Whitehall School

HAPPINESS AT THE HEART OF LEARNING

Handwriting Booklet for Parents/Carers



At Whitehall School, we are often asked about ways in which families can support their children in their learning.

Handwriting is one of the most common areas that parents ask about and is also an area in which additional support and practise can have a huge impact. Research has shown that the ability to produce legible handwriting makes a significant contribution to achievement.

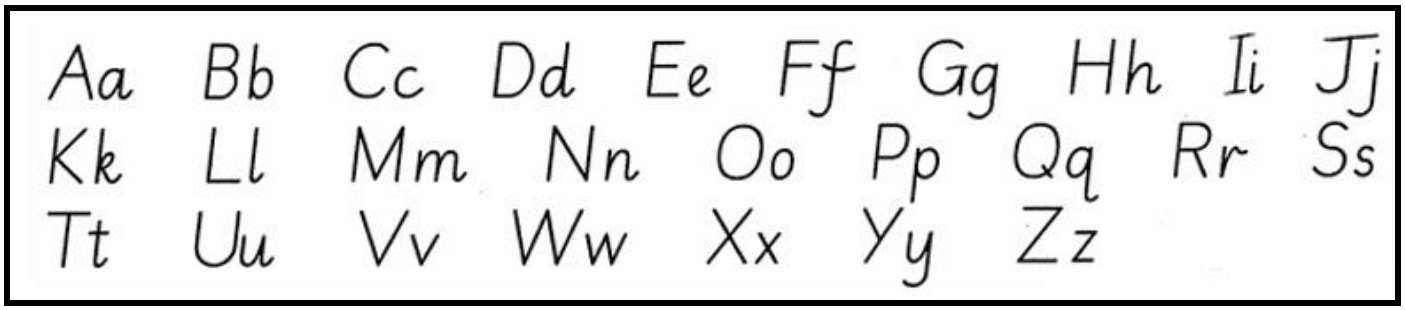
Handwriting is a complex skill and there are many children who have difficulty mastering it. However, with regular teaching and frequent practise, handwriting can improve. Fast fluent handwriting is the integration of a number of key skills and development starts from birth.

To develop good handwriting you need to:

- Have good whole body strength and dexterity (Gross and Fine Motor Skills)
- Understand direction, movement and position (Spatial Awareness and Motor Memory)
- Remember and recall how to form the different shapes of the letters (Visual and Motor Memory).

At Whitehall School, we use the Nelson handwriting scheme. This scheme helps children to practise their pattern formation and fine motor skills and is a whole school approach which ensures that children are taught handwriting consistently across the school from year to year. Handwriting should be neat, legible and joined.

When practising letter formation at home, please ensure that you copy the format below when supporting your child.



Handwriting activities

To improve handwriting there are a number of activities that can be completed to ensure that fundamental skills are in place. Repetitive practise of copying out letters and words will be ineffective and frustrating if these skills have not been developed. Where possible, handwriting activities should include big body movements and be active and fun.

Five areas to warm up ready for handwriting:

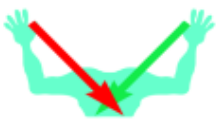
1) Shoulder stability

The shoulder girdle is a collection of bones, ligaments, muscles and tendons that work together to support arm strength and allow arm movements.



2) Crossing the mid-line

To make handwriting comfortable the writing arm has to be able to cross the vertical central line of the body (crossing the midline). This skill allows us to write comfortably with the paper appropriately positioned and be able to sit at a desk correctly.



3) Wrist strength and flexibility

To write well children need to have a range of wrist movements and strength.



4)Thumb and finger strength and dexterity
Thumb and finger strength are needed for the coordinated movements and strength needed to hold and maintain an efficient pencil grip.



5) Whole hand strength and dexterity
This skill is important for judging the correct amount of pressure required to hold the pen or pencil safely.



Examples of exercises for each of these key areas:

Shoulder stability

Hand pushes
Place your palms together, with elbows out and forearms held horizontally.
Now push your hands together as hard as you can and hold for 5 seconds - you should feel all the muscles around your shoulder girdle contract. Repeat a few times.



Crab walking
Squat on the ground, place hands behind you, and lift your hips off the ground. Start 'walking' using hands and feet.

