

I. The Importance of Teaching Good Handwriting

Teaching good handwriting is a skill that has been neglected in many of our school systems. For example, with the increasing use of computers in the classroom, the teaching of keyboarding skills appears to have become a higher priority than the teaching of handwriting. Furthermore, many teachers are understandably feeling immense pressure to devote their time to teaching those subjects that will be tested. It also seems that many of today's younger teachers were not taught to pay as much attention to handwriting skills as teachers once did. Although we have witnessed a decline in handwriting skills—educators still know that good handwriting is as essential for academic success today as it was when our forefathers beautifully scripted their signatures on the Declaration of Independence.

Educational research has provided evidence that students who are not able to write legibly are at a serious disadvantage. This deficiency can result in lower grades when teachers are not able to read correct written responses. An illegible job application could be the direct cause of not being hired by an employer. Furthermore, it needs to be understood that good handwriting is a crucial tool for effective communication and personal expression.

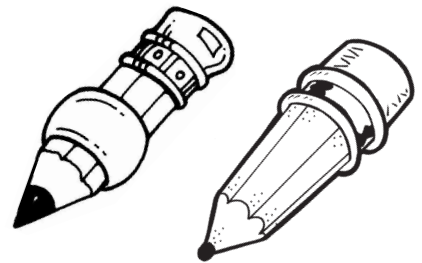
Clear and legible handwriting skills are important for every aspect of learning.

- ❑ Handwriting is necessary for effective classroom note-taking, test-taking, and homework assignments.
- ❑ Good handwriting is still a requirement for many occupations.
- ❑ Good handwriting skills can help build self-esteem in children who may not perform as well in other academic areas.
- ❑ Proper letter formation has been linked to improved reading and spelling success. (See page 5, Handwriting Suggestions for Struggling Students and Special Learners.)

II. Effective Teaching Tips and Techniques

The following list provides the teacher with some helpful teaching tips and techniques to ensure that their students will have successful handwriting experiences.

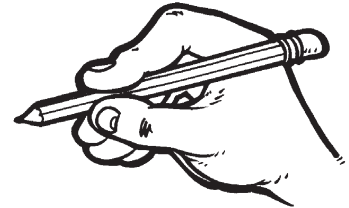
- ❑ **Short Handwriting Classes.** To keep students motivated it is recommended that the handwriting class period only last from 10 to 15 minutes.
- ❑ **Initially Practice the Physical Movement.** When introducing a new series of letters that share a common stroke, such as the "Little Hill Letters," begin by teaching the movement of the stroke. Have the children move their arms through the air. Practice writing the stroke or letter in the air. Children also enjoy using water and a paintbrush to draw large strokes on a chalkboard.
- ❑ **Introduce Letters Slowly.** Follow the developmental sequence chart (page 7) and let children master a couple of letters at a time before moving on to a new set of letters.
- ❑ **Provide Close Supervision.** It is very difficult to "unteach" bad habits.
- ❑ **Arrow Cues.** Provide the children with copies of the chart on page 7. Looking at a letter with arrow cues can be beneficial in helping the children learn to follow the correct letter formation.
- ❑ **Teach Letter Connections.** Cursive writing requires making connections between letters. Do not teach letters in isolation. As soon as students can write even one letter, teach them how to connect and continuously write the letter several times. As soon as the students know several letters, have them practice writing words that can be spelled from those letters.
- ❑ **Pencil Grips.** Use pencil grips for children who have a difficult time remembering how to hold their pencil.
- ❑ **Short Pencils.** Break or sharpen pencils down to about a 2-inch length. This will encourage small hands to hold the pencil properly.
- ❑ **Chubby Writing Tools.** Use sidewalk chalk, chubby crayons, or a chubby pencil cut down to a short 2-inch length to help children gain more control.
- ❑ **Eventually Aim for Speed.** Although legible handwriting is the goal, students must eventually develop enough speed in order for their writing skills to become effective.



- ❑ **Your Own Style.** Once students have acquired legible handwriting with correct letter formation and accurate letter spacing, encourage them to develop a personal style that reflects their own personalities.

(Posture, Paper Alignment, and Pencil Grasp for Right-Handed Students, See section III. below for Specific Strategies for Left-Handed Students.)

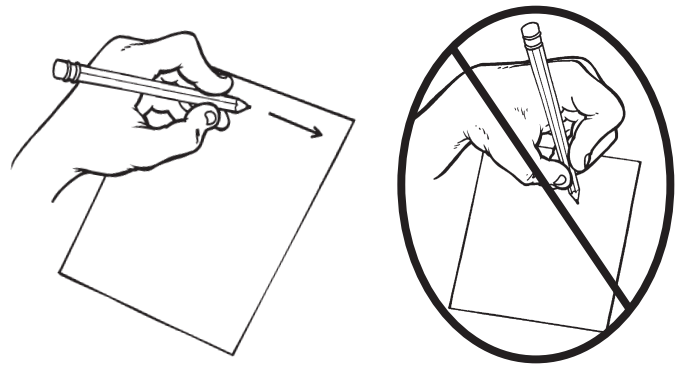
- ❑ **Maintain Good Posture.** Feet should be on the floor and the desk surface should be at a height for the arm and elbow to rest comfortably. Ankles, hips, and knees should all be at 90 degree angles. If the chair is too high, place a foot stool under the child's feet.
- ❑ **Proper Pencil Grasp.** The pencil should be held between the pads of the thumb and the index finger while resting on the middle finger. Another appropriate version of this grasp is for the pencil to be held between the pads of the thumb and the index and middle fingers while resting on the ring finger.
- ❑ **Align Paper.** Be sure that the paper is aligned parallel to the arm of the dominant hand and is at a 45 degree angle. The left hand should be used to hold the paper stable.



III. Specific Strategies for Left-Handed Students

Left-handed students have many more challenges in learning how to write. First, the English language requires that we write from left to right—just like we read. This writing direction allows the right-handed writer to “pull” the pencil away from the body and moves fluently across the paper. The left-handed writer must “push” the pencil as the arm moves towards and across the body. Many left-handed people find themselves holding their pencils in a “hooked” position as they write. This “hooked” position generally occurs because what they are writing is hidden by their writing hand, and they are attempting not to smear their own writing. This handwriting style is not correct, can be physically uncomfortable, and may even cause illegible handwriting. Left-handed children need to be carefully TAUGHT how to write, taking into consideration the unique differences when writing with the left-hand. (See illustrations below.)

- ❑ **Maintain Good Posture.** (Same as above.)
- ❑ **Proper Pencil Grasp.** The pencil should be held between the pads of the thumb and the index finger while resting on the middle finger—approximately 1” (2 cm) to 1.5” (3.8 cm) from the point of the pencil.
- ❑ **Align Paper.** The paper is slanted (about 20%) to the right —although this can vary depending on comfort.
- ❑ **Arm, Wrist, and Hand Position.** The wrist should be straight and below the writing line. The arm should be almost parallel with the paper.
- ❑ **Handwriting Slant.** The cursive letter slant usually taught is difficult for left-handed students. It is more natural and more comfortable for left-handed students to write letters using an upright slant or even slanting their letters slightly to the left. (See Left-Handed Writing Chart on page 7.)



IV. Handwriting Suggestions for Struggling Students and Special Learners

Good handwriting benefits all children, including those children with learning disabilities that involve handwriting difficulties. Although word processing programs and assistive technology are wonderful tools for children with writing problems, this technology should not eliminate the need for explicit handwriting instruction.