

Guidelines for writers for the Papua New Guinea School Journals

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Guidelines

Section A: General guidance

Some questions people ask

What are the School Journals?

They are booklets of short stories, articles, plays, poems, etc.

Who publishes them?

The Curriculum Development Division of the Department of Education.

How do I get to see a copy?

Copies are sent free to schools. If you wish to see one, visit a school and ask the headteacher.

What level are they?

- The Elementary level is for Elementary 1 and 2 (ages 7 to 9).
- The Junior level is for Grades 3 to 5 (ages 9 to 12).
- The Senior level is for Grades 6 to 8 (ages 12 to 15).

What sort of texts do you put in them?

- Interesting ones! We want the children to pick up the Journal and say, “This story is about me!” We want them to learn about PNG culture. We want them to read these stories and feel proud that they are Papua New Guineans.
- The texts can be all kinds of stories and non-fiction articles that fall into the following genres:

Genre	Examples
Narrative	Stories, fables, legends, poems, plays, songs
Recount	Personal accounts, true stories, photo stories, interviews
Procedure	Recipes, experiments, instructions, rules (e.g. games)
Argument/persuasive exposition	Essays, letters, e-mails, posters, speeches, book/film reviews
Explanation	Non-fiction
Information report	Non-fiction
Discussion	Balanced argument, non-fiction

- Texts should vary in length and difficulty; from simpler texts of up to 450 words for Grade 3 to harder texts of up to 1000 words for Grade 8.
- The texts can be all types of stories, non-fiction articles, personal experiences, poems, plays, photo stories and instructional articles.

Who writes these texts?

People like you: teachers, government workers, village people, town people. So far, most of the stories have been written at workshops, but now we are seeking texts from the public. We can't accept everything that people send us, but when we do accept something, we will pay the writer a small fee for it.

Some of the things we look for in stories

- Stories in which the writers have had the courage to show their true feelings.
- An opening sentence that really grips the reader.
- A good, satisfying shape (more about this further on).
- Dialogue that helps the reader to know the characters.
- Vivid, real details that let the reader picture the action.
- Stories that make us think of our own experiences.
- Stories that make us think or make us feel something (happiness, sadness, etc.)

The difference between a “storyteller’s story” and a “writer’s story”

- When a storyteller is telling a story, the storyteller’s personality is important. The storyteller often speaks directly to the audience.
- In a written story, on the other hand, the readers want to be right there with the action, in that time and place. The readers want to live the story as it unfolds. They don’t want to stand beside the writer now, looking back.

Stories about our childhood or stories about children today?

Children do like to hear about what happened to us when we were young, but not all the time! We try to have plenty of modern stories too; stories that children feel are about them, not just about their parents.

What do we mean by story shape?

A good story usually has four parts:

- an opening that hooks the reader like a fish (especially a good opening sentence)
- a steady build-up
- a climax — the most exciting part
- a resolution — where everything works out.

An example of a Senior-level story and a Junior-level story with good shapes are in Appendix 1 on p7 and p8.

Some things children don’t like in their stories:

- stories that end with “I woke up and it was all a dream”
- stories about children younger than themselves
- too much description
- stories written with the purpose of teaching a lesson; sometimes a story can have a lesson in it, but it must be first and foremost an exciting story.

Stories can be made up

Yes! A story doesn’t have to be true. Sometimes you can take a real story — maybe something that happened to you — and change it to make it more interesting. Sometimes you can make the whole thing up.

Dialogue — make characters talk in your story

Dialogue is great in a story. Use plenty!

Which of these is better?

- John shouted at his brother to get out of the way.
- “Get out of the way!” shouted John.

Yes, the second one. Using the actual spoken words is much stronger. Read through your story. If you haven’t used dialogue, change some parts to make the people talk.

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Section B: Types of texts

Funny stories

We are always looking for funny stories. It is much easier to write a sad story than a funny one, so we get lots of sad stories and not enough happy ones. Children enjoy:

- the weaker person winning in a funny or tricky way
- the big or clever person being wrong (as in “Dad’s hunting dog” in Appendix 1)
- word jokes (puns).

But in the School Journals we don’t use:

- toilet jokes
- jokes that put down a person’s race, tribal area, gender or religion
- sexual jokes.

Describing things

Put yourself in the situation you are writing about. If you are writing about being tied up, don’t just rely on your memory or your imagination, get someone to tie you up! Then see how much more vivid your writing becomes (after you are untied!) It’s the same if you want to describe the feeling of climbing a steep hill, the smell of seaweed or the way a small fish moves. Do it, smell it, watch it, then write about it!

