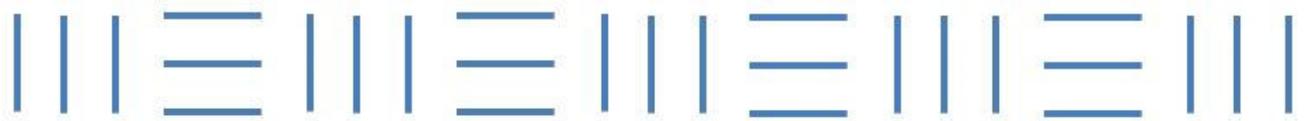




# EFFECTIVE HANDWRITING



Extracts from the  
Teacher's Handbook



First edition

## EXTRACTS FROM THE TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

# Pages 1-6, 8-9, 19, 22, 26-27

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Handbook is to give teachers a clear overview of some key areas in relation to the effective teaching of handwriting. In order to do this I have tried to make things as short as practicable and have used images wherever possible to support the text.

I assume the reader wants to learn about the effective teaching of handwriting and believes in teaching handwriting. Therefore I am not entering into a debate about whether or not handwriting is a necessary skill in the modern world. It is!

It does seem that the teaching of handwriting has been neglected in English schools for some time. This may be due to all sorts of things, including the fact that handwriting was not a prominent part of the National Literacy Strategy. Whilst good things came from the NLS<sup>1</sup>, it could be argued that the dissemination of techniques and knowledge pertinent to equipping teachers with the ability to teach handwriting were not among any of the NLS's lasting benefits.

In 2006 the Institute of Education carried out some research into the teaching of handwriting. The result was a report titled *Handwriting Policy and Practice in English Primary Schools* (Anna Barnett, 2006). The blurb promoting the report says:

*For many years, handwriting has been the "Cinderella skill" of literacy. Unless children are taught to write legibly and at speed, however, their educational achievements may be considerably reduced and their self-esteem affected. The ability to handwrite legibly is not an optional extra; it is essential for everyone even in this age of computer technology.*

Key findings from the report included:

- More than half of the teachers interviewed at 39 schools in south-east England said they had not received enough training in the area.
- Two-thirds of teachers had not been shown how to teach handwriting during their initial training.
- Less than half of schools set aside time for practice.

By 2011 the situation did not seem to have improved. A Daily Telegraph article (Paton, 2011) reported Professor Carey Jewitt, from London University's Institute of Education, as saying that students' handwriting skills were "absolutely appalling", adding that many failed to get the practice they needed at home or in the classroom.

It is common sense that if children cannot write effortlessly, then they may choose not to write at all. Handwriting is a skill that needs to be systematically taught in an informed manner. There are many reasons for this, not least to ensure every child has the power to communicate through writing regardless of technology.

*Greg. Walla*

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<sup>1</sup> National Literacy Strategy

Some people seem to think that handwriting is redundant and not worth teaching any more. This is not true. It is still an important, if not vital, skill worldwide.

There are times when a typed letter is inappropriate and you want something more personal. You want something special. We all know the feeling when an envelope arrives and you recognize the hand of a much-loved friend or relative. There are so many reasons for keeping up handwriting and acquiring a satisfactory personal script.

Rosemary Sassoon,

**Improve Your Handwriting**

(Sassoon, 2011)

## PROGRESSION IN HANDWRITING

### The pre-2014 English National Curriculum

So what are the key steps that children need to master in order to develop good handwriting?  
The pre-2014 English National Curriculum Attainment Target level descriptors are shown below.

Level	Attainment Target descriptor
<b>1</b>	Letters are usually clearly shaped and correctly orientated.
<b>2</b>	Letters are accurately formed and consistent in size.
<b>3</b>	Handwriting is joined and legible.
<b>4</b>	Handwriting style is fluent, joined and legible.
<b>5</b>	Handwriting is joined, clear and fluent and, where appropriate, is adapted to a range of tasks.

The ATs<sup>2</sup> were not intended to tell teachers how to teach, they were about assessment. The ATs for handwriting conformed to a logical view of progression in handwriting. The table below expresses the one above in a different way.

Level	Formation	Consistent size	Joining	Legibility	Fluency and speed	Range of styles
<b>1</b>						
<b>2</b>						
<b>3</b>						
<b>4</b>						
<b>5</b>						

It is worth trying to remember this broad sequence of progression. In other words, remembering that formation is the first key step, consistent size of letters the next and so on.

