

Supporting handwriting

Summary

Handwriting is a complex skill. Students need to frequently practice handwriting to become proficient. Many learning activities require handwriting skills to record information and ideas. Some students may continue to require support with their handwriting throughout their schooling.

In the first Australian educational needs analysis of students on the autism spectrum, students reported that handwriting was in the top 10 difficulties that they experienced at school. In particular,

- being neat
- being quick enough to keep up.

Supporting students to develop handwriting in the early years, including those on the autism spectrum, can be particularly challenging. These challenges can continue despite years of practice and intervention (Broun, 2009).

The Australian Curriculum requires student handwriting to be assessed up until Year 3. In this practice we provide information on how you can support students to develop their handwriting and adjustments you can make to the Australian Curriculum. This practice also includes a series of video clips featuring Helen McLennan - an occupational therapist and teacher.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 1.6 - strategies to support the full participation of students with disability
- 2.5 - literacy and numeracy strategies
- 4.1 - support student participation

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

Handwriting is a complex skill which requires automaticity and legibility.

- Automaticity is the ability to automatically recall how to form a letter when handwriting . This can impact the speed and length of a student's writing as they may take longer remembering how to start writing a particular letter.
- Legibility is the ability to write letters that have consistent sizing and spacing, and to understand what has been written.

Building Blocks of Handwriting

There are many skills which contribute to handwriting including fine-motor skills, visual-motor perception and motivation. Helen McLennan explains the impact of these building blocks when handwriting.

The importance of practice

Despite the impact of these building blocks on handwriting, research recommends focusing on direct handwriting instruction and practice rather than underlying skills such as general fine motor activities. Technology can support handwriting skills but it should not completely replace physical handwriting practice.

See the videos of Helen McLennan discussing handwriting challenges and strategies on the [practice page](#).

In the classroom

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Helen McLennan suggests several strategies for how to address your student's handwriting needs.

- Use an individualised approach to understand where the difficulty lies in the students' automaticity and legibility.
- Use technology such as iPad apps as an adjustment as well as a way to teach correct letter formation.
- Involve the student and parents/carers in their handwriting by asking what they have tried before.
- When the lesson outcomes require content (such as persuasive writing), allow your students to use technology for expression. When the lesson outcomes are more flexible (such as a fun writing task or free-write), use physical handwriting so that you can home in on how the student is progressing.

Reflection questions:

- What opportunities do you provide your students to practice handwriting ?
- What actions do you take to better support your students during handwriting tasks? Who could you seek advice and assistance from?
- How can you identify your next steps?

Materials informing this practice

Handwriting and the Australian Curriculum

The National Literacy Learning Progression for handwriting and keyboarding specifies:

Not all students will use handwriting to create texts; some will express themselves using augmentative and alternative communication strategies. This may include digital technologies, braille, real objects, photographs and pictographs.

To view the Australian Curriculum handwriting standards, visit the National Literacy Learning Progressions site.