



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

Handwriting

Universal Approaches to Supporting Differences





An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
um Oideachas Speisialta
National Council
for Special Education

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This booklet was developed by National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Occupational Therapists with expert advice from NCSE Advisors and Curriculum Specialist Leads. The content of the booklet is based on contemporary research and practice-based evidence garnered from NCSE occupational therapists' experience of working in schools.

Special acknowledgment must go to Dr. Mellissa Prunty, Associate Professor at the School of Allied Health, University of Limerick. Her expertise ensured that this resource is reflective of the international evidence base and adheres to the principles of best practice for schools.

Disclaimer

In line with inclusive education, this booklet explores how we can address and respond to the diverse handwriting needs of learners in our classrooms by removing barriers and creating a stimulating, supportive environment where students' strengths are recognised and valued. This booklet has been created for teachers of primary school-age children to provide information on universal, whole class handwriting supports that will benefit all students including those with identified handwriting difficulties. Where a student has an occupational therapy report, it is advised to consult with the student's primary occupational therapist.

As of 2026, and to the best of our knowledge, this document uses language and practices that are reflective of current research and evidence. We recognise that language and what is considered best practice with regard to language may evolve over time.

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Introduction

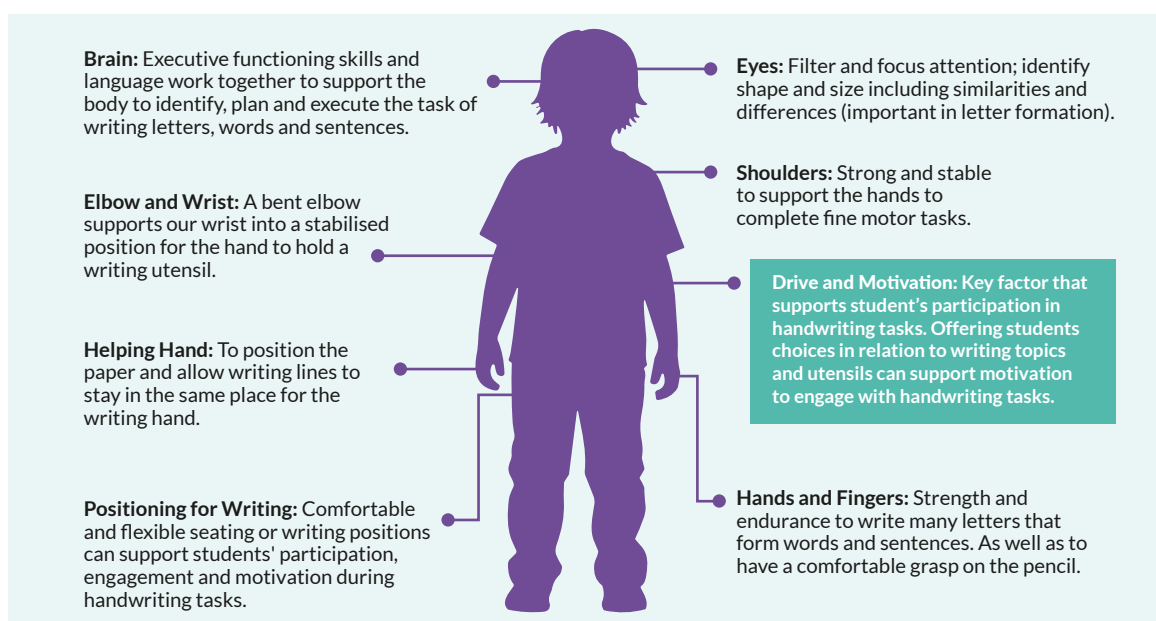
This booklet aims to:

- Support schools to reflect on the purpose and importance of handwriting.
- Support schools to identify whole class opportunities throughout the school day to develop students' handwriting skills.
- Support schools to identify whole-school policy that promotes consistency in handwriting teaching and learning throughout the school years.
- Support schools to collaborate with students to identify what supports may help them to express their learning.

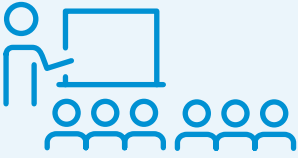
We recognise that no two schools, classrooms or groups of students are the same. We encourage schools to reflect on the ideas presented in this booklet and identify those that best support their context and students' needs.

What is Handwriting?

Handwriting is a key skill of school-aged students in the classroom environment (McMaster & Roberts, 2016). Although digital technology is becoming more common in schools, most writing tasks, from learning new ideas to showing understanding in assessments, still rely on using a pen or pencil (Santangelo & Graham, 2016; Nightingale *et al.*, 2022). Learning to write is a developmental skill that must be explicitly taught. It is not just about neatness, handwriting is a complex process that combines thinking, movement, and memory (Limpo & Graham, 2020). While fine motor skills help students control their pencil and form letters, successful handwriting also depends on orthographic coding, the ability to remember and recall letter shapes stored in memory (Berninger *et al.*, 1991). Effective handwriting instruction requires teachers to understand the many cognitive, physical, and perceptual factors that contribute to success (Van Galen, 1991).



Why is Handwriting Important?

	A student's ability to communicate in writing remains critical for academic success and classroom participation (Grajo <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Nightingale <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
	Although we live in an ever-developing digital age, the use of pen and paper remains the primary method for classroom tasks and school assessment (Nightingale <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
	Large amounts of the school day are spent on generating ideas and thoughts in relation to learning and translating this information into text responses. McMaster and Roberts (2016) identified that primary school students spend 18–47% of their day on fine-motor activities and 84% of that time on handwriting (Klein, 2021).
	As students progress through second level education, the curriculum places increased handwriting demands on them as they prepare for state examinations (Nightingale <i>et al.</i> , 2022).

It is estimated between 10 to 30% of primary school students struggle with handwriting (Nightingale *et al.*, 2022). This is of concern given the increasing amount of research showing a relationship between handwriting skill and writing achievement throughout schooling (Graham, 1997; Limpo *et al.*, 2017).

When students struggle with handwriting, it can impact their learning and confidence in several ways:

- **Speed and fluency:** Students who write slowly may struggle to get their ideas onto paper as quickly as they can think of them (Limpo & Graham, 2020). When handwriting is effortful, it consumes cognitive resources that should be available for planning, composing and revising text (McCutchen, 2000; Prunty *et al.*, 2016). As a result, slow or effortful handwriting reduces both the quantity and quality of written work, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, and overall cohesion.
- **Legibility and quality:** Students with handwriting difficulties often produce text that is difficult to read, and research shows that less legible writing is often judged as lower in quality (Greifeneder *et al.*, 2012).
- **Motivation and confidence:** In the absence of effective instruction and supportive writing environments, students may find handwriting tiring and stressful. Over time, this can lead to frustration, avoidance, and reduced self-belief in their ability to write (Alves & Limpo, 2015; Santangelo & Graham, 2016).

Whole School Handwriting Policy



School Handwriting Policy

Throughout this booklet we will use this symbol to draw your attention to factors to consider when reviewing/developing a school handwriting policy. Please also see Appendix 2 for guiding points to support you in developing a handwriting policy.

To teach handwriting effectively, it is important that everyone in the school follows the same approach. A whole school policy outlines the how, what, when, who, and why of teaching handwriting. Successful handwriting practice depends on everyone; education staff, students, and families, being consistent and working together.

What are the benefits of developing a whole school policy on handwriting?

- Promotes consistency in handwriting instruction across all classes, reducing confusion for students as they move through the year groups. This includes consistent expectations, shared language, and uniform approaches to letter formation.
- It ensures that the handwriting curriculum is grounded in evidence-based practice, and that it is structured around robust methods.
- Establishes clear expectations for both teachers and students, outlining the progression of handwriting skills from the Infant Classes through to Sixth Class.
- Supports inclusive practices, ensuring that all students, including those with additional educational needs, receive equitable support in developing their handwriting skills.
- Enhances teacher knowledge of handwriting development and progression.
- Encourages a shared understanding of key handwriting principles among teachers and promotes collaboration and sharing of effective classroom strategies.
- Engages parents and caregivers, helping them to reinforce key handwriting messages and practices at home.

The content of this booklet aims to give guidance on all aspects of handwriting which may be included in a whole school handwriting policy.

Handwriting Readiness for Curriculum Success

Writing Readiness

One of the main goals of primary education is to help students become confident, capable writers who can use writing to communicate effectively in their world (Limpo & Graham, 2020, Primary Language Curriculum, 2019). To set students up for success, teachers need to recognise when young students are ready to begin formal handwriting instruction.

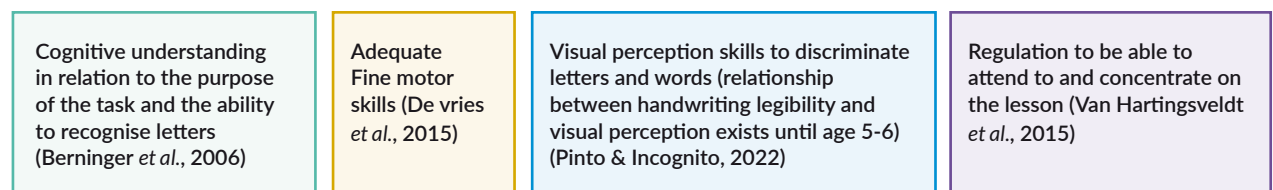


Figure 1: Subskills associated with handwriting readiness

Writing readiness isn't just about learning to hold a pencil or form letters. There needs to be a shift away from focusing on isolated skills towards a whole-student approach that looks at the range of foundational abilities that support handwriting (Klein *et al.*, 2021b). This includes motor coordination, Visual-Motor integration, attention, and motivation. While mastering individual sub-skills (see Figure 1) is important, it doesn't guarantee overall readiness. A more holistic, integrated view helps ensure that each student has the underlying skills needed for success.

Person-Environment-Occupation Model

A student's handwriting is influenced by who they are (Person), where they are working (Environment), and what the writing task demands (Occupation) (Law *et al.*, 1996). Adjusting any of these (see Figure 2) through supportive seating, developmental teaching approaches, encouraging classroom climate, or breaking tasks into manageable steps, can significantly improve handwriting outcomes for all students (van Hartingsveldt, 2014).

