

Handwriting



Introduction

There are 5 basic skills which a child has to have to be able to write

- The ability to copy shapes, letters or numbers
- The ability to recognise letters, remember what letters look like and tell the difference between two letters which look alike such as 'b' & 'p'.
- The ability to fasten buttons/poppers and to use two hands together in tasks such as threading beads is important in developing the ability to hold and control a pencil.
- A strong trunk is needed to provide a stable base when doing written work
- Shoulder stability, if the muscles at the shoulder are weakened then there will be less stability which means that it will be more difficult to write.

Steps to good handwriting

These skills can be developed through doing many different activities.

1. Trunk and shoulder strength can be developed through playing playground games which involve running, crawling, hopping, jumping and playing with a ball.
2. The ability to recognise, remember and tell the difference between letters which are alike can be developed through working with shapes or objects of different sizes, doing jigsaws and playing games like find the hidden object.
3. The ability to fasten buttons/poppers and use two hands together can be developed through crafts which involve cutting out and sticking down shapes, using plasticine or modelling clay, making or tracing patterns and sorting small objects.
4. The ability to copy shapes, letters and numbers can be developed through activities such as completing mazes, using chalk to draw large letters or shapes on a blackboard or pavement and using pointer finger or a stick to draw letters or shapes in sand.

Ready to write

There are many factors which can affect the ability to write well, these include:

Lighting- The work area should be well lit

Posture- Good seating and sitting posture will maximise the quality of writing. Feet should reach the floor, hips and knees should be at 90 degrees, elbows should rest comfortably on the table/desk with the back straight and head up and centred. If the child struggles to achieve the correct posture then aids such as a writing slope or wedge cushion can be used to help the child achieve good posture.

Paper position- In general the paper should be positioned on the right side for right handed people and the left side for left handers.

Writing tools- Trial different pens and pencils, some children find it easier to write using chunky pencils or using a pencil grip. There are various kinds of pencil grips and it may be good to try one or two different ones.

Tension - Tension or pressure shows up in both the grip of the writer on the pencil and the pressure of the pencil on the page. Using warm up exercises before beginning writing tasks can help prepare the muscles in the arms, hands and fingers.

Desk Push Ups.

Place hands on the desk with thumbs and pointer fingers forming a triangle. Bend elbows and lower your nose into the triangle and then push back up straightening your arms. Repeat 10 times.

Shoulder Shrugs.

Hold hands, palms up and shrug shoulders up towards the ears and then down again. Repeat 10 times.

Crossing Arm Wave.

Hold straight arms above your head and cross them to wave. Repeat 10 times. Then lower them so that hands are pointing at the floor and again cross straight arms to wave again (for this you may need to move the chair back from the table a bit). Repeat 10 times.

Throw Aways.

Hold fisted hands up in front of shoulders or on upper chest. Extend arms in a strong throwing movement. Repeat 10 times

Games which involve using pegs or tweezers to pick up small objects or playing paper football in which the child scrunches paper into a small ball and uses each finger to flick the ball at a goal can also help build up the small muscles needed for pencil control.

Letter Formation

In school letter formation is often taught as groups or families of letters which are defined by the direction in which they are drawn, clockwise or anti-clockwise.

l - long ladder—l i u t y

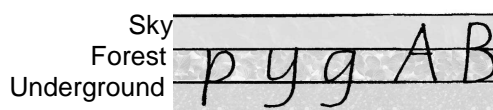
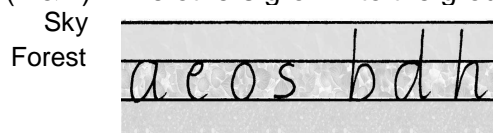
c - curly caterpillar—c a d g q o e s f

r - one-armed robot—r n m h b k p

z - zig-zag monster—z x v w y k

Letter Positioning

Some letters have sticks, lines which go up such as b while others have tails, lines which go down like p. Using lined paper which gives a solid line for the body of letters to sit on and a coloured or dotted line for the sticks or tails can help children to position letters. Kate Balcombe has suggested describing letters as forest such as a e o s, stretching into the sky (h & k) while others grow into the ground (p & y).



Spacing of letters & words

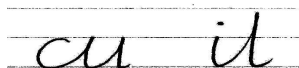
It is important that children learn that the letters of a word need to be evenly spaced and that there must be enough space between one word and the next in order for their work to be legible. Providing a slip of card approximately 1cm wide to use as a spacer between words can help children to space their work.

Joining letters

Once a child is managing to write correctly formed letters they will likely be ready to start joining letters. Joined writing is often taught through pattern making or linking pairs of letters such as *cl cl cl*

Basic joins

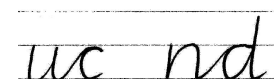
Up the hill join



Washing line join



Joining Curly



caterpillar letters

Fluency & speed of writing

Once your child has become comfortable in joining letters the fluency of their writing can be developed through practising handwriting patterns and encouraging your child to use joined up writing as much as possible.

Help your child to realise that different tasks require different levels of speed i.e. notes taken in class will most likely need to be taken quickly and legibility isn't so important but work that is to be presented or read by others will need to be legible with the speed of writing being less important.

Useful websites

The National Handwriting Association:-

<http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk>

Donna Young.org:-

<http://www.donnayoung.org>

References Dornan. G, 2009, National Handwriting Association.