

STAFFORDSHIRE CC

# Handwriting

## Activities and Strategies

Saxon Hill Academy and PDSS. Greenhall Nursery and PDSS. Blackfriars Academy and PDSS.  
Horton Lodge School and PDSS.  
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Handwriting activities and strategies to try when it has been identified that a child, in your class, is experiencing some difficulties developing handwriting skills.

## Handwriting Preparation

### **Letter and Word Practice (3 to 5 years)**

'Children have had experience with letters and print for several years now and are beginning to use letters in their own writing. Usually children start by experimenting with the letters in their own names, as these are most familiar to them. They also make "pretend letters" by copying familiar letter shapes, and will often assume that their created letter must be real because it looks like other letters they have seen' (Robertson, 2007).

#### **Early Learning Goal – writing**

Children use their phonic knowledge to write words in ways which match their spoken sounds. They also write some irregular common words. They write simple sentences which can be read by themselves and others. Some words are spelt correctly and others are phonetically plausible.

### **Positioning and Posture:**

#### **Position**

- Consider position of the child within the classroom when copying from the board/book.
- Sit on the right side if right handed (left side if left handed) of the desk if possible, as this will allow space for the forearm to move without obstruction. Watch out if you have a left handed child sitting next to a right handed child—the writing hand needs to be on the 'outside.'
- Feet flat on floor and hip width apart.
- Hips flexed at 90°
- Bottom and back supported.
- Chair tucked in under the table.
- Elbows supported on the table.
- If the chair has a deep seat, put a cushion behind the child's back to give him/her more support. If their feet don't touch the floor provide a low box or step to give a flat foot position.
- Place a mirror on the wall beside the child so they can check their own posture.

- Tape a small picture of an upright sitting posture to the desk as a visual prompt.
- Try an angled work surface using a lever arch file or commercial ones are available.
- A smooth work surface (such as whiteboard) will provide less resistance to movement.

Place something in the palm of child's hand, to hold with little/ring finger (Handiwriter). This encourages more isolated movements of the fingers when writing.

### The chair

- Sit with your feet on the floor and your hips well back in the chair.
- It is important that the chair is a suitable size, to provide stability whilst writing.

### The table

- Sit close to the table, making sure that the table is at the right height (eg elbows rest comfortably on the table).
- You can have a sloping surface to work on; (e.g. an A4 file) if this helps you to keep your work surface clear from clutter to allow room for the writing arm to move



## Paper Position

The position of the paper on the desk for writing is important. The paper should be principally on the same side of the body as the writing hand. The bottom of the paper then tilts down at the point, which is nearer the child's midline (ie slightly tilted to the right for right handers, vice versa for left-handers).



**Left Handed**

**Right Handed**

- The optimum position is when a child's forearm is supported. The child should be encouraged therefore to move the paper up rather than her arm down. Ensure the paper is angled at about 30° - 45° (the paper should be parallel with the writing arm).
- The child should stabilise the paper with the other hand.
- Ensure that the child moves the paper up as they near the bottom of the page.

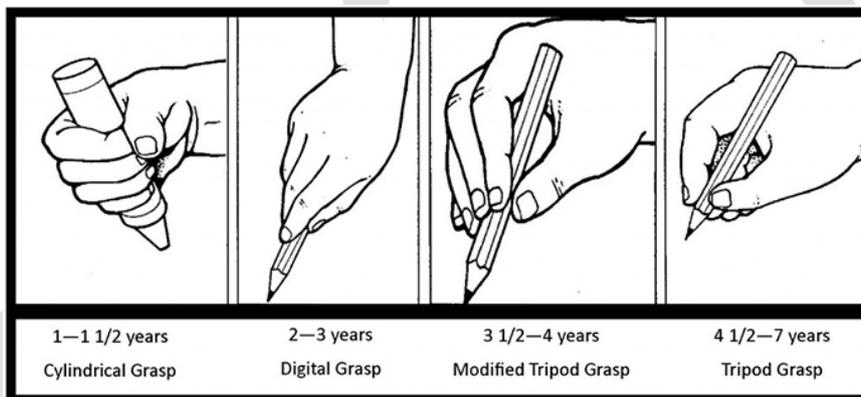
## The pencil

- Make sure that the pencil is sharp.
- Encourage the child to hold the pencil between their thumb, index and middle fingers. This can be helped by using a triangular pencil or pencil grip.
- The fingers should be placed approximately 3 cm from the tip of the nib, this will allow the child to see what they have written and avoid smudging work.
- Larger barrelled pencils will reduce strain on finger joints.
- Adapted pencils can be trialled for best grip and pressure e.g. stabilo, easy grip, yoro and moulded varieties.

