

## Handwriting

Handwriting is a developmental process involving many underlying skills. It is a learned, physical skill which requires the ability to recall and sequence muscle motor movements automatically when writing letters or numbers.

Consider 3 aspects required to achieve legibility, fluency and speed:

- Shape - accurate letter formation with parallel strokes
- Size - consistency, sitting on the line with ascenders and descenders extending above and below the line
- Spacing - between letters and between words in a sentence

Children experiencing difficulties should not be considered lazy but may require teaching in a focused area.

## Handwriting Checklist

Name:

DoB:

CA:

School:

Year Group:

### Pre-requisite Skills:

Date	Skill Area	Comment
	Correct posture and seating position	
	Demonstrates hand dominance	
	Demonstrates bi-lateral integration	
	Able to cross the mid-line	
	Able to track from left to right	
	Holds pencil with tripod grip	
	Applies appropriate pressure to paper	
	Able to draw basic person	

	Copies or draws 1.   — ○	
	2. L T + □	
	3. X △ ◇	

### Letter Formation (order indicates similarity in movement patterns)

	c	o	a	d	g	q	s	e	f	i	t	l	u	y	j	r	n	m	h	b	p	k	v	w	x	z
formation																										
orientation																										

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formation																										
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### Number Formation

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
formation										
orientation										

### Presentation Skills:



Date	Skill Area	Comment
	Most letters formed correctly	<i>e.g. Does child make use of verbal patter?</i>
	Letters are consistent in size	
	Letters are correctly positioned on the base line	
	Ascenders/descenders are clearly distinguishable	
	Spacing is even	
	Writes with fluency	
	Maintains stamina for writing	
	Aligns writing correctly on page	
	Uses cursive script	


Administered by:

Date:

## Support for Handwriting

(skill areas identified from checklist)

Target Skill Area	Strategies
<p><b>Correct posture and seating position</b></p> <p>Are feet flat on floor with bottom to back of chair?</p> <p>Is body position maintained with head in upright position to enable both eyes to work efficiently together?</p> <p>Is the paper angled appropriately for right/left handed children?</p> <p>Right Handed  30 - 45 degree angle</p> <p>Left Handed  30 - 45 degree angle</p> <p>Is paper slightly offset to the midline (to right for right handed and left for left handed)</p> <p>Are the shoulders relaxed with forearms resting on the table?</p> <p>Is paper stabilised using non-dominant hand?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop core stability to improve balance and co-ordination</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate table and chair height/ratio</li> <li>• Provide cue card as prompt for correct seating or paper position</li> <li>• Use of foot block if feet do not touch floor</li> <li>• Provide a cushion e.g. Movin'sit (<a href="http://www.norlite.co.uk">www.norlite.co.uk</a>) to prevent slouching</li> <li>• Use sloping board to encourage correct head position and reduce strain on neck (improvise with A4 lever arch file in landscape position)</li> <li>• Suggest moving paper up rather than arm down when writing</li> </ul>
<p><b>Demonstrates hand dominance</b></p> <p>Observe a variety of activities e.g. cutting, threading, eating, drawing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce knowledge of right and left through games and activities</li> <li>• Observe child throwing beanbag into hoop to note favoured hand</li> <li>• A dominant hand can be encouraged by placing a double sided easel/whiteboard <i>end</i> on to the child. Child then makes continuous circular patterns away from the body using both hands simultaneously. Watch for emerging hand dominance by repeating this task daily</li> <li>• Present work/task from favoured side e.g. when kicking a ball, handing a pencil to the child</li> </ul>
<p><b>Demonstrates bi-lateral integration</b> (the ability to use both hands/sides of the body at the same time to perform a task e.g. stabilise paper using non-dominant hand when writing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threading tasks</li> <li>• Sharpen a pencil</li> <li>• Peel a banana</li> <li>• Tearing paper into strips</li> <li>• Screwing lid on a jar</li> <li>• Cutting with scissors</li> <li>• Using a knife and fork</li> </ul>

