



VRANCH HOUSE IDEAS TO HELP DEVELOP HANDWRITING

Learning to write legibly is a major occupation in childhood and is one of the main tasks taught at school. As the child progresses through the educational system, the demand for written work increases.

At school, writing is used as a method of:

- recording learning
- exchanging information
- projecting thoughts and ideas
- demonstrating knowledge

Handwriting is said to be one of the most complex skills that children learn.

To teach writing well, each skill needs to be broken down into manageable chunks.

The child needs motor skills, sensory awareness, perceptual skills, praxis, cognitive skills.

The child needs:

MOTOR SKILLS

- sitting upright, with good posture without having to use arms & hands to balance.
- grasping and releasing a pen/pencil voluntarily
- using the hands together - one 'doing' hand and one 'helping' hand

SENSORY SKILLS

- feeling the position of the pencil and it's relationship to the paper
- understanding 'positional' words e.g. in front, behind, up, down, around, top, bottom

PERCEPTUAL SKILLS

- being able to recognise forms and be able to notice similarities and differences.
- memorising shapes, sequences of shapes, letter sounds - 26 capitals & 26 small letters
- interpreting printed language, which involves the visual analysis of letters.
- Processing letters and words from left to right

PRAXIS (MOTOR PLANNING SKILLS)

- getting the idea; planning and executing
- knowing what to do and knowing how to do it

COGNITION

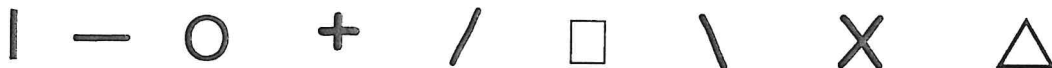
- understanding of what is asked
- meaning of letters/words
- understanding language
- memory for sound & shape & patterns

In order to write successfully, the child needs to integrate all of these skills in order to produce legible and successful letter and words/ handwriting.

PLEASE NOTE:

A child has not got sufficient visuo-motor integration skills to write fluently and easily until he/she is able to copy the following shapes - without any prompts.

The age norm for achieving the triangle is 5 years 3 months, but there is leeway either side of this norm that makes up the 'average' category.



WRITING SPEED

1. Handwriting Speed is related to age - the rate of greatest increase happens aged 7-9 years.
2. Two reasons for slow writing speed (Rubin and Henderson, 1982)
 - i. Children with poor mechanics for writing are deterred even further when needing to integrate spelling and composing into the process.
 - ii. Children with poor handwriting usually have an unstable motor set and are unable to write automatically and with flexibility.
3. Students aged 13 should be writing about 13 words per minute.
4. GCSE students (Age 15-16) should be writing about 20 words per minute.

ENDURANCE

Endurance is observed in testing or in classroom, whilst the child writes 5-6 sentences. Poor handwriters frequently cannot sustain the legibility of their writing as the length of their assignment increases.

As the child tires, writing may become smaller, more laboured with letters and words omitted.

When endurance is poor and the students writing pace is slow, he or she does not have the opportunity to practise letter formation as do other children, and therefore mastery of the formation of letters may be poor, due to insufficient practice.

TOUCHTYPING

Children who have difficulties writing from an early age or who have to concentrate hard on letter formation and presentation should be encouraged to learn to Touch-Type early on.

2 freely downloadable resources which are a good start are:

Dance Mat typing on the www.bbc.co.uk website and Text Type on www.doorwayonline.org

GOOD POSTURE IS VITAL FOR GOOD WRITING

- The table should be at tummy button height. The chair height should allow the feet to stamp on the floor.
- Wedge cushions can help a child to sit well e.g. Move 'n Sit LDA
- Pencil grips help to maintain tripod grasp - e.g. Special Direct, LDA or WH Smith
- Sloping boards are good - we use a wooden one which folds up called THE WRITING SLOPE. Available from Rowley Abbey Tel 01225 340856 Price about £12.50 + postage.
- As an alternative, Ikea do a laptop support called the BRADA for just over £3. Details on www.ikea.com

LETTER FAMILIES AND MOVEMENT PATTERNS - a good way to start to learn.

Curly-caterpillar letters (anti-clockwise round letters)

C is the key to writing c, a, d, g, q, o - all start the same way

All start at the top except e & d

Bouncing letters(down & retrace upwards in clockwise direction)

r is the key to writing r, n, m, h, b, p, k

all start at the top, go down and bounce off the line, up again and round

Long ladder letters (down & off in another direction)

l, L, t have the same pattern. U is like 2 l's, y- is like an l & j.

All start at the top, go down and have a tail in another direction.

Zigzag letters (letters with diagonals)

V, W, X, Z

Practise using dot to dot if you are having difficulty with x & z. All start at the top

Most of this sheet is devised by Vbranch House therapists

Part of the sheet is adapted from work by United Bristol Healthcare Trust OT Department

If you would like more information, please contact the Therapy Department

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