

Occupational Therapy: Children, Young People & Families Department

6: Handwriting fluency and legibility

Intervention Programme for Schools



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Intervention programme 6: HANDWRITING FLUENCY AND LEGIBILITY

Aims: To develop handwriting fluency and legibility

Functional outcomes: Being able to complete legible written work within an appropriate length of time.

Introduction

This programme has been designed to improve handwriting speed and legibility. If letter formation and neatness are problematic, please complete programme 5: Handwriting Letter Formation before starting this programme. It is important to work on the letter formation and placement first, otherwise speeding up the handwriting will cause the legibility to deteriorate further.

You can use a commercially-available programme, such as *Speed Up!* instead of, or as well as, this handwriting programme. Some of the later exercises in *Write from the Start (Booklet 2)* are also appropriate for this level.

Handwriting speed may be influenced by:

- Delays in information processing
- Problems with spelling
- Motor co-ordination difficulties
- Labour-intensive style, which results from lack of tuition in handwriting skills.

Some children will always write slower than others, not because they cannot physically write faster, but because of the time it takes them to process information. Other children need frequent breaks due to pain or fatigue in their hands, often because of a tight grip or heavy pressure.

In some cases, the use of IT (typing or voice dictation software) will be the most appropriate means of recording written work.

Quick or neat?

We write at different speeds and with different attention to neatness depending on the circumstances. A quick shopping list or telephone message will be scribbled down faster (and less neatly) than a birthday card message. When writing in an exam, our aim is to get as much information down, legibly but not neatly, in the time available.

Average words per minute by year group

Year 7	13.8
Year 8	14.3
Year 9	15.6
Year 10	14.7
Year 11	16.1

Some general suggestions

- Handwriting model: It is helpful to have a handwriting model when teaching children to write, so they can learn consistent letter formations.
- Once they are at the stage where speed becomes more important, a more pragmatic approach may be needed. Prioritise sizing and placement of letters and focus less on how close the child's letters are to a model alphabet (for example, some children seem to really struggle with continuous cursive and may be more efficient writers using a printed or italic script). As children get older, they will develop more of a personal handwriting style.

Before you start...

- Complete the "**Which Programme?**" Fine Motor Skills screening form to make sure you are choosing the appropriate programme for the child
- Fill in the **Baseline Assessment** (see back of booklet) to get an idea of how the child is performing now.
- Review the child's pencil grip. Is it functional? Is it comfortable? Do they fatigue or experience pain when writing? Give them the opportunity to experiment with different writing tools and pen grips.
- Have they mastered letter formation? Speeding up poor letter formation is going to result in a deterioration in legibility. If letter formation is still a problem, go back to Booklet 5 and complete this before working on fluency.

Remember...

- To fill in the **Session Completion** list (see back of booklet) to keep track of which sessions the child has completed.
- To re-do the **Baseline Assessment** at the end to see how much progress the child has made.

Further information

You can find more information and resources on our website:

<http://cyp.swft.nhs.uk/occupational-therapy.aspx>

Overview

Week 1	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Handwriting assessment Choose your weapon
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Feel the pressure Tip to tail
Session 3:	Rubber band stretch Doodle loops	Alphabet write Letter lists
Week 2	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Alphabet write Dictation
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Near-point copy Eyes shut patterns
Session 3:	Doodle loops Heavy/light	Far-point copy Feel the pressure
Week 3	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Dictation Eyes shut writing
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Free-writing
Session 3:	Heavy/light Doodle loops	Near-point copy Eyes-shut writing
Week 4	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Far-point copy Eyes shut writing
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Free-writing
Session 3:	Rubber band stretch Doodle loops	Dictation Feel the pressure
Week 5	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Near-point copy Eyes-shut patterns
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Far-point copy Eyes shut writing
Session 3:	Feel the pressure Doodle loops	Free-writing Carbon paper
Week 6	Warm up	Main activities
Session 1:	Arm wake-up Pencil aerobics	Alphabet write Letter lists
Session 2:	Bandage grab Handwriting patterns to music	Write a letter
Session 3:	Doodle loops	Handwriting assessment

Week 1: Session 1

Resources:

- Stopwatch
- Copy of the handwriting assessment (see back of this booklet) for each pupil
- Sheets of the normal handwriting paper used in class for each pupil
- Selection of pens, pencils, pen grips

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
- Push palms together
- Pull hands apart
- Link your hands together and circle your wrists, one way then the other
- Make a fist, thumbs up and give them a wiggle
- Touch each finger to your thumb, one at a time, making a big circle.
- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Put your pencil down facing right, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Put your pencil down facing left, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Don't forget, only use one hand – try this 3 times each side.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Timed handwriting assessment

Carry out the handwriting assessment, following the instructions at the back of this booklet.

