



Bishop Wilkinson

Catholic Education Trust

Through Christ, in partnership,
enabling all to flourish.

Handwriting Policy

February 2025

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Handwriting Policy for St Mary's Catholic First School

Handwriting is a basic skill that influences the quality of work throughout the curriculum. It is used as a mode of expressing and communicating language. By the end of Key Stage 2 all pupils should have the ability to produce fluent, legible and, eventually, speedy joined-up handwriting, and to understand the different forms of handwriting used for different purposes. Our intention is to make handwriting an automatic process that does not interfere with creative and mental thinking.

Handwriting is a compulsory component of the national curriculum in England: English programmes of study for both key stages 1 and 2.

Aims and objectives

The design of the handwriting curriculum is rooted in evidence-based practice. Leaders have constructed a curriculum that is both ambitious and designed to give all learners the skills needed to communicate by hand. The curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills. It aims:

- to develop a neat, legible, speedy handwriting style using continuous cursive letters, which leads to producing letters and words automatically in independent writing.
- to establish and maintain high expectations for the presentation of written work
- for pupils to understand, by the end of Year 6, the importance of neat presentation and the need for different letterforms (cursive, printed or capital letters) to help communicate meaning clearly.

Agreed language

Many problems in the teaching of handwriting have their origin in the misunderstanding of common terms. Developing an agreed vocabulary for handwriting helps to avoid confusion when staff communicate with one another and with pupils.

The same words should be used throughout school. There may be slight adjustments for the very youngest children. This list featuring some of the most important terms can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

Font

We follow the Letter-Join handwriting scheme. Font named '**Letter join-no lead**' must be installed on your PC to view the fonts correctly.

The handwriting style that we follow can be described as simple print moving to cursive. Cursive is the use of diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters with some letters left un-joined.

Our simple print font (EYFS):

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
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

Our simple print font (KS1):

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

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
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

Our cursive font (KS2/end KS1):

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

The pre-cursive font is not used in our school. In the 'Reading Framework' July 2023, it states that children should "be taught the correct start and exit points for each letter, which should not include 'lead-in' strokes from the line".

Number Formation

We teach the following number formation from EYFS.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Break Letters

There is only one letter break in joined cursive, and is after the x.

Capital Letters

It is important to teach the capital letters and their formation quite specifically. Pupils should also be sure of the upper case and lower-case forms of each letter and be able to relate them to one another. The policy should clarify the use of letter names, not sounds when talking about writing.

Joining

Children should be taught to join their handwriting as soon as they can accurately and automatically form each letter. It is important they are taught to join before their speed of printing increases significantly.

In our school, joining is typically taught in Year 3 but some pupils may be ready to join towards the end of Year 2. This means that rarely is joining taught to a whole class. Instead, the children are taught either individually or in small groups during instructional writing sessions where each join is modelled and practiced. Once children can join, the expectation is that, whenever they write, they should use a joined style with the exception of specific contexts that require print (for example, labelling a diagram). In Key Stage 2, letter formation and correct joins are modelled again at the beginning of each year and expectations are set.

Key resources

Pencils

Children are provided with a triangular shaped pencil and are lead grading: both hard and soft leads. Children who need extra grip support are provided with slide-on triangular grips.

Pens

In Year 4, children are provided with a blue handwriting pen (from February half term onwards) to use as preparation for the next stage in their handwriting journey. The National Curriculum for Years 5 and 6 includes a

reference to choosing the writing implement that is best suited for a task. The choice of writing tools is related to the task and subject, not any attributes of maturity or prestige.

Exercise Books – line spacing

We use exercise books with line-markings and margins for all writing tasks. The line spacing provided at all ages is selected to suit the natural size of the child's writing and their stage of writing development.

It is especially important that developing writers in EYFS and Y1 have widely spaced lines and a margin so that writing is not cramped. EYFS will send their writing up to Y1 who will finish the widely spaced lines in the Autumn term, before moving to regularly spaced lines when the child is ready. There may be instances when a reception child is ready for narrow lines by Summer 2, in such instances the child will be given narrow lined book towards the end of Reception and continue with this as they move into Year 1. Appropriate spacing continues into Key Stage 2 as highlighted in the National Curriculum. The requirements for Years 3 and 4 are that pupils should be taught that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch.

Where children are required to write on worksheets, correctly sized lines will be provided. Equally, whiteboards are lined to support children with correct formation and spacing.

Maths books should have appropriately sized squares to support correct number formation.

