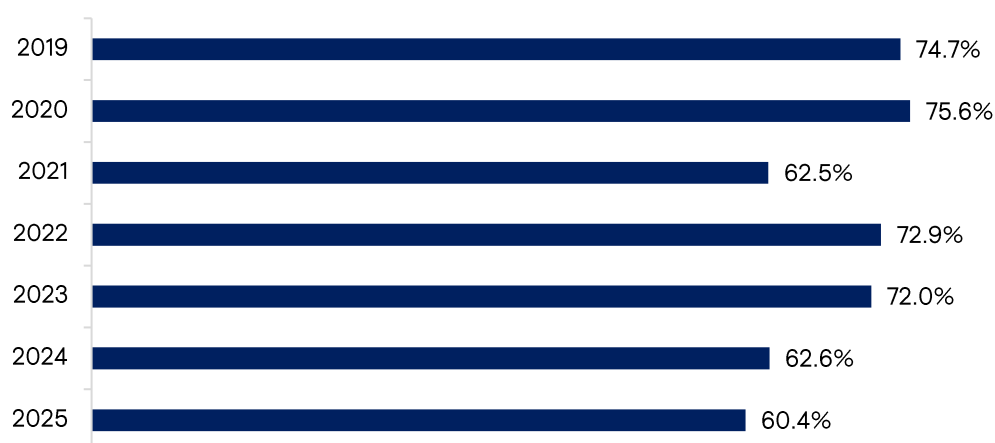
After last year’s decline (see Figure 1 for an over-time comparison), writing enjoyment levels have remained relatively stable, dipping 2.1 percentage points in the past year. However, the bigger picture is more concerning: since 2010, enjoyment of writing in free time has fallen by 20.2 percentage points. Put another way, the number of children and young people who enjoy writing in their free time has dropped by 43% over the past 15 years.

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 2025



We have also tracked the writing enjoyment of children aged 5 to 8 over the last six years. As shown in Figure 2, enjoyment of writing among young children has declined overall since 2019, with some fluctuations along the way. After relatively high levels in 2019 and 2020, there was a sharp drop in 2021, likely due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there was a rebound in 2022, enjoyment has steadily decreased each year since. By 2025, the percentage of children who said they enjoyed writing in their free time either very much or quite a lot had fallen to its lowest level over the six-year period, down by 14.3 percentage points compared with 2019.

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 8 who enjoyed writing in their free time either very much or quite a lot from 2019 to 2025



Writing enjoyment in free time in 2025 by gender, age group and free-school-meal uptake

As shown in Figure 3, more girls than boys said that they enjoyed writing in their free time regardless of age. Overall, writing enjoyment declined with age, with 3 in 5 children aged 5 to 8 telling us that they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with 2 in 5 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, but then rates recovered a little as 1 in 4 young people aged 16 to 18 told us that they enjoyed writing in their free time. More children and young people receiving free school meals, 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 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who enjoyed writing in their free time in 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake (8 to 18s only)

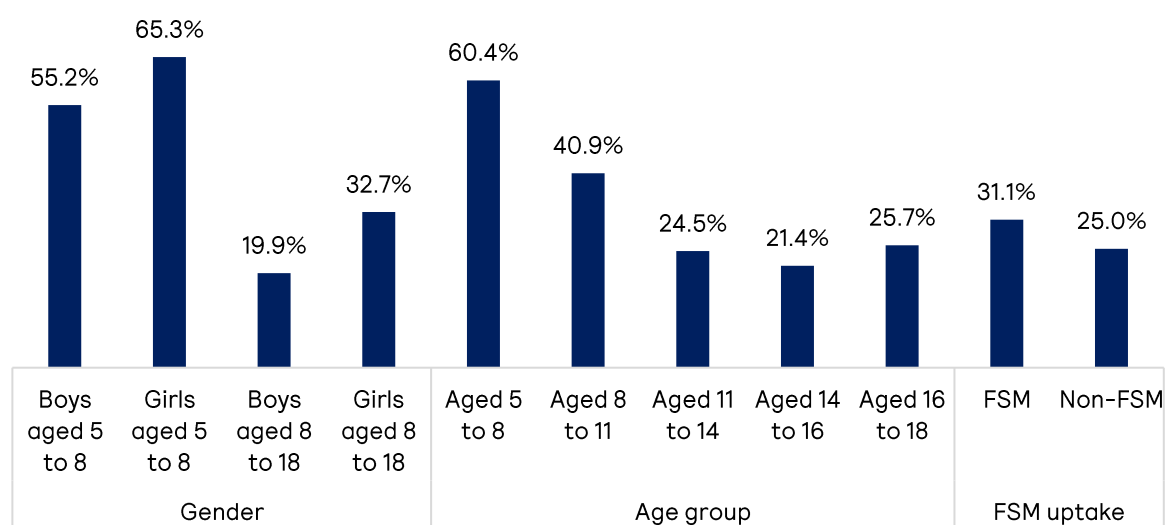


Table 1 shows writing enjoyment levels of those aged 8 to 18 over time by gender, age group and FSM uptake. Over the past 15 years, consistently more girls than boys told us that they enjoyed writing. While girls started out with relatively strong enthusiasm for writing, they experienced a steady drop from 2019 onwards, falling to nearly half the enjoyment levels they once had. By 2025, enjoyment had dropped steeply for both, but the fall was sharper for girls in absolute terms. While boys started low and ended even lower, girls' steeper decline represents a significant erosion of what was once a clear strength in writing engagement.

Writing enjoyment declined across all age groups between 2010 and 2025, but the pattern of change varies by age. Those aged 8 to 11 began with the highest levels of enjoyment and, while they remain the most positive group, they have experienced one of the steepest declines over time. The oldest group – those aged 16 to 18 – also saw a sharp drop, losing more ground than any other age bracket. Children aged 11 to 14 followed a similar trajectory, with a significant fall in enjoyment levels. Interestingly, those aged 14 to 16 showed the smallest overall decline, but only because their enjoyment was already low at the start and remained so throughout. This shows that disengagement with writing has

deepened across the age spectrum, with even the traditionally enthusiastic younger group now far less engaged than before.

Consistently more children and young people who told us they received FSMs told us they enjoyed writing compared with their non-FSM peers throughout the last 15 years. This trend has held even through the sharp drops seen in recent years. Since 2019, both groups have seen notable decreases, but FSM pupils have remained more positive about writing throughout. The gap in enjoyment has actually widened slightly in favour of FSM pupils, suggesting a more complex picture when it comes to socioeconomic background and enjoyment of writing.

Table 1: Writing enjoyment levels for children and young people aged 8 to 18 between 2010 and 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
2010	37.8%	55.1%	61.0%	44.3%	34.3%	47.1%	46.9%	46.6%
2011	38.1%	56.5%	66.7%	44.3%	35.9%	45.9%	45.9%	47.3%
2012	35.1%	52.4%	52.1%	41.0%	35.8%	40.3%	43.4%	43.7%
2013	38.0%	55.4%	56.3%	42.4%	36.0%	34.8%	47.9%	46.0%
2014	40.5%	57.5%	57.4%	47.2%	38.8%	38.4%	51.0%	49.1%
2015	35.9%	50.7%	63.1%	41.3%	31.3%	42.8%	46.7%	43.3%
2016	42.7%	52.8%	69.7%	47.4%	36.9%	40.4%	54.7%	50.0%
2017/8	40.9%	57.4%	68.5%	46.5%	36.0%	37.8%	50.1%	48.8%
2019	27.3%	44.5%	54.5%	32.4%	24.8%	27.9%	42.0%	33.8%
2020	34.5%	44.7%	53.4%	38.2%	29.3%	33.3%	44.9%	38.6%
2021	32.1%	42.3%	47.5%	35.6%	27.0%	28.9%	38.4%	33.6%
2022	29.9%	40.8%	52.0%	34.9%	26.6%	30.9%	40.8%	34.3%
2023	28.9%	39.5%	51.6%	32.6%	26.4%	28.5%	38.6%	32.9%
2024	22.1%	34.6%	47.4%	26.3%	21.8%	23.1%	34.2%	26.1%
2025	19.9%	32.7%	40.9%	24.5%	21.4%	25.7%	31.1%	25.0%

In 2025, more girls than boys aged 5 to 8 said they enjoyed writing in their free time, a pattern that mirrors the gender gap trend seen in older age groups. This difference has remained consistent since tracking began in 2019 (see Table 2), with more girls than boys consistently telling us that they enjoy writing in their free time.

However, the gender gap has narrowed slightly over time, shrinking from 14.4 percentage points in 2019 to 10.1 points in 2025. This narrowing is not the result of rising enjoyment among boys, but rather a steeper decline among girls: over the

past six years, writing enjoyment among girls in this age group has fallen by 16.4 percentage points compared with a 12.1-percentage-point drop for boys.

Table 2: Writing enjoyment levels for children aged 5 to 8 from 2019 and 2025 by gender

	Overall	Boys	Girls	Gender gap (percentage points)
2019	74.7%	67.3%	81.7%	14.4
2020	75.6%	70.1%	81.1%	11.0
2021	62.5%	52.5%	71.7%	19.2
2022	72.9%	67.5%	79.1%	11.6
2023	72.0%	67.6%	76.6%	9
2024	62.6%	55.7%	69.1%	13.4
2025	60.4%	55.2%	65.3%	10.1

Writing enjoyment by geographical region

National differences in writing enjoyment among children and young people were minimal (see Table 3). Marginally more children and young people who went to school in Scotland told us they enjoyed writing in their free time compared with their peers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

There were regional differences in writing enjoyment in England, with more children and young people from the North East and East Midlands saying 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.

