



**P O D A R**  
**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION**

**TO TEACH IS TO TOUCH A LIFE FOREVER**

**THE HANDWRITING**  
**MANUAL FOR EARLY**  
**CHILDHOOD**  
**TEACHERS.**

**PUT TOGETHER BY PODAR INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION WITH INPUTS FROM THE HANDWRITING**

**ASSOCIATION OF U.K**

**NOT FOR SALE**

Writing in preschools has always been a focus of discussion and debate that has been going on now for a while, mainly because a lot of inconsistencies prevail in early childhood education in India.

Recently heads of schools under a group started by Dr. Harish Shetty, discussed these questions at length-

- Do you need fine motor skills to write cursive? At what age are fingers of tiny tots ready for handling the controlled cursive strokes of pencil?
- Relevance of cursive writing in the computer age.
- Isn't Writing a skill and should it not develop in a systematic manner?
- Fixing age at which a child is ready to learn should be taken in to consideration as it is important
- Many of us have always hated the red and blue line books... standing line sleeping line... horrible lessons those. And the teachers focusing on those who have artistic handwriting.....
- In the open house day some schools display the written books of pre-school kids for other moms to see..... So that they can harass their own kids home.
- Kindergarten students, primary students feel terrified to write cursive, they concentrate more on joining the letters instead of understanding what they are writing, they take long time to complete the work if they are asked to write in cursive.
- This also brings us to another question, if a child at the kindergarten level succeeds in writing a letter or word or number then why does he have to go on writing the same fifty times? It becomes monotonous and that is why slowly children develop an aversion for their homework. Can we spare a thought to this?
- Some feel, those red and blue lines do help children to "shape and size" the letters within the given order and the whole handwriting looks "neat" when they are able to size the letters as figures in its limited structure. For those who can achieve this, it definitely does give sense of fulfillment and achievement.
- Should reading be taught before writing or writing before reading
- If writing of letters is taught as all letters with standing lines together etc then should number also be taught in the same manner?

To answer all the above is important because in India our primary, secondary and higher secondary school curriculum has gone through many drastic and some time path breaking changes for the benefit of children but the pre primary curriculum is still shackled in age old redundant traditional senseless practices!

The reason to some extent is because we call it pre school or pre primary instead of kindergarten or early childhood education. When we call it preschool the focus is on making it a preparatory for primary school and that is exactly what is happening, instead of focusing on brain research or theory of child development schools are forcing learning skills in kindergarteners that are not age appropriate, I don't think many schools even know the meaning of D.A.P (developmentally

appropriate practice) which is so essential for deciding the curriculum or activities of kindergarten.

After reading the discussion questions Podar Institute of Education decided to put together the latest research and notes on handwriting in early childhood so that teachers and schools can have a focused system to follow for reading and writing

For reading and writing the following points are important and they also answer the questions given above-

- Research says that writing should be taught to kids only at age 4 or 5! Till then give them writing implements and let them explore and they may even start forming letters , shapes , forms on their own, but controlled writing should not be taught before age 4! And here we have schools teaching nursery kids to write!
- Readiness skills are extremely important to develop fine motor, eye hand co-ordination so at age 2 and 3 more of such activities should be given to children, most children in primary school complain of 'hand pain' or inability to copy from the blackboard, this is because the two main skills of fine motor and eye hand are not suitably developed. Activities like catching a ball, (develops hand grip and eye hand co-ordination) parachute play, (develops all the write muscles namely wrist, forearm, elbows and shoulders) scissoring (develops the three main fingers used to grip a pencil) should be done before you give a pencil to a child.
- Is there any research that talks about what is the appropriate age was another question raised- well child development is the best research to guide educationists and child development says that growth in children happens cephalo-caudal and proximo-distal which simply means head to toes and torso outwards to your fingers, so our fingers are the last to develop, so writing should be the last skill to focus on!
- Writing develops in a systematic manner and yes, children learn reading and writing simultaneously, and maximum that children read is in print, but at that time we are asking them to join letters while writing, so confusion reigns supreme in both reading and writing.
- Should capital letters be taught first or small letters? Small letters should be taught first because children learn to read first and all reading is in small letters also in a sentence you use more than 90% small letters. Another reason is that when you teach them capital letters first then they learn to write words in all capital and then they have to learn to unlearn and write the correct manner, this again takes them backwards on the learning curve.
- Many schools teach the writing patterns first and then move on to writing letters that are of the same pattern like all letters with curves together, lines together etc, that is fine for letters because the only place children need to know the alphabet in the correct order is when referring to the dictionary! But doing the same for numbers is not good, as some schools teach 1,4,7,9

first and then the numbers with curves, this is completely incorrect as in numbers you need to know what comes before and after so you are actually confusing children with this method.

