

Suggestions for teaching Joined Handwriting

Good handwriting is an essential skill in the quest to spell and write fluently, confidently and competently. A joined handwriting style links kinaesthetic 'muscle memory' with the relationship between the sounds of our speech and with the letter shapes, letter groupings and whole written words. The ability to write neatly also provides a motivating factor in the production of written work.

Pencil or pen hold – and posture

Teach the traditional 'tripod' pencil hold. To make this skill child-friendly, say, “**Put your froggy legs** [*thumb and forefinger*] **on the bottom of the painted part of the pencil** [*not on the cone-shaped end part*] **with the pencil across the frog's back** [*back of the hand*], **then put the log under the frog**” [*middle finger supporting the pencil to complete the tripod grip*].

Emphasise the need for good sitting posture. The 'writing hand' should rest lightly on the paper **below** the words being written so that the words are not obscured. The paper may be tilted slightly to the right (for right-handers) or to the left (for left-handers).

Handwriting style

The style promoted here is an 'all-joined' style with two types of join - a '**diagonal join**' which starts with the pencil point on the writing line and a '**washing line join**'. The letters 'f', 'g', 'j' and 'y' have descenders which, “...**go straight down through the writing line with thin loops...**” and continue to form the diagonal join to the following letter.

Demonstrate the two joins by drawing two separate squares sitting on a writing line to 'half height'. In one square draw a **straight** line from the bottom left corner to the top right corner to form the 'diagonal line join'. In the other square, draw a **curved** line from the top left corner to the top right corner to form the 'washing line join'. The diagonal join is taught as a straight line at first to ensure good spacing between the letters, but over time and with increasing fluency the diagonal join naturally becomes slightly curved.

The joins are very important for spacing letters evenly and learners need to understand that there must be a clear 'join' between all the letter shapes. Learners are taught which part of each letter is the actual letter shape and which part of the letter is 'the join'. At first, all lower case letters are taught as discrete (separate) shapes starting with the pencil point '**on the line**' to form the diagonal lead-in stroke or 'leader' [see the examples below]. This style is not taught by writing long letter strings.

Not only are learners taught to form each letter shape to fluency, they are also taught to **think** carefully about the letters they write and the joins they need. This engagement with the mechanics of the writing style instead of just mindlessly copying strings of letter shapes results in learners proceeding rapidly to joining any words they wish to write independently.

All upper case, or capital, letters are simple 'print' letter shapes which do not join other letters. Teach that capital letters start '**from the top**' - that is, from just below the upper writing line. When writing a whole word which requires a capital letter at the beginning, a small space is left after the capital letter and the second [lower case] letter starts '**on the line**' and all subsequent letters in the word are joined.

The order of teaching the lower case letter shapes

It is most important to teach the letters which start like the letter 'c' to fluency before the other letters. Teach, “**Start on the line, diagonal join, then hook over, back and round**” for the letter 'c'. For the subsequent letters which start like 'c', describe and model how to, “...**catch the hook...**”.

c	a	d	g	o	s	qu	f
l	t		h	b	k		e
r	n	m	p		i	j	
u	y		v	w	x		z