

Patterns for Handwriting

LEARNING OUTCOMES

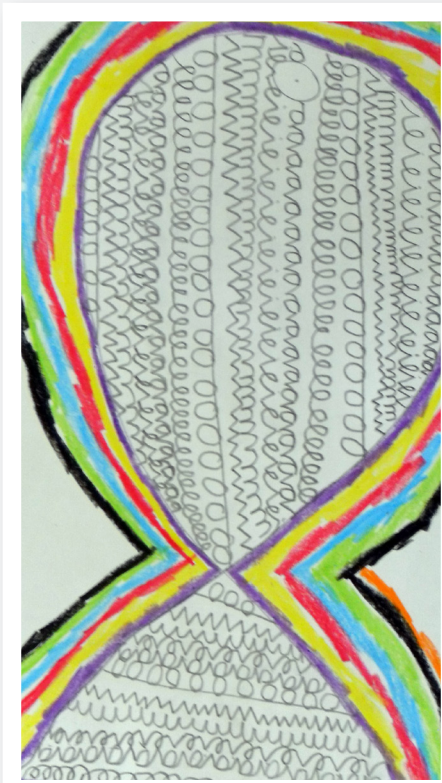
Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Engagement
- Motivation and choice
- Handwriting

Patterns and Handwriting

Patterns are wonderful teaching tools and can be useful at each stage of teaching handwriting. Patterns can help children to learn essential skills for writing in an enjoyable way. When making patterns, children repeat movements that are similar to those needed for letters without the anxiety of completing a letter correctly. The repetitive nature

of patterns emphasises the rhythmic movement which we aim for when writing. Patterns can also be helpful with developing the skills of older children.



The Benefits of Patterns

Writing patterns can help children in many ways:

1. As a **warm-up** activity for handwriting – developing their fine motor and perceptual skills.
2. To learn about the **correct position of the body** and **how to hold a writing tool**. It can be easier for children to concentrate on the movement and placement of their body and hands while performing a repetitive pattern than when writing normally.
3. To create **rhythm and fluency**. Children may become over-anxious and tense when writing. Patterns can be relaxing and this rhythmic flow can feed across to more complex writing.
4. To reduce **pencil pressure**. Learning how to write lightly when forming patterns is helpful when writing letters.

Blank paper is preferable to lined paper when children are beginning to create and practise patterns.

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5. To learn **directional sequences and movements**, e.g., top to bottom, left to right, clockwise and anti-clockwise rotation.

6. To maintain **consistency of size**. A pattern that alternates long and short strokes can reinforce the relationship between the ascenders and the x-height letters (a, c, e, u, v, etc.) and letters that are frequently made too large or too small can be paired with another.

7. To **practise a letter shape** or a join that is difficult for children.

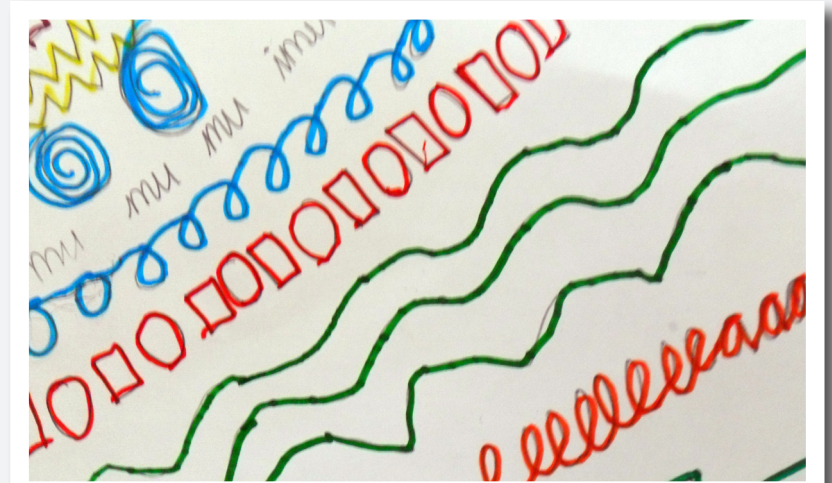
8. To **keep letters on the line**. Making a pattern on a ruled line can reinforce this

characteristic of good writing that some children find difficult.