Traditional stories

Some custom stories belong to particular clans and particular areas. If you are sending us a story that belongs to a particular area, make sure you have the permission of the people it belongs to. Other stories have been told in many places. They have become national or even international stories and don’t belong to anyone any more. You don’t need to ask permission to tell that kind of story.

Plays

Children love plays. We always put at least one in each Journal.

- Children like acting out parts — the angry teacher, the bossy child, the brave fighter.
- Plays can be used for reading around a group, allowing children to help each other.
- They can be performed for other classes.
- They give children practise at reading, because the lines are read over and over again.

Keep these things in mind when you are writing a play:

- Start with a really good story or story idea and then write it as a play. A play needs the same “story shape” as a story.
- Have plenty of action in your play. Don’t just have your characters standing there talking.
- Keep stage directions to a minimum.
- Avoid using a narrator.
- Keep the speeches short and crisp, with plenty of one-line speeches. This is how people talk in real life.
- Make the characters use each other’s names, especially early on, so that the audience knows who they are.
- Try to have girls in your plays and give them good strong parts. We have too many plays with just boys in them.

There is an example of a Junior-level play in Appendix 1 on p9.

Writing an article

The job of an article is to give information.

Choose something that you think a child needs to know about and write about it in an interesting way. For example, we have had articles in Journals about: looking after a dog; taking a baby to a “well clinic”; women police recruits; an old war plane at Alexishafen; climbing a betelnut tree to get betelnuts; customs officers; farming crocodiles; going to the dentist; studying the weather; and maths puzzles.

Write to us first!

It is a good idea to write to us first if you are thinking of writing an article. It may be that we have already got an article on that topic. Or we may be able to give you some useful advice that will make it more likely that we can use your article.

Our contact details are on p6.

Does your article need diagrams?

For example, if you are explaining a particular type of fish trap, you may need to draw a diagram. It doesn't matter if you are not an artist. If we use your article we will get an artist to make a proper drawing from your diagram.

Does your article need photos?

Some articles work better with photos. If you are taking photos, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Think about what are the important things to show happening. Make sure you get a good photo of each of those things.
- Take control! Tell people where to stand. Make them practise any action.
- Take people doing things. It will be much more interesting than if they are just standing there.
- Don't shoot into the sun. Have the sun behind you.
- Get in close. This is most important! Don't leave a lot of wasted space around the subject.
- Don't cut people's heads off!
- Make sure that people's faces are in the sunlight, or use a flash.
- If the article is about a person, get at least one very close shot that shows just their head and shoulders.

Poems

A poem is most likely to be successful if:

- it is about something that really matters to you
- you write simply
- you choose your words carefully
- you go through it several times when you have finished and chop out all the bits that aren't needed. (Which would you rather read: a short, strong poem or a long, weak one? Children are the same!)

There are two good poems in Appendix 1 on p10.

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Section C: Practical issues

This is what happens when we receive your text

- First we write back and confirm that we have received it.
- As soon as we can, we will decide if we can use it. If we can't, we will let you know. Please keep a copy of your text, so we do not have to send it back to you.
- If we can use your text, we will send you a contract, saying that we would like to acquire the copyright to use it and saying what the payment will be. We will also send you an edited copy of your story. There may be some changes in it to make it more suitable for young readers. If you don't like the changes, you can discuss them with us.
- When you sign and return the contract and send us your bank details, we will transfer the fee to you.
- It may be some time before your story is printed in a Journal, but when it is we will send you two personal copies, so please make sure we always have your latest address.

This is what we pay

- Stories, plays and non-fiction articles:
 - First 100 words: K150
 - Second 100 words: K100
 - Each additional 100 words: K50The rate is based on the edited length of the accepted script and the exact word count.
- Poems: K100 flat rate
- Photo articles: rate per word the same as for stories, plus the lesser of K20 per photo or K120 for a set of photos

Our contact details

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Appendix 1: Example texts

Here is an example of a Senior-level story with a good story shape.

The blue-finger disease

By Theresa Hamadi

“My fingers have turned blue!” said Shyock worriedly.

I rushed to him. “Your what?” I asked.

“My fingers!”

“Show me.” Shyock showed me his fingers.

I looked and gasped. “And Shyock! It’s not only your fingers — it’s your toes, too. Come and show Mama.”

“We’ll get you to the doctor straight away,” said Mama.

We took the bus to town. We were imagining all kinds of things. What if Shyock was dying of a new unknown disease? Would he make history?

The doctor was quite alarmed when he saw Shyock.