Organisation of teaching

Handwriting skills need to be taught both as a timetabled discrete subject and through ongoing reinforcement of skills in everyday written language activities. Our handwriting lessons are focused, short and at regular intervals. Handwriting sessions are in addition to phonics sessions.

Handwriting will be taught in the following sessions:

EYFS: daily in the afternoon session.

Year 1 to 4: Handwriting will be taught discretely at the start of the week before the first English session as outlined on the school timetable. During this session, key letters for the week will be introduced/reinforced as per the Handwriting Curriculum. Two additional 10-minute sessions later in the week will also be designated to the teaching of handwriting.

Handwriting will be a focus at the start of every writing session, reinforcing pencil grip, paper position, seating position (posture) & writing pressure with the '4Ps'. Pupils handwriting and letter formation will be assessed in the autumn term and throughout the year and each child will have their own handwriting cards (visible on the table) with bespoke letters that they need to work on with regards to their letter formation.

Core principles of teaching handwriting

Our core principles of teaching handwriting are set out in appendix 2.

These are drawn from evidence-based practice and guidance from the National Handwriting Association. All staff should follow these principles.

Provision for left-handed writers

At least ten percent of the population are left-handed – a slightly higher proportion are male. Potential issues for left-handed writers include:

- Some letter formation movements are made in a direction that is not natural
- A left-hander often cannot see what they are writing
- Writing is more likely to get smudged

A left-hander has to make many more *pushing* movements when writing that are more difficult to control than *pulling* movements.

Staff should assess the needs of left-handed writers and consider appropriate adjustments which may include:

- A higher seat
- A sloped writing surface
- Good lighting – to make sure the writing hand does not cast a shadow on the writing
- Sit on the left-hand side of right-handed writers so elbows do not bump
- Paper tilted clockwise in the left-handed writer position
- Pencils and pens to suit - ergonomic good grip, soft lead, fast drying ink
- Left-handed scissors
- Investigate arm, hand and pen hold positions to find those which suit
- Explore changes to letter formation and joining movements

Provision for EAL children

When supporting children transitioning from a different script or handwriting style, teachers should be aware of several potential challenges:

Directionality differences: Some scripts are written from right to left (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew), while others are left to right (e.g., English, Latin scripts). Adjusting to a new writing direction can be confusing for pupils.

Character complexity: Scripts like Chinese or Japanese involve intricate characters, whereas Latin scripts have simpler letter forms. Pupils may need time to adapt to the different levels of complexity.

Baseline orientation: In scripts like Arabic and Persian, certain letters have parts that descend below the baseline, contributing to the script's distinctive flowing appearance. Understanding these variations is crucial for teachers.

Strategies that staff should consider:

- Recognise the specific script or handwriting style the pupil is accustomed to. This awareness helps in identifying potential challenges they may face when adapting to a new writing system.
- Explicit instruction: Provide clear and direct teaching of the new handwriting style. Demonstrate proper letter formation, spacing, and alignment to establish a solid foundation.
- Gradual transition: Ease the pupil into the new handwriting style by starting with larger writing spaces and gradually moving to standard sizes. This approach allows for a comfortable adjustment period.
- Consistent practice and feedback: Encourage regular practice and provide constructive feedback. Positive reinforcement helps build confidence and reinforces correct techniques.

- Cultural sensitivity: Acknowledge and respect the pupil's original writing system. Incorporating elements from their native script can create a more inclusive learning environment.

Assessment of handwriting

Early identification and correction of errors will prevent many later problems with handwriting. Assessment needs to be an integral part of the teaching sequence of every new step within the handwriting curriculum.

Any feedback and marking of handwriting must reflect an awareness of the complexity of the task and individual needs of the pupil. Wherever possible, targeted feedback should be provided as promptly as possible, preferably within the lesson. Written feedback on handwriting should be explained, modelled and practised face-to-face with the child. Any written comments should be focused on structured learning steps and avoid descriptors such as 'neat' and 'untidy' or 'take care with your handwriting' as these are not specific enough, and do not provide the modelling which evidence-led practice recommends. Exercise books should evidence the timely, consistent, active correction of any errors.

An example assessment, provided by the National Handwriting Association, can be found in appendix 2.

Supporting children with handwriting difficulties

Where assessment or monitoring indicates that pupils are struggling with handwriting, care should be taken to ensure that a full diagnostic assessment is undertaken to understand the barriers to fluent and automatic handwriting. This will enable interventions and support to be precisely tailored to pupils' needs. Staff will ensure that, where pupils struggle significantly with transcription, written tasks are adapted appropriately. Pupils should not be expected to write beyond their phonic understanding. A short-term reliance on oral composition may be appropriate while the pupil is supported to rapidly secure automatic handwriting.