Once you have mastered this then all the associated issues need to be considered. For example, prior to teaching letter formation in Reception and Year 1, should preparatory work on relevant handwriting patterns be undertaken? If so, what are these patterns and how do they link to letter formation?

<sup>2</sup> Attainment Targets - ATs

At Level 2, when the AT says 'Letters are accurately formed and consistent in size' – what does this mean? Does it mean spacing is also accurate? And if so, what kind of spacing? A finger space? How does this work if a child is left-handed?

## The 2014 English National Curriculum

The 2014 curriculum moved away from the idea of ATs and accompanying 'programmes of study'.

The curriculum for handwriting is reproduced below.

### Year 1

Pupils should be taught to:	Notes and guidance (non-statutory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly</li> <li>• begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place</li> <li>• form capital letters</li> <li>• form digits 0-9</li> <li>• understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' (i.e. letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these</li> </ul>	<p>Handwriting requires frequent and discrete, direct teaching. Pupils should be able to form letters correctly and confidently. The size of the writing implement (pencil, pen) should not be too large for a young pupil's hand. Whatever is being used should allow the pupil to hold it easily and correctly so that bad habits are avoided.</p> <p>Left-handed pupils should receive specific teaching to meet their needs.</p>

### Year 2

Pupils should be taught to:	Notes and guidance (non-statutory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another</li> <li>• start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined</li> <li>• write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower case letters</li> <li>• use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters.</li> </ul>	<p>Pupils should revise and practise correct letter formation frequently. They should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.</p>

## Years 3 and 4

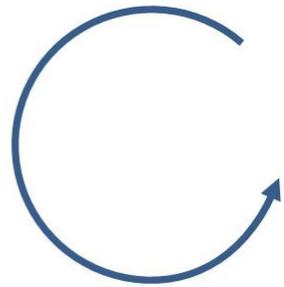
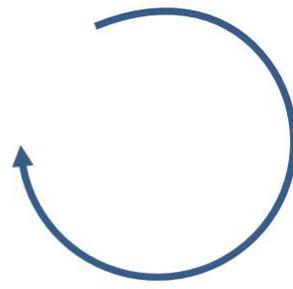
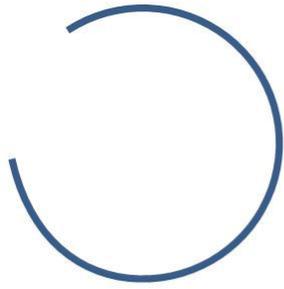
Pupils should be taught to:	Notes and guidance (non-statutory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined</li><li>• increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting [for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch]</li></ul>	Pupils should be using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing. Handwriting should continue to be taught, with the aim of increasing the fluency with which pupils are able to write down what they want to say. This, in turn, will support their composition and spelling.

## Years 5 and 6

Pupils should be taught to:	Notes and guidance (non-statutory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ choosing which shape of a letter to use when given choices and deciding whether or not to join specific letters</li><li>○ choosing the writing implement that is best suited for a task</li></ul></li></ul>	Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task, for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an unjoined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra and capital letters, for example, for filling in a form.

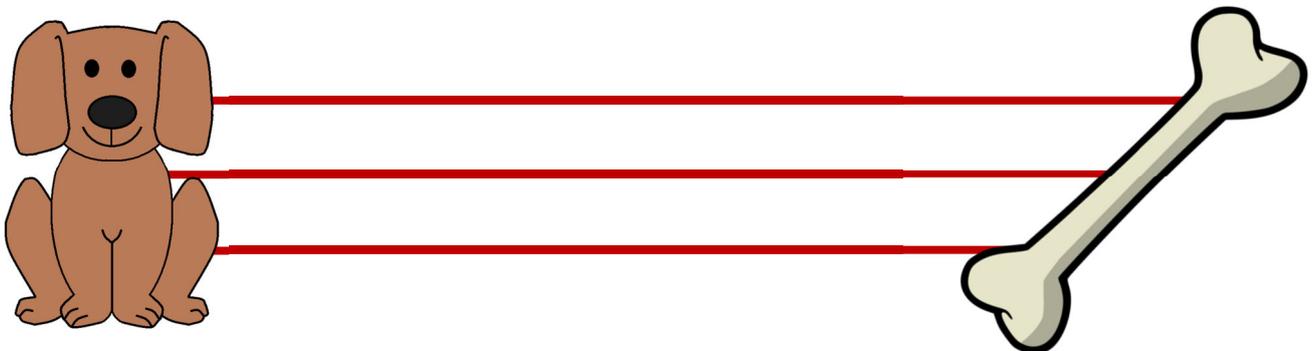
It could be said that removing the two elements of the previous National Curriculum (ie ATs and Programmes of Study) will make it easier for teachers to have a clearer, more detailed, overview of the necessary progression. The 2014 curriculum is not radically different from what preceded it – although it might be argued that expectations are now higher. One example of this could be in Year 2.