9. To maintain **consistency of slant**. Writing looks better and is easier to read if the down-strokes are parallel. This is easier to practise when writing a pattern such as *ululu*.

10. To gradually increase **speed and fluency**, especially as children become more confident with writing

In the early primary years, when practising linking patterns, encourage children to write about 3-5 shapes, then lift their writing tool. It can be difficult to create long lines of continuously linked forms/strokes.



Patterns for Handwriting



Ideas for Patterns

There are many resources that provide ideas for pattern-making. Programmes are available that focus on one or two specific benefits of pattern making. For example, programmes that help children to create patterns to music, use patterns to learn letter formation, and use patterns to increase speed and fluency.



Early writing patterns

Patterns give young children experience of movements and shapes that will both develop their motor skills and build their confidence.



Early patterns can include

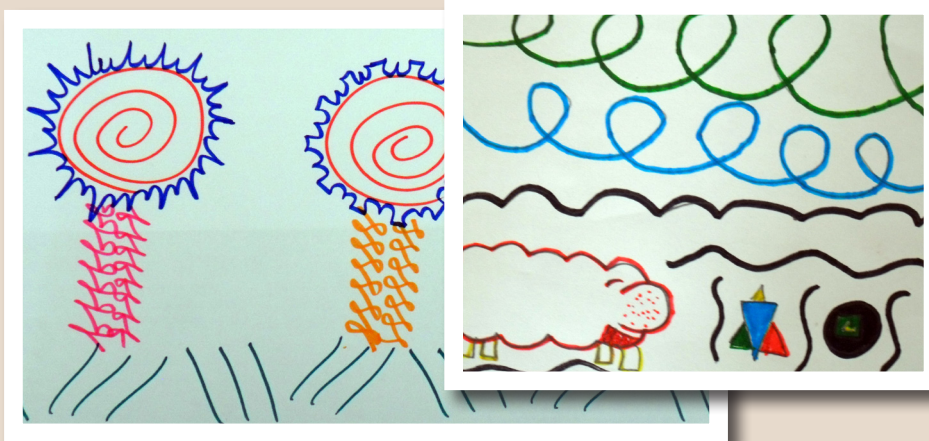
- straight lines, both up and down
- side to side and diagonal
- zig-zags
- simple circles in both directions
- concentric circles beginning at the centre or the outer edge
- dots
- spirals that wind outwards or inwards
- upward loops or garlands
- downward loops or arcades
- figures of eight, both vertical and horizontal.

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Supporting Early Writing Patterns

- Encourage children to **have fun** with making patterns and introduce different ideas one at a time, e.g., moving left to right, up and down.
- Provide a wide **variety of materials** for children to use when making patterns.
- Create pattern-making opportunities as part of **group**

projects, play or art work. For example, make patterns with **objects** (pasta shapes, shells, wool, thread, playdough), **movements** (moving in different ways together, making patterns in sand with **fingers**, footprints) and different **writing tools** (chalk in the playground, paint printers).



- For younger children, teachers can provide **basic shapes** that can be filled with patterns, e.g., the teacher might provide circle shapes on paper which the children can use to design and create wrapping paper for the shop in the socio-dramatic play area. Make the outline big enough to allow for pattern-making and small enough to ensure the children do not find it too repetitive.
- When the patterns are made with **writing tools**, encourage children who are ready to hold their pencils or pens with an **efficient grip** (ideally, the tool

is held between thumb and forefinger with the side of the middle finger completing the tripod). Younger children may still use a less mature pencil hold.

- Adding lots of **colour** to patterns provides more appeal. Felt-tipped pens need little pressure and can be useful when encouraging gentle pencil pressure. Gel pens are very effective on dark coloured paper.



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Patterns Supporting Letter Formation

Children who have experienced early pattern-making can be introduced to specific patterns that mimic the movements needed for writing letters. Making patterns the same size as a child's expected writing will be helpful. Some suggestions for patterns connected to letter formation are provided below.