The process of handwriting relies on the integration of component factors – motor skills, perceptual, cognitive and linguistic processing. Consequently, pupils with a known disability in any of these areas may need particular support to develop effective handwriting. The severity of the conditions will obviously have an impact, as will any co-occurrence with other conditions.

Related disabilities include Cerebral Palsy, Arthritis, Muscular Dystrophy, Hypermobility syndrome, Sensory impairments, ASD, ADHD, Developmental Coordination Disorder (or Dyspraxia), Developmental Language Disorder and Dyslexia.

Intervention

Intervention should be based on children's needs as identified through an assessment of their handwriting. Intervention should be 1:1, 1:2 or small group. Adult observation/supervision and guidance are essential to reduce the risk of poor habits developing and becoming embedded. In our school, intervention is intensive and intended to support rapid catch-up as we know that poor handwriting impedes pupils' ability to engage fully with the curriculum.

Community involvement

Knowledge sharing and relationship building are at the core of good practice in any school community and of particular importance in learning a complex skill like handwriting.

Involving parents and carers at every stage in learning ensures that key messages are implemented at both home and school. Successful practice in handwriting is based on consistency and continuity across the whole school community. In our school we involve parents in the process of handwriting by:

- Sharing how we teach handwriting at termly curriculum evenings
- Sending letter formation sheets home

Appendix 1: Agreed language

▪ Positional language

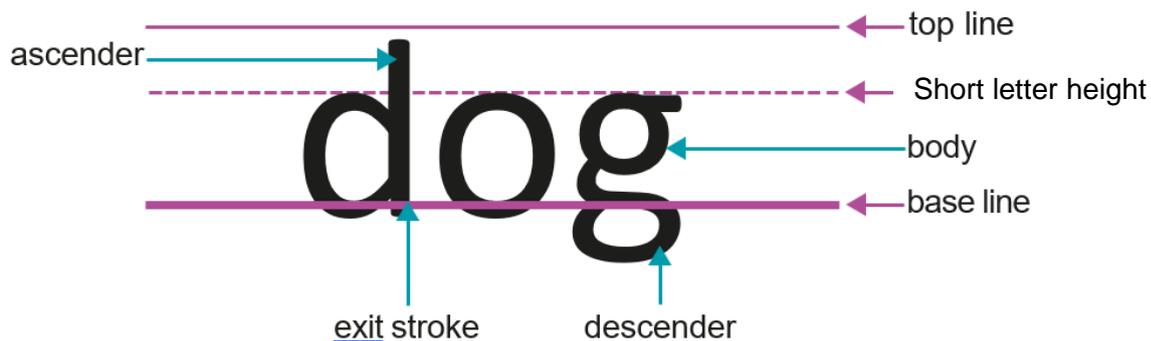
An essential part of teaching patterning and letter formation is to ensure that young children really understand positional language when working with pencil and paper.

Terms include up, down, above, below, under, top, bottom, across, around and between.

If the school's chosen phonics programme has a visual or ditty to support letter formation, this must be used consistently used across the school, when required. School to amend to indicate the requirements of their scheme.

▪ Capital / Lower-case letters

- **The base line:** This is the continuous line upon which the main bodies of letters rest.
- **Ascenders / Descenders:** These are the correct terms for the parts of letters that extend above or below the letter body. For younger children it is sometimes easier to describe these as Tall and Tail.
- **Short letters:** These are letters without ascenders or descenders, such as m, e, and o.
- **Letter bodies:** The parts of letters which are neither ascenders nor descenders e.g. the rounded parts of b, d and a and the "arches" of m and n.
- **Exit stroke:** Letters that finish on the baseline often have a final flick in the forwards direction. This provides the potential to join when the child is ready for this step.

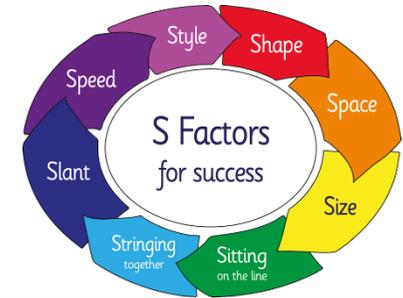


- **Please note the 'g' used in the above example is not the font we use in SMFS and is just being used as a letter for modelling appropriate line placement. SMFS use the following: Early Years-'g'/Years 1-4-'g'**
- **Joining strokes and break letters:** *Diagonal strokes* join from letters which finish on the baseline. *Horizontal strokes* join from letters which finish at the top.



