

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Helping the Older Student

From writing lesson to class work

Teachers and parents frequently ask the question:

“How is it that a student can learn to write well in a handwriting lesson but does not transfer that skill into class work?”

The problem:

Writing involves many processes such as generating and developing ideas, planning how to express thoughts and structuring sentences, as well as spelling, punctuation and legible writing.

This puts great demands on the memory.

A solution:

It will help the student if the transcriptional skills (handwriting – and also spelling and punctuation) are as automatic as possible, enabling him/her to concentrate on the demanding compositional skills.

A possible strategy is to first help him to write legibly and then to undertake a series of tasks of gradually increasing difficulty that will move him towards writing automatically in a series of short ‘hops’.

This has better chance of success than expecting him to transfer improved handwriting skills to class work in one leap.

Hop 1 Assessing the product

Together with the student, assess a sample of the student’s normal handwriting using seven ‘S’ Rules as a guide. (See below)
(Tips for Teaching: ‘S’ Rules for quick assessment gives more detail)

Specific aspects of the script which need to be improved can then be addressed in 4-6 targeted sessions.

| | Excellent | Good | OK | Not so Good | Poor |
|------------------|-----------|------|----|-------------|------|
| Shape/legibility | | | | | |
| Size | | | | | |
| Spacing | | | | | |
| Sitting on line | | | | | |
| Slant | | | | | |
| Speed | | | | | |
| Style | | | | | |

Assessing the product:
7 ‘S’s


Hop 2 Assessing the process

It is important to consider *how* the student writes. The four 'P's: posture, paper position, pen grasp and pressure are a useful guide. (See below)

Tips for Teaching: Writing Difficulties and *Writing Grip* give more detail

| | Some Common Faults |
|-----------------------|---|
| Posture | Lack of core stability. Not keeping the body still when writing. Leaning on the table/writing hand |
| Paper Position | Not centred in front of the body. Turned too much to left or right. |
| Pen Grasp | Gripping too tightly. Wrapping the thumb round the pen. Using an unstable pen grasp. Extreme 'hook' of the hand. |
| Pressure | Pressing too hard or not enough. |

Anything that is making the writing process painful or uncomfortable should be addressed.


 **Tip** Remember that changing long-established habits is difficult and requires attention and repetition. Support and encouragement are important.

Assessing the process:
4 'P's

Once the specific errors of the handwriting have been corrected at single letter level, begin a series of tasks of graded difficulty.

Hop 3 Bi-and Tri-grams

The student should practice the bi- and then tri-grams, if possible repeating them for short, frequent periods.

 **Tip** At each stage make sure that the correct handwriting is used and only move on to the next 'hop' when the letters are written correctly with confidence.

Most Common Bi-grams (in order)

th he in en nt ew er an ti
is on at se nd or ar al te
co de to ra et ed it sa em

Most Common Tri-grams (in order)

the and tha ent ing ion tio or
nde has nce edt tis oft sth men

Hop 4 Using whole words

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|------|-------|--------|-------|
| the | and | a | to | in | is | you | that | it | he |
| Was | for | on | are | as | with | his | they | I | at |
| Be | this | have | from | or | one | had | by | word | but |
| Not | what | all | were | we | when | your | can | said | there |
| Use | an | each | which | she | do | how | their | if | will |
| up | other | about | out | many | then | them | these | so | some |
| her | would | make | like | him | into | time | has | look | two |
| more | write | go | see | number | no | way | could | people | my |
| than | first | water | been | call | who | oil | its | now | find |
| long | down | day | did | get | come | made | may | part | |

100 most common words

 **Tip** Preferably use dictation rather than copying as it is a half-way stage to self-generated writing (the ultimate aim)

Hop 5 Single words to sentences

The student writes short dictated sentences well below his level of spelling ability i.e. c-v-c words only.

A good source is Alpha to Omega (Hornsby & Shear 1993) (See right)

1. The pan is hot.
2. The dog can beg.
3. Dan got a gun.
4. Mum has a wig.
5. A rat bit Tom.
6. Len hit the box.
7. Rex has a big mug
8. Tom ran to the red van.
9. Ron met Ted on the bus.
10. Mum hid the pot of jam.
11. Meg and Pam can fit Sam in.
12. Fat Dan cannot get in the van.
13. Ben hid the map in the hut.
14. Pam can get me a pot of jam.
15. Sam sat in the sun and got a tan.

Hop 6 From dictation to self-generated text

The student generates sentences of his own in this format and at this level of simplicity. For example: "The dog has a wig" (humour will always help!). First he says the sentence out loud, the teacher repeats it and then he writes it down.

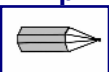
This is the next step towards free writing.

Hop 7 Introducing narrative writing

7A

The student is given a story using a simple text presented in cloze form, i.e. certain key words are omitted and the child chooses appropriate words to give meaning.

Tip



Choose a text that interests the student but the reading, vocabulary and sentence construction levels should be kept below his general language and intellectual ability.

7B

Rule a wide margin down the right side of the page and ask the student to supply the missing words, indicated by the numbers. As he does, you write the words he selects in a numbered column down the page (see right). These words, chosen by him, will serve as memory cues when retelling the story.

Jo had a radio. She got it in a car boot sale. It was a very strange radio. One day when Jo was listening to the six o'clock 1 a very strange thing happened. A hand came 2 of the radio and got hold of Jo's face. Jo was very 3 . She 4 the comic she was reading and 5 her cup of tea off the arm of her chair. Jo picked up the 6 . She stared at it. Then the 7 came out again. This time it got hold of Jo's left 8 . Jo jumped back. Jo got very upset. She grabbed the radio and ran into the kitchen. She put the radio in the sink and turned on 9 taps. The water filled the sink. Jo heard a voice coming out of the radio. It said: "Help me! Help me! Please help me! I'm 10 ."

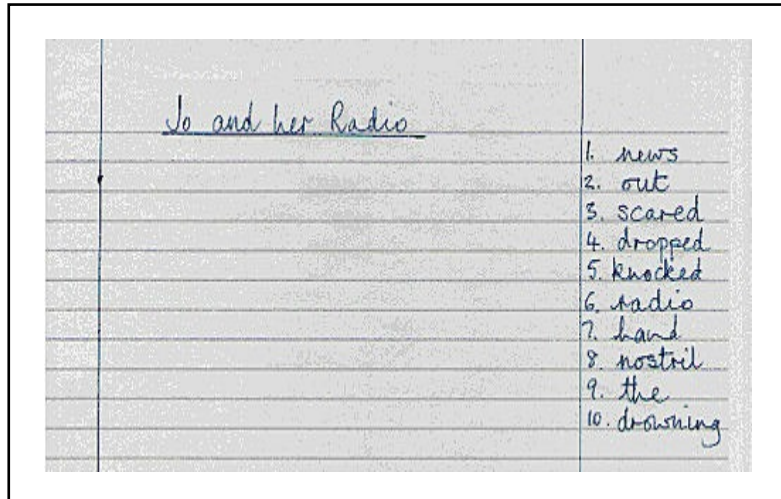
An example of cloze format - taken from the Headwork series, Book 2, (Walters & Culshaw, 1990)

7B

Ask him to retell the story orally from memory, showing him the list of cue words to aid him. Be sure he includes the selected words in the order in which you have written them.

7D

The student then writes the story, ticking each cue word as it is used.



Hop 8 Creating and writing a story

The student creates a short story of his own, orally at first and the teacher writes it out. The student then selects the key words to be the memory cues (to be written in the right-hand margin on the page as before). This list is used as in Hop 7 to help the child write the story.

This exercise reduces the load on the memory for generating the narrative and the word list will also provide support by acting as memory cues. An additional advantage in this method is that a short story with a good structure is a model for future narrative writing.

Timing

This will vary according to the individual student and the length and frequency of the teaching and practice sessions.

The ideal would be a session every day for eight weeks but this could well be impractical.

If practice can be time-tabled for at least twice a week, an average re-integration period would be around 3-4 months.

Tip



Older students (GCSE/A level) might prefer to write a factual account rather than fiction but the same method could be used.



There are no shortcuts – the greatest success demands both time and intensity – but once the skill properly established, it will be there for life.

Adapted from an article 'Handwriting to class-writing: one leap or several hops?' by Dr Angela Webb in *Handwriting Today 2014*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.

Publications referred to in the text:

NHA *Tips for Teaching: 'S' Rules, Handwriting Difficulties, Writing Grip, Speeding Up* Hornsby, B. & Shear, F. (1993). *Alpha to Omega: The A-Z of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling*. Heinemann.

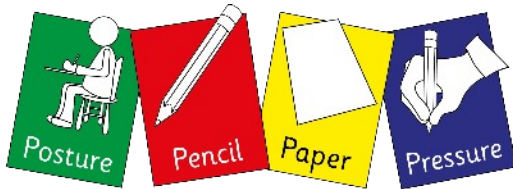
Walters, D. & Culshaw, C. (1990). *Headwork, Book 2*. Oxford University Press.

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Promoting good practice

'P' Checks

Preparing to write



The 'P checks' are used to support the *process* of handwriting and cover **Posture, Pencil grasp, Paper position and Pressure and fluency.**

Posture

Poor posture can be a root cause of common handwriting difficulties such as pain or fatigue and will present as a reluctance to write, poor presentation or legibility, slow writing speed and reduced output.

POSTURE GUIDELINES

- Feet flat on the floor or on a wide based raised surface
 - Knees at a right angle with 2-fingers space behind the knee to avoid compression
 - Sit on the chair so hips are positioned at approximately 90° with the back supported
 - Sit approximately a fist-distance away from the table
- AND
- Table height adjusted so that forearms rest on the top without leaning forward (too low) or raising the shoulders/arms (too high)
 - Surface - clean, smooth and uncluttered

Tip



Establishing good habits of posture and position early is really helpful. Correcting bad habits later is much more difficult.

ALTERNATIVE FURNITURE

Adaptive equipment is available for those that struggle with underlying stability, gross and fine motor skills.

If standing desks are used they should also be an appropriate height .

A writing slope can help with wrist position and posture. The chair height needs to be higher.


TABLE AND CHAIR HEIGHT

If the table is at the correct height the forearm is supported, making it easier to control the movement.

Too High: children may raise their shoulders inducing greater fatigue.

Too Low: children may slump forwards and increase strain on the trunk, neck, arm, wrist and fingers making it more difficult to make controlled precise movements.

Too Far: children will slump forwards if their chair is set too far back from the table, regardless of chair and table height.

Tips  Exchanging furniture with another class can accommodate children who are taller or shorter than their classmates.

At times swop a chair for a ball to sit on or try an air-filled or a wedge cushion. Check the height is correct.





Children and adults can be seen to use a wide range of different pencil grasps, often because they have not learnt differently or as compensation for postural instability elsewhere. An inefficient pen/cil grasp can cause discomfort, impacting motivation, fluency and legibility and create difficulty in sustaining speed.

1

Before children are asked to write, it is important that they are developmentally ready to do so. The teacher will be able to assess when a child has developed the essential skills. In Early Years, most children will manage pre-writing tasks only, which are designed to introduce the basic movements and 'feel' required for writing. Asking a child to hold a pen or pencil and write before they are developmentally ready can create difficulties.

PENCIL GRASP GUIDELINES:

- Check the child is developmentally ready before asking them to write.
- A dynamic tripod pencil grasp is the most efficient and is expected by end of Year 1.
- Address an inappropriate grasp in the early learning stages and later if it is causing discomfort or impacting speed.
- Consider corrective action using adaptive grips or specialist writing tools, but always trial several options to find the most appropriate.
- Encourage a 2 cm gap between finger tip and pencil point – and slightly greater for left-handers.