<p>Able to cross the mid-line</p> <p>Infinity Symbol </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Touch right elbow to left knee and vice versa in a continuous movement</li> <li>• Pass the beanbag when sitting sideways</li> <li>• Draw infinity symbol in air and on paper</li> <li>• Simon Says game</li> <li>• Tracking activities</li> </ul>
<p>Able to track from left to right</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following pathways</li> <li>• Joining dots</li> <li>• Trace finger along a textured line</li> <li>• Potato printing across the page</li> </ul>
<p>Holds pencil with tripod grip (There is no need to change an unusual pencil grasp if it is effective, consistent and comfortable)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a range of pencils/pens and pencil grips</li> <li>• Avoid pencils which are over-weighted at the top end</li> <li>• Pincer grip activities e.g. picking up small objects or popping bubbles between thumb and forefinger, making peg board patterns, picking up objects using tweezers</li> <li>• Encourage the child to hold the pencil on the barrel to prevent writing being obscured. Holding the pencil too close to the tip may also restrict fine motor movements. Encourage left handed children to hold the pencil at least 2cm from the point. A rubber band on the barrel could be used to indicate correct position</li> <li>• Offer a shorter pencil</li> </ul>
<p>Applies appropriate pressure to paper</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid over sharpened pencils</li> <li>• Offer a variety of pencil hardness e.g. 2b</li> <li>• Use good quality paper resting on an adequate writing surface i.e. avoid placing single sheets directly on to a wood or plastic surface</li> <li>• Hand and finger warm up exercises</li> </ul>
<p>Able to draw a basic person</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body awareness activities - recognition and naming</li> <li>• Model drawing</li> </ul>
<p>Draws</p> <p>1.   — ○</p> <p>2. L T + □</p> <p>3. X △ ◇</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage a multi-sensory approach by drawing shapes in the air, wet mop in the playground, sand or lentil tray, fingerpaints</li> <li>• Begin with large shapes on a vertical surface before progressing to a horizontal surface, gradually reducing in size</li> </ul>

Most letters formed correctly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage a multi-sensory approach to develop awareness of letter shape e.g. feely bags, sky writing, create letters in sand/rice/playdough</li> <li>• Practise large patterns/letters on vertical surface before horizontal and reducing letter size</li> <li>• Encourage child to use verbal patter</li> <li>• Teach letter in formation groups</li> <li>• Provide visual prompt e.g. start point, directional arrow</li> <li>• Demonstrate letter formation in air with both left and right hand according to child's hand preference</li> </ul>
Letters are consistent in size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a variety of line-guide widths, reducing the width as skills improve</li> <li>• Try forming individual letters in squared paper to regulate the size</li> </ul>
Letters are correctly positioned on the base line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use raised lined paper e.g. 'Right-Line' (Taskmaster)</li> </ul>
Ascenders/descenders are clearly distinguishable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise descenders group (g j p q y)</li> <li>• Revise ascenders group (b d f h k l t)</li> <li>• Provide triple lined paper</li> <li>• Encourage child to check by placing a ruler level with body of letter</li> </ul>
Spacing is even	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use finger for spacing</li> <li>• Use a lolly stick (adapt for left-handers, placing stick from above)</li> </ul>
Maintains stamina for writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of warm up hand and finger exercises</li> <li>• Teach and model writing for different purposes e.g. note-taking, general classroom work, presentation</li> <li>• Encourage the child to develop their own solutions for writing at speed e.g. lifting the pen in multi-syllabic words</li> </ul>
Aligns writing correctly on page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of traffic light system e.g. green dot to indicate start position at margin</li> <li>• Use lined paper to provide clear visual guidance</li> </ul>

### Uses joined script

#### Joined writing:

- Aids left to right movement across the page
- May reduce letter reversals and inversions
- Develops speed and fluency
- Develops motor memory which may aid spelling
- Helps to create spacing between words

- Teach that capital letters are never joined
- Practise multi-sensory approach as for individual letter formation
- Practise writing with eyes open/closed to help internalise movement patterns
- Teach horizontal joins (o r v w) to letters that start on x height line first, followed by horizontal lines to letters with ascenders
- Diagonal joins (from a c d e h i k l m n u x z) to x height letters should be introduced first followed by diagonal joins to letters with ascenders

