



# St Ambrose RC Primary School Learning Environment Guidance



## Introduction

Classroom environments can both support and enrich the learning of all children. As well as being vibrant and welcoming, the classroom environment is a learning resource, the second teacher, a way of engaging children and building the class community. It can create a sense of ownership and be used to support and promote learning as well as celebrating children's work. With careful thought and planning, an effective classroom environment is used as an interactive resource supporting teaching, learning and assessment.



At St Ambrose RC Primary School we believe that a well organised and stimulating environment has a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning, and therefore supports raising standards. It enables pupils to develop independence as learners, building on good Foundation Stage practice.

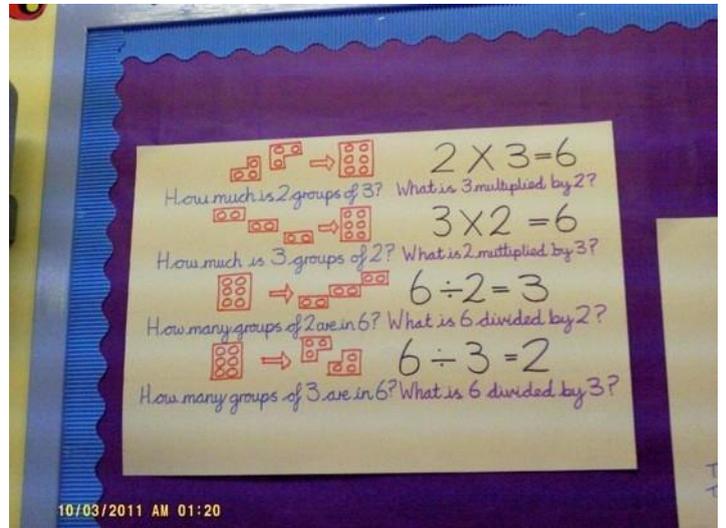
This guidance document sets out to clarify the common expectations at St Ambrose so that we provide consistency for all pupils in supporting, whilst challenging pupils to give their very best and develop a shared sense of what high standards look like.

## Working Walls

At St Ambrose we believe that working walls can make a positive contribution to children's learning.

The core purpose of a working wall is to:

- support children's understanding in the process of learning
- provide a visual resource and a reference to scaffold learning
- support current learning and pertinent prior learning
- represent the work in progress, the learning journey steps
- model specific unit modelling for children to access, including children's examples.
- help independent learning
- show progress in learning concepts or steps
- model essential concepts, processes, vocabulary.



### Where should working walls be displayed for maximum impact on learning?

At St Ambrose, working walls will be displayed where they are visible and accessible for pupils to see and use. This means displaying them in a central place (e.g. next to the white board) where most teacher led input can be seen and where the eye is drawn. A working wall should be the focal point for whole class learning.

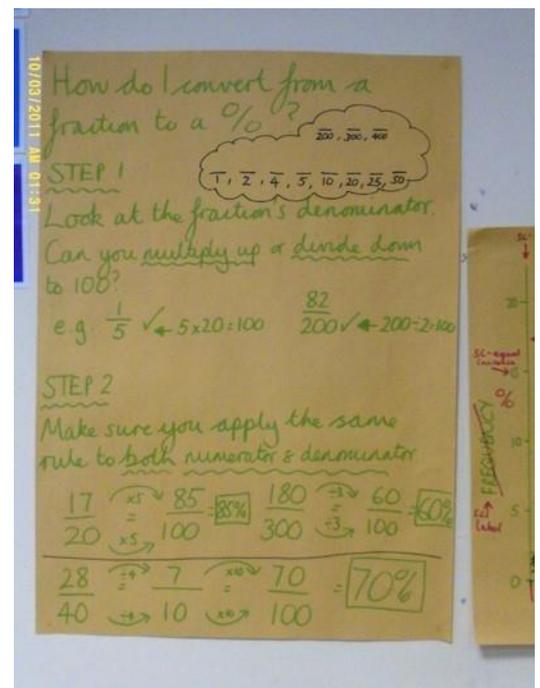
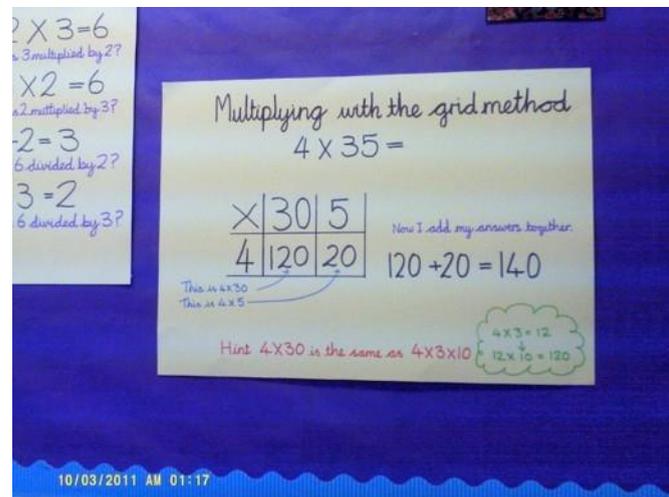
### How are working walls presented?

