



Thirsk Community Primary

Handwriting Approach



Ensuring our pupils are ready to write

At Thirsk Community Primary School, we believe that clear, fluent, and confident handwriting is an essential skill. High-quality handwriting enables children to communicate effectively, supports spelling and composition, and fosters pride and above all enjoyment in their work. Rooted in our values of **ambition, compassion, and inclusion**, we aim for every child to develop handwriting skills that reflect their highest potential, while recognising and supporting individual needs.

We are mindful of the impact of cognitive overload on young learners; by establishing consistent, well-structured approaches, we reduce unnecessary barriers so that children can focus on expressing their ideas with clarity and confidence. Our handwriting policy is designed to promote consistency across the school, nurture motivation to write, and support every child's development as a writer.

We are acutely aware that the role of handwriting in developing pupils' writing cannot be overstated.

Aims

- **Ambition:** Enable every child to develop fluent, legible, and consistent handwriting, supporting them to take pride in their presentation and aspire to the highest standards across all subjects.
- Develop stamina and speed for extended writing, preparing children for the demands of later schooling and beyond.
- **Compassion:** Provide encouragement, patience, and targeted support so that children who find handwriting challenging feel valued and motivated, recognising effort as well as achievement.
- Foster an understanding that handwriting is both a functional skill and a form of personal expression.
- **Inclusion:** Ensure all children, regardless of ability or need, have access to high-quality handwriting teaching, with appropriate adaptations to reduce barriers and promote success.
- Minimise **cognitive overload** by establishing consistent routines, clear modelling, and structured progression, so children can focus their working memory on content and creativity.

Teaching and Learning

Terminology

- The names of capital and lowercase letters are used.
- Ascenders and Descenders: Letters that go above the usual letter line and below the base line.
- Letter Bodies: The main body of letters, which are neither ascenders or descenders, e.g. the rounded parts of 'b', 'd' and 'a' and the arches of 'm' and 'n'.
- Each of the Letter Formation Rhymes – Little Wandle
- Letter Formation Families
- BBC – Bum to the Back of the Chair
- TNT – Tummy Near Table
- FFF – Feet Flat on Floor

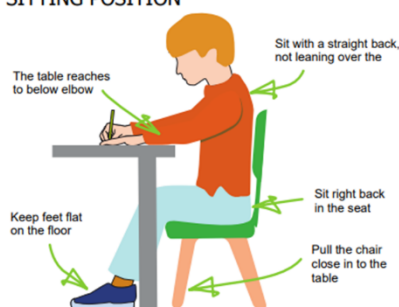
Approach

- Consistency of approach will be maintained through whole school terminology to promote posture (BBC/ TNT) and pencil grip to ensure pupils are ready to write.
- This will be supported by consistent visual scaffolds
- Handwriting will be taught **explicitly** through short, regular, and focused sessions.
- Skills will be **modelled, practised, and applied** in all curriculum areas.
- Teachers will provide **clear demonstrations** and use consistent language to describe letter formation.
- Consistency of style will be maintained throughout the school, using Little Wandle guidance for letter formation and following Nelson for joins.

Correct posture and pencil grip for handwriting

Pupils should be taught to sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly.

SITTING POSITION



Progression

Letter formation

In Reception children will learn the Little Wandle grapheme handwriting rhyme for each letter of the alphabet. All teachers and teaching assistants across all year groups will use these to reinforce handwriting and letter formation. This is especially relevant in Key Stage One, but should also be applied in Key Stage Two where appropriate.

Phase 2 grapheme information sheet

Autumn 1

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 s	 snake	Show your teeth and and let the s hiss out ssssss ssssss	Under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.
 a	 astronaut	Open your mouth wide and make the 'a' sound at the back of your mouth aaa	Around the astronaut's helmet, and down into space.
 t	 tiger	Open your lips; put the tip of your tongue behind your teeth and press ttt	From the tiger's nose to its tail, then follow the stripe across the tiger.
 p	 penguin	Bring your lips together and push them open and say ppp	Down the penguin's back, up and round its head.
 i	 iguana	pull your lips back and make the 'i' sound at the back of your mouth iii	Down the iguana's body, then draw a dot (on the leaf) at the top.
 n	 net	Open your lips a bit, put your tongue behind your teeth and make the nnnnn sound nnnnn	Down the stick, up and over the net.
 m	 mouse	Put your lips together and make the mmmmm sound mmmmm	Down, up and over the mouse's ears, then add a flick on the nose.



Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 d	 duck	Put your tongue to the top and front of your mouth and make a quick d sound d d d	Round the duck's body, up to its head and down to its feet.
 g	 goat	Give me a big smile that shows your teeth; press the middle of your tongue to the top and back of your mouth; push your tongue down and forward to make the g sound g g g	Round the goat's face, up to his ear; down and curl under his chin.
 o	 octopus	Make your mouth into round shape and say o o o	All around the octopus.
 c	 cat	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say c c c	Curl around the cat.
 k	 kite	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say k k k	Down the kite, up and across, back and down to the corner.
 ck	 sock	Open your mouth into a little smile; make your tongue flat and move it up towards the top of your mouth to say ck ck ck	c Curl round the heel of the sock. k Down the sock, up and across, back and down and to the corner. Catchphrase: Rock that sock!
 e	 elephant	Open your mouth wide and say e e e	Around the elephant's eye and down its trunk.

Grapheme and mnemonic	Picture card	Pronunciation phrase	Formation phrase
 u	 umbrella	Open your mouth wide and say u u u	Down and around the umbrella, stop at the top and down to the bottom and flick
 r	 rainbow	Show me your teeth to make a rrrrr sound rrrrr rrrrr	From the cloud to the ground, up the arch and over the rainbow.
 h	 helicopter	Open your mouth and breathe out sharply h h h	Down, up and over the helicopter
 b	 bear	Put your lips together and say b as you open them b b b	Down bear's back, up and round his big tummy.
 f	 flamingo	Open your lips a little; put your teeth on your bottom lip and push the air out to make the sound fffff fffff	Down the flamingo's neck, all the way to its foot, then across its wings.
 l	 lollipop	Open your mouth a little; put your tongue up to the top of your mouth, behind your teeth, and press lllll lllll	All the way down the lollipop.

Letter Formation Families

To encourage the correct letter formation, the children will be taught letter formation in the correct families as per the requirements of the current English National Curriculum. Children will focus on the correct letter movement rather than neatness at this early stage in Reception. Inaccurate attempts at letters will be reinforced with correct modelling and opportunities for further practise. Teachers will be vigilant to ensure that bad habits do not become ingrained, and that the specific needs of left-handed pupils and those with Special Educational Needs are met.

The letter formation families are:

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

Looped K introduced as children learn to join in Year 2.

Upper case letters will be taught when children have secured the lower case letters – following the guidance set out in the National Curriculum. It is expected that most children will be forming each lower case letter correctly by the end of Reception. All children will be taught capital letters in Year 1.

Capital Letters

Letter formation: Capital letters

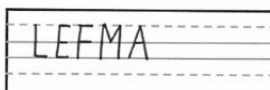
Use this document to ensure correct letter formation when you are teaching children to form capital letters.

