

When learning to read, children first have to link the shape of the word on the page with the sound it makes. Then, when it comes to writing, they have to recreate that shape back onto paper. For children with (and without) dyslexia, decoding these patterns and making these links can often be very difficult. As a result, they frequently fail to develop the automatic flow of writing which will help them to express themselves clearly and easily in writing.

It is recommended that children learn the continuous cursive style... with leading stroke.

Typically, when first learning to write, children 'print' their letters. They then move on to 'joined up' writing at a later stage. Learning two styles of handwriting can add an extra layer of difficulty and cause confusion. It is, therefore, much more helpful if a young child can learn to use a single system of handwriting right from the start.



Why is the child struggling?	What can help?
Q Is s/he developmentally ready to write? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can s/he form an oblique cross? (It should have diagonal lines - not +) Is hand dominance established? Check by placing a pencil in a neutral position in front of him/her and note which hand is used to pick it up. Repeat regularly. 	A Develop pre-writing skills (see p 4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> draw 'lazy 8' - perhaps as race tracks other pre-writing patterns (see <i>Tips for Teaching - Patterns</i>) Most children have established dominance before they start school. If a child of ~6 years old is still unsure which hand to write with consult a paediatric occupational therapist.
Q Does the child sit correctly for writing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can s/he sit with good posture? Is the table at the correct height? Does s/he fidget on the chair? 	A Encourage good sitting posture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feet should be flat on the floor and knees at 90° Hips should be at the back of the chair S/he should sit 'square on' to the desk Ideally the table should be 4 cm higher than the child's elbow Give verbal prompts to correct bad posture Introduce a rigid/air-filled wedge cushion to encourage active sitting.*
Q Does the child hold a pencil efficiently? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there pain in the hand when writing? Does s/he get tired when writing for a period and/or the quality of the writing deteriorate greatly? Can s/he control and manipulate the pen effectively? Is there a good space between the tips of his/her fingers and the pencil point? <p>(see <i>Tips for Teaching - 'Writing Grip'</i> for further detail)</p>	A Encourage an efficient pencil grasp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the child to pinch the pencil with thumb and first finger, with the middle finger behind (making a dynamic tripod) with an open and stable thumb web space. Use an adaptive grip - There are a variety of grips that can be put on a pencil to encourage a tripod hold and/or keep the fingers further from the point. Some elastics help position the pen/cil in the web space and even a rubber band on the pencil can keep the fingers away from the point. There are also pens designed to guide the fingers into a tripod grip. Trial which the s/he finds most effective and is happy to use. *
Q Does the child maintain a stable wrist? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the writing hand kept below the writing line? (not hooked) Are the wrist and forearm in contact with the writing surface - and the wrist 'stepping along' when writing? Is the pen is angled towards the shoulder? 	A Encourage wrist stability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put a sticker on the side of the hand below the little finger that should be kept hidden. Can s/he make it impossible for a ruler to be slipped under their forearm when writing? Try writing on a sloping surface. (An angle of ~20° is about right).*
Q Is the paper positioned well? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can s/he see the pencil point when writing? Is there a triangular space between the upper arm and the side of the child's body? 	A Encourage correct paper position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angle the paper anti-clockwise by ~35° for right-handers Angle the paper clockwise by ~35° for left-handers Position paper slightly to the right for right-handers Position paper slightly to the left for left-handers
Q Can the child see what is being written? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a difficulty more commonly experienced by left-handers and is a big disadvantage when writing creatively and in spelling correctly. Does the writing often get smudged?* 	A Help to adjust writing position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with him/her to find a way of holding the paper and tool that is comfortable and enables them to see the words they have just written. This might mean adapting some of the conventional rules about paper position and pen hold. As above and/or trial pens that do not smudge easily*
Q Is the child using undue pressure on the pencil or paper? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for white knuckles. Does the back of the written paper feel bumpy? Does s/he feel pain in the writing arm or neck? 	A Encourage light pressure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give verbal prompts about pressure on the pen Write on sheets of paper interleaved with carbon paper* and challenge him/her to make marks on fewer sheets Use a light-up pen as a training tool*. It should flicker as the child writes; on all the time - too heavy, off all the time - too light.
Q Can the child make flowing movements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watch as s/he writes. 	A Encourage fluency* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try 'lazy 8s' (as above) make use of patterns and scribbles <p>(see <i>Tips for Teaching - Patterns</i>)</p>

* Information about suppliers on p4

Link for further reading... <http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/about-handwriting-difficulties>

Our handwriting policy is available from school and on the school website.