Choose your weapon!

Set out a selection of pens and pencils, for example: gel pens, felt tips, biros, pens with thicker barrels, ergonomic pens (like the Stabilo pen), soft and hard pencils, mechanical pencils, fountain pens, italic pens. Add as many different types of pencil grip as you can find.

Encourage the children to try all the different pens and grips and ask them to think about:

- What do they feel like to hold?
- How do they affect your finger position?
- Do you have to grip hard or can you grip them lightly?
- What do they feel like to write with?
- Do you need to press hard or lightly with them?
- Do they write smoothly on the paper, or are they scratchy?

Now use some different handwriting papers – different spacing of lines, coloured/ black and white, squared paper.

Encourage the children to have a go at writing on these different papers with their chosen pen or pencil. What size of writing feels most natural to them? Do the different designs of paper make it easier or more difficult to write neatly?

Each child should choose their favourite writing instrument and paper and continue to use these for the sessions. They can keep coming back to this selection and trying different ones.

Week 1: Session 2

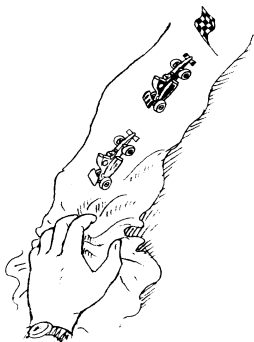
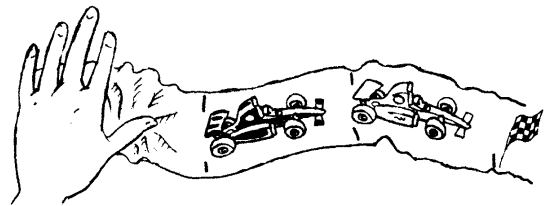
Resources:

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Music and a music player
- Preferred writing paper and pen/pencil
- Handwriting patterns (see back of booklet)
- Carbon paper (you can use a duplicate book or receipt book if you can't find carbon paper)

Warm-up:

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Feel the pressure

Give each child some carbon paper and some pens or pencils. Explain and demonstrate how the carbon paper works.

First, try writing so that it shows through as much as possible on the last sheet.

Next, try writing so that it doesn't show through at all.

Try this again, with eyes closed.

- How different does it feel, writing heavily and writing lightly?
- How does it affect how tightly they grip the pencil? How does their hand and arm feel?
- If the heaviest they can write is scored 10 and the lightest they can write is scored 0, how heavily do they think they write normally?
- Does this score change, for example, when trying to write quickly or really neatly?

Tip to tail

Give each child a pen or pencil and some paper.

Start by holding the pen/pencil as close to the tip as possible and writing.

Now, hold the pencil as far from the tip as possible and try writing.

Experiment by holding the pencil at different places along its length. Where feels best to hold it? What happens to your grip and your writing when you change the position?

Week 1: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Pencils and pens
- Handwriting paper
- Stopwatch

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy.

A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles. These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

Alphabet write

Using the preferred writing paper and pen/pencil, write out the alphabet in lower case for one minute.

How many correctly-sequenced and correctly-formed letters were produced?

Letter lists

Pick a letter and write as many words as you can think of beginning with it in one minute.

Try this with different categories, for example, animals, food, towns, sports, names.

Week 2: Session 1

Resources:

- Pencils and pens
- Handwriting paper
- A book to dictate from
- Self-assessment forms (see back of booklet)

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
- Push palms together
- Pull hands apart
- Link your hands together and circle your wrists, one way then the other
- Make a fist, thumbs up and give them a wiggle
- Touch each finger to your thumb, one at a time, making a big circle.
- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Put your pencil down facing right, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Put your pencil down facing left, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Don't forget, only use one hand – try this 3 times each side.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Alphabet write

Using the preferred writing paper and pen/pencil, write out the alphabet in lower case for one minute.

How many correctly-sequenced and correctly-formed letters were produced?

Dictation

Choose a short passage from a book that the children will find interesting. Read it out loud, at a pace that the children can copy it down.

Their work needs to be legible, but does not need to be overly neat. Explain that there is a trade-off between speed and neatness – some work needs to be very neat, and some work needs to be written down quickly, but so it is still readable.

Encourage them to appraise their own work, and that of the person sitting next to them? Can they read what they have written? What about what the person sitting next to them has written? There is a self-assessment form at the back of this book, which they can use to start thinking about how legible their work is.