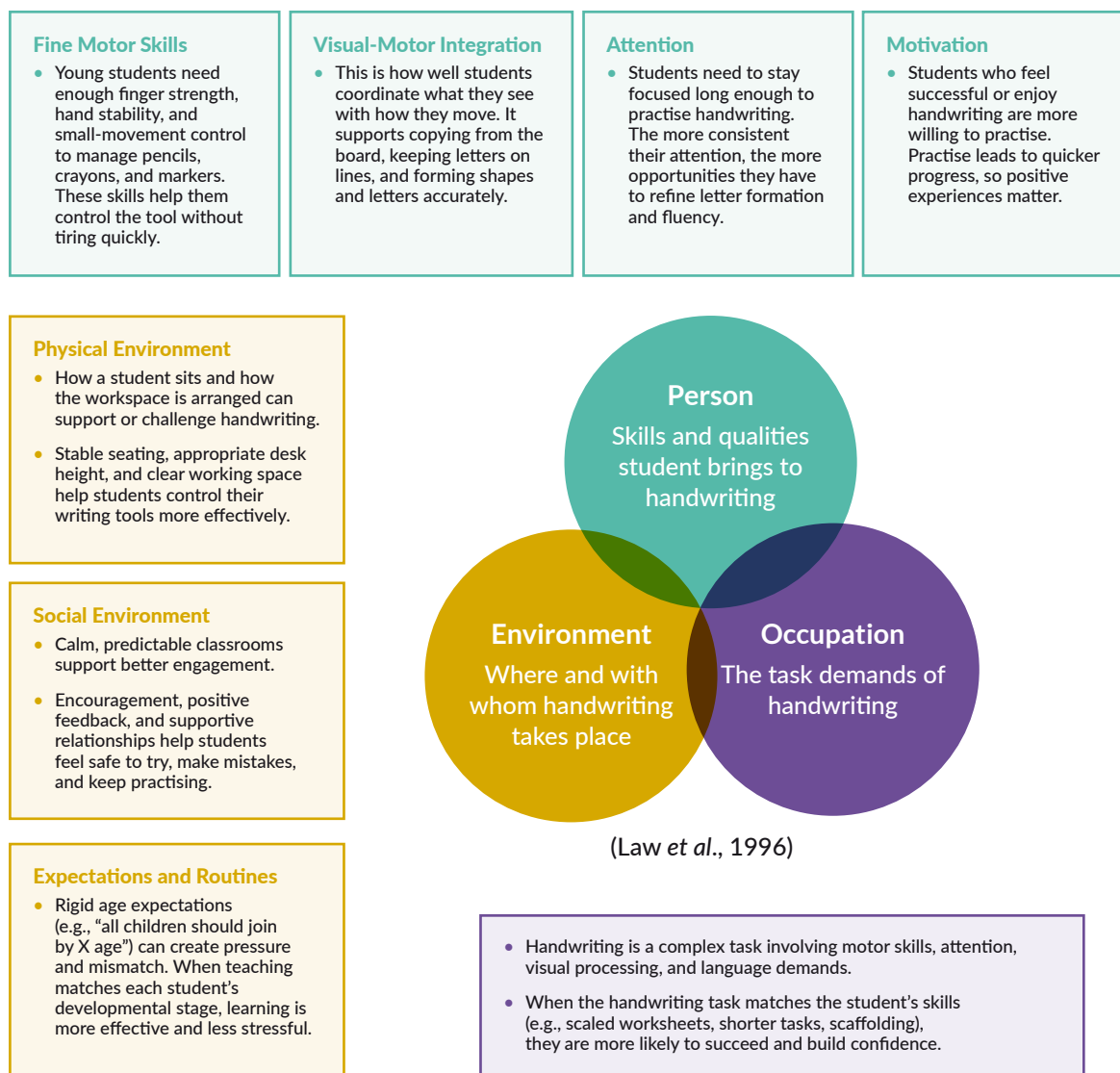


Figure 2: Person-Environment-Occupation Model (Law *et al.*, 1996) and handwriting components

Visual-Motor Integration in Young Children

Visual-motor integration (VMI) is the ability to coordinate visual information with motor actions (Beery *et al.*, 2010) and is a key component of being able to write and draw. Being able to copy simple shapes is an important foundation for handwriting because these early shapes use the same movement patterns needed for letters. Research shows that for students aged approximately 3–5 years, their ability to draw lines, circles, crosses and other basic forms (see Figure 3) can give an indication of whether they're ready to learn formal handwriting (van Hartingsveldt, 2014).

For example, students who can confidently copy a small set of early shapes often find it easier to learn letter formation because:

- They have better control over pencil movements,
- They can coordinate their eyes and hands more effectively,
- They can manage starting, stopping and changing direction on the page.

However, the connection between shape copying and handwriting is only relevant in the early years. As students grow, writing relies more on other skills such as attention, language, memory, and writing fluency. By around age 5 or 6, handwriting and shape copying become separate skills, so shape drawing is not a useful indicator for older students' years (Pinto & Incognito, 2022).

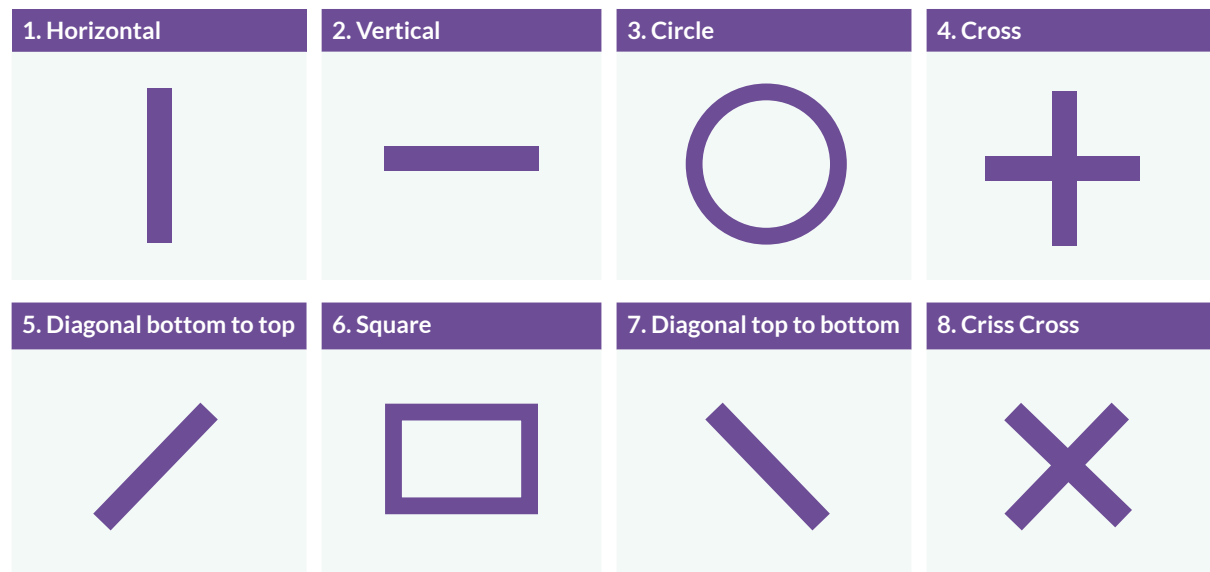


Figure 3: Basic shape formations (Beery, 1997)

Top Tips!

- Observe whether students can confidently copy simple shapes (lines, circles, crosses, squares) before introducing formal handwriting instruction.
- Look beyond pencil grasp or letter formation – consider fine motor control, visual attention, and engagement.
- Use informal observation and pre-writing activities to consider what skill level each child is at.



Handwriting in the Curriculum

Handwriting is embedded within the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), specifically under Learning Outcomes for Handwriting and Presentation. This section focuses on the foundational skills that help students to express themselves clearly in handwriting, including fine motor development, correct letter formation, fluency and legibility.

The curriculum includes a Progression Continuum for handwriting which outlines the learning outcomes for different stages (Junior Infants – Sixth Class). It also describes the steps students typically follow as their handwriting develops over time (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Primary Language Curriculum (2019) progression continuum for handwriting.

This Progression Continuum for handwriting supports teachers to:

- a) Track and support students' progression,
- b) Integrate handwriting into broader language learning,
- c) Identify necessary supports and pedagogical approaches to support students' handwriting development.

Teachers can use the relevant observations to guide when students are individually ready to begin learning letter formation families.

N.B. It is important that students are not rushed into a progression step that they are not ready for. Early writing experiences should focus on developmentally appropriate activities that build the foundations for handwriting, supporting gradual progress (Klein *et al.*, 2021a). Hence, we must consider students within the classroom environment as well as within the handwriting/writing task (Law *et al.*, 1996).

Top Tips!

- Use the Progression Continuum to monitor and celebrate small handwriting achievements rather than pushing for perfection.
- Meet students where they are in relation to readiness and the task demands of handwriting.
- Provide a rich, playful classroom environment where students can experiment with mark-making and letter formation.
- Combine handwriting instruction with language experiences, such as storytelling, rhymes, and discussion, to support integrated learning.



Handwriting Instruction

The goal of handwriting instruction should be to help students write letters, words, sentences, and connected text as **legibly** and **fluently** as possible (Graham, 2009).

What is Legibility?

Legibility refers to how easy it is for someone else to read and understand a student's handwriting (Downing & Caravolas, 2023). From a communication point of view, legibility is essential – readers need to be able to decipher what has been written to engage meaningfully with the text.

It is important to understand that legibility and neatness are not the same thing. While neatness can be a valued outcome in schools, excessive focus on neatness can sometimes limit writing speed and fluency. True legibility means handwriting that is clear, consistent, and easy to read, even if it isn't perfectly neat. Difficulties with legibility can also impact a student's confidence and self-esteem. Many students who struggle to make their writing legible become aware of this early on, often through comparison with their peers (Tierney *et al.*, 2026).

To support legibility, students benefit from explicit teaching that focuses on how letter shape, size, and spacing affect how readable their writing is.

What is Handwriting Speed?

Handwriting speed refers to how quickly a student can produce written text. It is often measured by the number of letters or words that a student can produce per minute. Research consistently shows that handwriting speed predicts not only how much a student writes in a free-writing task but also the overall quality of the writing; including grammar, spelling, punctuation, idea development, and cohesion (Berninger *et al.*, 1997; Prunty *et al.*, 2016). When handwriting becomes automatic and fluent, students can focus more of their attention on thinking, planning, and expressing ideas rather than on forming each letter. Correct letter formation, practised over time, naturally leads to increased speed and fluency of movement across the page.

Letter Formation Instruction

Correct letter formation is foundational to legible and speedy handwriting. In the early and junior years, handwriting instruction should focus on mastering correct letter formation before introducing more advanced skills such as joined-up writing. It is vital that students are taught simple un-joined letter forms from the beginning (Prunty & Barnett, 2020).

‘Unless the correct point of entry and direction of stroke for each letter is taught, understood and used from the start, it is progressively more difficult to alter the wrong movement pattern that is practised and becomes habitual’ (Sassoon, 1995).



Figure 5: Letter Formation: Key steps to acquiring letter forms adapted (Berninger & Graham, 1998).

Research suggests that some of the most effective ways of teaching correct letter formation include the following.