Working walls should be handwritten using cursive script. They should be written using large sheets of sugar paper or flip chart paper. They should represent "real

time learning" and be current to the learning area in focus. (E.g. part of a current topic or unit).

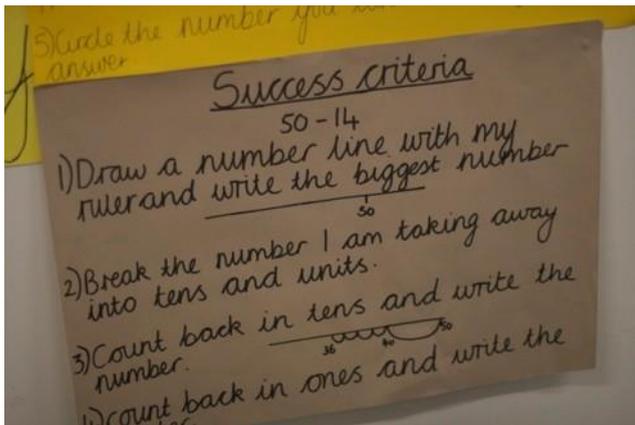
### How does a working wall lead to quality outcomes for learning?

- Working walls are supportive and interactive
- They are part of the planned learning experience and referred to continuously
- They are referred to by children
- Children can see their work contributing towards the working wall
- They provide 'stepping stones' for children
- Working walls can help children think through 'higher order thinking skills', especially when they contain open questions. E.g. '35 is the answer, what is the question?'



## Use of Success Criteria and Modelling 'What Makes Good'

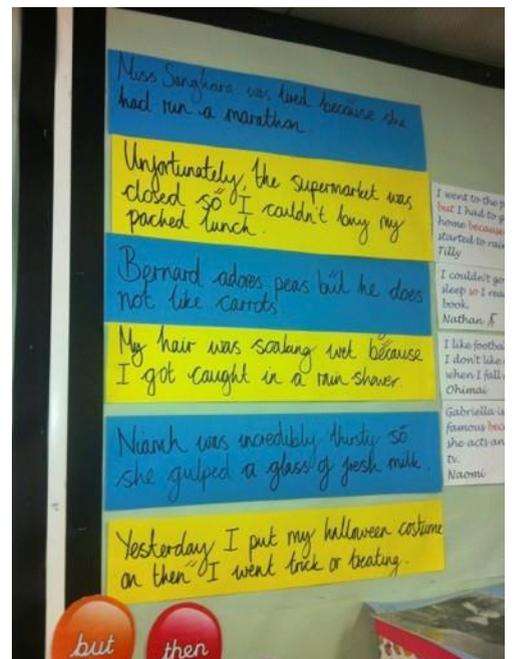
It is important to display examples of what makes good features of current learning because:



- Children can access WMG and know what they are working towards
- It models high expectations, to show what success looks like
- Shared understanding of judgement criteria
- Know what it looks like - successful model
- Show key features, aims and reminders of current learning, so children can see where they are and next steps
- Provides a reference to success for pupils
- When pupils encounter problems - they can self check and improve

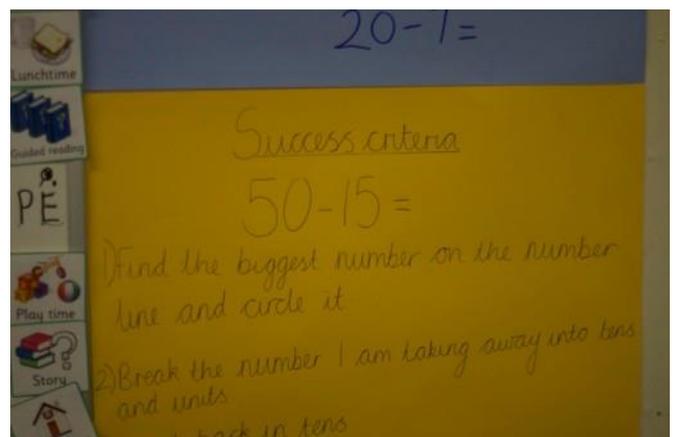
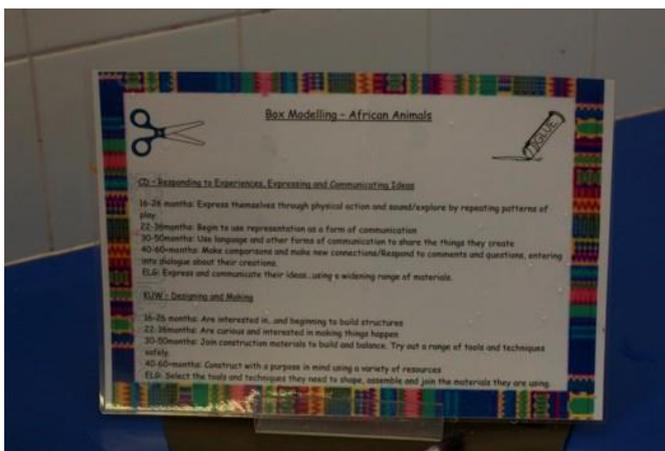
We ensure that WMG / success criteria are understood by children by:

- Introducing at start of unit
- Discussing, referring to in lessons and expanding with children
- Consistently referring back to, referencing throughout the learning process
- Placing them in child friendly speak and modelling
- Using pictures, symbols, photographs
- Developing a consistent format
- Model learning using them
- Using as in-lesson assessment tool
- Ensure vocabulary is accurate and understood
- Collaborative checklist and SC, modelling examples of adjectives etc.



Our shared agreement at St Ambrose about using success criteria is:

- We identify them in our planning
- We always share with children and encourage them to generate their own success criteria with staff
- We always display them
- We write success criteria using cursive script as a model for children
- In Foundation Stage, we link learning outcomes to the EYFS planning tools and publish the related developmental stages (see below left)





## Use of Topic Tables and Interest Tables In Classrooms

Topic tables and interest tables create an instant reference to a learning theme. They promote enquiry and stimulate the sense, drawing learners in.

Topic and interest tables provide a variety of opportunities in the classroom including:

- stimulating discussion in lessons linked to a curriculum theme
- generating enthusiasm towards a topic area or an aspect of a topic theme
- providing children with concrete examples / artefacts that prompt thinking
- role play and drama opportunities
- opportunities to display learning questions and link learning across curriculum areas.

At St Ambrose RC Primary School we expect all learning environments to contain topic or interest tables linked to a current or 'live' topic. They are used as a reference point by teachers and children to plan learning opportunities around and should be stimulating and inviting parts of our classrooms.

Below and right we have shown some examples of topic and interest tables linked to termly topic themes. Please note the use of key questions and vocabulary linked to the topic.