Table 3: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 enjoying writing in their free time in 2025 by geographical region

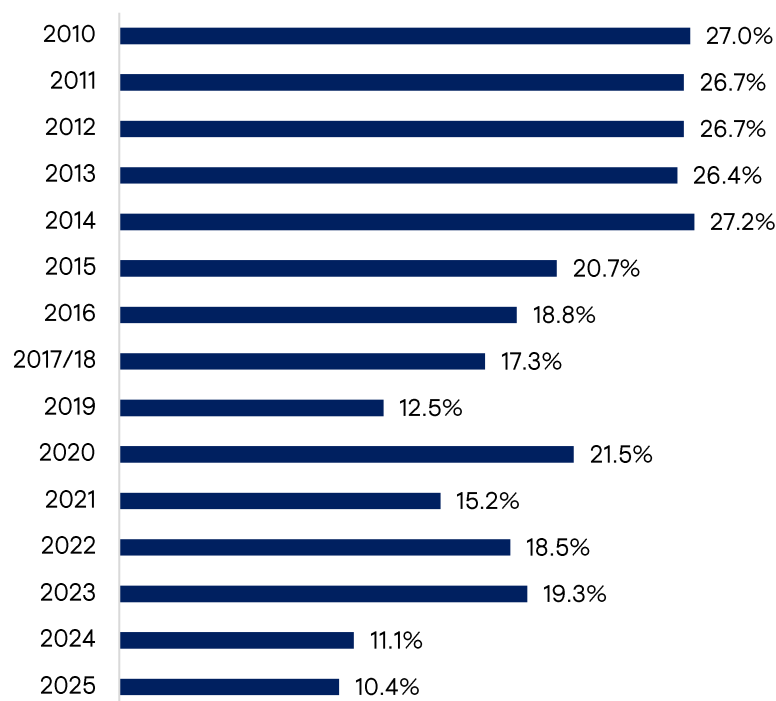
ENGLAND	26.7%
North East	34.3%
North West	27.7%
Yorkshire and the Humber	28.4%
East Midlands	30.0%
West Midlands	27.7%
East of England	26.3%
London	27.7%
South East	22.7%
South West	24.8%
WALES	26.2%
SCOTLAND	27.6%
NORTHERN IRELAND	24.9%

Daily writing in free time

In 2025, just 1 in 10 (10.4%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us that they wrote something in their free time on a daily basis. 2 in 5 (38.3%) wrote something at least once a week but nearly the same percentage (38.8%) said that they rarely or never wrote something in their free time.

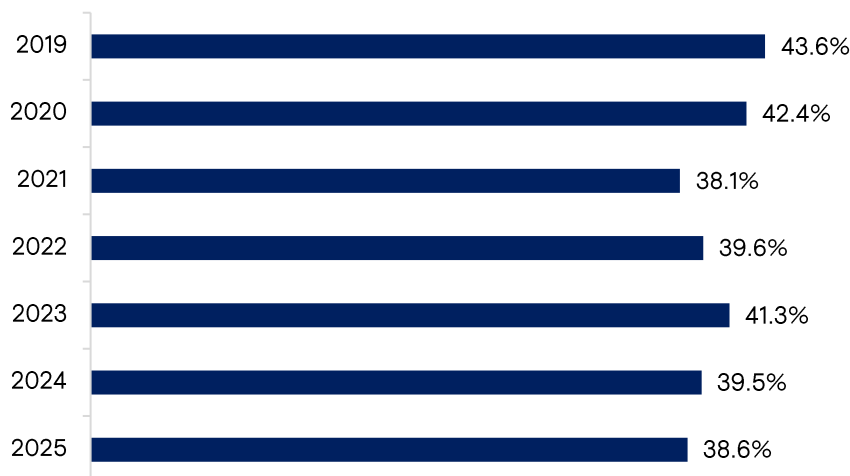
Figure 4 shows levels of daily writing for children and young people aged 8 to 18 over the past 15 years. While daily writing levels improved a little between 2022 and 2023, they halved between 2023 and 2024. While levels only dropped by 0.7 percentage points over the last year, the overall trend remains deeply concerning. Daily writing levels have decreased by 16.6 percentage points over the past 15 years, or expressed differently, 61% fewer children and young people today write daily in their free time compared with 2010.

Figure 4: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 who wrote something daily in their spare time from 2010 to 2025



Looking at just those aged 5 to 8 in 2025, 38.6% said they wrote something daily in their free time, more than three times the rate of daily writing reported by the older age group (see Figure 5). Interestingly, rates of daily writing for this age group have not dropped as noticeably as with their writing enjoyment, but they have still been on the decline for the last three years. Overall, daily writing enjoyment for 5- to 8-year-olds has reduced by 5 percentage points in the last six years.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 8 who wrote something daily in their spare time from 2019 to 2025



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 ($r = .614$), indicating that those who enjoyed writing wrote more frequently in their free time. The relationship between writing enjoyment and writing frequency was less strong for those aged 5 to 8 ($r = .424$).

As shown in Table 4, 1 in 4 children and young people aged 8 to 18 who enjoyed writing wrote something daily compared with 1 in 20 of their peers who didn't enjoy writing. However, it is worth noting that 1 in 4 (24.6%) of those who told us that they didn't enjoy writing in their free time still wrote something at least once a week, and nearly 1 in 2 (49.3%) wrote something in their free time at least once a month.

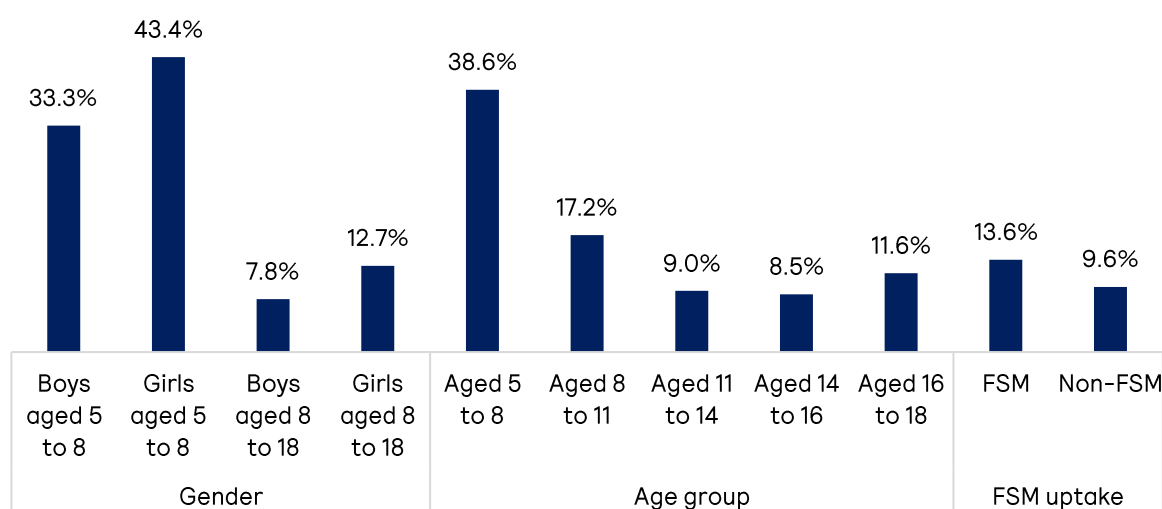
Table 4: Writing enjoyment by writing frequency in 2025 for children and young people aged 8 to 18

	Daily	A couple of times a week	Once a week	A couple of times a month	Once a month	Rarely or never
Enjoy writing	25.2%	33.6%	17.4%	12.8%	5.1%	6.0%
Don't enjoy writing	5.0%	9.5%	10.1%	12.1%	12.7%	50.7%

Daily writing by gender, age group and FSM uptake

In 2025, more girls than boys said that they wrote something daily in their free time, regardless of whether they were aged 5 to 8 or 8 to 18 (see Figure 6). As with writing enjoyment, levels of daily writing decreased with age: twice as many children aged 5 to 8 said that they wrote something in their free time daily compared with those aged 8 to 11. Only 1 in 10 of those aged 11 and older said the same. More children and young people who received FSMs reported enjoying writing and wrote something daily in their free time than their peers who didn't receive FSMs.

Figure 6: Percentage of children and young people aged 5 to 18 who said that they wrote something daily in their free time in 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake (8 to 18s only)



Consistently more girls than boys told us that they wrote something daily in their free time across the 15-year period (see Table 5). However, both groups experienced a significant drop in daily writing over time, especially after 2014. Girls, who started from a higher baseline, saw the steeper overall decline in absolute terms (-19.6 percentage points vs -13.7 percentage points for boys), although they continue to enjoy writing more than boys throughout. By 2025, daily writing was at a very low level for both boys and girls, with only a modest gap between them, suggesting a broad and deep disengagement with daily writing that affects all children and young people regardless of gender.

Daily writing has declined across all age groups since 2010, but the pattern of change varies markedly. Surprisingly, it was the oldest group – those aged 16 to 18 – who began with the highest levels of daily writing, but they also experienced by far the steepest decline, dropping more than any other group by 2025. The youngest children – those aged 8 to 11 – have shown the most resilience over time, with consistently more of this group writing daily than their older peers in recent years, even as their own levels have declined. Those aged 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 followed a similar downward path with notable declines in daily writing, especially after 2015. This suggests that teenagers have disengaged from daily writing most severely, whereas younger children, while still affected, remain relatively more engaged.