Letter	Capital letter formation phrase
A	From the top, diagonally down to the left, up to the top, diagonally down to the right. Lift up and across.
B	From the top, down, back to the top. Round to the middle, round to the bottom.
C	From the top, curl around to the left to sit on the line.
D	From the top, down, back to the top. Curve right, down to the bottom.
E	From the top, down, back to the top. Across, back. Down to the line, across. Lift up and across the middle.
F	From the top, down, back to the top. Across, back. Lift up and across the middle.
G	From the top, curl around to the line, carry on up, then straight down. Lift up and across.
H	From the top and down. Space. From the top and down. Lift up and join the lines across the middle.
I	From the top to the bottom and stop.
J	From the top, all the way down, then short curl to the left.
K	From the top, down, up to the middle. Diagonally up, back and diagonally down to the line.
L	From the top, down and across the line.
M	From the top, down, back to the top. Diagonally down, diagonally up. Straight down to the line.
N	From the top, down, back to the top. Diagonally down, then straight up to the top.
O	From the top – all around the o.
P	From the top, down then back up. Curve right to halfway down.
Q	From the top – all around the o. Lift off. Short line diagonally down.
R	From the top, down, then back up. Curve right to halfway down. Diagonally down to the line.
S	From the top, under the snake's chin, slide down and round its tail.
T	From the top, down and stop. Lift up and from the left, make a line across the top.
U	From the top, down and curve right, then straight up to the top.
V	From the top diagonally right to the bottom, then diagonally up to the top.
W	From the top diagonally right to the bottom, diagonally up (halfway), diagonally down to the line, then diagonally up again.
X	From the top, diagonally right to the bottom. Space. Start at the top, then diagonally left to the bottom.
Y	From the top diagonally right to halfway right. Space. Start at the top, then diagonally left to the bottom.
Z	From the top go across, diagonally down to the left and across the bottom.

1 PBRDU



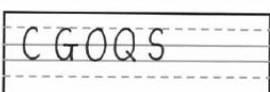
2 LEFMA



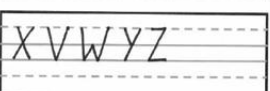
3 TIJHKN



4 CGOQS



5 XVWYZ



Key Stage 1

By the end of Year 1, children will be able to write most letters using a comfortable and efficient pencil grip. This will be a significant priority. Letters are correctly formed and orientated, and children put spaces between words.

By the end of Year 2, most children will be able to print legibly using upper- and lower-case letters appropriately within words, with ascenders and descenders clearly distinguished, and observing correct spacing within and between words. Some Year 2 children will be using the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters in their writing.

The national curriculum states that pupils should:

Year 1

- sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly
- begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place
- Leave spaces between words of a consistent size.
- form capital letters
- form digits 0-9
- understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' and to practise these.

Year 2

- form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another – teach looped k.
- **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 un-joined
- write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower case letters
- use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters.

Lower Key Stage 2

In Year 3 children will begin learning the diagonal and horizontal strokes, including the four joining strokes needed to join letters together. We follow the Nelson handwriting approach to introduce the different joins.

The Nelson Handwriting approach

Joining groups

The joining groups divide the letters according to how they will join to other letters.

Group 1

a c d e h i k l m n s t u

Thirteen letters with exit flicks plus s.

Group 2

a c d e g i j m n o p q r s u v w x y

Nineteen letters which start at the top of the x-height.

Group 3

b f h k l t

Six letters which start at the top of the ascender.

Group 4

f o r v w

Five letters which finish at the top of the x-height.

The break letters

b g j p q x y z

Eight letters after which no join is made. Joins are not made to or from the letter z.

The joins

	Group		Group	
The first join	1	→	2	in am
The second join	1	→	3	ab ch
The third join	4	→	2	oa wo
The fourth join	4	→	3	wh ob
The break letters				bigger

The joined style

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

The national curriculum states that pupils should:

Year 3 and 4

- use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters
- Secure joining across most common digraphs and letter strings.
- understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left un-joined
- increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting (e.g. by ensuring that the down strokes of letters are parallel and equidistant)

Upper Key Stage 2

Handwriting will continue to be taught in upper Key Stage 2 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. The focus for handwriting will be to develop an individual style based on the principles of good handwriting taught in previous years. Teachers will teach children that different degrees of neatness may be appropriate for different tasks.

In Key Stage 2 the aim is to improve quality, speed and stamina of handwriting. A uniformed handwriting style should be consistent throughout the school; this will be evident on display boards and in book looks.

Year 5 and 6

- **Quality:** Ensure letters are consistently sized with equal word spacing and that ascenders and descenders are parallel and do not touch words on the lines above and below.
- **Speed:** Improve speed of handwriting to allow creative writing to take precedence over the task of handwriting and be able to take 'quick notes' at a faster pace.
- **Stamina:** Have the strength and mobility to be able to write for longer periods without fatigue.
- **Joins:** Using the appropriate entry and exit strokes. Horizontal or diagonal where applicable.