## Modelling Handwriting

Our agreed expectation for teacher modelled handwriting is that:

- we use cursive handwriting at all times
- all adults model handwriting cursive script when writing anything for children
- we talk through it, consistent. At all times by every adult
- teacher written text must be cursive
- everybody does the same



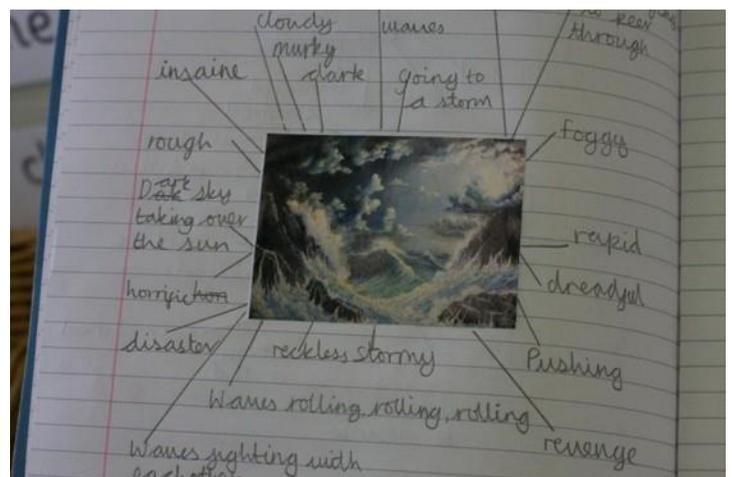
**Our non-negotiables for modelled handwriting are:**

- examples of handwriting available, children's displayed work shows good example of quality handwriting
- cursive letters are on display. This includes pupils' work, teacher's writing, mark in cursive script on display
- all handwritten work and labels in cursive script
- cursive posters displayed
- all work in books in cursive script

- high expectations from all staff
- all adults to model
- lots of praise for good presentation
- adult written marking is in cursive script

**We achieve consistency through:**

- High expectations
- Regular reminders
- Modelling and sharing examples of quality handwriting
- Publishing
- Celebrating good examples
- Children know steps to improve
- Non-negotiable rules / guidelines
- We insist every piece of work is in cursive writing



## Publishing Children's Work

There is no greater accolade for a child than to see his or her work published on display and celebrated. At St Ambrose we believe all children are capable of producing quality work that they can be proud of. We believe in developing a culture of sharing high quality work so that:

- children can be aspirational and aim for high expectations
- it provides learning with a purpose - to a wider audience
- it enables us to show progress and a broad range of learning across the curriculum
- it provides a real live purpose for editing and refining work
- perseverance is developed
- life skills for producing work in education / work are promoted
- children are empowered to feel like an author
- we celebrate quality of working
- we provide good models, proof that it's achievable
- we create a sense of pride in work and achievement



**We also aim to link published learning opportunities to cross curricular, problem solving and real life situations. The benefits of linking learning outcomes to real life situations where possible are:**

- we build stronger connections to the real world and create a sense of purpose for learning
- we promote lifelong learning
- it cultivates deeper thinking
- children engage in learning better
- it makes links to skills learned and use in real context
- we are able to draw on what children already know
- children can relate to learning better
- it makes learning purposeful and real. It gives children a reason why they are learning skills



**We create a shared ethos of publishing children's work and aiming for quality outcomes by:**

- having high expectations for everything we do
- being aware of reviewing, editing and improving work
- encouraging a sense of pride in end product, purpose, passion, perseverance
- scaffolding children to achieve best website
- believing that everyone is an author and a critic

**Our non negotiables about publishing children's work are:**

- we display a variety of childrens' learning
- we plan for displays and publishing
- we make time for publishing as a learning outcome
- displays will contain published children's work
- displays will focus on quality outcomes
- all displays will be double mounted
- where possible, displays will link to real life problems or have a cross curricular theme
- displays will contain learning questions, props or a stimulus for drawing in the audience
- children will be involved in peer assessing work for display (see above left)



## The Basics

At St Ambrose all classroom environments will provide the following at an appropriate level for the age of the children working in the classroom. The following will also be used within lessons to support teaching and learning.

