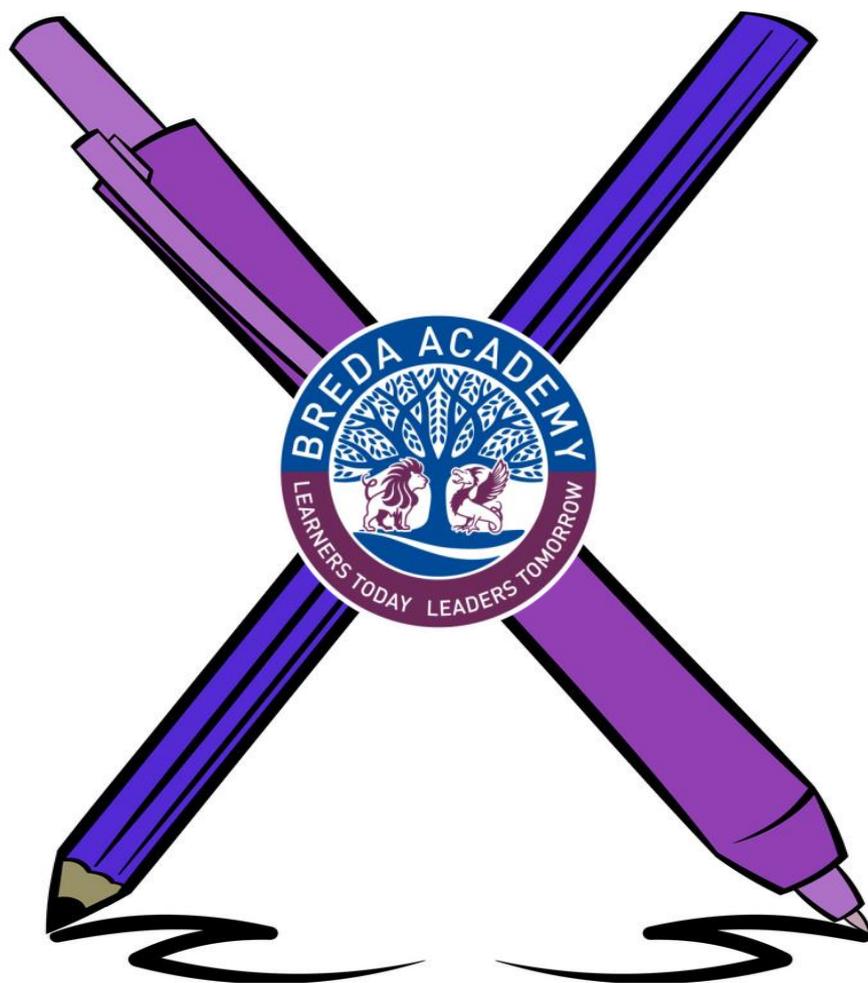


BREDA ACADEMY LITERACY SUPPORT



PARENT GUIDE TO WRITING

WHY IS WRITING SO IMPORTANT?

Writing means different things to different people.

- *Ask a poet and they will say writing makes them feel peaceful.*
- *Ask a content writer and they will say their bread and butter depends on it.*
- *Ask a child practising handwriting and you will probably hear moans and groans!*

Whatever the response, there is no denying that writing is an intrinsic part of our lives and is closely linked to communication. We spend years trying to teach children how to use words, language, and speech to communicate. Writing is a natural extension of speech and reading, and the importance of writing skills for effective communication cannot be stressed enough.

At Breda Academy we want our students to enjoy writing, to be able to use their writing skills to help them learn and to develop, increasing their confidence and competence in writing.

• **WHY PUPILS NEED TO DEVELOP THEIR WRITING SKILLS**

In this day of smartphones, tablets and laptops do children really need to write well? The simple answer is YES! Here are some reasons which highlight the importance of writing skills in children:

1. INDICATOR OF READING ABILITY

A child's writing development parallels the child's development as a reader. Keen to raise a reader? Then you must develop their writing skills simultaneously!

Experts say that when kids show an early interest in writing they will automatically enjoy reading. The connection between reading and writing runs deep. Teaching children how to write at a young age helps recognize the connection between letter sounds, and the words phonetic sounds create.

2. COMMUNICATING INNERMOST THOUGHTS

Your child may enjoy the fact that writing gives them another way to express themselves. Often, you can learn about what your child is interested in simply by reading their school assignment. The ability to use words to express innermost thoughts is priceless and learning how to write will enable your child to communicate with the world in a more meaningful manner.

Focusing on the importance of writing skills will also bring your child's attention to phonetics and reading comprehension. Through writing, your child will be able to communicate and share their unique perspective with others.

3. A SKILL FOR LIFE

Writing is not a skill that children will use just in school. This is a skill that they will use throughout life – from writing down their thoughts to writing CVs or application forms.

Starting from nursery or primary school, writing is closely linked with homework practice, tests, worksheets and much more. This writing workload from school only increases, as the child grows older. But writing doesn't stop with school. The importance of writing skills holds true for life. The emails that we write daily are a form of written communication too.

Being keen on improving writing skills – grammatically and with good vocabulary – will ensure you consistently get better at effective communication.

