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Handwriting, 4th Grade And Beyond



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Learning Outcomes

1. Identify typical developmental skills in handwriting for a 4th grader.
2. Identify common difficulties in handwriting in 4-12 grade.
3. Identify ideas and strategies to help children with their writing.

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Introduction

- A little more about me!



Handwriting: The Early Years

Often the natural development of skills does not match up with the academic demands. This creates a “gap” between what is developmentally appropriate, and what is academically expected. Handwriting included.

The decrease in outdoor and fine motor “play” activities has also affected handwriting skills. Kids need these foundational skills to develop good handwriting skills.

Handwriting: The Early Years

10-15 months

- Scribbles on paper.

2 years

- Can INITIATE a horizontal, vertical, circular, and curved line.

Handwriting: The Early Years

3 years

- Can COPY straight and curved lines.

4-5 years

- Can COPY a horizontal and vertical line, a “t”, “O”, SOME letters, numbers, and ATTEMPTING his/her name.



Handwriting: The Early Years

5-7 years

- COPY a triangle, his/her name, upper, and lowercase letters.
- Learn how to hold a pencil correctly.
- Start recognizing and copying the shape of sight words.



Handwriting: The Early Years

7-9 years

- Start adding spaces between words, capital letters at the beginning of a sentence, and punctuation at the end of a sentence.



Handwriting Defined

What is handwriting?

- It is “the matching of a motor program to the formation of a letter and then executing the program.” This includes visualization, memory, visual organization, and accuracy. -Learning Without Tears



Handwriting Defined

- 2013 research study states that K-5 classrooms spend 24-58% of their time on handwriting-based activities. (Handwriting Without Tears)

Handwriting Defined

- Handwriting Without Tears has an excellent break down of skills needed by each grade for handwriting and keyboarding: Standards for the Production and Presentation of Writing (2014). It can be downloaded for free from their website www.lwtears.com.

Handwriting Defined

- State standards for handwriting are often vague or have one standard which is “produces legible handwriting.”
- Common Core State Standards don’t mention handwriting AT ALL and don’t mention keyboarding until grade 3.

Handwriting Defined

- “Most children achieve printing fluency by the end of second grade and cursive fluency by the end of fourth grade. In fifth grade, children develop their personal style that continues into middle and high school.” 2014 Handwriting & Keyboarding: Standards for Production & Presentation of Writing.

Handwriting Defined

- What about cursive? Cursive is often no longer taught in schools even though there are important skills to get from this form of writing.
 - It activates important parts of the brain.
 - It helps develop accuracy and speed and fluency.
 - For a student with messy print, cursive is another alternative, and legibility may improve due to all the letters being connected.

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Handwriting Defined

- In a New York Times article, *The Benefits of Cursive Go Beyond Writing*, the author Suzanne Baruch reports students who wrote the essay portion of the SAT in cursive were reported to have higher SAT scores (Baruch, 2013).

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Handwriting Defined

Why we care

- Many times you'll hear people say "who cares?" if an older student can't write well. The wave of the future is technology and typing anyway.
- There are many articles that talk about the importance of handwriting especially in the older student.

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Handwriting Defined

Why We Care

- Harvard Graduate School of Education published an article stating low tech ways such as handwriting is often better for note taking (Dynarski, 2017).
- It states students who took notes by typing often learned less and got worse grades.

Handwriting Defined

Why We Care

- There is research that states writing instead of typing notes in class leads to better learning and higher test scores (Harvard Business Review 2015).
- Handwriting is still a critical part of everyday life. Examples are jotting down an note, making a list, signing a check, filling out a form, etc. There are MANY reasons we should continue to care about older students handwriting.

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Handwriting Defined

- Virginia Berninger professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington is conducting and has conducted research in the area of handwriting and its link to literacy skills.
- Laura Dinehart associate professor of early childhood education at Florida International University is doing research on the link between good handwriting and academic achievement.

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Handwriting Defined

- 2016 New York Times article “Why Handwriting is Still Essential in the Keyboard Age” discusses the work being done, and the links to literacy.

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4th Grade Expectations

- Grip is established.
- Letter memory is well established.
- Some students have developed a handwriting style.
- Cursive has been or is being taught.

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4th Grade Expectations

- Printing fluency is well established.
- Cursive fluency is established (by the end of 4th grade).
- Students can easily write a paragraph.
- Habits (good or bad) are established.

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4th Grade Expectations

- Students should be focused more on written content than the mechanics of handwriting.

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4th-12th Grade

- Usually by 4th grade, the mechanics of handwriting are firmly established (memory, orientation).
- If a child has learned incorrectly or has established bad habits, these can be difficult to change. There are certain bad habits like pencil grip and letter formation that are highly unlikely to change, and therefore, a great deal of time and energy should not be spent on these skills.

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4th-12 Grade

- According to 2009 research from the University College London, it takes anywhere from 18-254 days (average of 66 days) to change a habit.



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Common Complaints

- Legibility (this is the most common complaint).
- Amount of time it takes to write.
- Spatial organization on the page.

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What to do

- It is important to assess what specific areas the student is having difficulty in.
- Talk to older students about how they feel about their writing.
- Try teaching the student cursive if they don't already know it. Sometimes cursive can make for neater work.

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What to do

Motivation is KEY. If the student is not motivated to want to improve their writing, it is unlikely to happen. If they are motivated to change it, they will need consistent, FREQUENT practice.

MOTIVATION



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What to do

- The practice MUST focus on the mechanics of handwriting NOT written expression or other language arts skills.
- Practice should focus on visual organization (margins, spaces between words, lines) not letter formation which would be very difficult to change.
- Practice should be basic, simple, and not take up a lot of time.

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What to do

Corrections to handwriting must be practiced across settings and people. It does the student no good to practice with you, and then go back to old habits in the classroom or at home. Teachers and parents need to agree to be involved for this to be successful.

PRACTICE



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VISION!

- HAVE THE STUDENTS VISION EVALUATED!
 - By this time, older students should have their vision checked regularly (yearly) by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.
 - You should ask to see the report from the eye doctor to gain specific information about your student's vision.

What to do

Keep in Mind!

- There may be other reasons for messy handwriting.
- Make sure if there are other concerns that they are also evaluated.

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Dysgraphia

What is Dysgraphia?

- According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, dysgraphia is a “learning disability that affects writing abilities.”
- It is a processing disorder.
- There is more to dysgraphia than just messy handwriting.

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Strategies

Paper!

- Various types of writing paper may be helpful.
- This is usually a trial and error process.
- The student should be involved in what works best for them.

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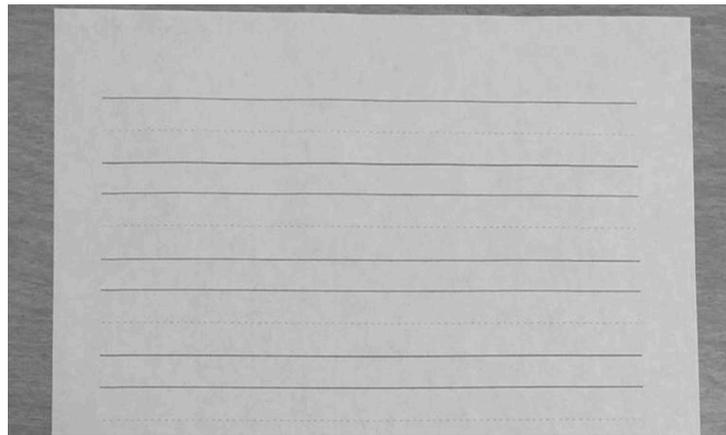
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Paper

1. www.printablepaper.net has many different kinds of writing paper. All can be downloaded for free!
2. www.dltkids.com has customizable writing paper you can download for free.
3. Graph paper for math problems
4. Raised lined paper
5. Highlighted paper
6. Larger or small lines

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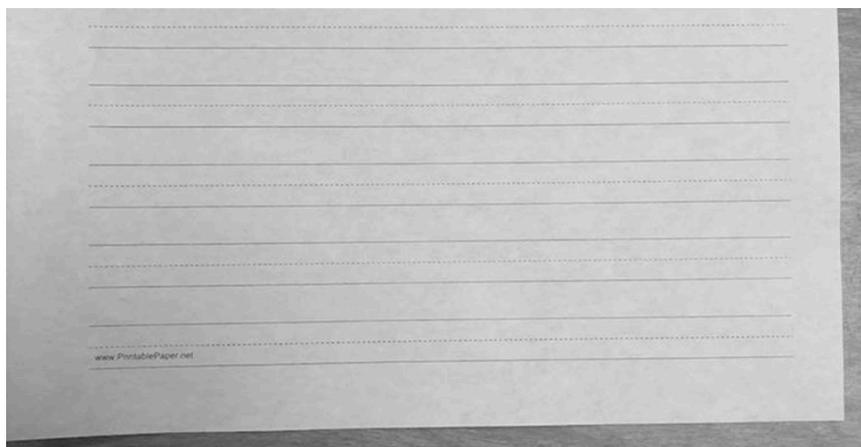
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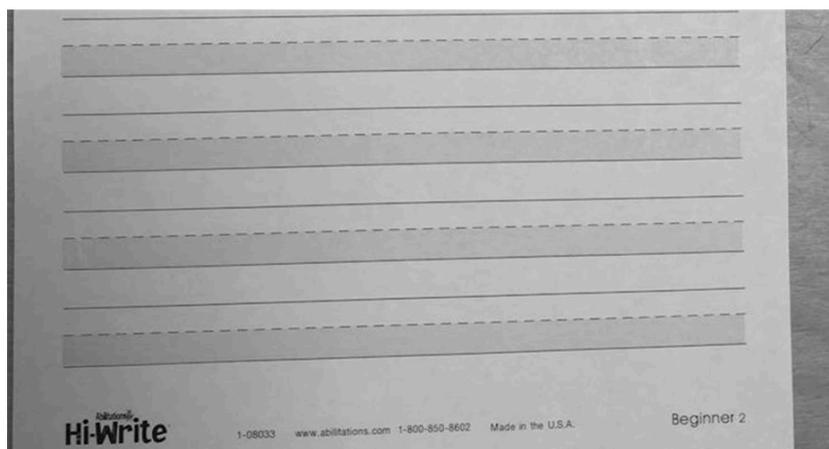
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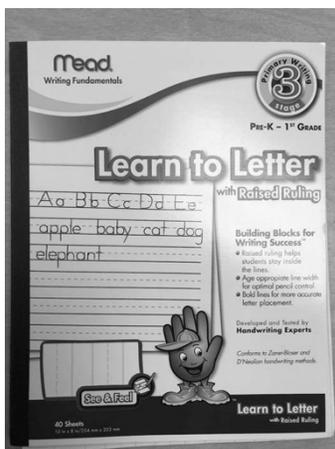
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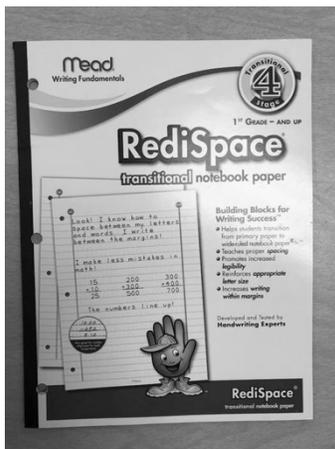
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Paper Samples



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Paper Samples



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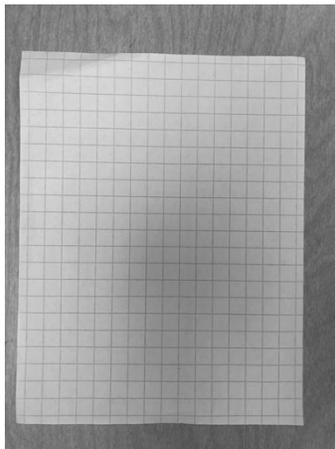
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Paper Samples



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Paper Samples



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Strategies

- Create worksheets that limit “free space” to fill in answers. Instead create worksheets with boundaries, boxes, lines, etc.
- Have students skip every other line.
- Create an editing checklist for the mechanics of handwriting.

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Editing Checklist

1. Can I read what I wrote?
2. Do all of my letters touch the bottom line?
3. Are there spaces between my words?
4. Did I fully erase my mistakes?
5. Did I begin my sentence with a capital and end it with punctuation?

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Strategies

- Limit writing to important assignments.
- Go back to work on specific skills that will improve legibility (i.e. spaces between words).
- Practicing handwriting.

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Strategies

- Allow the student to write in pen or sharpie.
- Try a slant board which places the students wrist and hand in a better position.
- Try a writing window.

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Strategies

- Highlight important things on the paper such as the baseline, the margins, etc. Bring visual awareness to the structure of the paper.
- Try various pencil grips if the student is willing (but be aware pencil grip is also hard to change at this age).
- Try different sized pencils and mechanical pencils.

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Other Strategies

- These activities can be helpful in continuing to develop fine motor and visual motor skills.
 - Dot to dots (extreme dot to dots for older students)
 - Mazes
 - Crossword puzzles
 - Play-Doh or clay activities

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Other Strategies

- Theraputty
- Scissor use
- Arts and crafts (friendship bracelets, finger knitting, mosaics)
- Adult coloring books
- Drawing activities
- Sudoku

Other Strategies

- Cards/card games
- Origami
- Outdoor play (many students present with decreased core and/or shoulder girdle strength). Ideas such as monkey bars, climbing, etc. can help strengthen weak areas.

Other Strategies

- Stress balls
- Legos
- Tweezers or tongs
- Puzzles
- Arts, and crafts with small pieces, tearing paper

Things To Do

- Let the students create his or her own story.
- Work on classroom assignments or homework so they don't feel like what you are asking them to do is "extra."
- Create posters or signs for school activities.

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Things to Do

- Play games like Scrabble or Pictionary where you can incorporate writing or drawing.
- Write nonsense stories.
- Give small rewards/incentives.
- Have students write out the steps to an obstacle course or a recipe and then do it or make it!

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Things to Do

- Have students write labels for things.
- Find a pen pal program and sign them up!
- Have students write out their Christmas list, or birthday list.
- Have students write a note to a favorite teacher.

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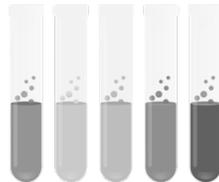
Things to Do

- Have students write their own song lyrics.
- Have students write poetry.
- Find a writing contest for the student to enter.
- Let students keep a journal.

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Things to Do

- Have students create their own science experiment, and write out the directions.
- Have students write a tutorial on their favorite video game.



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Things to Remember

- Remember to try and keep it fun!
- Many students already dread handwriting. Be creative and find fun ways to address skills.



What About Keyboarding?

- Keyboarding skills should start in Kindergarten!
- Typing can be a great alternative to writing IF the child has good typing skills.
- Specific time should be set aside for frequent, and consistent practice. Kids don't just "pick up" proper keyboarding skills.
- Many experts say to find out how many words per minute kids should be typing, multiply the grade by 5. Thus, 4th grade would be 20 words per minute.

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What About Keyboarding?

- www.Typing.com (great free website)
- www.Freetypinggame.net
- www.shockwave.com (typer shark)
- keyboarding without tears (www.lwteras.com)

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Other Alternatives to Keyboarding

- Typing (including word prediction)
- Voice to text technology
- Scribe
- Giving the information verbally
- Dictation

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Other Resources

- *Teach Yourself Better Handwriting* by Rosemary Sassoon.
- *Fix it Write* by Nan Jay Barchowsky.
- *Handwriting Practice for Teens: Children's Reading and Writing Education Books* by Prodigy Wizard Books.

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Other Resources

- Handwriting Without Tears (Learning Without Tears).
- The Handwriting Book: The Functional Skills for Kids (E-Book) www.functionalskillsforkids.com.

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Questions?

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**Thank
You**

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