**Handwriting**

Handwriting is one of the most complex skills we have to learn. It involves linguistic, cognitive, perceptual and motor components, all of which have to be integrated. Before children can hold a pencil, they need to be able to sit up and move their arm independently of their body.  They need to be able to isolate their fingers to hold their pencil.  To write, they first need to visually understand the difference between letters.  They need to have success with pre-writing shapes. And, then they need to remember how to form the letters.

The relevant handwriting activities for the child’s area of difficulty should be completed for 5-10mins a day at home/school.

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| **Area of Difficulty** | **Strategy** | **Tick when strategy has been tried and add comments.** |
| Child is left handed | Check the child’s pencil grasp. Holding the pencil at least 3cm from the point may help to see what is being written. |  |
| Offer fast drying/non-smudging pens (e.g. Jetstream Uniball) |  |
| Left handers should always sit on the left hand side of a right hander; this will avoid their arms colliding. |  |
| Paper Position:  a. Paper should be tilted a maximum of 45 degrees.  b. The paper should be principally on the same side of the body as the writing hand.  c. The best writing position is when the forearm is supported. The child should be encouraged to move the paper up rather than his/her arm down.  e. Once a good paper position has been found this angle can be marked on the desk with tape. |  |
| Child has difficulty writing legible letters and numbers | Practise one letter family at a time. This will help reinforce the correct starting points and movement patterns. |  |
| Position work on a vertical surface (paper on the wall, chalk/white board or easel) to help them realise that top means top, and not further away from the body when on a horizontal surface. |  |
| There are a number of printable ‘tracing and copying’ resources available online or dry wipe books can be purchased from shops.   * <https://teachhandwriting.co.uk/> * <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/literacy/handwriting-and-letter-formation-english-key-stage-1/literacy-handwriting> * <https://www.education.com/worksheets/handwriting/> * <https://www.jellyandbean.co.uk/free-resources>   It is important to be aware however that  learning the correct movement of the letters and numbers is often not achieved from just copying/tracing. |  |
| Multi-sensory strategies can be used to help reinforce correct movement patterns e.g.   * Writing with finger or stick in a tray of sand/shaving foam/mixture of cornflour and water * Paint brush dipped in bucket of water- painting on walls/patio/fence * Air drawing/sky writing/ - the child uses their arm to draw the letter in the air * Torch directed onto the wall**/**Jedi writing using a lightsabre/ribbon waved in the air * Chalk/crayon on an easel or paper on the wall   <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/help-for-parents/a-motivational-fun-approach-to-developing-handwriting-skills/> |  |
| Letter Formation Apps which can be used in combination with the above multisensory techniques. It is advised that the child uses a stylus instead of their finger to trace the screen.   * Wet, Dry, Try * Letter school * Writing Wizard * Letter Quiz * Little Writer * Ready to Print- Essare LLC (only available on a tablet not a phone) |  |
| Always have an example of letters and numbers on the table in front of the child to copy rather than have to remember the letter shape and formation pattern from memory. Alphabet and number strips can be downloaded online and it is important to ensure that parents are aware of the schools handwriting scheme i.e. is the child expected to be writing cursive letters. |  |
| Child is struggling with continuous cursive letter shapes | To better understand the arguments for and against teaching continuous cursive, the National Handwriting Association has 2 useful articles on their website <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/articles/continuous-cursive-cure-or-curse/>  [Teaching Fully Cursive Writing in Reception (nha-handwriting.org.uk)](https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/articles/teaching-fully-cursive-writing-in-reception/) |  |
| Child has difficulty sizing their letters and orientating letters to the line | Provide a clear and easy to use 2 lined handwriting paper. This could be laminated to use with a whiteboard pen.  It is important that the lines reflect the natural size of the child’s writing.  <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/shop/printable-line-guides/> |  |
| Try a 4 lined handwriting paper e.g. Sky, Grass and Ground paper. The benefit of this particular type of paper is that you can give clear verbal instructions e.g. “start in the sky”. |  |
| Child has difficulty orientating their writing on the paper and/or spacing letters and words | Use green tape/stickers or highlight on left hand side of the paper to show starting point and use red to show stopping point on the right hand side. |  |
| Try using graph paper or squared paper in various sizes. Instruct the child to put one letter in each box and leave one box free as a space between words. Start with large boxes and progress to smaller boxes. |  |
| Encourage the child to place a ‘finger space’ between each word. A lolly stick or visual prompt (see below) can act as a reminder if they struggle to remember. |  |
| Child complains of pain and/or fatigue when writing | Try chunky pencils, easy flow roller ball pens, soft foam pencil grips with the aim of making their pencil grasp more comfortable. |  |
| Break the writing task down into more manageable chunks allowing for regular rest breaks in between. |  |
| Encourage the child to practice some handwriting warm ups (see advice sheet for details). These ideas can also be used during rest breaks to stretch the fingers.   1. Handwriting Warm Ups-Penpals (Cambridge University Press) can be found on YouTube |  |