“When did you begin to develop these blue fingers?”

“This morning. I noticed them as I was having breakfast.”

“Do you feel sick?”

“No.”

The doctor examined him thoroughly. “Everything seems to be OK.”

“But Doctor, my fingers and toes ...”

“I know,” he replied. “Listen, take these pills. Come back in two days’ time.”

Two days went by. We noticed the blue fingers only appeared in the morning and at night. We reported this to the doctor. He called in a whole team of doctors, and more tests were done. Experts were consulted.

“We think it is a rare form of malaria,” said the doctors.

“Will I be cured?” asked Shyock.

“We will do our best,” they said.

We became more and more worried. Every morning and evening the disease struck. We waited anxiously for word from the doctors. Nothing came.

One morning when I had washed, I couldn’t find my towel. I grabbed Shyock’s new one to use. When I went to breakfast, everyone stopped and looked at me.

“You’ve caught it!” said Shyock. I looked at my hands. They were blue.

“And your face!” said Shyock. “It’s blue, too!”

I thought for a minute. My hands ... my face ... I had just dried them on Shyock’s new blue towel!

“It’s dye!” I said. “It’s coming off the towel!” We laughed and hugged and cried. “Blue fingers” became our family joke. Shyock did not make history. And we were glad.

Things to notice in the story

In the opening, Theresa has:

- hooked the reader into the story with a strong first line
- used dialogue — a good way to get to know the people in the story because you are listening to them talk
- let the reader know what the story will be about
- brought all the characters into the story

In the build-up:

- she has increased the tension and started to make the story go faster, to build it up

At the climax (the exciting part where the storyteller discovers she has caught the “disease”):

- she uses short sentences to make it more exciting
- she doesn’t use description here — just action!

In the resolution (where we see what happens in the end):

- she provides an unexpected twist
- she makes it satisfying — she makes the reader say “good job” or “I’m glad it turned out like that”
- she keeps it brief — a few short sentences are enough to finish the story
- she doesn’t leave any questions in the reader’s mind

Now a Junior-level story, also with a good shape.

Dad's hunting dog

By the Loloata Follow-Up Workshop Group

"I want a hunting dog," said Papa.
"No way!" said Mama. "It will bark all night."
"I want a hunting dog," said Papa.
"No way!" said Bubu. "It will eat the chickens."
"I want a hunting dog," said Papa.
"No way!" said Talio. "It will bite me."

But Papa bought a hunting dog. "His name is Buka," said Papa.
"Buka is a good hunting dog.
Buka won't bark all night.
Buka won't eat the chickens.
Buka won't bite you."

On the first night, Buka barked all night.
"Get rid of that dog!" said Mama.
"No," said Papa. "Buka is a good hunting dog."

On the second night, Buka killed Bubu's rooster.
"Get rid of that dog!" said Bubu.
"No," said Papa. "Buka is a good hunting dog."

On the third night, Papa went hunting.
"Buka is a good hunting dog," said Papa to himself.
A bandicoot ran past.
"Catch it! Catch it!" said Papa.
Buka jumped on the bandicoot.
"Good Buka! Good Buka!" said Papa. "Give it to me. Give it to me."
"Grr," said Buka.
"Good Buka! Give it to me."
Papa pulled the bandicoot.
Buka pulled the bandicoot.
"You useless dog!" shouted Papa. "Give it to me!"
"Grr!" said Buka. And Buka bit Papa's arm.

Papa came home. His arm was bleeding.
"What have you done to your arm?" asked Mama.
"Buka bit me!" said Papa.
"Serves you right!" said Mama.
"Serves you right!" said Bubu.
"Serves you right!" said Talio.

Things to notice in the story

- The story is kept simple, using short sentences.
- Repetition (like a chorus), rhyming words and rhythm (like a chant) can help children who are just beginning to read.
- Young readers like funny stories.

In the **opening**, the authors:

- get straight into the story — no wasted time
- use dialogue — this helps us get to know Dad and Grandmother and the others in the family

In the **build-up**, the authors:

- use repetition to make the story easy and fun for the reader
- make a pattern, so that the reader can guess what is going to happen

At the **climax** (the exciting part):

- the action (Buka biting Dad) makes it exciting
- the authors make it funny!

In the **resolution** (where we see what happens in the end):

- it is satisfying; the reader feels happy that the story ended like that

Here is an example of a Junior-level play. See how many of the qualities mentioned in the “Plays” section you can find.

Hen and snake

By Otto Anduari

Characters: Mother Hen, Snake

Scene: Mother Hen's cage

Mother Hen: This is a good day for me. Cluck, cluck! I have laid four eggs. Now I'm hungry.

