

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Speeding Up

Functional handwriting needs to be legible and also to be fast enough for the needs of the child. The National Curriculum requirements from September 2014 state that children in Upper KS2 should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase its speed. Speeding up will enable pupils to be ready for the demands of secondary school with its increased quantity of writing and external examinations, some of which need to be written by hand.

Note: Some handwriting writing schemes used in schools mention the training of note-taking techniques, which is a useful skill but is not the same as being able to quickly produce an easily legible piece of writing.

The following is a compilation of ideas used by members of the NHA Committee that can help classes or individuals to achieve a fast, yet legible, style of writing. You will be able to choose the ones that best fit your students.

SPEEDY PRACTICE



Introducing speed to beginner writers

The child writes out a single letter three times carefully and then ticks the well-formed letters.

Once the letter is formed with ease and fluency the child is asked to repeat writing the letter for a given amount of time. The teacher selects an appropriate time depending on age and handwriting ability.

The child ticks all the legible letters. The score is recorded and compared with previous efforts.

A useful tip to establish whether the child has internalised both the shape and the movement patterns necessary to write the letter is to ask him/her to write the letter with his/her eyes shut.



For small groups with parental support

- Ask children to write as many 3-letter words dictated in a minute as they can and then calculate how many words they have written.
- Depending on their age set a target (e.g. 45 letters a minute for a 9 year old child).
- The child writes words dictated by the parent (such as: cat, dog, pig, dot, bed, pod, hat, mat, mud) for 1 minute a day to get the writing up to a realistic speed within a set time agreed with child and parent.

Note: using a book with lines appropriate to the child's handwriting size helps with kinaesthetic feedback.



Try forming lines of looped o's. Write them faster and faster. Then use them to make words - room, wool etc.

Practise writing the words from the weekly spelling test at speed.

Use regular speed tests built into handwriting lessons. Pupils can keep a note of their scores and beat their own targets. Write phrases such as 'thirty days has September, April, June and November,'

M	T	W	Th	F
6	7	8	10	

'six and three make nine.'

TOP GEAR WRITING

(for class or individual)



- Each child writes a short word a few times.
- He checks that the letter shapes and alignment are correct and makes any necessary changes.
- The word is then repeated and the speed gradually increased until the child is writing in his highest gear i.e. the fastest writing that **does not impair** its quality very much.
- The children are timed for 2 minutes, writing the word at that speed.
- They keep a record of their speed in letters per minute.

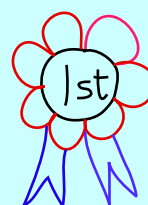
As in all these exercises, the aim is for individual improvement and not competition with classmates.

HORSE RACING (best with a single child or very small group)



- Once a group of letters have been taught (e.g. those that start with a curve to the left: **c o a g d q s**) divide the page into horizontal 'lanes', writing one letter at the left-hand side of each lane. The child chooses a name for each of these "horses" e.g. Oscar the O, Goofy the Goer, etc.
- Then, under starters orders, the child prepares to repeat the first letter along its 'lane' as fast as s/he can. Give the signal to go and time the letters as they race across the page. The time is recorded in seconds at the right hand end of each line.
- This is repeated with each of the letters in question. When all have been raced look at the time scores and decide the winner. He then gets the winner's rosette (i.e. a circle with curves drawn by the child all the way round). Horses are disqualified from the race if the letter is wrongly formed or begins with the wrong movement etc.
- This can be repeated on several occasions and comparisons made both between letters and between occasions.

N.B. It is important to stress that you are not expecting the child to write neatly or write on the line or to be concerned with any aspect of writing except making the correct movement and going as fast as possible between the lines.





Class or group activity

- Children choose or are given books to copy from. These should all be different, clearly printed and without excessively long words.
- The children copy from the book legibly as fast as they can for a timed period of 2 minutes (time can be increased according to age and experience).
- Each child then exchanges books with a partner and all read the text they have been given, putting a ring round any word that is not legible.
- The books are returned and each child records the number of legible words written in a chart at the back of his book.
- This activity can be repeated regularly as each child works to increase his own personal writing speed.