Wheel barrow walking (see illustration)



Crossing the midline
Lazy 8
Hold your right arm straight out in front of you. Keeping your arm straight trace a large 'lazy eight' (a figure of 8 on its side) 5 - 8 times in the air, so that the drawing hand crosses the middle of the body. Repeat with the other arm. Track your hand with your eyes while keeping your head still. This exercise can also be done using a long piece of ribbon.

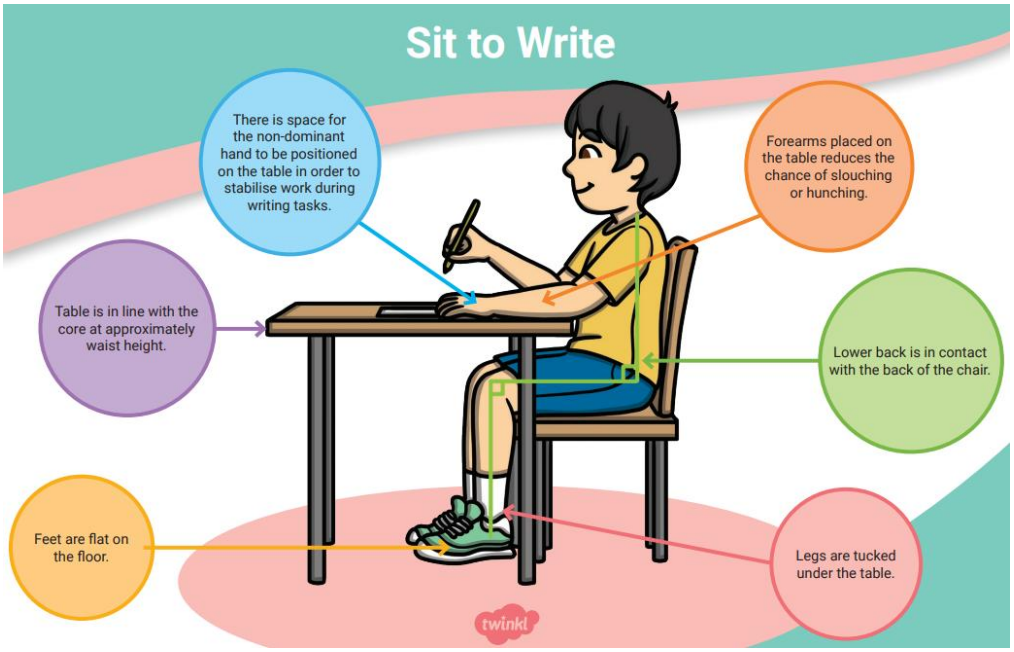
Wrist strength and flexibility
Wrist Circles
Extend your arms straight out in front of you with your palms facing down. Make a fist with your fingers wrapped around your thumb. Rotate your wrists clockwise and then counter-clockwise six times in each direction.

Thumb and finger strength
Circles - Hands held relaxed out in front of you start with the left hand first. Touch your thumb to your first fingertip and make a circle and then stretch your thumb out to the side. Repeat for each finger and then do it with the right hand. Repeat 2 - 3 times.

Letters - With your finger draw the letter on their back as you talk through the action, get them to repeat the activity on your back. Draw the letter in different media like sand or foam.

Whole hand
Rolling Pencil - Start with the pencil held across all the fingertips of one hand. Use your thumb to roll the pencil into your palm and back to your fingertips. Repeat 2 - 3 times then try the other hand.

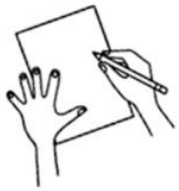
Posture
When sat at a table and ready to write, draw or colour, children should be sat at a 90/90/90 position. This means that their feet should be flat on the floor with their ankles, knees and hips at a 90 degree angle. Their tummy should be parallel to the table. This position ensures greater stability. Paper should be angled to increase comfort for the writer.