1. **Visual demonstration:** Students first examine a model of the letter with clear visual cues, such as arrows showing the direction of each stroke.
2. **Teacher modelling:** Teachers demonstrate the movement involved in forming the letter while giving verbal prompts that describe each action.
3. **Memory practice:** After repeated exposure, students practise writing the letter from memory, strengthening recall and motor planning (Santangelo & Graham, 2016).

Language Use for Letter Formation

The language teachers use during handwriting instruction is key to helping students understand movement, position and shape.

- Clear, consistent verbal cues assist students to learn the movement sequence associated with that letter's formation.
- Adopt a consistent vocabulary to support letter formation, consider:
 - How will you describe positional concepts (e.g., top, middle, bottom line)?
 - Will you use capital/small letters or upper/lower case?
 - How will you refer to ascenders and descenders (e.g., tall and tail letters)?
 - What language will describe letters that sit on the line (the body letters)?



Examples of terminology and approaches that schools may wish to adopt are provided in the following pages

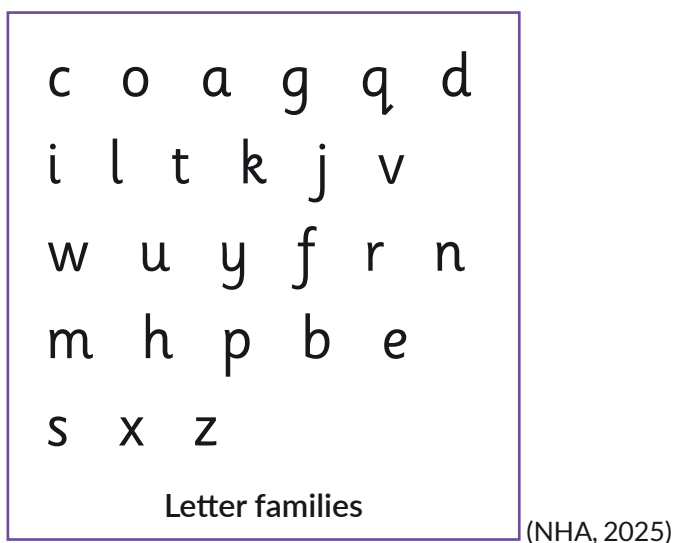
- Encourage students to talk through the movements as they write. This strengthens memory and reinforces correct patterns (Ward & Rodger, 2004). For example, the letter h, 'start at the top, go down to the bottom, back up, halfway over and back down'. For older students, encourage them to create their own plan for the movement actions required (e.g. self-created rhymes and/or mnemonics).
- Teaching letters in family groups (based on shared movement patterns) also supports motor learning. Begin with easier letter groups and progress to more complex ones. This approach helps students:
 - Practise similar movements repeatedly.
 - Reinforce consistent letter formation.
 - Reduce letter reversals.

Teaching Letters in Family Groups

Method A:

Letter families are groups of letters that begin in the **same place** and use the **same initial stroke** or movement. For example, the letter c shares its starting stroke with a, d, g, o, and q.

By teaching letters in these developmental groups, students can focus on mastering one type of movement at a time, making the learning of letter formation simpler and more efficient.



Method B:

Talls, **smalls** and **tails** provide students with tangible visual and verbal cues to support correct letter formation (size and placement on the line). **Talls** are letters that extend above the middle of the writing space. **Smalls** sit on the line and go up as far as the middle line of the writing space. **Tails** are letters that extend below the writing line.

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

Exit strokes

- For most students, adding a small exit flick (or exit stroke) to certain letters supports a smoother transition to joining letters later on.
- Teaching the purpose of these flicks helps students understand their function and stay motivated to use them.
- It can be helpful to draw on real-world examples of joining (e.g., joined signage, signatures, or everyday handwriting) to demonstrate how letters can flow into one another.
- Avoid an overemphasis on neatness – focus instead on the movement pattern and functional purpose of the flick.

Capital letters

- Capital letters should be taught explicitly and systematically. Students need to know:
 - How each capital letter is formed, using correct start points and stroke direction.
 - How capital and lowercase letters relate to each other in form and use.
 - When and why to use capital letters (e.g., names, sentence beginnings, proper nouns).
- Teachers should use consistent terminology when referring to letter names and shapes to avoid confusion. Explicit practice ensures students can recognise and produce both forms confidently.

Top Tips!

- Avoid overemphasising “neatness” – instead, focus on clarity, stroke direction and readability.
- Give positive feedback on functional writing, reinforcing effort and improvement rather than perfection.
- Use visual cues (arrows, starting points) alongside spoken instructions to reinforce directionality.
- Provide regular timed writing tasks (1–2 minutes) to build stamina and fluency in older children (fourth class onwards).
- Encourage correct letter formation before focusing on speed – as correct letter formation supports fluency later on.



School Handwriting Policy

It is important to have **consistent language** across classes and staff when teaching letter formation. Sharing the relevant language and instructions with parents and caregivers will support consistent messaging when practicing in the home environment.

Multisensory Approaches in Young Learners

Research has shown that handwriting improves with pen on paper practise and as such this should be encouraged wherever possible. However, early learners learn best when learning is hands-on, engaging, and playful. Letter movements can be explored in many creative ways – through painting, modelling, using toy wands or lasers, tracing in sand, or even through dance and music (The National Handwriting Association, 2025).

These experiences allow students to feel, see, and move through the shapes and patterns that form the building blocks of handwriting.

Research has found that sensory-motor activities alone (without explicit handwriting practice) do not improve handwriting outcomes (Santangelo & Graham, 2016; Hoy, Egan, & Feder, 2011). However, multisensory experiences can play an important role in supporting young learners. They can:

- Increase motivation and engagement, especially in early learners.
- Provide meaningful rehearsal of movement patterns before moving to the page.
- Support letter recognition and directionality before pencil-based writing begins.

During the early stages of handwriting, students may benefit from developmentally appropriate, multisensory practice for example:

- Tracing shapes or letters in sand, paint, or on textured surfaces.
- Air writing large letters with their finger or arm.
- Following music or rhythm to guide left-to-right or top-to-bottom movements.

These activities reinforce key handwriting concepts such as:

- Directionality (left to right, top to bottom).
- Movement patterns (clockwise, anticlockwise, diagonal, curved, zigzag).

By integrating multisensory experiences with explicit handwriting instruction, teachers can create an approach that is both developmentally rich and highly engaging for students.

See examples of multisensory approaches to practice letter formation in early learners in Appendix 3.

Multisensory learning involves using multiple senses, such as sight, sound, touch, and movement, to engage students in a holistic and immersive educational experience (Shams & Seitz, 2008).

Top Tips!

- Use multisensory warm-ups (e.g., air writing or tracing shapes in sand) before pencil work.
- Reinforce handwriting concepts (like left-to-right movement) through music, rhythm, or body movement.
- Where time is limited, the focus should be on getting to writing practice.
- Pair multisensory exploration with explicit teaching of letter formation, so movement activities support real writing progress.
- Offer a variety of materials such as paintbrushes, chalk, sand trays, whiteboards to keep practice fun and hands-on.



Literacy Programmes and Letter Formation

Literacy programmes also offer teaching patterns for letter formation. However, it is important to note that the order in which letters are introduced for phonics may not always support the most effective practice of motor patterns for handwriting.

For example, teaching letters such as c, o, and a together allows students to rehearse similar movement patterns – reinforcing motor memory and confidence. In contrast, teaching letters with very different movements (e.g., s, t, a) may make it more difficult for students to consolidate these key handwriting movements. Schools therefore may choose to teach phonics and handwriting in separate lessons.

Teaching for Fluency and Function

The goal of handwriting instruction is for students to become confident, capable writers who can use writing to communicate effectively in their world (Limpo & Graham, 2020, Primary Language Curriculum, 2019). Students benefit from a degree of flexibility to develop a functional, fluent, and comfortable script. The outcome should be handwriting that is legible, efficient, and personally expressive, rather than rigidly uniform. Ultimately, we want students to experience joy and automaticity in their writing, so their cognitive effort is spent on communicating ideas, not forming letters (National Handwriting Association, 2023).

Letter Formation Supports

Effective handwriting instruction is strengthened when students are provided with consistent visual and tactile supports. These tools help students understand letter size, shape, spacing and positioning, which are key factors in developing legible and fluent handwriting.

- **Desk Alphabet Models:** Place a small alphabet strip on each student's desk showing correct letter and number formation. This provides an accessible visual cue throughout writing tasks. Provide these in the style that the students are being taught (i.e. joined/un-joined).

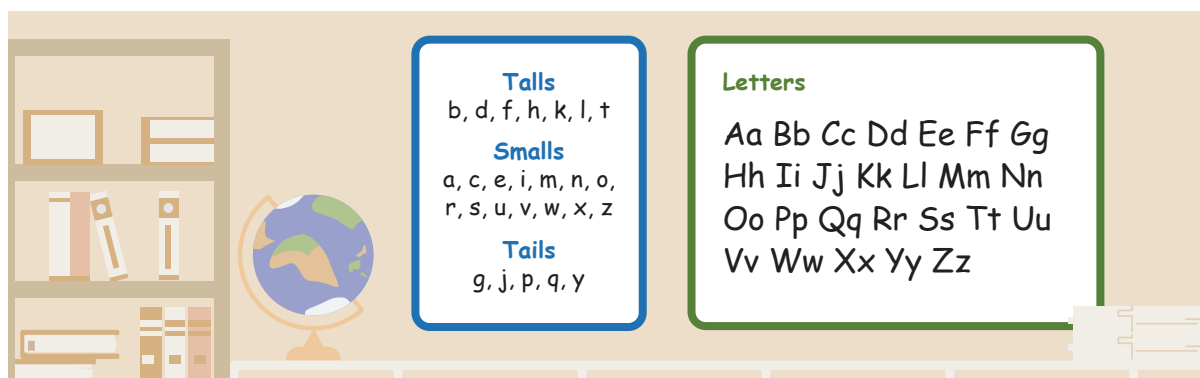
Student Name:

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

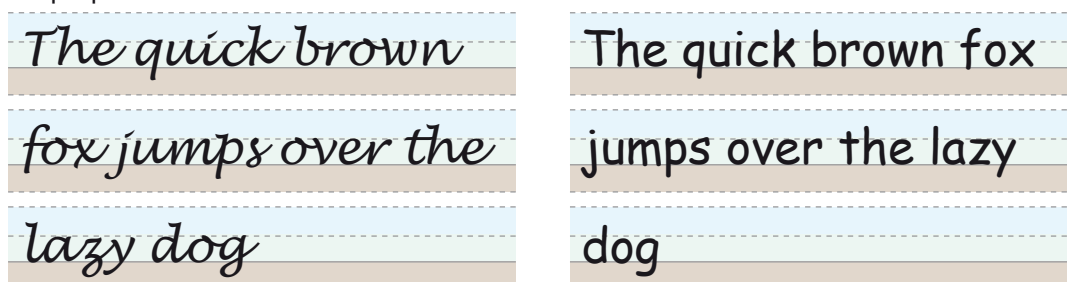
Student Name:

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo
Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

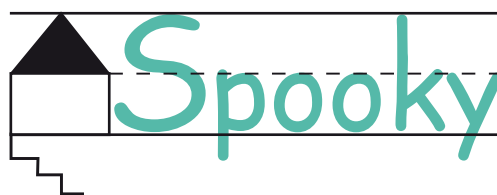
- **Classroom Wall Displays:** Display a large visual of the alphabet alongside key handwriting vocabulary (e.g., tall letters, tail letters). Refer to this display regularly during lessons to reinforce learning.