## The Pen

- Handwriting can be made to look tidier by choosing a pen that suits the child.
- Fibre tip pens tend to blot the paper and so a roller ball pen may be better.
- It is best for the child to try a pen for a couple of weeks before trialling something different.
- For some children a pen is much easier to use than a pencil.

## Grip/Hold



- The best grip for many of us is described below, although a child may find another way of holding a pencil which suits him/her better. It may be useful if you try to help your child to hold the pencil in this way, and remind him/her to check and correct his/her grip.
- Pencil balanced against hand.
- The wrist is slightly extended (bent upwards).
- The tip of thumb and index finger has the pencil resting on it at the level of the fingernail.
- Pencil grips also can reduce the finger/pencil pressure by changing the relative tension of the fingers and thumb involved.

## **Left Handed Writers**

If a left-handed child is only permitted to write with the left hand but not taught how to write, the child may develop an uncomfortable, inefficient, slow, messy way of writing that may last. Therefore, it is especially important for parents and teachers to understand how to teach left-handed children to write correctly.

The most important factors are: the position of the writing paper, the position of the arm and wrist, and the grip on the writing instrument.

The "hooked" style of writing that one often sees in left-handers results from lack of proper training - this is not how a left-hander should write. Left-handers adopt this posture because they are trying to see what they are writing and not smear what they have just written with their hand, while maintaining a right-slant to their letters - these problems are better overcome by paper positioning and pencil grip (with the understanding that a right-slant is not mandatory, that upright or left-slanted letters are acceptable).

### **Position of Paper**

For a left-handed child, the paper should be positioned left of the child's midline, and tilted so that the top right corner of the paper is closer to the child than the top left corner. The paper is placed so that the child's hand is to the left of, and away from, the body at the start of the writing line, and ends the line with the hand closer and in front of the body or slightly to the left of midline. The angle that the paper is tilted will vary according to individual children -- the important thing for the child to remember is to keep the arm perpendicular to the bottom of the page. The wrist should be straight (not bent). And the writing hand should be below the writing line.

Teach left-handed children to remember three things as they learn to write:

- Grip the pencil ~ 2.5 cm (1 inch) to 3.8 cm (1.5 inches) from the point,
- Tilt paper so that arm is at right-angle to bottom edge of paper (and the top right corner of page is toward writer)
- Write with the hand below the writing line and the wrist straight.

- Try using a non-slip mat (dycem) under the workbook to keep the paper in position.

Because the physical action of writing involves the whole arm, tilting the paper allows a writer the most efficient and comfortable position for the wrist, elbow, and shoulder. Some teachers have found it helpful to let the left-handed child start writing, or practice writing, on a board mounted on the wall (or on the ground, using a stick in sand). This allows the child to move the entire arm freely, keep the wrist straight, and not worry about seeing or smudging the writing, making it easier for the child to concentrate on learning to form the figures.

### **Pencil / Pen Grip**

A common problem for all young children learning to write is gripping the pencil too tightly, making writing tense and tiresome. Usually the child learns to relax his or her grip as writing develops, but teachers can remind students to hold the instrument gently. Frequent practice and letting the child write large letters, also helps children learn to relax their grip. The child will tend to naturally reduce the size of the writing as s/he attains better motor control.

Specific pens/pencils for left handers include the 'yoropen' The angle of the pen ensures that the fingers do not obstruct the field of vision. The writer can clearly see what he/she is writing.

Especially for children who are learning to write, the Yoropen will not only help them to write precisely, but will also help to avoid discomfort and pain caused by poor posture. Left-handers will be far less likely to smudge their writing when using a Yoropen.