1. Objectives, success criteria and key questions are displayed and referred to in lessons. (These are not only important for children but also enable adults working with children to be clear about teacher expectations).
2. Prompts, ideas and good examples that are generated during lessons are displayed and referred to, to support future learning.



3. Key questions are displayed and used to trigger prior knowledge.
4. Curriculum displays include statements and questions to highlight key learning points. (See examples in later section)

5. Key words and technical vocabulary are displayed and discussed for a variety of curriculum areas. *Please note that any*

*collections of words or phrases are displayed and updated regularly to ensure vocabulary links to an appropriate learning context*

6. Vocabulary and definitions of words are referred to, discussed and used within teaching.



Note in the example above that the key vocabulary on the left has been generated within the lesson and is changed regularly. On the flip chart, pupils can see the success criteria for the lesson identifying the pupils' steps to success. The VCOP display is interactive and words are changed regularly. The display does not dominate the whole classroom and is located in an area where it is easy for the teacher to refer to. The use of a flip chart makes it easy to display words, and ideas generated by the pupils.

## Book Corners

Book corners should be inviting, stimulating places to learn to read and learn. They should be organised using the St Ambrose RC book corner labels (available from the Literacy Co-ordinator).

The use of soft fabrics, cushions and plants can 'soften' the area making it more inviting. The use of key questions, interactive author focus displays and displays of featured genres can all enhance the learning experience for pupils using a book corner well. (See photographs below).



Any books in poor condition should be removed from book areas and reported to the Literacy Co-ordinator. Children found deliberately mis-using books will receive letters to their parents requesting the replacement of books.

Note below (right) how the use of an author focus table can create interest around the book corner.



## Storage of Pupils' Books

Pupils books should always be stored in a neat, accessible, pupil friendly ways using storage containers, table trays or individual pupil trays. This ensures that pupil books are always maintained in good order and do not become dog eared or worn. (See example left).

Pupil books should be easily accessible for children to find or distribute. Building good routines for pupils to find their books is key to managing a workable system.

By contrast, where books are left on the teacher desk or scattered around a room, this conveys confusing messages to children that their books are not valued and makes it harder for pupils to access work books independently.



## Key Areas

Key areas for the storage of equipment must be clearly defined and easily accessible for pupils. They should always be organised and tidy. (See examples). Recommended key areas include:

### Art corner / art storage trolley



### Topic Table / Role Play Area



### Maths storage area



### Outdoor Learning Spaces



## Displays at St Ambrose

At St Ambrose we pride ourselves on the quality of display work which plays a significant role in setting out our shared expectations. We believe that display is fundamentally important for the following reasons:

- ◆ It celebrates pupils' work and learning achievements
- ◆ Presenting pupils' work well is a reward in itself for pupils
- ◆ It communicates the schools' shared high expectations for learning
- ◆ Displays can inspire, create interest and generate discussion around learning
- ◆ Quality work which is carefully displayed values children's efforts and is aspirational for all members of the St Ambrose RC school community

Provided below are some practical guidelines for displaying children's work. These guidelines are intended to support all staff in achieving the best quality displayed work at the school.

### 1. Aim for quality (and do never second best!)

All pupils are capable of producing quality work regardless of age, ability or need. Having high expectations and timetabling quality time for pupils to publish work for display is the key for achieving good results. If a pupil finds it difficult to sustain longer pieces of work for publication, publish extracts or even just a small section of work.



### 2. Keep it simple

A good quality display is not about the brightness of the backing paper or the size of the title but more about quality of work. It should speak for itself and should stimulate interest.

The example shown below is a cluttered display where the eye is drawn to the colours and the added materials rather than the quality of work.