5

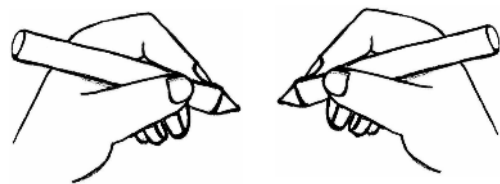
When developing handwriting skills, the child needs to see the pencil nib to monitor their writing. This is more difficult for left-handers.

Holding the pencil too close or too far from the tip or holding too tightly can cause tension and thereby difficulties with handwriting.

2

Introducing an effective pencil grasp, when appropriate, is beneficial for developing fast, efficient, legible handwriting in the longer term.

A **dynamic tripod grasp**, with the pencil held between thumb and index finger with the middle finger supporting is considered optimal as it provides stability, but allows the precise movements needed to form letters. To be effective, this grasp must be supported by a stable wrist resting on the writing surface and positioned below the writing line.



3

Changing a writing grasp can be challenging for an older child and should only be attempted if there is discomfort or other difficulty.

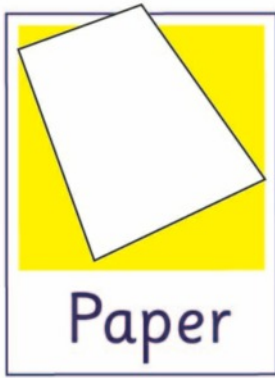
(See *Tips for Teaching – Writing Grip* from www.nha-handwriting.org.uk for more detail)

4

There is a wide range of specialist pencils, pens and adaptive grips available to purchase.

However, focusing on the writing tool alone will not solve handwriting difficulty – take care when recommending specialist pens and pencils and trial several options as what helps one writer may cause greater discomfort for another.

See NHA booklet '*NHA TOOLS*' (available soon from www.nha-handwriting.org.uk) for more details



Correct paper position is vitally important during the early years of handwriting development as bad practice can lead to compensatory strategies, such as a hooked-wrist in left-handers, that are difficult to remedy in later years.

TILT

When writing, the wrist and hand will naturally step along a path across the paper, but at an angle to the body. The writing paper should ideally be positioned so that the hand follows this natural path. For a right hander the top left corner of the paper is angled down to the left.

For a left-hander, the opposite is best, having the top right corner angled down to the right.



PAPER GUIDELINES:

- Tilt and offset the paper according to the writing hand.
- Move the paper up or down to facilitate a comfortable reach and keep it in place with the non-writing hand.
- Consider glare from paper and overhead lighting.
- Consider a specialist vision assessment if visual stress continues.

LIGHT ON THE PAPER

TOO LITTLE

Make sure that the children's work is well lit - sometimes there is a dark corner of a classroom where lighting levels are low

TOO MUCH

Direct sunlight tends to reflect brightly off white writing paper

Eyes have to work hard to compensate for fluctuating light levels. It is better to try to keep light levels as constant as possible. Artificial light or window blinds can be effective as can writing on coloured, rather than white paper.

OFFSET

The paper should not be directly in front of the child but slightly offset, to the right for a right hander and to the left for a left hander.

NON-WRITING HAND

Encourage the use of the non-writing hand to stabilise the paper. (This enables the writing hand to move freely and also balances the body). Encourage writers to move the paper and adjust the position of the holding hand as writing progresses down the page.

VISUAL STRESS

Ocular motor (eye movement) difficulties tend to be fatiguing, especially when having to be focussed on an extended writing task. If a child rubs their eyes frequently or complains of headaches when writing, it can be a sign of visual acuity or ocular motor difficulties. An eye test will detect visual acuity difficulties, but other factors can make the eyes work harder than they need to, causing fatigue.

The teacher will be able to identify the best measures for each child, but ocular motor difficulties should not be ignored, as left unaddressed will tend to demotivate children to writing regardless of lighting levels.



The act of writing should leave a clear trace on the paper, neither too faint nor too dark, and flow along the line rhythmically.

Tip



The shape of the writing tool and the way it is held impact the amount of pressure exerted onto the paper. Trialling a range of pens, pencils and grips can be a good place to start.

EARLY WRITERS

When learning to write, pencil pressure is likely to vary depending on the demands of the task and stage of development. Most children will learn through experience how much pressure they should exert through the pencil onto paper.

LIGHT PRESSURE INDICATORS

- Faint, shaky script
- The fingers are often more extended at the joints and higher up the pencil

HEAVY PRESSURE INDICATORS

- Marks that go through to the next page
- Raised ridges on the back of the paper that can be felt with the fingertips
- Red marks on the skin because of contact with the pen
- White knuckles

SUGGESTIONS TO HELP

- Use carbon paper underneath layers of writing paper and challenge the student to aim for: p2 - copy, p3 - shadow, p4 - invisible.
- Use a 2H pencil for increased sensory feedback so there is less need for hard pressure.
- Use a mechanical pencil (0.5mm) that will break under heavy pressure.
- Use a B/2B pencil or a pen to improve the visibility of writing for those who have light pressure.
- Use light up pens: the light is activated to correct light pressure and deactivated to correct heavy pressure.
- Use a lead pencil to shade in a picture using light, medium and dark grey. Discuss how different amounts of pressure alter the shade.
- Write on a single sheet of paper when at a desk or table. A firm surface can limit the amount of pressure the child can use.

PRESSURE GUIDELINES:

- The just-right pressure eases writing across the page, which is important for fluency and reducing the risk of pain during handwriting.
- Use teaching tools such as carbon paper, mechanical pencils, 'light-up' and 'squiggle' pens to demonstrate appropriate pressure.
- Try some gross and fine motor warm ups before and during the handwriting task. Actions which include squeezing and deep pressure, resistance and/or vibration will increase body awareness.
- Check that posture/issues with postural control are not the causative factor here.

FLUENCY

- Write to rhythms / beats of music
- Pattern repeated letters and encourage flowing movements
- Think of skating / gliding on the paper
- Use gel crayons or pastels to increase ease of flow when patterning at a larger scale and on bigger blank paper

See also - NHA posters: '**P**' Checks and '**S**' Factors and *Tips for Teaching: The 'S' Rules*

Adapted from an article '**P**' Checks explained' by Catherine Elsey, Joanna Moore and Michelle van Rooyen in *Handwriting Today* 2016, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.

Edited by Gwen Dornan

TIPS FOR TEACHING

Patterns

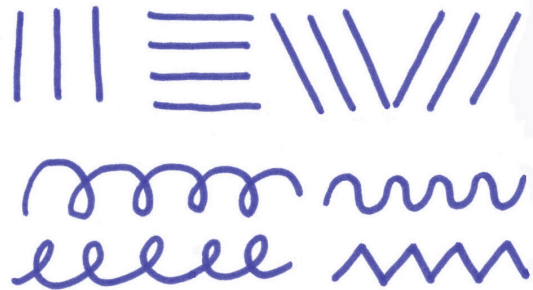
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Patterns are wonderful teaching tools because they enable a child to learn so many essential skills for writing in a way that can be enjoyable. They can also play a part in developing the skills of older pupils.

Patterning before writing

Patterns give small children experience of movements and shapes that will develop their motor skills, extend their vocabulary and build confidence.

Early patterns can include straight lines, both up and down, side to side and diagonal; zigzags; simple circles in both directions; concentric circles beginning at the centre or the outer edge; dots; spirals that wind outwards or inwards; upward loops or garlands; downward loops or arcades; figures of eight both vertical and horizontal.



The patterns can be made in a multitude of materials that provide variety, reinforce movements already experienced and can be a part of group projects and artwork. They might be made with fingers in sand, lentils, foam, paste and paint or in the air; on biscuits with tubes of icing; rolled from plasterscine or dough; made with wool or thread; in chalk in the playground; with whole bodies to make large patterns in the air or in tracks of movement on the floor, and with brushes, pencils or felt pens.



Tip



When the patterns are made with writing tools children who are sufficiently mature can be encouraged to hold their pencils or pens with an efficient grip. (Ideally, the tool is held between thumb and forefinger with the side of the middle finger completing the tripod) but young children might need to still use less mature pen holds.

Patterns make good texture or borders.

Outlines to be filled with pattern can be made by the children themselves but if the purpose of the exercise is the experience of making the patterns it is often simpler to supply a basic shape to be filled. (Children tend to draw the shapes too small or complicated for effective pattern-making or else so large that the patterning becomes boring). Some favourites are fish and hot air balloons.

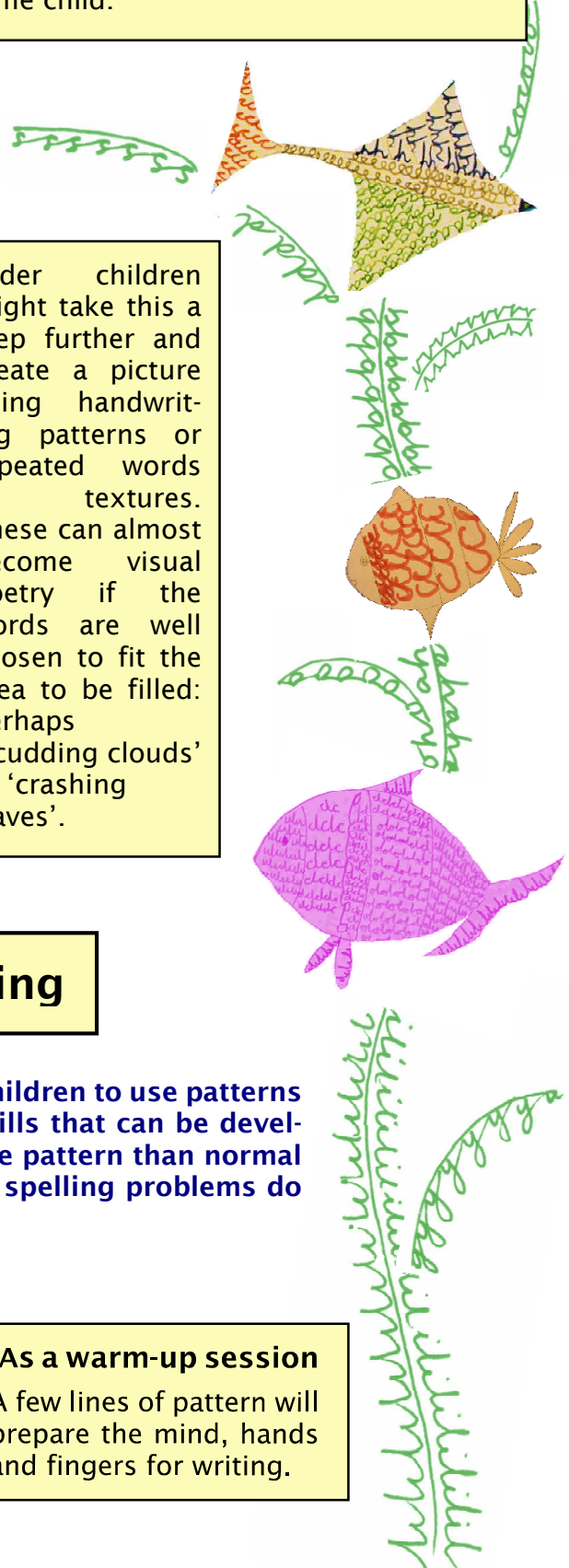
The finished shapes can be kept in a folder, combined to make a class picture or form a picture with other shapes by the same child.



Colour can give additional appeal to handwriting patterns. Fine-tipped felt pens in bright colours have the added advantage that they need little pressure to make good colours.

Older children enjoy using gel pens and these are especially effective on dark coloured paper.

Older children might take this a step further and create a picture using handwriting patterns or repeated words as textures. These can almost become visual poetry if the words are well chosen to fit the area to be filled: perhaps 'scudding clouds' or 'crashing waves'.



Patterns to support writing

There are good reasons for encouraging children to use patterns after they can write as there are many skills that can be developed more easily when making a repetitive pattern than normal writing. Complex letter combinations and spelling problems do not distract.

