

## Cursive Writing

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

*Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:*

- Handwriting

### Cursive Writing from the Beginning

Young children love to make marks and to see themselves as capable and competent writers. They use letters, words, numbers, signs, pictures, colours, and shapes to give and record information and to describe and to make sense of their own and others' experiences. Along with supporting children's emergent writing through pretend play, the teacher has a key role in planning and teaching a structured approach to developing

children's handwriting.

Fluency is an important goal in teaching handwriting and cursive (joined) writing helps to fulfil that goal as it involves a continuous, natural left to right movement.

With cursive writing, words are written in an unbroken movement similar to children's continuous pre-writing patterns. Spaces are used mainly to separate one word from another. Instead of learning print first and cursive later, children can be supported to learn the cursive style from the outset – which supports them to focus on other aspects of literacy development as they progress through primary school.

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### Fine Motor Skills

Fine motor skills are essential for children to form letters. These skills include both an ability to control the small muscles of the body and to co-ordinate the actions of the eyes

and hands (hand-eye co-ordination). Children need motor control to form patterns and letter shapes, and they also need perceptual skills for letter size, spacing and orientation.

Just as is the case with gross motor skills (large muscle movements such as crawling, walking, running, jumping, swinging, throwing, kicking and skipping), children develop fine motor skills at different times. Teachers need to model these skills and provide daily opportunities for children to practise and develop them as a first step to developing handwriting.

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### *Fine motor skills and children with SEN*

Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) may encounter difficulties with gross or fine motor skills, or both. For some children, sensory processing difficulties may result in delays in reaching particular progression steps. Ensuring children have upper-body stability and have both hands free are important measures in supporting them to complete a fine motor task. Planning and organising regular, engaging activities in short, snappy sessions provides time for children to process, consolidate and improve their skills. Providing practice on vertical or sloped surfaces will also benefit children.

### Teaching Cursive Writing

#### *Transition into conventional writing*

Providing adequate time and space for children to explore and enjoy the transition into conventional writing are key to children developing positive dispositions toward writing. Opportunities for pretend play, and for drawing and writing using different mark-making/tracing materials such as crayon, paint, sand and shaving foam, are important for children to engage in meaningful early writing experiences. In planning and teaching for cursive writing, the teacher provides opportunities for children:



- To develop **fine motor skills** using a range of hand exercises, involving imaginary activities. A list of activities is provided below.
- To practise **basic handwriting movements** such as vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines, intersecting lines to make a cross or an 'x', and shapes such as a circle (clockwise and anti-clockwise), a square and a triangle.
- To experiment, practise and improve **new pattern movements**.
- To practise **over-curve and under-curve** movements. Size, uniformity and slant come later.

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- To understand the **rationale for the various pattern exercises**, such as the anti-clockwise circular movement for the letters a, c, d, g, q and o.
- To **practise and copy letters**, with modelling and examples from the teacher.
- To introduce ‘cursive writing’ in Junior Infants by showing the child how to **‘lead in and out’ of letters**, e.g., the flick at the end of a letter, to create separate but flowing letters.

In Stage 1, it is important for the teacher to balance open-ended activities which foster a positive disposition toward writing, along with more systematic modelling and teaching of correct letter formation.

In Stage 2, children can begin to join their letters, in line with the school’s Literacy policy as part of their School Self Evaluation.

### Pencil Grip

The **pincer grip** involves lifting and holding objects between the thumb and index finger. For young children, the pincer grip replaces the **palmar grip**, i.e., holding an object (such as a baby’s rattle) in the palm and wrapping fingers around it. The goal of children’s early writing is the **tripod grasp** – the ability to hold a pencil with the tip of the thumb and index finger and to rest the pencil against the side of the third finger.

A faulty pencil grip can become more difficult to correct the longer it progresses. For older children, poor pencil grip impacts when the volume of writing increases, and can lead to tiredness as well as slow/poor letter formation. Children who have difficulty forming the tripod grasp, despite having plenty opportunities to do so, may require specialist assistance from an occupational therapist.

### Posture

Developing good posture for writing is as important as a correct pencil grip. Good posture provides

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upper-body stability which is essential for good mobility of the arms, wrists, hands and fingers. For writing, children should be seated with both feet on the floor at a desk of appropriate height (a desk too high or too low could affect pencil pressure). Children use their non-writing hand, which also bears some body weight, to steady their paper.

### SUPPORTING LEFT-HANDED CHILDREN WITH THEIR WRITING

- Place the paper to the left of the body.
- Angle the paper.
- Ensure there is enough space (and that the child is not obstructed by a right-handed child).
- Help the child to hold the pencil further up from the point.

### Hand Dominance

By the age of four, most children will have developed a clear hand preference, i.e., **hand dominance**. The dominant hand develops expertise in performing tasks while the non-dominant hand assists, e.g., cutting paper with a scissors. However, just as there are some children who may not have reached this stage, there are others who may be

### ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP FINE MOTOR SKILLS

#### Finger and Hand Exercises

- Bend and straighten your fingers. Fan-out and then close your fingers.
- Flick each finger away from your thumb.
- Clap your hands and ‘clap’ your fingertips.
- Make a ‘circle’ (pincer) shape by joining your thumb and first finger in each hand. Interlock both ‘circles’ and pull.
- Place your hand on the desk (palm facing downwards) and raise each finger in turn.
- Place your hand on the desk (palm facing upwards) and raise each finger in turn to touch your thumb.
- Rotate your thumb around each finger-tip (clockwise and anticlockwise).

#### Imaginative Approaches

- Use your fingers as a scissors to cut some string.
- Play the drums on your desk.
- Play piano in the air and on the desk.
- Stir the porridge quickly and slowly.
- Wring-out the wet clothes.
- Put on and remove your gloves.
- Turn the front-door key using your thumb, first and middle fingers.

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quite proficient using both hands (ambidextrous). The non-writing arm/hand should be steadying the paper and also bearing some body weight.

Many left-handed people write with their hand above what they write and, in order to see their writing, may develop a hook which can range from insignificant to quite severe. People who are right-handed write in a movement away from the body, while left-handed children write towards the body.

### Monitoring Development of Cursive Writing

The following pointers may be useful in monitoring and supporting children's development of cursive writing:

- Posture
- Upper-body stability
- Fine motor skills
- Pencil-grip
- Pencil pressure
- Paper position
- Ability to trace/copy
- Letter formation
- Leading in/out
- Letters properly rounded
- Spacing of letters/words
- Slant of letters
- Uniform letter size
- Position of letters on the line
- Speed of writing

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