- Are 4 lines important? Oh, the monsters called red and blue lines! This is a 10 year old battle that Podar Jumbo Kids has been fighting; here are some points in favour of 3 lines to replace 4 lines (red and blue lines). Ultimate goal of writing is to see that the child is able to write on a 'single line format'. In most schools now the preference is given to using three line books instead of four lines as the transition from three lines to single lines is easier rather than from four lines to single line for the following reasons
1. In single line the child has to use one line after the other and hence when the child is trained on a 3 line page, only the dotted middle line disappears, no unlearning and no major change.
  2. It also helps them understand that the small letters are half the size of the capital letters
  3. Where as in the red and blue line, there are four lines and ultimate goal for the child is to write on single line, so when he writes a capital G and a small g on a four line he needs to use all four lines, so which of the four lines disappear when he moves to single one? Very confusing as all four lines are required to write so children go through a tough process of learning and unlearning. (try out this example and you will experience the trauma that they go through when changing from 4 line to 3 lines)

Writing is a researched systematic skill and teachers who teach foundational writing have to be trained in it and to do so Podar has put together a handwriting manual with inputs from "developing a handwriting policy" by the Handwriting Association of U.K.

This manual is available free for download on the website [www.podarinstitute.com](http://www.podarinstitute.com) and [www.pencil-india.org](http://www.pencil-india.org)

So help us spread the word about writing skills and I am sure we can have more children saying- 'Give me more', when it comes to writing in schools and at home.

Warm regards,  
Swati Popat Vats  
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**A**s educators it is our responsibility to understand the growth that takes place

inside a child's brain so that we can fully educate our children to their maximum potential. The first five years are critical and will help define a child's purpose, creativity, and ultimately his or her destiny.

Knowing what to teach, how to teach and understanding the development of the child's brain (D.A.P – Developmentally Appropriate Practice) all influence instructional practices for the young child.

Every brain is uniquely organized. No two children's experiences are the same as are no two child's neurological network of cells, neurons and dendrites.

Education is about the 'holistic development' of the child. Teachers must also know the importance of emotional development in children-that children from age 1 to 6 are developing important life emotions like trust – mistrust, autonomy, shame, doubt, initiative, guilt etc. Our lack of understanding the developmental milestones while developing the child's fine motor skills for writing may end up developing more negative emotions than positive emotions towards the art of writing in our child thus affecting his/her brain development.

So, teachers do and be patient with your children when teaching writing skills and if you find a child being notoriously slow in responding, it's just that every bit of information that passes through a child's brain has to navigate through trillions of extra connections so their growing brains are bagged down by all those excess synapses. If you observe and carefully study a child's face, you can actually see the child trying to process information before he/she responds.

“ . . . Education is not something which the teacher does, but a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in the virtue of experience in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher’s task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child.”

- Maria Montessori



**Correlate Maria Montessori's philosophy to foster the writing skills in a child:**

 **The 3 parts of process of learning**

**and**

 **The five steps to learning**



**According to Maria Montessori, the process of learning has three parts:**

1. the brain,
2. the senses and
3. the muscles

All the above three mentioned must cooperate for learning to take place. So teachers must let the children **see-do and learn** rather than explain and learn.

There is no fixed age to teach writing to children, because a child has to be physically and psychologically ready for writing. Hence, writing readiness activities are very important because it is very essential that the muscles of the finger, thumb and wrist (fine motor skills) are properly developed before we ask the child to do any activity or make him/her hold a writing tool.



**According to Maria Montessori there are five steps to learning:**



**1. Observes demonstration:**

In teaching anything to the child, always demonstrate it first, because children learn best through imitation. So, when a teacher is teaching a child to hold a crayon, scissor or how to write with a pencil, the first step of a teacher should be to demonstrate and show the correct way.



**2. Participating stage:**

Then is the participating stage where the child tries out what was demonstrated / taught. At this particular stage the child does not require your constant help but all that they ask for is your presence and guidance.



**3. Practice:**

Now it's time for practice and repetition. The more a teacher revisits the writing readiness activity / information the more it strengthens.



#### **4. Eureka moment:**

At this stage the teacher will experience the moment where the child has mastered what she has taught and is excited, enthusiastic about the writing readiness activities. Teacher should keep in mind that at this stage the child wants to do the activity again and again, try it in many different ways etc. Here teachers must not get irritated and ask them to change the activity. The same enthusiastic is required from the adult too.



#### **5. Performance:**

Now the children have mastered the writing readiness activities and will be able to do it well, whenever required.