Timed test to improve personal best performance (PB)

The child writes out the letters of the alphabet legibly and in sequential order in a given amount of time. The teacher selects an appropriate time depending on age and handwriting ability.

The child ticks all the legible letters. The score is recorded and compared with previous effort. This task should be repeated if there are several poorly formed letters as the child is obviously writing too fast.

If one or two letters are poorly formed then the child can be asked to practise those letters separately by writing out the letter three times and ticking the well-formed letters.

Scribbles and handwriting patterns

Free scribbling or patterns repeating particular letters or basic shapes can be written more freely than complete words and help to develop speed.

For more information on using patterns see *Tips for Teaching - Patterns*

SPEEDY TIPS

For younger children:

Teach the following words in cursive script:

First 12 key words
a, and, he, in, is, it,
that, the, to, was

Next 20 words
all, as, at, be, but, are,
for, had, have, him, his,
not, one, said, so, they,
we, with, you, on

Joined writing has few pen lifts and so is quick to write. Once children are accustomed to joined writing expect them to use it for all everyday handwritten work, including drafting.

Older children might like to loop the descenders of the letters **g, j, y** to avoid a pen lift.

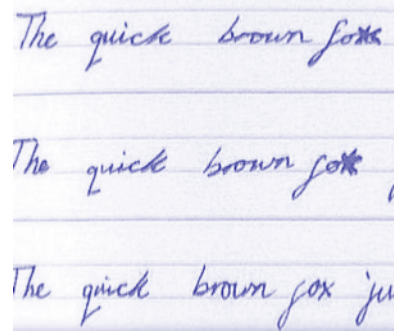
Crossing **t** and dotting **i & j** at the end of writing a word is quicker than breaking off in the middle of the word.

LITTLE AND OFTEN WORKS

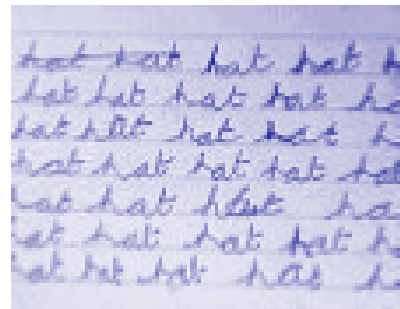
- Three Y5 children wrote 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' as many times as they could for 2 minutes and recorded the time they took.
- They practised for 5 minutes a day (using the Top Gear Exercise)
- They repeated the Quick Brown Fox test and all increased their writing speed.



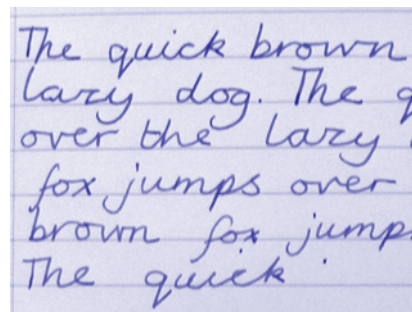
Alex L practised 5 minutes every day for a week and increased her writing speed from 62 letters per minute to 79.



Hugh practised 5 minutes most days for a week and increased his writing speed from 70 letters per minute to 81.



Alex C practised 5 minutes most days for 2 weeks and increased her writing speed from 74 letters per minute to 84.



NB Before encouraging children to write more quickly, it is essential that they can form their letters correctly and write legibly.

Additionally, they are likely to be more successful at writing quickly if they know how to join their letters together.

This article was first published in *Handwriting Today 2007*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association, with contributions from Gwen Dornan, Catherine Elsey, Jessica Falconer, Beverly Scheib, Jane Taylor, Suzanne Tibertius and Angela Webb.

Other **Tips for Teaching** that might be useful: *Basic Steps, Patterns, 'S' Rules, Above Year 4*