## General Strategies

Age	Typical Behaviour
Birth to 11 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children's later writing is based on skills and understandings which they develop as babies and toddlers. Before they can write, they need to use spoken language to communicate. Later they learn to write down the words they can say.</li><li>• Early mark-making is not the same as writing. It is a sensory and physical experience for babies and toddlers, which they do not yet connect to forming symbols which can communicate meaning.</li><li>• Distinguishes between the different marks they make.</li></ul>
8 to 20 months	
16 to 26 months	
22 to 36 months	

## Letter Formation

- It seems incomprehensible why certain children cannot reproduce familiar letter shapes even when these are placed directly in front of them. This is due to poor form constancy, a vital perceptual skill. It is important to use variety of multisensory activities to reinforce the child's appreciation of shape and size:
- Play games which reinforce shape and size, i.e. sorting boxes, ball games, shape stencils, Spirograph.
- Create shapes using dough or clay encouraging the child to mould and knead the material into a clear shape (this reinforces tactile sensation).
- Create letter forms out of Play-Doh and see if the child can detect what the shape or letter form is with their eyes closed (this reinforces proprioception and tactile sensation).
- Encourage the establishment of individual shapes before introducing new ones, ie clearly produce a circle before an oval or square.
- Use 'Roll n Write Alphabet' sensory forms to help with direction. [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com).
- Using an index finger, create letters and shapes in trays of sand, shaving foam or silly soap.
- Write letters on rough sandpaper using a variety of medium, ie soft leaded pencil or wax crayons (the fine vibrations reinforce Kinaesthetic sense).
- Develop an appreciation of form using sections from the 'Write from the Start Perceptuo-Motor Handwriting Programme' especially sections 1A-2A.

## **Fine Motor Control**

- The combination of poor sensation, inadequate tactile sensation and poor pressure awareness will result in poor motor control and the child may need to practice simple motor tasks to develop an ability to track and scan ahead. To develop this:
- Introduce puzzles such as mazes; grade these in complexity.
- Use electronic tracker games where a buzzer sounds if the wire is touched, these usually come with 3 levels of difficulty.
- Use dot to dot puzzles.
- Button and bead threading games.
- Cutting out complex outlines with scissors.
- Pattern making using geo-boards.
- Construction activities such as Lego and K-nex.
- Encourage creative activities such as collage and papier-mâché.

### Using Touch & Joint Sensation to Warm Up

- Touch and joint sense in the hands and fingers are important senses to develop when it comes to handwriting. Touch receptors in the skin and receptors in the joints help inform us about our immediate environment. The information gained is used to help guide our actions, making movements smooth and coordinated, for example, how much pressure we should use when writing so that we do not press the pencil too hard or too light on the paper.  
Here are some activities to develop your child's awareness of his hands and fingers so that he can become more aware of the difference between heavy and light pressure when writing. If touch and joint sensitivity is due to a medical condition please seek additional advice.

The sensory channels which can be used for learning to write are:

- Tactile channel, i.e. sensation of touch
- Visual channel, i.e. seeing
- Gustatory channel, i.e. smelling
- Kinaesthetic channel, i.e. sensation of movement (proprioception)
- Below are some suggestions to try and increase the multi-sensory emphasis.

Encourage learners to draw these shapes:

X O | Δ — / +

### **Tactile strategies (multi-sensory)**

- Draw letters with the index finger in sand, paint or shaving foam.
- Practise writing the letters in the air.
- Trace letters or simple pre-writing shapes on child's back and let them guess the letter you have drawn.
- Practise writing the letters with their eyes shut as well as open.
- Write on paper that is hanging on the wall, and develop whole arm movements to formulate a pattern.
- Draw using crayons, chalk, pencils and pens on different textures and focus on the different feels of the writing when doing it e.g. Use chalks to draw on the pavement.

### **Visual activities**

- Writing on coloured paper, or black paper using silver or gel pens.
- Use aluminium foil to write on
- Construct the shapes or letters using pipe cleaners or similar materials.
- Use different types of paper.
- Use special painting books where, with a wet finger, the colour appears by magic.
- Rainbow letters on to a piece of paper or chalkboard. Using a variety of colours draw the large letter and then to copy over it and make a rainbow.
- Smell activities
- Writing with scented markers.
- Add scented oil or essences to finger paints to make it smell.
- Use scented lotion for finger painting.

### **Proprioceptive activities**

These activities would stimulate the joint muscles and provide feedback to the child's brain regarding the movement they are making. They incorporate weight or resistance to the movement.

- Use a weighted brush to paint with or a heavy pencil.
- Use a rolled up magazine as a wand to draw the letter in the air using both hands.
- Use wrist weights.
- Use a wobbling pen.

## **LETTER FORMATION ADVICE**

Handwriting Statutory requirements - Y1

Pupils should be taught to:

- Use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined
- Increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting (for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch).