Appendix 3: NHA Assessment

S Factors Self-Assessment for Handwriting



S Factor	Letter families	Mastered	Developing	Insecure
Shape	c o a g q d			
	l l t k j v			
	w u y f r n			
	m h p b e			
	s x z			
Space <small>between letters/words</small>				
Size				
Sitting <small>on the line</small>				
Stringing <small>joining where appropriate</small>				
Slant				
Speed				
Style				

Appendix 2 Handwriting Components and Guidelines

Components

Handwriting remains an important life skill as an effective means of self-expression and communication with others. It is, however, not a natural skill like walking or jumping. As with reading and maths, the skill of handwriting needs to be taught. Effective teaching requires an awareness of the complexity of this process and the many factors which contribute to success. Handwriting should be of a left to right orientation.

Development of skills

Babies and toddlers will instinctively 'mark make' even with their messy play when they move it around, they are making marks naturally and with purpose.

We are not born knowing how to handwrite, we as educators must understand the components of handwriting in order to be able to support its teaching. Understanding this 'iceberg' of factors which underpin handwriting will help to guide effective practice. It will also inform intervention strategies when these are needed.

Handwriting is a movement and motor skill that requires postural control and trunk balance to sit upright and to provide stability for arm and hand movements. Children must be able to control and regulate the movement of their large muscles: shoulder, hip girdle, trunk, neck, elbows, wrist, knees, in order to manage the precise, fine movement of the small muscles: fingers and toes.

Fundamental movement skills are a set of basic motor patterns that benefit from good teaching and practice to aid development. They can also facilitate (or impede) physical activity in childhood and beyond. They can be subdivided into three sets of skills that have common aspects for the range of movement:

- locomotor skills, for example running and jumping
- stability skills, for example twisting and balancing
- manipulation skills, such as throwing and catching

In Early Years, we must ensure that children are physically and developmentally ready to be successful writers. A curriculum to address the following gross motor factors is vital:

- Core strength, control and postural stability
- Motor planning skills
- Development of a consistent hand preference
- Ability to coordinate both sides of the body together
- The ability to reach across the midline of the body

In Nursery and the autumn term of Reception, there should be an intense focus on supporting those children who struggle to control and regulate the movement of their large muscles of the shoulders, hip girdle, trunk, neck, elbows, wrist and knees.

Learning gross motor skills helps children to develop fine motor skills. A joined-up approach to physical development is important.

Fine motor skills give children more control over objects. For example, children will go from whole-hand grasping, to a pincer grip using the thumb and forefinger, to a pincer grip using the thumb middle finger and index finger.

This eventually gives them the ability to hold and control small tools with ease and confidence. They will need repeated practice to develop the muscle strength and hand–eye coordination needed.

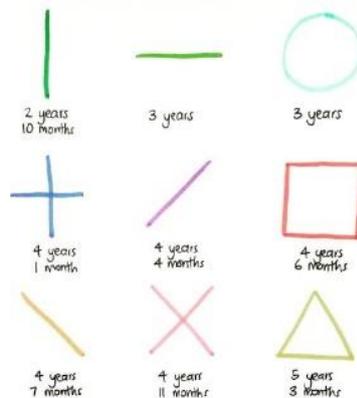
Staff need to give opportunities within the curriculum to develop:

- Flexibility, stability and strength in wrist, hand and fingers
- Separation of the two sides of the hand
- Ability to maintain the thumb-web space
- Finger isolation
- Development of pincer grasp

Once children have secured gross and fine motor skills – there is an expectation that they swiftly move to correct pencil grip and accurate formation of letters.

Handwriting is also a visual motor skill that uses both your eyes and your muscles to coordinate a task - visual sense and motor sense working together. Children need to visually observe the letter and then make the required movements to reproduce the letter with a pencil on paper. If a child struggles with visual motor skills, they may have incorrectly formed letters, letters of different sizes that are not on the line, and/or difficulty with grasping the writing tool.

The ability to copy a vertical line, circle, horizontal line, right oblique line, square, left oblique line and an oblique cross have been recognised by therapists as an indication of a child’s readiness to integrate visual-motor skills to begin handwriting instruction.



Handwriting is language based and involves learning the conventions of a written script. Children need to have:

- an interest in talk and communication through mark making
- sufficient cognitive ability to pay attention, follow instructions and shape formation
- an understanding of prepositional language such as up, down, top and bottom

The grapheme phoneme correspondence needs to be taught in-line with the school’s phonics scheme. However, letter formation in phonics sessions alone will not be sufficient to secure foundational knowledge of handwriting for Key Stage 1. Frequent, discrete and direct teaching of handwriting is essential as each letter is taught in the phonics scheme.