4. WRITING ENHANCES CRITICAL THINKING

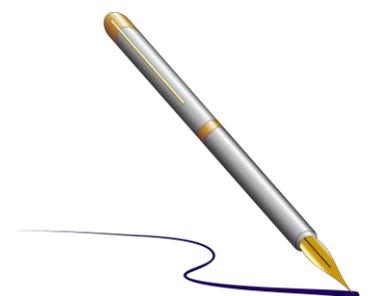
Before putting words down on paper, children need to have a clear sense of what they are about to write. This means organising their thoughts and processing them before writing them down. Experts say writing enhances problem-solving and critical thinking skills because words need to be written down in a particular order and structure. Thus, children clearly need to process information to form words and construct sentences and paragraphs.

5. WRITING HELPS ORGANISE THOUGHTS

Writing stories with a clear beginning, middle, conflict, and ending requires a certain level of thought organisation. When children are asked to write stories, they will have to organise their thoughts to be able to present it in writing in a coherent manner.

6. WRITING ENCOURAGES CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION

Writing offers a blank canvas for your child's imagination. Putting pen to paper is not just therapeutic for many but a great outlet for their creativity. Stories, poems, journal writing, scrapbooking are all great ways to encourage children to explore their creativity and imagination. Thus, the importance of writing skills extends beyond just assignments and exams.



• HOW WRITING DEVELOPS

Part of early print awareness is the realisation that writing can be created with everyday tools such as pens, pencils, crayons, and markers. Children begin to imitate the writing that they see around them. What often starts as scribbling ends up being important clues to a young child's understanding that print carries meaning.

Young children move through a series of stages as they are learning to write. The stages reflect a child's growing knowledge of the conventions of literacy, including letters, sounds and spacing of words within sentences. Almost every interaction in a child's world is preparing them to become a reader and writer.

**It's important to remember that every child is different and there are variations in the way kids move through writing stages — it may not happen in the same way or at the same time and the lines between the stages can be blurry.*

- SCRIBBLING AND DRAWING

Most children begin their writing career by scribbling and drawing. Grasping the crayon or pencil with a full fist, a young scribbling child is exploring with space and form. They are creating a permanent record of their ideas and thoughts. These first scribbles can be proud accomplishments! Thick markers, crayons, and unlined paper are good writer's tools for this stage.

- LETTER-LIKE FORMS AND SHAPES

At this stage of writing development, children begin to display their understanding that writers use symbols to convey their meaning. Writing begins to include shapes (circles, squares) and other figures. A writer in this stage will often write something and ask, "What does this say?" There's little orientation of forms and shapes to space (i.e., they appear in random places within the writing or drawing). Tubs of markers, crayons, and paper remain good writer's tools.

- LETTERS

As a child's writing continues to develop, they will begin to use random letters. Most children begin with consonants, especially those in the author's name. Pieces of writing are usually strings of upper-case consonants, without attention to spaces between words or a sense that writing moves left to right and top to bottom. At the beginning of this stage, there remains a lack of sound-to-symbol correspondence between the words they are trying to write and the letters they use. Later efforts may include letters for the key sounds in words and include the author's own name.

Different types of paper, including memo pads, envelopes, lined paper and some smaller pens and pencils are good writer's tools at this stage. Tubs of foam letters and letter magnets are also handy.

- LETTERS AND SPACES

As beginning writers practice their craft, they are learning many concepts about print. When a child points to individual words on a page when reading and works to match their speech to a printed word, a "concept of word" is developing — the awareness of the purpose and existence of spaces separating words and that spoken words match to printed words. Adults watch young writers insert these important spaces in their own work. Guided either by an index finger in-between each word or by lines drawn by the parent or teacher, children demonstrate one-to-one correspondence with words.

At this stage, children write with beginning and ending sounds. They also may begin to spell some high frequency words correctly. Vowels may be inserted into words. As children transition to more conventional writers, they will begin to write words the way they sound. Using punctuation begins when writers experiment with forming sentences.

- CONVENTIONAL WRITING A SPELLING

At this stage, children spell most words correctly, with a reliance on phonics knowledge to spell longer words. Writers use punctuation marks correctly and use capital and lower-case letters in the correct places. Writing for different purposes becomes more important.

Storybook language, "Once upon a time," and "happily ever after," become a part of writing samples, with a storytelling purpose. As students progress through the writing stages, various pieces become more automatic and fluent. Handwriting becomes easier, as does the spelling of a majority of words.

**At all stages, it's important to honour the writing efforts of your young child. Find opportunities to have your child share their work with others. Display efforts on the wall or on the fridge. Ask your child to read their work at the dinner table or by sitting in a special 'author's chair' at home.*



- **THE SKILLS NEEDED TO WRITE WELL**

To write well, children need a broad set of skills including:

BASIC WRITING SKILLS:

These include spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, handwriting or keyboarding, and sentence structure (for example, elimination of run-ons and sentence fragments). Basic writing skills are sometimes called the “mechanics” of writing.

