Handwriting

**Introduction**

**Aims**

- To enable students to produce a skilled legible style that is quick and easy to produce

- To provide a style that requires less dedication to processing concerning letter formation enabling the student to focus on composition and content

**Style**

The St John’s Grammar Handwriting style:
See Appendix

**History**

This handwriting style was developed by staff at the school to provide:

- Fluency (minimal pen lifts)
- Allow for kinaesthetic feedback when writing
- The same exit points
Skills

Formation of letters in the correct way is important once students can recognise letters and begin to write for themselves.

Through handwriting practice and varied experiences skills are developed including:

- **Hand, eye coordination**

- **Fine motor control**

- **Correct letter shapes using suggested sequence**
  (Correct letter formation at an early age will allow for correct exit points and fluent joining later on.)
  - Practice ensures that this becomes automatic
  - Includes supervised practice
  - Practise shapes used to make letters

Consistency is required for:

- **Size, proportion and alignment** – above and below the line, sitting on the line, same height
- **Slope** - slightly to the right for a right handed student
- **Spacing** – within a word and between words
- Correct use of **capital letters**

- **Approximate use of pen lifts**
  - between words
  - for capital letters

**Technique:**

- **Posture and seating position**
  (See Appendix: Handwriting Wall Chart)
  - Use of sloped boards to assist students experiencing difficulties with writing or for use in small groups

- **Pen/pencil hold** – tripod grip, thumb and 2\textsuperscript{nd} finger
  (See Appendix: Picture of pencil hold on the Handwriting Wall Chart)
  - Use of triangular pencils in the Early Learning Centre
  - Larger implements to be used for ease of use
  - Consider twist in wrist/arm

- **Pressure**
  Consider pressure of fingers through the pen/pencil
• **Position of paper**
  – Approximately 45 degree angle
  – In front of writing shoulder

• **Legible writing at speed**

• **Assessment of student’s own technique and style** –

  Demonstrate strategies to assist students

**Essential Considerations:**

• **Fatigue** – take writing breaks

• **Left-handed students** (approx. 17 % of population)
  ▪ Special directional help with formation and left to right orientation
  ▪ Special attention to hand posture and paper position to prevent “hooking”
  ▪ Pencil hold approximately 3cm from the point

• **English as a Second Language students**
  ▪ Awareness of different script style/s
  ▪ Awareness of different directions of writing
    e.g. right to left
  ▪ Awareness of different directions of letter formation
  ▪ Awareness of layout
    eg. Rows rather than columns

• **Location of students**
  ▪ Consideration of right-handed students next to one another, left handed students next to one another

• **Consideration of students transferring** from different countries, states and schools with different handwriting styles
**Content**

St John’s Grammar Handwriting Style is learned in three stages:

**It is important to ensure continuity.**
1. Teachers in the Early Learning Centre, Reception and Year 1 set the foundation for handwriting.
2. Teachers in Years 2 and 3 assist students to develop cursive skills.
3. Teachers in Year 4 to 6 will then incorporate the style into their programs.

**Early Learning Centre, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2**
- Students will focus on the beginner’s alphabet and capitals in writing.
- By the final term of Year 2 students are taught to develop exits on lower case letters and are given time to practise.
- The use of 14mm dotted thirds is highly recommended for all Year 2 students, not just for students requiring assistance.
- Explicit instruction for handwriting should be provided
  - Reception - minimum of 40 minutes per week
  - Year 1 – minimum of 40 minutes per week
  - Year 2 – minimum of 40 minutes per week

**Middle Primary (Year 3 and Year 4)**
- Students are introduced to direct linking and begin to develop the cursive alphabet.
- In Year 3 loops on descending letters are introduced.
- The use of 14mm dotted thirds is highly recommended for all Year 3 students, not just for students requiring assistance.
- By the end of term 3 in Year 4 all students should be using cursive writing for their work at school.
- Explicit instruction for handwriting should be provided
  - Year 3 - 40 minutes per week
  - Year 4 – 40 minutes per week

**Upper Primary (Year 5 and Year 6)**
- Students experiment in order to develop a personal style.
- Techniques must be the same as The St. John’s Grammar Style, as these foster legibility, speed and endurance.
- Year 5 students should have the opportunity to gain their pen licence
- Explicit instruction for handwriting should be provided
  - Year 5 – 40 minutes per week
  - Year 6 – It is expected at that a neat, legible, individual style has been developed by each student, adhering to the techniques outlined above. Teachers will only intervene and modify styles where appropriate.

**All year levels:**
- Handwriting styles such as Linked script and Print script (which use a **finger technique rather** than a combined finger/hand/ arm movement) should be discouraged.
- This may be varied if formal assessment indicates that other provisions should be made to suit the individual student’s requirements.

-Initial links on letters may be incorporated to assist students who have difficulty with direction when forming letters.

**Assessment and reporting:**

If any form of assessment is to be worthwhile, it must provide both student and teacher with useful information, which will help in the evaluation process and planning for further learning experiences.

Some suggested **means of assessment** include:

- Observation
- Anecdotal records and follow up
- Samples of work
- Individual assessment using a checklist
- Use of a commercial writing assessment package (e.g. Handwriting Speed Test)

**The Specific Criteria to monitor for Handwriting are:**

- Eye / hand coordination
- Fine motor control
- Posture and seating
- Pen/pencil hold
- Paper position
- Pressure
  - Through pencil/pen - Too heavy / too light
- General legibility
- Spacing
  - Within words
  - Between words
- Slope
- Use of lines – On, above, below or varied position
- Presentation layout – setting out – margins etc
- Letter formation
  - Direction
    - “t”s crossed and “i”s dotted
- Letter shape
- Proportion - Size of letters in relation to one another
- Alignment of letters
- Linkages
- Speed
- Fatigue
- Alternative styles
- Writing implements used
- Letter confusions
- Corrections - Amount
- How they are made – neat or untidily
  • Student’s ability to look critically at product/technique
  • Note points for practice

**Suggested Strategies for Remediation:**

As students are central to the learning process, they should share in the evaluation of their work.