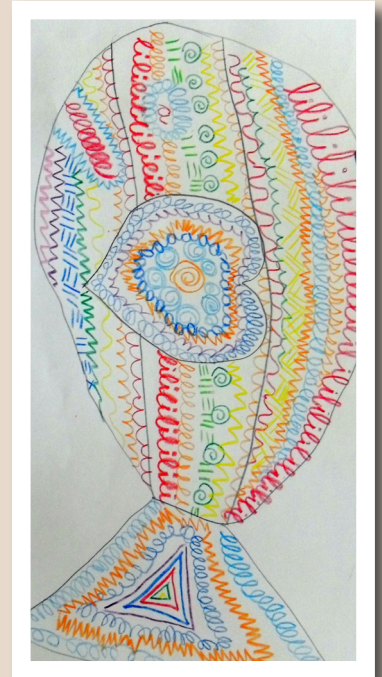
- **Arches or bridges** made with points at the base mimic the springing movement used in the letters **r, b, n, m, h, k, p**.
- **Loops or garlands** made with points at the top are good preparation for writing the letters **l, t, u, y**.
- **Circles** made in an anti-clockwise direction are good preparation for making the letters **c, a, d, g, q, s**.

Provide children in infant classes with **lots of opportunities** to practise patterns, preferably on widely-spaced, single-lined paper and using pencils, crayons or felt tips.

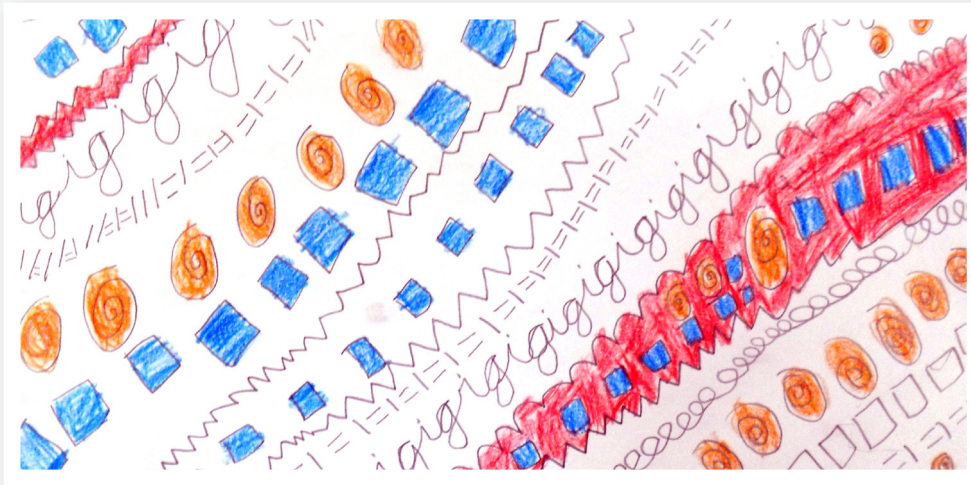
As children progress they can begin to **combine patterns** to form more intricate designs and textures. For example, lines of patterns can be fitted together to make dragon scales or waves.

Creating a **patterned border** around a page of writing or a drawing is a useful warm-up exercise for handwriting with older students.

Designing a **picture using patterns or repeated words** as textures can be linked to the text to ensure more relevance. These can almost become visual poetry if the words are well chosen to fit the area to be filled: perhaps 'scudding clouds' or 'crashing waves'.



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Cursive Script

Patterns are ideal for the development of cursive script. Pattern-making can be used to teach children the movements essential for making single letters and then much of the knowledge and skills needed for joining letters.

Practising the different join patterns helps children to prepare for joining letters. Children can then progress to making patterns from pairs of letters, perhaps those that require particular attention or a group of similarly-shaped letters, e.g., **adada** or using a child's initials.

Patterning is a useful handwriting practice that, once taught, can be continued by children in those occasional free minutes in a school day.

Remember to ensure children keep a balance between control and fluency as they progress.

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References

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The drawings and writing examples included in this Support Material were produced by pupils of Kilrickle N.S., Loughrea, Co Galway.