Week 2: Session 2

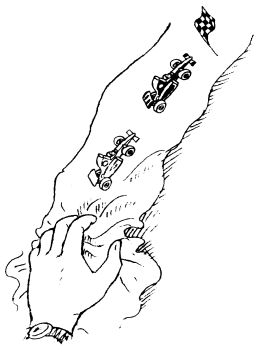
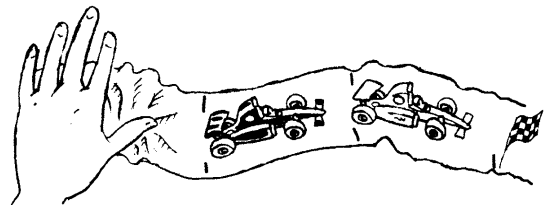
Resources:

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Handwriting paper
- Handwriting patterns (see back of booklet)
- Pens/ pencils
- Music and music player (optional)
- Short piece of writing to copy (passage from a book/photocopied sheet)

Warm-up

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Eyes-shut patterns

Ask each child to choose a handwriting pattern (see back of booklet).

First, they should copy the handwriting pattern with eyes open. Encourage them to think about the movement their hand is making to form the pattern.

Next, ask them to copy the pattern with their eyes shut.

Repeat, using the same or different patterns, encouraging them to feel the movement of writing.

Near-point copy

Choose a short passage from an age-appropriate book – make sure each child has a copy/photocopy and that they are able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task.

Week 2: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Carbon paper (you can use a duplicate book or receipt book if you can't find carbon paper)
- Short piece of writing to copy (passage from a book/photocopied sheet)
- Pens/ pencils
- Handwriting paper

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy. A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles. These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

Feel the pressure

Give each child some carbon paper and some pens or pencils. First, try writing so that it shows through as much as possible on the last sheet.

Next, try writing so that it doesn't show through at all.

Try this again, with eyes closed.

- How different does it feel, writing heavily and writing lightly?
- How does it affect how tightly they grip the pencil? How does their hand and arm feel?
- If the heaviest they can write is scored 10 and the lightest they can write is scored 0, how heavily do they think they write normally?
- Does this score change, for example, when trying to write quickly or really neatly?

Far-point copy

Choose a short passage from an age-appropriate book – blow this up on a photocopier (or type into Word and print out at a large font size, or display on a large screen) so it can be read easily from about 6 to 8 feet away.

Make sure each child is able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task and compare this with the near-point copying task. Ask the children which they find more difficult and why they think this is?

Week 3: Session 1

Resources:

- Pens/ pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Passage from a suitable book to read out

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
- Push palms together
- Pull hands apart
- Link your hands together and circle your wrists, one way then the other
- Make a fist, thumbs up and give them a wiggle
- Touch each finger to your thumb, one at a time, making a big circle.
- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Put your pencil down facing right, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Put your pencil down facing left, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Don't forget, only use one hand – try this 3 times each side.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Eyes shut writing

Make sure each child is set up in a good sitting position, with their preferred pen/pencil and paper. Explain that they are going to be writing with their eyes shut.

Start by writing with eyes open:

- Name
- Alphabet
- A sentence (for example, what you had for breakfast)

Next, repeat with the eyes shut.

How did writing with the eyes shut feel different?

What changed about their writing? Were the letters formed better or worse? What about where on the page the letters were placed?

What information is their vision giving them when they write?

Dictation

Choose a short passage from a book that the children will find interesting. Read it out loud, at a pace that the children can copy it down.

Their work needs to be legible, but does not need to be overly neat. Explain that there is a trade-off between speed and neatness – some work needs to be very neat, and some work needs to be written down quickly, but so it is still readable.

Encourage them to appraise their own work, and that of the person sitting next to them? Can they read what they have written? What about what the person sitting next to them has written? There is a self-assessment form at the back of this book, which they can use to start thinking about how legible their work is.

Week 3: Session 2

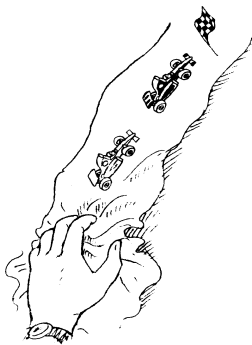
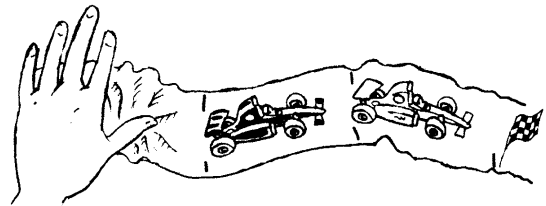
Resources:

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Music and a music player
- Preferred writing paper and pen/pencil

Warm-up:

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Free-writing

This task adds in the demands of composing what to write, rather than copying something that is already there.