**Getting it right from**  
**the start**



## **The concept of readiness**

Both physiological and psychological developments are necessary for the child to be ready for any activity – this is termed as ‘readiness’.

This is a very difficult concept to define. An experienced teacher can have a clear vision that a child is not quite ready to learn to form letters. There are many possible reasons for this, e.g. the child may be generally delayed in the area of language and literacy or lack the physical coordination to hold and control a writing implement.

A less experienced teacher making this kind of judgment about a child may be difficult and schools need to discuss and offer some guidance, e.g. a very simple rule of thumb is that a child who cannot draw a circle, a vertical and/or a horizontal line that is recognizable is unlikely to manage the more complex shapes that make up letters (see purple column on next page).

To make writing fun for children it is very important to link it with colouring and art activities as these activities help develop the muscles needed for writing.

Reading and writing go hand in hand. One cannot teach a child writing without doing readiness activities for reading, both cannot be taught in isolation.



## **Some guidelines for teachers to know when a child is ready to write:**

Firstly a teacher should know and observe if a child has sufficient pencil control/coordination to begin to form letters.

Listed below are a few checklist to identify if a child is ready to write.



## **Teachers to demonstrate the following and then ask the child to imitate freehand:**



Horizontal lines left-to-right, both straight and wavy.



Straight scribble



Round and round scribble



A diagonal cross



A horizontal / vertical cross



An anti-clockwise circle



A clockwise circle



A vertical line in a downward direction



A vertical line in an upward direction

If the child is able to complete these figures with a pencil on paper and following the same movements as the adult he or she is likely to be ready to begin learning to form the letters.



**Teacher can also observe the below mentioned points in the children and draw an overall conclusion on whether a child is ready to write:**



A child learns to appreciate the writing tools such as crayons, brushes, pencils and scissors.



Is able to form simple shapes like circles, lines and boxes.



Develops a hand preference.



Exhibits certain physical abilities like small and large muscle co-ordination, eye-coordination, is able to sit and concentrate.



Has developed wrist dexterity which is essential for proper flow and movement.



Shows visual and auditory discrimination.



Is able to find out likeness and differences in sizes, shapes, objects and sounds.



Is able to follow left and right direction while looking at pictures.



Is able to follow instructions like big, small, left, right, up and down etc.



**General pre-writing**  
**activities for finer**  
**muscle development**



**To new and inexperienced teachers it should always be made clear that the activities mentioned below are only indirectly related to handwriting - they do not help the child to learn how to form letters for example.**

### **Pre writing activities for finer muscle development**



#### **For Age group: 3 to 4 years**

- Catching a ball
- Play doh
- Block printing
- Lacing beads
- Dabbing
- Finger rhymes
- Snapping fingers
- Paper sticking activities
- Thumb or finger printing
- Sand play: making wet balls of sand
- Using telephone with old fashioned dials
- Dropping water with dropper
- Jigsaw puzzle
- Buttoning
- Paper crumpling
- Scissoring
- Cooking activities –
  1. Baking activities: mixing, pounding the dough, rolling, cutting in small shapes can help develop finer motor skills.
  2. Making sandwich – applying jam and butter on bread, cutting can help develop the finer motor skills.



**For age group: 4 to 6 years**

- Washing car
- Parachute play
- Tweezers
- Scissoring
- Nestling barrels that screw together
- Opening lids of jars
- To unwrap parcels, open boxes, and unscrewing the lids of jars
- Paper twisting
- Paper sticking
- Collage work
- Spray painting
- Paper folding
- Cooking activities-
  1. Making sandwich – applying jam and butter on bread, cutting can help develop the finer motor skills
  2. Making salad – sorting beans, peeling/grating potato, carrot, fruits, cutting fruits, shelling peas, mixing ingredient with a spoon.
- Cutting paper activities.



## Get set go...how to mould a kindergartners to make writing a fun loving activity.

Before a tool of writing is introduced, teacher to understand the palmer grip and pincer grip and give activities accordingly.

Crayon or pencil or scissor?

Which tool is the most appropriate for a kindergartner to begin their journey of writing?

**It's firstly the crayon, then the scissors and finally a pencil.**



### Crayon:



#### Why a crayon?

- Small muscle exercise stimulates brain growth.
- Crayons help the children to exercise their finger muscles, especially those fingers that are used for holding a pencil.
- Very young children should not be given a pencil to hold, as their small fingers cannot hold it comfortably, so they should first be given thick crayon that is comfortable.
- Once the children are comfortable holding crayons, they will automatically hold a pencil comfortably.
- The two activities that are important before the children start colouring within a given boundary are '**doodling**' and '**scribbling**'.



