

The www.saveyoursundays.com Handwriting Scheme

Contents

Page	Content
1	Forewords
2-3	Cursive (joined-up) writing
4	Videos on letter formation
5-6	Teaching sequence for letters + Structure of worksheets
7	Print or colour photocopy worksheets + Editing worksheets
8	References

Author's background

I recently had a dyslexic child in my class. Realising that I had no idea how to meet her needs, I enrolled on a Postgraduate Diploma in Dyslexia and Literacy with Dyslexia Action (validated by the University of York). I was fortunate enough to have my course fees covered by funding from the government of the time (2009), which was made available following the Rose Review on 'Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties'.

The aim of this funding was to increase the number of specialist dyslexia teachers. One of the conditions for receiving this funding was that those who benefitted from it would use what they had learnt to assist other people in knowing how to best support those with such difficulties - writing this scheme and making it freely available is one of the ways in which I am trying to do this.

Why the handwriting scheme was developed

The scheme was developed as an essential pre-requisite for a child before they begin on the spelling scheme. Children should not begin on the spelling scheme until they have learned to correctly form the letters, otherwise bad-letter-forming habits become engrained through repetition.

Scheme not used in school yet

I will only be introducing the scheme to my school for the first time in 2011/2012, as it was only created in the summer of 2011; therefore I cannot vouch for its effectiveness. The principles behind the scheme and the reasons why I believe it should be used are given below. I feel that use of the scheme in all schools would be of benefit to children and teachers alike, particularly children with special needs, in particular dyslexia.

I would be very grateful for any feedback either on the effectiveness of the scheme from teachers who do use it, or from teachers who decide not to use it on the reasons they decided against using it. I make no claims to be an expert in the teaching of handwriting and will be teaching in Reception in 2011 (for the first time) with the aim of encouraging children to begin joining up their writing as soon as possible, for the reasons and rationale given below.

Why cursive / joined-up writing from day one?

I would suggest that a child should use the scheme as soon as they are learning to form letters for the following reasons:

1. If they become fast and comfortable with a printing-style of writing, and then later have to switch to a cursive / joined-up style they can be reluctant to move away from what they know and are comfortable with i.e. writing in print, rather than joining up.
2. Children will have to unlearn how to form some letters e.g. f and k.
3. A key principle of specialist dyslexia teaching is that learning to spell needs to be made multisensory. Joining letters up helps a child's 'muscle memory' to remember a word and is a kinaesthetic way of learning. Given that 4 to 8% of children are thought to be dyslexic (Rose Report, 2009), there is likely to be at least one dyslexic child in most classes.

Why do all of the letters have flicks at the end?

Each letter has a flick, or exit stroke, to lead in to joining up with the next letter in a word. Teaching children to include this exit stroke shows them where to join from on a letter. Although this may cause them to add exit strokes unnecessarily with letters that they do not actually join, or to add them to letters at the end of words, this can be easily corrected as they get older. Also the words on the spelling scheme do not have exit strokes at the end of words, which should help with eradicating unnecessary exit strokes.

Why not lead in strokes?

Some schools and schemes teach letters with a lead-in stroke from the beginning, so that all letters start 'on the ground (on the line)'. This scheme does not do this for the following reasons:

1. It makes letter formation more complicated; therefore it can put children off writing, slow them down and cause them to have messy 'spider-writing'.
2. The letters o, r, v and w join 'through the grass (in the middle of the upper and lower lines)'. Teaching letters with an entry stroke from 'the ground' causes problems when joining from these letters e.g. it can make an r look like an n.

Choice of style for each letter

The choice of how to form each letter was based on two main factors:

1. Keeping the letters as close to their print form as possible.
2. Using letter formations that allow a flowing, fluent cursive style e.g. for the letter k, the looped version allows for greater flow and fluency than the version without a loop.

Why is little emphasis placed on capital letter formation?

How a child forms a capital letter is not as important because they will not join capital letters to other letters. Capital letters are also more straightforward in that they all reach the 'sky' and the 'ground', but do not go below the ground.

Using the videos on letter formation

There are two videos for each letter formation lesson: one only shows how to form the new letter being introduced, the other shows how to form the new letter being introduced *and* how to form all of the letters covered previously. If you do a quick handwriting session at the start of the day, children can be watching the videos while you take the register and listen to any 'news' they have to tell you.

What to do if you cannot access youtube at your school

Some schools block Youtube, so the videos are also available via www.screencast.com. Again this is a website that some school filters will automatically block, but if you ask the relevant person in your school or local authority they should be able to unblock access to this site. I have found with our particular web-filter that refreshing the page allows you to access it.

To access the account with the videos use the following details:

Username: saveyoursundays@hotmail.co.uk

Password: handwriting

Rationale for teaching sequence and structure of videos / worksheets

Letters on the videos and the worksheets are organised in to movement groups of:

- l, i, t, u, y and j - all of these letters begin with a straight line, moving from the tip of the letter to the base, with a curve to the right at the bottom of the letter, either for the exit stroke or to continue forming the letter. (Note: j is a slight exception, as it curves to the left, but it is taught after y and has the same movement as when forming the 2nd half of the letter y.)
- r, n, m, h, b, k and p - all of these letters are formed with the initial movement being down, back up and across to the right.
- c, o, a and d - all of these letters begin with the same movement as when forming the letter c.
- e and f - both of these letters start with a similar movement.
- v, w, z and x - all of these letters start at the same point.

The letters are colour-coded on the videos based on these movement groups: l, i, t, u, y and j are red, r, n, m, h, b, k and p are green, c, o, a and d are black and e, f, v, w, z and x are blue.

The guidelines on the videos are coloured as follows: blue for the sky, green for the grass and brown for the ground. This should be explained to the children and provides a child-friendly way of discussing whether the size and / or orientation of their letters is correct e.g. 'Does an m start in the grass or on the ground?'. All letters begin either in the grass or in the sky, except for e and f.

Structure / features of the worksheets

- Space for child's name
- Space for the date
- Target - this is the learning objective.
- New letter being introduced
- Revision of previous letters. Letters that were covered at the beginning of the scheme are practiced less as you move through the scheme.
- Image of a pencil next to each letter to show the child the correct start point for the letter
- Guidelines with an additional broken line in the middle (the 'grass') to help children make the letters the correct size
- Light grey to allow both child and teacher to see the pencil mark when tracing over a letter
- Image and border to make the worksheets visually appealing

Note: where there are blank spaces left for the children to write a letter towards the end of the scheme you will need to either display the lower ability worksheet on your interactive whiteboard or display the video on pause at an appropriate point.

Why not learn one letter at a time?

The reasoning behind this is as follows:

1. It can be monotonous to copy out the same letter too often.
2. Children need to constantly revise the correct way to form each letter so that this movement pattern becomes engrained in their hand.
3. Introducing the new letter as part of a movement group (through its colouring) should help to ensure it is formed correctly e.g. forming the letter o after the letter c.

Why are there only worksheets for lower and middle ability children?

'Higher ability' children should be working their way through the spelling scheme, once they have learnt to correctly form all of the letters.

Print, not photocopy, worksheets

Unless you are fortunate enough to have a high-quality colour photocopier in your school, the worksheets are better printed in colour than photocopied in black and white. This is because photocopying makes the letters appear black and it is harder for both the teacher and the children to see where they have traced over the letter.

Editing pages, File types and Handwriting for Windows

Each page of the scheme is available in two formats: Rich Text Format and PDF. Some, but not all, versions of Microsoft word will open the Rich Text Format files. Unfortunately, unlike the spelling scheme, the amount of formatting involved in each worksheet means that opening them in word will not be effective. If you wish to edit the cursive parts of the pages you will need to purchase a programme called 'Handwriting for Windows' which is available online from the Dyslexia Action shop for £25.52 (price correct on 1st September 2011). However again the amount of formatting may mean that even buying this programme does not allow you to easily edit a worksheet. (Note: I have no commercial ties with Dyslexia Action or those who produces 'Handwriting for Windows', nor do I receive any financial reward for promoting them.)

References

Great Britain. Department for Children, Schools and Families. (June 2009) *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties* [Online]. Available at: <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk> (Accessed: 27 October 2010)