



Information on handwriting challenges

A summary of research findings about the handwriting difficulties of students on the autism spectrum.

Writing is a complex skill involving fine motor-control as well as perceptual skills^{1,2}. Children generally begin to develop handwriting skills in early childhood and, by around their second year of formal schooling, these skills have usually become somewhat automatic³. When students develop writing automaticity it allows them to focus more on the content of their writing⁴. It has, however, been observed that students on the spectrum have handwriting that is less legible than students not on the spectrum⁵, which may be related to difficulties with fine motor-skills^{6,7}. One study of 56 eight-year-old students found that those on the spectrum differed from their neurotypical peers in the accuracy of their letter formation, and sacrificed legibility in order to write faster⁸. Similarly, research has found that students on the spectrum had greater variability in the way they formed letters and the speed that they wrote⁹. Not only may these differences in handwriting ability entail a lack of automaticity and less capacity to focus on writing content, but problems with legibility may also affect the way in which the academic ability of these students are perceived¹.

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