#### What are 'doodles'?

Drawing, which have no forms, just free expression are called 'doodles'. This activity helps a kindergartner to be comfortable with the crayon and help relax his/her muscles.



### **Why 'scribble'?**

In the early stages children need to develop some control to make a mark at all. By 'scribbling' they learn to make marks, by pulling and pushing the crayon and the varying the pressure. In this way children develop the ability to form straight and curved lines, which they will use to enhance their writing skills.

Most importantly while doing the above activities with the children – a teacher shouldn't interrupt a child when he/she is doing 'doodling' or 'scribbling' for when we do this – we as educators unknowingly would have 'killed' independent thinking and problem-solving in the child.

By selecting the right kind of writing implement a teacher and a parent can foster healthy writing habits in children and make them love writing.



### **While selecting crayons:**

- For toddlers select those that are thick and fit in the palm because that is the first instinctive way a child will hold a crayon.
- Crayons should be such that they do not break easily, as this can be frustrating for the child.
- Children tend to put everything in their mouth and may even bite it and swallow – so always select crayons made from food grade colours and avoid those made from textile dyes-as these are dangerous for children when swallowed.
- The wrapper of the crayon should be of the same colour as the tip of the crayon as this helps the child select the colour all by himself and hence develops confidence.
- A crayon box is usually labeled with the child name but what about crayons, as these can get easily mixed with the other children crayons so try and find those that have the facility to write the child name on each crayon.
- After a child has done colouring it should not stain the other pages.
- While colouring the child should be able to get an even flow and not a patchy print.

- Teacher and a parent should always select a crayon that is 3 sided so that it automatically teaches the child the right way to hold the crayon and this will in future will help him in holding a pencil.



### **Why a scissors?**

- The 'thumb', the 'forefinger' and the 'middle finger' together help the child hold a pair of scissors.
- The same three fingers that help the child in holding a pencil are used in a scissor and hence cutting with a scissor is a good finger exercise. It makes the fingers stronger and relaxed.
- When a child learns to cut on a line – it improves 'eye-hand co-ordination' skills. So, by using a scissor a child will be able to hold the pencil comfortably and will hence have a relaxed and smooth flow and enjoy writing.

By selecting the right kind of writing implement a teacher and a parent can foster healthy writing habits in children and make them love writing.



### **While selecting scissors:**

It is very important to give cutting with scissors as a pre-writing activity as the same three fingers that are used in holding a pencil are used for holding the scissor and hence this helps develops them.

- Both the finger holes should be of the same size as this teaches them to give the right pressure.
- It should be sharp enough for cutting and blunt enough not to hurt the child.
- Try rubbing the blades on your palms to check if they hurt.



### **While selecting a felt pen:**

- Do not go one the size or the thickness of the pen. Check the length of the inside ink holder.

- It should use food grade ink so that it is safe even if the children put it in their mouth.
- The cap should be ventilated as this will help the child breathe in case it swallows it.
- The tip should be comfortable-not too short or too thin.
- The ink should be such that it can be washed off easily from the child's hands.



#### **While choosing a pencil:**

- A pencil should have a ridged body as this helps a child's fingers rest comfortably.
- If a child is finding it difficult to hold a pencil correctly, help him/her by putting a little soft clay on the pencil and gently press the child's fingers into the correct position for writing. Check that the pencil only rests on the middle finger and not gripped too tightly.
- Check the centering of the lead-it should be exactly in the center or else the pencil point will keep breaking while writing and this can be very frustrating for the child.
- Do more for utility rather than its colour or price.
- Do by selecting the right kind of writing implement you can foster healthy writing habits in the children and make them love writing.



#### **For a child to start writing with a pencil:**

- His left and right preference should be in place
- How to hold a pencil-pincer- three digit grip
- Trace
- Copy simple shapes
- Be able to draw small and big
- Progression from left to right
- Do writing patterns
- Control his grip and pressure

- Is interested in writing
- Has attention span



### **Few pointers for a teacher to enhance the correct writing skills in children:**



#### **Furniture**

As far as possible teachers should ensure that children are sitting in chairs and at tables which are the right size for them.



#### **Posture**

It is very important for children to develop correct posture from the beginning, i.e. sitting with the upper body reasonably upright and squarely facing the writing surface, with feet on the floor and the non-writing hand supporting the work.



#### **Light**

Ensure that all children have good light when they are writing. If they must copy from the board, they should have a good view of it and it should not be obscured by the excessive shine on many of the cheaper white-boards.