Paper positioning for left-handers:

Paper positioning for right-handers:



Pens and pencils

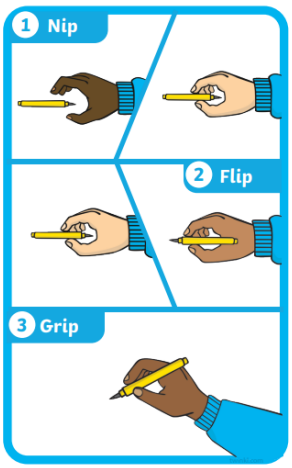
When writing, try to make sure that your child has access to a variety of different writing implements. They should experiment with what feels comfortable for them. However, when at the early stages of writing a pencil is best. Do check that it has been sharpened. The size and shape of the writing implement may impact their grip and comfort. By Years 5 and 6, children should be able to select the most appropriate writing implement for the task.

Pencil grip

Children will go through several developmental stages before securing a dynamic tripod grip.

We teach the tripod grip by using the 'Nip, Flip, Grip' terminology.

1. Nip: With the pencil pointing towards you, pinch the pencil near its tip using the thumb and index finger.
2. Flip: Flip the pencil backwards so it rests against the hand, towards the web space between the thumb and index finger.
3. Grip: Position the pencil between the thumb and index finger, resting it on the middle finger.



You can access a video clip which shows this method at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li8QbOQ4aCc

Left-Handed Pupils

If your child is left-handed, they should position their paper to the left of the centre and then angle the paper for comfort, slanting it to the right. Hold the pencil using the 'tripod' grip, between the thumb, index and middle fingers, gripping it at a slightly higher point so they can see around their fingers (see 'Pencil Grip' above) and keep their hand and wrist under the writing line so that they are not covering their writing; this could cause it to smudge and it is harder for your child to keep track of their writing ideas if they cannot see it.

Motivation to write

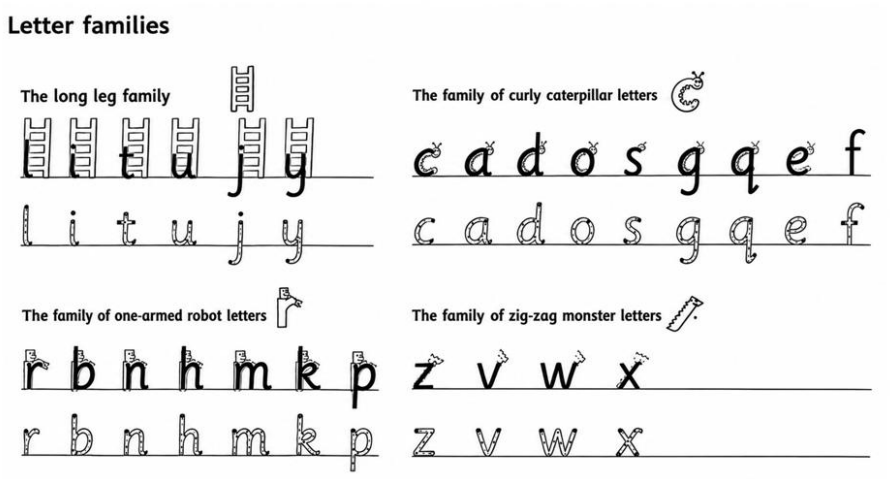
Children will need a reason to practise their handwriting. This could be through a colouring activity, but it could also be a shopping list or their own diary. Try to make the activity something that they would like to do. Writing should be fun!

School expectations

To give you an idea of how your child should progress with their handwriting, here are our expectations. However, if you are concerned about your child's handwriting development, please speak to your child's class teacher or our SENDCo.

- End of Reception: Most children can form most lower case letters and numbers correctly
- End of Year 1: Most children can form lower case and upper case letters correctly, starting and finishing in the correct place, they can form the digits 0-9 and understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' (letters that are formed in similar ways). They use wide-lined paper.
- End of Year 2: Form lower case letters of the correct size, relative to one another. Start using diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, next to one another, are left unjoined. Write upper case letters (capitals) and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another.
- End of Year 4: Most children can write legibly, consistently and at speed using the horizontal and diagonal strokes needed to join letters.
- End of Year 6: Most children can write legibly, fluently and at increasing speed. They will be able to choose the writing implements best suited to a task.