### **Specific Strategies**

#### **Heavy Pressure**

- Heavy pressure through the writing instrument can slow writing without output significantly. We know that many children struggle to monitor pressure through their limbs due to what is termed poor proprioception, therefore we need to help the child to develop an awareness of the amount of pressure placed through the limbs, the upper limbs in particular. The following will help:
- Regularly undertake a series of exercises whereby pressure is placed through the upper limbs, ie crawling games, wheelbarrows, ladies press-ups, elephant walks, etc these should ideally be incorporated into a daily schedule.
- Provide a light-up pen. Challenge the child to write so that the light does not come on.
- Play games using several carbon copies and encourage pressure that produces just one copy. Initially the pressure may make the child write so that the message can be seen on 3 or 4 copies, but by encouraging the child to self-monitor, pressure will reduce.
- Use a hard leaded pencil such as HB so that writing is not easily smudged.

## **Light Pressure**

- Some children will have the opposite problem to the above and will not apply enough pressure through the writing instrument. This will affect control and will make writing appear 'spidery' and poorly formed. To help with this:
- Make sure that the wrist is extended and resting on the table – if not, try using an angled board. The angle should be approximately 25°. This will ensure that the wrists are positioned on the writing surface.
- Provide weighted wrist-bands which would provide additional sensory feedback to the wrist area, increasing the child's awareness of their hand, wrist and arm position.
- Lower the table slightly to that the hips are flexed more than 90. This enables the child to obtain the assistance of body weight to assist with pressure through the writing instrument.
- Use softer leaded pencils such as 2B so writing appears darker.

## **Decrease fatigue/pressure**

- Playdough etc to develop hand strength.
- Have short breaks between long periods of writing to help relieve the tension in hand muscles. Exercises can be done to help relax the hand.

## **Letter spacing, sizing and placement**

- Use a lolly stick/emery board to place after each word to assist with spacing.
- Use a spoon—use small end for spacing between letters, and the large end for spacing between words.
- After completing work, ask child to highlight the over/under spaced words and letters.
- Use coloured writing lines to emphasise correct positioning.

## Spatial Orientation

Children who struggle to judge distances and assess space will not only affect gross motor skills, but will also have a bearing on handwriting. Spaces between words may be omitted or placed erratically. This results in text becoming increasingly illegible. It is therefore crucial to teach the child how to provide adequate space between words and to space letters appropriately.

To do this:

- Use the 'Write from the Start Perceptuo-Motor handwriting Programme', especially section 2B.
- Practice writing on grid paper, placing each letter in a square and a space between each word.
- Introduce joined writing very early in the child's education.
- Place a fingertip after each word before writing the next word.
- Play games which involve judging distances, i.e. obstacle courses, target throwing such as bean bags into a box.
- Use board games which involve spatial organisation such as Connect 4, peg board patterns, etc.
- Play 'How many steps?' standing with the child, ask, 'How many steps will it take you to reach that chair?' The child then guesses. They are then encouraged to take those steps and monitor their own movement. Initially the child may grossly under or over-estimate the distance, but with time the estimations gradually become more accurate.

## Letter Orientation

- It is often a common complaint that children frequently invert or reverse letter forms so that confusion arises between p/d, b/d, p/q, t/f, m/w, u/n. In addition, letters may be formed in reverse with the letter 'o' being produced in a clockwise direction rather than anti-clockwise. To help this:
  - Use 'Rol n Write' forms which help the child to appreciate the direction of writing: [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com)
  - Introduce Finger Phonics books from the Jolly Phonics series which provide an indented image of each letter to help formation.
  - Provide a starting arrow to show which way a letter should be produced, i.e. the letter 'c' is orientated in an anticlockwise direction and the letter 'b' requires a clockwise orientation.