#### **Paper and paper position**

Good quality, smooth paper can make quite a difference to the ease of the writing. Unfortunately re-cycled paper is not helpful to handwriting as it tends to be rough and absorbent.

Left-handers should rotate the writing surface slightly to the right and right-handers should rotate to the left.

Avoid allowing pupils gradually to rotate the paper further and further until the lines are virtually vertical, as this can become a habit difficult to break.



## **Lines**

Children, except perhaps the very youngest, should be provided with lined paper to write on, with lines which are not too faint and at an appropriate width for the pupils

*(Above are excerpts from the book "Developing a handwriting policy for your school" by the Handwriting Association of U.K.)*



## **Some helpful suggestions for making writing and drawing easy and enjoyable:**

- Encourage free expression.
- Do not make children copy drawings as this kills creativity.
- Give children as many different writing tools to experiment with as possible – like crayons, chalk, colour pencils and paint brushes etc.
- Do not criticize a child's attempts at drawing.
- Ask the children about drawings. Do not force the children if he is not ready to answer but instead coax them with questions like would you like to tell me about your drawing? Rather than by asking what is this?
- Never force a child to write in a small and confined space. Restricting the natural movement of the hand before time can lead to antipathy towards writing.
- Show the children how to use a crayon or a pencil correctly. It should be held away from the tip between the index finger and thumb and supported by the middle finger. The fingers should be relaxed and comfortable.
- To make the fingers relaxed and comfortable – pre writing activities for finer muscle development like – clay modeling, peg puzzles, lacing, threading and cutting with scissors should be encouraged.
- Another activity to promote love for writing is by having a writing corner in the classroom during freeplay time. The writing corner can simply be a table with writing implements and materials.

- Sight reading or sight vocabulary is very important to develop in children when they are learning to read and write.



### **Why is sight vocabulary important for writing?**

To write is to form symbols representing letters or words with pen, pencil and brush etc on any surface and especially paper.

Hence, recognizing that symbols stand for something is the first step towards writing readiness.

**For e.g.:** a child looks at a picture of a cat and is able to say 'cat'. Now if the same picture also has the word written under it then the child will over a period of time able to recognize the word and read it.



**Introduction –**  
**Handwriting an**  
**essential skill**



### **What is handwriting?**

Handwriting is a complex skill which involves a wide range of cognitive, linguistic and perceptual-motor abilities. It is the way we record our thoughts on paper, using a generally understood system of symbols.



### **Is handwriting an essential skill like reading, spelling and maths?**

Yes, like reading, spelling and maths, handwriting is a skill which has to be taught in school. The time taken to help the children learn to write fluently and quickly is well spent, since handwriting is required in every school subject.

Children cannot simply 'pick up' the handwriting skill by themselves. Even with effective teaching, it is a skill which takes time to perfect. Handwriting and the way it's taught also changes over time.

The goal of a kindergarten school is to ensure that all children reach an acceptable level of handwriting skill by the time they are ready to move to the primary school.