- **Consistent reinforcement** will support letter recognition and reinforce formation learning. For example, the letters chosen for the wall display will need to match the individual table models.
- **Letter Height and Positioning Visuals:**
 - **Earth Paper:** This resource uses visual cues (e.g., a blue line for the sky and a green line for the ground) to help students visualise where different letters sit – supporting correct size and proportion.



- **House Method:** Draw a simple “house” on the left margin of the page – attic for tall letters, floor for small letters, and basement for tail letters.



Spacing and Sizing Supports

Clear spacing and consistent sizing of letters and words are essential for legible handwriting. Early writers often benefit from extra space and explicit practice with layout and alignment. Plain/blank paper provides students with this opportunity when practicing.

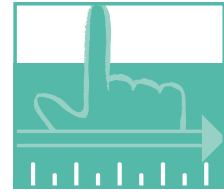
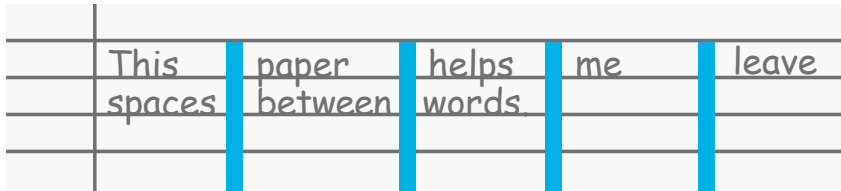
The National Handwriting Association (2025) recommends a developmental progression when introducing writing lines, aligned with students’ growing skills and five of the ‘**S Factors for Success**’ (size, spacing, slope, sitting, speed).

Stage description purpose

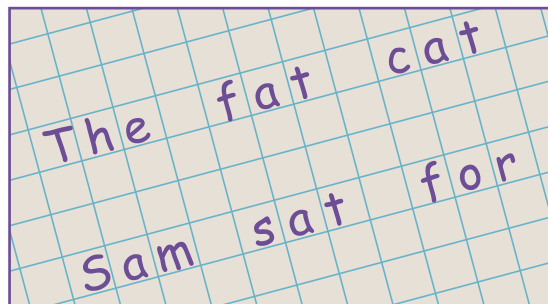
- Beginner writers: use blank paper to focus on letter formation and movement patterns without line constraints. This builds confidence and shape familiarity.
- Secure formation: introduce a single baseline for letters to sit on. This reinforces spatial awareness and consistency.
- Writing more: use faint lines with enough space for ascenders and capital letters. This develops letter size control and rhythm.
- Understanding alignment: introduce double lines temporarily. This supports alignment and awareness of letter proportions.
- Developing fluency: return to standard lined paper with adequate spacing. This encourages fluency and automaticity.

The NHA framework identifies eight total ‘S Factors for Success’ (Shape, Space, Size, Sitting (on the line), Stringing (together), Slant, Speed and Style). This section only highlights the five influenced by lined paper.

- Use physical spacers such as ice-pop sticks, fingers, or pipe cleaners between words, as students become more competent writers these supports can be phased out.



- Provide large-square graph paper to help students visualise spacing between letters and words.



- Overemphasise spacing in early practice: encourage students to make spaces large enough to notice.
- When copying from a worksheet or board, include visual markers (e.g., stop signs, red circles, or asterisks) to prompt students to pause and check their spacing:
 - Example: "Include spaces between your words."
 - Example: "When you see the asterisk, pause to check your spacing."



- Gradually fade supports as students gain confidence and control.
- As students get older, ask them to think of their own strategy for remembering their spacing. This can often be more effective than giving them the prompt.



School Handwriting Policy

Support for letter formation should be available to **all students** in the classroom. They will be essential for some students but beneficial for all.

Handwriting Styles – Joined and Un-Joined

In the context of handwriting styles, language can often be confusing. For the purpose of this guidance and in line with research and practice, we will use the following terms.

Un-joined: handwriting that is completely un-joined, often referred to as print

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Joined: handwriting that is joined up, often referred to as cursive

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Once students have mastered correct letter formation using an un-joined style, handwriting instruction can progress to joined writing (typically third class). Joining some letters supports the development of fluency and speed, as it allows the hand to move smoothly across the page without repeated lifts of the pencil.

Research indicates that the most efficient and fluent handwriting style is a mixed style, where some letters are joined and others remain un-joined (Graham, Berninger & Weintraub, 1998). This balanced approach allows for speed while maintaining legibility and individual comfort. The more connected the text becomes, the greater the potential for fluency and automaticity (Graham, 2009).

Teaching Joining

There is a difference between ‘continuous joined’ and ‘joined’ writing when it comes to the construct of joining. Both are joined styles of writing with some subtle differences. Continuous joined writing often refers to a ‘lead in’ stroke where the beginning of the letter starts on the baseline followed by an upward stroke leading into the main letter sequence. Joined writing without the continuous aspect refers to strokes that lead out of a letter, allowing for easy connection to the next letter. Research has shown that letters that have a lead in stroke are slower to produce as the pen rarely leaves the page (Graham, 2009). It also demands additional strokes and complex directionality which some students find very difficult to learn. Since a mixed style of joined and un-joined letters allows for fluency and speed of writing, we advocate for the exit stroke only when teaching joined handwriting in the classroom (Graham, 2009).

When to Introduce Joining

- There is no expectation in the Primary Language Curriculum to introduce joined writing before a student is ready.
- The National Handwriting Association (2025) advises that joining should only be introduced once the following ‘S Factors for Success’ – Shape, Space, Size, and Sitting on the line – are well established.
- Some students may be ready to begin joining from first class, but this should be based on individual readiness, not class level.
- Schools should ensure that the process of “starting to join” is not given elevated importance, as this can create pressure and comparison among students who may not be ready yet.
- Students should begin learning how to join letters as soon as they can consistently form letters with correct orientation and proportion (National Handwriting Association, 2023).
- The goal is to ensure that joining feels like a natural progression rather than a sudden leap or regression.



School Handwriting Policy

Schools should adopt a flexible, responsive approach to joined writing in line with children's developmental progress. Promoting joined writing as superior to un-joined can create pressure and comparison amongst students.

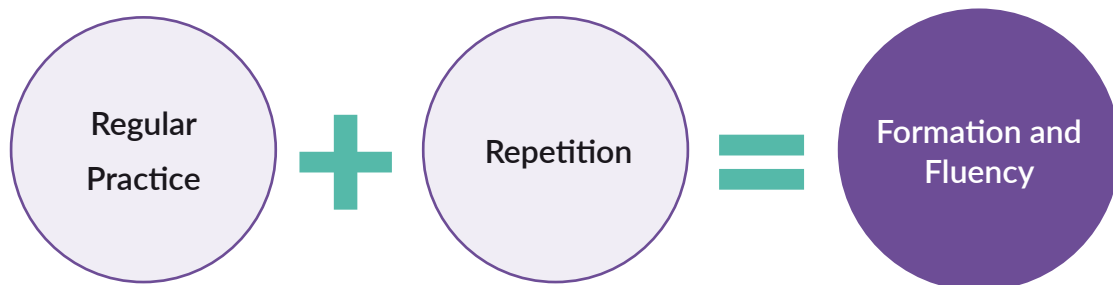
Top Tips!

- Allow flexibility – encourage students to adopt a style that feels natural, legible, and comfortable.
- Model and discuss the purpose of joined (to increase flow and fluency, not neatness).
- Provide short, frequent opportunities to practise joined in meaningful contexts (e.g., writing names, words from reading texts, or creative sentences).



Handwriting Practice

Once students have learned letter phonics and forms, they need frequent and purposeful opportunities to practise handwriting in context through writing words, sentences, and short pieces of text (Graham, 2009).



Regular, structured handwriting practice is one of the most effective ways to build speed and fluency. While the amount and intensity of practice will vary depending on students' needs, research suggests that during the early years (infant classes up to and not limited to third and fourth classes) of handwriting development, **students benefit from around 50 to 100 minutes of handwriting instruction per week** (Graham, 2009).

The key is to make practice frequent, varied, and motivating, helping students see handwriting as a tool for expression rather than just a mechanical skill. Remember that little and often is more effective than one longer lesson on handwriting in the week.

Handwriting Practice Supports

- **Motivating Writing Opportunities:** Encourage students to write about topics that interest them, without focusing on spelling or grammar. The goal is to promote fluency, confidence, and enjoyment in writing.
- **Timed Writing Activities (“Mad Minutes”):** For older students, set a timer and ask students to write as much as they can within a short time frame (e.g., one minute). Track progress over time and celebrate improvements in speed and flow, not neatness or accuracy.
- **Untimed Precision Practice:** Provide separate sessions where students can focus carefully on letter formation, spacing, and consistency without time pressure. Examples could include posters, notice boards or adverts.
- **Peer Audience Writing:** Have students write short texts that will be read by a classmate. The emphasis is not about how much the student writes, rather to encourage attention to legibility and communication, as students write with a real reader in mind.
- **Daily Integration:** Include short bursts of handwriting within other subjects such as writing labels in science, jotting maths answers, or recording observations, to help students apply handwriting across the curriculum.

Top Tips!

- Mix focused instruction (on letter forms and joins) with free-flow writing (to build fluency).
- Encourage students to reflect on progress, noticing improvements in speed, legibility, and comfort.
- Reinforce the idea that practice leads to ease; handwriting becomes automatic through regular, purposeful use.
- Aim for 50 to 100 minutes of handwriting instruction per week.



