Handwriting Guidance

Alabama Reading Initiative
Purpose

This guide was developed as an instructional tool to support teachers, parents, and students in Grades K-3 with handwriting developmental skills. This guide will work in conjunction with the local district/school curriculum for handwriting.
Lexi’s Law

Lexi’s Law requires cursive handwriting to be taught by the end of third grade in all state schools. Lexi’s law prescribes a standardized method for teaching cursive handwriting and provides classroom instructional plans outlining when and how cursive handwriting is to be taught.

*The Alabama Course of Study requires cursive writing instruction beginning in second grade.*
Handwriting Matters

According to Moats and Tolman (2019), young and struggling writers tend to devote most of their attention to letter formation, sustaining the effort of the physical act of writing, and managing spelling, spacing, and punctuation. In the beginning, this is a lot of work, and the simple act of getting words on the page takes all the cognitive resources available.

Handwriting Matters

• Handwriting is closely linked to academic achievement, especially composition and literacy skills.

• Current research suggests that students may learn to spell words more accurately through the process of handwriting. Direct handwriting instruction was also found to be related to improved reading at the word level for first grade students who had previously been identified as having handwriting difficulties.

Table 8.2 Phases of Literacy Development and Writing Development (Paulson & Moats, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Literacy Development</th>
<th>Writing Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prealphabetic</td>
<td>• Developing letter knowledge and lack of phonemic awareness</td>
<td>• Three unique levels of writing that lack any use of letter-sound connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sight words learned by visual cues</td>
<td>- Scribbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Words spelled morphologically</td>
<td>- Mock letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preschool to kindergarten</td>
<td>- Random letter strings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Toddlers and preschoolers (ages 2–5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Partial Alphabetic</td>
<td>• Letter-name knowledge and developing phonemic awareness</td>
<td>Semiphonetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sight words learned by partial phoneme-grapheme connections with partial phonetic spellings</td>
<td>• Beginning awareness of the connection between letters and speech sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Kindergarten to first grade</td>
<td>• Late preschool to kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Full Alphabetic</td>
<td>• Full phonemic awareness and complete phoneme-grapheme correspondences</td>
<td>Phonetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Spellings are phonetic</td>
<td>• Writing words using close letter-sound correspondences,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• First grade to third grade</td>
<td>• Kindergarten to second grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Consolidated Alphabetic</td>
<td>• Known grapho-sylabic spelling units used to decode unfamiliar words</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Grapho-sylabic and grapho-phonemic units used in spelling</td>
<td>• Orthographically and grammatically correct writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Third grade and beyond</td>
<td>• Third grade and beyond</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Determining the Dominant Hand

Use these exercises to determine a student's natural hand preference.

• Stand in front of the student. Hand the student a pencil in the middle of his or her body and see which hand the student uses to reach for it.
• Ask the student to show you how he or she would throw a ball.
• Watch the student engage in other fine motor activities, such as cutting with scissors and using a fork. Which hand does the student prefer?
Pencil Position and Grip

Left corner of paper are up. Bottom right corner points toward your body.

Right corner of paper are up. Bottom left corner points toward your body.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

There are 5 developmental stages, that a child needs to go through, before they can successfully use a mature tripod grip. They need to work through each stage and as their hand, shoulder and arm strength and mobility increases so does the ability to move to the next developmental stage of the grip.

There are principles of development called “big to small” and “proximal to distal” – basically this means that children develop the larger muscles of the trunk and arms before the smaller muscles of the hands and that the proximal muscles closer to the body centre (shoulder muscles, upper arm muscles) develop before the distal muscles which are further away (hand muscles).

A child may not develop a three-finger tripod pencil grip until the age of 5 or 6. This is considered the most appropriate pencil grip, for right and left-handed writers, as it allows the fingers and wrist to work together to provide a freer flowing movement.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

Stage 1: Palmer-supinate grasp

Holds the crayon/pencil in fist (whole hand) like a dagger. They use whole arm movements from the shoulder to mark-make. Due to this whole arm movement they prefer to work on a vertical surface.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

Stage 2: Palmer or digital-pronate grasp

Holds a crayon/pencil with the palm of the hand facing down towards the paper. The crayon/pencil is held by all the fingers and the thumb. The movement comes from the shoulder and elbow. Again, due to the way the arm moves a vertical surface is preferred.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

Stage 3: Four finger and thumb grip

Holding the crayon/pencil between the thumb and four fingers with the crayon/pencil in a nearly vertical, upright position. Movement comes from the elbow and wrist.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

Stage 4: Static quadruped or tripod grip

Holding the pencil in very nearly in the correct position however the web space is narrower than it would be if held in a mature tripod grip. This means that the movement is coming from the wrist and large finger movements.
The Five Pencil Grip Developmental Stages

Stage 5: Mature/Dynamic tripod grip

This is traditionally considered the most appropriate handwriting pencil grip for both left and right-handed writers. Holding the pencil between the thumb and index finger with pencil supported on the middle finger. The ring and little fingers are gently curled inwards. This gives an open wide web space which means the movement comes from the fingers.
Proper body position is important to ensure legibility in writing, as well as to promote factors that lend to good health. Students should sit straight in their chairs, leaning forward slightly to place hands on the desktops in the proper writing position.
By kindergarten, students should be taught to do the following:

COS #34- Print legibly, using proper pencil grip.

a. Print upper and lowercase letters using proper approach strokes, letter formation, and line placement.

b. With prompting and support, print first and last name using proper letter formation, capitalizing only the first letter of each name.

c. With prompting and support, use lower case letters in the majority of written work, using capitals only when appropriate.
Keys of Legibility Manuscript

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keys to Legibility Manuscript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The size is correct when all letters of the same size are even in height and rest on the baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall letters: b d f h k l t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short letters: a c e g i j m n o p q r s u v w x y z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript letters are based on four kinds of lines. The shape of the letters is determined by these lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vertical quality) All letters should be spaced evenly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>football soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters should not be too close.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>football football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters should not be too far apart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is correct spacing. It</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Handwriting Contest Information, call 800-929-9233 or go to www.zaner-bloser.com/contest
Example: Kindergarten (Focus Areas)

First Semester

Prewriting skills focusing on basic writing strokes: (Include left-right progression, top-bottom, and up-down)

Correct pencil grip, paper, and body position.

Write first name using correct upper and lowercase letters.

Begin with vertical line and slant lines letters and numeral formation:
Numerals: 1, 4, 7

Focus instruction on backward circle and curve-line letters. Continue to write on unlined paper.
Letters: O, Q, C, G, o, a, d, c, e, f, g, j, q, u, s
Numerals: 0, 6, 8, 9
Example
Kindergarten (Focus Areas)

Second Semester

Continue with the first semester skills. Review and practice letters learned.

Introduce the correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters in the student’s last name.

Introduce forward circle letters (b, p).
Letters: P, R, B, D, U, S, J, b, h, p, r, n, m
Numerals: 2, 3, 5

Begin students to using ruled paper for instruction and practice.

Use correct letter formation as students learn to form letters, words, and sentences.
By first grade, students should be able to do the following:

COS#30- Write legibly, using proper pencil grip.

a. Print upper and lowercase letters fluently, using proper approach strokes, letter formation, and line placement.

b. Print first and last names using proper letter formation, capitalization, and punctuation.

c. Use lower case letters in the majority of written work, using capitals only when appropriate.

d. Write letters of the English alphabet in alphabetical order from memory.
Example
Traditional Manuscript Alphabet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Manuscript Alphabet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aa Bb Cc Dd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ee Ff Gg Hh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nn Oo Pp Qq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ww Xx Yy Zz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example: First Grade (Focus Areas)

First Semester

- Review correct pencil grip, paper position, and body position.
- Review basic strokes, letter formation, and line placement.
- Practice writing first name and last name.
- Use lined paper with top, middle, and bottom line. Top line can be the “hat” line, the middle the “belt” line, and the bottom the “shoe” line.
- Place emphasis on using capital letters only when appropriate.
Example: First Grade (Focus Areas)

Second Semester

Continue review of pencil grip, paper position, and body position.

Continue review of the uppercase and lowercase letter formation with aim for manuscript mastery.

Write letters in alphabetical order from memory.

Transition from guideline paper to notebook paper.

Continue to review letter formation and line placement to enhance writing fluency.
By second grade, students should be able to do the following:

COS#37- Write legibly.

a. Write words and sentences fluently using correctly formed manuscript letters with appropriate size and spacing.

b. Demonstrate cursive writing stokes, including undercurve, overcurve, downcurve, and slant.

c. Form uppercase and lowercase in cursive.
Example

Keys to Legibility for Cursive

Attention students: All entries will be judged according to the Keys to Legibility—Shape, Size, Spacing, and Slant.

Shape

The cursive letters are made up of four basic strokes:

- slant
- underline
- downcurve
- overcurve

Size

The size is correct when all letters of the same size are even in height and rest on the baseline.

Tall letters

b d f h k l t

Short letters

A c e g j m n o p q r v
w x y z

Spacing

Spacing between letters, words, and sentences should be even. Between letters in a word, there should be just enough space for a minimum-sized oval. For uniform spacing between words, the beginning stroke should start near the ending stroke of the preceding word. A slanted line (\(\text{\textasciitilde}L\)) drawn from the endpoint of the last stroke to the baseline should touch both words. Allow enough space for an uppercase \(\text{O}\) between sentences and two lowercase \(\text{O}\)’s for the indentation of a paragraph.

Slant

Curved letters should have a forward slant. Correct slant is achieved by positioning the paper correctly, pulling the downward slant in the proper direction, and shifting the paper as the writing line fills.

Paper Position

Left hand

Right hand
Example
Uppercase and
Lowercase Letters
in Cursive

Trace the cursive letters.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee
Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj
Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr
Ss Tt Uu Vv
Ww Xx Yy Zz
Example: Second Grade (Focus Areas)

First Semester

Transition from guideline paper to notebook paper.
Continue to review the correct pencil grip, paper, and body position.
Continue to review uppercase and lowercase letter formation with aim for manuscript mastery.
Review correct spacing between letters and words.
Continue self-evaluation techniques.
Example: Second Grade (Focus Areas)

Second Semester

Continue review of pencil grip, paper position, and body position.