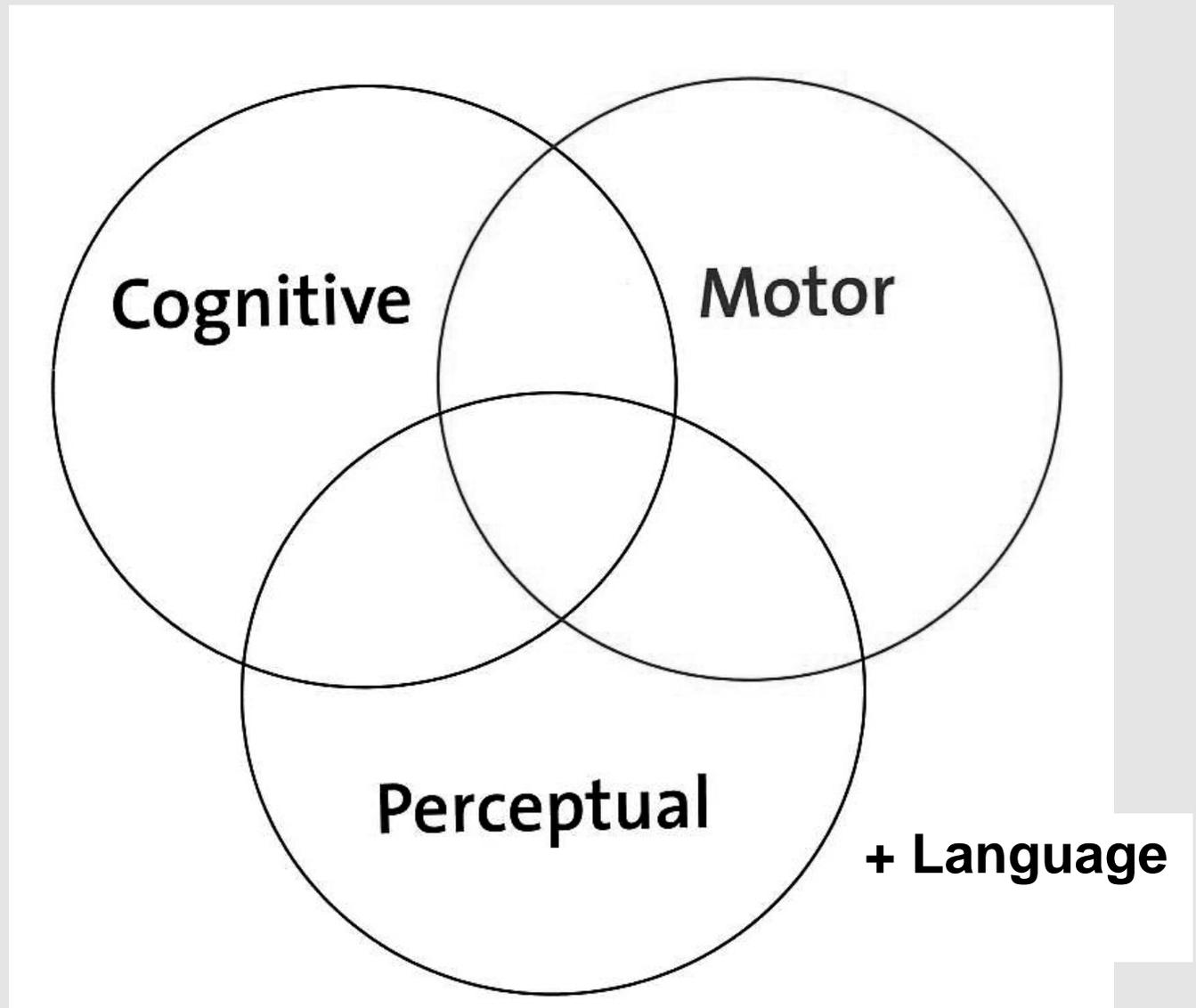
**Teaching handwriting –**  
**from principles to**  
**practice**



### Handwriting as a movement or motor skill

- Unless they are very disabled, children learn many motor skills without any instruction.
- By the time they reach school age, they can run and jump, feed and dress themselves, and speak fluently - speech involves many intricate movements. In contrast, the ability to write comes later and does not develop spontaneously.
- Consequently, it is really important to teach the basic movements as early as possible.

The diagram below shows the skills needed for good handwriting:





### **Handwriting as a perceptual skill**

- Every action we perform involves the senses and interpretation of the information they supply. Even the simplest act of picking up an object from the floor, for example, requires guidance from vision and a knowledge of where our limbs are in space.
- Handwriting is a skill which involves very fine spatial judgment and good control of the body parts e.g. to join the letters d and a, a child must be able to 'see' the difference between them so that they can plan the movements required.
- Similarly, it is difficult to help a child correct irregular slope if he/she cannot perceive the problem to be solved.
- Linking sound to visual representation is another perceptual requirement if writing is to be linked to other aspects of literacy.



### **Handwriting as a cognitive skill**

- Handwriting is rather different from other movement skills in that it is language-based and involves learning rules specific to our language system. For example, we write from left to right, the main bodies of our letters sit on a line, and we use spaces to separate one word from the next.
- In contrast, Chinese is usually written from right to left and there are no spaces between words.
- All children enjoy learning about other cultures and for some, comparing writing systems may be a way of helping them to remember our rules better.
- 



### **Variations in learning speed**

- Children vary in the speed at which they learn to write. Some have very little difficulty from the beginning and may be using good joined handwriting while they are still in infant school. Others need much more practice and take longer to learn to write fluently.

- Whatever the speed of learning, however, once a motor 'habit' (correct or incorrect) has been established, it can be very difficult to alter.
- Preventing difficulties from arising by ensuring correct initial teaching is much easier than trying to put things right later.



# Teaching the basics of handwriting



In order for staff to communicate precisely with one another and with their children it is important for everyone to be familiar with the vocabulary of handwriting and to use the same words.