Correct formation and fluency in handwriting

We expect, in line with the EYFS statutory framework and the early learning goal for writing, that children will have secured correct letter formation by the end of Reception. This should be embedded in Year 1 and most children should, therefore, be ready to learn to join in Year 2. From Year 3 onwards, the majority of children should be able to write with increasing fluency in a joined style.

EYFS framework: ELG for writing

Children at the expected level of development will:

- Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.
- Spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters.
- Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.

National Curriculum

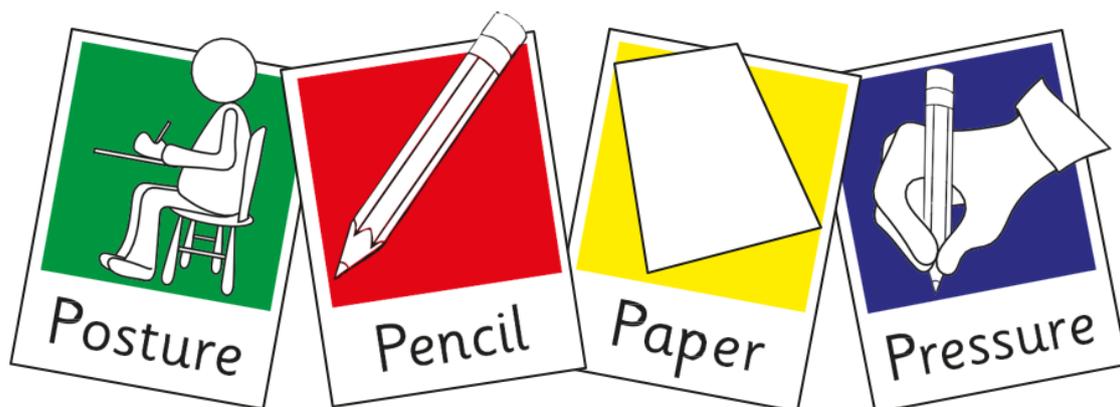
	Statutory Requirements	Non-Statutory Notes and Guidance
Year 1 Age 5-6	<p>Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly • begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place • form capital letters • form digits 0-9 • understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' (i.e. letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these. 	<p>Handwriting requires frequent and discrete, direct teaching. Pupils should be able to form letters correctly and confidently. The size of the writing implement (pencil, pen) should not be too large for a young pupil's hand. Whatever is being used should allow the pupil to hold it easily and correctly so that bad habits are avoided.</p> <p>Left-handed pupils should receive specific teaching to meet their needs.</p>
Year 2 Age 6-7	<p>Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another • start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left un-joined • write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower case letters • use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters. 	<p>Pupils should revise and practise correct letter formation frequently. They should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.</p>

<p>Years 3 & 4 Age 7-9</p>	<p>Pupils should be taught to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left un-joined • increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting [for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch. 	<p>Pupils should be using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing. Handwriting should continue to be taught, with the aim of increasing the fluency with which pupils are able to write down what they want to say. This, in turn, will support their composition and spelling.</p>
<p>Years 5 & 6 Age 10 -11</p>	<p>Pupils should be taught to write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choosing which shape of a letter to use when given choices and deciding whether or not to join specific letters • choosing the writing implement that is best suited for a task. 	<p>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. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task, for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an un-joined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra and capital letters, for example, for filling in a form.</p>

Handwriting requirements from the English programmes of study: Key Stages 1 and 2 National Curriculum in England

Joining

The basic principle of joining is quite straight forward: instead of lifting their pencil after forming each letter, children are taught to keep their pencil on the page. Once this simple concept is secure, break letters are introduced. Learning to join is unlikely to take more than about four instructional writing sessions. Fluency is then established through regular practice.



Preparing to write – The P Checks

Effective handwriting practice has two dimensions: preparation (process) and teaching steps (product). Preparation involves setting up the optimum conditions for successful learning.

This can be summarised as the P checks – Posture, Pencil, Paper and Pressure. These, together with other biomechanical and ergonomic factors such as furniture and tools, have a significant impact on the motor actions demanded of handwriting.

The P Checks need to be gradually explained to children as soon as they are ready to sit at a table to write. This ensures that good handwriting habits are established from the start and become automatic.

Posture

Children need to maintain a stable, comfortable position to support the process of handwriting.

- Back should be supported by the chair.
- Slight tilt forwards
- Hips, knees and ankles at right angles
- Feet flat on the floor (or supported on a step)
- Arms resting comfortably on the table
- Tummy - a fist's distance from the table
- Other hand used to stabilise paper.
- Eyes should be a ruler's length away from the desk.



