



Tips for Teaching Handwriting

The following are research-based suggestions for teaching handwriting.

Curriculum Considerations

- The initial use of one type of script (e.g., manuscript versus cursive or different versions of manuscript) does not appear to affect handwriting performance.
- Special emphasis is placed on difficult-to-form letters and those that are frequently reversed.
- Lowercase letters are introduced before upper-case letters, unless they are formed using similar strokes (e.g., C, c).
- Letters that share common strokes are grouped together (e.g., o, c, d, a).
- The introduction of easily confused letters (e.g., b, d, p, q) is staggered.
- The formation of individual upper- and lowercase letters and, for cursive, difficult letter transitions (e.g., *ream*) are modeled.
- Visual cues, such as numbered dots and arrows, and verbal descriptions are used to guide letter formation.
- Activities to reinforce letter recognition and naming are combined with handwriting practice.
- Students practice using a comfortable and efficient tripod pencil grasp.
- Students are shown and expected to use appropriate posture and paper positioning for their handedness.
- Handwriting fluency is developed through frequent writing and speed trials, with an emphasis on maintaining legibility.
- Opportunities are provided for distributed practice and judicious review of individual letters and letter sequences.
- Students are permitted to develop their own handwriting style and to choose which script (manuscript, cursive, or even a blend) they prefer to use after mastering handwriting (manuscript tends to be more legible than cursive and can be written just as quickly if given equal emphasis).
- Students are prompted to identify when a high degree of legibility is and is not necessary.

Weekly Routines

- In the primary grades, 60–75 minutes per week is allocated for handwriting instruction.
- Students are encouraged to compare letters to discover patterns and to highlight their similarities and differences.
- Students are given opportunities to reinforce target letters by tracing them (a dashed or faded model), copying them, and writing them from memory.
- Students' handwriting is monitored and immediately reinforced for correct letter formation, spacing, alignment, size, slant, and line quality.
- Students are asked to self-evaluate their handwriting and to set goals for improving specific aspects of their handwriting each day.
- Students are encouraged to correct poorly formed letters and to rewrite illegible work.

See Graham, 1999; Graham & Weintraub, 1996; Troia & Graham, 2003.

Note: *Although the research base for these recommendations is limited (as compared to, for instance, the research base for instructional recommendations in reading), study findings are generally consistent.*