To maintain consistency of size

A pattern that alternates long and short strokes can reinforce the relationship between the ascenders and the x-height letters (a c e u v etc.) and letters that are frequently made too large can be paired with another.

As a warm-up session

A few lines of pattern will prepare the mind, hands and fingers for writing.

To practise a letter shape or join that presents difficulty

e.g: the join from **v** and **w** frequently causes problems, especially to **e**, and **u** is commonly not completed so **vovov**, **wewew** & **uauau** are useful exercises.

To keep letters on the writing line

Making a pattern on a ruled line can reinforce this characteristic of good writing that some children find difficult.

To create rhythm and fluency

Children are often over-anxious and tense when writing. Patterns can be unthreatening and relaxing and so become more flowing and rhythmical. This can feed across to more complex writing.



To reduce pressure

Many children find writing hard work because they put such effort into the process, gripping their pens or pencils as though they could escape and carving the letters into the paper. The experience of making a pattern as lightly as possible can be transferred to normal writing.



To increase writing speed

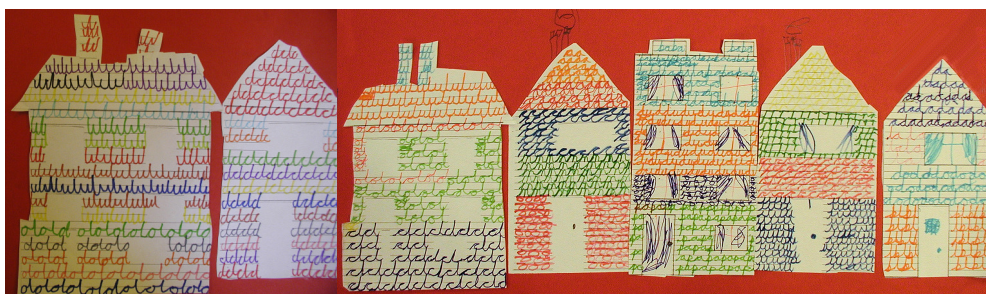
Gradually increasing speed when writing patterns can help to write words more quickly too.

To maintain consistency of slant

Writing looks so much more attractive and is more pleasant to read if the down strokes are parallel. This is easier to practise when writing a pattern such as **ululu**.

To improve the position of the body and pen hold

It is easier to concentrate on the movement and placing of body and hands while performing a repetitive pattern than when writing normally.



References

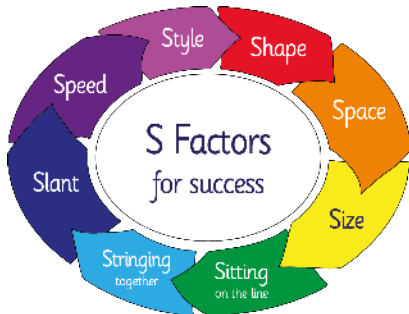
- 1 Write Dance: A Progressive Music and Movement Programme for the Development of Pre-writing and Writing Skills in Children. R. Oussoren-Voors, (2001). Paul Chapman Educational Publishing.
- 2 Penpals for Handwriting. Foundation 1 Teacher's Book. G Budgell & K Ruttle, (2003) Cambridge UP.
- 3 The Development of Handwriting Skills: A Book of Resources for Teachers. C Jarman, (2001). NAPE Enterprises.

Compiled by Gwen Dornan from an article in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.

TIPS FOR TEACHING

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'S' Factors for success



Shape, Space, Size, Sitting, Stringing, Slant, Speed, Style Useful as:

- 1 A **GUIDE TO TEACHING** handwriting and a **CURRICULUM RESOURCE** showing development of handwriting skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the National Curriculum (NC) KS1 & 2.
- 2 An **ASSESSMENT TOOL**: a checklist for quick evaluation of handwriting by a student or teacher (see p 3)

Part 1 'S' Factors as a GUIDE TO TEACHING handwriting

1

Shape

EYFS: Reception
NC: KS1

Once a child is ready to write, the first important task is to learn how to form the letters correctly – best taught as a motor skill. (This will save many problems at later stages.)

Children learn best by:

- 1 Watching the letters being made and hearing a simple patter.
- 2 Making the letters themselves in developmentally appropriate ways using just fingers – sand, paint, sandpaper, air-writing etc. – before pencils.

Letters can be put into groups or teams according to the movement needed to make them. When children learn to write a new letter, the 'lead' letter of its team will help them to start.

The 'l' team

l i u t y j

The 'c' team

c a d g q o e s f

The 'r' team

r n m h b k p

The 'zig-zag' team

z x v w y k

N.B.

These letters have exit flicks to support joining but **no entry strokes** which complicate the basic letter shapes and use diagonal lines that many young children find difficult at this stage.

A basic lower case alphabet in letter formation families

2

Space

NC: KS1

Children need to understand that spaces need to be left between words so they can be easily read.

Gradually, they need to learn to leave an appropriately-sized space – about the size of 1 or 2 letter 'o's. Lolly sticks make good spacers for beginner writers, followed by coffee stirrers if necessary later. These work much better than the traditional finger-spacing. (Fingers grow bigger while writing becomes smaller so are ineffective when the child is older. Finger spacing is also difficult for left-handers to use).

3

Sitting on the line

Once children are secure in forming letters correctly they need to know where to position them in relation to the base line.

The plan is hot.
mum has a rig.
I hid the map.

Writing on a
single base-line

4

Size

NC: KS1

... and also to their relative sizes:

Small/halfway letters/x-height letters e.g. **a, e, o, s**Tall letters/letters with ascenders e.g. **h, l, b, k** (plus all capitals)Tailed letters/letters with descenders e.g. **p, g, y, j**

A visual image helps children understand the 3 levels. Suggestions are:

- sky/grass or forest/underground
- head/body/legs

While children are learning about size it is helpful to use paper marked with a base-line and a second line above for the tops of **a, e, s, o** etc. The tall letters and tails are written at about twice that size.

(This is preferable to traditional 'tram-line' paper with 4 lines that encourages over-long ascenders and descenders).

l u c a o e s r n m v w x z

l t d f b h k

j y g f q p A B C D

Beginner writers, especially, need widely spaced lines to avoid cramping letters and all children need some flexibility in line spacing rather than 'one size fits all'.

5

Stringing together

NC: KS1 & KS2

Joined or cursive writing is the next step towards fluency.

The NC states that children 'should be taught a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation' and 'understand which letters, when adjacent to each other, are best left unjoined.'

Basic joins.

These can be taught in a series of lessons with plenty of practice:

- Diagonal (up the hill join) to 'l' team letters, both tall and short e.g.
- Horizontal (washing line join) to both tall and short letters from **o, v, w** e.g.
- Joins to 'c' team letters e.g.

c u i l

o u w h

u c n d

Practice is more fun making patterns from digraphs using felt tipped pens. (See *Tips for Teaching: Patterns* for ideas)

The NC expectation for Years 3 & 4 is that pupils will be 'using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing'. This will encourage joined writing to become automatic. Note: cursive/joined writing can have some breaks - usually after **j, y, g, x, z**. (See *Style* below)

6

Slant

NC: KS 2

A consistent slant helps the appearance of handwriting.

A slightly forward slant is a natural movement for right-handers and helps to improve fluency and speed. (See 'Slant' in Part 2)

7

Speed

NC: Y5+

Students in KS2 & 3 need to be able to write legibly and quickly.

Students need help in understanding that increasing speed changes writing: it can improve rhythm and fluency but can cause illegibility if allowed out of control. It will help students if they are encouraged to gradually build up the speed of legible writing by repeating words, then phrases, sentences & paragraphs in short regular periods of practice. (See *Tips for Teaching: Speeding up*)

8

Style

NC: Y5+

Students should be encouraged to develop a style of writing that works for them.

Students can consider changes to their writing style that could increase speed and/or fluency, e.g.

- Adding loops to **g, y, j** and possibly **f** to increase speed and flow.
- Consider if there are any joins that do not flow well and would be better left unjoined.
- Be aware that different qualities and speeds of writing are required for different tasks: personal notes, exams, course work, job applications - and adapt accordingly.

N.B. They should also be aware of occasions when an unjoined style is appropriate: for labelling diagrams/data, e-mail addresses etc. and be able to use capital letters for form-filling.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. When she had reached the

These children are developing personal styles

Part 2 'S' Factors as a CHECKLIST FOR QUICK EVALUATION of handwriting by a student or teacher (see also Part 1)

Notes

This is an effective way of giving older students (Y5+) the knowledge of elements of good handwriting and so enable them to make improvements in their own writing.

A good way to begin is for the students to write a few lines or a pangram (a sentence that contains all 26 letters) e.g.

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Test

The students look carefully at their writing, and consider each 'S' factor in turn by answering the question. They give themselves a grade for each 'S' Factor separately.

Action

The students, with the guidance of the teacher, might:

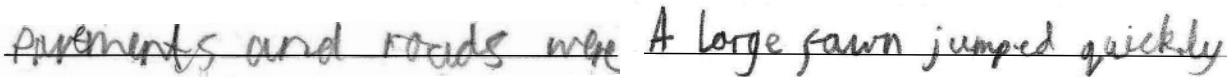
- Repeat the sentence, trying to improve their score for that particular 'S'.
- Set up some practice activities, perhaps repeating a word or phrase to improve the 'S' that needs attention. To be effective, these are best practised in short, frequent sessions.
- Gradually use the improvement in regular school writing. See also *Tips For Teaching: Helping the Older Student*



Q Do all the letters 'sit' on the writing line?

Notes

This is a good 'S' to start with as it is simple for students to understand and many can improve their performance fairly easily. Success can boost confidence and facilitate tackling perhaps more challenging questions.



This boy improved his writing immediately when he concentrated on sitting the letters on the line.



Q1 Are the letters written at the correct size and position?

Notes (see the 'Size' section in Part 1)

Many children who understand the rules write particular letters too large or small; common faults being k and s written too large and letters at the end of a word written too small.

Test

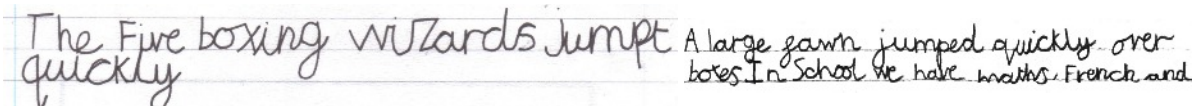
Draw a line along the top of the small letters to show the evenness of size:



Q2 Is the writing a suitable size?

Notes

Some children write minutely small, some write too large for the space so the ascenders and descenders of the letters touch the writing above and below and become less legible. Most students, given encouragement and flexible resources, e.g. paper with different line spacing, can develop an acceptable size.



This was written by the same boy on the same type of paper after encouragement to write smaller.



Q1 Are letters spaced evenly without bumping together?

Notes Letters that touch each other are difficult to read (see below). Irregularly spaced writing does not look good.



Space cont, Q2 Is the space between words consistent?

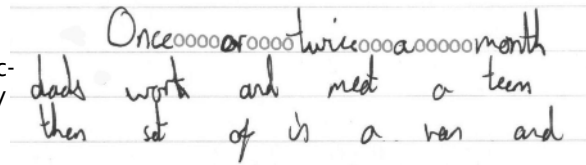
Notes

Too little or too much space between words can make reading more difficult.

A simple rule that works for any age and both left and right-handed writers is to leave enough space for 1 or 2 letter 'o' s between words.

Test

Children can test the evenness and size of their spacing by using a contrasting colour to draw in as many o's as will fit between words. (see right)



Shape

Q Are all the letters legible and formed correctly?

Notes

As writing matures some letters can lose their legibility e.g. a, g, d, o are not closed

Test

Students sometimes find it easier to spot illegible letters in someone else's writing - perhaps anonymously.

Action

Work out the ideal way to form the difficult letter, then practise it in strings - dddd - and then in words, before attempting to use the new forms in normal work.