TEXT GENERATION:

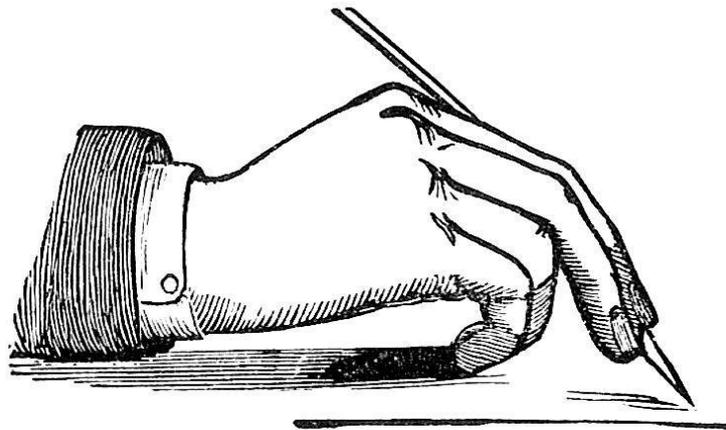
Text generation means translating your thoughts and ideas into language — the “content” of writing. Text generation includes word choice (vocabulary), details that add meaning, and clear expression.

WRITING PROCESSES:

Good writing involves planning, revising, and editing. These processes are extremely important to success in writing and become even more important throughout a child's school career.

WRITING KNOWLEDGE:

Writing knowledge includes an understanding types of writing (genre) — for example, understanding that narrative writing or descriptive writing is organised differently than informational writing or persuasive writing. Another important part of writing knowledge is understanding the audience you are writing for.



• **PROMPTS AND IDEAS TO GET YOUR CHILD WRITING**

Stressing to your child the importance of writing skills and asking them to write a story over, and over again, may pressurise them to a point where they won't feel like writing at all. Instead, why not play a few fun games that are guaranteed to make writing less of a chore and more fun?

There are lots of ways to help inspire writing at home, and below are some ideas to help you get started.

- **PICTURE PROMPTS**

Photos and images are great at inspiring story ideas. You can download or print out flashcards to help inspired children. Use one flashcard with multiple elements and slowly increase the number of flashcards as they get comfortable. They can imagine places, settings, characters, and incidents and write a short story

Alternatively, you can do a web search and find a few interesting images or cut out pictures from magazines and newspapers. The pictures can be realistic, such as a photo of students on a playground, or they can be fantastical images, such as a superhero flying in space.

Glue a couple of images into a notebook. Then ask your child to write about one of them. You can prompt them, asking them to include what they see, what the people are thinking, what will happen next—or just let their imagination run free.

- **RANDOM WORDS PROMPTS**

Pick four random words. For example, book, Mumbai, dog, ship and ask your child to write a story that features all four words prominently.

- **COMIC BOOK CAPERS**

Children love comic books so why not do a fun writing activity that involves writing dialogue for comic book characters? Give your child a story that has some of their favourite comic book characters and ask them to write dialogue for the characters. This is a great way to teach children how to write dialogues.

- **WRITE A "CONVINCE ME" LETTER**

Writing isn't just about telling stories or reporting on books. There are many ways your child can use words, including trying to convince others to agree with them. You can help them practice this type of writing by letting them argue with you—in writing!

Choose a topic you don't agree on, such as pocket money, screen time or bed time. Have your child write you a letter trying to convince you to change your mind. The catch? They have to use facts, quotes and logic to back up their argument.

- **SCRIPT A NEW ENDING OR TWIST THE TALE**

One way of inspiring writing ideas is to use stories that children are already familiar with. Tell them a common story and ask them to write a new ending. Let their imagination run wild and you will end up seeing classic tales with a very different outcome!

Alternatively, ask them to imagine a twist in a well-known tale... Imagine if Goldilocks had actually walked in when the bears were still at breakfast. Or if Red Riding Hood had taken a wrong turn in the forest while walking to her grandmother's cottage. What would have happened? This is a great way to get the creative juices flowing and to see where your child's imagination takes them.

- **THROW IN A CHARACTER OR TWO**

Pick two stories similar in one particular manner – it could be a city setting, or both stories could have evil villains. Now merge the two stories together. Ask your child to write what would happen when characters from Story A meet characters from Story B. Now this is where things get interesting!

- **PLAY “TELL ME HOW”**

In this activity your child pretends they are writing to a space alien who doesn't know anything about our culture. This alien does everything exactly as it's said or written. Your child's job is to choose an everyday task, like brushing their teeth or making a sandwich. Then, they need to write step-by-step directions about how to do the task for the alien. When they are done, you get to be the alien and try to follow the steps exactly as they wrote them; they may be surprised at what they left out!

- **MAKE AN “I CAN” BOOK**

As your child learns to write, they'll also be learning other new skills. Making an “I Can” book will let them practice writing skills and keep track of other burgeoning skills and accomplishments. Staple together a bunch of blank sheets of paper to make a book. As your child reaches a new milestone, or achieves something special or unique, they can draw a picture on a new page of the book.

Younger kids can then write simple sentences like, “I can tie my shoes” while older children and teenagers can write a few sentences/ paragraph about what they've accomplished/ how they feel about it etc.