The key point about any kind of effective teaching is that the teacher knows the progression and knows when to use this to inform teaching. The best teachers link what they teach to the needs of the children. They do this through thorough, accurate assessment. The 2014 curriculum states that Year 2 children should 'start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters'. But remember, in spite of this, that there is not much point in trying to teach joining, 'the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters', if a child cannot form the letters.

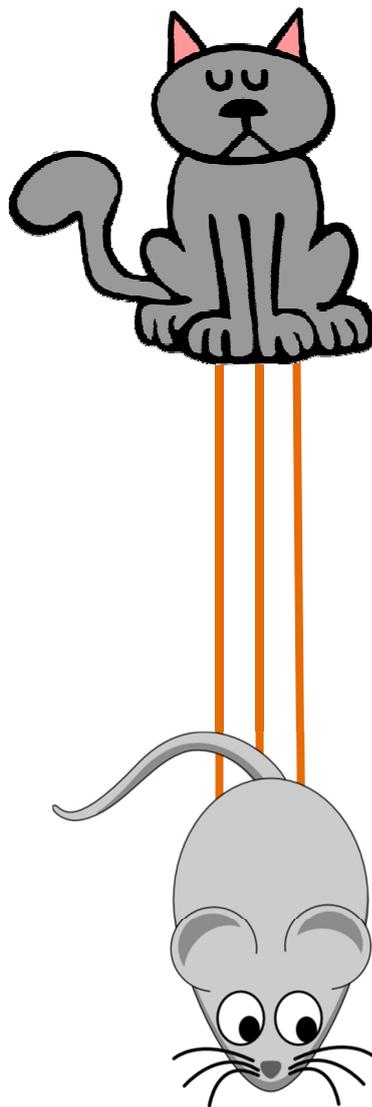


With very young children, you may want provide some kind of context for the pattern making. For example, the left to right line pattern might be practised by connecting linked items, as shown below. Some other simple examples follow the left to right pattern.

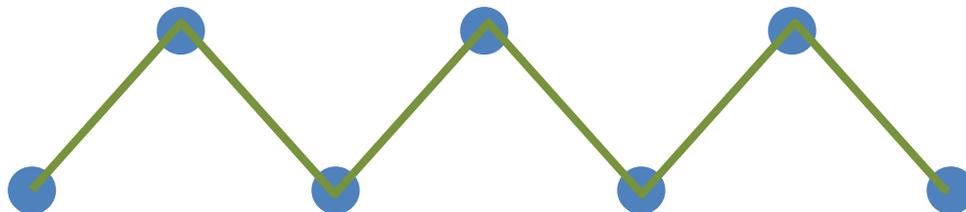
*Left to right line patterns*



*Top to bottom line patterns*



*Up and down zigzag patterns*



## Teaching slant/slope

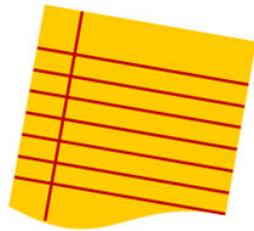
Slanting our handwriting can help us to write more quickly. It is generally suggested that the slant should be slightly to the right.

However, this can be tricky for left-handed children.

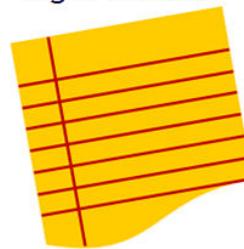
Children should be encouraged to slant the paper as shown below.