Stringing together

Q Are most of the letters joined?

Notes

It is helpful for a student to become confident in writing in a simple joined style before making any adaptations. (see 'Stringing' and 'Style' in Part 1)

Action

Writing patterns made from single letters or pairs of joined letters can be effective ways of practising.

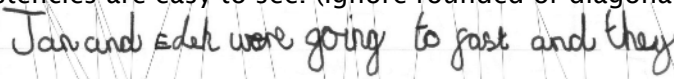


Slant

Q Is the writing slanting/sloping in a consistent direction?

Test

Use a coloured pen to make all the down lines longer so inconsistencies are easy to see. (Ignore rounded or diagonal letters)



Action

Practise writing small words using letters l, h, b, i, u, y: hill, little etc. and concentrate on parallel down strokes.

Speed

Q Is the writing fast enough for the student's needs?

Notes

Trying to speed up poor writing can create real problems. It is therefore advisable to address the first six 'S' Factors and achieve as high as standard as possible before attempting to speed up the writing. (see 'Speed' in Part 1)

Test

Students can time themselves for 1 or 2 minutes or longer when writing words or phrases.

Action

Increasing the speed of functional, legible writing requires regular practice. (See 'Speed' in Part 1)
Other ideas can be found in *Tips for Teaching: Speeding Up*.

Style

Q Is the writing consistent and fluent? (See Style in Part 1)

Other *Tips for Teaching* that might be of use: 'P' Checks, Above Year 4, Basic Steps, Speeding Up, Helping the Older Student, Patterns

Revised by Gwen Dornan From *Tips for Teaching: 'S' Rules* and articles in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association, by members of the Association.

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

'S' Rules for quick assessment

S stands for Size, Shape, Sitting, Spacing, Slant, Sequence & Speed.

These 'S' Rules provide a checklist for quick evaluation of a child's handwriting. Under these headings handwriting can be assessed by a teacher or by older children themselves to find what actions are needed to improve legibility, neatness or speed.


A good way to begin is to ask the students to write a few lines.

'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'

is a favourite sentence as it uses all the letters of the alphabet.

The writing should be looked at carefully with the points below in mind (not necessarily in this order).

Children can be given a check list and asked to give themselves a score out of 10 for each 'S'. This gives them a measure for comparison and greater control over the process of improvement.

 **Tip** Some changes e.g. 'Sitting' may be relatively easy to make and yet improve the quality of the writing noticeably; spurring enthusiasm for tackling more challenging problems.

SIZE

Are the letters written at the correct size?

The 'small' letters (a c e u etc) and the 'body' parts of b d g h k p q should all be written the same size. Letters with ascenders (b d f h k l) should ideally be written approximately twice the height of the small letters and descenders should drop a similar distance below the writing line (y g j etc).

Many children who understand these rules write particular letters too large or small; common faults being k and s written too large and letters at the end of a word written too small.

A demonstration of the evenness of letter sizing can be made by drawing a line along the top of the small letters. It is then usually possible to note the letters that are larger or smaller than the norm. (see below)



capsized and there canoe went on

Tip

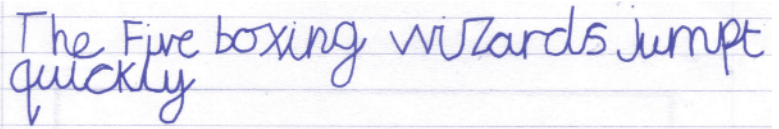
 Writing on paper with a dotted line marking the top of the small letters can be helpful.

Is the writing a suitable size?

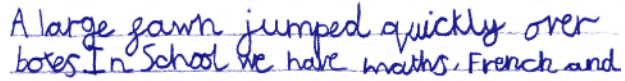
Some children write minutely small.

Some write too large for the space so the tails of the letters get mixed up with the line below.

With younger children it might be preferable to use paper with wider line spacing.



This writing is too large for the paper being used.(reduced)

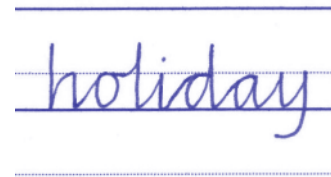


This was written by the same boy on the same type of paper after encouragement to write smaller.

Tip



Practising on paper ruled with lines at the desired size can be helpful when children are trying to write larger or smaller and it can be made on a computer to suit the needs of the children.



Writing between lines that define the height of the small letters.

SHAPE

Are all the letters legible and formed correctly?

The letters of the alphabet can be grouped according to their shape and movement patterns. For example the round letters *c a d g q* all begin in the same way and share a similar shape.

Sometimes letters that have been learned correctly lose their legibility when the writing speed increases. For example: if the letters *a d g o* are not completely closed they can be mistaken for different letters.



Are these day and bat or clay and but?

Are the shapes of the letters consistent?

For example, a rounded *o* looks better with a rounded *a*; an oval *o* needs an oval *a*.

Similarly there should be consistency in the shape of descenders, whether looped or open, wide or narrow.

See examples below



This 11 year old boy uses narrowed oval letters consistently.



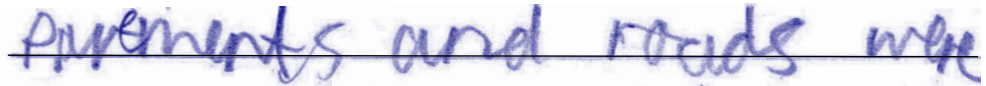
This 10 year-old girl prefers rounded letters that are equally consistent.

SITTING

Do all the letters 'sit' on the writing line?

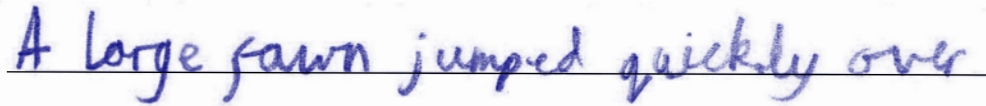
(with the 'tails' of such letters as **g** and **p** hanging below).

Attention to this makes the writing more easily legible and improves the appearance of writing, so increasing the confidence of the writer.



Apprentices and roads were

This boy improved his writing when he concentrated on sitting the letters on the line.

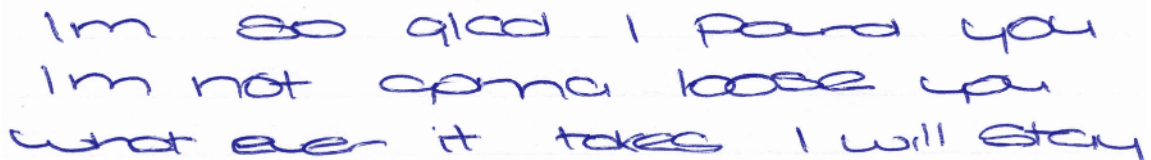


A large fawn jumped quickly over

SPACING

Is each letter spaced evenly from its neighbours?

Letters that touch each other are difficult to read (see below). Irregularly spaced writing does not look good.



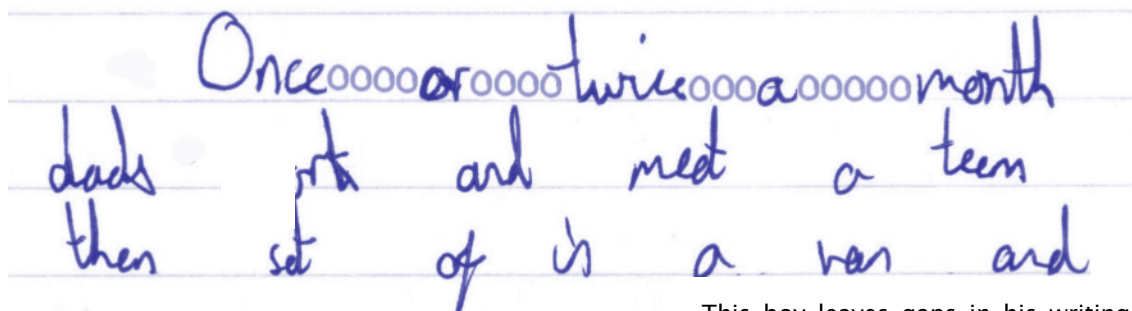
I'm so glad I found you
I'm not gonna lose you
what ever it takes I will stay

Is the space between the words consistent?

Is there too little or too much space between words? -

A simple rule that works for any age and both left and right-handed writers: leave enough space for a letter **o** between words.

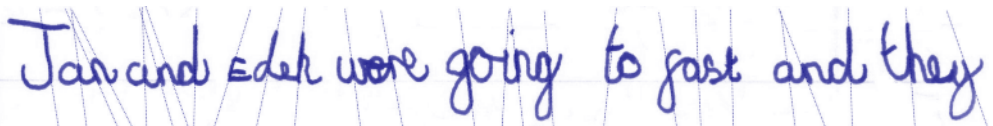
Children can test the evenness and size of their spacing by using a contrasting colour to draw in as many **o**'s as will fit between words. (see below)



Once ooooo orooooo twice ooooo a ooooo month
dads o rth and meet a teen
then set of is a van and

This boy leaves gaps in his writing that are wider than the spaces between the horizontal lines of writing.

SLANT



Is the writing slanting in a consistent direction?

A consistent slant or slope improves the appearance of a piece of writing and invites the reader to read more. Many handwriting copy styles are written with a slightly forward slant, which is a natural movement for a right-hander and facilitates speed. Some children find this difficult and prefer to write in an up-right style.

A test can be made by extending the down strokes with a contrasting pen or pencil. It is then easy to see which is the most common slant used and which letters break the pattern. (as above)

SEQUENCE OR STRING

Is the writing consistently joined?

Once joined writing has been learned children should be encouraged to use it for all their normal writing so that the practice makes it easy and familiar.

Note that some styles of joined writing have spaces after descenders and perhaps some other letters, such as **b** and **p**. These can provide a break when the hand can be moved along the page.

Advantages of joined writing

- Fewer pen lifts, therefore potentially quicker.
- The joining line helps to create even spacing.
- The physical movement of writing strings of letters together helps in establishing spelling.



This girl knows how to join her letters but does not always do so.

SPEED

Is the writing fast enough to be functional?

So many school situations require fast writing that a student is at a disadvantage if he needs longer to write than his peers. However, encouraging a child to write quickly if there are aspects of his writing that need attention will only reinforce incorrect habits. It is better to first consider the above criteria for good handwriting and remedy any problems before encouraging greater speed.

See *Tips for Teaching - Speeding Up* for suggestions.

Other *Tips for Teaching* that might be of use: *Above Year 4*

Compiled by Gwen Dornan From articles in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association by Jane Taylor and herself.

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Speeding Up

Functional handwriting needs to be legible and also to be fast enough for the needs of the child. The National Curriculum requirements from September 2014 state that children in Upper KS2 should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase its speed. Speeding up will enable pupils to be ready for the demands of secondary school with its increased quantity of writing and external examinations, some of which need to be written by hand.

Note: Some handwriting writing schemes used in schools mention the training of note-taking techniques, which is a useful skill but is not the same as being able to quickly produce an easily legible piece of writing.

The following is a compilation of ideas used by members of the NHA Committee that can help classes or individuals to achieve a fast, yet legible, style of writing. You will be able to choose the ones that best fit your students.

SPEEDY PRACTICE



Introducing speed to beginner writers

The child writes out a single letter three times carefully and then ticks the well-formed letters.

Once the letter is formed with ease and fluency the child is asked to repeat writing the letter for a given amount of time. The teacher selects an appropriate time depending on age and handwriting ability.

The child ticks all the legible letters. The score is recorded and compared with previous efforts.

A useful tip to establish whether the child has internalised both the shape and the movement patterns necessary to write the letter is to ask him/her to write the letter with his/her eyes shut.