Throughout the 15-year period, consistently more children and young people who told us that they received FSMs wrote something daily in their free time than their non-FSM peers. Although both groups have seen a significant long-term decline, especially between 2014 and 2019, those who received FSMs have remained slightly more engaged year after year. A brief resurgence in 2020, likely influenced by changes in routine during the pandemic, was followed by another sharp drop. By 2025, daily writing levels were low across the board, but more of those who received FSMs wrote in their free time compared with their non-FSM peers, suggesting that socioeconomic disadvantage does not directly translate to lower writing engagement.

Table 5: Daily writing levels in children and young people aged 8 to 18 between 2010 and 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
2010	21.5%	32.3%	26.2%	27.1%	28.2%	37.3%	30.3%	26.6%
2011	20.8%	32.7%	27.3%	27.0%	25.0%	30.8%	29.6%	26.2%
2012	21.0%	32.6%	27.1%	26.8%	25.9%	29.4%	27.5%	26.6%
2013	21.1%	31.8%	27.1%	25.5%	26.6%	39.4%	29.1%	25.8%
2014	21.9%	32.2%	28.1%	27.3%	23.9%	38.3%	29.0%	26.9%
2015	17.1%	24.0%	24.6%	20.8%	15.8%	20.2%	24.6%	20.2%
2016	15.9%	21.7%	24.1%	18.1%	14.5%	13.4%	23.6%	17.9%
2017/8	14.3%	19.9%	22.1%	16.8%	13.8%	11.2%	21.1%	16.7%
2019	9.9%	14.9%	18.8%	11.3%	9.4%	7.7%	17.1%	11.4%
2020	18.8%	23.8%	24.7%	21.6%	18.5%	15.4%	24.2%	21.0%
2021	12.6%	17.4%	23.3%	15.9%	10.9%	9.9%	18.5%	14.3%
2022	15.8%	20.7%	24.1%	18.7%	13.8%	11.6%	22.3%	17.5%
2023	16.5%	22.1%	28.2%	18.8%	13.7%	12.3%	23.6%	17.9%
2024	8.6%	13.3%	23.6%	9.1%	8.7%	12.3%	14.8%	9.5%
2025	7.8%	12.7%	17.2%	9.0%	8.5%	11.6%	13.6%	9.6%

Focusing specifically on children aged 5 to 8 (see Table 6), a higher percentage of girls reported writing daily compared with boys, reflecting the gender-gap trend observed in the older age group. As with writing enjoyment, this trend has been consistent since we began tracking daily writing for this age group.

The gender gap in daily writing has fluctuated in the last six years but overall has decreased by 4.6 percentage points. This has been driven largely by a reduction in the number of girls aged 5 to 8 who write daily, which has decreased by 7 percentage points since 2019.

Table 6: Daily writing levels for children aged 5 to 8 from 2019 to 2025 by gender

	Overall	Boys	Girls	Gender gap (percentage points)
2019	43.6%	35.7%	50.4%	14.7
2020	42.4%	51.1%	61.2%	10.1
2021	38.1%	30.4%	45.2%	14.8
2022	39.6%	33.0%	46.0%	13
2023	41.3%	35.2%	47.5%	12.3
2024	39.5%	33.5%	45.3%	11.5
2025	38.6%	33.3%	43.4%	10.1

Daily writing by geographical region

National differences in daily writing rates were again minimal (see Table 7). Marginally more children and young people who went to school in Wales told us that they wrote something daily in their free time compared with their peers in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

There were also small differences in daily writing by regions in England, with marginally more children and young people from the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, and East Midlands 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.

Table 7: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing daily in their free time in 2025 by geographical region

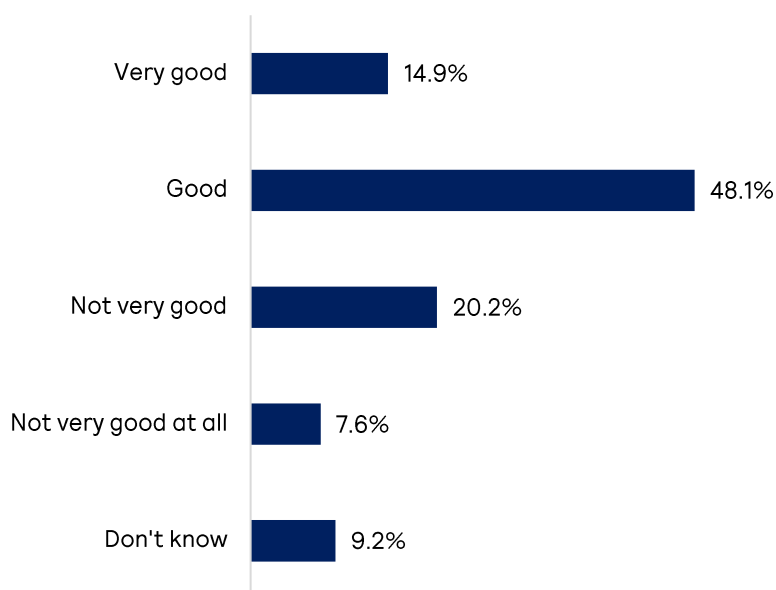
ENGLAND		10.3%
	North East	13.9%
	North West	11.3%
	Yorkshire and the Humber	12.3%
	East Midlands	12.0%
	West Midlands	10.1%
	East of England	10.2%
	London	10.2%
	South East	8.6%
	South West	9.2%
WALES		11.6%
SCOTLAND		10.4%
NORTHERN IRELAND		10.7%

Perceived ability: children and young people's views on their writing skills

In addition to their enjoyment and frequency of writing, we also asked children and young people aged 8 to 18 how good a writer they think they are. As shown in Figure 7, nearly 2 in 3 (63.0%) rated themselves as either very good or good writers; 1 in 5 considered themselves not very good at writing, while 7.6% felt they were not very good at all. Nearly 1 in 11 were unsure of their writing abilities. Overall, this suggests that around 37% of children and young people lack a confident or positive self-concept as a writer.

Children and young people's perceived writing skills have remained stable over the past year: in 2024, 62.4% of children and young people aged 8 to 18 considered themselves to be either very good or good writers.

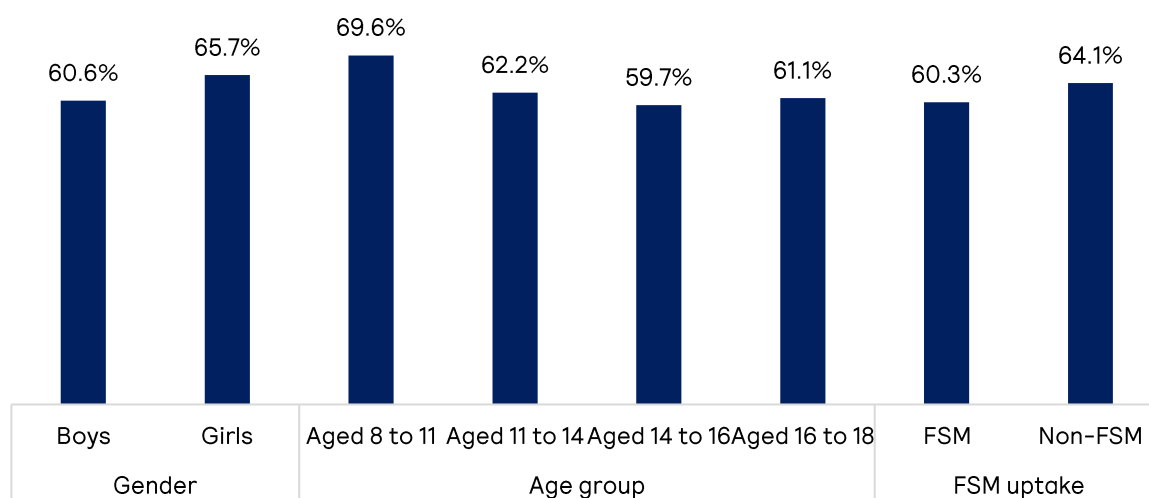
Figure 7: Children and young people's (aged 8 to 18) perception of their writing skill in 2025



In 2025, slightly more girls than boys told us that they thought they were either very good or good writers (see Figure 8). More children aged 8 to 11 also said this compared with their older peers. In contrast to the patterns seen in writing enjoyment and daily writing, more children and young people who didn't receive

FSMs believed themselves to be either very good or good writers compared with their peers who received FSMs.

Figure 8: Children and young people's (aged 8 to 18) perception of their writing skill in 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake



The relationship between self-perceived writing skill, enjoyment and frequency

Although there was a positive correlation between writing enjoyment and children and young people's self-reported ability as writers, the relationship was relatively weak ($r = .316$). Similarly, the relationship between writing frequency and self-perceived ability was also weak ($r = .278$), suggesting that while enjoyment and frequent writing may contribute to greater confidence in writing, other factors are likely to play a significant role in shaping young people's self-perception as writers.

Why children and young people write

We also wanted to know what motivated children and young people aged 8 to 18 to write in their free time, focusing on those who reported doing so at least once a month ($n = 57,773$). We presented children and young people with 19 different reasons for writing. We grouped these reasons into four distinct writing profiles

based on the motivations children and young people gave for writing in their free time: the *creative writer*, *curious writer*, *mindful writer* and *social writer*. Each profile reveals different emotional, intellectual or social drivers behind the act of writing.