Provision for left-handed children

All teachers are aware of the specific needs of left-handed pupils and make appropriate provision:

- paper should be positioned to the left for right handed pupils and to the right for left handed pupils and slanted to suit the individual in either case;
- pencils should not be held too close to the point as this can interrupt pupils' line of vision;
- left-handed pupils should sit to the left of a right-handed child so that they are not competing for space;

Teachers are aware that it is difficult for left-handed pupils to follow handwriting movements when a right-handed teacher models them. Teachers demonstrate to left-handers on an individual or group basis, even if the resulting writing is not neat.

Inclusion

Some pupils might need more support and provision will be made for this. To develop good handwriting you need to:

- Have good whole body strength and dexterity (Gross & Fine Motor Skills).
- Understand direction, movement and position (Spatial Awareness & Motor Memory).
- Remember and recall how to form the different shapes of the letters (Visual & Motor Memory).
- Sit correctly (Gross Motor Skills).
- Hold a pencil appropriately (Fine Motor Skills).
- Control the pencil (Fine Motor Skills).
- Tilt and move the paper on the desk (Gross Motor Skills & Spatial Awareness).
- Refine letter formation and position (Fine Motor Skills, Visual & Motor Memory, Spatial Awareness & Eye Tracking).
- Join the letters to form words (Fine Motor Skills, Visual & Motor Memory, Spatial Awareness & Eye Tracking).

Teachers of children whose handwriting is limited due to any of the above should liaise with the SENCO/ writing lead to develop a programme designed for the individual child.

Teachers will consider the size of line and space, as well as colour and font, for all children, but especially those with a SEN need. Other things teachers will consider are; writing aids for Phonics, pen grip, and for pressure, as well as the use of over-lays. Some pupils will be supported by handwriting lined books across the curriculum.

Frequency

Reception children will take part in a daily ten-minute handwriting session, as soon as a suitable pen grip is established. All Reception children will take part in the writing section of the Phonic lesson, which is a daily five-minute write.

Year One and Year Two children will take part in a daily ten-minute handwriting session. This can be extended to fifteen minutes when teaching a new skill.

Year 3 and Year 4 children will take part in a ten-minute handwriting session three times a week.

Year 5 and Year 6 teachers will decide if, and when, handwriting sessions are appropriate. Our aim is to have a targeted approach with children in Upper Key Stage Two who require support with handwriting, as most children will have mastered the skill over the previous years.

Assessment and Monitoring

Handwriting progress will be monitored through regular book looks, moderation, and feedback in lessons.

Teachers will celebrate improvements and set clear, individual targets where needed.

Children's handwriting achievements will be recognised through praise, display, and school rewards, through our "Handwriting Heroes" approach.

Appendix 1 - Pencil Grip Approach

The Tripod Pencil Grip is considered the most appropriate grip for handwriting, for both right and left-handed writers. This is because it allows the fingers and wrist to move freely without putting strain on the hand, helping to improve correct letter formation ability and making handwriting a more comfortable experience.

There are 5 pencil grip developmental stages that a child needs to go through before they can successfully use a mature/dynamic tripod grip. They need to work through each stage and as their hand, shoulder and arm strength and mobility increases so does the ability to move to the next developmental stage of the grip.

It is important to hold a pencil correctly to allow the fingers and wrist to move freely without putting strain on the hand, helping to improve correct letter formation ability and making handwriting a more comfortable experience.

Foundation Stage (4 - 5 year olds)

When children start in Foundation Stage (4 - 5 year olds) they will be at different pencil grip development stages, this is what we would normally expect:

- A few children will be at Stage 1.
- Most will be at Stage 2 with some moving to Stage 3 but not confident in its use.
- A few will have reached and be comfortable at Stage 3.

By the end of Foundation Stage, the children will still be at different pencil grip development stages, this is what we would normally expect:

- Some will be at Stage 3.
- Most will be at Stage 4 with some moving to Stage 5, but not confident in its use.
- A few at Stage 5.

Stage 1 - Palmer-supinate grasp



Holds the crayon/pencil in fist (whole hand) like a dagger. They use whole arm movements from the shoulder to mark-make. Due to this whole arm movement they prefer to work on a vertical surface.

Stage 2 - Palmer or digital-pronate grasp



Holds a crayon/pencil with the palm of the hand facing down towards the paper. The crayon/pencil is held by all the fingers and the thumb. The movement comes from the shoulder and elbow. Again due to the way the arm moves a vertical surface is preferred.

Stage 3 - Four finger and thumb grip



Holding the crayon/pencil between the thumb and four fingers with the crayon/pencil in a nearly vertical, upright position. Movement comes from the elbow and wrist.

Key stage One

Year 1

As children move from Foundation Stage (4 to 5 year olds) to Year 1 they may be at different pencil grip development stages, this is what we would normally expect:

- A few children will be at Stage 3
- Most will be at Stage 4 with some moving to Stage 5, but not confident in its use.
- A few will have reached, and be comfortable at, Stage 5.

Year 2

As children move from Year 1 to Year 2 we would expect the majority of children to be at stage 5 in their pencil grip development.

Stage 3 - Four finger and thumb grip



Holding the crayon/pencil between the thumb and four fingers with the crayon/pencil in a nearly vertical, upright position. Movement comes from the elbow and wrist.

Stage 4 - Static quadruped or tripod grip



Holding the pencil in very nearly the correct position however the web space is narrower than it would be if held in a mature tripod grip. This means that the movement is coming from the wrist and large finger movements.

Stage 5 - Mature / Dynamic tripod grip



This is traditionally considered the most appropriate handwriting pencil grip for both left and right-handed writers. Holding the pencil between the thumb and index finger with pencil supported on the middle finger. The ring and little fingers are gently curled inwards. This gives an open wide web space which means the movement comes from the fingers.

Key Stage 2

The dynamic tripod pencil grip is considered the most appropriate grip for handwriting, for both right and left-handed writers, however not all children find this the easiest grip to learn.

It is important to hold a pencil correctly to allow the fingers and wrist to move freely without putting strain on the hand, helping to improve correct letter formation ability and making handwriting a more comfortable experience.

There are 5 Pencil Grip Developmental Stages on the way to developing a good tripod pencil grip for handwriting.

Year 3

As children move from Key Stage 1 (5 to 7 year olds) to Year 3 they may still be at different pencil grip development stages, this is what we would normally expect:

- A few children will be at Stage 4;
- The majority will have reached Stage 5; some may not be confident in its use but most should be comfortable and naturally using the tripod grip for handwriting.

Year 4 to 6

It would normally be expected for children in Year 4 and upwards to be confident and naturally using the tripod grip for handwriting tasks. For some children who have developed a poor pencil

grip, and find it difficult if not near on impossible to change, then developing the adaptive tripod grip may prove to be a more appropriate option (suitable for both left and right-handed writers).

Stage 4 - Static quadruped or tripod grip



Holding the pencil in very nearly the correct position however the web space is narrower than it would be if held in a mature tripod grip. This means that the movement is coming from the wrist and large finger movements.

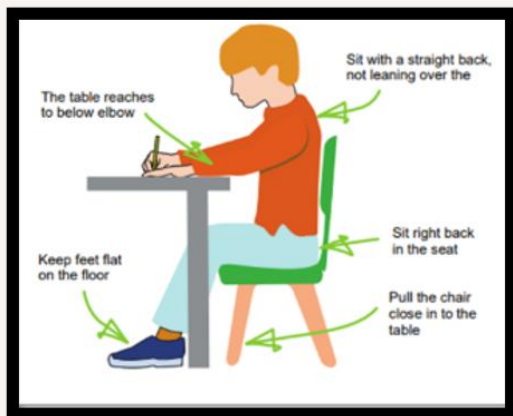
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Handwriting – Posture



Be Ambitious

Be Compassionate

Be Inclusive

Handwriting – Posture

BBC

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Handwriting – Pencil Grip



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