Letter Families (1. Long leg, 2. One-armed robot, 3. Curly caterpillar and 4. Zig-Zag monster)

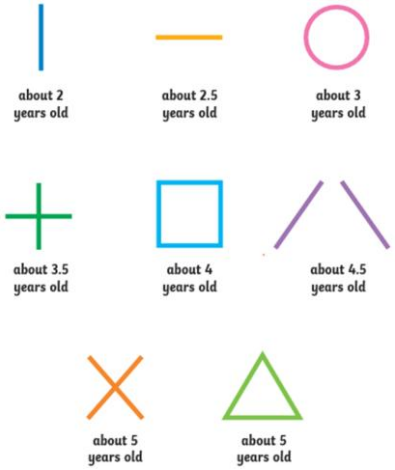


The teaching of handwriting

Handwriting is taught progressively across the school, developing children's motor skills, accurate letter formation, consistency and fluency. The overview below should give you a clear indication of how your child should be progressing as they move through our school.

Nursery

Children develop fine and gross motor skills through practical activities and mark-making experiences. They practise pre-writing shapes using a variety of media and through large-scale movements, including forming shapes in the air, to develop coordination and control and learn directional language, e.g. up, down, round and back.



Reception

For children who are ready, handwriting teaching begins straight away, using Read Write Inc./directional mantras (see below). Children write on plain paper or lined paper, with the focus on directionality and correct formation, rather than precise sizing and positioning, as modelled by the teacher. Children also learn to form the digits 0-9. These should be practised using the rhymes and formations shown below.

Rhymes for letter formation - taken from Read Write Inc.

a Around the apple and down the leaf.	b Down the laces to the heel and around the toe.	c Curl around the caterpillar.	d Around the dinosaurs bottom, up his tall neck & down to his toes.	e Lift off the top and scoop out the egg.	f Down the stem and draw the leaves.
g Around the girls face, down her hair and give her a curl.	h Down the head, to his hooves and over his back.	i Down the body and dot for the head.	j Down his body, curl, dot for his head.	k Down the kangaroo's body tail and leg.	l Down the long leg.
m Down Maisie, mountain, mountain.	n Down Nobby and over his net.	o All around the orange.	p Down the pirates plait and around his face.	qu Round her head, up past her earring, down her hair,and flick.	r Down the robots back and curl over his arm.
s Slither down the snake.	t Down the tower, across the tower.	u Down and under, up to the top and draw the puddle.	v Down a wing, up a wing.	w Down, up, down, up.	x Down the arm and leg, repeat the other side.
y Down a horn, up a horn and under head.	z Zig-zag-zig.				

Letter	What we say to help us form the letter correctly
a	Round the apple, down the leaf. (round, up, down and flick)
b	Down the laces to the heel. Around the toe. (down, down, up to the middle and round)
c	Curl around the caterpillar (round and stop)
d	Round his bottom, up his tall neck, down to his feet. (round, up, up, down, down and flick)
e	Lift off the top and scoop out the egg. (across, up and round)
f	Down the stem and draw the leaves. (round, down, down, curl. Lift off the pen and across)
g	Round her face, down her hair and give her a curl. (round, up, down, down and curl)
h	Down the head to the hooves, and over his back. (down, down, up to the middle, over, down and flick)
i	Down the body, dot for the head. (down and flick. Lift off the pen and dot)
j	Down his body, curl and dot. (down, down and curl. Lift off the pen and dot)
k	Down the kangaroo's body, curly tail and leg. (down, down, up to the middle, round to the middle and diagonal down and flick)
l	Down the long leg. (down, down and flick)
m	Maisie, mountain, mountain. (down, up, over, down, up, over and flick)
n	Down Nobby, over his net. (down, up, over, down and flick)
o	All around the orange. (round and join)
p	Down the plait and over the pirate's face. (down, down, up to the top and round)
q	Round her head, up past her earrings and down her hair. (round, up, down, down and diagonal flick)
r	Down his back then curl over his arm (down, up to the top and over)

s	Slither down the snake. (curl around and curl around the other way)
t	Down the tower, across the tower. (down, down, flick, lift off the pen and across)
u	Down and under, up to the top, and draw the puddle. (down, round, up, down and flick)
v	Down a wing, up a wing. (diagonal down, diagonal up)
w	Down, up, down, up. (diagonal down, diagonal up, diagonal down, diagonal up)
x	Down the arm and leg, repeat the other side. (diagonal down, lift the pen off, diagonal down to make a cross)
y	Down a horn, up a horn and under his head. (down, round, up, down, down and curl)
z	Zig-zag-zig (across, diagonal down and across)