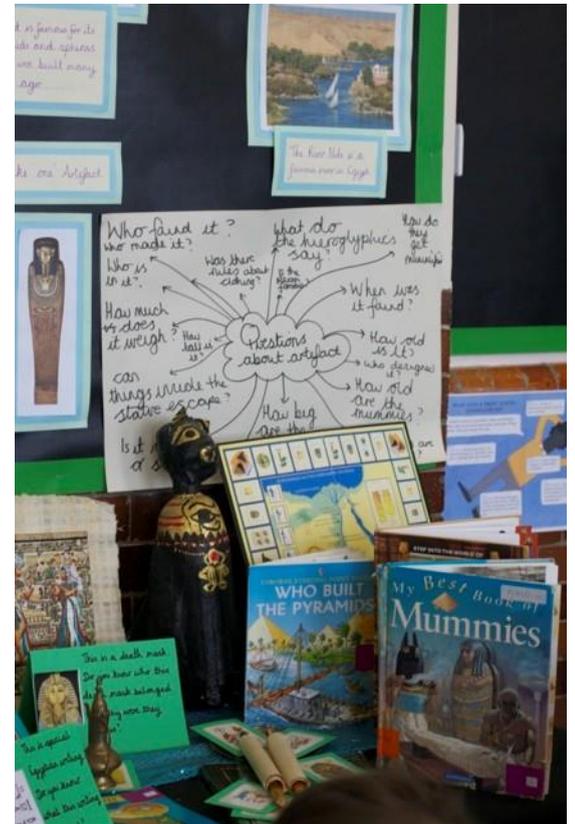
### 3. Aim for Symmetry

When planning a display, plan the display from the centre point of the board and have a fixed horizontal 'top line' for the display. Work outwards from the centre keeping your top lines level. This creates a symmetrical effect which is easy for the eye to orientate.



#### 4. Use Drapes and Props Sympathetically

Drapes and fabrics can really enhance a classroom display, generating interest in the display and creating textures for pupils. The same is true of the use of 3-D objects and materials. Aim for objects, fabrics and drapes which compliment the display.



#### 5. Use Photographs In Display To Help Show the Learning Process

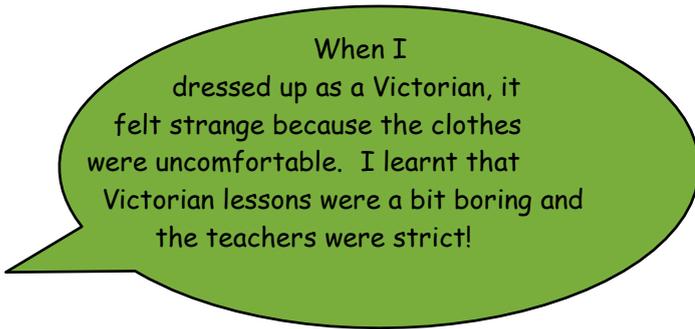
Photographs in display are really great for those "you had to be there" moments. Especially when the learning takes place over a period of time, photographs are great for capturing the learning processes.



This display uses photographs to show children sampling different types of fruit. It would be hard to convey the quality of learning experience without the use of photography to enhance the display.

## 6. Quotes, Context and Key Vocabulary

Always ensure displays contain quotes from children which emphasise what they have learnt and the impact of learning. Alongside this add any key vocabulary linked to the learning and a context which explains what children have been learning.



## 7. Insert Key Questions or Challenges

The text in this display contains a range of questions and tasks encouraging pupils to learn. It sets readers the challenge of finding the key information contained in the display in the same way as a good information book would.



Interactive maths displays are a great way of introducing learning opportunities such as problem solving. Pupils will spend time solving the problems and will apply skills taught in lessons.

In this display, (right) there are hidden clues that encourage further thinking and prompt discussion about the learning.