The creative writers channelled their imagination and original ideas into their writing to express and explore their unique creativity. Many wrote to express their thoughts and feelings, explore ideas and escape into other worlds, often drawing inspiration from the books, games, films and shows they love. Writing was also used to entertain others.

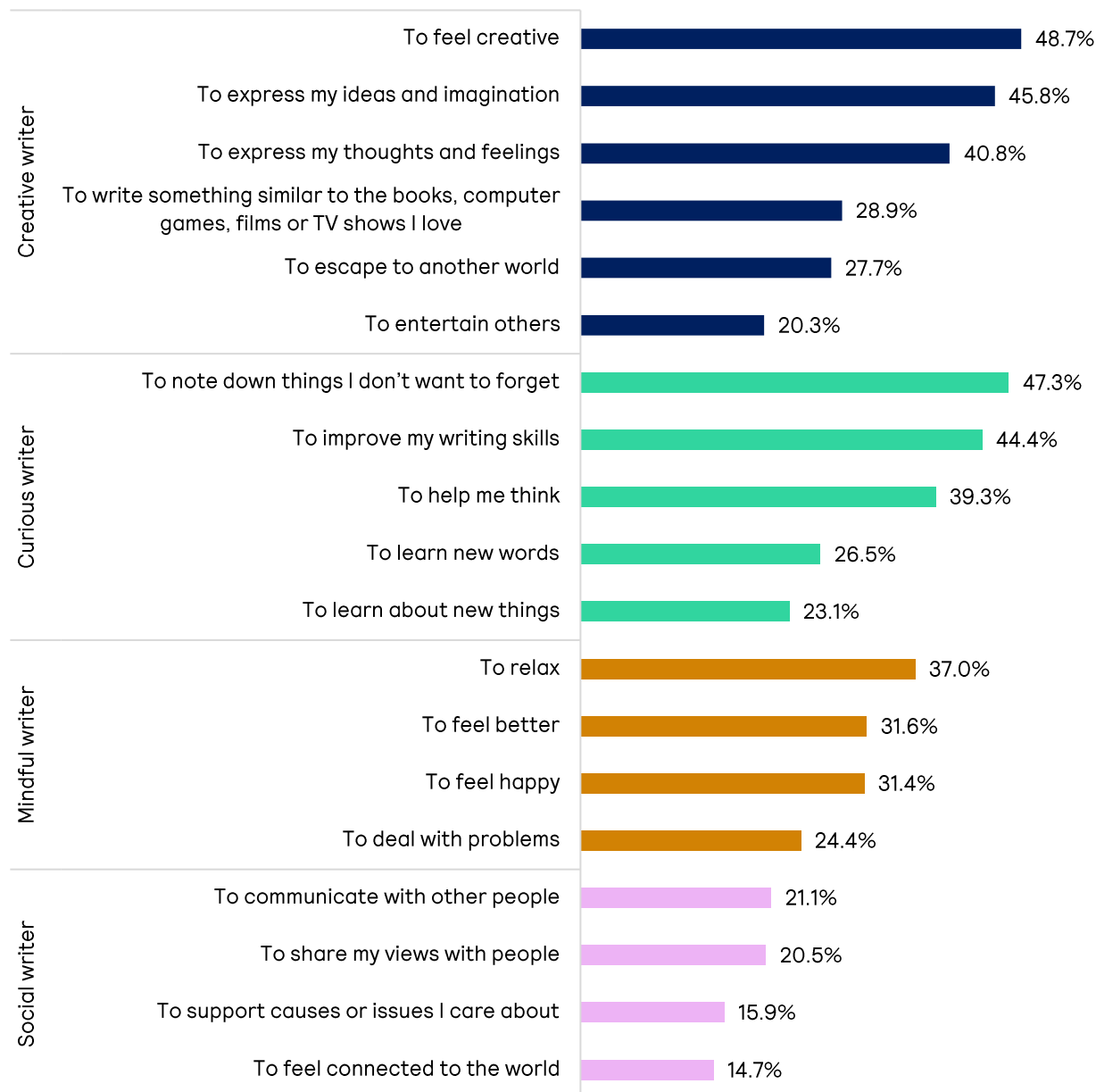
The curious writers explored new ideas, perspectives and experiences through their writing. They were motivated by learning and self-improvement. Many wrote to organise their thinking, improve their skills, remember key information and expand their vocabulary. For this group, writing was a purposeful activity that supported intellectual growth and helped them make sense of the world.

The mindful writers used writing as a tool to explore their emotions, experiences and inner thoughts to promote emotional wellbeing. They turned to writing to relax and to process emotions. Writing provided a sense of happiness and control for them, offering a quiet space for reflection and a way to navigate life's challenges.

The social writers used writing to cultivate social connections, nurture interpersonal relationships, foster a sense of belonging and acknowledge their agency and motivation for societal change. For this group, writing served to communicate, share their views, and support causes they cared about. Although fewer used writing to connect with others directly, their motivations indicated a strong sense of outward engagement and a desire to influence or better understand the world around them.

Figure 9 shows that in 2025, the most common writing profiles among children and young people were the creative writer and curious writer, highlighting the strong personal and reflective motivations that underpinned much of their engagement with writing. The social writers were the least common profile.

Figure 9: Children and young people's (aged 8 to 18) reasons for writing in 2025

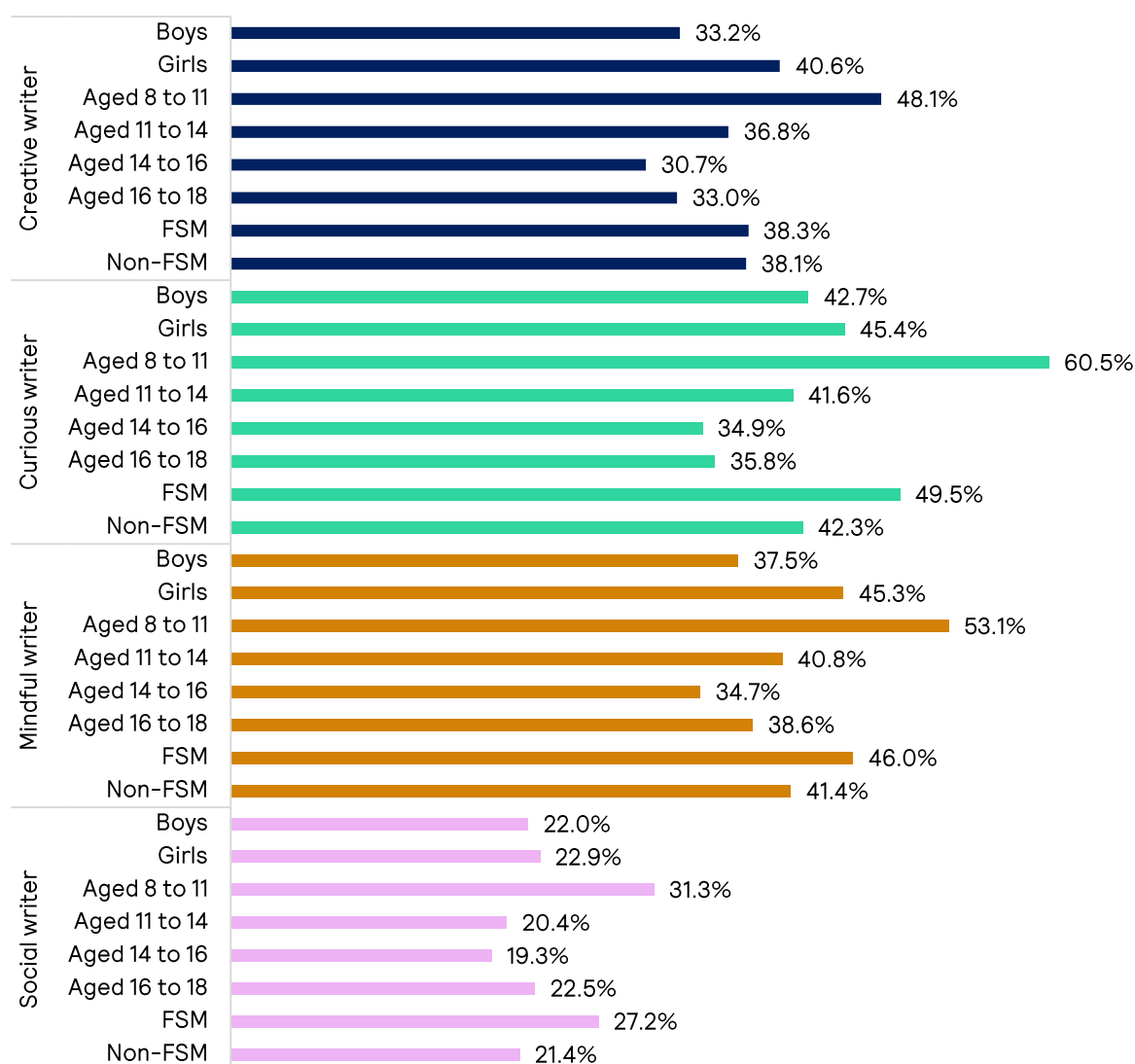


Writing motivations are shaped by age, gender and, to a lesser extent, by whether or not children and young people receive FSMs (see Figure 10). More girls than boys identify as creative, curious and mindful writers, indicating a stronger emotional, reflective and expressive engagement with writing. However, the gap between boys and girls is relatively small for curious writers, suggesting a shared drive across genders to use writing as a tool for learning and discovery. Social

writing is relatively low across the board, but boys and girls are almost equally likely to identify with this profile.