- Use specific criteria as a guide as listed above
- First look at the positive aspects of the handwriting
- Then look at the priorities for development – discuss with student and work with student on personal goals
- Focus on only one aspect of writing at a time for student to work on
- Make writing practice goal directed and success orientated
- Use kinaesthetic awareness and multi-sensory activities to assist learning

**Suggested Activities for Learning and Remediation:**

- Constant focus on letter formation limits student performance. Their thought processes are interrupted. However fluency in letter formation assists as students also have sentence construction, sequencing and content to consider. It is therefore essential that handwriting is focussed on in the early years and provided as a specific individual lesson in the primary years. Handwriting affects most areas of curriculum. At present this is still main recording tool at school. Handwriting needs to be automatic, legible and fluent. A student’s difficulty with their handwriting can affect their self-esteem and therefore handwriting concerns needed to be focussed on positively, with small practical steps used to assist development.

- **Pen hold** – It is difficult to change an incorrect pen/pencil grip after the age of 7 years. Focus on correct pencil grip in the early years is therefore essential.

- **As a class, analyse the Specific Criteria for Handwriting** points, one at a time, for each writing sample to assist students to understand the different aspects of handwriting. This can be done with samples of work from students who are not in the class.
  - e.g. Highlight the spaces between words with a highlighter, are they even?
  - How are corrections made? Crossed out with ruler, cross next to error or scrubbed out heavily. Are these corrections neat or untidy?

- **Use the Specific Criteria for Handwriting points to assist students to determine personal goals** for their own handwriting. Looking at their writing samples using the Specific Criteria for Handwriting and consider the positive aspects of their handwriting and the areas for improvement. Focus on only one area for improvement at a time.
• **Look at samples of writing from a student. Use the Specific Criteria for Handwriting points** to compare samples and determine the difficulties the student is displaying in specific areas in their handwriting.

  e.g.  Look at position of letters on a line:
  Highlight the letters that are above the line in one colour.
  Highlight the letters that are below the line in another colour.

  Look at presentation layout:
  Highlight the space between the first word on each line and the margin.
  Is this gap too small, too large or just right?

  List letters that students have written incorrectly

  Spacing -Use a piece of writing about 3 lines in length. Ask the student to highlight the spaces between the words. Use an arbitrary measure like a pencil and ask the student to see if they can find ten spaces to score a total of 10.

  Capital letters - Ask the student to highlight the capital letters that are in the incorrect places.

  To assist with writing on lines ask the student to place 10 dots as near to the line on every line on the page. Then do horizontal lines eg letter “l” then “i”. Ask the student which was their best example.

• **Use groups of letters before using words for handwriting practice** (Give no more than groups of 3 letters joined together of the same letter to prevent fatigue of repetitive motions and attention span.)

• Trace letters then write without a model

• Arrows to follow instead of verbal instructions (consider verbal comprehension and sequencing difficulties of your students)

• Practice using dot-to-dots, mazes, puzzles (pencil control)

• Letter dictation (from memory)
  – Sounds and names
  – Upper and lower case

• Write the alphabet from memory
  - Upper and lower case

• Rainbow coloured letters (repetition of formation, beware of fatigue, don’t overdo repetitions)
• Air-writing (with a model to trace)
  – Gross motor movements then refine down to fine motor pencil movements
  – Use large sheets of paper, blackboards and other multi-sensory activities

• Multi-sensory activities to feel letter formation (kinaesthetic awareness) – Blackboard, chalk on the ground, finger-painting, shaving foam on a tray, sand trays, sand on white glue (let dry) to make sensory letters, close eyes to form letters

• Trace a letter onto another person’s hand – sit the same way – beware of confusing directions eg. Tracing on backs can result in the person having the shape traced on feel the letter in reverse)

• Trace over dotted letters

• Write for short periods of about 15 minutes at a time

• Practise writing frequently used words
  - Trace over commonly misspelt words to ensure they are learnt correctly
  - Incorporate this activity in spelling tasks

• Use a clipboard to hold the paper

• Rubber band around bottom of pencil to remind the student to hold at the correct place ie. Not too low

• Create “A left handed club” for left handed writers

• Tracking activities where letters in mixed order are on a page. Trace over the letter and say its sound or name as you write it. One letter per line of mixed letters. Do the same letter for the whole page to give practice.
  To assist with “b” and “d” confusion: do as per example above and when student becomes proficient do “b” on one line “d” on the next. The student is to say the letter name aloud as the student writes it to give multi-sensory feedback and promote learning.

• Time writing to increase speed – note-take, copy text or write a short sentence over and over and record the number of words written in 1-3 minutes – student competes their own time.

• Dictation of letters according to a common letter formation e.g. all ascending letters, all “two o’clock letters”
• Try different sized lined paper to suit the needs of the child. Missing a line in between may assist at first to develop a pleasing result.

• Provide a scrap paper for spelling attempts to avoid attempts being recorded several times and crossed out on the page.

• Verbalise letter formation directions
  - e.g. “z” and “e” are “to the end of the page letters”, they go in the same direction as we write

• Share Handwriting work-sheets between staff

• Share books and resources

**Handwriting can be assisted by:**

- Behavioural Optometrist – A vision check is recommended
- Occupational Therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Developmental Optometrist
- Speech Pathologist

The disadvantage of solely using the above professionals is that they are health based.

**The classroom teacher is in the best situation to assist students.**

**Special Education teachers can also assist.**