- PLAY 'FORTUNATELY/ UNFORTUNATELY'

This turn-taking writing game is based on a classic kids' book by Remy Charlip called *Fortunately*. In it, something lucky happens and then something unlucky happens. Each event is introduced by either the word "fortunately" or the word "unfortunately."

To play, take a piece of paper and write a sentence beginning with "Fortunately," such as "Fortunately it was a sunny day. I wanted to play outside." Pass the paper to the next player, who will add an "unfortunately" sentence, such as "Unfortunately, I had to clean my room." Keep going until the story is too silly to continue.

- MAKE A JOURNAL JAR

A journal doesn't have to be a diary. It can also be a book where your child writes about ideas or answers questions, like "If you could do *anything* next summer, what would you choose?" A journal jar is a place to keep all those ideas and questions.

Wash and decorate a wide-mouthed jar, like one that used to contain a candle or similar. Then, write or print out journal prompts on slips of paper. Ask your child to pull out one prompt each day and write about it in their journal.

- CREATE A FAMILY SCRAP BOOK

A family scrapbook is a great way to save memories and jump-start your child's writing. Use an inexpensive photo album to keep souvenirs of things you do together. This can include photos, ticket stubs, and found objects, like pretty leaves. Your child can begin by writing the date and a line about where you were and what you did. Then, you can work together to write a more detailed summary. Don't forget to include funny or even annoying moments!

**Remember every child learns at a different pace. Writing well is not a skill that develops overnight.*

**Reading books are always the best source for reading prompts or for exposure to different forms of writing.*



- **SUPPORTING YOUR WRITER AT HOME**

What are some things that you as a parent can do to support your struggling and/or reluctant teenage writer? Here are a few suggestions to help you get started.

ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS

- **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**

Writing takes practice, and lots of it! Let your teen see you write often and encourage them to write often, too. At home writing might include e-mails, instant messaging, thank-you notes, scrapbook descriptions, diaries, and what's-for-dinner notes.

- **WRITE FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES**

Encourage your teen to expand their range and abilities by writing for many different audiences. They could try a letter to the editor or to a local politician, a silly story for a younger sibling, or a "top ten" list to cheer up a friend or relative.

- **MAKE LANGUAGE FUN**

Have fun with language yourself and share that sense of play with your teen. Point out new words and phrases you come across in the newspaper or on the radio; share favourite song lyrics; get creative in naming a new pet or in writing gift cards

- **OFFER LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES TO READ**

Offer your teen a wide variety of opportunities to read, both educational and entertaining, and pass on your own favourite authors, novels, and magazines to show him you're a reader, too. Discuss the things those things you've both read.

- **EXAMINE DIFFERENT STYLES AND REASONS FOR WRITING**

Encourage your teen to compare the styles of different authors, and to compare how a newspaper editorial may be different than a website or an instruction manual.

- **PURSUE FORMS OF WRITING THAT APPEAL TO INTERESTS**

If your teen has found a form of writing that they enjoy, encourage them to pursue it whether it's poetry, journals and letter writing, or writing on the internet. If your teen is learning English as an additional language, you may wish to encourage them to practice writing informally in their first language as a way to become familiar with basic writing skills.

However, when writing assignments in English, students should write directly in English, rather than writing in their native language first and then translating the assignment into English as their vocabulary will probably be much larger in their native language and they may not be able to translate everything they write.

- **WRITE ABOUT THOUGHTS AND INTERESTS**

Encourage your teen to use writing to think more deeply about things in their life; questions, problems, difficult assignments, hobbies, and topics they want to learn more about. Writing regularly in a journal may provide a valuable outlet and space for them.

- **MAKE SURE THEY HAVE WHAT THEY NEED TO WRITE**

Support your teen by making sure that they have adequate materials for writing (sufficient paper, pens, pencils, etc.), as well as a quiet place to work. If your teen must write an assignment on a computer and you don't have a computer at home, check with the school to see if they can complete assignments there, or check computer availability at your public library.

In addition, if English isn't your child's first language, make sure they have a dual language dictionary in order to translate new vocabulary, and help them learn how to use it.

- **GO TO THE LIBRARY**

Help your teen obtain the resources needed to complete any writing assignments by taking them to the library, especially if they are working on a research report. While some resources may be available online, many will only be available at the library.

The library is also the perfect location to work in a quiet environment away from distractions, and computer access is usually readily available.

- **COMMUNICATE WITH TEACHERS**

If your teen is struggling with their writing, talk with their teachers to find out ways that you can help their efforts at home.

- **SUPPORT EFFORTS TO LEARN ENGLISH**

If your teen's writing problems are related to a limited English-language proficiency, ask their teachers what you and your child can do to improve their English reading and writing skills.

BEFORE STARTING A WRITING ASSIGNMENT

- **ASK HOW YOU CAN HELP**

Start by asking your teen, "How can I help you?" Your role is to listen and help your teen figure out what they are trying to say.

