

Why Handwriting is Important

Contrary to the view that handwriting is a trivial skill, handwriting is important for several reasons. One involves the concept of mental resources in relation to reading and mathematics as well as writing. Just as effortful word decoding may impair reading comprehension, or lack of automatic recall may reduce the mental resources available for learning advanced computational algorithms in math, labored handwriting creates a drain on mental resources needed for higher-level aspects of writing, such as attention to content, elaboration of details, and organization of ideas. Because handwriting is a basic tool used in many subjects – taking notes, taking tests, and doing classroom work and homework for almost every content area as well as in language arts classes – poor handwriting can have a pervasive effect on school performance. Moreover, when handwriting is perceived as arduous and time-consuming, motivation to write may be greatly reduced, leading to a lack of practice that may further compound difficulties with writing. Finally, 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.



What Research Says

“Research over the last 30 years continues to show that handwriting speed and legibility, or what some call transcription fluency, predicts everything from a student’s quality and quantity of written compositions to his or her ability to take notes and the scores and grades he or she receives on exams in college classes ... And even though handwriting transcription fluency is considered a low-level skill, it appears to be nonetheless consistently related to and an accurate predictor of the amount and quality of the texts students produce—of students’ creativity of thought, organization, coherence of ideas, comprehensiveness of topical coverage, and clarity of expression... Even in the current age of computing technology, [researchers have] found a high correlation between handwriting speed and typing speed...” (Reutzel, 2015).

Ways to Help your Child Improve handwriting

Kids are not able to write well until they have developed good fine-motor skills. Fortunately, these skills improve easily with lots of practice. Use the following activities to help your young child develop the precision, balance, and hand-eye coordination that are needed to perform the fine-motor skills used in handwriting:

- Supervise handwriting homework and practice, practice, practice!
- Give your child clay or playdough to play with to strengthen the major muscles used in handwriting.
- Encourage her to play with Legos, miniature cars, small blocks, action figures, and other small toys.
- Do puzzles with your child or play games that involve handling of cards and small game pieces.
- Provide creative art projects that involve using crayons, marking pens, scissors, and finger paints, or tearing paper.
- Ask your child to sort collections of loose coins into stacks of pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters. Try sorting and stacking fruit loops instead and then enjoy!
- Use tweezers to pick up small items
- Help your child learn to manage such everyday skills as tying and lacing his shoes and buttoning his clothes.