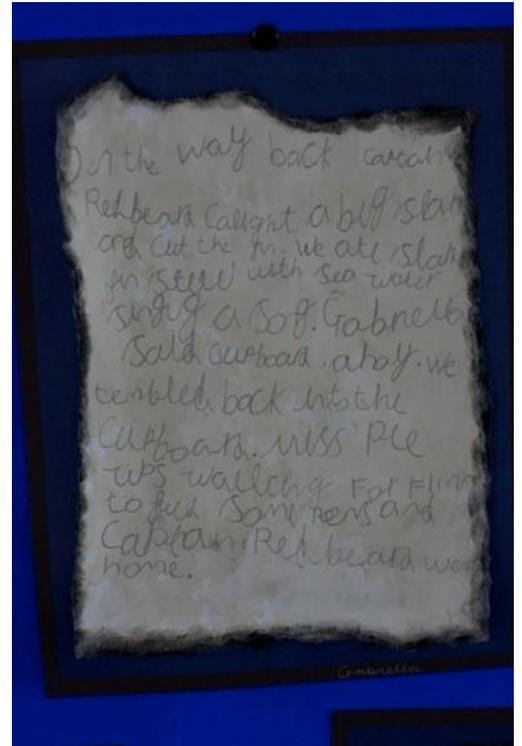
## 8. Get creative with the borders and let the work speak for itself.

To add your own personal touch and emphasise creativity, try using different style borders to make your display stand out.



The borders on the display (left) are made from newspaper. This complements the theme of newspaper reports.

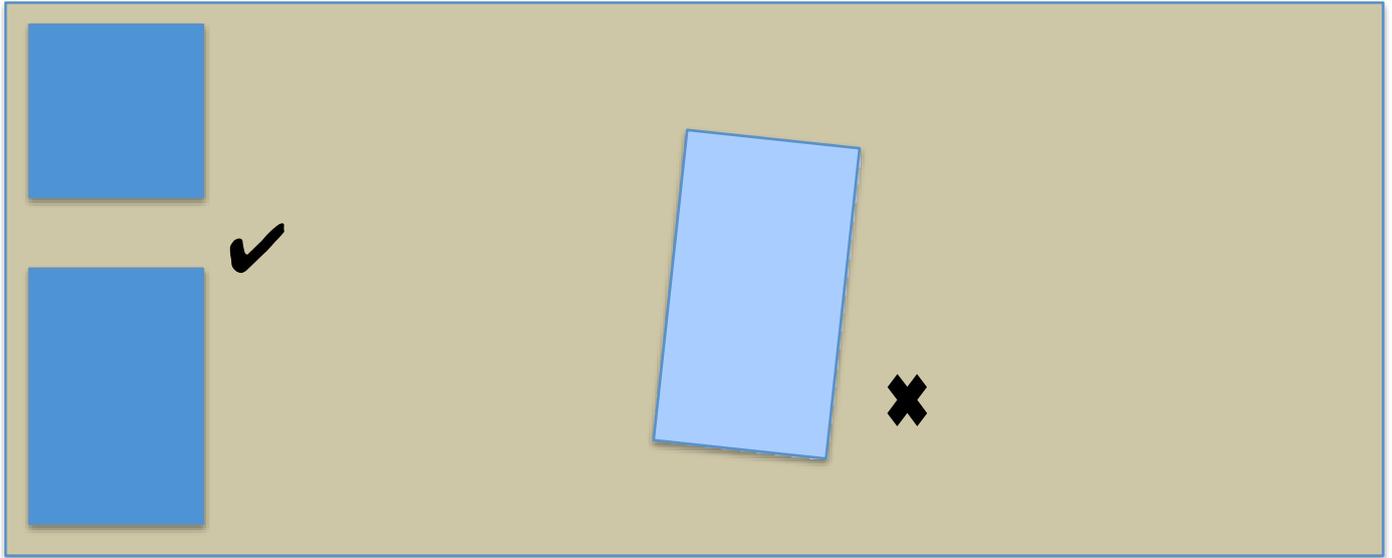
The torn paper and stained paper (right) in these pirate letters are the perfect way to emphasise the purpose and audience for the writing.



In this display, thin strips of card are used to create the effect of reeds, without compromising or detracting from the quality of the art on display.