*How much should writing slant?  
Which way?*

Left-handed

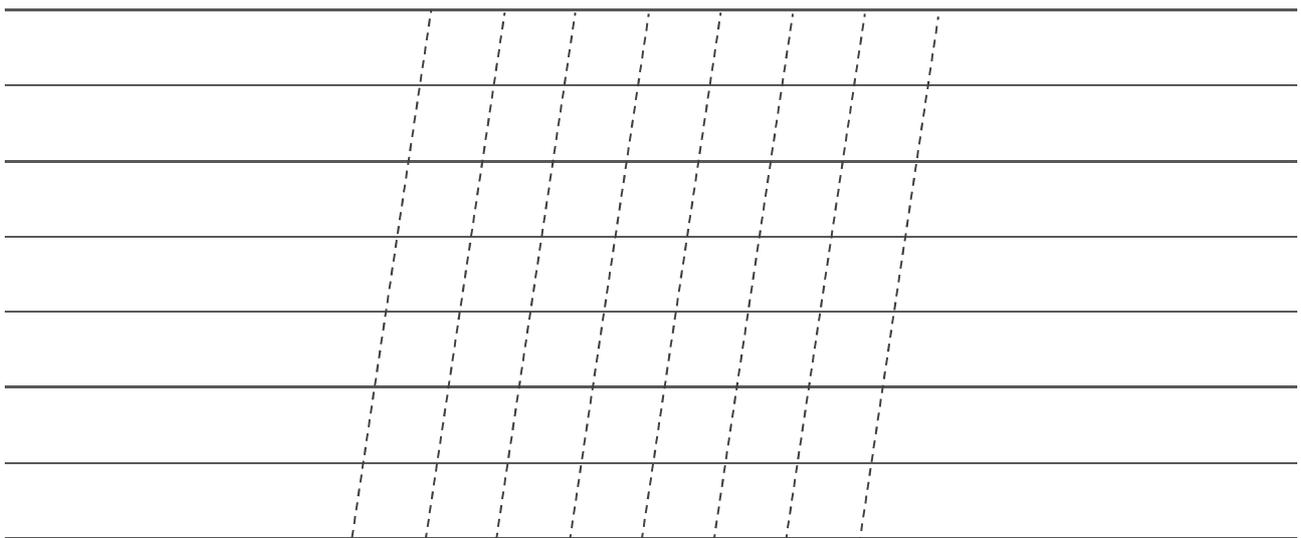


Right-handed

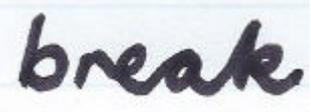


Opinion varies as to how much writing should slant – as well as to the direction in which it should slant. Probably somewhere between  $5^\circ$  and  $10^\circ$  is ideal. By the time you reach  $20^\circ$  the slant will probably be too much to facilitate easy reading and may be distorting the letters.

It is probably a good idea to encourage a slope of between  $5^\circ$  and  $10^\circ$  to the right of vertical. The lines below are at  $8^\circ$ .



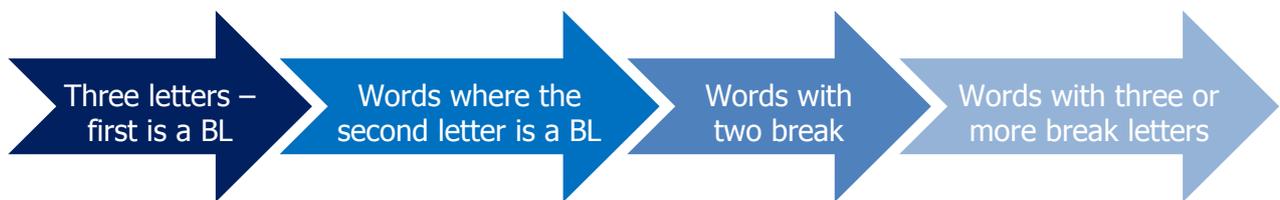
Effective Handwriting recommends the use of break letters. Break letters can prevent a backward pen movement. In some scripts where break letters are not break letters, ie they are joined, the letters look less-familiar. However, the most important factors of all are consistency, legibility and ease of formation.

'b' as a break letter	'b' joined, causing a re-tracing movement	'b' in a less-familiar shape so it can be joined
		

### Introducing children to break letters

Think carefully about the sequence you will use when you want children to practise break letters.

The following sequence may be helpful.



#### *Three letters, where the first is a break letter*

So, initially, the 'pattern' to practise is one where the first letter does not join (because it is a break letter) but the following two letters do join.

You can use the following words for this purpose. (NB These words have been chosen based on the break letters used by Nelson Handwriting. They will need adapting if you use a different combination of break letters.)