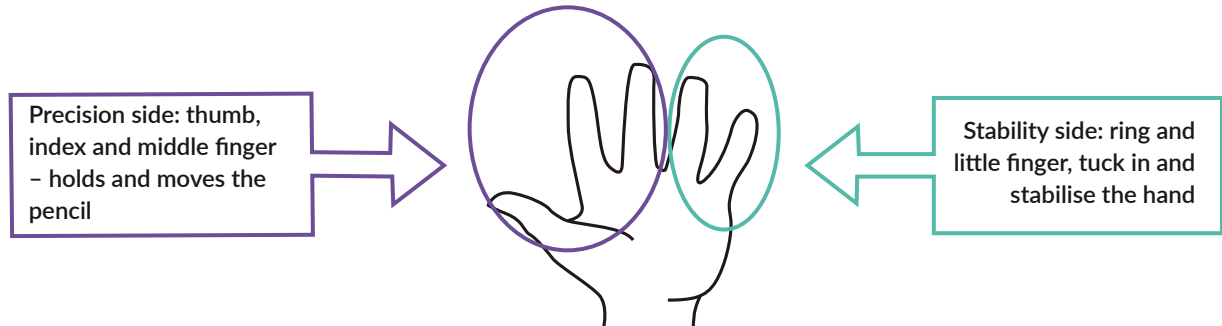
Pencil Grasp

Effective handwriting performance can be achieved using a variety of pencil grasps (Schwellnus *et al.*, 2012). A functional pencil grasp is one that allows students to write with good control and minimal muscular effort. There is no single “correct” way to hold a pencil – what matters most is that the grasp works well for the individual learner.

When considering whether a student’s pencil grasp may be impacting their handwriting, it can be helpful to ask the following question:

Is it comfortable? Does the student experience pain, fatigue, or discomfort while writing? Sustained discomfort can make handwriting more difficult, leading to frustration, reduced confidence, and avoidance of handwriting or related fine motor tasks such as drawing or colouring.

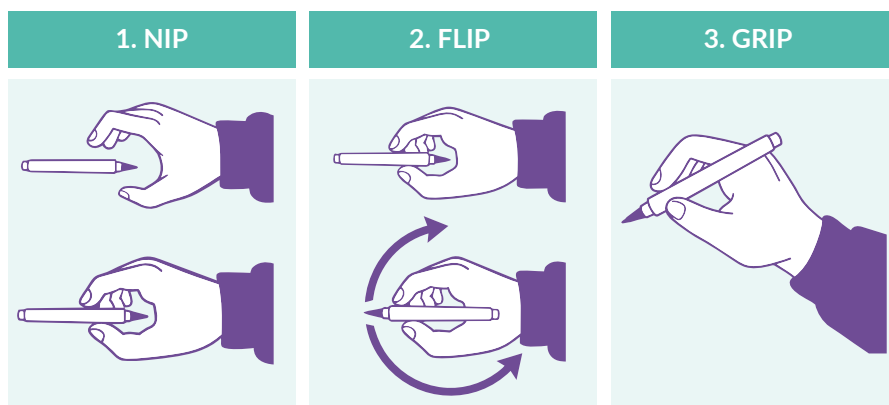
When holding a pen/pencil, the hand is separated into two sides. One side is the precision side and the other is the stability side.



Students benefit from opportunities to explore different grasp patterns through varied tools and activities that promote hand and arm strength (e.g., playdough, tweezers, pegboards, vertical writing). We all hold and manipulate writing tools in our own way. As such, the focus should be on supporting each student to find a comfortable and functional grasp that enables them to write effectively and confidently.

Pencil Grasp Development Supports

	Encourage exploratory tool use: Provide all students with a range of writing and drawing tools of different sizes, shapes, and textures (e.g., short crayons, thick chalk, triangular pencils). These encourage students to naturally adapt their grasp.
	Use vertical surfaces: Writing or drawing on whiteboards, chalkboards, or easels promotes wrist extension and shoulder engagement. This can be fun and engaging for students in the early stages of handwriting development.
	Model and discuss comfort: Encourage students to reflect on how their hand feels while writing – “Does this grasp feel comfortable?” “Can you move your fingers easily?” Students who have progressed their handwriting are capable of reflecting and problem solving issues and should use this to their advantage.
	Short and frequent practice: Rather than long handwriting sessions, short bursts of writing integrated throughout the day can help build endurance without fatigue.
	Teaching pencil grasp: Simple rhymes and routines can help establish good grasp habits. There are several rhymes available. For example, “nip, flip, and grip” reminds students in the early stages of handwriting development how to position their fingers correctly on the pencil before writing.



Example of routine to help establish pencil grasp

Writing Pressure

While pencil grasp and writing pressure can be related, they do not always occur together – a student may have an efficient grasp but still struggle to maintain consistent pressure, or vice versa.

An effective pencil grasp should be comfortable and functional, allowing the hand and fingers to move freely and easily during writing. The goal is not to achieve one “perfect” grasp, but rather to support each student in finding a grasp that enables control, comfort, and efficiency.

It is important not to overstate the role of pen pressure in the case of handwriting difficulties. Research has shown that many students who present with handwriting difficulties do not demonstrate difficulties with moderating pen pressure (Prunty *et al.*, 2020). However, a small number of students may demonstrate the following:

Signs of heavy pencil pressure	Signs of low pencil pressure
• Press so hard that they tear the page or leave deep marks on the next sheet. • Break pencil tips frequently. • Complain of hand or finger fatigue during writing.	• Produce very faint or inconsistent marks on the page. • Struggle to control the pencil, resulting in wobbly or spidery letter forms. • Appear to “skim” the page rather than press firmly enough to write.

Both extremes can make handwriting physically tiring and may impact on the fluency and legibility of written work.

Writing Pressure Supports



Talk to the Child about Handwriting Pressure: Explain what pressure means and get their perspective. Consider whether the writing utensil being used requires increased pressure to make a mark.



Practice on Different Surfaces: Ask the child to write on various textured surfaces (e.g. sandpaper, cardboard, or carbon paper) on a few occasions to help them think about the pressure they apply while writing. Educate the child about the role of pressure in handwriting so that they have an awareness of it when writing.



Adjust Tool Size and Shape: Invite the child to explore different writing tools. Shorter writing tools (e.g. small crayons, broken chalk, or golf pencils) can encourage a more efficient grasp and promote better finger control.



Thicker tools (wide pencils or triangular barrels) support students with heavy pressure or reduced finger strength by opening the hand web space and reducing strain.

Avoid oversized pencils that can lead to compensatory grasps and reduced dexterity.

Triangular or wide-barrelled pencils can help promote a more natural and relaxed hand position. Students who press heavily may also benefit from cushioned grips that reduce strain on their fingers.



Use Writing Aids When Needed: Some students may benefit from specialist writing aids or adapted tools that make it easier to achieve a stable, comfortable grasp. There are many writing utensils on the market and students should be encouraged to explore utensils that make writing more comfortable for them. See Page 26 for more information on Writing Tools and Aids.



School Handwriting Policy

Offer all students the choice to explore writing using a range of pencils and pens, and writing tools of different shapes, sizes and textures. It is important to have enough of the aids and utensils for all students to trial and potentially use in the classroom. Therefore, only offer what is universally available.

Supporting Participation and Motivation

Motivation and engagement are key to developing and maintaining confidence in handwriting, especially for students who find handwriting challenging. The way handwriting is introduced, taught, and embedded in daily routines directly influences how students perceive their own ability and their willingness to participate in writing tasks (Tierney *et al.*, 2026).

Recent research has described the emotional burden of having a handwriting difficulty and the impact it has on both the student and their parents. Having a handwriting difficulty can be highly emotive for a student. A positive experience in the school setting can be instrumental in how they perceive themselves years later (Tierney *et al.*, 2026).

Using these frameworks helps teachers identify and remove barriers that limit participation and create classroom environments that promote engagement and success in handwriting for every student.

When supporting students with handwriting, it is important to think about the environment in which writing takes place. Physical and sensory factors can all influence how comfortably and effectively students write.

Sensory Comfort

The sensory qualities of our classrooms such as lighting, noise, temperature, and visual clutter, can greatly impact students' energy, attention, and readiness to engage in learning (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2023). Classrooms that are either too stimulating or too bland can create barriers to learning and participation.

In your classroom, conduct a brief sensory audit of the space. Consider the following:

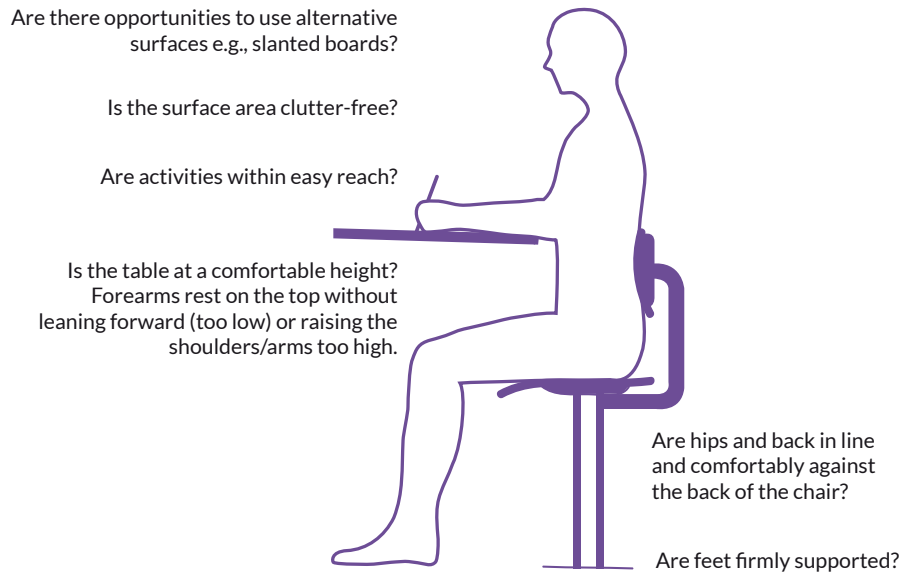
- Are lighting and noise levels comfortable?
- Are there calm, uncluttered areas for focus tasks?
- Could noise-reducing strategies be used if needed?
- Is movement incorporated to help students regulate before tasks?

Physical Comfort

Classroom furniture can impact on physical comfort during handwriting, particularly during long, sustained writing tasks. If students are seated at desks and chairs for handwriting, it is important that they fit their body size, not just their age. If the desk or chair height is not appropriate, this can lead to discomfort and distractions from writing, for example:

- Too high: Students raise shoulders, leading to tension and fatigue.
- Too low: Students slump forward, increasing strain on the neck, arms, and hands.

A well supported sitting position can reduce discomfort and promote engagement during sustained writing tasks (National Handwriting Association, 2023).

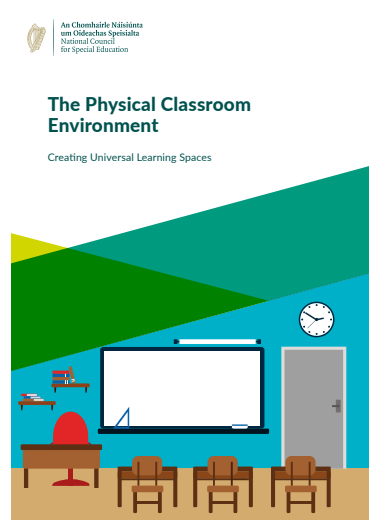


In the Classroom, Try:

- **Swapping furniture** between classes to accommodate different heights.
- Using **table risers** for taller students.
- Providing **foot support** (e.g., a sturdy box with non-slip material) for students whose feet do not reach the floor.