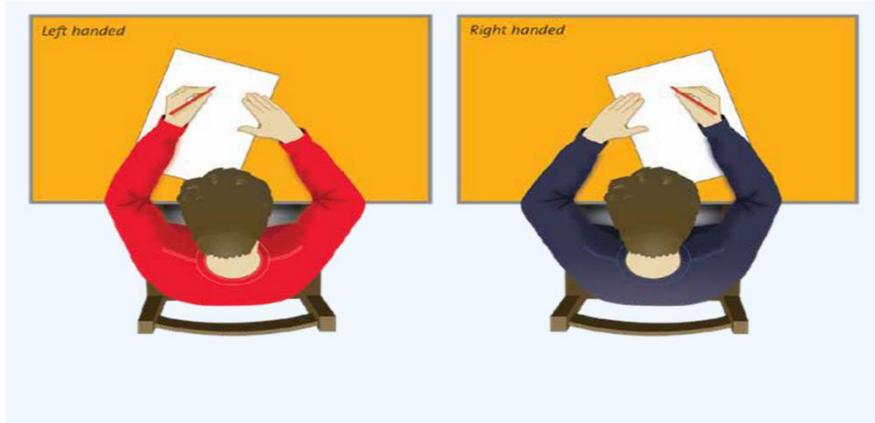
Pencil (grip/grasp)

The subject of pencil grip is one that raises a great deal of concern and controversy, possibly more than any other aspect of handwriting.

A functional grip combines a balance of control, freedom and comfort in order to produce a legible script for the required duration. The dynamic tripod grasp is considered optimal because it provides stability and 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.



As a child grows older, it becomes increasingly difficult to change a grip. When considering whether action needs to be taken, a general rule should be applied. If the grip is causing pain, discomfort or fatigue, or is seriously affecting legibility, then seek advice. If not, it should be left alone. It may be possible to support a more effective grip with a wider choice of pencils and pens, adaptations to posture and relaxation techniques. Pencils should be held about two centimeters from the tip. Grip should be supported by a stable wrist, resting on the desk.



Paper

(position)

The issue of paper position and how it can impact on a writer's posture need to be understood. If this strategy is left to chance when children first begin to write, paper may be placed in an unsuitable position. The body then adjusts to this placement, often twisting itself in the process. This can also lead to awkward pencil grasp, such as the hooked grip.

It should be explained to the child how to position the paper or exercise book on the table and hold it still with the 'helper' hand. The paper should be slanted parallel to the writing arm at a comfortable distance from the edge of the table. It 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.

Other points to include:

- A smaller sized exercise book (or landscape format) is easier for young children to manage
- Show how to gradually move the book upwards as the writing moves down the page
- A single sheet of paper needs to be paper-clipped to card to provide more stability

Pressure

This refers to the pressure or force put through the pen(cil). Ideally, this should leave a clear trace on the paper, neither too faint nor too dark, and flow along the line rhythmically. When children are learning to write, pencil pressure is likely to vary depending on the demands of the task, stage of development and the tools being used. Most children will learn through experimentation how much pressure they should exert.

Where there are difficulties regulating pressure, this will affect the quality of handwriting produced. Some children apply very light pressure and produce faint, spidery writing. Others press so heavily that the paper is marked or torn.

- Writing sessions should begin with warm up and hand relaxation exercises
- Observations of difficulties need to include what is happening with the whole body
- A range of pencils, pens and adaptive equipment should be available.

Key Resources

Pens and/or pencils?

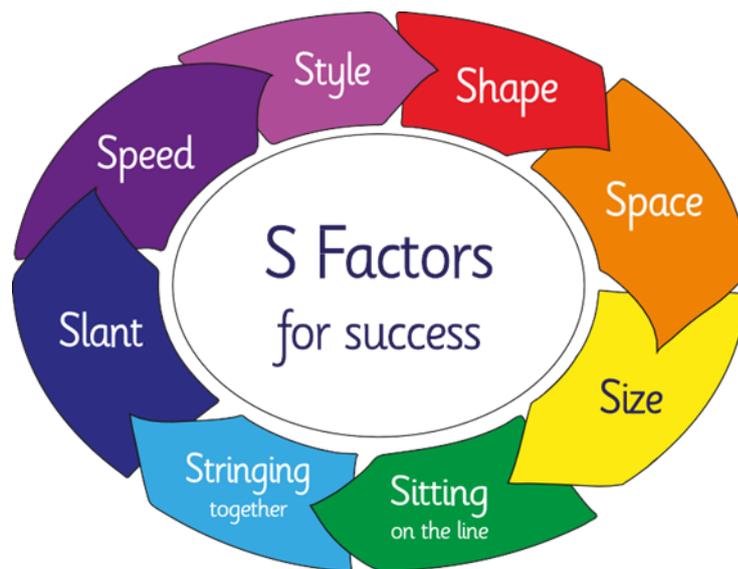
The actions of the two tools differ beyond the obvious features of ink and graphite. A pencil provides helpful sensory feedback as the writer applies pressure to make a mark. In contrast, many pens move more quickly on the surface of the paper and make control more difficult but speed and joining easier. Many children benefit from using pencils for longer and should not feel embarrassed by this choice.