She goes off. Along comes Snake.

Snake: Ah, eggs! I'll have two for breakfast. Gulp! Gulp! Now to go back through the bars. (*Snake tries to push through the bars.*) These eggs in my tummy won't go through, but I know what to do.

Mother Hen (*coming back*): Who's that in my hen house? Oh, no! It's the snake!

Snake: Uh-oh! I'd better hurry. (*Snake pushes harder and squeezes his body through the bars.*) Crack! Crack! Good! Now the eggs have broken. Oh I love the feel of those eggs cracking in my stomach.

Mother Hen: Oh, he's getting away!

Snake slides away.

Mother Hen: Oh, he's eaten two of my eggs! What shall I do? I know. I have a plan. I'll boil these other two eggs. Then we'll see what happens if the snake comes back.

She boils the eggs, leaves them in the nest and goes away. Snake appears.

Snake: Mmm. I'm hungry again. Where are those last two eggs? Ah, here they are. Gulp! Gulp! Now to get away. I'll slip my head through the bars. Now my body. (*Snake's body gets stuck and won't go through the bars.*) What's this? Why won't the eggs break? Help! I'm stuck.

Mother Hen: Time to come home. I wonder if that snake has been around. Oh! There's something caught in the bars.

Snake: I must get away. But these eggs are hard like two rocks.

Mother Hen: Of course they're hard. I boiled them. Take this! (*She hits Snake.*)

Snake: Oh!

Mother Hen: And that!

Snake: Aee!

Mother Hen: And this!

Snake: Yaa!

Here is an example of an informative article for a Senior Journal.

Power from the wind

By the School Journal 2000 Non-Fiction Workshop Group

On Daugo Island, near Port Moresby, there are no wires to bring us electricity. We have to make our own power.

For a long time we have been using petrol and diesel generators. These gave us power for electric lights and for the TV and video. But generators have problems:

- They are expensive.
- They are noisy.
- They need a lot of fuel.
- They need maintenance and spare parts.

What we needed was a cheap, quiet way of getting power.

First we thought about solar panels. Solar panels are quiet. They need almost no maintenance and they don't need fuel, so they cost very little to run. But they don't generate much power. And when it is dark, they don't generate any power at all.

One thing we have on our island is a good steady wind, day and night. So we thought about a wind generator. Wind generators are expensive to buy, but they are quiet. They don't make as much power as a petrol or diesel generator, but they make it all the time. Their "fuel" is the wind, and the wind is free. Also, they can run for years with almost no maintenance.

We don't need much power; just enough to run a few lights and the TV. We decided a wind generator was just what we need.

Our wind generator has just been set up. We watch it spinning around in the wind, making electricity. This power is stored in four big batteries until we need it for lights at night or for the video.

It is great knowing that we won't have to buy any more fuel. And it is great not having a noisy motor rumbling away at night. As long as there is wind, we will have all the electricity we need.

These two poems are good because the authors felt very strongly about their subjects.

A cuscus's plea

By Sereima Lumelume

You came to my tree
And trapped me.
You gave me magic beans.
I danced with glee
But ...
Please set me free!

I am now in a cage
All closed and sealed.
I sit and eat
And sleep and dream
But ...
Please set me free!

Without trees and peace,
Without the forest and the sky,
Without the serenity and joy
Of being on my own,
I feel absolutely enclosed.
Please set me free!

Free! Free! Free!
I long to be free
To swing and sway
And enjoy the breeze
Of freedom and peace.
Please set me free!

Beer!

By Clay Livara

Beer! Beer! Beer!
One beer, two trouble, three poor.
So sweet to Papa, so sour to my life.

One: Mama says NO!
But Papa says YES!
Mama says nothing and Papa goes drinking.
One beer, two trouble, three poor.

Two: Papa says don't trouble, trouble.
But drunk Papa troubles Mama,
And they trouble me.

Three: Papa has no money,
Mama has no money,
I have no money.
We have nothing, but nothing.
From one beer, two trouble, three poor.

Oh beer, beer, beer.

Appendix 2: Crocodile Prize advice on writing for children

Writing for children is a much tougher assignment than writing for adults.

Simplicity of sentence structure and vocabulary are not so simple in creation. They require technical discipline – and an understanding of what children want.

And what do children like? They like to laugh, they like to be excited, they like to see problems solved, they like to learn, they like to see embarrassment successfully resolved and they like to see heroes (protagonists) who are like themselves.