For small groups with parental support

- Ask children to write as many 3-letter words dictated in a minute as they can and then calculate how many words they have written.
- Depending on their age set a target (e.g. 45 letters a minute for a 9 year old child).
- The child writes words dictated by the parent (such as: cat, dog, pig, dot, bed, pod, hat, mat, mud) for 1 minute a day to get the writing up to a realistic speed within a set time agreed with child and parent.

Note: using a book with lines appropriate to the child's handwriting size helps with kinaesthetic feedback.



Try forming lines of looped o's. Write them faster and faster. Then use them to make words - room, wool etc.

Practise writing the words from the weekly spelling test at speed.

Use regular speed tests built into handwriting lessons. Pupils can keep a note of their scores and beat their own targets. Write phrases such as 'thirty days has September, April, June and November,'

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|----|---|
| M | T | W | Th | F |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 10 | |

'six and three make nine.'

TOP GEAR WRITING

(for class or individual)



- Each child writes a short word a few times.
- He checks that the letter shapes and alignment are correct and makes any necessary changes.
- The word is then repeated and the speed gradually increased until the child is writing in his highest gear i.e. the fastest writing that **does not impair** its quality very much.
- The children are timed for 2 minutes, writing the word at that speed.
- They keep a record of their speed in letters per minute.

As in all these exercises, the aim is for individual improvement and not competition with classmates.

HORSE RACING (best with a single child or very small group)



- Once a group of letters have been taught (e.g. those that start with a curve to the left: **c o a g d q s**) divide the page into horizontal 'lanes', writing one letter at the left-hand side of each lane. The child chooses a name for each of these "horses" e.g. Oscar the O, Goofy the Goer, etc.
- Then, under starters orders, the child prepares to repeat the first letter along its 'lane' as fast as s/he can. Give the signal to go and time the letters as they race across the page. The time is recorded in seconds at the right hand end of each line.
- This is repeated with each of the letters in question. When all have been raced look at the time scores and decide the winner. He then gets the winner's rosette (i.e. a circle with curves drawn by the child all the way round). Horses are disqualified from the race if the letter is wrongly formed or begins with the wrong movement etc.
- This can be repeated on several occasions and comparisons made both between letters and between occasions.

N.B. It is important to stress that you are not expecting the child to write neatly or write on the line or to be concerned with any aspect of writing except making the correct movement and going as fast as possible between the lines.





Class or group activity

- Children choose or are given books to copy from. These should all be different, clearly printed and without excessively long words.
- The children copy from the book legibly as fast as they can for a timed period of 2 minutes (time can be increased according to age and experience).
- Each child then exchanges books with a partner and all read the text they have been given, putting a ring round any word that is not legible.
- The books are returned and each child records the number of legible words written in a chart at the back of his book.
- This activity can be repeated regularly as each child works to increase his own personal writing speed.

Timed test to improve personal best performance (PB)

The child writes out the letters of the alphabet legibly and in sequential order in a given amount of time. The teacher selects an appropriate time depending on age and handwriting ability.

The child ticks all the legible letters. The score is recorded and compared with previous effort. This task should be repeated if there are several poorly formed letters as the child is obviously writing too fast.

If one or two letters are poorly formed then the child can be asked to practise those letters separately by writing out the letter three times and ticking the well-formed letters.

Scribbles and handwriting patterns

Free scribbling or patterns repeating particular letters or basic shapes can be written more freely than complete words and help to develop speed.

For more information on using patterns see *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*

SPEEDY TIPS

For younger children:

Teach the following words in cursive script:

First 12 key words
a, and, he, in, is, it,
that, the, to, was

Next 20 words
all, as, at, be, but, are,
for, had, have, him, his,
not, one, said, so, they,
we, with, you, on

Joined writing has few pen lifts and so is quick to write. Once children are accustomed to joined writing expect them to use it for all everyday handwritten work, including drafting.

Older children might like to loop the descenders of the letters **g, j, y** to avoid a pen lift.

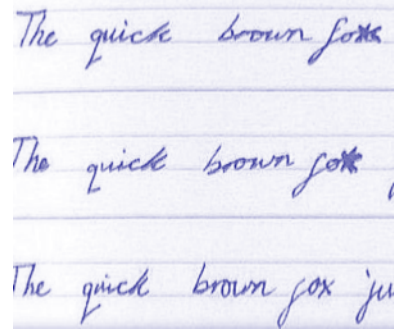
Crossing **t** and dotting **i & j** at the end of writing a word is quicker than breaking off in the middle of the word.

LITTLE AND OFTEN WORKS

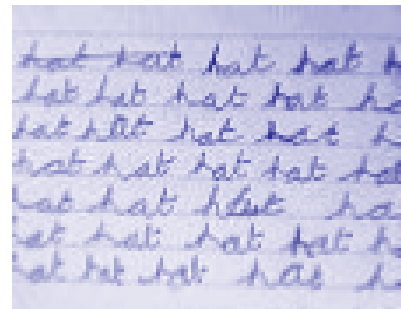
- Three Y5 children wrote 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' as many times as they could for 2 minutes and recorded the time they took.
- They practised for 5 minutes a day (using the Top Gear Exercise)
- They repeated the Quick Brown Fox test and all increased their writing speed.



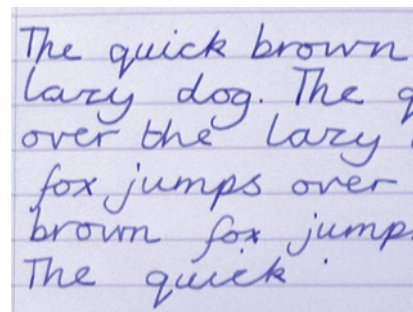
Alex L practised 5 minutes every day for a week and increased her writing speed from 62 letters per minute to 79.



Hugh practised 5 minutes most days for a week and increased his writing speed from 70 letters per minute to 81.



Alex C practised 5 minutes most days for 2 weeks and increased her writing speed from 74 letters per minute to 84.



NB Before encouraging children to write more quickly, it is essential that they can form their letters correctly and write legibly.

Additionally, they are likely to be more successful at writing quickly if they know how to join their letters together.

This article was first published in *Handwriting Today 2007*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association, with contributions from Gwen Dornan, Catherine Elsey, Jessica Falconer, Beverly Scheib, Jane Taylor, Suzanne Tibertius and Angela Webb.

Other **Tips for Teaching** that might be useful: *Basic Steps, Patterns, 'S' Rules, Above Year 4*

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Key-boarding

Touch-typing and Effective Use of Keyboards in Class

Digital communication is so important in 21C that the effective use of a keyboard is an essential educational tool for all children. For those with SEND or handwriting difficulties typing can provide an alternative to handwriting. Evidence suggests that to be able to type effectively all children should receive explicit keyboard instruction from the start.

The benefits of keyboarding:

- Provides consistency
- Produces legible script
- May be easier to learn than handwriting for those with handwriting difficulties
- Is a necessary skill for any student.

The advantages of touch-typing over other methods of keyboarding:

- Touch-typing uses all the fingers, whilst looking at the screen or speaker (creative), or visual source (copying). Touch-typists never look at the keyboard.
- Reduces burden on working memory allowing brain to process higher-order writing skills (such as composing).
- Reduces likelihood of physical discomfort (such as head or neck aches due to changing position).
- Produces faster speeds than other typing methods.
- Spotting spelling errors is easier as the typist looks at the screen.

When is the best time to learn?

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Below 8 years old | The child is likely to be physically and emotionally immature |
| 8 - 9 years old | Still a little early but useful for those with severe handwriting problems or other SEND issues. |
| 10 - 11 years old | The best time from a motor learning point of view. It also prepares a child for secondary school when keyboards are used more frequently and where bad habits could hinder the development of speed. |

A Key Question:

Is it necessary to use a commercially produced programme?

Answer:

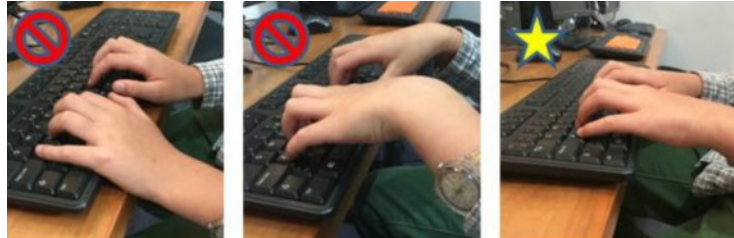
Not if certain key principles are observed (see overleaf)



It is important to sit correctly to reduce the risk of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)

Symptoms include: pain, aching, cramp or tenderness, stiffness, tingling, numbness, weakness in upper body (forearm, elbow, wrist, hands, neck and shoulders)

Recommended Body and Finger Position for Typing



Fingers, hand, wrist and arm should all be in a line. Curl the fingers onto the keyboard.

- Sit up straight with the lower back supported and the feet flat on the floor.
- Sit with shoulders relaxed and upper arms hanging straight down.
- Ensure elbows don't stick out and are slightly higher than the wrists.

Tip



Sit at the keyboard with the letter B opposite your tummy button.

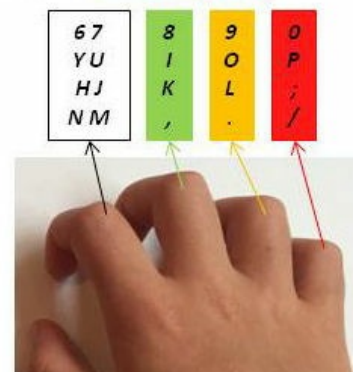
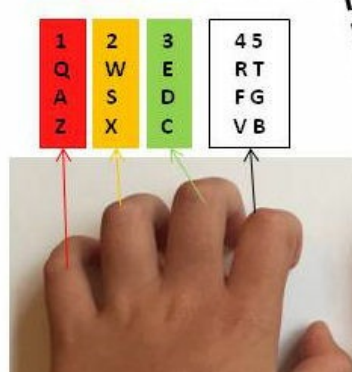
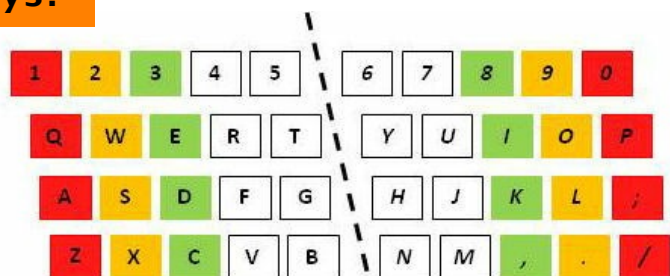
Which Fingers? Which Keys?

To touch-type effectively the learner needs to be able to locate the keys without looking at them.

Tip



F and **J** have a raised mark so the typist can feel where the index fingers rest.



Use either thumb for the space bar

Tip



Hide the alphabet and common punctuation keys by:

- blank stickers
- a cover over the whole keyboard
- Tippexing out the keys

How to learn to touch-type:

left hand right hand

1. Locate the home keys (**asdf** - **jkl;**). Each finger has its own 'home' e.g. the left index finger rests on **f** and moves across to **g**, up to **r** & **t**, higher up to **4** & **5**, and down to **v** & **b**. Only the index fingers type two keys in each row.
2. Practise using the keys in your chosen order (see below) but first learn the vowels in each group.
3. Type new keys 7 times saying the letters out loud. Bring your finger back to its home key after each set e.g. 'eee home eee home eee etc.
4. Build up to typing words e.g. red red red red red red. Always return to the home key after each word.
5. Repeat already-learned keys to consolidate e.g. reg red fed led
6. Progress to new letters only when fully secure with those already learned.
7. Practise 10 -15 minutes every day for the first 6 weeks.
8. Once the student is familiar with the alphabet, progress to copying sentences, then paragraphs and longer passages.

