

Y5 and below handwriting advice.

It is expected that high quality inclusive teaching can support handwriting development for most children.

The National Handwriting Association have lots of information and resources both for teachers and parents:

<https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/help-for-teachers/>

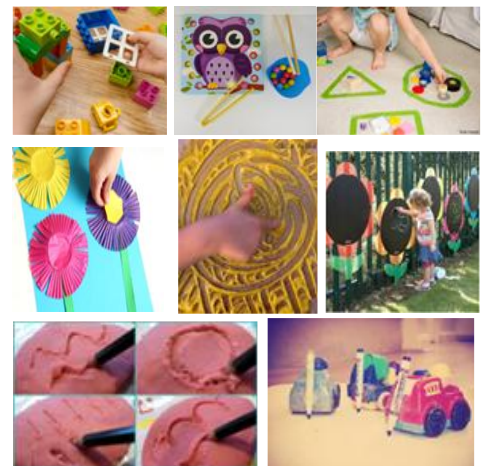
<https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/help-for-parents/>



Early Years – Supporting Handwriting development

Children in Early Years settings benefit from lots of play opportunities to build the foundations for handwriting:

- different fine motor activities to build hand skills and visual motor integration,
- exploratory mark making activities with lots of different mediums and tools to explore how different movements make different patterns and shapes,
- intentional mark making activities to help recognise, imitate, copy and form shapes and patterns and eventually letters and numbers.



CREATIVE!

MESSY!

FUN!

Top Tips for improving primary age handwriting

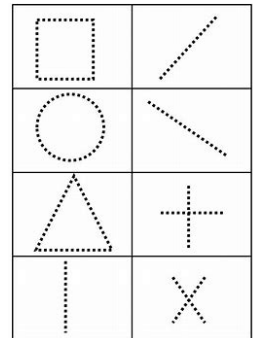
Handwriting improves with practice of handwriting...working on fine motor skills will not automatically transfer to improvements in writing.

Handwriting practice needs to be FUN and FREQUENT and take MANY different forms!

Consider a child's learning abilities in relation to your expectations of their handwriting.

Do they recognise letters?

Can they produce the pre-writing shapes shown here? If not, they need to work on these before starting to draw letters and numbers.

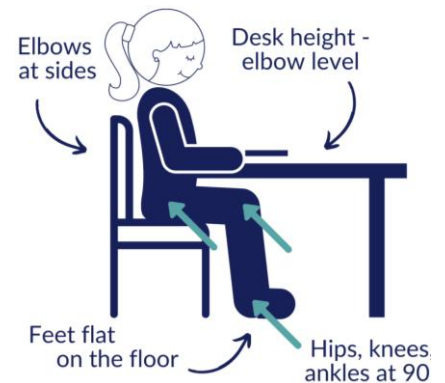


Encourage good sitting posture:

Slanted writing boards, footstools, pen grips and positioning the paper at a 45-degree angle can be helpful.

Promote focus for handwriting, try minimising distractions by considering position in the classroom or pop-up desk dividers, movement breaks before hand writing, a sand-timer to indicate how long to focus for or a weighted lap pad.

If introducing any of the above, ensure you only try one strategy at a time and watch if it helps.



Letter formation difficulties:

Watch how a child writes as well as looking at the finished product (what they have written) to notice where they might be having problems.

Some children find it easier to print than to join up, some find it easier to join letters, there is no right or wrong approach, legibility is the most important factor as they move into secondary school.

Ensure letter formation is secure and automatic before working on speeding up handwriting.

AAA aaa BBB bbb CCC ccc

The flicks and ticks on letters and joining of letters can be confusing for some children

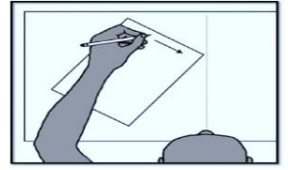
Strategies to support left - handed writers:

Position child on the left end of a row or to the left of another student, tilt paper to the right, grasp slightly farther from the point of the pencil or pen, as shown in these images.

For copying – ideally place examples down the right-hand side of page.

Letter formation actions might need to be different, left hander resources can help, try:
<https://lefthandedchildren.org/> or searching left handed writing on www.twinkl.co.uk

Consider if there is anyone left-handed in school or at home who could be involved in teaching letter formation / strategies.



Handwriting Intervention:

Children can often identify what they need to change or get better at, **involve them in making their own goals for handwriting practice.**

Intervention or practise needs to be done regularly, **little and often is best, at least 40 minutes a week**, this could be broken down to 5-minute chunks a few times a day. Promote practise at home and school for the biggest impact.

