Handwriting

The purpose of this booklet is to gather together for you activities and resources to get you up and running in your classroom. I have also outlined pupils' progression in this area and given you some pointers towards more theoretical material you may wish to read for yourself. Very little of this material is my original work. I would like to acknowledge here any work that I have not attributed to its author.

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Top tips for developing children’s handwriting

Children need to have well developed fine-motor skills before they begin to write. Activities like using scissors, threading beads, jigsaw puzzles and more can be used to develop these. Young pupils need to begin with large writing or painting tools for to develop their control. Don't be concerned about letter size at first; instead, emphasize form, letting them draw on blank paper with easy-to-hold ""fat"" markers, crayons, or paintbrushes which allow less pressure to be used in drawing a solid looking line. Be sure the pupils use the same grip required later for paper and pencil work.

Begin with lines and shapes, encouraging pupils to draw all vertical lines from the top to the bottom. All circular shapes should begin at the 2 o'clock position, moving up, left, and around-like the letter c. Shapes using straight lines-triangles, rectangles, and squares, should always use individual lines that meet, not a single stroke with an attempt to make ""pointy"" corners. Every line should be drawn left to right or top to bottom. Vertical lines are drawn first, left side, then right side, and then the connecting horizontal lines. The horizontal lines on top are first, and all horizontal lines should begin at the left. Pupils have their own short cuts, so these basics do need to be taught.

Next, teach a few lower-case letters and short words. Letters should be taught in groups according to the way in which the letter begins (Appendix 1). Many pupils want to learn to write their own name before anything else. That's fine as long as you are careful to show them the correct form for drawing each letter, only use a capital letter at the beginning, and then give the child samples to trace.

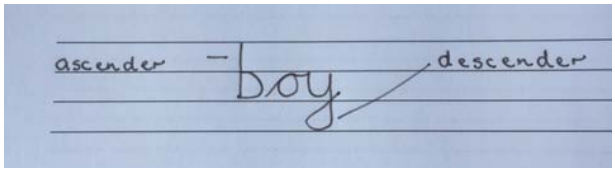
There are two components to handwriting, whether a pupil is learning to print or write in cursive (joined): correct letter formation and uniform letter size. Pupils should focus on one objective at a time-first, correct formation, then size.

Have them work on several, but not all, letters, forming letters and then words. Once assigned letters are formed correctly, emphasize uniform size-lower case letters consistently half the size of upper case letters, but continue to require correct formation. Follow this procedure as you add new letters, words, and sentences. When practising, single letters require the same even spacing as whole words. It helps young pupils to use a finger in between each word for uniform spacing.

Oversee practice so pupils don't fill a page with improper work simply to finish quickly. Praise letters and words written well and have the pupil rub out and rewrite anything unacceptable. While this may seem time consuming, remember that it will actually take more time to undo bad habits.

Once letter formation is acceptable, pupils should practice on paper with wide guide lines in order to learn to control size as well as to develop uniformity in size. Educational supplies sell paper with the correct pattern of lines for practice, or this can be produced by computer.

Whether printing or writing in cursive, it is important that pupils have these lines to show them high letters (letters with ascenders of tall letters) should reach and also how low letters with descenders (letters with tails) should go. Handwriting paper is available with lines in a variety of widths. Write the letter or word on the paper a few times for the pupils to trace and then copy.



For best results, handwriting practice should be scheduled every day. It is better to take several days off after practising consistently for a week or so, then to practise erratically. It is also more effective to have two short practices a day then one long practice if the pupil becomes quickly tired when writing. Fine motor skills develop more slowly, especially in boys, then gross motor skills. Often boys fuss about paper and pencil work simply because their hands get tired. Be sure to have pupils sitting in a proper writing position. The flat surface on which their arms can rest comfortably should not be too high or too low, and their feet should be supported on the floor or on a box, rather than dangling. Improper table height, a slouching or straining body position or dangling feet all sap strength, increases fatigue.

Handwriting practice consists of copying, not creating, letters, words and sentences. Separate composition from handwriting by allowing pupils to dictate or type compositions, turn in work with handwriting that is less than perfect, or copy final drafts during regularly scheduled handwriting practice instead of the usual handwriting lesson. Remember that composition requires pupils to focus on content and organization, and, during the editing process, on spelling and punctuation skills. If handwriting perfection is also required, pupils who are fatigued by handwriting or who have difficulty with neatness are likely to look for ways to avoid composition work. At the very least they will compose extremely short works simply to avoid as much handwriting as possible.