A flexible approach would be to continue using pencils in Year 3 to secure fluency without any added complications and introduce pens in Year 4 for those who are ready. The transition should be gradual when the child feels comfortable with making the necessary adaptations.

Exercise Books

Most children start to gradually reduce the size of their writing in KS2 and can make the transition to lines that are less far apart. But this progression should be gradual and avoid any sudden changes in spacing. Many handwriting problems in Key Stage 2 are started when children leave Y2 writing confidently on 15mm lines, then just weeks later in Y3, are expected to squeeze their letters between 8mm spaces.

The teaching steps – S factors



The S Factors show the teaching steps in order. They correlate with the requirements of both the National Curriculum and the end of Key Stage assessments. To aid memory, these all begin with the letter S, so are called The S Factors. Each S Factor represents a step in a developmental sequence, beginning with learning letter formation (Shape).

Shape

S for Shape – letter formation

A key component of legibility is accurate letter formation. It is vital that children are taught how to form the letters of the alphabet correctly from the beginning. This means knowing the right starting point for each letter and following the correct movement pathways.

If children are not taught how to do this, they will invent their own ways of writing the letters, and although the letters may look right, the incorrect way of forming them will soon become established in the pupil's movement memory and effectively hamper progress in developing fluent joined writing later. These faults will need to be corrected at some stage if the pupil is to progress. This is always more difficult for both pupil and teacher than teaching the right movement from the start.

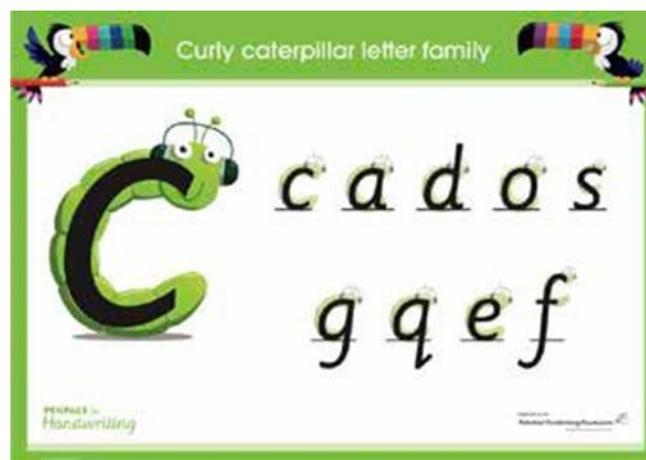
Practice makes permanent!

Letter Formation Families

Teaching the letters in movement groups reduces the learning load and provides for reinforcement of basic movement patterns. This is a statutory requirement for Year 1 of the National Curriculum:

'understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' (letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these.'

As letter formation begins in Reception, it makes sense to introduce the families there. The movements of letters should be practiced. Research on motor learning in children emphasizes the importance of self-talk and verbal mnemonic scripts. These letter patterns help young children to remember how each letter is formed. It is helpful if there is consistency in the patterns used in school, especially in EYFS. These should be shared with parents.



The use of exit strokes

For the majority of children, adding an exit flick to the appropriate letters is manageable and leads quite naturally into joining later on. It is helpful to explain this function of flicks to children so that they are motivated to use them. Examples of joining from everyday life can help the understanding.

Space

S for Space – between letters and words.

There needs to be a small space between letters in a word. Exit flicks and joining strokes can provide this.

There needs to be appropriate spaces between words for the sake of legibility. The spaces should be even, match the size of the writing and be about the same size as one letter o or two – oo. Children need to gradually visualise a suitable space between words, but before this is established, a lollystick or coffee stirrer can help. Using the traditional 'Finger space' is not helpful in the long run as fingers grow bigger and writing gets smaller.