Present the children with a suitable (enjoyable!) topic. For creative children, this could be a story or description of something, or a letter to someone. Some children find creative writing more difficult and are better off with a more concrete subject, such as an account of something that happened recently, or a list of some sort. It is important to find a subject that interests each child, to maximise the motivation and reduce the cognitive demands.

You could spend part of this session getting the children to come up with a list of ideas for free-writing, and then using this as a prompt for future free-writing sessions.

It may help to have an egg-timer or clock visible, so that children have an idea of how long they will be writing for.

Start by giving the children one minute to plan what they are going to write. This might be thinking of key words, events or characters. Get them to jot these down on a piece of paper – they could also draw a quick picture if that helps.

Now give them a set number of minutes to write for. You may want to vary this, depending on the age of the children. If you like, you can record how many words they have written in the time available. Notice who keeps writing steadily, who ran out of ideas quickly, who had to stop to stretch their hand.

Week3: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Short piece of writing to copy (passage from a book/photocopied sheet)
- Preferred writing paper and pen/pencil

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy. A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles. These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

Eyes shut writing

Make sure each child is set up in a good sitting position, with their preferred pen/pencil and paper.

Explain that they are going to be writing with their eyes shut.

Start by writing with eyes open:

- Name
- Alphabet
- A sentence (for example, what you had for breakfast)

Next, repeat with the eyes shut.

How did writing with the eyes shut feel different?

What changed about their writing? Were the letters formed better or worse? What about where on the page the letters were placed?

What information is their vision giving them when they write?

Near-point copy

Choose a short passage from an age-appropriate book – make sure each child has a copy/photocopy and that they are able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task.

Week 4: Session 1

Resources:

- Short piece of writing to copy, blown up on a photocopier
- Pens/ pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Stopwatch/ egg-timer (optional)

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
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- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

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- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Eyes shut writing

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Far-point copy

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Make sure each child is able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task and compare this with the near-point copying task. Ask the children which they find more difficult and why they think this is?

Week 4: Session 2

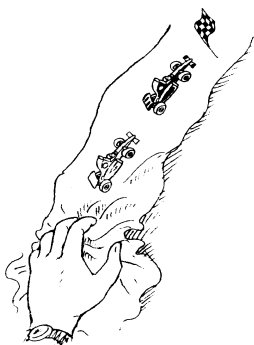
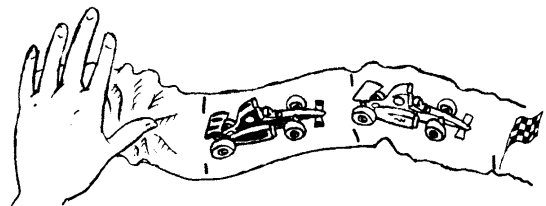
Resources:

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Music and a music player
- Pens/pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Handwriting patterns (see back of booklet)
- Stopwatch/ egg-timer

Warm-up:

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Free-writing

This task adds in the demands of composing what to write, rather than copying something that is already there.

Present the children with a suitable (enjoyable!) topic. For creative children, this could be a story or description of something, or a letter to someone. Some children find creative writing more difficult and are better off with a more concrete subject, such as an account of something that happened recently, or a list of some sort. It is important to find a subject that interests each child, to maximise the motivation and reduce the cognitive demands.

It may help to have an egg-timer or clock visible, so that children have an idea of how long they will be writing for.

Start by giving the children one minute to plan what they are going to write. This might be thinking of key words, events or characters. Get them to jot these down on a piece of paper – they could also draw a quick picture if that helps.

Now give them a set number of minutes to write for. You may want to vary this, depending on the age of the children. If you like, you can record how many words they have written in the time available. Notice who keeps writing steadily, who ran out of ideas quickly, who had to stop to stretch their hand.

Week 4: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Carbon paper (you can use a duplicate book or receipt book if you can't find carbon paper)
- Short passage from a book to read out
- Handwriting paper
- Pens/pencils

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy. A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles. These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

Feel the pressure

Give each child some carbon paper and some pens or pencils. First, try writing so that it shows through as much as possible on the last sheet.

Next, try writing so that it doesn't show through at all.

Try this again, with eyes closed.

- How different does it feel, writing heavily and writing lightly?
- How does it affect how tightly they grip the pencil? How does their hand and arm feel?
- If the heaviest they can write is scored 10 and the lightest they can write is scored 0, how heavily do they think they write normally?
- Does this score change, for example, when trying to write quickly or really neatly?

Dictation

Choose a short passage from a book that the children will find interesting. Read it out loud, at a pace that the children can copy it down.