| Child has an unconventional pencil causing difficulty | Rubber pencil grips (Get a Grip Pencil Grip assessment kit available from https://www.tts-group.co.uk/ ) can be useful for younger children who are still working on developing a mature grasp and need help to position their fingers correctly.  The ‘Get a Grip’ Kit available from TTS includes all the popular pencil grips which can be trialled with the child. <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/get-a-grip-pencil-grips/1002033.html?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIgIq59oOG8wIV1GDmCh123QDaEAAYASAAEgKAa_D_BwE>  A loose hair band or a ‘handiwriter’ can help children who tend to hold their pencil very upright. These can be purchased from a variety of websites.  Holding a coin or small item in the small and ring finger can stop children adopting a grip using more than three fingers.  It can often be difficult to correct a child’s pencil grasp beyond the age of 10 years, as their natural grasp has become habitual and forcing a more conventional grasp can actually hinder their handwriting further.  Pencil grips and ergonomic pens can be trialled at any age and may simply be more comfortable for some children, particularly those children with joint laxity (bendy fingers).  For older children (10 and above) compensatory strategies need to be considered such as use of chunky pencils and easy flow pens to help reduce handwriting strain, as it is likely to be more difficult to change the nature of their pencil grasp through use of a rubber pencil grip by this age  Unconventional pencil grasps can be functional and do not always cause the child any difficulties therefore careful consideration needs to be given to why the grasp needs to be changed. |  |
| Child has lots of great ideas but struggles to record them legibly on paper | Trial allowing the child to verbalise their ideas to an adult to scribe. The child can then copy the sentence which reduces the complexity of the task and allows them to focus on just the physical elements of writing. |  |
| Consider allowing the child to utilise ICT as an additional means of recording their work in order for them to be able to demonstrate their true potential. |  |
| Child finds it difficult to sit comfortably for handwriting tasks. | A good position at the table will help the child  to be stable and be able to concentrate and use their hands most effectively.   1. The child’s feet should be flat on the floor with hips and knees at about 90º. A foot box may be required to enable the child’s feet to be supported. 2. A person sitting at a table     Description automatically generatedThe height of the desk should be (5cms) above the bent elbow (when the child is seated correctly on his/her chair). 3. The head should be kept central and the child’s bottom should be well back in the chair. 4. When copying from a whiteboard the child should be facing it directly. 5. A slanted work surface can help (e.g. posture pack or wide A4 lever arch folder or angled board available at IKEA).   <https://www.cambspborochildrenshealth.nhs.uk/services/cambridgeshire-childrens-occupational-therapy-service/sitting-position-and-posture/> |  |
| Child is struggling to move onto cursive script | This is a topic covered in detail on the National Handwriting Association website (<https://nhahandwriting.org.uk/handwriting/articles/>).  The most important factor to consider is whether the child is able to produce legible writing which enables them to demonstrate their true potential. |  |
| Children who haven’t been given their ‘pen licence’ | * Some schools adopt a ‘pen licence’ scheme. This means that children generally have to demonstrate consistent letter formation, letter sizing and spacing, joined up and fluent writing in order to gain permission to use a pen. * For children that are experiencing difficulties with handwriting, the pen licence scheme can have an impact on their confidence and self-esteem, as they observe their peers progressing around them. * Most children will find it easier to write with a pen as the shaft is usually thicker (enabling a more secure and less effortful grasp), pen requires less pressure than pencil (so can assist pressure and reduce effort) and the easy flowing nature of rollerball pens (e.g. Uniball or erasable pens) can aid fluency and help reduce fatigue. |  |
| Child isn’t engaging in the traditional school handwriting practice sessions | **Handwriting Programmes** that can be followed as part of small group interventions or additional practise at home:   * **‘Getting Ready to Write’- Alistair Bryce Clegg.** This book takes practitioners through the developmental stages, looks at gender differences in mark making and then provides some innovative ideas for intervention such as Dough Gym and writing like a Jedi * **‘Start Write Stay Write’** addresses the environmental, postural and physical elements required for effective and automatic writing. Available from https://www.tts-group.co.uk/ * **‘Write from the Start’** contains over 400 graded activities that develop the intrinsic muscles of the hand and help develop perceptual skills required to orientate letters and organise the page. Suitable for children aged 4-6 (or older with additional needs). * **Speed up!** specifically for children aged eight to 13 years to develop speed and fluency. * **Penpals for Handwriting** is produced by Cambridge University Press and provides an easy to follow programme/whole school scheme for primary aged children aligned with national curriculum standards. It includes lesson plans, photocopiable worksheets, interactive videos, small group activities, homework activities. There are YouTube videos to explain about the content if you are considering purchasing this for your school.   **Other Handwriting Resources:**   * <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-52341-handwriting-activity-sheets>. * <https://www.education.com/worksheets/handwriting/> * <https://www.jellyandbean.co.uk/free-resources/> * <https://www.sparklebox.co.uk/literacy/writing/ground-grass-sky-handwriting.html>. * <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-access-arrangements> * BBC Dance Mat Typing practise can be accessed for free online |  |
|  | Also see:  <https://www.cambspborochildrenshealth.nhs.uk/child-development-and-growing-up/hand-skills/handwriting-and-typing/> |  |

**Handwriting Warm Ups and Stretches**

Handwriting Warm Up videos for the classroom can be found on YouTube e.g. Penpals Handwriting Warmups (Cambridge University Press)