Children aged 8 to 11 consistently show the highest engagement across all writing profiles, suggesting that younger children are more connected to writing for creativity, self-expression and exploration. Engagement tends to decline steadily with age, most sharply for creative and mindful writing between the ages of 11 to 14 and 14 to 16. Interestingly, social writing remains low throughout but shows a slight increase among those aged 16 to 18, possibly reflecting growing social consciousness in later adolescence.

Figure 10: Writing motivation profiles by gender, age group and FSM uptake in 2025



There were modest differences in writing profiles by FSM uptake. Children and young people receiving FSMs reported higher levels of engagement across all writing profiles compared with their non-FSM peers, with the largest gap seen in the curious and social writer profiles. While these differences are not large, they suggest that writing holds an important role across socioeconomic backgrounds, providing a consistent platform for self-expression, exploration and connection.

While we know that there is a relationship between writing enjoyment and writing frequency, with those who enjoy writing choosing to write more frequently (see Table 4 earlier), we also know that a fair number of those who only enjoy writing a bit ($n = 37,271$) or not at all ($n = 6,173$) still write in their free time at least once a month. We therefore wanted to know why they engaged with writing.

Figure 11 presents the writing motivation profiles and their individual components, distinguishing between children and young people who enjoyed writing and those who reported enjoying it only a bit or not at all. It shows that writing motivations are strongly shaped by enjoyment levels, with distinct patterns emerging between those who enjoy writing and those who do not.

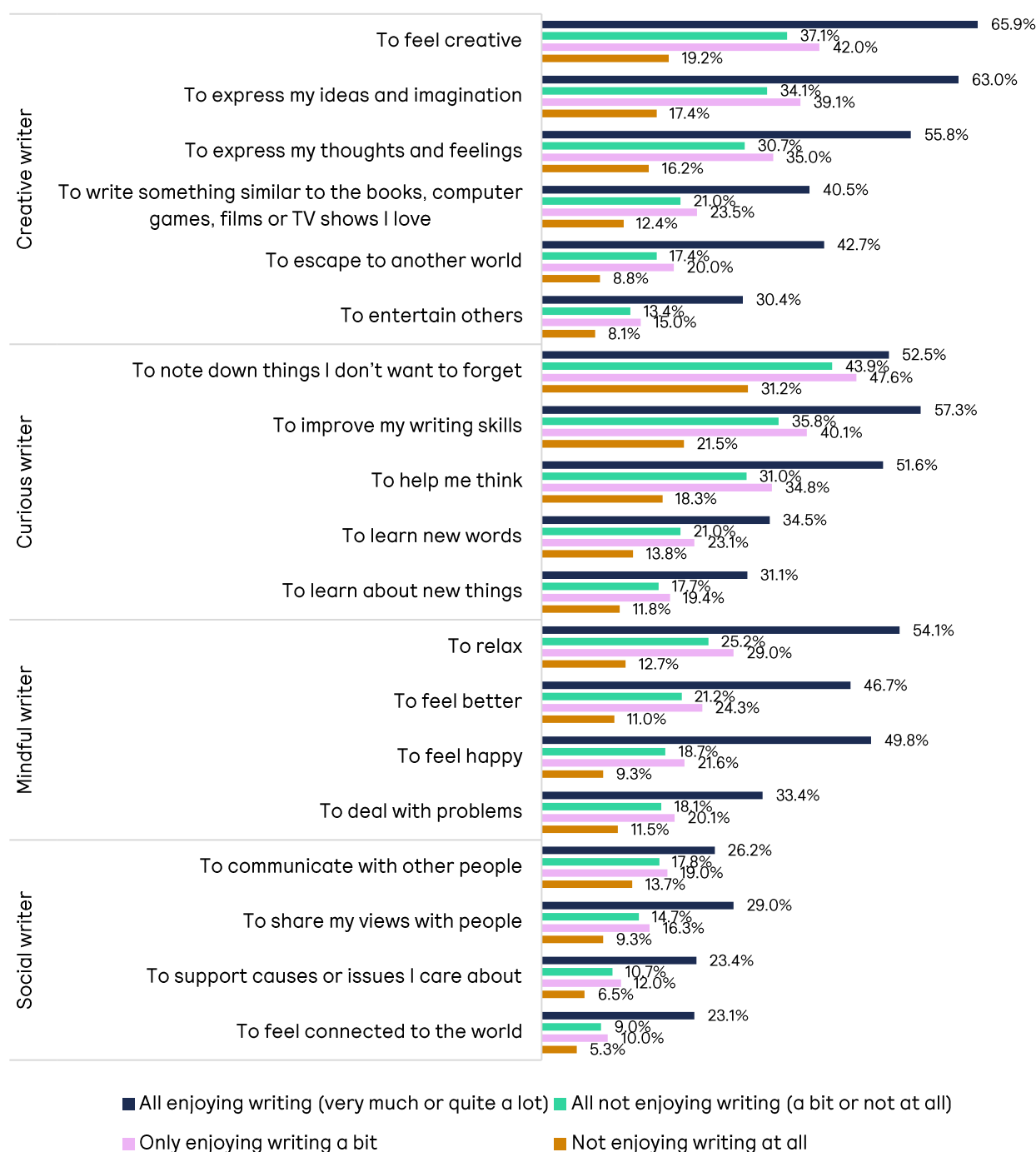
Among children and young people who enjoy writing, creative motivations are the most powerful drivers. Many write to feel creative and to express their ideas and imagination. Emotional expression is also significant, with a large proportion writing to express their thoughts and feelings. Curiosity-driven motivations, such as improving writing skills and noting down things they don't want to forget, are also strong among those who enjoy writing. Mindful motivations, such as writing to relax or to feel happy, highlight writing's important role in supporting emotional wellbeing for this group.

Among those who do not enjoy writing, motivations are generally lower across all categories, but some pathways to writing still exist. Even among those who don't enjoy it, a notable number still see value in writing for practical or functional purposes, such as improving their writing skills or noting down things they don't want to forget. Creative and emotional motivations are much less common in this group, suggesting that their disengagement from writing is closely tied to a diminished emotional and imaginative connection.

Among those who report not enjoying writing at all, motivations are notably limited, especially when it comes to creative and emotional expression. Few say they write to feel creative, express their imagination, or share their thoughts and feelings. While practical reasons, such as recording important information, resonate slightly more with this group, overall engagement remains low across all

categories. Emotional motivations, such as writing to feel better or cope with problems, are especially weak, highlighting a deep disconnect between writing and personal wellbeing for this group.

Figure 11: Writer profiles of children and young people aged 8 to 18 in 2025 by whether or not they enjoy writing



Gateways into writing

In light of the decline in writing enjoyment and daily writing observed in 2025, we were particularly interested in identifying potential motivators to write, especially for those who reported not enjoying writing in their free time.

Children and young people aged 8 to 18 were given a list of 11 possible factors that might encourage them to write. They could select as many as they liked. Figure 12 highlights these gateways into writing, revealing notable variations based on how much they enjoy writing, while also showing that clear motivators exist across all groups.