# Top Tips For Mounting the Perfect Display

1. When backing walls always start from the bottom and work up. The top layer of backing paper should overlap the bottom piece. This ensures overlap lines are at the bottom of the display wall and avoids gapes in the display.
2. When mounting work on to larger pieces of backing paper always work with the angles of the backing paper. Avoid placing work to be trimmed in the middle of the backing paper at odd angles. The example above left shows the work being lined up with the backing paper accurately. This means that the work will only need to be trimmed around 2 sides keeping the 90 degree angles accurate. The example on the right shows the work has been placed in the middle of the paper for backing. It will be hard to trim this



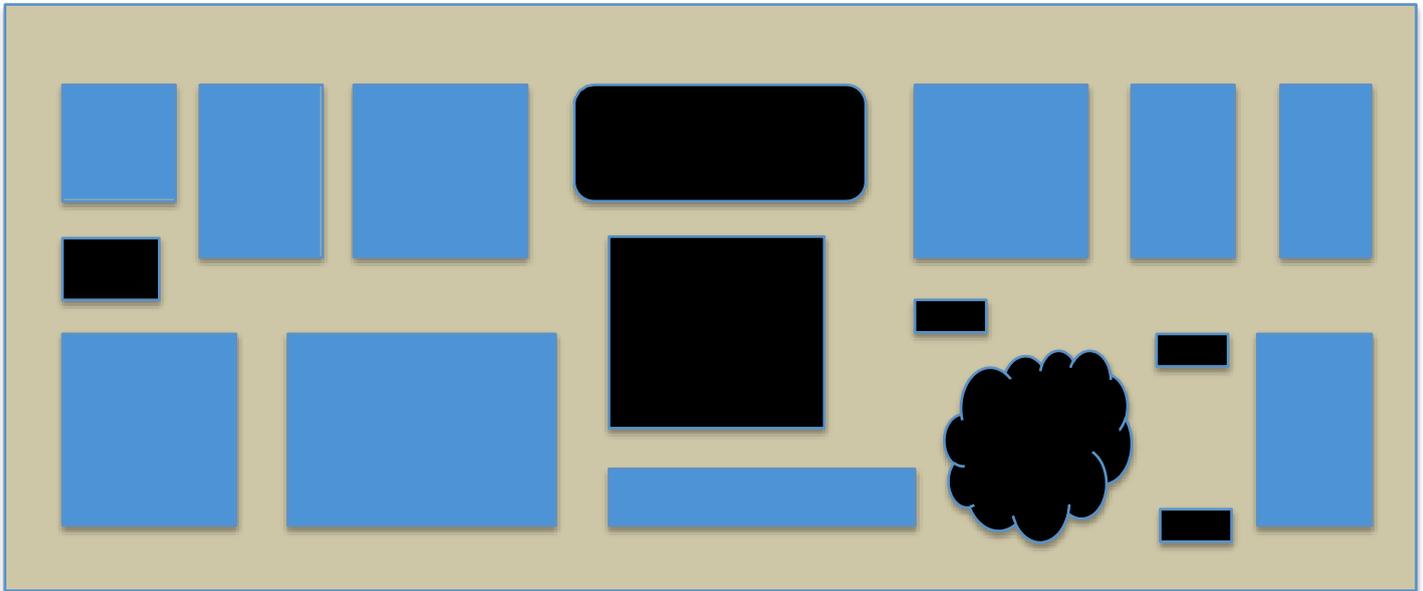
work with accuracy and will also waste paper

3. Always double mount work using 2 complementary colours or using the first colour to match the colour of the backing paper. The gap for each piece of work should always be 1 cm per piece.



Borders around the work carefully trimmed

4. Pin or Blu-tack the work first to ensure everything is in place. When stapling, always staple at an angle so that staples can be easily removed.
5. Print context labels larger than expected so that they can easily be read. (See below).
6. Do not over clutter the display board but do not leave big gaps either. (See below).



In the display above, the title and context are placed at the centre using a top horizontal line to measure where work is placed. There are no big gaps between pieces of work but neither is there a cluttered feel. Note that the display contains pupil comments (thought bubbles), photographs and key vocabulary.