Their work needs to be legible, but does not need to be overly neat. Explain that there is a trade-off between speed and neatness – some work needs to be very neat, and some work needs to be written down quickly, but so it is still readable.

Encourage them to appraise their own work, and that of the person sitting next to them? Can they read what they have written? What about what the person sitting next to them has written? There is a self-assessment form at the back of this book, which they can use to start thinking about how legible their work is.

Week 5: Session 1

Resources:

- Pens/ pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Handwriting patterns (see back of booklet)
- Short piece of writing to copy (passage from a book/photocopied sheet)

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
- Push palms together
- Pull hands apart
- Link your hands together and circle your wrists, one way then the other
- Make a fist, thumbs up and give them a wiggle
- Touch each finger to your thumb, one at a time, making a big circle.
- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Put your pencil down facing right, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Put your pencil down facing left, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Don't forget, only use one hand – try this 3 times each side.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Eyes-shut patterns

Ask each child to choose a handwriting pattern (see back of booklet).

First, they should copy the handwriting pattern with eyes open. Encourage them to think about the movement their hand is making to form the pattern.

Next, ask them to copy the pattern with their eyes shut.

Repeat, using the same or different patterns, encouraging them to feel the movement of writing.

Near-point copy

Choose a short passage from an age-appropriate book – make sure each child has a copy/photocopy and that they are able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task.

Week 5: Session 2

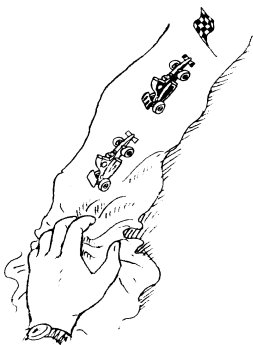
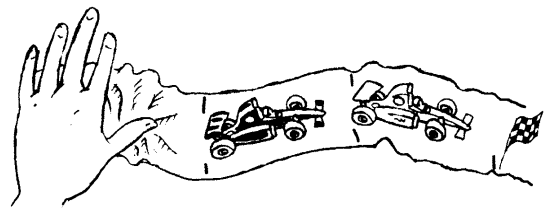
Resources

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Music and a music player
- Short piece of writing to copy (passage from a book/photocopied sheet)
- Pens/ pencils
- Handwriting paper

Warm-up:

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Eyes shut writing

Make sure each child is set up in a good sitting position, with their preferred pen/pencil and paper.

Explain that they are going to be writing with their eyes shut.

Start by writing with eyes open:

- Name
- Alphabet
- A sentence (for example, what you had for breakfast)

Next, repeat with the eyes shut.

How did writing with the eyes shut feel different?

What changed about their writing? Were the letters formed better or worse? What about where on the page the letters were placed?

What information is their vision giving them when they write?

Far-point copy

Choose a short passage from an age-appropriate book – blow this up on a photocopier (or type into Word and print out at a large font size, or display on a large screen) so it can be read easily from about 6 to 8 feet away.

Make sure each child is able to read it.

Encourage the children to check their sitting and paper position.

Using their preferred pen/pencil and paper, copy out the passage. You may want to time this task and compare this with the near-point copying task. Ask the children which they find more difficult and why they think this is?

Week 5: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Carbon paper (you can use a duplicate book or receipt book if you can't find carbon paper)
- Pens/pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Stopwatch/ egg-timer

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy.

A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles.

These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

Feel the pressure

Give each child some carbon paper and some pens or pencils. First, try writing so that it shows through as much as possible on the last sheet.

Next, try writing so that it doesn't show through at all.

Try this again, with eyes closed.

- How different does it feel, writing heavily and writing lightly?
- How does it affect how tightly they grip the pencil? How does their hand and arm feel?
- If the heaviest they can write is scored 10 and the lightest they can write is scored 0, how heavily do they think they write normally?
- Does this score change, for example, when trying to write quickly or really neatly?

Free-writing

This task adds in the demands of composing what to write, rather than copying something that is already there.

Present the children with a suitable (enjoyable!) topic. For creative children, this could be a story or description of something, or a letter to someone. Some children find creative writing more difficult and are better off with a more concrete subject, such as an account of something that happened recently, or a list of some sort. It is important to find a subject that interests each child, to maximise the motivation and reduce the cognitive demands.

It may help to have an egg-timer or clock visible, so that children have an idea of how long they will be writing for.

Start by giving the children one minute to plan what they are going to write. This might be thinking of key words, events or characters. Get them to jot these down on a piece of paper – they could also draw a quick picture if that helps.

Now give them a set number of minutes to write for. You may want to vary this, depending on the age of the children. If you like, you can record how many words they have written in the time available. Notice who keeps writing steadily, who ran out of ideas quickly, who had to stop to stretch their hand.