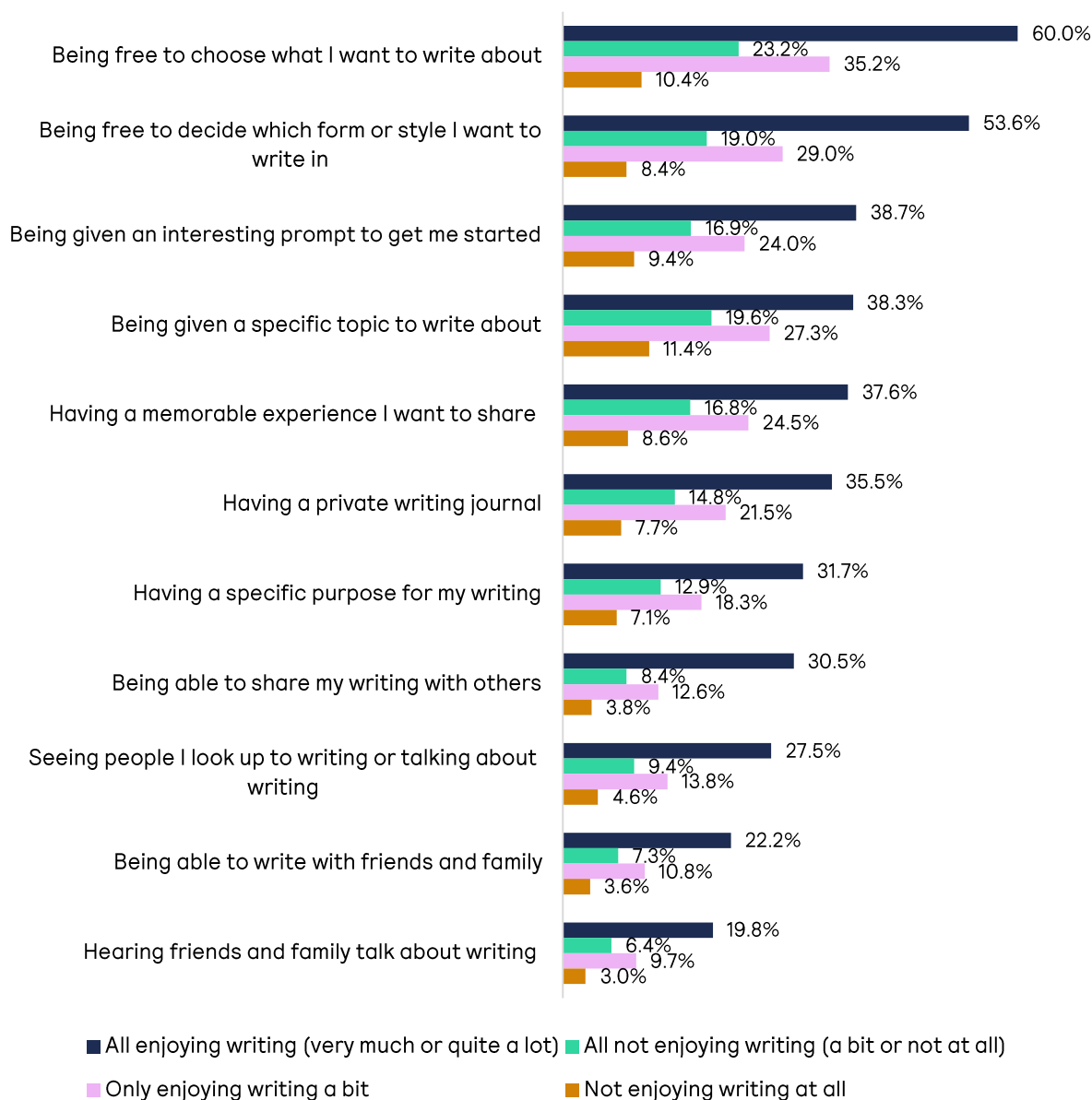
Among those who enjoy writing, freedom and choice stand out as the strongest drivers. Being free to choose what they write about and deciding the form or style of their writing were particularly motivating factors. Other strong factors included receiving interesting prompts, being given a specific topic of relevance and interest, and drawing inspiration from memorable experiences they wanted to share.

Among those who enjoyed writing a bit, the same patterns were present, though at lower levels. Choice remained crucial, with many motivated by selecting their own topic or style. Prompts, specific topics and personal experiences also played an important role, suggesting that even partial enjoyment of writing can be strengthened with the right opportunities.

The figure also shows that for children and young people who do not enjoy writing at all, engagement is much lower across all factors. Nevertheless, some pathways remain: freedom to choose what to write about, being given a specific topic, and selecting the form or style of writing still showed potential to encourage engagement. Practical and purposeful motivations, such as having a memorable experience to share or being given an interesting prompt to springboard from, also offered possible entry points, even among the most disengaged.

Social motivations, such as hearing friends and family talk about writing or writing with others, were consistently less influential across all groups, particularly among those who did not enjoy writing. However, these motivators remained more influential for a subset of children and young people who already enjoyed writing.

Figure 12: What would motivate children and young people aged 8 to 18 to engage with writing in 2025 by whether or not they enjoy writing



Overall, the findings highlight the central importance of autonomy, relevance and personal inspiration in fostering writing engagement, even among those who are currently less motivated.

Gateways into writing by gender, age group and FSM uptake

Gateways into writing for those who don't enjoy writing are shaped by gender, age group and socioeconomic background (see Table 8), with notable differences in what motivates boys and girls. Among children who don't enjoy writing, more girls than boys identify a broad range of factors that could encourage them to write. The largest gender gaps emerge around owning a private writing journal, being able to choose their own writing topics, and receiving an interesting prompt to get started. These findings suggest that girls in this group are particularly responsive to opportunities for self-expression and creative freedom. Fewer boys who don't enjoy writing identify strong motivators for writing, although freedom to choose their own writing ideas remains important to both genders.

Gateways into writing for children and young people who do not enjoy writing vary by age, with younger children showing far greater responsiveness to a range of motivating factors. More of those aged 8 to 11, compared with older age groups, identify multiple factors that might encourage them to write. Freedom and choice, both in what to write about and how to express it, emerge as the most powerful drivers for this age group, with over a third (35.0%) motivated by choosing their own topic. Being invited to share memorable experiences, writing journals and receiving interesting or relevant prompts are also notably more influential for younger children.

As children move into adolescence, potential routes into writing decline sharply. Across all motivators, interest drops steadily from age 11 upwards, with the sharpest falls seen in writing with friends and family, hearing others talk about writing and sharing writing with others. Very few motivators show strong appeal, suggesting that once disengagement from writing sets in, it may become harder to reignite interest during the teenage years. Nonetheless, factors tied to autonomy and personal experiences, such as having a specific purpose or memorable experience, retain slightly more traction among teenagers compared with purely social routes into writing.

There were no meaningful differences in routes into writing by FSM status. This suggests that the key drivers of writing motivation for those who don't enjoy writing, such as choice, creativity and inspiration from experiences, are broadly consistent regardless of socioeconomic background.

Table 8: Routes into writing for those who don't enjoy writing in 2025 by gender, age group and FSM uptake

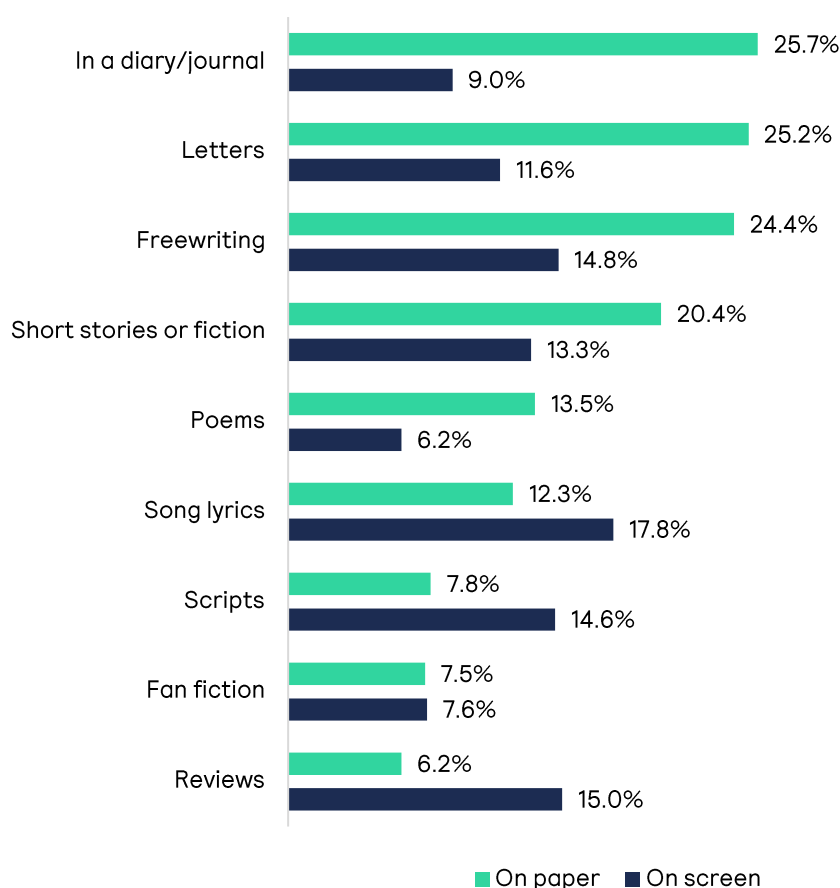
	Gender		Age group				FSM status	
	Boys	Girls	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	FSM	Non-FSM
Being free to choose what I want to write about	18.9%	28.3%	35.0%	22.9%	17.6%	16.5%	22.9%	23.0%
Being free to decide which form or style I want to write in	14.9%	23.6%	29.8%	19.0%	13.0%	11.5%	19.7%	18.6%
Being given an interesting prompt to get me started	13.3%	21.1%	19.6%	16.8%	15.6%	15.7%	14.3%	17.7%
Being given a specific topic to write about	16.1%	24.0%	27.7%	19.3%	15.8%	15.9%	18.9%	19.7%
Having a memorable experience I want to share	12.3%	22.4%	22.7%	16.6%	13.4%	15.9%	16.1%	16.9%
Having a private writing journal	7.0%	23.9%	22.8%	13.6%	12.6%	16.6%	15.7%	14.5%
Having a specific purpose for my writing	10.6%	15.6%	15.9%	12.4%	11.6%	15.8%	12.5%	13.2%
Being able to share my writing with others	7.6%	9.2%	17.7%	7.5%	5.3%	5.8%	9.6%	7.9%
Seeing people I look up to writing or talking about writing	8.0%	10.9%	18.5%	8.6%	6.4%	7.1%	11.0%	8.8%
Being able to write with friends and family	6.5%	8.2%	17.1%	6.6%	3.9%	3.1%	8.9%	6.7%
Hearing friends or family talk about writing	5.6%	7.4%	14.5%	5.8%	3.6%	3.9%	8.1%	5.9%

What children and young people write in their free time

After exploring why children and young people write in their free time, and what might encourage those who don't write as much, we also wanted to find out what kinds of writing they do at least once a month. This will help us build a clearer picture of the formats and content that sustain children and young people's writing interests and motivation.

