

Handy Hints for Handwriting!

Grip

- Tripod grip (standard thumb, index pincer grip resting on supporting middle finger).
- The top of the writing implement should point down to the elbow.
- *The child should hold the pencil 2-2 ½ cms above lead line to prevent smudging and aid vision.
- **Left-handers should hold their pencil higher, between 3-4 cms.**
- Use a permanent marker line, an incised cut or a rubber band to indicate point height so it becomes a natural action.

Pencil/Pen

- No special pencil is necessary for right-handers unless the child has very poor pencil control and a very weak grip. Triangular pencils will help.
- **A sharp pencil is not always advisable for developing writers as the child can pierce the paper.**
- **Soft pencils allow a smooth fluent movement across the paper.**
- **Select pens that produce the minimal amount of friction, such as a Berol, fibre tip or Biro.**
- **Left handed Stabilo pens are available.**

Posture

- The child should be seated on the chair with body in straight position.
- Head as near to the centre as possible.
- Feet should be flat on the floor.
- Desk height should be appropriate.

Paper position and stabilising hand

- When printing, the paper should be slanted (as much as 45° for some children), slightly less slanted when attempting cursive (about a 30° slant). It should be parallel to the child's forearm as he starts to write.
- Incorrect paper positioning can lead to the 'hook' grip.
- The writing hand should be positioned to the right or below the writing line as the child works from left to right. If the writing is blocked then the child will start to hunch over.
- **A left-handed child must have their hand placed to the left of the writing line.**
- The stabilising hand should be placed at the top left hand side of the page to support the writing process.
- **Left-handers will place their right hands on the top right.**
- Use tape to fix the paper until the child is used to this way of writing.
- The LS department can supply writing mats.
- The lower left corner should be slightly to the right of the body midline (the centre of the body).
- **For left-handers, the lower right corner should be slightly to the right of body centre.**

Seating position, lighting and vision

- **Left-handers should be seated at the end of a row to facilitate full writing movement.**
- **Some left-handers need to sit on a higher chair (2 chairs can be placed on 1 to lift the child up) BUT feet should still be able to be placed firmly flat on the floor.**
- **There is a case to organise your seating so all left-handers are on the same side of the room-without it being made an issue!**
- A child should be able to sit at a table with their elbow resting on the table surface forming a 90° angle. The shoulder should be comfortable and loose.
- If a child can't rest his feet flat on the floor, use magazines, books, stepper stools or boxes to achieve this.
- A child will not be able to see the letters over their hand when they are writing if there is a mismatch between the table height and the child's seated position.
- **Lighting**-The light should come from the left so as not to obscure the writing. **Make sure the light is coming from the right hand side to avoid shadows and obscuring the child's writing for left handed children.**
- **Vision**-If a child has difficulty copying from the board check first that there isn't a strong reflection cast from the window – sit in the child's chair and look at the board. Check that you use a strong coloured pen to write with.

Exercises

- All children should be encouraged to do exercises before, during and after they write.
- **Some children with low muscle tone can have very tight grips and need to release their muscles before attempting further sustained activity.**

Writing surface

- If a child has developed a 'hooked' hand use a lever arch file. Try a variety of thickness to establish the most comfortable and correcting height.
- Use a clipboard on a book and fix with 'blu-tac'.
- Writing slopes can be used.

Practice

- As with all activities 'practise makes perfect' and this should be age and need appropriate.
- It should replicate the range of movements found in a writing situation.
- Manipulative activities, patterns, tracing, copying, using a chalk board, vertical easel, painting, play-do, brain gym and the exercises planned for the school will ensure the child gets the practice they need.
- It takes time to correct poor handwriting habits and patience and understanding of a child's frustration is needed.
- Giving handwriting formation worksheets to children who have a clear and recognisable difficulty continues to compound their failure.

Parents as Partners

- Raising awareness of the need to follow these techniques at home is essential for all children with handwriting concerns.