

Abstract: Back to Basics – Lighting the Way to Stronger Writing in the Middle Years

This presentation will highlight the critical need to revisit and explicitly teach foundational punctuation and sentence-level skills to students in Years 7 and 8, ensuring they develop the literacy foundations required for success across all discipline areas. Research conveys that writing proficiency often declines in the early secondary years: Clary and Mueller (2021) identify persistent weaknesses in punctuation and sentence construction, even when students generate sophisticated ideas; Larson (2024) notes that insufficient explicit literacy instruction remains widespread; and Wyatt Smith (2020) argues that schools move away from structured writing instruction too early. In response, Barnes (2020) advocates a clear “Back-to-Basics” approach, which has underpinned the writing framework my school has successfully adopted.

This workshop is aligned to the “Back-to-Basic’s” ALEA journal article written in the Middle Year’s Literacy Journal (June 2025). The approach enlightens participants to gain a comprehensive understanding of the school’s writing framework, exploring how writing is explicitly taught, supported, and assessed within each subject area using a “Back-to-Basics” model. Participants will engage in a modelled lesson to experience the instructional cycle firsthand and examine the tools and resources embedded as part of the framework. These resources are designed to support teachers, improve student writing, and provide families with practical guidance across the curriculum. All tools will be shared with participants from all sectors, including preservice teachers and academics with an interest in middle years literacy.

The “Back-to-Basics” approach has illuminated a clear pathway for improving student literacy outcomes, strengthening academic writing skills, and better preparing students for the demands of senior schooling. Importantly, consistent implementation of this model has also enhanced teacher capability and prompted its adoption across additional year levels, contributing to lighten the way to stronger writing outcomes in the middle years.