As shown in Figure 13, children and young people aged 8 to 18 engaged with a wide range of writing formats in their free time, both on screen and on paper. Paper remained the preferred medium for more reflective or narrative-driven writing, such as diary entries, letters, freewriting and short stories. In contrast, formats such as song lyrics, scripts and reviews (such as book, film, TV, product or podcast reviews) were more frequently written on screen, suggesting a connection to digital media, performance or everyday communication. Fan fiction showed a rare balance across both formats, indicating its flexibility as a creative outlet.

Figure 13: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats on paper or on a screen at least once a month in 2025



These patterns reflect how children and young people use writing in ways that align with their interests, the context of what they choose to express, and the medium they feel serves their purpose best.

Writing formats by writing enjoyment

Perhaps unsurprisingly, more children and young people who reported enjoying writing engaged in a wider range of writing formats in their free time, both on screen and on paper, compared with those who said they did not enjoy writing (see Table 9). The contrast was particularly striking in creative and expressive forms of writing, such as freewriting¹, short stories, poems and diary entries. For example, more than twice as many of those who enjoyed writing compared with their peers who didn't enjoy writing wrote stories, poems, or letters, especially on paper, in their free time, while three times as many wrote fan fiction both on paper and on screen.

It is noteworthy that many of those who didn't enjoy writing still chose to write in their free time. Song lyrics were the most common format on screen among those who didn't enjoy writing, followed by reviews and scripts. These choices may reflect a connection to music, media and personal communication, reminding us that writing is still part of their lives, even if they reported not enjoying writing. Around 1 in 5 also engaged in expressive formats on paper, such as diary entries, freewriting and letters, indicating that creative writing still holds value for some children and young people in this group.

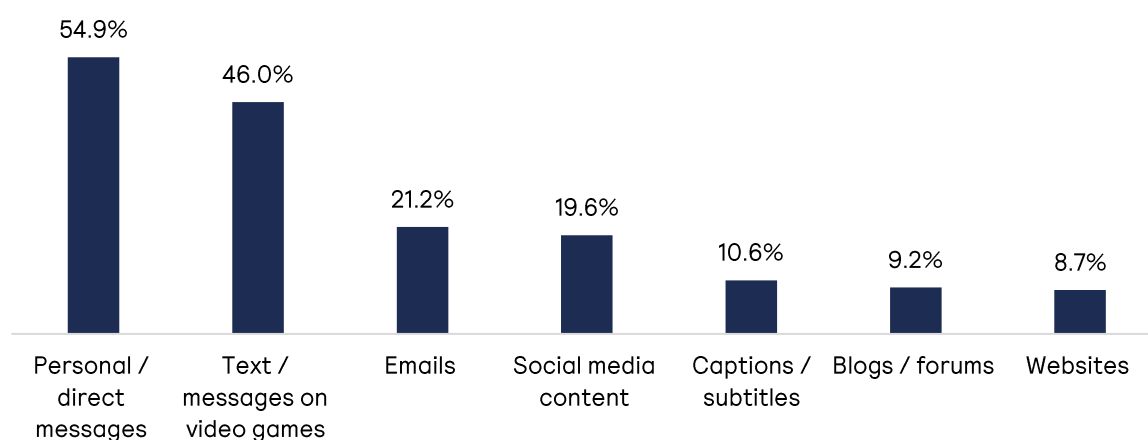
¹ Freewriting is a writing practice that entails continuous unedited composition, prioritising the spontaneous flow of ideas over grammatical accuracy, stylistic conventions or structural coherence. It is frequently employed as a generative strategy in the early stages of writing or as a technique to overcome creative obstacles. Additionally, freewriting is often used in both facilitated and self-led therapeutic settings, where it can support emotional expression, self-reflection and personal insight.

Table 9: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 reading various formats (on paper or on a screen) in their free time in 2025 by whether or not they enjoy writing

	On screen		On paper	
	Enjoys writing	Doesn't enjoy writing	Enjoys writing	Doesn't enjoy writing
In a diary / journal	17.0%	7.3%	45.9%	22.0%
Letters	19.5%	10.3%	41.1%	23.0%
Freewriting	32.7%	10.4%	48.7%	19.0%
Short stories or fiction	29.7%	9.2%	42.8%	15.1%
Poems	14.7%	4.0%	29.7%	9.4%
Song lyrics	27.6%	16.6%	24.0%	9.8%
Scripts	24.3%	13.1%	15.9%	5.9%
Fan fiction	16.4%	5.4%	16.2%	5.4%
Reviews	23.9%	13.9%	12.3%	4.9%

We also asked children and young people aged 8 to 18 whether they wrote any formats exclusively on screen. As shown in Figure 14, personal or direct messages and text messages were the most commonly written digital formats. Fewer children and young people told us they wrote captions, blogs or websites.

Figure 14: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various exclusively on-screen formats in their free time in 2025



Writing formats by gender, age group and FSM uptake

In 2025, girls reported writing a wider variety of formats than boys during their free time, both on paper and on screen (see Table 10). This difference was particularly evident in more expressive and personal forms of writing, such as diaries and journals, which were written by three times as many girls as boys. Notably, both boys and girls engaged with fan fiction at similar levels, suggesting that this genre holds a more universal appeal.

Table 10: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats (on paper or on a screen) in their free time in 2025 by gender

	On screen		On paper	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
In a diary / journal	4.8%	13.0%	12.9%	38.6%
Letters	10.4%	12.6%	20.2%	30.5%
Freewriting	11.3%	17.7%	18.3%	30.4%
Short stories or fiction	10.7%	15.1%	16.6%	23.9%
Poems	4.4%	7.6%	9.3%	17.5%
Song lyrics	14.7%	20.4%	7.6%	16.8%
Scripts	13.7%	15.3%	6.0%	9.3%
Fan fiction	6.1%	8.2%	7.2%	7.4%
Reviews	13.5%	16.5%	5.6%	6.7%

Writing habits also varied notably across age groups, with younger children generally engaging in a broader range of writing formats than their older peers, particularly on paper (see Table 11). Children aged 8 to 11 were the most active writers overall, especially when it came to expressive and creative formats, such as diaries, letters, short stories, poems and freewriting. More of this age group also wrote fan fiction and scripts in their free time, suggesting a stronger inclination toward imaginative and narrative-based writing.

As age increased, engagement with almost all writing formats steadily declined, most markedly on paper. By the age of 14 to 18, fewer young people were writing across most formats, with the exception of reviews, which remained relatively stable and even saw a slight increase among the oldest age group when written on screen. This may reflect a shift toward more practical or media-related writing as young people grow older.

Table 11: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats (on paper or on a screen) in their free time in 2025 by age group

	On screen				On paper			
	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18	8-11	11-14	14-16	16-18
In a diary / journal	12.9%	8.3%	7.6%	9.9%	37.3%	24.8%	19.4%	22.2%
Letters	16.4%	11.3%	8.7%	9.7%	39.1%	25.0%	16.8%	15.3%
Freewriting	21.1%	14.6%	11.0%	11.1%	36.1%	24.8%	15.1%	14.0%
Short stories / fiction	19.4%	12.8%	10.4%	11.1%	36.1%	20.3%	10.4%	8.2%
Poems	11.8%	5.2%	4.8%	6.3%	26.2%	12.3%	8.1%	7.9%
Song lyrics	24.5%	18.2%	12.9%	8.9%	20.2%	12.2%	7.4%	6.6%
Scripts	22.4%	14.6%	9.8%	8.3%	11.6%	7.9%	5.1%	4.1%
Fan fiction	22.9%	7.2%	6.0%	5.5%	16.4%	7.0%	3.2%	1.9%
Reviews	19.5%	14.3%	13.8%	15.3%	12.6%	5.7%	3.4%	3.2%

Differences in writing habits between children and young people who received FSMs and their non-FSM peers were generally modest across most formats (see Table 12). More of those who received FSMs engaged in almost every type of writing, both on screen and on paper, particularly in creative and expressive formats, such as song lyrics, poems, short stories and freewriting. They also reported slightly higher engagement with fan fiction, reviews and script writing.

That being said, the gap between FSM and non-FSM pupils was less pronounced than the differences observed by gender or age group, indicating that socioeconomic status may have a more limited impact on writing preferences and behaviours in free time. Nonetheless, the consistent 15-year trend of slightly higher writing engagement among FSM children and young people may reflect the role of writing as a means of personal expression or connection for those facing greater barriers to access in other areas.