During handwriting practice focus on adjusting size or any other difficulties that make attempts to fill in blanks sloppy, illegible, or tediously slow. Increase the total daily time spent on handwriting as an isolated lesson as necessary rather than pressuring the pupils with handwriting expectations they are not yet able to meet while working in other subjects. As maturity and motor skills allow, you may require readable written answers that fit the allotted space. Once you know that the pupil is capable of neat work done at a reasonable speed, all final written work (not rough drafts) can be required to meet the standard you have set.

Ultimately, pupils should be able to take phone messages, write letters, and complete applications with writing that is legible, neat, and fits into the space allotted. Teach older pupils who have great difficulty with cursive writing to sign their names with a mature looking cursive form, and then focus on printing letters that are neat and small enough for filling out forms. They can use their typing skills for everything else.

Handwriting does not have to be a battleground. By targeting specific and narrow objectives, praising efforts that are well-done as well as pointing out errors to be corrected, and scheduling regular, supervised practice, progress can be made much more rapidly than if pupils are left on their own to complete handwriting workbooks. Young pupils want to write well, but are often frustrated by their own lack of coordination and discouraged because it requires so much more effort to please either the teacher or themselves than they thought it would. Older pupils often rush to complete assignments and argue that neatness is irrelevant. In either case, the teacher must be patient, choose reasonable objectives, and stand firm. Legible handwriting is a worthy cause!

Appendix 1

Letter Families

c a d g o s q e

l t f i j

b h r k p y

n m

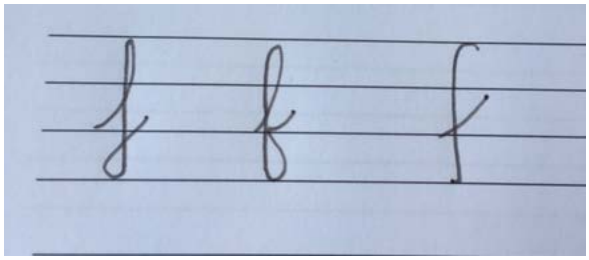
u w v x z

Appendix 2

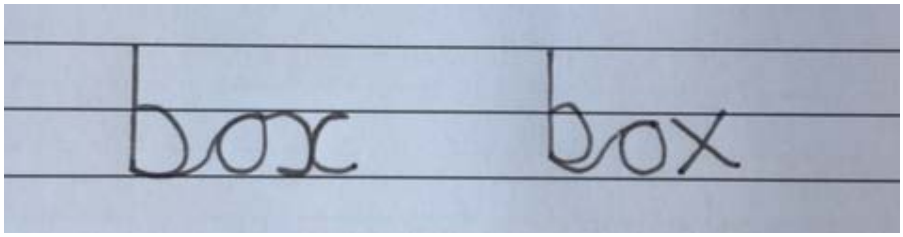
Handwriting styles

The style of handwriting taught from school to school can vary a great deal so it always better to check which is used. Children need to be taught the same style or they can become very confused and anxious.

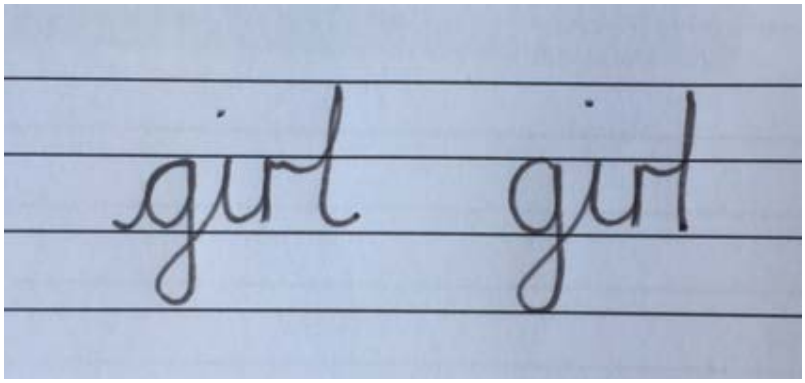
The shape of a particular letter can vary:



Some schools teach that each letter should be joined to another, while some schools teach that some letters do not need to be joined:



Whether each letter has a “tail” at the beginning and the end, can vary too:



Appendix 3

Handwriting Practice

Appendix 4

Line guide

Make sure that the top of your paper and the top of the line guide are nice and straight.