Department of
Education

GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Shaping the future

Teach handwriting to students

Handwriting is a complex skill. It is linked to other cognitive, kinaesthetic and perceptual motor skills and functions

Handwriting is still an important part of the curriculum. Even though technology has changed how we communicate, being able to write clearly, easily and quickly is still a key skill.

The Western Australian Curriculum: English requires teachers to formally teach and monitor handwriting.

Develop a whole school approach

Use a whole school approach to plan for handwriting. This will ensure:
- consistency in teaching practices and monitoring techniques
- educators understand handwriting development and expectations
- teaching and learning builds from year to year
- students develop a fluent, legible style of writing.

The amount of time you spend teaching handwriting will vary across the phases of schooling. In Pre-primary to Year 3, teach and give regular opportunities to develop:
- an efficient pencil grip
- handwriting movements
- posture and paper placement
- letter formation, consistency of size, spacing and shape.

In Year 4 to 10, lessons can focus on:
- consolidation of letter formations and consistency of size
- using clearly formed, joined letters
- developing fluency and automaticity.

Choose a font

School leaders decide what font is used to teach handwriting. Choose a font:
- with a printing style (taught from Pre-primary to Year 2) that flows into a running writing style (taught in Year 3)
- where Year 3 students do not have to change their letter formations and pencil grip to learn cursive writing
- with one basic set of letter shapes that are the same for printing and running writing.

Victorian Modern Cursive is the recommended font for WA schools, as:
- there is no difference between printing (manuscript) and running writing (cursive)
- students learn the basic form of each letter, and then learn how to join letters for running writing
- students don't need to learn a new style when moving from printing to running writing
- it is based on natural handwriting patterns (basic scribble patterns).
- it requires no retracing of letter parts.

You can also consider using:
- South Australian Modern Cursive
- New South Wales Foundation Style.

All fonts have one basic set of letter shapes, which are the same for printing and cursive writing.

Effective teaching of handwriting skills

Develop a teaching plan

Develop a teaching plan to:
- engage students
- teach specific handwriting skills
- guide practice
- provide opportunities for students to apply their skills
- provide feedback
- reflect on writing skills.

You can incorporate the lessons as:
- part of dictation
- a sentence of the day
- modelled writing
- a written conversation
- word building.

Deliver handwriting lessons

Handwriting lessons include a focus on:
- appropriate pencil grip
- posture and paper placement
- letter formations and joins
- handwriting movement patterns
- starting and finishing points
- the direction to follow
- the number of strokes involved in producing a letter
- the size and spacing of letters.

Follow up these demonstrations with individual coaching for students who need extra support.

Build hand strength and coordination with children in the early years.

Use tailored small group lessons to focus on the specific needs of Year 4 to 10 students who have not yet developed a fluent, legible style of writing.

Students in Year 3 or above who already have an established handwriting style should not have to change their handwriting style if they move schools. This may include students from overseas.

Instruction can be followed up with 'over the shoulder' demonstrations for students in need of additional support.

For more information on handwriting lesson planning, refer to:
- [Pre-primary to Year 10 English Syllabus](#)

- [The Early Years Learning Framework](#)
- [Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines](#).

Pencil grip and page position

Teach students the correct pencil grip as soon as developmentally appropriate and reinforce this with regular practise.

The dynamic tripod grip is preferred, as it allows students to have good control of the pencil. In tripod grip:
- the thumb, index finger and middle finger form a triangle to hold the pencil
- the ring finger and little finger support the middle finger
- the pencil is positioned between the fingers so there is equal pressure
- the index finger rests on top of the pencil, approximately 1.5m from the tip
- the thumb and index finger control the movement of the pencil which rests on the third finger
- the length of the pencil rests against the long bone of the index finger
- all fingers are slightly bent
- the student's writing hand is below the line they are writing so they can see what they are writing.

This applies to both right and left-handed writers.

The dynamic tripod grip

Left-handed students

A left-handed student writes toward the body and 'pushes' the pencil, (which is the opposite way that right-handed students write).

Left-handed students may need a different positioning and writing technique:
- position the page slightly to the left, with the top left corner tilted higher than the right
- grip the pencil around 2.5cm to 3.8cm from the pencil tip, so they can see what they are writing and avoid smudging
- their lower arm is perpendicular to the bottom of the page
- the wrist is straight and the hand is below the writing line
- write the horizontal components of letters by 'pulling' from right to left, not left to right. These letters include lowercase t and f, and uppercase a, e, f, h and t.

Page position for left-handed students
You can also:
- sit left-handed students on the left side of writing areas, so they don't bump elbows with the student next to them
- left-handed students may need a slightly lower writing surface
- give left-handed students soft pencils to prevent the point of the pencil digging into the page
- give students moulded grips to help reinforce the correct pencil hold
- use a desk mat to illustrate how students should sit, hold the pencil and position the paper.

Make adjustments for students

Make adjustments to give all students the opportunity to progress their handwriting.

Adjustments can include:
- drawing on learning area content from different year levels
- tailoring the teaching and learning program based on the students' learning and support needs
- providing alternative opportunities for students to demonstrate their writing skills, such as using technology, augmentative and alternative communication systems
- providing access to alternative equipment and furniture
- providing alternative input devices, such as keyboards, switches and voice recognition software
- providing alternative writing tools, such as pencil grips, writing scaffolds and templates.

Assessment

Your formative assessment of student handwriting should focus on students':
- self-evaluations of their own handwriting for legibility
- monitoring progress against the West Australian Curriculum - English - Creating Texts.

To help inform your assessment, collect information on:
- the quality and accuracy of letter formations
- the consistency of spacing, shape, size, slope and speed
- letter joins
- the fluency of handwriting
- the legibility of handwriting
- pencil hold
- paper placement
- a student's seated position.

Assessment guidelines for year levels

The following is a list of suggested assessments across year levels.

Adapt the assessments to suit the individual needs of students.

Pre-primary to Year 2:
- hand-eye coordination
- pencil grip and posture
- formation of lower and uppercase letters (such as starting place, direction and shape)
- space between words
- uniformity of size
- formation of numerals.

Years 3 and 4:
- pencil grip and posture
- formation of lower and uppercase letters (such as starting place, direction and shape)
- joins
- fluency
- spacing
- legibility.

Years 5 to 6:
- formation of lower and uppercase letters (such as starting place, direction and shape)
- consistency of shape and size
- joins (including diagonal and horizontal)
- use of speed loops
- fluency and automaticity
- spacing
- uniformity of slant
- aesthetic appeal
- personalised style.