

HANDWRITING









Pocketbook



By Julie Bennett

Cartoons:
Phil Hailstone

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The problems



In our classrooms we have the responsibility for teaching and/or improving students' handwriting. We regularly encounter students whose handwriting is:

- Slow
- Illegible
- Poorly formed
- Joined incorrectly
- Lacking in fluency
- A mixture of capitals and lower case
- A mixture of cursive (joined) and print (not joined)
- Sloping in multiple directions
- Not uniform in size/too large/too small

These difficulties may be a result of developmental delay or specific learning difficulty, or they may simply be habitual patterns that have developed over time. Whatever the causes, learners with handwriting difficulties often have to invest an enormous amount of effort to create acceptable handwriting. As a result they may experience tiredness, frustration and may possibly get 'turned off' from learning.

⌈ **Struggling with handwriting hinders learning and achievement.** ⌋

What are the benefits?



It is beneficial to work towards improving handwriting for both our students and ourselves.

Some benefits of fluent and legible handwriting are:





- Ease of learning letter strings and spellings
- Higher exam results
- Better readability for teachers and examiners (time saving for teachers)
- Easier acceptance of students' ideas because they are more easily read
- Enhanced ability to focus on composition and quality of writing content
- Improved capacity of writers to access their own thoughts and information
- Raised sense of self-competence as writers, which in turn increases achievement across all subjects

It is important that we work towards improving our students' level of handwriting, as it will improve their overall performance.

What is handwriting?



Handwriting is not an isolated activity; neither can it be seen solely as a motor activity (all about movement). It is part of language activity. Virginia Berninger refers to handwriting as 'language by hand', which is a useful reminder of its context and purpose.

- | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|-------------------|
| Reading | = |  | Language by eye |
| Listening | = |  | Language by ear |
| Speaking | = |  | Language by mouth |
| Writing | = |  | Language by hand |

Handwriting should be seen in the context of its place in literacy development. We know that the most effective methods for teaching literacy are structured, cumulative, and multi-sensory; it is the same for handwriting. First we must be clear about what we are teaching and expecting from our writers.

Defining 'good handwriting'



As teachers we often refer to 'good handwriting'. It is important to define what the qualities of good handwriting are before we start to teach it. There are three broad goals:

1 Fluency

2 Legibility

3 Speed

Fluency is the ability to carry out the motor movements required for handwriting smoothly, easily, comfortably and readily.

Legibility is the ease with which the reader (and the writer) can discern the handwriting on the page and is directly related to how well formed the letters are.

Speed is the rate at which handwriting is produced in relation to a student's developmental stage.

The body, mind and soul of handwriting



To achieve fluency, legibility and speed we need to engage the:

Body

Mind

and

Soul

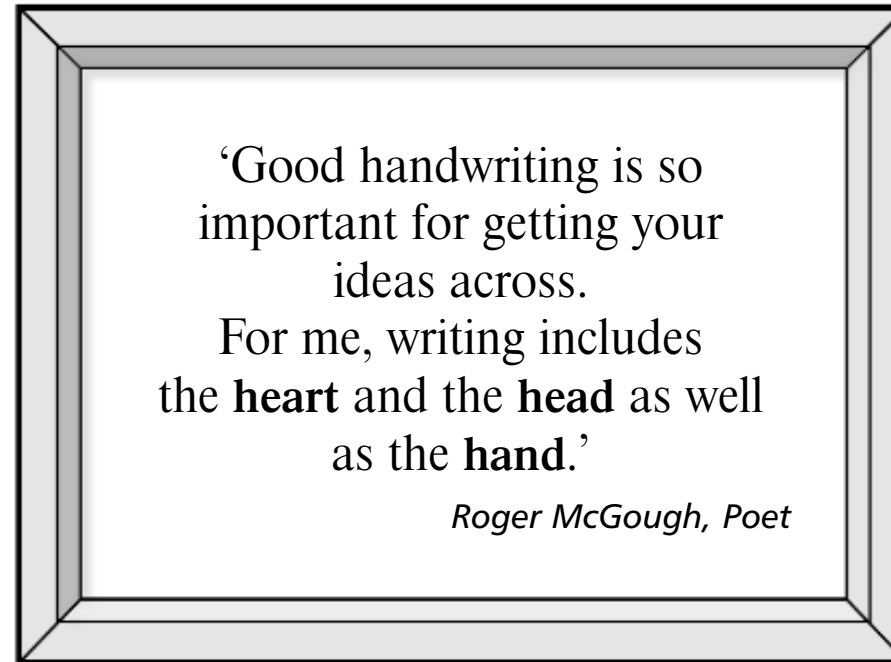
The Body: Getting the position and the motor movements of handwriting physically correct.

The Mind: Understanding the construction of handwriting and the meaning of the language we are writing.

The Soul: Enjoying the process, developing a sensual and aesthetic appreciation of handwriting.

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Body, mind and soul



The internal model of handwriting



There are two key processes – related but different – that come into action for handwriting. Try this brief activity to help you experience them both:

Activity:

Sign your name on a piece of paper, first with your eyes open and then again with your eyes closed. What do you notice?

1. The first time you relied on **visual feedback**.
2. The second time you relied on **kinaesthetic feedback** (the feel and movement).

The key to fluency lies with **kinaesthetic feedback**. Visual feedback is not rhythmic; kinaesthetic feedback is. By using kinaesthetic feedback we develop an **internal representation** of handwriting. One effective method of teaching and improving handwriting is to teach the **rhythmic, fluent, (kinaesthetic) movement** sequences which build the internal model.

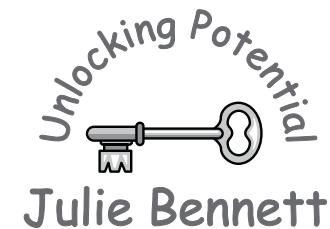
About the author



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