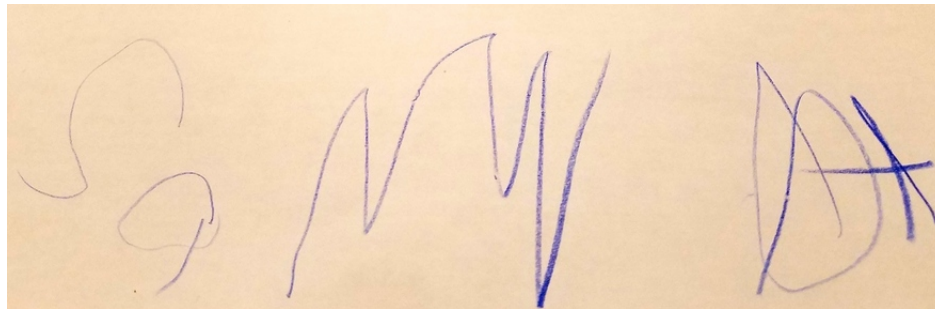


Why Teach Handwriting? It's Brain Training!



Handwriting is the primary tool for classroom communication and assessment. Poor handwriting can impact performance across all subjects for students who struggle to take notes, take tests, and do homework. Conversely, good handwriting can have lasting positive effects. Researchers, in three separate studies, found that college students who took notes by hand performed better on assessments than their peers who typed their notes (Hotz, R.L. April 4, 2016. Can handwriting make you smarter? *The Wall Street Journal*).



Handwriting is a language skill, not just a fine motor skill.

When pre-literate children draw letters freehand (as opposed to tracing them or using a keyboard), they increase activity in the same three areas of the brain that are activated in adults when they read and write ([James, 2012](#)). This demonstrates that the handwriting process actually changes the brain, reinforcing the neuro-circuitry used for higher level reading and writing skills.



Handwriting impacts students' writing process.

"Of all of the knowledge and skills that are required to write, handwriting is the one that places the earliest constraints on writing development. If children cannot form letters—or form them with reasonable legibility and speed—they cannot translate the language in their minds to written text" ([Graham, 2009](#)). Children who labor to form letters

won't have the mental reserves for organizing their ideas, choosing content, and providing details. Their motivation to write and the quantity and quality of their writing will suffer.



Handwriting influences students' spelling and reading development.

"... handwriting in the earliest grades is linked to basic reading and spelling achievement; for example, when children learn how to form the letter *m*, they can also be learning its sound. Attention to the linkages among handwriting, reading, and spelling skills can help to reinforce early achievement across these areas" ([Spear-Swerling, 2006](#)).



How to teach handwriting

Modest amounts of explicit handwriting instruction—as little as 10-15 minutes/day—may help to prevent writing difficulties for many students. "There are considerable returns for such a small investment of time, as students' sentence-writing skills, the amount of time they write, and the quality of their writing all improve along with their handwriting" ([Graham et al., 2000](#)). Evidence-based handwriting approaches teach consistent letter formation, group letters that are formed in similar ways, and separate easily reversible or confusable letters such as *b* and *d*.



Dysgraphia—When students struggle to write

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that impacts written expression. Dysgraphia may occur alone, with dyslexia (impaired reading disability), or with another language learning disability. Common signs of dysgraphia include an awkward pencil grip and body position, illegible handwriting, letters of different sizes, unfinished words or sentences, inability to write for very long, avoidance of writing or drawing activities, and difficulty organizing ideas on paper ([Reading Rockets](#)). See the International Dyslexia Association's [Fact Sheet](#) to learn more about dysgraphia. Understood offers these [parent tips](#) for students with dysgraphia.

Learn more about handwriting by visiting Literacy How's [Reading Wheel](#) and clicking on *Phonics*, *Spelling*, or *Written Expression*.

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