

## Why is Handwriting Important?

In the current age of technology, we might assume that handwriting is becoming redundant, so what is the point? Recently the staff have completed an up-to-date staff training session to discuss just this.

It is no longer deemed to be about, 'so your work can be read.' Handwriting runs deeper than that. In recent years, modern technology has dramatically changed the way we communicate through writing. However, despite the increased use of computers for writing, the skill of handwriting remains important in education, employment and in everyday life.

Studies have shown that children who are unable to form letters accurately and with continuous flow, use up a lot of cognitive load to write. In short, this means that their thinking brain (whether conscious of it or not) is busy working out how to form letters (transcribing) than thinking of amazing language and sentence types.

The National Handwriting Association said:

*"Time devoted to the teaching and learning of letter formation in the early years will pay off. 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 important when assessments are based on written work, particularly in time-limited written examinations, which remain as a major form of assessment for many formal qualifications. Without fast and legible handwriting, students may miss out on learning opportunities and under-achieve academically."*

*"The process of composing writing (choosing words and thinking about words and how) is often obstructed by the amount of effort required to transcribe (the forming and writing of the actual letters)"*

*"If children find the physical act of scribing taxing, they will be unlikely to develop into confident effective writers." (DfEE, 2001)*

*"The ability to produce legible handwriting at speed has been shown to make a significant contribution to achievement. "(Charter, 2000)*

The aim is to become completely 'free' when writing by using continuous cursive and only lifting the pen from the page when ending words and dotting the 'i' for example.

Within our classes, we are looking carefully at handwriting and to what pupils need in order to become fluent writers. Handwriting is one of our first steps to achieving this.

These are the things we will be considering:

Pencil grip – this is particular.

Posture – sitting properly.

Entrance and exit points – lead ins and outs for cursive preparation.

Movements, not end products – watching carefully that the formation is correct as this affects fluency.

These are also things to focus on at home- particularly pencil grip and posture.

## Setting the Foundations

National Handwriting Association 'P Checks'



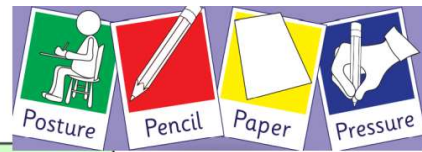
### POSTURE GUIDELINES

- Feet flat on the floor or on a wide based raised surface
  - Knees at a right angle with 2-fingers space behind the knee to avoid compression
  - Sit on the chair so hips are positioned at approximately 90° with the back supported
  - Sit approximately a fist-distance away from the table
- AND
- Table height adjusted so that forearms rest on the top without leaning forward (too low) or raising the shoulders/arms (too high)
  - Surface - clean, smooth and uncluttered

### PENCIL GRASP GUIDELINES:

- Check the child is developmentally ready before asking them to write.
- A dynamic tripod pencil grasp is the most efficient and is expected by end of Year 1.
- Address an inappropriate grasp in the early learning stages and later if it is causing discomfort or impacting speed.
- Consider corrective action using adaptive grips or specialist writing tools, but always trial several options to find the most appropriate.
- Encourage a 2 cm gap between finger tip and pencil point - and slightly greater for left-handers.

# Setting the Foundations



- PAPER GUIDELINES:**
- Tilt and offset the paper according to the writing hand.
  - Move the paper up or down to facilitate a comfortable reach and keep it in place with the non-writing hand.
  - Consider glare from paper and overhead lighting.
  - Consider a specialist vision assessment if visual stress continues.

- PRESSURE GUIDELINES:**
- The just-right pressure eases writing across the page, which is important for fluency and reducing the risk of pain during handwriting.
  - Use teaching tools such as carbon paper, mechanical pencils, 'light-up' and 'squiggle' pens to demonstrate appropriate pressure.
  - Try some gross and fine motor warm ups before and during the handwriting task. Actions which include squeezing and deep pressure, resistance and/or vibration will increase body awareness.
  - Check that posture/issues with postural control are not the causative factor here.

These are all inefficient grips.

Try to:

Pinch and flick

Air-write with a 'pen'



Figure OTA 4.5 Inefficient grasp



Figure OTA 4.6 Thumb wrap



Figure OTA 4.7 Thump tuck grasp

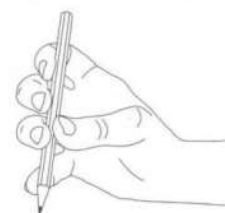


Figure OTA 4.8 Index grip

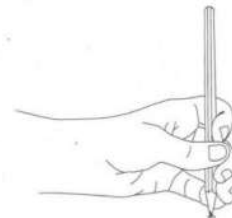


Figure OTA 4.9 Left hand index grip

### Common faults:

- Faulty pen/pencil grip –Dynamic tripod grasp.
- Incorrect letter formation
- Reversals and inversions
- Poor posture and paper positioning

### Nelson Handwriting: Teacher Guide

**Activities to help:** Sewing, knitting, building with intricate pieces of Lego, arts and crafts, cutting carefully using scissors, drawing lines, using the pinch motion with fingers, finger – muscle strengtheners, playdough, kneading, clay work, digging, gardening, games with pegs, colouring, drawing and art generally, practising picking and flicking a pencil into the correct position, forming letters in the air holding a pen or pencil, pencils not shorter than 8cm, using pincers/tweezers to pick up peas and sweetcorn or other small items. Developing core muscle strength so that pupils can sit in a strong upright position.

As a school we will continue to focus on handwriting and prioritise this within all subjects.

Please help at home with positive handwriting messages to support us and work on pencil grip, posture and formation. Within lessons we will be teaching and revising the formation of cursive letters.