

Handwriting Strategies for the Classroom

Handwriting is a tremendously complex task, requiring perfect integration and coordination between both sides of the brain and the hand and arm. Children must integrate movement patterns in their muscles and joints with information stored in visual and spatial memory (shapes and forms of letters) and auditory information (hearing words inside their heads) so that they know what to write and how to sequence it.

When we see dysgraphia (difficulty with writing), it is important to continue to strive for quality. Dysgraphic children often need extra time to write and may need to write less at a time, as they work on improving their writing.

Quality vs. Quantity

- Place an alphabet strip and a number strip at the top of the desk (manuscript or cursive). It is easier to reference than a sample above the chalkboard. Put a green dot on the left-hand side as a special reference to remind the child to go from left to right.
- Circle representative problems/questions in workbooks, instead of requiring the whole page, which can be overwhelming and cause the child to rush and be unclear.
- Do not require the student to copy questions or math problems as part of the assignment. Instead offer a photocopy of the page which he/she can fill in. Keep the emphasis on problem solving rather than copying.
- Request minimal copying from the chalkboard, unless the child likes it. Instead, offer a sample on the desk, so the child doesn't have to keep changing visual fixation from far to near and vertical to horizontal.

Fine Motor/Visual Perception

- Good positioning is important! Make sure feet are flat on floor, use flat bottomed chairs instead of bucketed (sloped back) seats. Desk height should be 2-3 inches above the elbows.
- When possible allow child to practice at the chalkboard. Gravity provides up/down reference in standing, which helps with spatial orientation. Using chalk allows more feedback to muscles and joints.
- Have an extra chair and desk close to the board to use for copying. Children can use it as needed

- Provide graph paper for math or spacing during writing. It helps with orientation on the page and aligning numbers for addition and subtraction.
- If child tends to lay on the desk when they write, use a slant board or hard 3-ring binder for keyboarding and writing activities. It encourages upright posture, and is visually easier on the child.
- If child leans on arms and slides forward on their desk until they are laying down (or have their head on their arm) put dycem or no-slip shelf liner under elbows.
- Use tape to outline paper placement on the desk- especially when they have to tilt it for cursive writing.
- Minimize clutter on desk

Teaching and Material Modification

- Use extra large coloring books, mural activities, large flip-chart size pads on easel, and large pictures on butcher paper (on a roll) to encourage crossing midline. Child may need to be cued to use the whole page.
- Use art activities which encourage use of both hands- finger painting, cutting, folding paper
- Using both hands, use bungee cords or other elastic material to form letters as a group



- To encourage use of both hands, use rubber bands on a nail board to make letters
- Place large templates or stencils on chalkboard using one hand to hold and one to draw

- Use plastic windows for reading or use bookmark or finger to follow line with reading
- Use stamps for visual perceptual training
 - Sequencing to follow a certain pattern
 - Letter stamps to work on up/down and left/right orientation
 - Eye-hand coordination by having child place stamp in a certain box or defined area. For example:

X		X		X
	X		X	
X		X		X
	X		X	
X		X		X

COPY



- Use scrabble letters to work on spelling and spacing
- Use magnetic letters on a cookie sheet for spelling practice
- Have child write letters in rice, sand or confetti in a pie tin or cookie sheet- provides tactile input to reinforce patterns of movement with letter formation
- Put fine sand paper under paper to reinforce tactile input of letter and number formation
- Use Popsicle sticks and string to form letters

Direct Student Intervention

- Encourage crossing midline by placing supplies and pieces of an activity (ex. Crayons) on the opposite side of the dominant hand
 - Lean chalkboards, desks and counters using both hands (place an eraser or towel in each)
 - Carry large boxes or books with both hands
 - Play with clay, playdough or silly putty. It gives lots of sensory input to the hands and strengthens the small muscles in the hands and fingers.
 - Use finger cues for left/ right orientation
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- Encourage using both hands for keyboarding
 - Cooking and baking activities using rolling pin or kneading
 - Trace over the top and bottom lines of lined paper with glue and let dry. Practice making letters between the lines, making sure to always bump the bottom line
 - Draw letters on index cards with glue and let dry, have children close their eyes and practice tracing the letter with their finger
 - Use “changeable” crayola makers to trace letters- they get more rewarding feedback than just tracing dotted lines
 - Practice different letters using different colored pencils, so the child has another way to associate the movement pattern of forming a specific letter
 - Fill a cookie sheet with sand or rice and have the child print the letter. You can also make a window out of construction paper or cardboard, so the child has to fill the box with the letter (to work on making contact with the lines on a paper)

- For children who press much too hard with their pencil, have them practice writing by putting paper on top of 1/8 craft foam (sold at Joanne Fabrics or AC Moore) and try not to puncture the paper as they write
- For children who have trouble keeping the pencil stable in their hand, have them keep a gum eraser held in their palm using their ring finger and little finger. It can help with hand stability.

References:

What To Do When Writing is Difficult, SI Quarterly, Dec. 1991

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