- **HELP THEM BRAINSTORM IDEAS**

If your teen has trouble getting started writing, suggest brainstorming, jotting lists of ideas, or talking through their thoughts with you or a friend. Sometimes just spending 15 minutes writing anything and everything (including "I don't know what to write.") loosens up the very ideas needed for the piece. It may also be helpful to preview specific vocabulary that they will need in order to write about the assigned topic.

- **HELP THEM DRAW FROM THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES**

Encourage your teen to draw from their experiences and to make an assigned topic their own. If a student can connect with a topic, they may feel more motivated about the writing assignment.

- **CLARIFY THE ASSIGNMENT**

Make sure your teen understands what they are supposed to write about. Ask your child to explain the assignment to you. If they can't, ask them if they have a written assignment sheet from the teacher. If not, have them get the assignment from a friend, or contact the school for more information.

- **CLARIFY THE CONTENT**

Some students struggle with writing because they haven't thought about what they want to say or don't know how to organise their ideas effectively. Ask your teen to tell you the main point they want to make. If they can explain ideas verbally first, the writing will be easier. Ask them to tell you examples or anecdotes that support that main point. That will help them think through how they'll support their main point or thought process.

If your teen is reacting negatively to an assignment, ask them to tell you why. If you help them think ideas through, they may be able to write an effective paper based on their objections to the assignment.

AFTER COMPLETING A WRITING AN ASSIGNMENT

- **POINT OUT STRENGTHS IN WRITING**

Find three strengths in your teen's writing and point them out. Always start with strengths. Look for concrete details, sentences that are clear, words that

are vivid, and praise them when you find them. Point to the phrase, sentence or paragraph and read it aloud. Tell him why it's effective: "I really like the way you understand the main character of the book," or "I love the colourful details in that sentence." You'll be showing them that writing isn't a mystical process but one that requires skills that they can master.

- **HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE VALUE OF THE WRITING PROCESS**

Help your teen see the value of clarifying their ideas, drafting, and revising before they attend to the mechanics. Writing is a process of developing and drafting ideas, then revising, and, finally, editing for correct grammar and spelling.

- **EVALUATE THE ACCURACY AND RELEVANCE OF THE MAIN IDEA**

Check the evidence. Do the examples or anecdotes support the main idea? Are they accurate? Are they lively? Did your teen use reliable resources? If your teen is having trouble here, ask them to take a minute and tell you about the scene or event they are describing as if they were a reporter, using the **5 W's and H: who, what, when, where, why and how.**

- **CHECK THE ORGANISATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT**

Review your teen's work to see if the writing is well-organized. If the assignment is an essay, see if the teacher has given specific instructions about the introduction, body paragraphs or conclusion. Go over the sequence of ideas in each paragraph your teen has written. Can you follow the thinking or are there missing steps that you need to understand their logic? Are transitions needed to link the paragraphs together? Talk about paragraphs that work well, identifying why they are effective. Discuss how the introduction and conclusion relate to the topic. Does the writer draw in the reader with the introduction? Does the conclusion include the thesis and sum up the main ideas?

- **ENCOURAGE THEM TO READ THEIR WORKOUT LOUD**

Listen to your teen read the piece of writing aloud without interrupting. Writing is hard work that requires concentration. If you interrupt, you risk interfering in your child's thinking process.

- **ASK THEM TO EXPLAIN SECTIONS YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND**

If something is unclear ask for more information. Ask questions about what your teen is trying to communicate. Tell them if there's something you'd like to know more about, an idea that's not fully expressed. Don't criticise or give the answer, but help them find their own answers. If you respond to their writing as a reader, you'll show that writing is a way to communicate ideas to an audience. Don't forget: Every writer has an audience! Student writers may not realise this because they're writing an assignment for a teacher.

- **GIVE LOTS OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK**

Support your budding writer. If your teen chooses to share their writing with you, point out specifically what you like best about the piece. Rejoice in effort, delight in ideas, and resist the temptation to be critical. Make it clear that you are always interested in reading any writings that they want to share with you.

- **DON'T FOCUS ON MISTAKES IN A ROUGH DRAFT**

Don't correct grammar or mechanics on a rough draft. Your child may correct their own rough-draft errors as they revise their writing, particularly if you encourage them to read work aloud to you or to themselves.

If your child makes a consistent mistake in mechanics at this stage, though, see if they know how to correct it. If they don't, give them the correct form. On the final draft, encourage your teen to edit their own work. Resist the temptation to make the paper "perfect" from your point of view.

- **GIVE THEM A SPECIAL PLACE TO KEEP THEIR WRITING**

Provide a special writing folder or notebook for your teen and encourage them to save writings in it. Nothing can replace the good feeling of reading something we wrote months ago and rediscovering how good it is, or seeing how we've developed or how far we've come!

- **RESPECT YOUR TEEN'S WRITING**

Respect your teen as a writer. What and how to revise is their choice, not yours. The "voice" they use should be theirs, not yours. Offer suggestions but remember that they must learn to do the thinking and writing for themselves.

**Writing does not come easily to many students, but with patience and your support, you may find that it comes a little more easily to your child than it used to!*

HANDWRITING

Good handwriting may be the last thing on a student's mind. The rush of the hour, hectic schedules, and the volley of assignments to complete, take precedence over good handwriting.