Reduce the spacing between letters and words.

Continue to review uppercase and lowercase letter formation with aim for manuscript mastery.

Reduce the spacing between words and downsizing of uppercase and lowercase letters.

Transition from guideline paper to notebook paper.

Continue self-evaluation techniques.
By third grade, students should be able to do the following:

COS# 31- Write legibly with connected, correctly formed letters and appropriate spacing between words.
Example:
End of Third Grade Cursive Proficiency

Cursive Handwriting

Rewrite the following sentence below in your best cursive writing:

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

Self Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know I can do better</th>
<th>I have some things to work on</th>
<th>I have good handwriting</th>
<th>I know this is my very best and is great</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Teacher Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You can do better</th>
<th>You have some things to work on</th>
<th>You have some good handwriting</th>
<th>You did your very best and this is great work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
# Example Student Handwriting Self-Assessment Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before Writing</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable with the chair and table.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sit correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I position the paper correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hold the pen/pencil correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Example Student Handwriting Self-Assessment Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During and after writing</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I form the letters correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The letters sit correctly on the line.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The slant of my letters is regular.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spacing between my letters is even.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spacing between my words is even.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The letters with curve are nicely rounded.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use capital letters correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Example: Handwriting Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Handwriting</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letter Formation</strong></td>
<td>All the letters formed correctly</td>
<td>Most of the letters are formed correctly (more than 75%)</td>
<td>Some of the letters are formed correctly (50-75%)</td>
<td>Few of the letters are formed correctly (25-50%)</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the letters are formed correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Placement</strong></td>
<td>All letters are oriented correctly on the lines</td>
<td>Most of the writing sample is oriented correctly on the lines (more than 75%)</td>
<td>Some of the writing sample is oriented correctly on the lines (50-75%)</td>
<td>Little of the writing sample is oriented correctly on the lines (25-50%)</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the writing sample is oriented correctly on the lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Letter Sizing</strong></td>
<td>All letters are sized correctly</td>
<td>Most of the letters are sized correctly (more than 75%)</td>
<td>Some of the letters are sized correctly (50-75%)</td>
<td>Few of the letters are sized correctly (25-50%)</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the letters are sized correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spacing of Letters</strong></td>
<td>All letters are spaced correctly</td>
<td>Most of the letters are spaced correctly (more than 75%)</td>
<td>Some of the letters are spaced correctly (50-75%)</td>
<td>Few of the letters are spaced correctly (25-50%)</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the letters are spaced correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legibility</strong></td>
<td>All letters in the writing sample are legible (more than 75%)</td>
<td>Most of the writing sample is legible (50-75%)</td>
<td>Little of the writing sample is legible (25-50%)</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the writing sample is legible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speed</strong></td>
<td>Keep up with peers when completing handwritten assignments</td>
<td>Takes 25% longer than peers to complete handwritten assignment</td>
<td>Takes 50% longer than peers to complete handwritten assignment</td>
<td>Takes 75% longer than peers to complete handwritten assignment</td>
<td>Takes more than 75% longer than peers to complete handwritten assignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neatness</strong></td>
<td>Writing assignments are always neat without erasures, torn paper or cross outs</td>
<td>Most (&gt;75%) of the writing assignment is neat without erasures, torn paper or cross outs</td>
<td>Some (50-75%) of the writing assignment is neat without erasures, torn paper, or cross outs</td>
<td>Little (25-50%) of the writing assignment is neat without erasures, torn paper or cross outs</td>
<td>Less than 25% of writing assignment is neat without erasures, torn paper or cross outs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spacing of Words</strong></td>
<td>All words are spaced correctly</td>
<td>Most (&gt;75%) of the words are spaced correctly</td>
<td>Some (50-75%) of the words are spaced correctly</td>
<td>Little (25-50%) of the words are spaced correctly</td>
<td>Less than 25% of the words are spaced correctly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Handwriting Terms

- **Baseline** - The line upon which the letters rest
- **Cursive Writing** - Writing in which the letters are joined together in a flowing motion
- **Horizontal Strokes** - Left-to-right or right-to-left progression of a line used in manuscript writing
- **Lowercase Letters** - A letter written or printed in a size smaller than or in a form differing from its corresponding uppercase letter
- **Manuscript** - Writing in which letters are not joined and the writing instrument is lifted after most strokes, also called “print writing”
- **Slant Line** - The diagonal line that is a basic manuscript stroke and is always pulled downward
- **Spacing** - The distance between letters, between words, between sentences, and between lines
- **Uppercase Letter** - A letter often written or printed in a form differing from its corresponding lowercase letter; a capital letter of the alphabet
- **Vertical Strokes** - One of the manuscript basic strokes; it is always pulled downward (except in the uppercase manuscript U)
Use your non-writing hand to fingerprint between words to keep proper spacing.
References