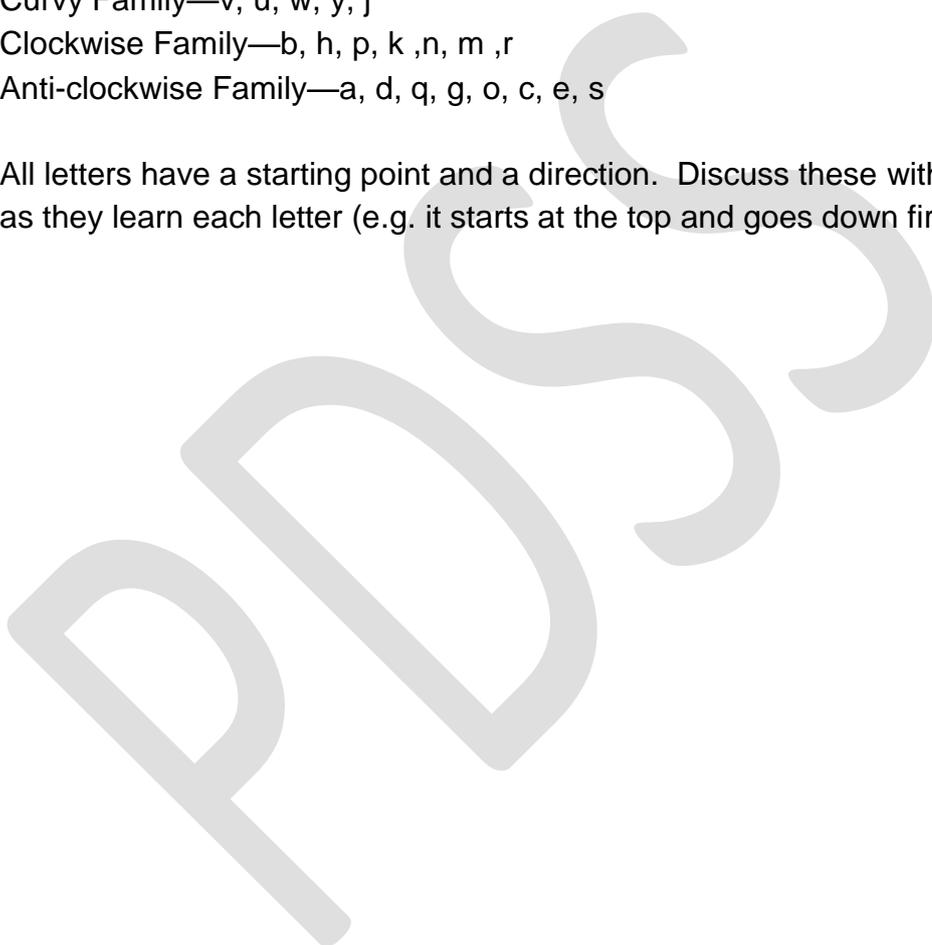
- Join letters as early as possible even in Reception, this significantly helps with orientation.
- If the 'p' and 'b' continue to be used interchangeably open formation to b p.
- Use odd one out games to help the child to determine discrepancies in orientation.
- Write letters in the air using whole arm movements with eyes closed to reinforce kinaesthetic appreciation of letter orientation.
- Develop a sense of directional orientation using games such as 'Bop it Extreme II.'

### **Writing Alignment**

- Many children struggle to plan and organise their movements, they will also find writing across the page in a left to right horizontal direction very difficult. Guidance is therefore needed to help them with writing alignment:
- Always use lined paper rather than a line guide which easily moves.
- Mark a margin at the left hand side in a clear colour or place starting points at the left margin to reiterate where each line of writing should start.
- Create coloured lines on plain or pastel coloured paper giving guidance for ascenders and descenders encouraging the child to write in the middle keeping within the frame. Commercial ones are available.
- If a child has significant difficulties in this area, create coloured bands across the paper (rather than lines) encouraging the child to write within each band before proceeding to the next.
- Provide 'Right line' or 'hint-print' paper which incorporates lines which are slightly raised giving a tactile reference when writing each letter or use PVA glue to mark lines.

## Letter families

- It is easier to teach the letters family by family. Each family is made up of letters with similar movements and directions so it will make it easier for your child to learn how the letters are formed. Try teaching them in the following order to make it easier for your child:
- Stick Family—i, l, t, f, x, z
- Curvy Family—v, u, w, y, j
- Clockwise Family—b, h, p, k, n, m, r
- Anti-clockwise Family—a, d, q, g, o, c, e, s
- All letters have a starting point and a direction. Discuss these with your child as they learn each letter (e.g. it starts at the top and goes down first.)