However, it is very important for students to concentrate on adopting good handwriting because it has its own benefits.

Handwriting is unique to every individual. It is like a thumbprint; different and unique for everyone. There are so many aspects involved in handwriting.

Handwriting encompasses the following:

- *Formation of letters*
- *Amount of pressure applied on paper*
- *The positioning of arms on writing base*
- *Position of fingers while holding the pen or pencil*
- *Spacing between letters*

Good handwriting is one that is legible and makes for pleasant reading. Whereas bad handwriting is one that is illegible and difficult to read.

It is very important for students to have good handwriting. The advantages of having good handwriting will prove beneficial to students in more ways than one.

• **THE BENEFITS OF GOOD HANDWRITING**

Writing by hand is a slower, more considered activity than typing. When forming letters with a pen, you have more time to connect with the subject matter and so understand it better. As a result, it:

IMPROVES CONFIDENCE

One of the reasons why handwriting is important is because it boosts self-confidence. In fact, you feel quite superior with good handwriting.

When you have a bad or illegible handwriting you often worry if the reader will be able to understand your written intent.

Good handwriting instils confidence in the writer. Moreover, when you have good handwriting, you are often asked to take the lead when it comes to writing something on behalf of a class. This instils a sense of confidence and pride.

IMPROVES UNDERSTANDING AND FOCUS

Writing by hand forces the brain to mentally engage with the information being written, improving pupils' literacy and reading comprehension.

BOOSTS MEMORY

When we write something down, it helps us remember it. Writing activates the parts of our brains involved with thinking and information storage, allowing us to keep, manage and retain information.

STIMULATES BRAIN ACTIVITY

Writing by hand uses more complex motor and cognitive skills than typing. The writing process encourages pupils to expand on their thoughts, form connections between them and critically evaluate what they're writing about.

SUPPORTS BETTER CREATIVE WRITING

Being able to write legibly and quickly affects both the fluidity and quality of a pupil's writing. With good skills, children can get their thoughts down on paper almost as quickly as they're thinking them.

Poorer writers, however, may struggle with letter formation, so not keep up with their thoughts and have their thought process interrupted.

BOOSTS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Research undertaken in the US has proven there's a positive correlation between handwriting skills and better reading and writing skills. Published in the Journal of Early Childhood Education and Development, the study looked at 1,000 pupils at Pre-K and then again three years later. It found that children with good fine motor skills at the age of 4, developed through learning their letters, outperformed their peers at age 7.

IMPROVES GENERAL ATTAINMENT

In primary school, learning is largely writing-based. Handwriting is an integral component of the English curriculum, including transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing).

Examinations follow the same approach, so being able to write speedily and legibly is critical for pupils to achieve their full potential right up to GCSE and A-level.

THERAPY FOR DYSLEXIA

According to Language expert, Marilyn Zecher of the Atlantic Seaboard Dyslexia Education Centre, students diagnosed with dyslexia find it difficult to read because their brains comprehend sounds, letters and their combinations inefficiently.

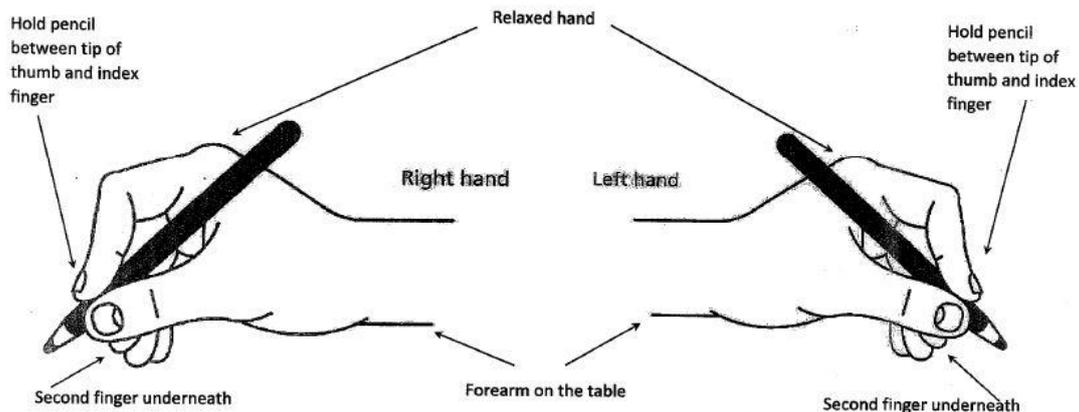
However, cursive writing can help. It aids in decoding because it combines hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills and memory functions.

She explains, “When the hands are involved, it’s a stronger association for learning and memory. When people write things, they remember them longer”.

• SUPPORTING HANDWRITING

There are lots of ways that parents can support their child with handwriting at home. Here are some hints and tips you can follow to help guide and improve handwriting.

1. Make sure your child is holding the pencil/ pen properly, ensuring the correct tripod pencil grip is used, i.e. holding the sharp end of the pencil or pen between the thumb and first finger and resting on the middle finger.