### Vocabulary of handwriting:

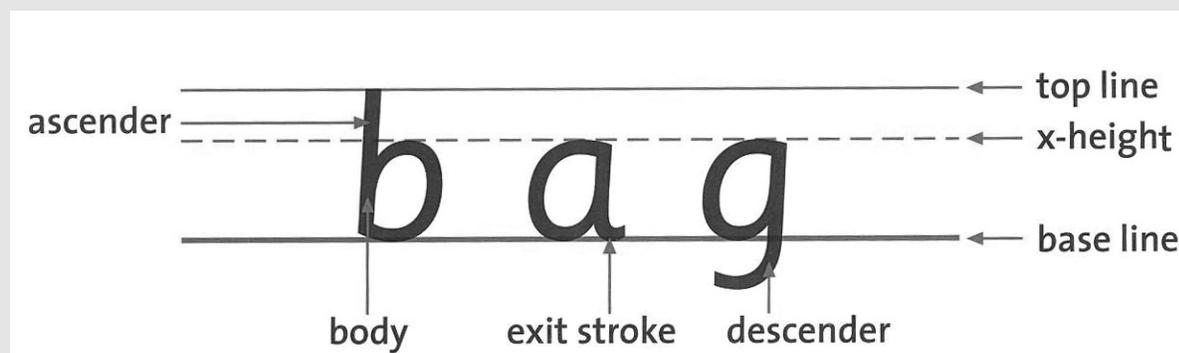


### Capital or upper case letters/small or lower case letters

Teachers need to decide which terminology they will use with their pupils:

- **Capital or upper case letters or**
- **Small or lower case letters**

The terminology chosen collectively by the teachers has to be consistent for all the classes. So, when a child graduates from one class to the other, the new teacher is referring to the same terminology.



### The base line

- It is the continuous line upon which the main bodies of all letters rest.



### Ascenders and descenders

- These are the correct terms for what children often call the sticks and tails of the letters.
- The teachers need to decide which terms they will use and be consistent.
- A few teachers think that 'sticks and tails' is more accessible for young children.
- The important thing is that teacher and children all use the same words and understand what they mean.
- Letters with ascenders – b, d, h, k, l and t.
- Letters with descenders – g, j, p, q, y, z.
- Letters with both ascenders and descenders – f.



### **X-height letters**

- The letters without ascenders or descenders such as a, c, e, i, m, n, o, r, s, u, v, w and x are the 'x-height' letters.



### **Letter bodies**

- Letter bodies are the parts of the letters which are neither ascenders nor descenders e.g. the rounded parts of b, d, and a and the 'arches' of m and n.



### **Entry and exit stroke**

- The beginning of every letter from the base line; is called an entry stroke.
- Most schools teach their children not to finish their letters by stopping short at the base line but to finish with a final 'flick' in a forward direction - preparatory to joining to the next letter. This is called an exit stroke.



### **Up and down, left and right**

- Teachers of young children will need to check whether their children understand the concepts of 'up' and 'down' as it is used when a child is writing with pencil on a paper.
- Otherwise children who have only encountered these concepts as in 'look up' and 'fall down' may find instructions they are given impossible to understand.

- Rather than using the words 'left' and 'right' when giving instructions to young children teachers may find that providing a reference point, e.g. 'towards the window or 'towards the bookshelf' is more helpful at first.



### **Cursive or joined up**

- Experts in the field of handwriting disagree as to whether these words are synonymous or not and government documents are not consistent in their use of the words either. Schools should discuss this and agree a strategy for both the staff and children.





## The crux of the matter -forming letters correctly

It is vital that children are taught how to form the letters of the alphabet following the correct movement pathways.

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

- If children are not taught how to do this they will find their own ways of writing the letters as they see them - although such 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 and this is always more difficult for both pupil and teacher than teaching the right movement from the start.

- It is not so hard to teach the letters with correct formation if, instead of teaching each letter individually, they are taught in groups, teaching the letters which are formed with a similar movement together.
- Teaching the letters in movement groups cuts down the learning load and provides for reinforcement of basic movement patterns.
- The National Literacy Strategy also stresses the importance of 'patter'-little sayings which help young children to remember how each letter is formed (e.g. "Father Christmas comes down the chimney then runs up and over the roof" for h).



### **The use of entry/exit strokes:**

- Some schools teach their children to begin every letter with an entry stroke, starting from the baseline, i.e. from the line which they are writing on, a strategy recommended for dyslexic pupils by the Dyslexia Institute, UK.
- This practice of starting each letter with an entry stroke from the baseline before making the letter itself gives the child a consistent starting place for each letter and may also make learning some of the joins easier later.
- Teachers also need to decide if each letter will finish with a small exit 'flick' preparatory to joining. This is generally found to be helpful for children, as it does not usually make the letters more difficult to write and leads quite naturally into joining later on.



### **Capital Letters**

- As well as teaching the lower case letters which children will use most of the time it is important to teach the capital letters and their formation quite specifically.
- Children should also be sure of the upper case and lower case forms of each letter and be able to relate them to one another.