Size

S for Size - the relative positioning of letters

Sitting on the line

S for Sitting on the line

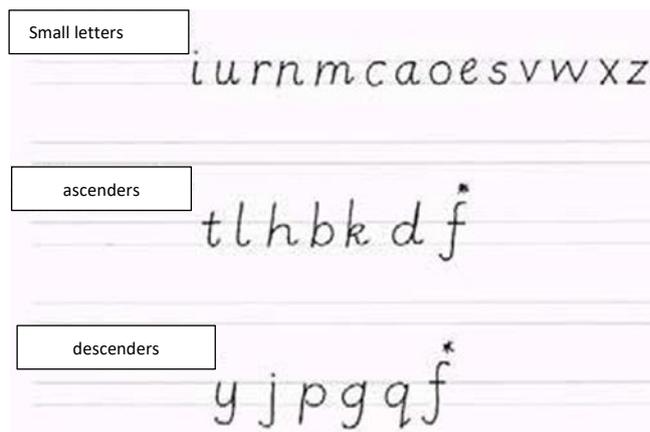
Once children are secure in forming letters correctly, they need to learn where to position them. Sitting the letters on the writing line helps legibility. After sitting, the next step is to understand the relative sizing of letters.

To enable all letters to be appropriately aligned, the lines in all exercise books need to be sufficiently spaced to accommodate the child's natural writing size. If the spacing is too narrow, writing becomes cramped and incorrectly aligned. A short period using simple double lined paper will help scaffold learning of size and position. As the size of children's writing will vary, it is advisable to print this format in differing widths and use that most suitable for each child.

In Years 1-2, this will need to include 6mm, 5mm and 4 mm spacings between the two lines. Children will need to use their eyes to judge the sizing of 'tall' and 'tail' letters. Once this awareness of sizing becomes embedded, the child can return to using normal lines.



Practising the size families on double lined paper follows next.



S for Stringing (Joining)

The National Curriculum statutory notes and guidance for Year 2 state:

- start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined.

The non-statutory notes and guidance add:

- they should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.

Some children may be ready to join before Year 2, but it is crucial that 'starting to join' is not given elevated esteem or some children will feel pressured to try doing it before they are developmentally ready.

There are three basic rules for joining.

- Diagonal or up the hill joins
Letters which finish on the baseline join diagonally
- Horizontal or across the bridge joins
Letters which finish at the top join horizontally
- Unjoined or break letters
Only the x is left unjoined from the letter following it.



Progression in teaching joins

If the school is using a published scheme, this will provide a structure which should be followed consistently. If there is not a scheme, then staff will need to draw up an agreed teaching progression, introducing the joins both to and from each letter and giving the children plenty of practice with short words.

This should begin with adjacent letters which occur most frequently e.g., it, he, th, ee. Once learnt, the joins should be applied to the high frequency words, digraphs, trigraphs and consonant clusters required to be learnt in phonics.

As soon as children are able to join letters, they should use this for all of their written work so that it gradually becomes automatic. This is also the requirement for Years 3 and 4 in the National Curriculum.

S for Slant

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. This step is included in the National Curriculum for Years 3 and 4. Slant can be practised through writing small words using letters l, h, b, i, u, y: hill, little etc with a focus on parallel down strokes.

S for Speed

Speed and style are the aspects of handwriting to be secured in Years 5 and 6. Speed is a measure of automation, so it will not develop until the other S factors are embedded. Children need help understanding that increasing speed changes writing. More speed can improve rhythm and fluency, but too much can cause illegibility.

There needs to be awareness that competent writers have two kinds of handwriting - one which is good quality and is used for more formal purposes and the other - a fast, note-taking 'rough' hand which is used when speed is needed.

Building up speed takes short regular practice of appropriate tasks: repeating words, phrases, then sentences and paragraphs.

There are some children who learn to write legibly but will have disabilities which preclude them from writing at speed (e.g. children with cerebral palsy or DCD). This is where the school handwriting and SEN policies must be coordinated so that special provision can be made for this group.

S for Style

As handwriting develops, children should be encouraged to develop a style of writing that works for them individually and is accessible to a reader. Slight changes to style could also increase fluency and speed. The teaching needs to include how to adapt style to different writing demands, including emails, labels, block capitals and decorative fonts.

Left-Handed Writers

Practical support ideas may include:

- A higher seat
- A sloped writing surface
- Good lighting - make sure the writing hand does not cast a shadow on the writing
- Sit on the left-hand side of right-handed writers so elbows do not bump
- Paper tilted clockwise in the left-handed writer position
- Pencils and pens to suit - ergonomic good grip, soft lead, fast drying ink
- Left-handed scissors
- Investigate arm, hand and pen hold positions to find those which suit
- Explore changes to letter formation and joining movements