2. Build up your child's strength and dexterity; pegboards / lacing / beading / sewing / Lego/ kneading dough, rolling plasticine snakes all help to build up dexterity in the fingers.
3. Puzzle books with finish the drawing, dot to dots ('a-b-c' as well as number), mazes, colouring in, drawing and painting help to improve hand / eye co-ordination skills.
4. Offer a selection of pens and pencils to write with.
5. Avoid fancy pencil/ pen tops - they interfere with pencil balance.
6. Something you might also want to consider is using a **handgrip**, especially if your child finds writing difficult or have issues with hand movements. There are even some ballpoint/ rollerball pens that have an inbuilt handgrip for those who find handwriting difficult or uncomfortable.
7. Put a dot at the side of the page where you want them to start writing.
8. Work on pastel paper to cut out the glare.
9. You may want to provide a writing mat for hard surfaces

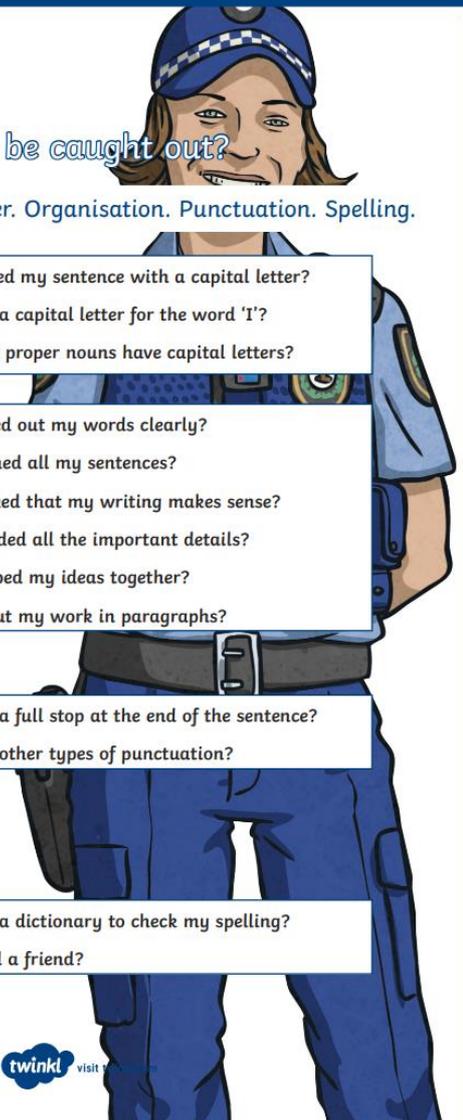


• PRESENTATION OF WRITING

There are conventions that everyone should be familiar with when writing. The earlier these rules and conventions are introduced, and then continually reinforced will ensure that all children and young people will have a good foundation on which to build their writing skills.

Basic Rules and Conventions of Writing:

- A sentence should begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop or other appropriate punctuation
- If there is a margin, look at where your child starts writing from the margin
- Try to write on the line if age appropriate or appropriate to your child's needs
- There should be a space between every word. Finger spacing could be used.
- To encourage regular spacing say - 'give the words space to breathe'
- Use **COPS** for proof reading for mistakes.



C.O.P.S.

Are you going to be caught out?

Remember! Capital Letter. Organisation. Punctuation. Spelling.

C

- Have I started my sentence with a capital letter?
- Have I used a capital letter for the word 'I'?
- Do all of the proper nouns have capital letters?

O

- Have I spaced out my words clearly?
- Have I finished all my sentences?
- Have I checked that my writing makes sense?
- Have I included all the important details?
- Have I grouped my ideas together?
- Have I set out my work in paragraphs?

P

- Have I used a full stop at the end of the sentence?
- Have I used other types of punctuation?

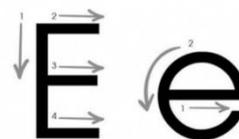
S

- Have I used a dictionary to check my spelling?
- Have I asked a friend?

twinkl visit www.twinkl.com

- Practise letter formation:

- All letters except 'd' and 'e' start at the top (lower case).
- Oval letters should be closed tight.
- These small letters sit on the line (a c e m n o r s u v w x z).
- Some letters hang down (g j p q y).
- Some letters are tall (b d f h k l).
- The body of all letters should be sitting on the line.
- The space between letters should be even.



- Position and posture make sure your child:

- Is provided with a chair and a table at the correct height (a cushion could be used on a chair).
- Has enough light.
- Keeps the book or paper in the correct position – tilted/slanted to the left for righthanded pupils and to the right for left-handed pupils.
- Uses the non-writing hand to steady the page.
- Holds the sharpened pencil or pen between the thumb and first finger, resting on the middle finger (tripod grip)/
- Does not hold the pencil/pen too firmly or press too hard.

- If the child's writing is faint, use a 'B' pencil lead. If the writing is dark change to an 'F' or 'H' lead. There is also a wide variety of mechanical pencils available on the market with comfortable grips and wider barrels.

- In most school subjects, pupils will be expected to complete written work using a pen. Some pupils find this a little strange at first, because pencils are used for writing in lots of primary schools. Therefore it is extremely important to practice handwriting using a pen.