Handwriting help for parents

Bonneygrove



Primary School

Time devoted to the teaching and learning of letter formation and sitting properly will pay off in the long run.



Handwriting is not just about it 'looking pretty' but about the overall presentation and impression a piece of work gives. Please encourage your children to ALWAYS show off their best work.

Legible writing that can be produced comfortably, at speed and with little conscious effort allows a child to attend to the higher-level aspects of writing composition and content.

This is so important when school assessments are based on written work, often on the time-limited written examinations, which remain as a major form of assessment for many formal qualifications.

How can I help my child with handwriting?

Handwriting still holds its place in the curriculum as a core skill, allowing children to express themselves in all areas of their learning. Good handwriting becomes a life-long source of pleasure to all who receive or read it. After speech, written information is still the most accessible and creative way of keeping in touch. So you can help by showing that you value and admire the skill. Have a small selection of handwriting materials available at home — soft pencils (B grade), felt tips, different pens and some sheets of A4 paper.



Make writing by hand part of your family's routine, including:

- ◆ Keeping in touch with relatives through letters
- ◆ Making lists and labels
- ◆ Leaving notes for one another
- ◆ Design and make home made greetings cards

Display your child's work on a notice board or on the fridge door. Transfer these pieces of work to a scrap book to build up a unique record of your child's progress and development to share together.

Correct your child's letter formation as long as it doesn't interrupt the flow of their writing; sometimes it is more helpful for the child to finish the word or sentence than correct letters as they go along.

Children with handwriting problems often experience difficulties with the movements needed, as a physical difficulty or a perceptual one. The following activities practised for 5 minutes a day can be used to help these. Choose a mixture from the list, 4 or 5 from each section plus any others of your own to make it fun and interesting as well as educational.



Grasp and Grip

- Pick up pencil (Whole hand grip).
- Change to pincer, change back.
- Speed up and try with other fingers.
- Teach tripod grasp as follows...
- Put a coloured dot on the 'web' between index and thumb.
- Put pencil on table, tip towards you.
- Pick up with a pincer grasp (approximately 3cm from the tip... mark the spot!).
- Flick into writing position with middle finger.
- Pencil rests in web between thumb and index.
- Hold with thumb and 1st/2nd fingers (tripod).
- Flex and extend fingers - pencil moves in and out.
- Go fast and slow.
- Walk these fingers up and down pencil shaft.
- Check grip is still on the dot.
- Roll pencil round and round between these 3 fingers clockwise and anticlockwise.
- Keeping wrist on the table make circles with pencil tip in the air.

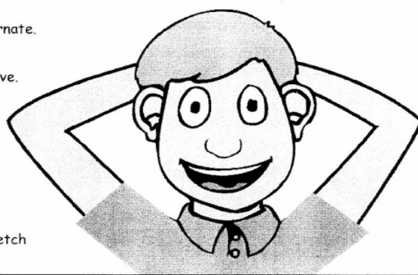
- Fast and slow, big and small, clockwise and anticlockwise.
- Check pencil hold again.
- Is shaft on the dot?
- Is the thumb on the shaft?
- READY TO WRITE?



Elbows

- Two fists on the table (elbows bent).
- Straighten elbows, bend again.
- Repeat with flat hands, alternate.
- Cross arms fists on shoulders, alternate.
- Repeat with flat hands.
- Try different variations of the above.
- Two fists on table (elbows bent).
- Tap fists on table... clap in the air.
- Copy rhythms.
- Intertwine fingers, elbows on table hands up.
- Clap palms together, copy rhythms.
- Put clasped hands behind head, stretch elbows back.

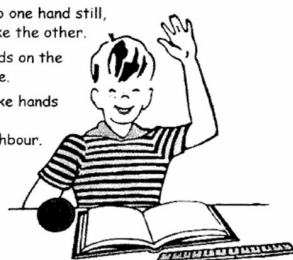
- Stretch arms up and forwards with hands still clasped.