Years 1 and 2

In school, the children take part in formal handwriting lessons and record their work in handwriting books, with an emphasis on letter sizing, working through the letter families. Teachers model letter formation on whiteboards that replicate the handwriting book layout, using and saying the directionality mantra, or saying, shown in the table above. It is really important that children learn to form letters and digits in the correct way. Children learn the sounds of each letter, rather than the letter names. Children practise each letter in isolation, then in words and sentences.

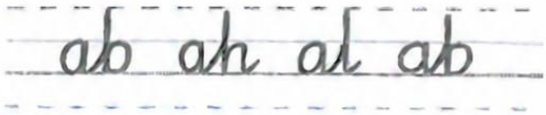
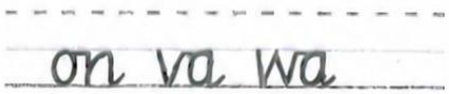
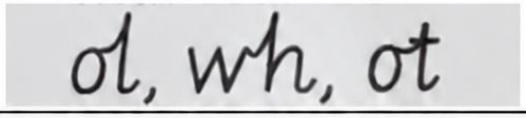
We advise parents/carers that whenever their child is writing at home, to encourage them to start their letters in the right place, and to form each letter correctly. Use the matras (sayings) above so that you are supporting your child in the same way we teach letter formation at school. It is important that the children develop good handwriting habits now, in order to prepare them for being fluent writers later.

Only when children demonstrate secure letter formation and are ready to progress, usually by the Summer Term of Year 2, do they move on to the Nelson Handwriting scheme to learn joined handwriting. Teachers model joins clearly, and children work systematically through the different join types. Handwriting repeater (www.handwritingrepeater.org) may be used to consistently demonstrate the focus letters and joins. You can use this website at home to model and playback letter formation and joins with your child.



Nelson Handwriting Joins Checklist

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Join 1	Diagonal upwards join from letters **that** finish with upstrokes to letters **without** ascenders e.g. a to n / l to i 
Join 2	Diagonal upwards join from letters **that** finish with upstrokes to letters **with** ascenders (to b, f, h, k, l, t) 
Join 3	Horizontal join across the top of letters to letters without ascenders (o v and w). 
Join 4	Horizontal join to letters with ascenders (to l, h, t etc.) 
Break Letters	Joins are not made **from** these letters. Appropriate joins are made **to** these letters. b g j p q x y
Mean Letter	The only mean letter is z. Children should not join to or from this letter.

Years 3 and 4
In Years 3 and 4, children regularly practise letter formation and joins, using the Nelson Handwriting scheme in a taught timetabled session. Teachers model the focus letters and joins on the interactive whiteboard, which reflects the same format as the children's handwriting books. As teachers model the handwriting, they use a think out loud (TOL) approach to describe the letter direction and formation. Handwriting repeater (www.handwritingrepeater.org) may be used to consistently demonstrate the focus letters and joins.

Years 5 and 6
In Years 5 and 6, the focus is on legibility, fluency and increasing speed. At this stage, children may select writing implements appropriate to task, audience and purpose. Handwriting does not have a specific timetabled session, but is taught and modelled consistently across all subjects.

Resources

There are a variety of different resources available if you would like to find out more. These include:

Handwriting repeater https://www.handwritingrepeater.org/ (a free online tool where you can model handwriting and play these examples back to your child)

The OT Toolbox www.theottoolbox.com/

National Handwriting Association https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/

British Dyslexia Association https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/

Oxford Owl Nelson guide for parents https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/english/nelson-guide-for-parents/ (select 'handwriting' menu)

If you would like to practise handwriting using a resource book, there are many different workbooks available either online or at book shops. The published handwriting scheme that we use at Whitehall School is Nelson Handwriting. Note: we form our capital G, I and J differently to the Nelson scheme. In our school, we teach these letters as follows: G, I and J. Another published scheme that is similar to the handwriting style we use at school is CGP.

If you have any questions about how to support your child with their handwriting development, please speak to their class teacher.