Three letter words starting with 'b' where letters two and three join	bad bag ban bar bat bay bed beg bet bid big bin bit bow box boy bud bug bun bus but buy
Three letter words starting with 'g' where letters two and three join	gap gas gel gem get got gum gut guy
Three letter words starting with 'j' where letters two and three join	jab jam jar jaw jet jig job jog jot joy jug jut
Three letter words starting with 'p'	pad pal pat paw pay pea peg pen pet pie pig pin pip pit pod pop pot put

## Work scrutiny form

This work scrutiny form can also be adapted by managers to use when observing handwriting lessons. Individual teachers can use it to self-assess their own teaching of handwriting.

<b>Teacher:</b>	
<b>Date of observation/coaching:</b>	
<b>Observation/coaching carried out by:</b>	

### Key targets from previous observations and coaching (ie the 'next steps')

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### Progress

<b>1</b>	Children in your class are making exceptional progress with their handwriting.	
	Many children in your class are making exceptional progress with their handwriting.	
	Children in your class are making very good progress with their handwriting.	
<b>2</b>	Many children in your class are making very good progress with their handwriting.	
	Children in your class are making good progress with their handwriting.	
	Many children in your class are making good progress with their handwriting.	
<b>3</b>	Children in your class are making pleasing progress with their handwriting.	
	Children in your class are generally making pleasing progress with their handwriting.	
	Children in your class are beginning to make pleasing progress with their handwriting.	
<b>4</b>	Ensuring children make progress in handwriting is an area that needs to be addressed with a greater sense of urgency.	
	Children are not making enough progress in handwriting.	

### Handwriting patterns

<b>1</b>	The teaching of handwriting patterns is outstanding. Both you and the children take great pride in accuracy and presentation.	
	Handwriting patterns are being taught very effectively. As a result of very effective teaching the children are producing very good work in this section of the lessons.	
<b>2</b>	Handwriting patterns are being taught effectively. As a result of effective teaching the children are producing good work in this section of the lessons.	
<b>3</b>	Handwriting patterns appear to be taught effectively. As a result of effective teaching the children are producing some pleasing work in this section of the lessons.	
	It is not clear whether handwriting patterns are being taught effectively.	
<b>4</b>	Handwriting patterns are not being taught with enough rigour.	
	More time needs to be spent teaching handwriting patterns.	

<b>1</b>	The use of colour makes an exceptional contribution to the accuracy of children's patterns.	
<b>2</b>	The use of colour makes a good contribution to the accuracy of children's patterns.	
	The use of colour makes a pleasing contribution to the accuracy of children's patterns.	
<b>3</b>	The use of colour makes a generally pleasing contribution to the accuracy of children's patterns.	
<b>4</b>	Colour is not being used effectively to make a contribution to the accuracy of children's patterns.	

### Main focus of handwriting lessons

<b>1</b>	The main focuses of your handwriting lessons are always very clear.	
<b>2</b>	The main focuses of your handwriting lessons are always clear.	
<b>3</b>	The main focuses of your handwriting lessons are generally clear.	
	The main focuses of your handwriting lessons are not always clear.	
<b>4</b>	The main focuses of your handwriting lessons are generally unclear.	

<b>1</b>	You choose the main focus with a very high level of regard for the children's learning needs.	
<b>2</b>	You choose the main focus with a high level of regard for the children's learning needs.	
<b>3</b>	You choose the main focus with an adequate level of regard for the children's learning needs.	
<b>4</b>	It is hard to see why you have chosen to focus on some of the areas you have been teaching.	

### Assessment for learning focus, the quality of marking and the quality of handwriting

<b>1</b>	The AfL focuses at the end of the lessons are consistently very well chosen.	
<b>2</b>	The AfL focuses at the end of the lessons are well chosen.	
	The AfL focuses at the end of the lessons are generally well chosen.	
<b>3</b>	The AfL focuses at the end of the lessons are not consistently well chosen.	
	Make sure that the AfL task is very clearly presented.	
<b>4</b>	AfL is not being used sufficiently well in handwriting lessons.	

### Quality of marking

<b>1</b>	Marking is very focused, relevant and helpful. Well done.	
<b>2</b>	Marking is focused, relevant and helpful.	
	Marking is often focused and helpful.	
<b>3</b>	Marking is becoming focused, relevant and helpful.	
	Marking is not always focused, relevant and helpful.	
<b>4</b>	Marking of handwriting is an area for development.	
	Marking of handwriting is an area for significant development.	