Shoulders

- Good sitting position, feet flat, back straight, head up, bottom back on chair.
- Lift (shrug) shoulders up and down.
- Lift (shrug) alternate shoulders.
- Circle them backwards then forwards.
- Shake to loosen them.
- Hold edges of chair (two hands). Push self up and down... sitting press ups.
- Two straight arms, stretch forward (palms down).
- Raise one then the other.
- Cross them over (one on top). Change.
- Turn them over palms up.
- Alternate one up, one down.
- Circle wrists - clockwise, anticlockwise.
- Clap hands (arms straight/copy rhythms).

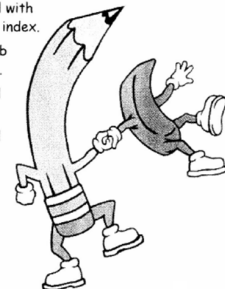
- Clasp hands - circle two arms together.
- Sit on hands... sit on one, wave the other.
- Shake two hands in the air - shake one.
- Shake up, down, fast, slow.
- Keep one hand still, shake the other.
- Hands on the table.
- Shake hands with neighbour.



Pencil Power

- Good sitting, feet flat, back straight.
- Head up, bottom back on chair.
- Two pencils for each child.
- Rub hands together until pink (fingers pointing away from body).
- Repeat with one pencil between hands.
- Check hands for 'pinkness'... Ready?
- Sit on non writing hand.
- Pick up a pencil in the centre.
- Turn it round and round in the air.
- Clockwise and anticlockwise.
- Hold pencil with pincer grasp.
- Swing and twizzle it side to side.
- Hold pencil with point on table.
- Remember not to press too hard.
- Change to put end on table, change again... speed up.

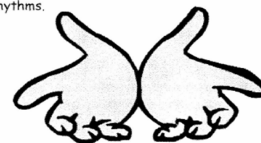
- Hold pencil with end on table (keep it still).
- Slide fingers right down the pencil.
- Walk them up to the top.
- Repeat until perfect.
- Hold pencil with thumb and index.
- Then thumb and middle.
- Thumb and ring.
- Thumb and little, repeat.
- Thread pencil between alternate fingers.



Fingers and Thumbs

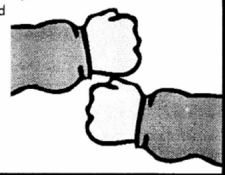
- Wriggle fingers in the air.
- Wiggle them up and down.
- Hands flat on table, talk about them, creases, nails etc. Name fingers and thumbs touch them.
- Shake hands with neighbour.
- Hands flat on table, palms down.
- Tap thumbs, tap all fingers.
- Singly, together, alternately.
- Tap named fingers loud then soft.
- Tap in 1's, 2's and 3's.
- Flex and stretch each finger in turn.
- Try different fingers on each hand.
- Spread fingers out and in.
- Walk fingers sideways (wrists kept still), and then back again.
- Elbows on table, hands up.

- Press all fingertips and thumb together then move fingers apart and together.
- Press palms together... like prayers.
- Stretch elbows out.
- Thumbs touch each finger in turn, one hand then two.
- Bent fingers then straighten fingers.
- Incy wincy spider.
- Hold ears with pincer grip.
- Cross arms to hold opposite ear.
- Rub hands together.
- Keep hands clasped, clap palms to rhythms.



- Shake wrists till floppy.
- Up and down, sideways.
- One higher, one lower.
- Mix the above.
- Make two fists (hands on the table).
- Thumbs out, thumbs in.
- Thumbs up, wriggle them, circle them.
- Climb fists upwards (thumbs in) as in one potato, two potato.

- Elbows on table fists flat.
- Move fists only, side to side, up and down, alternate.
- Make one fist, one flat hand - alternate.



Flat Hands

- Two flat hands in the table - thumbs out.
- Spread fingers, thumbs touching.
- Turn over, little fingers touching.
- Repeat, alternating hands.
- Stand flat hands on sides.
- Thumbs up, thumbs down etc.
- Clap hands to rhythms.
- Clap hands then thighs.

- Increase complexity.
- Chant to clapped rhythms.