### **Fluency and speed**



**T**wo aspects of handwriting which a teacher will need to develop in children of 5 to 6 years are fluency and speed.



#### **Strategies for teaching 'speed':**

- For children in the age group of 5 to 6 years, time must be set aside for teaching children how to write more quickly.
- One simple approach a teacher can use is to ask the children to copy text from a book for a set time, say 5 minutes then to count how many **legible** words they have written. This activity might be repeated daily for a week or two, with each child trying to beat his own previous scores - until most can write at least 12 words per minute.



#### **Children with difficulties**

- 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 muscular dystrophy).
- This is where coordination is needed with a special educator so that special provision can be made for this group.



#### **Advice on left-handed pupils**

Some guidelines for dealing with left-handed pupils.



#### **Awareness of the main problem**

- Left-handed pupils do not always find handwriting difficult but there is no doubt that our left-to-right writing system is 'the wrong way round' for them and this may need some consideration by teachers, e.g. during demonstrations of how to form letters.

- Also, if the teacher needs to guide the hand of a left-handed pupil then he/she should also use the left hand.



### **Seating arrangements**

- Teachers might be reminded that left-handers should either sit next to each other or on the left of a right-hander, so that elbows do not clash.
- Left-handers may also benefit from having a slightly higher seat than would otherwise be the case as this makes it easier for them to see what they write.



# Assessment of handwriting

- One-to-one assessment with a child need not be long or arduous; it simply consists of asking the child to demonstrate the desired skill and observing how well or easily he/she performs.
- While observing the child, however, the teacher needs to bear in mind the balance between what the child 'knows' about handwriting (the cognitive component) and what he or she can 'do' (the movement or motor component).



**All assessments should include an evaluation of:**



**Letter formation and joining** – This is the most important thing to observe for a teacher. Teacher should note how the child forms each letter and when appropriate how he/she executes particular joins.



**Letter shape** - Letters can be formed using the correct sequence of movements but still be misshapen.



**Letter Size** - Consistency of size is most important but overall size (too big or too small) and relative size is also relevant (e.g. ascenders or descenders too short).



**Slant/Slope**- Inconsistency of slant is most problematic (in particular, ascenders and descenders need to be parallel) but extremes of slope in either direction can make writing hard to read.



**Alignment** - Letters may be correctly formed but if the relevant components do not rest on the base line, reading can be difficult (e.g. letters like p and g, which have descenders, may stand up on their 'tails').



**Spacing** - This should include spacing between words and spacing of letters within words.

In addition, the assessor should observe:



**Posture** – How the child sits at the desk.



**Pen grip** - How the child holds the pen



**Paper position** - How the child positions the paper (different for the right and left-hander).



**Pressure and fluency** - Is the pressure noticeably too hard or too soft? Is the grip tense or too slack?



**Speed** - The assessment of speed of writing is not appropriate in young children but becomes progressively more important as children get older.

*(Above are excerpts from the book “Developing a handwriting policy for your school” by the Handwriting Association of U.K.)*



**Some points to**  
**think about....**



**Which two lines go away in four lines when the child progresses from red and blue line to single line?**

- Are 4 lines important? Here are some points in favour of 3 lines to replace 4 lines (red and blue lines)
- Ultimate goal of writing is to see that the child is able to write on a 'single line format.'
- In most schools now the preference is given to using three line books instead of four lines as the transition from three lines to single lines is easier rather than from four lines to single line for the following reasons
- In single line the child has to use one line after the other and hence when the child is trained on a 3 line page, only the dotted middle line disappears, no unlearning and no major change.
- It also helps them understand that the small letters are half the size of the capital letters
- Where as in the red and blue line, there are four lines and ultimate goal for the child is to write on single line, so when he writes a capital g and a small g on a four line he needs to use all four lines, so which of the four lines disappear when he moves to single one? Very confusing as all four lines are required to write so children go through a tough process of learning and unlearning. (try out this example and you will experience the trauma that they go through when changing from 4 line to 3 lines)



**Should the focus and stress be on neatness or form while teaching writing?**



**Do children see good handwriting around them?**



**The only place that children will need to know the ABC in the right order is when referring to a dictionary, so when teaching writing to children, it helps if same flow letters are taught together.**



**The same concept cannot be used for numbers. Because if you teach kids to write 1, 4, 7 then you are focusing on correct writing but the math concept will suffer as a child will be weak in what comes after!**



**Let us not stress out our children and let us not allow anyone to stress them.**

**Let reading, writing and learning be fun and education a pleasurable goal.**