And these young readers want you, the writer, to be in touch with the world where they live. In other words, your stories will mostly have a Papua New Guinean theme and offer situations and experiences that your readers know first-hand.

This means that the Western ‘fairy tale’ approach is unlikely to be suitable unless it is cast strongly within a Melanesian context.

When you write for adults, you can select the best word from the many you know (or your thesaurus has to offer). You can choose the sentence structure that is best, even if it is complex.

But when writing for children, your words must be accessible – your audience must be able to understand it and engage with vocabulary, structure, content and ideas.

That said, you should feel able to introduce new and harder words and ideas so long as you provide contextual support. This means making sure meaning is able to be understood from surrounding text and content.

Here’s an important point. Your story should be fun to read aloud. And it follows that a useful way of testing the merit of what you’ve written is to read it to a child.

The plot of the story should be straightforward, so devices like time jumps, flashbacks or shifts in point of view will need to be explained within the story or avoided altogether. And, for the most part, your story should be linear – moving logically from beginning to end.

It should also move at a rapid pace, not dwell too much on detail or scene-building.

The plot needs to be strong, the characters memorable and there will be excitement (and a problem or two) and humour.

When young characters solve problems with clever solutions they stand in for the young reader, who will enjoy their aptitude.

Next to last, learn to love revision and rewriting. At any level of creative writing this yields better results.

And finally, to reiterate, always remember you are writing for young Melanesians, so offer them a story that is meaningful to Papua New Guinea. So much of what they are offered in books is derived from other cultures. It’s a real thrill to read a story about themselves and where they live.

One reason we’re working so hard to make the Crocodile Prize a success is to provide Papua New Guineans with the joy of reading about themselves and their own culture and society. So good luck with your writing.

Writing for children seems like a straightforward thing to do. No big words, keep the storyline simple and include a moral of some sort. How easy can that be?

Unfortunately it's not easy at all. In fact, writing for children is much harder than writing for adults.

The key, just like writing for adults, is to know your audience. However, where knowing what adults might enjoy is reasonably simple, an audience of children is made up of infinite variables.

Children are complicated little creatures with developing intellects, complex foibles, unexplainable hang-ups and evolving perspectives. This produces a bewildering and sometimes perverse world view that is changeable and open to all sorts of influences.

Even with your own children it is sometimes difficult to work out what makes them tick and when you think you've got them sussed they invariably surprise you. If you are a bloke and your kids are girls, it is doubly difficult.

If you are going to write for children, it is a good idea to check out what experienced children's writers are doing. But be prepared to be surprised.

For starters, you will discover that the old fairy tales that you grew up with are not in the race. Anything starting with the phrase 'once upon a time' will turn children off straight away.

Fairies, dwarfs, sleeping princesses and glass slippers don't cut it anymore – although wizards, vampires and hobbits have had a good run lately.

And if you think that the fare that you grew up with – be it Ninja Turtles, Smurfs or some other American rubbish – is relevant, think again.

If my six year old grandson is anything to go by, the current hero of children's literature is someone called 'Captain Underpants'.

Which brings us to another consideration. Children are inherently wicked, often cruel and have a sense of humour to match.

Bums, willies and throwing up are big themes in current children's oeuvres. Even kids as young as my grandson are developing sexually and they have an intense curiosity.

And these days there are many avenues available to them to satisfy this curiosity and often confuse them – not least being the age-old rite of 'you show me yours and I'll show you mine'. Just try eavesdropping on the little buggers; you'll be appalled.

A kid's book called 'The Boy with the Big Blue Bum' will beat a book called 'How the Butterfly Got Its Wings' every time. And anything that appeals to adults as cute, cuddly and delightful won't have a snowball's chance in hell.

Kids also like to be scared witless. Monsters and flesh-eating green slime appeal to their perverted little minds – just as long as there is a convenient parent they can safely crawl into bed with at night.

All this is cross-cultural. It is remarkable how the tastes of a child growing up in a remote highland village resemble their counterparts in the razzmatazz of places like Port Moresby.

Children are also subject to immense peer pressure. If one or two kids are reading and enjoying a particular book, it is a fair bet that by the end of the week every child in the neighbourhood will be talking about it.

It works on the same principle as television and film. If you capture that initial audience, no matter how dumb your idea might be, it will spread like wildfire. Just don't make it a dangerous idea.

So, if you are going to write for children, you have to have a broad mind and be innovative. Recycling old tropes is not a good idea.

And for goodness sake don't preach. Kids hate it when adults talk down to them. Save that for when they are teenagers.

www.crocodileprize.org