

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Above Year 4

Children in British schools usually learn to form the letters and then to join them together in Key Stage 1. It is in the Upper Key Stage 2 that their skills are developed further so that *'by the end of Y6 writing should be sufficiently fluent and effortless for them to manage the general demands of the curriculum in Y7'* (National Curriculum for England implemented September 2014)

The following are suggestions for teachers of Upper Juniors and older to use with their students.

Speed up good writing

Hold short class sessions that encourage quicker writing. The aim is to speed up good legible writing.

See *Tips for Teaching - Speeding Up*



Encourage Individual Styles

At the beginning of Y5 pupils should have been using joined writing in their normal work since Y3. (from Sept 2014 if not before)

They will then be ready to consider possible small adjustments to their writing to increase speed and or fluency eg making loops to *g, y, j* or not joining from a particular letter that is impeding flowing writing. Discuss these possibilities with the class in handwriting sessions and encourage individual decision-making.

Show the group how to recognise good handwriting

There is a useful set of 'S' Rules that children can use to find out how to improve their writing. They can check if their writing is consistent in Size, Shape, Slant, Spacing and whether it Sits correctly on the line.

(see *Tips for Teaching - 'S' Rules*)

A whole class can write out a sentence and give themselves a score for each 'S' in turn. They can then work to improve the score on any aspects that need improvement.

A few points:


- This might require a few short class sessions.
- Good writers with little to improve can work on increasing their writing Speed.
- The children may need help in recognising good letter Shapes. This can be done by discussing groups of letters e.g. *a d g q* that are made similarly.

★ *Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say.*

National Curriculum implemented Sept 2014)

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

 **Tip** Make it clear that handwriting skills are as important as spelling and punctuation. Notice and praise efforts to improve the quality of writing in all normal work.

Set specific tasks

To help a group or individual.
E.g. "This week concentrate on making sure you close the tops of the letters *a, g, d, q*".

Challenge the class

Have a weekly challenge.
E.g. "Can you write a line of writing so that the body of every letter sits on the line?" – The challenge can be chosen to suit the particular group.

Sail the zesty siren who grabbed pay from the quick

Think about pens

A change of pen can work wonders for writing.

Consider what pens your students are using.

An interesting activity is to allow the group to experiment with different types of pens so that they appreciate some of the differences:

- How heavy the pen feels
- How comfortable it feels in the hand
- The quality/width of line
- How easily the ink flows
- How quickly the ink dries on the page

Do the children realise that the hard point of a ballpoint pen moves very quickly on the page and is therefore more difficult to control? Fine liners and fountain pens can grip the surface and so give a little more time to control the movement. This can help some children.


Make writing less stressful

Many children press heavily on the paper, sit awkwardly, and hold their pens in a way that is uncomfortable.

The beginning of Year 5 is a good time to re-evaluate how tools are handled, how much pressure is applied to the paper and whether the act of writing is causing strain in hand, shoulder or back that could be alleviated by a different position or by a deliberate relaxing of muscles.



Rhythmical pattern work can be useful in reducing stress as the complexities of complicated letter formation are avoided and attention can be given to the movement.

 **Tip** Patterns can be accepted more easily by older children if they are seen as preparation for writing in the same way that warm-up activities are used in sports or playing musical instruments.

See *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*

A

A

a

A

a

A

a

A

Look at other letterforms:

Many children are interested in computer fonts and other writing systems (modern ones such as Chinese, Arabic, Thai, or ancient, such as hieroglyphs, cuneiform, gothic, uncial scripts).

Collect a particular letter in many different styles from magazines/ make headings or collages using different fonts or letters.

Understanding more about letters can inspire children to give more attention to the writing they themselves create whether using a computer or a pen.

A

a

a

A

a

A

a

A

Demonstrate the importance of legible writing

Ask the class to exchange a piece of writing with a neighbour and to note how many words they find difficult to read in their classmate's work.

(or use anonymous pieces from another class or school)

What writing do I need for this task?

Help your class understand that some tasks need to be very legible but speed is more important for others (noting down homework requirements or drafting, perhaps). Help them to use appropriate speed and legibility for the task in hand.

Note: Some tasks require different treatment such as separate print letters for labelling and perhaps capitals or decorated letters for headings and posters.

The rocket ship shoots upwards with a whoosh
Blasting upwards in a flash of light
Drawing lines into the sky
Racing to discover worlds far away

Flitting in among the garden flowers
A flash of brilliant colour, like a piece of summer sky
You balance on the open rose
Like a ballerina on her toes
Your wings folded carefully
While you sip the sweet dew
How can such beauty come from a crystal? wrinkled and brown?

Use handwriting creatively

Try writing a poem or descriptive piece of writing in a way that reflects the subject - the obvious is a snail poem written in a spiral but children can be very inventive if encouraged.

Carrots work better than sticks

Put writing on display

Good writing on the classroom walls and in public areas of the school can be an excellent motivator.

In the morning I woke up in my bedroom but then I realised it had all been a dream. I was

Pieces of work could be chosen to be displayed in a special place each week/month.

Give awards

Awards can be used in a number of ways:

- For the achievement of a particular goal e.g. being able to write all the letters of the alphabet correctly orientated and relating to the base line. This encourages each child to achieve success and the child who is slower at mastering handwriting skills has the same goals although will inevitably need more time to achieve them.
- To reward a level of achievement of handwriting and layout in general work.
- For effort made to improve handwriting.

Awards could be:

- Allowing the use of a particular pen.
- Giving a certificate to be presented in front of the school.
- Putting names on a special display or stars (or pen nibs?) on a chart.
- Signing a book in the Head's room.
- Writing a thank you letter on behalf of the school.



Enter/organise a competition

A competition can inspire otherwise reluctant writers.

All the students in a class/school can be helped to make as many improvements in their written work as possible and then be given advice on layout so that each piece of work looks as good as possible.

Professional calligraphers prepare roughs and often make many versions before they are satisfied with the quality of a piece of work. Allowing children opportunity to work towards a really good competition entry can raise their standards and improvements made are often carried over into everyday written work.

Tip



www.handwritingcompetition.co.uk gives details of a national competition for schools.

Other **Tips for Teaching** that may be of use: 'S' Rules for quick assessment, Speeding Up, Patterns.

Compiled by Gwen Dornan from articles in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.