Order of learning: left hand right hand:

By Row:

| | | |
|--------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Home Row | a s d f g | h j k l ; |
| Top Row | q w e r t | y u i o p |
| Bottom Row | z x c v b | n m , . / |
| Very Top Row | 1 2 3 4 5 | 6 7 8 9 0 - = |

Some prefer to use a phonics order:

| | |
|-------|-------------------------|
| Set 1 | s a t p |
| Set 2 | i n m d |
| Set 3 | g o c k |
| Set 4 | ck e u r |
| Set 5 | h b f ff l ll ss |
| Set 6 | j v w x |
| Set 7 | y z zz qu |

Tip



A multi-sensory approach can help:

VISUAL



AUDITORY



KINAESTHETIC



Tip

Invent your own mnemonics e.g.



| | |
|------------|--|
| Home row | ASDFGH - A dults S ay D on't F orget G ood H ands |
| Middle row | RT - R each up for R and T iptoe across for T |
| Bottom row | MN - N is nearer the G ood H ands; M is miles away |

This method takes time to teach and practice is essential to consolidate the skill. Advantages:

- Promotes accuracy (no requirement for speed too early)
- Builds typing stamina (typing sentences, paragraphs and pages)
- Inexpensive!

A few suggestions:

Always monitor learners carefully – unsupervised children may develop bad habits.

Commercially-available software can be used to supplement as long as:

- Children with SEND use real words straight away. (*sequences such as asasdf are confusing*)
- Typing games are only used after the keyboard has been securely learned.
- The speeds set for games are not too high for the student's ability. (*The temptation to look at the fingers in order to win the game is too great!*).
- The student does not only use typing games for practice as this does not increase typing stamina and may reduce the ability to type text at speed over a long period of time. See *Speed Building* overleaf).

Tip



Encourage and reward progress with stars/stickers or whatever is appropriate for the individual.

Handy tips for the student

- Take your whole hand off for **Enter** and **Delete** buttons and return to home row to promote speed.
- Learn to use the **Full Stop** and **Shifts** keys early so you can type full sentences:
Full stop – lift the little finger out of the way or pull the whole hand down to the bottom row.
Shift keys – Instead of the **Caps Lock** use the opposite **Shift** to the letter to be written as a capital.
- Learn these common symbols once you have learned the alphabet: ! “ ; : () ‘ / @ £
(Note: The apostrophe and speech marks are swapped on Mac and PCs.)
- Type real words and realistic sentences.

Speed building

- Practise copy (not creative) type.
- Warm up with alphabet/keyboard drills e.g. zaq1 xsw2 cde3 vfr4 bgt5 nhy6 mju7 ,ki8 etc.
- Practise pangrams that use all letters of the alphabet: e.g. “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”.
- Rhythm – use a metronome and increase its speed each day.
- Type from a foreign language – to help focus and build rhythm.
- Do speed games and typing stamina exercises: 1 minute races and 10 minute typing sessions.

Tip



Every time you touch the mouse or mouse pad you slow down: use these keyboard short cuts

- Save/Save As
- Print (doc. and pages)
- Undo last action
- Bold/Italics/Underline
- Spell check and Thesaurus
- Jump: word by word/paragraph/page
- Margins: Left/Right/Centre/Fully Adjust
- Highlight: word/line/paragraph/document
- Document: Beginning/End
- Line: Beginning/End

[Google ‘Key-board Shortcuts + (Mac/Windows 7’ etc.)’ to find command.]

Tip



Practise little and often

Three vital questions:

Q How do you know you are ready to use a keyboard for school work?

A *When you can copy type for 5 minutes, at 30 wpm, with 90% accuracy on every row (including basic punctuation); or copy type twice as fast as your creative writing speed.*

Q How long does it take to learn? – Do you have enough time to build speed?

A *Depends on age/ability (cognitive and physical). On average, learning the keyboard takes about 8 hours and building speed needs an additional half a term. More time may be needed for those with SEND.*

Q What about using a laptop in class?

A The following need consideration:

- *security (of both data and device),*
- *where to print and charge,*
- *back-up of files,*

From an article by Amanda McLeod, www.amandamcleod.org

TIPS FOR TEACHING

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Handwriting Difficulties

Identifying difficulties early and providing assistance will greatly enhance the child's ability to develop handwriting skills and enjoyment of writing.

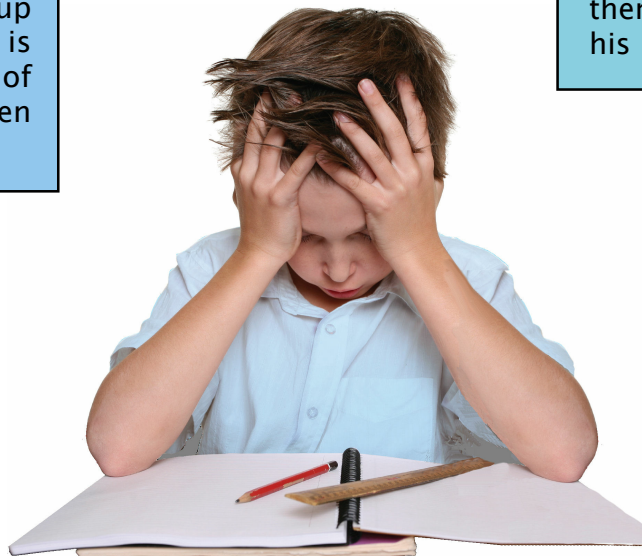
This leaflet provides a checklist of indicators that a child is finding handwriting difficult and suggestions of ways to help.

If this boy does not receive help he is likely to:

struggle to keep up at school as there is still a great deal of school work written by hand;

have low self esteem that will affect all aspects of his life;

be reluctant to tackle writing tasks and therefore not fulfil his full potential.



He can be helped if:

his particular difficulties are recognised so that action taken to address them can be tailored to his needs;

his difficulties are addressed as early as possible as changing habits is more difficult at a later stage;

his ability and stage of maturity are taken into consideration when planning intervention so that he is not being asked to perform tasks for which he is not ready.

Not all causes of difficulty are addressed in this Tips sheet, especially those originating from visual and medical conditions, but the common causes are listed together with suggested approaches for intervention.

Why is the child struggling?

Q Is s/he developmentally ready to write?

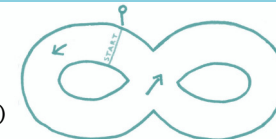
- Can s/he form an oblique cross?
(It should have diagonal lines - not +)
- Is hand dominance established? Check by placing a pencil in a neutral position in front of him/her and note which hand is used to pick it up. Repeat regularly.



What can help?

A Develop pre-writing skills (see p 4)

- draw 'lazy 8' - perhaps as race tracks
- other pre-writing patterns (see *Tips for Teaching* - Patterns)
- Most children have established dominance before they start school. If a child of ~6 years old is still unsure which hand to write with consult a paediatric occupational therapist.



Q Does the child sit correctly for writing?

- Can s/he sit with good posture?
- Is the table is the correct height?
- Does s/he fidget on the chair?

A Encourage good sitting posture

- Feet should be flat on the floor and knees at 90°
- Hips should be at the back of the chair
- S/he should sit 'square on' to the desk
- Ideally the table should be 4 cm higher than the child's elbow
- Give verbal prompts to correct bad posture
- Introduce a rigid/air-filled wedge cushion to encourage active sitting.*



Q Does the child hold a pencil efficiently?


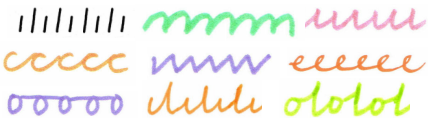
- Is there pain in the hand when writing?
- Does s/he get tired when writing for a period and/or the quality of the writing deteriorate greatly?
- Can s/he control and manipulate the pen effectively?
- Is there a good space between the tips of his/her fingers and the pencil point?

(see *Tips for Teaching* - 'Writing Grip' for further detail)

A Encourage an efficient pencil grasp

- Encourage the child to pinch the pencil with thumb and first finger, with the middle finger behind (making a dynamic tripod) with an open and stable thumb web space.
- Use an adaptive grip - There are a variety of grips that can be put on a pencil to encourage a tripod hold and/or keep the fingers further from the point. Some elastics help position the pen/cil in the web space and even a rubber band on the pencil can keep the fingers away from the point. There are also pens designed to guide the fingers into a tripod grip. Trial which the s/he finds most effective and is happy to use. *



| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Q Does the child maintain a stable wrist?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the writing hand kept below the writing line? (not hooked) Are the wrist and forearm in contact with the writing surface - and the wrist 'stepping along' when writing? Is the pen is angled towards the shoulder? | <p>A Encourage wrist stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put a sticker on the side of the hand below the little finger that should be kept hidden. Can s/he make it impossible for a ruler to be slipped under their forearm when writing? Try writing on a sloping surface. (An angle of ~20° is about right).* |
| <p>Q Is the paper positioned well?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can s/he see the pencil point when writing? Is there a triangular space between the upper arm and the side of the child's body? | <p>A Encourage correct paper position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angle the paper anti-clockwise by ~35° for right-handers Angle the paper clockwise by ~35° for left-handers Position paper slightly to the right for right-handers Position paper slightly to the left for left-handers  |
| <p>Q Can the child see what is being written?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a difficulty more commonly experienced by left-handers and is a big disadvantage when writing creatively and in spelling correctly. Does the writing often get smudged?* | <p>A Help to adjust writing position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with him/her to find a way of holding the paper and tool that is comfortable and enables them to see the words they have just written. This might mean adapting some of the conventional rules about paper position and pen hold. As above and/or trial pens that do not smudge easily* |
| <p>Q Is the child using undue pressure on the pencil or paper?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for white knuckles. Does the back of the written paper feel bumpy? Does s/he feel pain in the writing arm or neck? | <p>A Encourage light pressure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give verbal prompts about pressure on the pen Write on sheets of paper interleaved with carbon paper* and challenge him/her to make marks on fewer sheets Use a light-up pen as a training tool*. It should flicker as the child writes; on all the time - too heavy, off all the time - too light. |
| <p>Q Can the child make flowing movements?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch as s/he writes. | <p>A Encourage fluency*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try lazy 8s (as above) make use of patterns and scribbles <p>(see <i>Tips for Teaching - Patterns</i>)</p>  |

* Information about suppliers on p4

Suppliers - some suggestions

Development of pre-writing skills

Several programmes are marketed to help with physical motor co-ordination essential for the fine pencil control needed for handwriting e.g.

Start Write, Stay Write!; *Write Dance* and *Callirobics* from www.specialdirect.com

Write from the Start by Ion Teodorescu and Lois Addy

Mark-making and Creativity, Foundation 1 Teacher's Book, Penpals for Handwriting. CUP

Sitting correctly and Stability

Table and chairs – several educational and specialist suppliers market varying height tables and chairs for optimal writing posture e.g. www.backinaction.co.uk

Support cushions - Movin' Sit from ldalearning.com and above.

Pen/pencil hold

Adaptive grips – many different designs are available for adapting standard pencils. It is useful to have a variety of different designs available as the design that works for one child will not necessarily work for another. There is a wide selection on, for example, www.specialdirect.com; www.taskmasteronline.co.uk

Specialised pens – many different designs are available, some with non-slip grips, and shaped grips for left and right-handers such as Stabilo 'Easy' range and Pelikan Griffix pens and pencils. Different types can help individuals depending on the weight, width of the barrel, type of tip, whether fine-liner, gel pen etc. Trialling is the best approach for finding which work best for an individual.

Wrist stability

Sloping boards – make at home or purchase from several suppliers but check the angle before purchasing. www.backinaction.com www.specialdirect.com

'Write Angle' from philipandtacey.co.uk 'Writestart Desktop' from ldalearning.com

Non-slip surface – Dycem from Nottingham Rehab Supplies: www.nrs-uk.co.uk

Non-Smudging pens

There is a wide variety of pens which smudge very little. E.g. Edding Easy Writer, Stabilo Easy pens, Manuscript handwriting pen, Berol fineline - and many gel pens.