Week 6: Session 1

Resources:

- Pens/pencils
- Handwriting paper
- Stopwatch

Warm-up:

Arm wake-ups

- Shrug your shoulders to your ears then back down.
- Touch the sky, keeping your shoulders down.
- Touch your shoulders – hand to same shoulder
- Touch your shoulders – hand to opposite shoulder
- Push down on the desk
- Hold your hands out, palm up, then palm down
- Push palms together
- Pull hands apart
- Link your hands together and circle your wrists, one way then the other
- Make a fist, thumbs up and give them a wiggle
- Touch each finger to your thumb, one at a time, making a big circle.
- Shake your hands out – you're ready to begin!

Pencil aerobics

- Hold onto the pencil as if you were going to write – using your fingers only, walk up the pencil! And when you get to the end walk back down. Try this 5 times.
- Put your pencil down facing right, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Put your pencil down facing left, pick it up and be ready to write.
- Don't forget, only use one hand – try this 3 times each side.
- Place your palm facing up with your pencil on it. Roll your pencil from your palm into your fingertips 10 times – using movement of your fingers and wrist only.
- Pick up the pencil so you're ready to write. Draw a dot on the paper. Now, using just that hand, turn the pencil round and rub out the dot. Repeat five times.

Main activities:

Alphabet write

Using the preferred writing paper and pen/pencil, write out the alphabet in lower case for one minute.

How many correctly-sequenced and correctly-formed letters were produced?

Letter lists

Pick a letter and write as many words as you can think of beginning with it in one minute.

Try this with different categories, for example, animals, food, towns, sports, names.

Week 6: Session 2

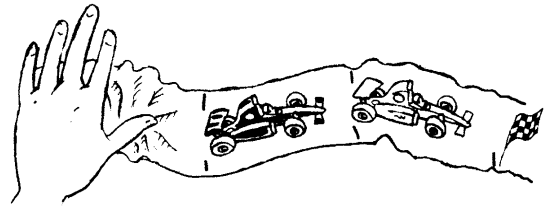
Resources:

- Strips of bandage or cloth
- Music and a music player
- Handwriting paper
- Pens/pencils

Warm-up:

Bandage grab 1

- Use a long thin piece of material such as a bandage. Sit at a table and stretch the material out horizontally (as shown).
- Put your writing hand at one end of the material (right side if right handed, left side if left handed). The palm should be on the table with the fingers resting on the material. Try and gather up the material, tucking it under your hand, using only your thumb and keeping your wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.



Bandage grab 2

- Sitting at a table, place the material in front of you, stretching it out vertically.
- Put your writing hand on the end of the material nearest to them to anchor it. Try to gather up the material, using the fingers of that hand only while keeping the wrist still.
- Complete 5 times; try to increase your speed each time.

Handwriting patterns to music

Give each child a sheet of their preferred paper, their preferred pen or pencil and a sheet of handwriting patterns to copy (see back of booklet).

Put on some music with a discernible beat and encourage the child, first of all to tap along to the music so they have identified the beat, then to complete handwriting patterns in time to the music.

To progress this, encourage the children to complete the patterns in “word-size” chunks rather than a continuous line.

Make sure they try a range of different patterns, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Main activities:

Write a letter

Show the children how to set out a letter correctly. Using their preferred paper and pen, they will write a letter. This could be to a person they know (a family member, friend, teacher), an imaginary person (character in a book or film), or someone famous.

Chat first about who they want to write to and what they might want to include. They may want to plan what to say first, noting down some key words.

Encourage them to write this letter neatly.

Week 6: Session 3

Resources:

- Rubber bands in a range of sizes
- Large sheets of paper and crayons, or whiteboard and markers
- Music and music player (optional)
- Stopwatch
- Copy of the handwriting assessment (see back of this booklet) for each pupil
- Sheets of the normal handwriting paper used in class for each pupil
- Selection of pens, pencils, pen grips

Warm-up:

Rubber band stretch

Place a rubber band around the fingers and thumb. Now slowly stretch the fingers out and then relax them back in. Start with five and then build up to ten. Add extra bands or thicker bands if it is too easy. A loop of playdough can be used instead of rubber bands.



Doodle loops

Using a large piece of paper (on the desk, wall or floor) and some crayons (or a whiteboard and markers), fill the page with loopy doodles. These should be done fast and freely, without too much pressure through the crayon. Encourage the children to feel loose and relaxed in their arm and hand, making sure they aren't gripping the crayon too tightly. Some relaxing music might help!

Main activities:

The programme will conclude with repeating the handwriting speed assessment (see end of the booklet). Follow the instructions on the form.