Alternative Writing Spaces

Encouraging students to write in different positions and on varied surfaces can add novelty, motivation, and physical engagement to handwriting tasks. Changing posture and environment supports gross and fine motor development while making handwriting more playful and engaging. These positions can also be incorporated throughout the day for other learning activities (e.g. artwork, game time, reading, class discussions) and are not isolated to handwriting. On the next page are a selection of writing space supports. Also, check out [The Physical Classroom Environment Booklet](#) for a wider range of ideas.



Handwriting

Universal Approaches to Supporting Differences

- **Floor writing:** Allow students to write for short periods while sitting cross-legged, side-sitting, or lying on their tummy. This engages larger muscles that support shoulder and wrist stability. In addition, it can support motivation and engagement with the handwriting tasks.
- **Vertical surfaces:** Use easels, flipcharts, or paper taped to walls. Writing in a standing or high-kneeling position promotes development from large muscle movements (shoulder/elbow) to fine finger control, especially helpful in early handwriting stages.
- **“Drop Everything and Write”:** Similar to ‘Drop Everything and Read’, this invites students to take spontaneous, creative writing breaks using different materials or tools. It builds independence, enjoyment, and ownership of writing.
- **Mini whiteboards or chalkboards:** Offer these for low-pressure, quick handwriting practice, great for developing letter formation without the fear of making mistakes.



Writing Tools and Aids

There are a range of writing aids and alternative writing tools available to support students to adopt functional and comfortable writing grasps. Pencil grips are placed on the pencil or pen to help position the fingers more comfortably. The key purpose of any grip or aid is to enhance comfort and function – not to enforce one single “correct” way of holding a pencil.

See some examples below.



These types of pencil grips support comfort when grasping a pencil.



These types of pencil grips have adaptations to support finger and thumb placement.



These are modified writing tools to support pencil grasp without using additional grips.

Top Tips!

Consider creating a writing tool station for all students, having a basket or station in your classroom that contains:

- A range of pencils, pens, and crayons in different shapes, sizes, and textures.
- Various pencil grips and writing aids for all students to explore.
- Shorter or triangular pencils to promote natural finger positioning.



Handwriting

Universal Approaches to Supporting Differences

Reduce the stigma associated with adaptations by encouraging all students to experiment and reflect on which tools work best. This empowers them to take ownership of their handwriting comfort and performance. After using a writing tool or grip, invite students to reflect with simple guiding questions:

- How did your hand feel when you were writing?
- Was it comfortable to use?
- Would you like to use it again?

This reflection helps students build self-awareness and recognise what supports them best. When a particular grip or tool improves comfort and control, encourage the student to use it consistently across all writing activities throughout the day for continuity and habit-building.



School Handwriting Policy

Student voice is particularly important in supporting motivation and engagement with handwriting tasks. Ask about their specific handwriting preferences.

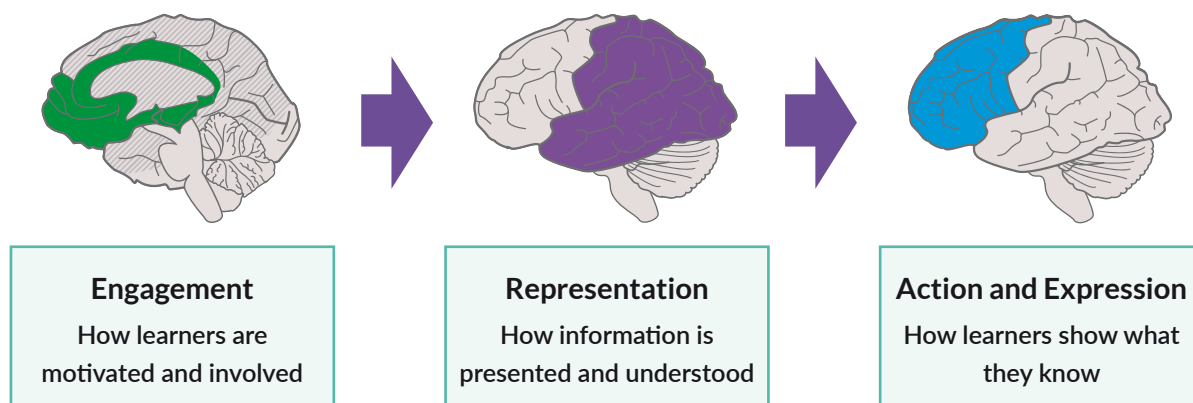
Alternative Means of Expression

Do they need to write it? No two students learn in the same way, each student has unique strengths, preferences, and needs. The same is true for how they express their learning. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a framework for designing lessons that work for all learners. It encourages teachers to plan for variability from the start, offering students multiple ways to access, engage with, and demonstrate their learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002; Burgstahler & Cory, 2010).

As described in the EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Teaching and Learning (2020, p.48):

“Principles of universal design for learning anticipate learner variability and provide multiple paths to successful outcomes”

The Three Principles of Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2024).



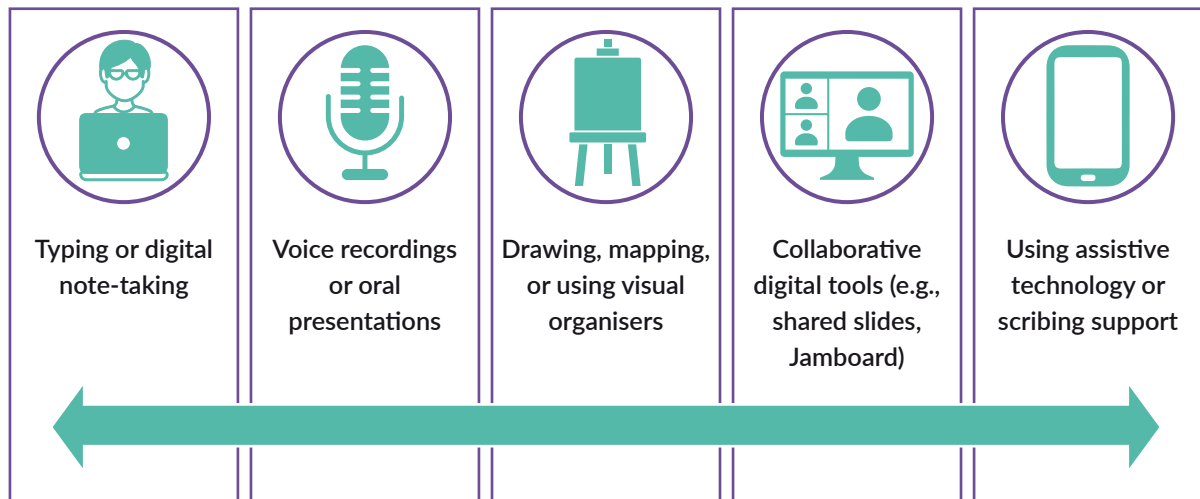
When we apply these principles, we design learning experiences that remove barriers and make success possible for everyone.

When Handwriting Becomes a Barrier

For some students, handwriting can be a barrier to expressing ideas clearly or completing tasks efficiently. When handwriting is slow, uncomfortable, or difficult to read, it can reduce confidence and limit participation. If a student's handwriting affects legibility, speed, or causes discomfort, it's important to ask:

- What is the purpose of this task?
- Is the goal for the student to practise handwriting skills?
- Or is it to demonstrate understanding or creativity?

If the goal is not handwriting, then consider allowing students to show their learning in alternative formats such as:



By offering these alternatives, we ensure that handwriting challenges do not prevent students from demonstrating their knowledge.

Applying the UDL Lens

Using the UDL framework helps us plan lessons that are:

- Beneficial for all students, not just those who struggle with handwriting.
- Flexible and inclusive, providing choice and ownership.
- Focused on learning goals, not just task completion.

Through this approach, we move away from a “one-size-fits-all” mindset and towards a classroom culture that values multiple pathways to success.

Let's consider how we can apply the UDL framework in classrooms. These short case studies show how UDL principles can be used to ensure all students, including those with handwriting difficulties can access and demonstrate their learning successfully.

Case Studies

Example 1: Infant Class

Learning Goal	Students will be able to identify and describe common insects found in their environment.
Challenge	Some students find it hard to record observations using a pencil due to developing fine motor skills.
Engagement	UDL approach Hands-on exploration and choice in how to record findings increases motivation and confidence.
Representation	The teacher reads a story about insects, uses photos, and explores the school garden to find real examples.
Action and Expression	Students record what they find in different ways: • Drawing the insects they see. • Using a tablet to take photos or short voice recordings (“I found a ladybird!”). • Tracing or copying labels with support, rather than writing full sentences.
Outcome	All students successfully shared what they learned, some through pictures and speech, others through emerging handwriting.

Example 2: First - Third Class

Learning Goal	Students will write a short description about a place that is special to them.
Challenge	Some students have ideas but find it difficult to sustain writing due to slow handwriting speed or fatigue.
Engagement	UDL approach Providing choice and technology reduces frustration, keeping focus on the content of ideas, not the handwriting process.
Representation	The class brainstorms sensory words together, creating a “word wall” to support vocabulary.
Action and Expression	Students choose how to plan and present their work: • Typing sentences on a tablet or laptop. • Recording an audio version first, then using speech-to-text to help with transcription. • Using drawing and labelling as part of their description.
Outcome	Students demonstrated strong descriptive skills through multiple formats. The task remained inclusive while still valuing handwriting as one of several valid ways to communicate.

Example 3: Fourth - Sixth Class

Learning Goal	Students will research and present information about an Irish historical figure.
Challenge	Extended handwritten work causes discomfort or reduces legibility for some students.
Engagement	UDL approach Choice, collaboration, and creativity keep all learners involved and proud of their contribution.
Representation	Information is accessed through books, videos, and digital archives.
Action and Expression	Students choose how to plan and present their work: • Students may present learning through slides, short podcasts, posters, or handwritten reports depending on their preference and strengths. • Students collaborate in mixed-ability pairs, dividing roles (e.g. researcher, scribe, designer, speaker).
Outcome	Each student successfully shared historical knowledge in a meaningful way. Handwriting was one option, but not a barrier.

Key Takeaway: Using the UDL framework allows teachers to:

- Keep learning goals at the centre.
- Remove unnecessary handwriting barriers.
- Encourage students to communicate confidently in diverse ways.

Ultimately, the goal is for all students to feel competent and valued as communicators, whether they express their ideas with a pencil, a voice, or a keyboard.