Pressure on the paper

Carbon paper available from Ryman's stationery shops or Mi5 paper from www.specialdirect.com

Light -up pens - ldalearning.com www.sensetoys.com

Encouraging fluency

Write Dance and *Write from the Start* (see above)

Further reading:

Handwriting Pocketbook. Julie Bennett, www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk

Handwriting, the way to teach it. Rosemary Sassoon (2003) Paul Chapman publishing.

Start Write, Stay Write! By Alison Harris and Janet Taylor (see above)

Writing Left-handed published by NHA www.nha-handwriting.org.uk

Tips for Teaching by NHA - *Patterns, Writing Grip*

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Writing Grip

Children hold their pens and pencils in a number of different ways and some grips tend to arouse adult concern. Important considerations are:

Children need to have a stable hold of the tool to control it effectively but also need to maintain freedom of movement.

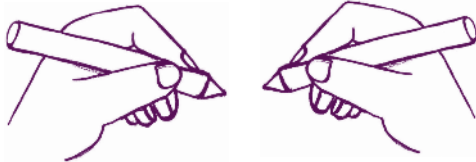
Research evidence that an odd pen-hold affects legibility or speed is inconclusive.

However, an association with pain, fatigue and discomfort is often reported so encouraging a good grip from the outset is important.

Some grips for both stability and freedom of movement

These all use 3 digits only and allow flexible movements to be made with a minimum amount of muscular effort. Most of the movements when writing are made with the fingers whilst the whole hand and wrist mainly move horizontally along the writing line.

1



The pencil is held between thumb and first finger with the middle finger placed behind for support. This provides a good balance of stability and freedom of movement (*dynamic tripod*).

2



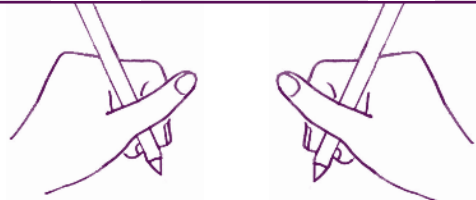
The pencil is held between the forefinger and middle finger with the thumb placed underneath for support. This allows the tool to be held more upright which better suits some modern pens (*alternative tripod*).

3



Some children place their middle finger on the tool instead of holding it underneath. This adds a little more stability but does limit freedom of movement (*static tripod*).

4



This grip is controversial. Some researchers claim it is equal in terms of control, speed and legibility but others suggest it does limit the range of movement and fine motor control (*lateral tripod*).

Ideally, children should be encouraged to develop a tripod grip in their early years of writing.



Tip A child who is unable to pick up objects in a pincer grip between forefinger and thumb is not ready to use a dynamic tripod grip.

Tips for making a dynamic tripod grip

Quack quack - making the dynamic tripod

- Put the pencil on the table pointing to the right (if R-handed) or left (if L-handed).
- Make a 'duck beak' with thumb and fore finger.
- Pick up the tool with the 'beak'.
- Allow the pencil end to flick back so it sits in the groove between thumb and forefinger - or gently steer it with the other hand.
- Put the middle finger underneath.

Six Pencil Game

Choose 6 pencils.

- Pick one up - perhaps using the 'quack quack' sequence, or a modification for an older child.
- Check the grip is correct.
- Draw a smiley face.
- Repeat for each pencil in turn.

Frog on a log -

checking the dynamic tripod

The frog's eyes are the tips of the thumb and forefinger as they grasp the pencil and the 'log' is the middle finger sitting underneath.

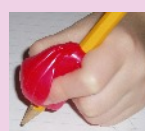
Special tools that can help



Shaped or moulded pencil grips and pens with shaped grips

There is a wide range of commercially available grips that can be slid onto a pencil.* Most encourage a tripod grip, some position the fingers away from the pencil point, some direct the shaft of the pencil into the web space.

Many pens have integral shaped grips for the same purpose. Allow a child to trial a number of different ones before deciding which suits best.



Very short pencils, chinks & crayons



They encourage the use of a 3-fingered grip.

A woolly pompom held in the hand

This makes it difficult to hold the pencil with more than 3 digits.



Some less efficient grips

These grips have either: additional fingers on the tool; it is held too tightly and/or the fingers are placed very close to the point. They definitely limit the range of movement of the fingers so that more of the movements needed for writing have to be made with the wrist and the whole hand. This can lead to fatigue and discomfort especially when there is need to write quickly or for long periods of time.

5



There are a number of variations that use 4 or even 5 fingers to control the tool.

6



The 'thumb wrapper'- the thumb is wrapped over the forefinger.

7



The thumb is tucked under the forefinger.

8



This stab grip is commonly used by very young children.

* See p 4 for suppliers

Changing a grip?

Changing an established grip needs to be approached with care as the change will almost certainly involve much practice and motivation.

A younger child may find it easier to use a new grip. Once a grip is well established a change should be considered only if the child is experiencing significant difficulty : illegibility, pain, fatigue, slowness or an impaired view of what is being written.

Some special cases:

Children with a physical difficulty that affects their coordination or strength (e.g. cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, hypermobility). A conventional grip may not be the best for them. Consult an occupational or physio-therapist for advice.



Left-handers with an extreme hook that is causing pain. They can be encouraged to either make the 'hook' less extreme by placing the forearm parallel to the writing line - or keep their hands below the line.

Children who missed out early teaching. Some children adopt a grip which gave them stability early on but which limits their fluency when they need to write faster. These children may be keen to work on a new pen hold.

Should you decide to attempt a grip change:

- Work with the child to find the best grip for him or her. The ideal is some form of tripod grip but sometimes a compromise has to be made between the ideal and what can realistically be achieved.
- Explain, demonstrate and allow the child to experience, perhaps by writing in the air, the advantages of the new grip you are recommending and so appreciate the additional freedom of movement/uncluttered view of the writing/comfort the new grip could give.
- Encourage and praise effort - changing well-established habits is not easy.
- Be aware that handwriting quality may deteriorate for a time until the new grip is firmly established.

Additional ideas to make writing easier and see p4

Move the paper to the right (if R-handed) or the left (if L-handed)

Change how upright the pen is held.

Use an angled writing surface* - perhaps with a non-slip surface*

This can help to promote a more efficient grasp and wrist position. There are commercially available writing slopes or they can easily be made. Alternatively use a lever arch file. The angle of slope is usually between 15-22°. Writing, drawing and painting on sloped or vertical easels, chalkboards or white boards also helps to promote a functional position.

Keep the side of the hand resting on the paper

Put a sticker/mark below the little finger. Can the child keep it hidden?

Change the writing tool

Offer a fatter/thinner/ heavier/ shorter pen/cil, or with a rough or rubberised surface - whichever the child prefers.

Tip Try the new grip for 2 weeks



Perhaps start by drawing, doodling and scribbling with the new grip before writing. If children have not been able to change the grip after a couple of weeks of genuine effort it is unlikely that they will succeed.

* See p 4 for suppliers

Taking the pressure off

Discomfort and fatigue can be the result of holding the tool too tightly. Reducing this pressure can be helpful and might not be as difficult as changing the grip.

Tip



Look out for the curved fore-finger. If accompanied by a white knuckle this probably means the tool is being held very tightly.



Make sure the pupil knows about holding the pen tightly and loosely:

What does it feel like when squeezing a pen or pencil as tightly as possible, then with the fingers loosened? Practise a bit, saying "loose" and "tight" as s/he holds the tool appropriately.

Some children like to imagine that the tool is animate and can feel pressure (like a cat's tail). They might 'join' the imaginary SPCPP (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Pens and Pencils).

Reduce pressure on the paper:

- Use a padded writing surface
- Put layers of carbon paper beneath so the child can check how many layers the writing shows through.
- Feel the back of the paper for bumps after writing.

Scribbling can loosen tension.

Write with a soft pencil.

Try soft rubber or foam grips*.

Use a mechanical lead pencil - it will break if pressed too hard.

Leave about 2 cm between the finger tips and the pen point

Holding the fingers close to the point limits their freedom of movement and can hide the words just written.

- An elastic band can be wrapped around a pencil just below where the fingers should be positioned.
- Some specialised grips position the fingers away from the point.*
- Many pens have shaped barrels to site the fingers in a good position.*

Tip



This is especially important for left-handers as it helps to keep the writing visible.

Suppliers - a few suggestions but there are many more:

Pencil Grips - www.specialdirect.com and www.taskmasteronline.co.uk
dexball aid for severely handicapped - www.handyhealthcare.co.uk -

Left-handers - www.anythingleft-handed.co.uk, www.lefthand-education.co.uk
Writing left-handed published by NHA www.nha-handwriting.org.uk

Sloped Boards - www.backinaction.com

Carbon paper - Ryman stationers

Dycem - non-slip surface - www.nrs-uk.co.uk www.idalearning.com

Specialist pens - shaped grips: Stabilo Easy pens, Pelikan Griffix range, Lamy ABC and other fountain pens for students. Non-smudge: Edding Easy writer

Adapted from an article by Carolyn Dunford in *Handwriting Today* 2009, the journal of the NHA. Edited by Gwen Dornan with contributions from Sheila Henderson.

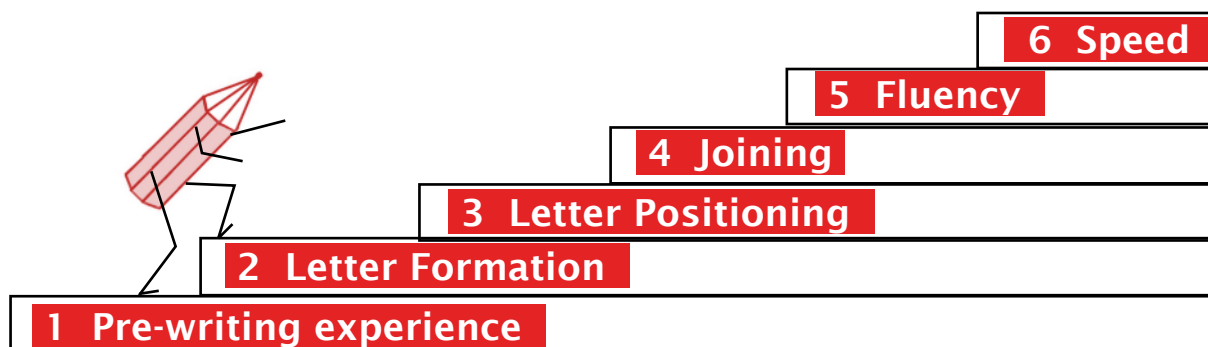
TIPS FOR TEACHING

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Basic Steps



Children need to be able to write legibly, neatly, comfortably and quickly. Teaching handwriting to the majority of children is not difficult but there are certain stages that are crucial to successful learning:

Step 1 Pre-writing experience

To develop good handwriting a child needs strength and stability in his body. This **gross motor control** can be developed in the playground and in PE sessions, for example, crawling, jumping, running, hopping, arm circling, ball skills.



Writing involves using a tool to make small, controlled movements. This **fine motor control** can be developed by activities such as cutting, threading, modelling, hammering, finger rhymes, sorting small objects, sticking, pattern-making & tracing.



A child needs to have developed **perceptual skills** before he can write. Working with shapes, objects in different sizes and sorting can assist this development.



Sets of activities to prepare children for writing are detailed in *Mark-making and Creativity*, CUP¹
See p4 for details

Tip



Asking a child to hold a pencil properly and form letters before he is sufficiently mature to succeed is building in failure from the start.

★ When a child is writing attention should be given to his comfort - the furniture, body position and ease of movement - and encouraged to hold his pencil in a way that gives both control and flexibility.

Step 2 Letter Formation

In British schools the lower case alphabet is usually taught before the capital alphabet. How to form each letter can be taught at the same time as children are introduced to the letter's shape and sound.

A visual image and a verbal description helps a child to remember the movements necessary to form letters. There are many different images that can be used and your school may have its own style.

One set of images recommended by the Department of Education groups the letters according to the movement made when forming them².