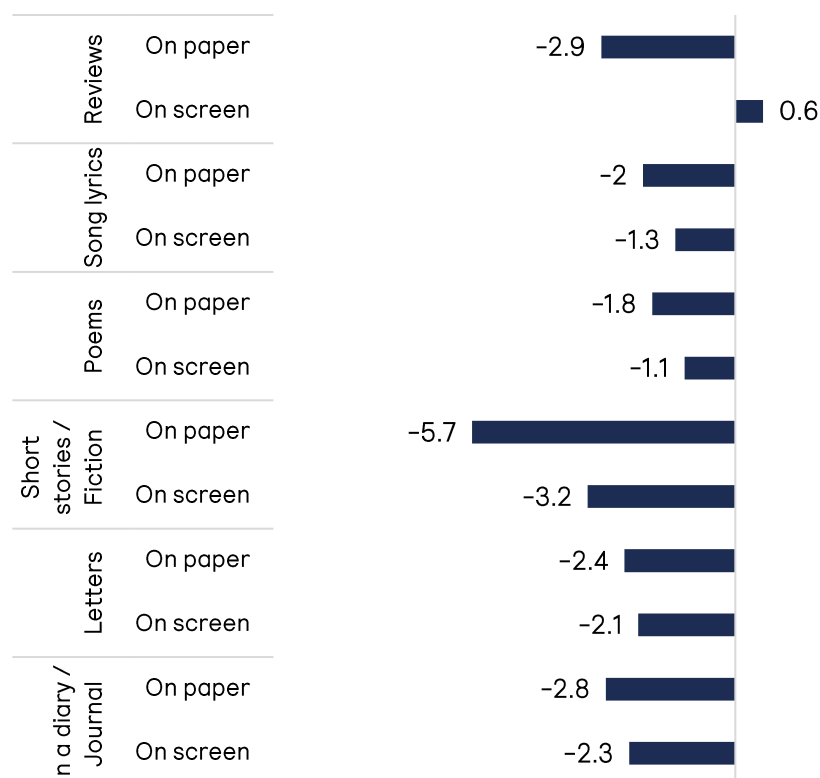
Table 12: Percentage of children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats (on paper or on a screen) in their free time in 2025 by FSM uptake

	On screen		On paper	
	FSM	Non-FSM	FSM	Non-FSM
In a diary/journal	11.7%	8.1%	27.5%	24.9%
Letters	13.31%	10.9%	26.4%	24.5%
Freewriting	18.1%	13.6%	25.9%	23.6%
Short stories or fiction	16.0%	12.3%	21.6%	19.6%
Poems	9.0%	5.2%	16.6%	12.2%
Song lyrics	22.8%	16.0%	13.6%	11.7%
Scripts	18.6%	13.2%	8.5%	7.4%
Fan fiction	10.1%	6.7%	9.5%	6.6%
Reviews	17.8%	14.2%	7.4%	5.6%

Writing formats over time

Compared with last year, fewer children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported writing any of the listed formats (see Figure 15), whether on paper or on a screen, apart from writing reviews on screen, which saw a modest increase of 0.6 percentage points. Across all formats, writing on paper experienced a steeper decline than writing on screen. The most significant drop was in writing short stories and fiction on paper, which fell by 5.7 percentage points compared with the previous year.

Figure 15: Percentage-point difference in children and young people aged 8 to 18 writing various formats (on paper or on a screen) in their free time between 2024 and 2025



Discussion

Our 2025 Annual Literacy Survey findings confirm that writing for pleasure remains in a worrying state of decline. Only 1 in 4 children and young people enjoy writing in their free time, and just 1 in 10 write daily, with both rates now at their lowest level in 15 years. The drop is particularly steep among primary-aged children, reversing earlier patterns where younger children's enjoyment levels had been relatively resilient. However, boys and older children continue to show the lowest levels of writing enjoyment and frequency.

Writing is currently the lowest-performing area in national assessments. However, as our findings indicate, although academic achievement is important to children and young people, it is not the sole factor that matters to them. While 2 in 3 children and young people see themselves as good or very good writers, a

significant number still lack a positive self-concept as writers. Addressing this could play a key role in enhancing overall enjoyment levels. If students feel unsuccessful in their writing efforts, or don't feel knowledgeable about the process of writing, it becomes much harder for them to enjoy writing as a self-motivated activity. One way to address this may involve enhancing the quality of writing instruction, ensuring students experience success more often, which could, in turn, help reignite their motivation.

The report also highlights further clear opportunities for (re)engagement. Notably, even among children and young people who say they do not enjoy writing, important motivators persist. Many value writing as a tool for learning and personal reflection. Those who enjoy writing a bit are responsive to factors including having the freedom to choose and develop their own writing ideas, being encouraged to explore their personal writing style, and receiving engaging prompts that inspire their imagination.

This suggests that disengagement from writing is not inevitable. Approaches that promote autonomy, creativity, social connection and personal relevance can play a crucial role in rebuilding a culture of writing for pleasure. Supporting children and young people to make choices about what and how they write, offering inspiring publishing or showcasing opportunities, and helping them connect writing projects to their own life experiences and cultural capital, including, but not limited to, their own interests and knowledge of popular culture, could help reignite their connection to writing and develop their sense of being a successful writer.

At the same time, it is vital to recognise and nurture those who already find joy in writing. This is particularly significant, as data from the past 15 years consistently shows that pupils eligible for free school meals are more likely than their peers to enjoy writing and write more often in their free time. This long-standing trend highlights the essential role that writing continues to play in the lives of children and young people. Beyond academic achievement, writing serves as a meaningful outlet for creativity, emotional expression and personal growth. Many write to explore ideas, express their thoughts and feelings, and find relaxation and happiness through the process of 'making' writing. They are therefore more likely to write frequently, across a wider range of formats, and to view writing as an important part of their identity. Ensuring that students have opportunities for creative freedom, personal choice and connections to their wider cultural interests is essential, not only for supporting their growth as writers but also to develop a broader culture of writing that can inspire their less-engaged peers.

Additionally, recognising that writing fulfils a range of purposes beyond classroom performance, such as self-expression, mental wellbeing, intellectual development and social connection, can help broaden its appeal and relevance beyond the pursuit of academic standards. Personal writing journals, flexible creative assignments, and writing projects that tap into lived experiences offer particularly promising pathways for (re)engagement, especially for younger children whose recent drop in engagement is especially concerning given their historically strong involvement and positive attitudes towards writing.

While there is no single solution, the evidence is clear: writing enjoyment must be positioned as a meaningful, personal and empowering part of children and young people's lives. By meeting young writers where they are – socially, culturally and emotionally – we can begin to rebuild writing confidence, identity and enjoyment for a new generation.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all the schools that took part in our survey this year. We couldn't do it without you!

Thank you also to Twinkl for supporting this report.

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.

Visit www.literacytrust.org.uk to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on X.

About Twinkl

Founded in 2010 with a mission to 'help those who teach', Twinkl supports educators and families worldwide with expert-created, curriculum-aligned resources that build essential literacy skills and ignite a lifelong love of reading and writing. With over 1.5 million resources – including the DfE-validated Twinkl Phonics programme, Symbols Apps and collections of curriculum schemes that aim to support building strong writing foundations – Twinkl empowers educators and learners from early years to secondary school across classrooms, homes and every setting in between.

Copyright

© National Literacy Trust 2025. You may report on findings or statistics included in this report if you accredit them to the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is Bonafede, F., Clark, C., Picton, I., Cole, A. and Young, R. (2025). Children and Young People's Writing in 2025. London: National Literacy Trust.

We will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- Acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- State that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust

Appendix

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 young people's use of AI to support their literacy have been included since 2023, and questions about speaking were added to the survey in 2024.

We made three surveys available in 2025: 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 over 16. The surveys contain similar questions but the one for the younger age group is shorter and more pictorial, while the one for those aged over 16 had questions more relevant for that age group. The 2025 survey contained 19 questions for those aged 5 to 8, 39 questions for those aged 8 to 16, and 35 questions for those aged 16 and over.

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 that they can compare their responses to those received nationally once we've published the national reports.

114,970 children and young people aged 5 to 18 from 515 schools took part in our Annual Literacy Survey in 2025. 9,730 answered a shorter survey for those aged 5 to 8, while 105,583 answered longer surveys intended for those aged 8 to 18.

Sample description

The make-up of our 2025 sample was largely comparable with that of 2024 and previous samples. Of those aged 8 to 18, 50,907 (48.2%) were boys; 50,748 (48.1%) were girls; 2,360 (2.2%) would rather not say; 1,475 (1.4%) described themselves another way; and 93 (0.1%) described themselves as non-binary. 15,509 (14.7%) were aged 8 to 11; 67,624 (64.0%) were aged 11 to 14; 15,913 (15.1%) were aged 14 to 16; and 6,537 (6.2%) were aged 16 to 18.

18,493 (17.5%) told us they received FSMs; 76,336 (72.3%) told us they didn't receive FSMs; 8,873 (8.4%) didn't know; and 1,881 (1.8%) didn't want to say. 90,749 (86.0%) attended schools in England; 1,939 (1.8%) attended schools in Wales; 7,739 (7.3%) attended schools in Scotland; and 5,156 (4.9%) attended schools in Northern Ireland. Of the children and young people attending schools in England, 3,328 (3.7%) came from the North East; 9,708 (10.7%) from the North West; 5,295 (5.8%) from Yorkshire and the Humber; 8,630 (9.5%) from the East Midlands; 11,191 (12.3%) from the West Midlands; 14,292 (15.7%) from the East of England; 10,403 (11.5%) from London; 19,397 (21.4%) from the South East; and 8,505 (9.4%) from the South West.

Of those aged 5 to 8, 4,239 (45.2%) were boys; 4,428 (47.2%) were girls; 174 (1.9%) would rather not say; and 62 (0.7%) described themselves another way (485 didn't answer the gender question). 7,047 (75.1%) attended schools in England; 187 (2.0%) attended schools in Wales; 1,644 (17.5%) attended schools in Scotland; and 510 (5.4%) attended schools in Northern Ireland. Of the children attending schools in England, 929 (13.2%) came from the North East; 961 (13.6%) from the North West; 747 (10.6%) from Yorkshire and the Humber; 821 (11.7%) from the East Midlands; 725 (10.3%) from the West Midlands; 1,122 (15.9%) from the East of England; 513 (7.3%) from London; 544 (7.7%) from the South East; and 685 (9.7%) from the South West.



Change your story