Conclusion

- There is no single “right way” to write. What matters most is that every student has the opportunity, tools, and support to communicate effectively and confidently.
- Whether through joined, un-joined writing, pen, or pencil, handwriting instruction should prioritise function, comfort, and expression over perfection.
- By providing flexibility, encouragement, and access to alternative means of expression, educators can ensure all students experience success and joy in written communication.



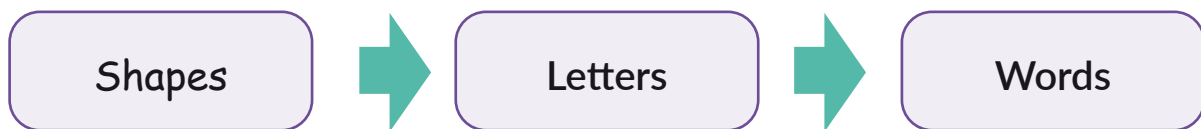
FAQs

This section addresses common questions educators often have about handwriting instruction and progression in the primary classroom. It explores when and how to introduce joined writing, how to approach pen licences inclusively, and how typing can complement handwriting development. The aim is to support informed, balanced, and inclusive decisions that help all students develop confidence and success in their written expression.

Un-joined vs Joined Writing

Which should students learn first?

In relation to handwriting development, there is a sequence of progress.



To form words, we need to form letters, and to form letters, we need to be able to form shapes. In line with the Primary Language Curriculum, **joined writing should only be introduced once students have securely embedded correct letter formation using un-joined letters.**

While some educators advocate for teaching joined writing earlier, particularly for students with learning needs, **current research does not support this as an effective approach.** Joined writing introduces additional complexity, with more strokes, directional changes, and cognitive load. For some students, this can make writing less efficient and more stressful.

Teaching joined writing in letter groupings supports students' understanding of joins. For example some letters join diagonally while some join horizontally. Some join from the bottom while some join from the middle and top. All students should be encouraged to develop writing skills that support them best and educators must remain mindful of individual needs. When handwriting becomes a source of frustration or anxiety, adaptation, not acceleration, is key.

Pen Licences

Are they helpful or harmful?

A key question to ask is: What is the purpose of a pen licence? In early primary years, students are still developing handwriting control. Pencils support experimentation and revision; students can erase, correct, and refine their work. As handwriting fluency increases, pen use becomes more appropriate for clarity and presentation.

While pen licences can motivate some students, recent research suggests that **they can cause unintentional harm to students with handwriting difficulties** (Tierney *et al.*, 2026). They can cause stress and reinforce feelings of inadequacy. It is important to remember that handwriting ability does not always reflect a student's effort, understanding, or progress.

Inclusive approaches to pen licences are recommended. Goals and expectations should be tailored to the student's individual ability level. One example supported by the National Handwriting Association (NHA) is a "Pen Party". Students bring in a range of pens and writing tools to try, discussing which ones feel most comfortable and supportive. This shifts the focus from "earning" a pen to exploring what helps them write best – building confidence, autonomy, and motivation.

Typing vs Handwriting

Which should we prioritise?

The handwriting vs typing debate is not necessary. Typing and handwriting are both essential skills; they serve different purposes but complement one another. As with handwriting, typing is not an automatic process; it requires explicit instruction, practice, and time to develop proficiency.

Although students now use digital devices more frequently, many still lack the typing fluency needed for classroom tasks or assistive technology use. For students with handwriting challenges, learning to type effectively can be empowering, but it can also feel daunting at first.

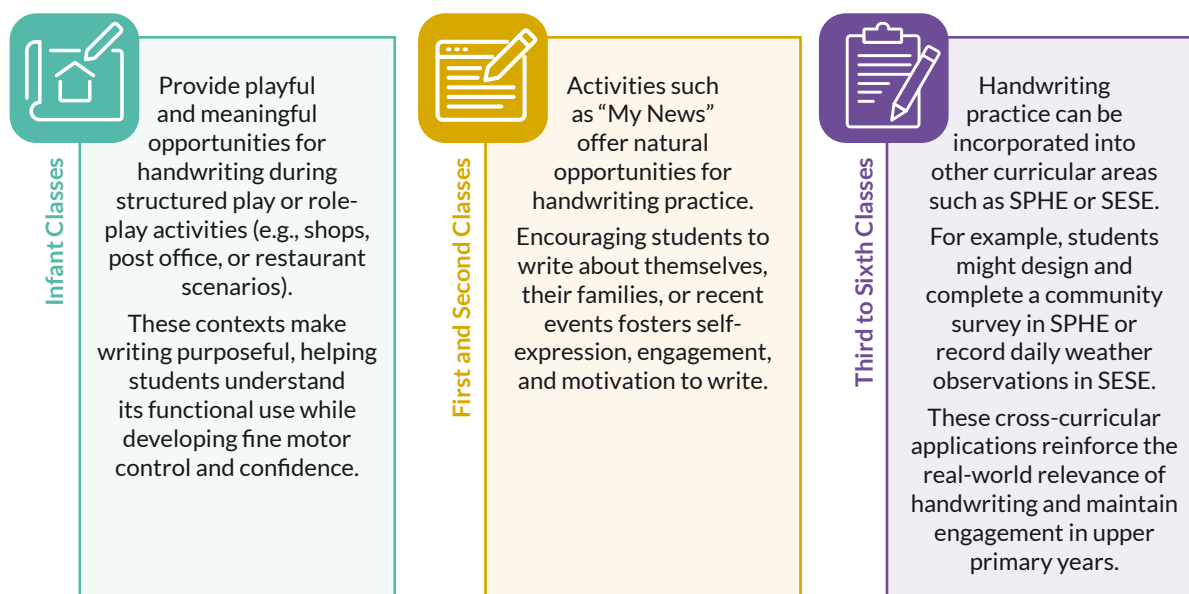
Importantly, handwriting should continue to be supported throughout schooling. It remains vital for functional daily tasks such as signing documents, taking notes, or writing cards. However, for approximately 27% of students who experience handwriting difficulties (Nightingale *et al.*, 2022), access to alternative methods, such as typing, speech-to-text, or visual presentation, is essential for equitable participation and success.

Handwriting Interventions

What does the evidence say?

Research consistently demonstrates that the most effective way to improve handwriting fluency and legibility is through direct, structured handwriting practice using pen or pencil on paper (Howe *et al.*, 2013; Santangelo & Graham, 2016). According to a systematic review by Hoy, Egan, and Feder (2011), handwriting interventions are most effective when they include a minimum of two sessions per week for at least 20 sessions in total. This evidence highlights the importance of short, frequent practice sessions, as these are more beneficial than occasional, lengthy ones. Embedding handwriting practice into daily routines and existing curricular activities can make this achievable and meaningful for students.

Integrating handwriting into regular classroom activities not only reinforces skill development but also enhances motivation and engagement. Below are examples of how handwriting practice can be embedded across class levels and subjects:



While handwriting relies on several foundational abilities, such as fine motor control, hand strength, postural stability, and visual-motor integration, targeting these skills in isolation does not reliably lead to improvements in handwriting performance (Novak *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, group handwriting interventions may include warm-up or preparatory activities to develop these skills, but to be effective, they must always include direct handwriting practice (Grajo *et al.*, 2020; Hoy, Egan, & Feder, 2011).

This reflects the evidence that handwriting improvement occurs through engagement in the act of writing itself, where motor learning and cognitive processes are integrated in a meaningful way.

Key Takeaways

- Direct handwriting instruction improves both fluency and legibility.
- Frequency and consistency matter – at least twice weekly for 20 sessions or more.
- Short, embedded practice sessions are more effective than longer, less frequent ones.
- Functional, meaningful writing tasks enhance motivation and generalisation of skills.
- Skill-based training alone (e.g., fine motor or sensory activities) should not replace handwriting practice.

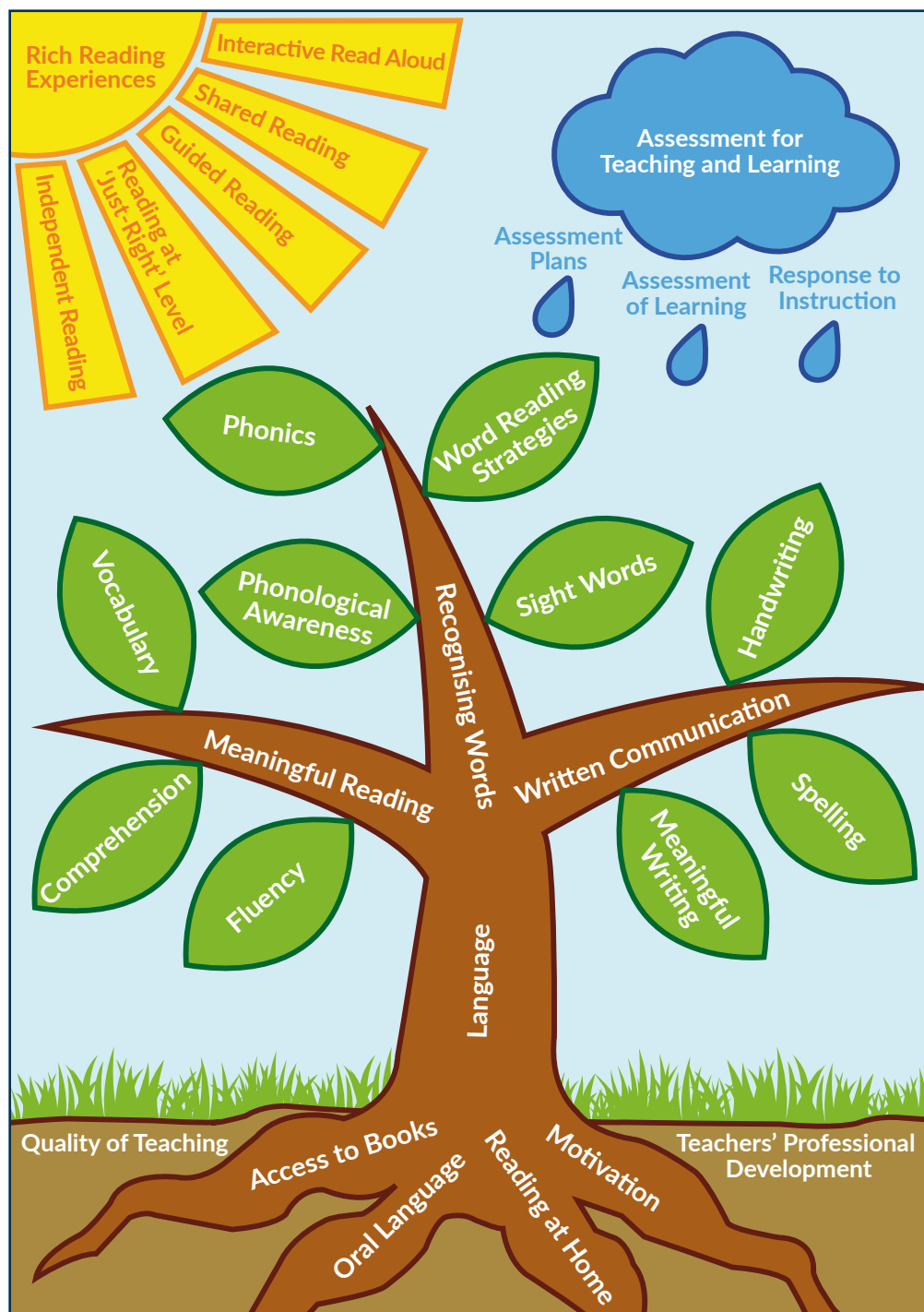
Useful Resources

- [National Handwriting Association](#)
- [Primary Language Curriculum – Handwriting and Presentation Learning Outcomes](#)
- [Oide Primary Language Curriculum and PDST resources](#)
- [CAST: Universal Design for Learning Guidelines](#)
- [NCSE: The Physical Classroom Environment](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Literacy Tree



Appendix 2

Handwriting Policy Guide

The aim of a handwriting policy is to ensure that all students in a school have access to consistent, structured, and effective handwriting instruction. The policy should focus on supporting the development of:

- Legibility.
- Fluency and speed.
- Comfort, confidence, and individual style.
- Positive attitudes towards handwriting.