Each 'family' has a leading letter:

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| l - long ladder | c - curly caterpillar |
| r - one-armed robot | z - zig-zag monster |



Tip

The letters need not be taught in the order given here but each new letter needs to be related to its group e.g. 'q' is a curly caterpillar letter and 'm' a one-armed robot letter.

Some schools teach young children to begin each letter from the base line. This means that the starting point is very easy to remember but it may complicate the visual image of some of the letters and also result in the need for some relearning when the child begins to join letters together. (Any letter joined from o, r, v, w - and possibly f - does not start from the base-line). Requiring children to relearn an established movement pattern is not good practice.



Tip

Teaching young children how letters are formed does not necessarily mean expecting them to write with pens or pencils. The first shapes are best made in the air/sand/foam/paint /on the back of another child etc. where fine control is not required.



Always use the correct way of making each letter when writing in front of children.



Watch young children writing to make sure they use the correct movements.



Young children will be accustomed to using some capital letters when writing their names. The whole capital alphabet needs to be taught after the lower case letters are familiar. Capital letters are all the same height and as they are not intended to be joined to other letters the order of strokes is not as important.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Step 3 Letter Positioning

Alignment

In written English letters need to be aligned in a conventional way to be easily read. Children need to understand that the 'body' of each letter sits on a line (like cats on a wall), some letters have sticks (or ascenders) that are taller and some have tails (or descenders) that drop below the writing line.

There are many visual images to help children understand this. One suggestion by Kath Balcombe³ uses the sky, forest and underground. Some letters such as **a e o s** live only in the forest but others stretch into the sky (**b d**) and others (**g p**) grow into the ground.

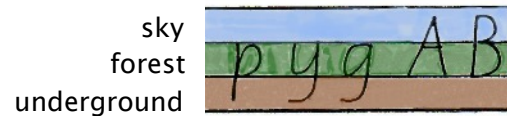




Diagram using Kath Balcombe's idea

 **Tip** Giving children lined paper with a solid line for the letters to sit on and a dotted or coloured line to mark the tops of the small letters can be useful.

Spacing

Children need to understand that letters in a word should be evenly spaced. In addition there needs to be sufficient space between each word and the next.

 **Tip** Recommending that small children use their finger as a spacer between words is not a good idea as it is impossible for left-handers and becomes inappropriate when children are older and their writing becomes smaller. A more reliable rule is to leave enough space for a letter 'o' and/or supply a slip of card as a spacer.

Step 4 Joining

A child who writes correctly-formed letters with confidence is usually ready to learn how to join them together.

There are three ways of teaching children joined writing:

1 Pattern making. Children who have plenty of experience making writing patterns, both standard handwriting patterns and those made from linking pairs of letters (eg. **cl**, **wh**), will find that they have all the skills necessary for joined writing and little additional teaching is necessary.

(see *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*)

clclclcl whwhwhwh

2 Groups of letters. A blend of letters being taught in a phonics lesson can be joined together when demonstrated by the teacher and practised by the children in the air or on small whiteboards. (Note that some letter combinations are easier to join than others.) The children who are confident can be encouraged to use the joins in free writing.

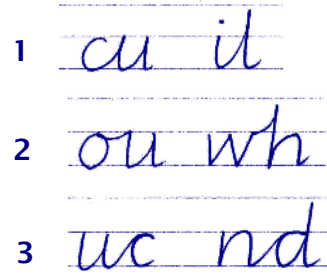
(Note: This would necessitate using a mixture of joined and separate letters for a time. See below)

cool cat play time

3 Basic joins.

These can be taught in a series of lessons with plenty of practice:

1. Diagonal (up the hill join) to a long ladder letter, both tall and short (e.g. **c-u**, **i-l**)
2. Horizontal (washing line join) to both tall and short letters (e.g. **o-u**, **w-h**)
3. Joins to curly caterpillar letters (e.g. **u-c**, **n-d**)



Step 5 Fluency

Steps 5 and 6 are often overlooked because it is thought that children who have mastered Step 4 are able to write and need no further help. (This is like allowing children who have just learned to control a two-wheeled bicycle to ride along a busy road.)

Children are expected to write in greater quantity and at greater speed as they grow older and will need functional handwriting that will allow them to do this. They need to be able to write automatically so that their attention can be given to the content of their writing (just as most people can walk without thinking).

Fluency can be developed by:

using joined writing in all situations so it becomes a familiar skill. (except for presentation, labelling etc.)

using handwriting patterns.
See *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*

helping students to assess their own writing and monitor their progress. (see *Tips for Teaching - 'S' Rules & Above Y4*)

Step 6 Speed



When students concentrate on writing quickly, as in an exam, legibility often suffers. Most children need to:

understand that different tasks require different levels of speed and legibility. E.g. for personal notes speed is usually important and legibility less so; work for display requires a high level of legibility and neatness but speed is less important.

develop a style of writing that is both legible and speedy. This can be done by practice sessions and the children encouraged to measure the speed of their writing (see *Tips for Teaching - Speeding Up*)

References:

1. *Mark-making and Creativity*, Foundation 1 Teacher's Book, Penpals for Handwriting. CUP
2. *Developing Early Writing*, Section 3. DfEE 0055/2001 (obtainable free. Type the ref. in Google)
3. Kath Balcombe Educational Resources www.kber.co.uk

Further reading:

Handwriting. The way to teach it. Rosemary Sassoon, (2003) Paul Chapman Publishing, London
Handwriting Pocketbook. Julie Bennett, Teachers' Pocketbooks. www.teacherspocketbooks.co.uk
Tips for Teaching by NHA - *Above Y4, Patterns, Speeding Up, 'S' Rules*
Getting Ready to Write. Alistair Bryce-Clegg, (2013) Featherstone, imprint of Bloomsbury plc

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Promoting good practice

Above Year 4

Children in British schools usually learn to form the letters and then to join them together in Key Stage 1. It is in the Upper Key Stage 2 that their skills are developed further so that *'by the end of Y6 writing should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the general demands of the curriculum in Y7'* (National Curriculum for England implemented September 2014)

The following are suggestions for teachers of Upper Juniors and older to use with their students.

Speed up good writing

Hold short class sessions that encourage quicker writing. The aim is to speed up good legible writing.

See *Tips for Teaching - Speeding Up*



Encourage Individual Styles

At the beginning of Y5 pupils should have been using joined writing in their normal work since Y3. (from Sept 2014 if not before)

They will then be ready to consider possible small adjustments to their writing to increase speed and or fluency eg making loops to *g, y, j* or not joining from a particular letter that is impeding flowing writing. Discuss these possibilities with the class in handwriting sessions and encourage individual decision-making.

Show the group how to recognise good handwriting

There is a useful set of 'S' Rules that children can use to find out how to improve their writing. They can check if their writing is consistent in Size, Shape, Slant, Spacing and whether it Sits correctly on the line.

(see *Tips for Teaching - 'S' Rules*)

A whole class can write out a sentence and give themselves a score for each 'S' in turn. They can then work to improve the score on any aspects that need improvement.

A few points:


- This might require a few short class sessions.
- Good writers with little to improve can work on increasing their writing Speed.
- The children may need help in recognising good letter Shapes. This can be done by discussing groups of letters e.g. *a d g q* that are made similarly.

★ *Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say.*

National Curriculum implemented Sept 2014)

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

 **Tip** Make it clear that handwriting skills are as important as spelling and punctuation. Notice and praise efforts to improve the quality of writing in all normal work.

Set specific tasks

To help a group or individual.
E.g. "This week concentrate on making sure you close the tops of the letters *a, g, d, q*".

Challenge the class

Have a weekly challenge.
E.g. "Can you write a line of writing so that the body of every letter sits on the line?" – The challenge can be chosen to suit the particular group.

Sail the zesty siren who grabbed pay from the quick

Think about pens

A change of pen can work wonders for writing.

Consider what pens your students are using.

An interesting activity is to allow the group to experiment with different types of pens so that they appreciate some of the differences:

- How heavy the pen feels
- How comfortable it feels in the hand
- The quality/width of line
- How easily the ink flows
- How quickly the ink dries on the page

Do the children realise that the hard point of a ballpoint pen moves very quickly on the page and is therefore more difficult to control? Fine liners and fountain pens can grip the surface and so give a little more time to control the movement. This can help some children.


Make writing less stressful

Many children press heavily on the paper, sit awkwardly, and hold their pens in a way that is uncomfortable.

The beginning of Year 5 is a good time to re-evaluate how tools are handled, how much pressure is applied to the paper and whether the act of writing is causing strain in hand, shoulder or back that could be alleviated by a different position or by a deliberate relaxing of muscles.



Rhythmical pattern work can be useful in reducing stress as the complexities of complicated letter formation are avoided and attention can be given to the movement.

 **Tip** Patterns can be accepted more easily by older children if they are seen as preparation for writing in the same way that warm-up activities are used in sports or playing musical instruments.

See *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*

A

A

a

A

a

A

a

A

Look at other letterforms:

Many children are interested in computer fonts and other writing systems (modern ones such as Chinese, Arabic, Thai, or ancient, such as hieroglyphs, cuneiform, gothic, uncial scripts).

Collect a particular letter in many different styles from magazines/ make headings or collages using different fonts or letters.

Understanding more about letters can inspire children to give more attention to the writing they themselves create whether using a computer or a pen.

A

a

a

A

a

A

a

A

Demonstrate the importance of legible writing

Ask the class to exchange a piece of writing with a neighbour and to note how many words they find difficult to read in their classmate's work.

(or use anonymous pieces from another class or school)

What writing do I need for this task?

Help your class understand that some tasks need to be very legible but speed is more important for others (noting down homework requirements or drafting, perhaps). Help them to use appropriate speed and legibility for the task in hand.

Note: Some tasks require different treatment such as separate print letters for labelling and perhaps capitals or decorated letters for headings and posters.

The rocket ship shoots upwards with a whoosh
Blasting upwards in a flash of light
Drawing lines into the sky
Racing to discover worlds far away

Flitting in among the garden flowers
A flash of brilliant colour, like a piece of summer sky
You balance on the open rose
Like a ballerina on her toes
Your wings folded carefully
While you sip the sweet dew
How can such beauty come from a crystal?
Wrinkled and brown?

Use handwriting creatively

Try writing a poem or descriptive piece of writing in a way that reflects the subject - the obvious is a snail poem written in a spiral but children can be very inventive if encouraged.

Carrots work better than sticks

Put writing on display

Good writing on the classroom walls and in public areas of the school can be an excellent motivator.

In the morning I woke up in my bedroom but then I realised it had all been a dream. I was

Pieces of work could be chosen to be displayed in a special place each week/month.

Give awards

Awards can be used in a number of ways:

- For the achievement of a particular goal e.g. being able to write all the letters of the alphabet correctly orientated and relating to the base line. This encourages each child to achieve success and the child who is slower at mastering handwriting skills has the same goals although will inevitably need more time to achieve them.
- To reward a level of achievement of handwriting and layout in general work.
- For effort made to improve handwriting.

Awards could be:

- Allowing the use of a particular pen.
- Giving a certificate to be presented in front of the school.
- Putting names on a special display or stars (or pen nibs?) on a chart.
- Signing a book in the Head's room.
- Writing a thank you letter on behalf of the school.



Enter/organise a competition

A competition can inspire otherwise reluctant writers.

All the students in a class/school can be helped to make as many improvements in their written work as possible and then be given advice on layout so that each piece of work looks as good as possible.

Professional calligraphers prepare roughs and often make many versions before they are satisfied with the quality of a piece of work. Allowing children opportunity to work towards a really good competition entry can raise their standards and improvements made are often carried over into everyday written work.

Tip



www.handwritingcompetition.co.uk gives details of a national competition for schools.

Other **Tips for Teaching** that may be of use: 'S' Rules for quick assessment, Speeding Up, Patterns.

Compiled by Gwen Dornan from articles in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.