Encourage the children to think about what improvements they have made since the beginning of the programme. They may want to look back at the handwriting speed assessment they completed at the start of the programme.

This may be improving their speed or legibility, increasing confidence, understanding more about their handwriting, or having found a pen that is comfortable to use.

Reinforce to them that continued practice - 10 to 15 minutes a day - is the best way to keep improving their writing.

6: Handwriting – fluency and legibility

Baseline and outcome assessment

Child's name Date of birth

Class Date of assessment

Fill in this table to rate the child's performance **before** and **after** the block of intervention sessions.

Area of difficulty	Before intervention			After intervention		
	A lot of difficulty	Some difficulty	No difficulty	A lot of difficulty	Some difficulty	No difficulty
Holds pencil in a functional grasp (with/without a pen grip)						
Maintains a good sitting posture for duration of task						
Steadies paper with helper hand						
Consistent letter sizing						
Spacing between words/letters is consistent						
Letters placed on the writing line						
Able to maintain alignment with margin						
Letters formed correctly						
Letters joined correctly						
Legibility of writing						
Clear ascending strokes on b,d,k,t						
Clear descending strokes on g,j,p,q,y						
Consistent slant of ascender and descender strokes						
Able to write with a consistent rhythm						
Appropriate level of pressure (not too light or too heavy)						
Able to complete written work at similar pace to peers						

Advice for administration

<i>Holds pencil in a functional grasp (with/without a pen grip).</i>	<i>Does the child hold their pen or pencil in an efficient, comfortable grasp? It does not have to be a tripod grasp, but it should not be a "fist" grasp or a fingertip grasp.</i>
<i>Maintains a good sitting posture for duration of task</i>	<i>Is the child able to sit straight-on to the desk, and maintain a fairly upright sitting posture, without hooking their feet around the chair legs or falling off the side of their chair?</i>
<i>Steadies paper with helper hand</i>	<i>Does the child use their non-writing hand to keep the paper still when writing?</i>
<i>Consistent letter sizing</i>	<i>In a typical sample of handwriting, is the child performing similarly to their peers in terms of keeping letters the same size?</i>
<i>Spacing between words/ letters is consistent</i>	<i>In a typical sample of handwriting, is the child performing similarly to their peers in terms of spacing between letters and words?</i>
<i>Letters placed on the writing line</i>	<i>In a typical sample of handwriting, are letters placed on the line? Do they consistently sit above or below the line, or is there are a lot of variation?</i>
<i>Able to maintain alignment with the margin</i>	<i>In a typical sample of handwriting, does the writing start in the top left and work across to the right? Does the writing gradually slope away from the margin?</i>
<i>Legibility of writing</i>	<i>Looking at a typical sample of handwriting, how much of it is easily legible?</i>
<i>Clear ascending strokes on b,d,h,k,t</i>	<i>Is the child able to form clear ascenders?</i>
<i>Clear descending strokes on g,j,p,q,y</i>	<i>Is the child able to form clear descenders?</i>
<i>Consistent slant of ascender and descender strokes</i>	<i>Are the strokes of ascenders and descenders consistent in the direction of their slant?</i>
<i>Able to write with a consistent rhythm</i>	<i>Observe the child writing – does their writing flow or is it hesitant, with pauses in letter formation and when joining letters?</i>
<i>Appropriate level of pressure</i>	<i>Does the child press very heavily when writing, or very lightly?</i>
<i>Able to complete written work at similar pace to peers</i>	<i>Is the child noticeably slower than their peers in completing written work?</i>

Session completion record

Child's name

Date of birth

Class

Date of assessment

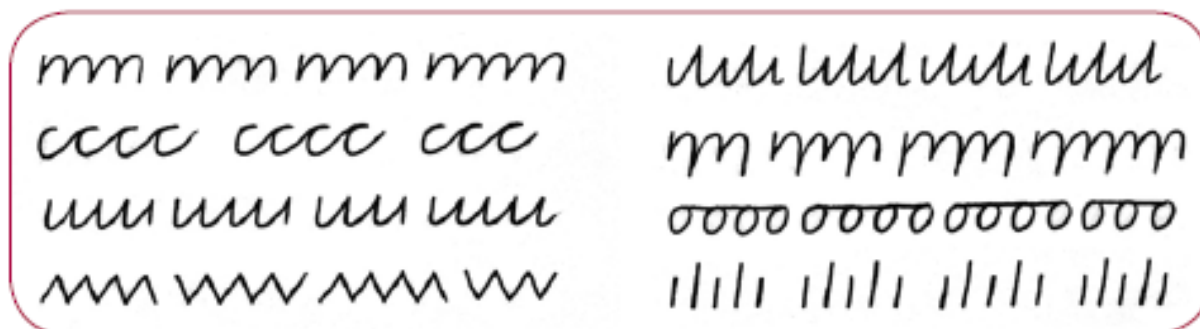
Write in the name of the programme you have carried out with the child and then the date when you carried out each session. If you have carried out additional activities, add these in the final column.