Interventions should start from a clear baseline, have SMART goals and monitor progress (South Warwickshire has useful documents to support this).



Praise all writing achievements and efforts no matter how small...
this helps children feel good about themselves and practise more!



Further Support for Handwriting Difficulties

Children in Year 5 or below with handwriting difficulties should be supported by school or home educators to take part in a **minimum term or 10-12 week** programme of targeted intervention to try to address the child's difficulties. Remember, intervention or practise needs to be done regularly, little and often is best, *at least* 40 minutes a to be effective (this can be broken down into small chunks of time). Small group interventions can be effective, if children have similar areas of difficulty.

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South Warwickshire have produced resources that educators can use to identify areas of difficulty and deliver targeted interventions. Schools can use this resource to plan a targeted handwriting intervention, the handwriting programme can be found here under the 'How can I help my child at school' tab: <https://www.swft.nhs.uk/our-services/occupational-therapy-children>

Supporting Neurodiverse Learners

Schools should consider how neurodiverse young people can find handwriting difficult and can try introducing simple strategies to support learners. Educators can access training to consider handwriting difficulties for neurodivergent children and strategies to help here:

<https://sway.office.com/ksMkgPQMSWW26NYn?ref=Link>

'Menu of Technology' under the 'areas of need & support' tab suggests supportive strategies: <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Partners/Inclusion-Task-Force/Guidance-and-Resources>

Alternatives to handwriting

If a child is struggling to write their ideas down on paper or to work, consider other methods to help them. If a child is near the end of Year 5 or in Year 6 and continues to have difficulty with handwriting despite intervention and support, they should start to move to an alternative or supported recording method like:

- Typing on a laptop/keyboard.
- Using Clicker software at school which has pictures and words to pick from (*this is particularly useful for children who may have some additional learning needs and challenges generating sentence starters/ word finding difficulties * see advice below*)
- Using magnetic pictures, symbols and words
- Dictation: using voice activated software so the child can speak their ideas
- Using a scribe; speaking their ideas for an adult to write or draw

Children will need support and lots of opportunities to practice their alternative recording method at home and school to help them feel ready and confident to use this at secondary school. Further advice on alternative recording methods can be viewed on the Y6 and Secondary Handwriting Advice for Schools resource.

Clicker software guidance

If a school is new to using Clicker it might be helpful to watch the Clicker tour video and look at the Clicker Basics page on the Crick Software website to give a good overview of the features available: www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/tutorials/win-mac/get-started and www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/clicker-basics. There is also a full training guide with comprehensive information if required at www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/clicker-training/training-guide/win-mac. If schools haven't met with anyone from Crick Software, they can do so via a customer care meeting. This can be helpful to establish a contact at Crick Software, discuss how to embed Clicker in your school and ask questions: www.cricksoft.com/uk/training/customer-care-meetings.

Once staff are familiar with the features they can begin thinking about which features might be helpful for a child, staff could discuss the child's needs in the customer care meeting or over email with a Crick Software rep if you needed more support. Staff should then trial the discussed features with the child, it can be helpful to trial one at a time so not to overwhelm the child or staff helping them.

Top tips for Clicker

- Ensure the technical aspects are all set up before introducing with a child e.g. does Clicker open successfully, how can the child save their work and how can they print? It may be worth involving the school IT team to problem solve if needed. You may need to consider purchasing headphones if the child is using the read aloud feature. Technical support can be found here www.cricksoft.com/uk/support/contact
- It is useful to have a member of staff who is upskilled and takes a lead on Clicker. The software can be overwhelming to staff especially if technology is something they find difficult so having a key person can be helpful for staff members or the child to go to.
- It can be helpful to spend time upskilling the child so they are as independent as possible e.g. do they know where the laptop/device is stored, can they access it without having to ask, do they know how/where to charge the device. It needs to be as easy as getting a book off the shelf like other children would otherwise these things can be a huge barrier to success. Also, things such as logging into the laptop, opening Clicker, saving, printing etc.

Onward referral of handwriting difficulties

If all of the above has been tried and handwriting difficulties persist, health professionals can refer to community therapy services. Referrals will be accepted for children with handwriting difficulties if they have at least 2 other areas of gross or fine motor skill difficulties. Referrals are not accepted for children with only handwriting difficulties as this is most likely due to specific learning needs rather than motor difficulties. **Referrals are accepted if a child has a physical disability that is directly affecting their ability to handwrite or use technology, such as cerebral palsy or muscular dystrophy.*

If schools recommend to a parent or health professional that a child is referred to therapy services, they should indicate all areas of motor difficulty, what handwriting intervention they have tried and what strategies have helped.