- There are lots of different types of pens you can use, but we would ask that pupils use **ballpoint/rollerball** pens. We would also highly recommend that pupils use **erasable pens**; these are particularly useful for correcting mistakes. We would ask that pupils don't use gel pens, felt pens or fountain pens in school.



• FAQs ABOUT HANDWRITING DIFFICULTIES

I'm concerned about my child's handwriting. What should I do?

AT HOME:

Watch how your child writes, as well as what they produce.

1. Look at your child's general coordination and their fine-motor coordination with other implements, e.g. knife and fork. This will give an indication if immature or impaired motor coordination might be contributing to the difficulty.
2. Make sure they are in the correct environment for writing when at home, i.e. sitting at a table on a chair of the right height, and not lying on the floor, in front of the TV or in bed.
3. Make sure writing tools are suited to age and capabilities (pencils not too thick or thin, pens not scratchy, etc.)
4. Talk to your child about how they feel about their handwriting? Does it worry them? Do they find it difficult? Do they care about it?

If the difficulties persist you need to consult the school.

AT SCHOOL:

Have a word with the class teacher and ask the following questions:

1. Are they also concerned about the handwriting?
2. How, and how often, is handwriting taught in class?
3. Is there a particular approach or style which is being used with the children?
4. How can you, at home, support what they are doing at school?

If you have done all these and you are still concerned, request a handwriting assessment from the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in the school and take advice from them about next steps.

Do children grow out of the handwriting difficulty?

Evidence suggests that mild difficulties will be helped with good teaching and the maturation of the child. However, more severe problems persist into adolescence and beyond if appropriate intervention is not given.

Can all handwriting difficulties be cured?

Targeted intervention, either from an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist or a specialist teacher will make a noticeable difference for most children. There are a

few, however, who may never manage to write well enough and fast enough to do themselves justice on paper. For them, keyboarding is an essential alternative.

Does keyboarding solve all the problems?

It certainly helps a great number of children and young people to express their ideas at the level of their intellect and it should be encouraged. But handwriting should not be ignored completely for several reasons:

- 1. There are times when handwriting is needed, e.g. for certain school subjects (such as maths, science) and in other everyday circumstances.*
- 2. There is some evidence that the physical act of handwriting helps the flow of ideas for written composition in ways which keyboarding doesn't.*
- 3. Handwriting is very personal. It is an expression of a person's identity, like how they dress or wear their hair. In adolescence it is common to find young people adopting a particular style of handwriting to suit their personal image. This should not be discouraged as long as the handwriting remains functional.*

Is being left-handed the cause of the problem?

Being left-handed is not of itself a disability. The majority of left-handers write as well as their right-handed peers. Some evidence suggests that they develop fluency a little later than right-handers because they are 'pushing' the pen across the page rather than 'pulling' it, but this should not be a problem in the long-term.

Are handwriting problems more common in boys?

Girls seem to master good handwriting earlier than boys, but boys catch up by the time they reach secondary school if there are no underlying difficulties. Handwriting difficulties are reported more frequently among boys than girls but most improve, given the right help.

How important is pen grip?

Many children with difficulties hold their pen or pencil in unconventional ways. However, so do many competent writers and there is no evidence to date to link poor pen or pencil grasp with poor handwriting. The dynamic tripod grasp (with the pen pinched between the ball of the thumb and the forefinger, supported by the middle finger with the other fingers tucked into the hand) is recommended once the child is old enough to hold a writing implement. This minimises the risk of strain and offers the greatest control. However, for those with handwriting difficulties, changing the grasp will not, of itself, solve the problems. It may be that the poor grasp and the poor handwriting are both visible symptoms of the same underlying factors.

My child's handwriting is slow and untidy. Does this mean they are dyslexic or have dyspraxia?

Many children with additional educational needs may experience difficulties with handwriting. These include those with problems with reading and spelling, those with attention issues, those who are poorly coordinated and those with ASD, but a handwriting difficulty on its own is not sufficient to indicate the presence of one of these additional needs. A full assessment by an educational or clinical psychologist or paediatric neurologist is needed for an accurate diagnosis.

What is dysgraphia?

Dysgraphia means “disturbance of or difficulty with orthographic-motor integration” (i.e. handwriting). The term describes purely the handwriting difficulty as it is possible for this to be an isolated problem and not associated with a more general disorder. Some researchers have described sub-categories of dysgraphia in order to study it better, such as ‘surface dysgraphia’ or ‘deep dysgraphia’. These recognize that weaknesses in different types of processing may be responsible for the problem, such as motor control, visual perception, and spelling difficulties. The term may be used differently by different professionals, so it is important to check what is meant by the term in any one context.

Is it possible to improve a secondary school student's handwriting once they have established a style, or does it automatically lead to a reduction in the child's writing speed?

Changing a writing style is a major undertaking and is dependent upon the student's drive and motivation to make that change. In the short term it will almost certainly lead to a reduction in the child's writing speed. Continual practice of the new style with short, frequent practice sessions will be necessary. It can then be used in situations where speed is not a requirement, only putting it into ‘everyday’ use when it is thoroughly learned and has become faster and automatic.