

# TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association   
Promoting good practice

## 'S' Rules for quick assessment

### S stands for Size, Shape, Sitting, Spacing, Slant, Sequence & Speed.

These 'S' Rules provide a checklist for quick evaluation of a child's handwriting. Under these headings handwriting can be assessed by a teacher or by older children themselves to find what actions are needed to improve legibility, neatness or speed.


A good way to begin is to ask the students to write a few lines.

**'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'**

is a favourite sentence as it uses all the letters of the alphabet.

The writing should be looked at carefully with the points below in mind (not necessarily in this order).

Children can be given a check list and asked to give themselves a score out of 10 for each 'S'. This gives them a measure for comparison and greater control over the process of improvement.

 **Tip** Some changes e.g. 'Sitting' may be relatively easy to make and yet improve the quality of the writing noticeably; spurring enthusiasm for tackling more challenging problems.

#### SIZE

##### Are the letters written at the correct size?

The 'small' letters (a c e u etc) and the 'body' parts of b d g h k p q should all be written the same size. Letters with ascenders (b d f h k l) should ideally be written approximately twice the height of the small letters and descenders should drop a similar distance below the writing line (y g j etc).

Many children who understand these rules write particular letters too large or small; common faults being k and s written too large and letters at the end of a word written too small.

A demonstration of the evenness of letter sizing can be made by drawing a line along the top of the small letters. It is then usually possible to note the letters that are larger or smaller than the norm. (see below)



**Tip**



Writing on paper with a dotted line marking the top of the small letters can be helpful.

### Is the writing a suitable size?

Some children write minutely small.

Some write too large for the space so the tails of the letters get mixed up with the line below.

With younger children it might be preferable to use paper with wider line spacing.

This writing is too large for the paper being used.(reduced)

This was written by the same boy on the same type of paper after encouragement to write smaller.

### Tip



Practising on paper ruled with lines at the desired size can be helpful when children are trying to write larger or smaller and it can be made on a computer to suit the needs of the children.

Writing between lines that define the height of the small letters.

## SHAPE

### Are all the letters legible and formed correctly?

The letters of the alphabet can be grouped according to their shape and movement patterns. For example the round letters *c a d g q* all begin in the same way and share a similar shape.

Sometimes letters that have been learned correctly lose their legibility when the writing speed increases. For example: if the letters *a d g o* are not completely closed they can be mistaken for different letters.

Are these day and bat or clay and but?

### Are the shapes of the letters consistent?

For example, a rounded *o* looks better with a rounded *a*; an oval *o* needs an oval *a*.

Similarly there should be consistency in the shape of descenders, whether looped or open, wide or narrow.

See examples below

This 11 year old boy uses narrowed oval letters consistently.

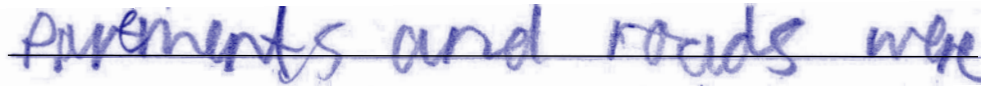
This 10 year-old girl prefers rounded letters that are equally consistent.

## SITTING

### Do all the letters 'sit' on the writing line?

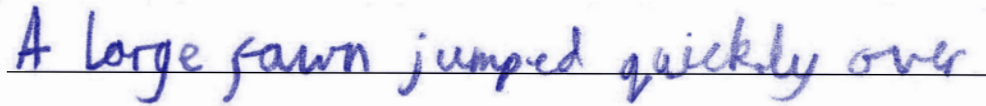
(with the 'tails' of such letters as **g** and **p** hanging below).

Attention to this makes the writing more easily legible and improves the appearance of writing, so increasing the confidence of the writer.



Apprentices and roads were

This boy improved his writing when he concentrated on sitting the letters on the line.

