



## Handwriting

**A guidance document to inform schools' approach  
to the teaching of handwriting**

**V1 - January 2026**

This document applies to all academies and operations of Cambrian Learning Trust.

[www.cambrianlearningtrust.org](http://www.cambrianlearningtrust.org)

Document Control			
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<b>Last Reviewed</b>	23/01/2026	<b>Next Review</b>	23/01/2028
<b>Review Cycle</b>	2 years	<b>Version</b>	1

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## Introduction

The importance of developing children's handwriting is paramount to ensure positive writing outcomes. ***'If handwriting is not fluent, it can hinder children's composition, reduce motivation and prevent others understanding what has been written'*** [Writing Framework DFE 2025](#).

Handwriting should be taught in a clear sequenced progression starting from Reception to ensure strong foundations are built. It is vital that we expect consistently high standards and adults own handwriting should provide a model of these. Children should be **corrected at the point of learning** in all aspects of handwriting teaching e.g. sitting position, core strength, paper hold, pencil grip and letter formation, size, orientation and spacing.

Handwriting progression is broken down into 3 steps:

- **Letter formation** – show pupils the right way to move their pencil for each letter. Letters should be grouped in families – 'curly caterpillar' letters, 'long ladder' letters, 'one-armed robot' letters and 'zigzag' letters. Some letters may need more practice than others.
- **Handwriting of individual letters** – once they can form letters correctly, more attention should then be paid to the placement of the letter on the line. Children will need lots of practice at this stage to become fluent – we want them to be able to place each letter correctly without thinking about it. Automaticity will come from muscle memory and build from repeated practice.
- **Joined (cursive) handwriting** – when children can form and orientate all 26 letters correctly and fluently, we can introduce joined handwriting, also known as cursive. Children will need to be taught the horizontal and diagonal joins between letters (DfE, 2021).

## EYFS

Handwriting teaching should start in the first term of Reception and should be taught by trained teachers and practitioners. This will build on the foundations for handwriting which have taken place in Nursery/Pre-school to support the development of both **gross and fine** motor skills. This could include but is not limited to: mark making, threading beads, cutting, using playdough as well as plenty of big arm movements which strategies such as Dough Disco and Squiggle while you Wiggle can support.

Pupils must be explicitly taught how to hold their pencil correctly using the tripod grip and what good writing posture looks like. Good posture and a relaxed grip make writing easier and help prevent tired hands (Erdhardt & Dinehart). Time should be made for regular

movement activities, such as, climbing, jumping or outdoor games. These build core strength and balance, supporting good posture and control for writing.

Whilst children are developing the fine and gross motor skills they need, they start with simple patterns and shapes before moving on to forming letters. This is to ensure they can practise the correct pencil grip, posture and paper position.

Our schools use Little Wandle or Read Write Inc as their Phonics programmes. These may also be used to introduce letter formation in handwriting. We know that reading and handwriting are different disciplines and it is acceptable to learn different letter families in phonics and handwriting lessons. Those letters which are best learnt first to promote early success in reading are different to those in handwriting. If schools prefer, it is also possible to begin teaching letters from Letter Join. ***'Pupils should be taught both phonics and handwriting consistently and systematically, in line with the programme for each.'*** [Writing Framework DFE 2025](#).

Start on plain paper and always sit at a table to write. Help children develop a mind picture of the letter rather than asking them to trace it. 'Magic fingers' can help them practise the formation in the air, internalise it and then write it. Children need to ***'build a strong mental model of the movement patterns that underpin letter formation'*** rather than tracing or copying letters. [Writing Framework DFE 2025](#).

Pencils should be a comfortable size for young children's hands. Pencil grips and triangular pencils may help some children learn the correct hold and become secure with it. Pencils should be sharp.

Pupils should be taught **daily** (and in addition to their phonics lesson) until they can form letters easily and legibly. It is recommended that children in Reception are provided with wide lines to write on, particularly after the first term.

Practise sitting in the **perfect handwriting position**. Once automatic, use a signal or say 'Ready to write' to trigger this position.

- *Hand ready in a tripod grip – teach children how to do this right from Day 1*
- *Feet on the floor*
- *Bottom at the back of the chair*
- *Body one first from the table*
- *Shoulders down and relaxed*
- *Lean forward slightly*
- *Left/right hand holds the page*

## Early identification and intervention

Some children will need more help than others and staff will need to use their observations to keep tight records of progress. Records should be kept of which letters children need to practise more so that all adults can support at every opportunity. Reasonable adjustments should be made for those children who need additional consideration. This may include shorter and/or more frequent sessions and/or change of writing implements and/or paper. All children need to be sat with good sight of where teaching is being modelled.

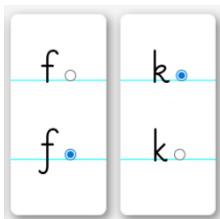
Rigorous records should be kept to show which letters children need more practice with so that all adults can target these for improvement.

## Year 1

Continue with letter formation but with more focus on size, spacing and orientating letters on the line. Children will also be taught to form capital letters and numbers 0-9 correctly. Children can continue with wide lines but it is recommended to use Oxford handwriting lines which provide more guidance for the positioning of ascenders and descenders. Daily practice is recommended and should be supervised so that children do not form bad habits and get used to forming letters incorrectly. Correction at the point of learning is crucial. Schools will need to show children how a lower-case k is formed differently now (see below).

## Year 2 and 3

Once letter formation, orientation, size and spacing is secure, children should be taught how to join their handwriting. Our approach is to use a cursive style with break letters (not a continuous cursive). This is to ensure all children can access joined handwriting whatever their needs. We use the Letter Join programme to teach children, opting for the **Letter-join Break font** and using <https://www.letterjoin.co.uk/> We have chosen the **letter forms below** within the font and all staff need to be aware of the chosen approach so that we are consistent in teaching.



As Hugo Kerr, author of 'The Cognitive Psychology of Literacy Teaching' states, cognitive overload is a real issue when combining numerous complex processes. A simple, joined script with break letters allows for children to think about their spelling as they

simultaneously focus on handwriting and to reset their writing on the line at regular intervals.

Children need to be taught how to make the joins both horizontally and diagonally. Children should continue to have timetabled handwriting sessions daily in Y2 and at least 2-3 times a week in Y3 to ensure they can become secure with a fluent, joined handwriting style. Children ***'should be introduced to paper with narrower lines once they can write legibly and easily on wide-lined paper'***. [Writing Framework DFE 2025](#).

## Year 4 onwards

By Year 4, whole class handwriting sessions will not be needed and instead should focus on individuals and groups who still need practice and support. Our aim is for all children to be joining their handwriting fluently by the end of Year 4. As they are ready, children should begin writing in pen so that in UKS2 they can refine this skill which prepares them for the demands of KS3. Children should use black handwriting pens with medium sized tips to allow for writing to be neat and fluent.

## Year 5 and 6

Children will use their handwriting across the curriculum, increasing speed whilst maintaining legibility and beginning to develop their own style. They will learn to write for different purposes e.g. for presentation and note taking.

## Left-handed pupils

Left-handed pupils need specific demonstration and adjustments, including by making sure they:

- have space to write
- sit to the left of any right-handed pupil to prevent their arms colliding
- slant their paper to the right
- use softer pencils that require less pressure
- grip the pencil at a slightly higher point so they can see around their fingers
- do not hold the pencil too tightly or press down too hard

**Please see additional guidance for leaders and teachers:**

From the [Writing Framework DFE 2025](#):

- Handwriting Audit pg. 37-39
- Appendix A Handwriting Guidance pg100