



This resource is designed to assist classroom teachers to reflect on and inquire into their approach to teaching handwriting.

Handwriting

Why learn to handwrite?

Handwriting remains an important means of communication. Although it is important for learners to be able to write using a keyboard or touchscreen, the ability to handwrite legibly and easily remains a vital skill in many aspects of everyday life.

Learning to handwrite helps to build learners' expertise and confidence. This helps them to recognise letters and symbols and to understand the sound of the letters which they use to form and read words.

All learners, who are physically able to, should be provided with the opportunity to develop a handwriting style that enables them to write efficiently and in a way that they can be easily understood by others.

The lack of an automatic command of handwriting can inhibit a student's ability to write, affect his self-confidence, and encourage him to avoid writing. (Allen, 2003) ... If a student has to concentrate deeply on producing letters and pondering spelling, she'll have much less cognitive space for planning, organizing, and fine-tuning her ideas while she writes. (Graham in Allen, 2003)

South Australian Modern Cursive

In DECD, South Australian Modern Cursive (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2006) is the font used for forming letters. This font was developed to be used with a wide range of writing implements. The South Australian Modern Cursive has two forms: beginners' alphabet and the cursive formation.

The beginners' alphabet is usually taught first followed later by the cursive formation. When learners are introduced to the cursive formation they will often be introduced to the ways that letters link to one another.

When learners develop a fluent cursive style they may go on to experiment with speed loops. Ultimately, learners will develop a personal handwriting style.

How do learners learn to handwrite?

Handwriting is best taught and practised with a wide range of purposeful, multi-sensory activities that incorporate numerous materials.

In the most effective handwriting programs, children see, hear, and say what they are writing; they find the activities applicable and important and they are allowed to experiment with different writing instruments. This is best supported in classrooms where learners have daily modelled and guided activities with frequent and consistent practice.

Other experiences that support the development of handwriting skills include moulding and squeezing materials such as dough and clay, finger painting, finger plays and clapping games, music and movement, pasting, paper tearing, cutting, construction, putting together and pulling apart toys and building blocks, jigsaws, finger puppets, ball games, balancing games, climbing, crawling and negotiating obstacle courses.

Older learners benefit from experiences such as rapid writing, note taking fluency and by playing with patterns and drawing to develop fluency and control.

What do teachers need to know about handwriting?

South Australian Modern Cursive handwriting is the expected font to be used in all classrooms using a systematic and explicit approach.

The teaching of handwriting needs to occur in a developmentally appropriate manner, starting with emergent drawing and writing skills. At this age, learners will make marks on paper and call it their 'writing'. Encouragement from this very early interest supports learners to draw, make shapes and letters and play with writing skills.

In all year levels, handwriting needs to be taught explicitly through a multi-sensory approach, with close monitoring of individual progress and learning needs.

Readable or legible handwriting relies on the establishment of the automated use of one style that is the most fluent, functional script for each learner. The SA Modern Cursive font has a strong research base as to fluency and efficiency.

Automaticity is developed through consistent rehearsal and practise that is specific, deliberate and meaningful. Automaticity of handwriting reduces the demand on working memory and the amount of parallel processing needed (parallel processing is the ability for the brain to engage in multiple processes at the same time). This allows learners to focus more on the content of their writing. Research shows there is a high correlation between automated handwriting and effective written language and spelling abilities.

Handwriting as part of daily modelled and guided writing encourages confidence and speed. Developing handwriting through regular practise supports learners to develop their technique and control. Teachers should provide many opportunities for learners to use frequent handwriting experiences throughout the learning program.

By students exploring correct letter formation, rapid writing and by engaging them in writing and drawing experiences, it helps them to produce hand written texts.

Site review: Reflecting on a systematic and explicit site approach to handwriting

- How often and when do teachers teach handwriting at your site to support learning?
- What is your site agreement about the place of handwriting in your literacy program?
- How do you ensure that a systematic and explicit handwriting approach is part of a balanced and integrated literacy program?
- Are there ways for teachers to moderate or share writing samples to evaluate the effectiveness of your site's approach to handwriting?

Self review: Prompts for an explicit and systematic teaching of a balanced and integrated handwriting program

A BALANCED HANDWRITING PROGRAM

How do you:

- build learners' self-image as writers?
- plan specific lessons on correct letter and numeral formation, posture, paper placement, seated position and pencil grip?
- develop learners' abilities to apply their handwriting skills to the writing of words and sentences?
- support learners to apply handwriting strategies and to self correct?

AN INTEGRATED HANDWRITING PROGRAM

How do you:

- connect handwriting instruction to curriculum areas?
- build handwriting into any teaching and learning cycle?

A SYSTEMATIC AND EXPLICIT APPROACH TO TEACHING HANDWRITING

How do you:

- support learners to develop a legible and fluent handwriting style through letter knowledge and correct letter formation?
- provide a range of interactive activities to practice handwriting?

References

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Further reading

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This paper is part of the DECD Leading Learning Improvement *Practical guide* series, which aims to provide teachers with support to reflect on and design numeracy and literacy learning within their classrooms.

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P p Peter Piper picked a
peck of pickled peppers.
Q qu Quentin Quinn is quite