It should also aim to guide staff in implementing handwriting instruction consistently across all class levels, from Junior Infants to Sixth Class, including special classes.

The following are guiding points to consider when developing a school handwriting policy, based on the National Handwriting Association policy guide (2025).

Stakeholders & Responsibility	• Representatives from all sectors of the school (junior, senior, special classes). • Involvement of classroom teachers, special education staff, and school management. • Inclusion of student voice representation from all classes. • Consultation with occupational therapists or literacy specialists if required.
Policy Aims	• To ensure handwriting instruction is developmentally appropriate for all ages. • To promote a consistent approach to teaching print, joined, and mixed styles. • To support students in achieving functional handwriting skills for academic and everyday purposes. • To provide guidance on resources, classroom organisation, and assessment. • To differentiate support based on age, readiness, and individual student needs. • Early handwriting learners should focus on correct letter formation, orientation and basic fluency. • Students who have progressed with their handwriting development should focus on legibility, speed, joined writing and functional application.

Whole School Approach	• Decide on a school-wide font to be used. • Decide on a school-wide handwriting style: un-joined in the early years and when joined is introduced. This requires collaborative practices with junior class teachers. • Outline letter formation families and progression through un-joined → joined styles. • Ensure consistency across classes in templates, worksheets, and workbooks and displays. • Formal handwriting teaching should be based on agreed workbooks and materials to maintain consistency.
Handwriting in the Curriculum	• Support all staff to be familiar with the Primary Language Curriculum – Handwriting and Presentation Learning Outcomes. • Review the Progression Continuum to understand expected outcomes for each class level. • Allocate daily or weekly handwriting practice (time targets may vary by class group).
Consistent Language & Terminology	• All stakeholders should use agreed terminology for: – Letters (upper and lower-case). – Letter sizes (short/small, tall/ascender, tail/descender). – Letter groupings/families. – Letter formation strokes and joining letters. – Page lines and spacing.
Resources & Classroom Setup	• Furniture: – Provide appropriately sized tables and chairs. – Allow flexible furniture exchanges between classes for taller or shorter students. • Pencils: – Offer a range of sizes and types for students to explore. – Encourage students to find tools that allow control and comfort. • Pens: – Introduce pens when students can make good choices in relation to what utensil to use for tasks. – Consider pen licenses carefully and in an inclusive way. Avoid unintentional harm or undue pressure. • Paper types: – Use blank, lined, raised line, or graph paper as appropriate for spacing, alignment, and letter sizing.

Teaching Steps & S Factors	• Implement the ‘S Factors for Success’ framework (National Handwriting Association, 2025) for progression in letter formation, spacing, and fluency. • Include entry and exit strokes, joining techniques, and letter families in lessons. • Adapt teaching steps for developmental readiness of students. 
Organisation & Instruction	• Specify how un-joined and joined writing will be taught across year groups. • Provide guidance for planning lessons, multisensory approaches, and differentiated support.
Assessment & Progression	• Use formative and summative assessments to monitor handwriting development. • Track correct sequence of strokes in letter forms, overall legibility and speed. • Adjust instruction and supports as needed for individual students.
Home-School Collaboration	• Communicate letter formation language and handwriting expectations with parents/caregivers. • Share strategies for reinforcing consistent handwriting practice at home. • Encourage collaboration between home and school to support student success.
Review & Update	• Policy should be reviewed annually or as needed based on student voice and outcomes, curriculum updates, or staff feedback. • Student voice feedback is important for implementing effective handwriting instruction, as it supports education staff to meet students where they are and maximise learning.
Possible Appendices	• Suggested daily/weekly practice targets by class level (i.e. 5-7 minutes, 3-4 times a week). • Sample letter formation family charts. • Recommended multisensory activities for handwriting with early handwriting learners. • Visual examples of lined paper, spacing tools, and alternative grips.

Appendix 3

Multisensory approaches to learning letter formation in early handwriting learners.



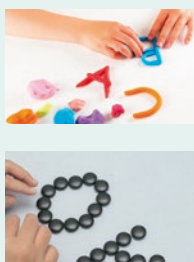
- Have letters set up using masking tape; students can trace the letters using cars.
- Laminated cards with letters printed; students can trace with coloured markers.



- Make patterns or practice letter formations in the air.
- Play “Simon Says” focused purely on letter making.
- In groups, have students create shapes and letters using their bodies and/or PE equipment.



- Make shapes and letters on different surfaces.
- Draw/write in a flat tray filled with a layer of rice, salt, split peas, flour, talc or shaving foam.
- Draw in sand, gloop, finger paints, gelatine, oatmeal, corn flour, instant pudding, lotions with the index finger.
- Go outside: write and draw on different surfaces. For example, paint with water using a large brush; draw on the ground using chalk of varying sizes.



- Create shapes using wooden pieces, blocks, counters playdough.
- Make letters and shapes using different objects. For example, trace the letters of the alphabet on a wall using a ball; start with two hands and a large ball; progress to eventually one hand and a small ball.
- Use large cardboard tubes (tinfoil/kitchen rolls) as wands to make letter formations and shapes.

Appendix 4

Cognitive approaches for students who have progressed their handwriting development to reinforce handwriting

Spot the Difference	Have the teacher write the letter on the board, verbalise the movements from beginning to end. Ask the student to look at their letter. Do they form it in the same way as the teacher? If not, why not? How is their letter different? Educate the class on why the letter is formed in that way (how it promotes movement across the page).
Letter of the Day: How Do You Write Yours?	Ask the class to write the letter on the page. Ask them to think about where they started, what direction they went in and where they finished. Share their plan for the letter with their neighbour.
Self-Evaluation using the 'S Factors for Success'	Ask the class to choose a piece of recent handwriting in their copy books, take them through the 'S Factors for Success' or choose to focus on one S Factor for the lesson. Ask the students to evaluate their writing using the 'S Factors for Success' below. If they would like to do better, then help them set a goal for this. Ask them to think about what they could do differently to improve the S Factor. Provide brief explicit teaching where this is needed. Consider this type of exercise at the beginning and end of each term.

Appendix 5

Student Reflection Checklist – Sample One



My Handwriting Reflection

Name: _____

Date: _____



Really good at
this



Getting there



Need some
help

How I Feel About Handwriting

- Handwriting lessons
- I feel proud when I look at my writing

How I Think I'm Doing

- I can understand what I have written
- Others can read my writing easily
- I can copy from the board or a book
- I can write down what the teacher says
- I can spot and fix my mistakes

My Letter and Word Writing

- I form all letters correctly
- I form all numbers correctly
- I join letters correctly
- My letters sit on the line
- My letters are the right height
- My letters and words are spaced well
- I use capital letters and punctuation properly



My Next Steps

Something I do well:

Something I want to get better at:

How I feel about my handwriting today: 😊 / 😐 / ☹️ (circle one)

Student Reflection Checklist – Sample Two



My Handwriting Reflection

Name: _____

Date: _____

	 Really good at this	 Getting there	 Need some help
How I feel about writing			
• I like handwriting			
• I'm proud of my writing			
When I write			
• I can read my own writing			
• My teacher/friends can read it			
• I can copy from the board			
• I fix my mistakes			
• My letters sit on the line			
• My letters are the right size			
• My words have spaces			



My Next Steps

Something I am proud of:

Something I want to get better at:

Appendix 6

Teacher Reflection & Planning Checklist

This reflective tool helps teachers consider and plan handwriting and written expression activities that are inclusive, engaging, and accessible for all students, creating Inclusive Writing Opportunities through Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

Step 1. Clarify the Learning Goal

- ☒ What is the true focus of the task?
- ☐ To develop handwriting skills (e.g., letter formation, fluency)?
- ☐ To demonstrate knowledge or understanding of another topic?

If handwriting is not the goal, can students show their learning in another way?

Step 2. Offer Multiple Means of Expression

- ☒ How can students share what they know?
- ☐ Oral responses, discussion, or presentation.
- ☐ Drawing, mapping, or visuals.
- ☐ Typing, voice recording, or assistive tech.
- ☐ Short written notes instead of full text.

Can handwriting remain an option – but not the only one?

Step 3. Review the Environment

- ☒ Is the classroom set up to support participation?
- ☐ Furniture fits student size and posture.
- ☐ Sensory environment supports focus <https://ncseproductionsa.blob.core.windows.net/assets/2025/12/Classroom-Sensory-Screening-Tool.pdf>
- ☐ Flexible writing positions and surfaces available (e.g., floor, wall, standing desk).

Step 4. Support Engagement & Motivation

- ☒ Are students supported to engage confidently?
- ☐ Tasks link to students' interests or experiences.
- ☐ Learning goals are clear and achievable.
- ☐ Students can choose tools, partners, or outcomes.
- ☐ Reflection encouraged: "What helped me write best today?"

Step 5. Reflect & Adjust

- ☒ After the task:
- ☐ Who demonstrated their learning with minimum support?
Who benefited from additional supports?
- ☐ Were handwriting expectations appropriate?
- ☐ What small change could remove a barrier next time?

Use brief reflection notes to inform future planning and to celebrate progress – not just in handwriting, but in communication, creativity, and confidence.

Optional Prompt for Team Discussion: "How can we make sure that every student in our class can share what they know – even if handwriting is hard for them?"

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