

THE THERA-PARENT'S GUIDE TO TEACHING HANDWRITING

1. The correct sitting posture needs to be taught.

“The shoulders should be at the same height and the shoulder line should be parallel to the front edge of the desk.

The back may be arched, but the chest may under no circumstances press against the desk or table.

The head can be slanted slightly in order to facilitate the view of the writing surface, but should not be turned sideways.

Both eyes should be more or less 30 cm from the writing surface.

Legs should not be crossed.

Feet should be flat on the floor and should not be pushed forward or backwards”

(The SAOU manual for teaching handwriting, October 2008)

2. The correct position of the arms and hands needs to be taught.

“It is important that the pupil should sit keeping his shoulders level and parallel to the desk. To do this he must place both forearms, almost to the elbows, lightly on the desk. In other words, the less active arm must take up a comfortable position similar to that of the writing arm to equalise the muscle contraction across the shoulders and back. The function of the left hand is to move the exercise book as required for maximum ease for the right hand.”

(The primary school course: syllabus and guide for handwriting, Western Cape in the 1990s)

3. The correct position of the writing book needs to be taught.

Books need to be turned so that the forearm of the writing hand is at right angles to the bottom of the page. The direction in which books should be turned will depend on whether the child is right or left handed. With regards to the right handed child, the top left-hand corner of the page should be more or less in line with the left eye so that the child crosses the midline of his body at the start of each line.

As writing proceeds down the page, the book should be gradually moved up so that there is sufficient support for the writing arm. With regards to the left-handed child, the top right-hand corner of the writing paper should be in line with the middle of the body. The right hand rests on the paper and moves it upward as the page becomes full. The left handed child does not cross the midline of the body when he is writing.

The fingers should be below the line that the child is writing on so that the hand can easily flow across the page, at the same time as enabling the efficient use of the fingers in writing. The forearm should remain in light contact with the desk and move fluently across the page as the child is writing. This requires good shoulder girdle stability. Many children either lift their forearms off the table or lean heavily on them. Fluent, efficient writing at speed requires the child to move their forearms across the page, at the same time as using their fingers to produce the letters.

4. The best pencil grip for the specific child needs to be taught

Why is a good pencil grip important?

“If children are to develop a fluent and fast handwriting style, they must learn to hold a pencil with a grip that is relaxed but allows for efficient control of the pencil. If children grip a pencil too tightly, they won’t develop a free-flowing movement and they will tire very quickly. Experts agree that children should be encouraged to hold the pencil between the thumb and forefinger with the pencil resting on the third finger. The thumb and forefinger should also be able to move slightly so that very fine movements required for writing are possible”

(The National Literacy Strategy, Developing early writing. Department for Education and Employment, London).

5. Learners need to be taught the correct size of letters in relation to each other.

Children need to learn that the ‘body’ of the descenders (g, j, p, q, y), the bits which sit on the line, are the same height as the x letter (a, c, e, i, m, n, o, r, s, u, v, w, x, z). The t is shorter than the other ascenders b, d, h, k, l, and f. Capitals are the same size as the ascenders.

6. Learners need to be taught how to form the letters, the starting point, size, shape, and direction of movement. Later, they need to be taught how to join letters.

7. Spacing between letters and words needs to be taught.

The usual technique is to use a finger space between words, when children are first learning to write. However, left-handed children need to have a spacer, such as a piece of cardboard cut to the correct size, as it is difficult for them to write over the finger of their right hand. As children get older, they should be taught to leave enough space for the letter o, in-between words.

8. Focus should be on correct posture/ pencil grip/ paper positioning/ movement patterns/ letter formation above neatness, initially.

9. Writing patterns and drawing should be encouraged as often as possible, using the correct posture/pencil grip/paper positioning/movement patterns.

10. Strengthening of muscles and improving co-ordination should be done.