## **Writing Programmes and Resources**

- Write Angle (Writing slope) at [www.philipandtacey.co.uk](http://www.philipandtacey.co.uk).
- Write start Desktop (Writing slope) at [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com).
- Magnetic Angled Writing Board at [www.nrs-uk.co.uk](http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk).
- Pencil Grips at [www.homecraft-rolyan.com](http://www.homecraft-rolyan.com) and [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com)
- Light Up Pens at [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com)
- Hint Print Paper at [www.otideas.com](http://www.otideas.com)
- Right Line Paper at [www.theconsortium.co.uk](http://www.theconsortium.co.uk) and [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com)
- Finger Phonic Books from Jolly Phonics by Lloyd, Werham and Jolly at [www.nesarnold.co.uk](http://www.nesarnold.co.uk)
- Handwriting without Tears at [www.hwtears.com](http://www.hwtears.com)
- A Hand for Spelling by Charles Cripps at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)
- Write Dance by Ragnhild Oussoren Voors at [www.waterstones.com](http://www.waterstones.com)
- Callirobics by Liora Laufer at [www.callirobics.com](http://www.callirobics.com) and [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)
- Joining the ABC by Charles Cripps at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)
- Loops and other Groups by Mary Benbow at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)
- Structural Cursive Writing by Chasty and Philips at [www.annarbor.co.uk](http://www.annarbor.co.uk)
- Speed Up by Llois Addy at [www.ldlearning.com](http://www.ldlearning.com)
- Handwriting a Second Chance by Philomena Pickard at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) .
- Yoro pen <http://www.tts-group.co.uk>
- Yoro pencil <http://www.penheaven.co.uk/pen-brands/yoropen>
- Dycem non-slip mat <http://www.amazon.co.uk>

# Handwriting Development

## Target Setting: A Six Week Programme

Following an assessment of the child's writing, the most apparent difficulties should have been identified. A six week programme, with clear targets to address these difficulties can be the most important part of supporting any necessary intervention.

**To Start:** Discuss the target with the child. Be clear and specific with your instructions. Provide visual prompts and reminders where appropriate and provide an example of what it is you are expecting them to do.

### **The Session and Activities:**

A planned session will be dependent on individual needs and settings, but should be for no more than 40 minutes. This can include movement and the development of physical skills e.g. 5 minutes each dedicated to dough disco, hand warm ups, correct seating positioning, multi-sensory writing with various mediums such as foam etc. Changing the activities will help the child to maintain interest and concentration. Ideally, sessions should be planned for a group of four children, but could go up to six if this is thought to be sustainable.

Aim to make the programme specific to individual needs and based around policy principles of your school.

### **Resources and Equipment:**

Consider the range of tools and equipment available. A multi-sensory approach can motivate and widen the child's experience e.g. writing with ribbons, squirting letters with foam, encouraging the children themselves to make letter shapes on the floor with their bodies. This approach often promotes interest and enjoyment, making being part of a handwriting group much more fun.

Prepare any resources in a box before each session. Don't rely on rushing around at the last minute, trying to find equipment, then ending up 'making do' with something else. This is important and needs to be organised, well presented and well evaluated in order for positive outcomes to be at their optimum.

### **Motivators:**

Encourage new methods for pupils to have some ownership of the programme to demonstrate the importance of the life skill of handwriting.

- Allow self-evaluation of their target
- Discuss what they found difficult, what they did well and what they could do better next time.
- Encourage suggestions of rewards for good work.

# Handwriting Development

## Target Setting: A Six Week Programme

### EXAMPLE

Week: 1

Date:

Aims: To develop well-formed descenders.

Target(s): That pupil can accurately write letters 'g j p q y' on the line with well-formed descenders

Equipment: Dough, wipe clean boards, sponge letters and feely bag, squirty foam, tray, lined paper, easy flow pens and pencils, triangular coloured pencils, barrel pencils, pencil grips, writing sheet, visual prompt (direction card)

Warm – ups: Hand warm up sheet, Dough Disco

Teaching Methods: Demonstration, a scaffolded learning approach e.g. hand over hand support and gradually withdraw, visual prompts, sky writing, choice of pens and pencils, vocalisations to match letter sounds/names

Activities:

- Adult led instruction and demonstration
- 5 minutes Dough Disco, followed by 5 minutes fine/gross motor warm up
- Sky writing
- Turn-taking with the foam in the tray – guess the letter
- Feely bag and sponge letters – child sky writes their chosen letter for the rest of the group to guess
- Whiteboard patterns
- Check pen/pencil grip
- Letter formation writing on the line
- Word writing – pig, jig, big, fig, jam, any,

Feedback and Praise: Positive, Verbal response from peers. Points to build up for end of week reward, stickers.

- Evaluation:

- Next Steps

# Handwriting



Name:

Target:

Week:

Date:

Aims:

Target(s):

Equipment:

Warm-ups:

Teaching Methods:

Activities:

Feedback and Praise:

Evaluation and next steps: