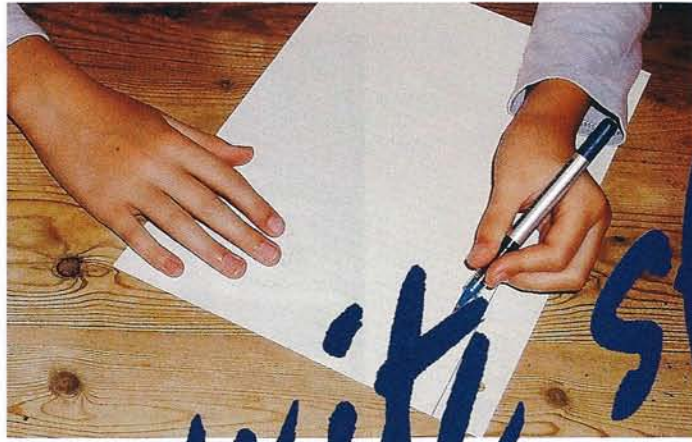


Despite small differences in particular letter shapes, there is general agreement in the basic formation of letters and it is important that a child forms his letters in a conventional way from the start



# The write stuff.

Gwen Dorman looks at how an age-old skill need not be forgotten

**N**ow computers have become such an important part of everyday life, it is tempting to think that the teaching of handwriting in schools is becoming obsolete. However, this view ignores the importance of handwriting in a child's educational development.

Children who do not feel confident in their writing skills are at a disadvantage in the whole development of literacy and their sense of self worth is impaired. At secondary stage, by which time it is hoped that the student will also be able to use a computer effectively, some written work is likely to be done with a pen and the student who is unable to write fluently, quickly and fairly automatically is again likely to be disadvantaged. At a later stage, poor handwriting skills may be just as much a handicap in the job market as poor reading and numeracy skills.

Many parents are concerned about their child's writing development, but are unsure of how to help. Making sure that the child is ready to write will provide a good start. Encouraging activities that develop muscle strength, especially in the shoulders (such as climbing, ball skills, skipping etc) help to give the stability and strength in the muscles needed to enable fine skills such as writing to be

possible. Similarly there are many activities such as cutting, sorting, and cooking that will build up manual dexterity in preparation for the complex movements needed for writing.

### Spelling and composition

When children begin to write it is helpful to encourage them to hold the tool in an efficient way (ideally between the forefinger and thumb, with the middle finger placed behind), but be aware that young children without sufficient maturity for such a precision grip frequently add additional fingers. As they get older, encouraging them to adopt a more efficient grip is helpful. It is also important to encourage children to hold a pencil or pen about two centimetres from the point so that the words on the page are clearly visible when they are being written, as this will help in spelling and composition.

At school it is hoped that there will be a clear policy in place that will guide your child to develop his handwriting skills through KS1 and 2, so that by the time he or she is ready for secondary school he can write quickly and legibly with a fair level of automaticity. It will be helpful if you know what style of writing your child is being taught so that you can support his or her learning. In this country there are a number of slightly



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differing styles taught, and when older a child will develop his own personal style, but in the early stages it is confusing for a child to be given mixed messages. Despite small differences in particular letter shapes, there is general agreement in the basic formation of letters and it is important that a child forms his letters in a conventional way from the start so that there is no re-learning needed at a later stage.

It is possible to encourage good habits in writing at home by making sure that the furniture used by children for homework and writing activities is a suitable size so they can write comfortably. Simple adaptations such as using a foot rest or firm cushion can make a difference to the support and comfort of a writing station.

Encourage your child's school to belong to the National Handwriting Association and perhaps join as an individual member yourself. Their website, [www.nha-handwriting.org.uk](http://www.nha-handwriting.org.uk), has some useful information.

**Gwen Dorman is Vice Chair of the National Handwriting Association, and is also part of the team at Laidlaw Education (020 8487 9517, [www.laidlaweducation.co.uk](http://www.laidlaweducation.co.uk)). Visit them at Stand 67 at the Archant Good Schools Show**