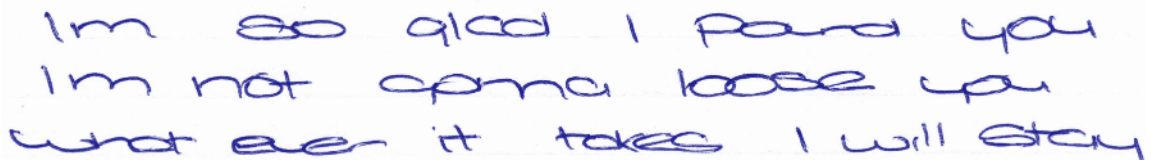


A large fawn jumped quickly over

## SPACING

### Is each letter spaced evenly from its neighbours?

Letters that touch each other are difficult to read (see below). Irregularly spaced writing does not look good.



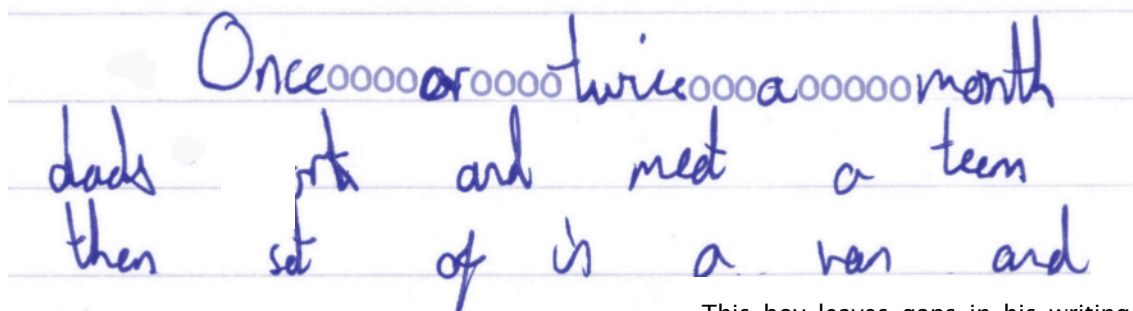
I'm so glad I found you  
I'm not gonna lose you  
what ever it takes I will stay

### Is the space between the words consistent?

#### Is there too little or too much space between words? -

A simple rule that works for any age and both left and right-handed writers: leave enough space for a letter **o** between words.

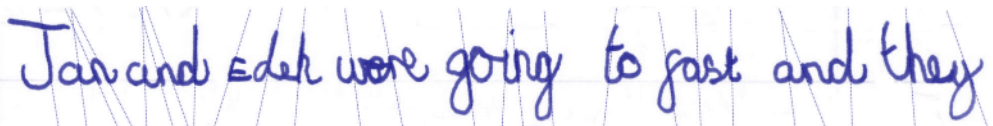
Children can test the evenness and size of their spacing by using a contrasting colour to draw in as many **o**'s as will fit between words. (see below)



Once ooooo orooooo twice ooooo a ooooo month  
dads o rth and meet a teen  
then set of is a van and

This boy leaves gaps in his writing that are wider than the spaces between the horizontal lines of writing.

## SLANT



### Is the writing slanting in a consistent direction?

A consistent slant or slope improves the appearance of a piece of writing and invites the reader to read more. Many handwriting copy styles are written with a slightly forward slant, which is a natural movement for a right-hander and facilitates speed. Some children find this difficult and prefer to write in an up-right style.

A test can be made by extending the down strokes with a contrasting pen or pencil. It is then easy to see which is the most common slant used and which letters break the pattern. (as above)

## SEQUENCE OR STRING

### Is the writing consistently joined?

Once joined writing has been learned children should be encouraged to use it for all their normal writing so that the practice makes it easy and familiar.

Note that some styles of joined writing have spaces after descenders and perhaps some other letters, such as **b** and **p**. These can provide a break when the hand can be moved along the page.

### Advantages of joined writing

- Fewer pen lifts, therefore potentially quicker.
- The joining line helps to create even spacing.
- The physical movement of writing strings of letters together helps in establishing spelling.



This girl knows how to join her letters but does not always do so.

## SPEED

### Is the writing fast enough to be functional?

So many school situations require fast writing that a student is at a disadvantage if he needs longer to write than his peers. However, encouraging a child to write quickly if there are aspects of his writing that need attention will only reinforce incorrect habits. It is better to first consider the above criteria for good handwriting and remedy any problems before encouraging greater speed.

See *Tips for Teaching - Speeding Up* for suggestions.

Other *Tips for Teaching* that might be of use: *Above Year 4*

Compiled by Gwen Dornan From articles in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association by Jane Taylor and herself.