

Guidelines For Teaching Handwriting

▾ Teach students how to hold a pencil.

Students should learn to hold a pencil comfortably between their thumb and forefinger with the pencil resting on their middle finger. Teachers should regularly evaluate students' pencil grip during writing activities. As mentioned in previous pages, poor or incorrect pencil grip will lead to muscle fatigue and illegible handwriting. It is important to help students consistently transition to a tripod or quadropod grip. Here is a way for students to practice [picking up their pencils and holding them correctly](#).

▾ Model efficient and legible letter formation.

Model correct letter formation on the board or by "skywriting" letters. When modeling these activities, face the same direction as your students so they can imitate the strokes you show them.

▾ Use scaffolds, such as letters with numbered arrows showing the order and direction of strokes.

Students benefit from the use of numbered arrows to support student understanding of where to start letters. Handwriting paper with a dashed line in the middle can help students monitor the size of the letters they are producing. Provide alphabet strips with visual arrows when students are learning to write independently.

▾ Have students practice writing letters from memory.

Have students practice writing letters from memory. Students can copy letters but should also practice writing them from memory.

Review a quick instructional routine:

- Teacher models letter formation
- Students practice tracing the letter several times in their handwriting workbooks or journals
- Students practice writing the letter with a model
- Students cover the model and write the letter independently several times
- Students identify which letter looks closest to the model

▾ Provide handwriting fluency practice to build students' automaticity.

Just as they do with other skills, students need to build handwriting fluency. A simple activity that can support fluency is to have students copy a sentence or write the letters in the alphabet repeatedly for a brief interval (e.g., 45 - 90 seconds). Afterward, they can count the number of letters they wrote. You can lead your students through this quick exercise two or three times a week and compare or even graph their number of letters to see their improvement.

▾ Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice effective letter formation.

Students should practice writing their letters both out of context and within the context of writing words and sentences. Have students say the name of the letter before they write it. As they make progress, have students write groups of letters (e.g., two to five letters). During this practice, monitor students' pencil grip and letter formation closely. Providing immediate feedback to students will reinforce correct practices and help students make necessary changes in a timely manner. Make sure that students practice both uppercase and lowercase letter formation. Lowercase letters are much more prevalent in our writing system than uppercase letters, yet students often get more practice with uppercase letters. Once students have learned how to correctly form a letter, they should practice writing this letter multiple times every day in authentic settings.