Name of programme					
	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Additional activities?	Comments on performance (difficulties and achievements).
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					
Week 5					
Week 6					

Resources

Handwriting patterns

- You will find plenty of free downloads by searching “handwriting patterns worksheets” or you can draw your own to demonstrate to the children the movement of the patterns.
- Aim for patterns that resemble letters:



- You could also try linking commonly joined letters to form patterns, such as “ch”, “rd”, “oe”, “th”, “ly”, “ing”.

Handwriting paper

- You will find free downloads by searching “handwriting paper free download”, for example:
- <http://www.printablepaper.net/category/penmanship>
- <http://www.donnayoung.org/penmanship/handwriting-paper.htm>
- Some papers are just black lines on a white background, and some have a coloured area for the main body of the letter.
- Experiment with different papers and different line spacings to find one that suits the child.
- Some children like squared maths paper, as this gives them a guide for individual letter size.



Useful information

The **National Handwriting Association** is a very useful source of advice and has some excellent publications aimed at schools, including;

Choosing a handwriting scheme

<http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/publications/publications-summary/choosing-a-handwriting-scheme>

Developing a handwriting policy

<http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/publications/publications-summary/developing-a-handwriting-policy>

Handwriting in the secondary school

<http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk/publications/publications-summary/handwriting-in-the-secondary-school>

Session completion record

Child's name

Date of birth

Class

Date of assessment

Write in the name of the programme you have carried out with the child and then the date when you carried out each session. If you have carried out additional activities, add these in the final column.

Name of programme					
	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Additional activities?	Comments on performance (difficulties and achievements).
Week 1					
Week 2					
Week 3					
Week 4					
Week 5					
Week 6					

Handwriting speed exercise

Print out a copy of the Handwriting Assessment (see next page) sheet for each student. Provide the child with a sheet of paper to write on. This should be the usual paper they use in class.

	Before intervention	After intervention
<p>Alphabet writing. <i>Instruct the student to write out the alphabet in lower case for one minute. If they reach the end of the alphabet, they should begin again and keep going until the time is up.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alphabet - Numbers 1-10 	<p>Number of letters:</p>	<p>Number of letters:</p>
<p>Near-point copying. <i>Instruct the student to copy the sentence on the assessment sheet, which should be placed approximately 3 inches away from the student's paper. They have two minutes to copy it out as many times as possible.</i></p> <p>The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.</p>	<p>Number of letters:</p>	<p>Number of letters:</p>
<p>Composition <i>Instruct child to write about one of the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Friends or family - Pets - Holidays - Birthdays/ Christmas - Favourite music/ computer game/ TV programme - Hobbies / clubs/ activities <p><i>Adjust the amount of time according to the age of the child. For example, a Year 1 or 2 child might only write for 2 minutes, whereas an older child would be expected to write for 5 to 10 minutes.</i></p>	<p>Time period:</p> <p>Number of words:</p>	<p>Time period:</p> <p>Number of words:</p>

- 1) Write out the alphabet in lower case letters. If you reach the end, start again at the beginning until you are told to stop.

- 2) Copy out this sentence in your normal handwriting. If you finish writing the sentence, start again at the beginning until you are told to stop.

The quick brown fox jumps over
the lazy dog.

- 3) Now you are going to write for a few minutes. Choose one of these subjects. If you run out of things to write about that subject, go on to another one. Keep writing until you are told to stop.
 - Friends or family
 - Pets
 - Holidays
 - Birthdays/ Christmas
 - Favourite music/ computer game/ TV programme
 - Hobbies / clubs/ activities

Handwriting self-assessment checklist

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Before writing	Yes	No
I feel comfortable with the chair and table		
I sit correctly		
I position the paper correctly		
I hold the pen/pencil correctly		
I steady the paper with the other hand		

During and after writing	Yes	No
I form the letters correctly		
The letters sit correctly on the line		
The tall letters are the correct height		
The letters with tails are the correct length		
The mid-zone letters (for example, a,c,e,i,m, etc) are the same size		
The slant of my letters is regular		
The spacing between my letters is even		
The spacing between my words is even		
The letters with curves are nicely rounded		
I use capital letters correctly		
The horizontal joins are correct		
The diagonal joins are correct		
I form the numbers correctly		