

i-learn writing



Price: £495
Key Stage: 1, 2
Contact: www.cambridge-hitachi.com
Reviewed by Jonathan Lear



A few weeks ago at school, I was passed a demonstration copy of a new piece of software to look at. Our intention was to investigate ways to supplement and enhance our English teaching. Due to a busy end to the half term, it took its place in my ever increasing 'to do' pile. It was hastily retrieved however, when a very familiar looking DVD-ROM called *i-learn writing* arrived from Cambridge-Hitachi to be reviewed in *Teach Primary!*. As luck would have it, it was same software – a rare opportunity to complete two jobs for the price of one!

i-learn is an interactive whiteboard resource designed to teach children the skills required to write non-fiction texts. There are three *i-learn* DVD-ROMs: Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4 and Years 5 and 6. The evaluation copy I received focused on Years 3 and 4. I am always wary of resources that appear to do it all as they never seem to live up to expectations. My fears were very quickly allayed – in part because the series editor is Pie Corbett. For many years, Mr Corbett has been a leading light in the development of children's skills,



engagement and enjoyment in English. In my opinion, any software series bearing his name is worthy of serious consideration.

i-learn is very easy to navigate. Its bright and colourful menu pages allow you to choose between teacher and child centred elements of the software. Beyond this, you simply select your year group and are ready to explore this comprehensive resource.

Having chosen the teacher option, you are shown three genres of writing for Year 3 (instructions, reports and information texts) and a different set for Year 4 (explanation, recount and persuasive texts). When you select a text type, you are presented with a new menu screen that charts the complete writing process from model texts to publishing.



There is a lot to look at. The writing process is broken down into nine steps and each of these takes you to a further menu and related activities. I was initially put off by the sheer amount and depth of activities within these sections. It was difficult to quickly get an overview of just how this product would take children through the writing process.

However, after several hours it became very, very clear. *i-learn* has a great structure – the nine steps to successful writing are easy to understand and guide children and teachers skilfully from reading and talk-for-writing to practice and publishing. Within the nine steps, a great deal of thought has gone into how the learning is presented. There are countless opportunities for the children to talk, and partner work is actively encouraged. There are also very good ideas for the use of drama and role play.

This piece of software would be particularly popular with boys as it features some very engaging topics

Each text type features 'Reading as a writer' and includes video clips of writers talking about the text they have written. This is clearly focused on their choice of language, purpose and organisation and structure – a valuable insight that children would only normally experience should they meet an author in person.

The writers also appear in other sections to offer advice, tips and further insight into the writing process. Each text type features model texts, which have been carefully selected to be of high interest. This piece of software would be particularly popular with boys as it features some very engaging topics including Bigfoot, the Egyptians, Inventions (using a fantastic Wallace and Grommit film short), Extreme weather and UFOs.



VERDICT: LOTS TO LEARN

i-learn writing is definitely worth looking at and exploring. It has a great structure, is clearly linked to framework objectives and offers cross curricular links. The software really does take children through the writing process in enjoyable, interactive steps; and a speech function which reads out all on-screen text to pupils ensures the material is accessible.

i-learn writing is not a resource to have a quick look at and try with the kids. As with all good things, it requires time, effort and thought. Given this investment, *i-learn writing* will prove hugely rewarding and will be enjoyed by teachers and children alike.

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