### Letter confusion of reversals and inversions:

b/d      n/u      p/q      m/w      i/j      t/f      g      s      z

- Use of visual and auditory prompts:
  - **b\_d** to represent bed
  - Make letter shape with hands
  - Picture of bat and ball / drum and drum stick
  - Small 'b' is hidden within capital B
  - Letter 'd' is formed by first forming 'c' continuing into formation of 'd' i.e. 'c' comes before 'd'
- Highlight specific letters e.g. find all the 'p' s hidden in the text
- Use a visual prompt on the desk or top of the page for close access

## Hand/Finger Warm-Ups for Handwriting

*Practise fun activities little and often e.g. 5 minutes, 4-5 times a week*  
Demonstrate all activities first

### Hand Warm-Ups

- Lift arms out to the front of body up to shoulder height, ensuring elbows are straight with hands outstretched as far as possible. Repeat 2-3 times
- Lift arms out to the side of body up to shoulder height, ensuring elbows are straight with hands outstretched as far as possible. Repeat 2-3 times
- Lift arms up above the head, ensuring elbows are straight with hands extended as far as possible. Repeat 2-3 times
- Stretch both arms straight out in front, palms downwards. Turn arms so palms face upwards. Turn arms back again. Repeat using one arm at a time
- Stretch right hand across body to touch left-hand side of waist. Repeat with opposite hand
- Place right hand on left shoulder and left hand on right shoulder
- 'Windscreen Wipers', placing heels of hands on table and imitating the movement of windscreen wipers with both hands. Repeat, but mirror the movement of the left hand with the right

### Finger Warm-Ups

- Sit with palms of hands together, spreading fingers apart. Keeping the fingers pressed together, push the elbows out and the heels of the hand down. Repeat 5 times
- Sit with fingers interlaced. Stretching arms out in front of body, push palms of the hands forward away from body. Repeat 5 times
- 'Spy Holes', using thumb and index finger to make a hole. As the child becomes more competent, use the other fingers and thumb to make the spy holes and progress to a refined pincer movement
- Spread hands palms down, pressing as hard as possible on to the table. Relax and repeat
- Place hands on table, spread fingers out then close to make a fist, keeping hands on table
- Place hands on table, spread fingers wide then close again. Repeat 5 times. Do one hand then the other (the resting hand should remain quite still), then both hands together
- 'Finger Press Ups', using the thumb and fingers in turn to press on table. Let the child experiment to feel degrees of pressure, keeping the fingers rigid. Use hands alternately then simultaneously
- 'Finger Isolation', placing hands on table, fingers partly spread. Raise each finger in turn using alternate hands, moving right to left/left to right. Repeat with both hands, mirroring the movements (this activity could be extended by a child/adult touching individual fingers of partner's hand which should be raised in isolation)
- 'Pat and Clap', patting the table twice with palms, clap hands together twice, maintaining a rhythm

Children may also enjoy finger rhyme activities and using finger puppets

## **Suggested Resources:**

### **Programmes:**

#### **Jump Ahead**

West Sussex

- a programme with graded activities in stages to develop gross and fine motor skills

#### **Speed Up**

Lois Addy (ISBN 1-855033-86-0)

#### **Write from the Start**

Teodorescu and Addy

- a programme to develop visual perceptual skills of eye-hand coordination, form constancy, spatial organisation, orientation and laterality

#### **Write Dance**

Lucky Duck ([www.luckyduck.co.uk](http://www.luckyduck.co.uk))

- focuses on pre-writing patterns to music

#### **Handwriting Rescue Scheme / Handwriting File Paper Pads**

Multi-Sensory Learning ([www.msl-online.net](http://www.msl-online.net))

### **Further Reading:**

#### **Writing Handwriting - Assessment and Activities for Handwriting**

Regional LA Support Services, ReLEASS, York

#### **Handwriting - A Teacher's Guide**

Jane Taylor, Fulton (ISBN 1-85346-765-0)

#### **Developing a Handwriting Policy**

The National Handwriting Association ([www.nha-handwriting.org.uk](http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk))

#### **Handwriting in the Secondary School ....not a secondary skill**

The National Handwriting Association ([www.nha-handwriting.org.uk](http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk))