Handwriting guidelines
Revised November 2017

Purpose
These guidelines provide support and advice for teachers to assist students to develop a personalised, fluent and legible handwriting style that enables them to communicate effectively when writing for different purposes. The document replaces the Department's previously published Handwriting guidelines. It makes explicit links to the content descriptions from the Western Australian Curriculum: English that form a mandatory part of each school's teaching and learning program.
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Introduction

Handwriting is a complex skill which is linked with a number of other cognitive, kinaesthetic and perceptual-motor skills and functions. From Pre-primary onwards, it is critical that letter formations are explicitly taught. Students need regular opportunities to practise handwriting and receive feedback on their progress. The Gradual Release of Responsibility model of explicit teaching provides students with the necessary support through teacher modelling and guided practice.

The teaching of handwriting continues to have an important place in the curriculum in the 21st century. While technology has impacted on the different ways we communicate, the ability to handwrite legibly remains a vital skill in many aspects of everyday life.

The Western Australian Curriculum: English requires teachers to formally teach and assess aspects of students’ handwriting. These guidelines recognise the need for all students to develop a personal handwriting style that is legible, fluent and automatic and supports writing for extended periods.

The English year level content descriptions describe teaching support for students that progresses from beginning with unjoined letters in the early years to writing using clearly formed joined letters with increasing fluency and automaticity from Year 3 onwards. The overall aim is that all students develop a personalised, fluent and legible handwriting style that enables them to communicate effectively when writing for different purposes.

The Western Australian Curriculum: English – Literacy strand articulates the handwriting content for each year level.

**Western Australian Curriculum: English - Literacy Strand – Handwriting**

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<th>Produce some lower case and upper case letters using learned letter formations</th>
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<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Write using unjoined lower case and upper case letters</td>
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<td>Write legibly and with growing fluency using unjoined upper case and lower case letters</td>
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<td>Write using joined letters that are clearly formed and consistent in size</td>
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<td>Year 4</td>
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<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Develop a handwriting style that is becoming legible, fluent and automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Develop a handwriting style that is legible, fluent and automatic and varies according to audience and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Consolidate a personal handwriting style that is legible, fluent and automatic and supports writing for extended periods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. A whole-school approach

School planning for handwriting needs to ensure a systematic approach where there is consistency in instructional practices and the teaching and learning builds from year to year. The allocation of time for teaching handwriting will vary across the phases of schooling. In Year PP-3 students require regular lessons where they are taught correct pencil grip, hand movements, letter formations and have the opportunity to practise and consolidate their handwriting. In Year 4-7 whole class lessons focus on consolidation of letter formations and joins with emphasis placed on using clearly formed joined letters and developing increased fluency and automaticity. Small group focus lessons are tailored to address the specific needs of students who have not yet developed a fluent, legible style of writing.

Effective instruction of handwriting skills

Effective instruction of handwriting skills involves explicit whole-class, small group and individual teaching of specific skills; and opportunities for students to practise these skills in the context of relevant writing activities. The explicit teaching lessons incorporate teacher modelling of letter formations with a focus on starting and finishing points, direction, size, slope and spacing. During demonstrations the teacher draws attention to specific instructional points. This ‘front of the class’ modelling can be followed up with ‘over the shoulder’ demonstrations for students in need of additional support.

Assessment

Assessment of students’ handwriting will focus predominantly on formative data (assessment for learning). Information gathered about the development of the following aspects of handwriting will help determine the teaching focus for future lessons:
- progress in letter formations – quality and accuracy
- consistency of spacing and shape, size, shape, slope and speed
- letter joins
- fluency
- legibility
- pencil hold
- paper placement
- sitting position.

Students should be encouraged to evaluate their own handwriting for legibility. This process is supported by the development of success criteria for handwriting with the class. These criteria can be used by the students to reflect on their own handwriting and by the teacher when giving feedback to students.

Font

The selection of the font used for forming letters is a school-based decision. Victorian Modern Cursive has been the recommended style for Western Australian schools for many years for the following reasons:
- Victorian Modern Cursive removes the distinction between printing (manuscript) and running writing (cursive).
- Students learn a foundation style and then learn how to join letters to form a cursive script. This does away with the need to learn a completely new style when moving from printing to cursive writing.
- It is based on natural handwriting patterns (basic scribble patterns), and requires no retracing of letter parts.

Other fonts schools may consider using include South Australian Modern Cursive and the New South Wales Foundation style. Both of these fonts have one basic set of letter shapes that are the same for young students using manuscript handwriting and older students using cursive writing.
School-based decisions about which font to use need to consider the following:

- The manuscript style taught in PP-2 needs to ensure that the transition to cursive writing in Year 3 does not require students to unlearn letter formations and pencil grip.
- The cursive style taught in Year 3 should flow naturally on from the manuscript style taught and learnt in PP-2.
- The selected font should have one basic set of letter shapes that are the same for young students using manuscript handwriting and older students using cursive writing.

**Pencil grip**

It is important to establish and reinforce a proper pencil grip as early as possible. The tripod grip is the preferred grip as it allows for proper control of the pencil. In the tripod grip the thumb, index finger and middle finger form a triangle to hold the pencil with the ring finger and the little finger supporting the middle finger. The pencil should be positioned between the three fingers so there is equal pressure. The index finger should rest on the top of the pencil. All fingers are slightly bent.

![The tripod grip](image)

**Teaching advice**

Position of the hand – Students should be instructed to position their writing hand below the actual line of writing so they can see what they are writing (for both right and left handed writers).

Position of the pencil – The barrel of the pencil should rest against the long bone of the index finger.

**Time allocation**

The allocation of time for teaching handwriting will vary across the phases of schooling. In Year PP-3 students require regular lessons where they have the opportunity to learn letter formations and practice and consolidate their handwriting. In Year 4-7 teachers plan lessons in response to their students' needs both whole class and small group.

Across PP-7 further opportunities to practise handwriting are best integrated into meaningful learning experiences that involve the students in writing for particular purposes.

**Planning - teaching and learning considerations**

When planning for handwriting teachers should refer to the following documents:

- The Western Australian Curriculum: English, Literacy and Language Strands, Year level Content Descriptions
- The Western Australian Curriculum: English, Literacy and Language Strands, Scope and sequences to identify the relevant sequences of learning
- The Early Years Learning Framework (K - Year 2)
- Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines
Handwriting lessons should be short focused sessions supported by opportunities throughout the day to reinforce key messages about handwriting.

Handwriting lessons include a focus on:
- appropriate pencil grip
- correct posture and paper placement
- letter formations and joins
- establishing handwriting movement patterns
- starting and finishing points
- the correct direction to follow
- the number of strokes involved in producing a letter
- size and spacing of letters.

Lessons may be integrated into the literacy block as:
- part of dictation
- a sentence of the day
- modelled writing
- a written conversation
- word building.

Types of learning experiences/lessons/activities
- Whole class handwriting lessons following a planned sequence: lessons with the whole class are designed to introduce new skills or revise and consolidate previously taught content. They may also focus on common areas of difficulty.
- Small group focus handwriting lessons are tailored to address individual and group needs. Students receive more individualised attention in relation to their specific learning needs.
- Practice and consolidation activities are built into the daily program where handwriting is not the main focus of the learning activity but there is an opportunity at the completion of a lesson for students to evaluate their writing in relation to familiar success criteria. This could occur following activities such as dictation, written conversation, grammar or writing in a reading response journal. Students may also be asked to assess each other’s writing.
2. Western Australian Curriculum requirements

The Western Australian Curriculum: English describes the skills and processes teachers are expected to teach at each year level. The handwriting content descriptions outline the progression from Foundation (Pre-primary) through to Year 7.

The Western Australian Curriculum: English describes the progression of handwriting across the year levels. Teachers will assess their students’ progress in relation to the year level expectations in order to determine teaching and learning needs. The class program will address these needs through whole class and small group lessons.

Please note:
Students in Year 3 and beyond who move schools, who have already established an effective handwriting style, should not be required to change that style. This may include students from overseas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation (Pre-primary)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Handwriting development is related to fine-motor skill development. Children in Pre-primary will be at different stages of development in their fine-motor skills and their ability to manipulate tools and perform different movement patterns. They need the opportunity to engage with a range of different activities that will further develop their fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, visual discrimination and spatial awareness/orientation.

The teaching and learning program should provide a wide range of opportunities for children in Pre-primary to:

- engage with pre-writing activities – copying, tracing, painting, manipulating materials and produce and explore various scribbles and patterns in variety of settings with a variety of tools
- experiment with print and symbols
- learn correct letter shapes following the suggested sequence of movement
- develop awareness of the terminology and concepts relating to written and printed material – spaces, words, letter, direction; position, upper and lower case letters, letter names and sounds
- develop a visual memory of letter shapes.

Paper
Paper should be selected to meet individual students’ needs.
Pre-primary - blank, folded newsprint and dotted thirds.

Writing implements
Pre-primary – 2B and B pencils, felt-tipped pens, crayons, triangle pencils.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western Australian Curriculum: English - Foundation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce some lower case and upper case letters using learned letter formations (ACELY 1653)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Year 1**

As students develop the ability to recognise and form letters, they need opportunities to consolidate their handwriting skills. Students will continue to:

- learn correct letter shapes following the suggested sequence of movement
- develop awareness of the terminology and concepts relating to written and printed material – spaces, words, letter, direction, position, upper and lower case letters
- identify and correctly form the twenty-six lower case and upper case letters
- write every day in order to consolidate and refine handwriting skills
- develop sufficient legibility and fluency to enable them to focus on the message, form and purpose of the writing
- develop understanding of the purposes of legible writing.

**Paper**

Paper should be selected to meet individual students’ needs

Year 1 – blank paper, dotted thirds

**Writing implements**

Year 1 – HB, 2B and B pencils, felt-tipped pens

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### Western Australian Curriculum: English – Year 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaborations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Write using unjoined lower case and upper case letters (ACELY 1663) | - using correct posture and pencil grip, learning how each letter is constructed including where to start and the direction to follow  
- writing words legibly using unjoined print script of consistent size |

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**Year 2**

The teaching and learning program in Year 2 should provide opportunities for children to:

- write every day in order to consolidate and refine handwriting skills
- practise and consolidate the twenty-six lower-case and upper case letters
- write with consistent size, spacing, proportion and alignment of letters
- develop sufficient legibility and fluency to enable them to focus on the message, form and purpose of the writing
- develop understanding of the purposes of legible writing.

**Paper**

Paper should be selected to meet individual students’ needs

Year 2 – dotted thirds

**Writing implements**

Year 2 – HB, 2B and B pencils, felt-tipped pens

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### Western Australian Curriculum: English – Year 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaborations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Write legibly and with growing fluency using unjoined upper case and lower case letters (ACELY 1673) | - using correct pencil grip and posture  
- writing sentences legibly and fluently using unjoined print script of consistent size |
Year 3

The teaching and learning program in Year 3 should provide opportunities for children to learn to write using joined letters. Students will:

- consolidate correct formation of letters with consistent slope, size, spacing and letter alignment
- practise joining techniques
- practise joining letters to develop a fluent style
- develop sufficient legibility and fluency to enable them to focus on the message, form and purpose of the writing
- develop understanding of the purposes of legible writing.

Paper

Paper should be selected to meet individual students’ needs

Year 3 – dotted thirds

Writing implements

Year 3 – HB, 2B and B pencils

Western Australian Curriculum: English – Year 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaborations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write using joined letters that are clearly formed and consistent in size (ACELY 1684)</td>
<td>• practising how to join letters to construct a fluent handwriting style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Year 4-7

The teaching and learning program in Year 4-7 should provide opportunities for students to develop handwriting that is fluent, legible and automatic. Teaching and learning activities should support students to:

- consolidate correct formation of letters with consistent slope, size, spacing and letter alignment
- consolidate joining letters to develop a fluent style
- use speed loops when joining techniques are established
- use strategies to assess their own technique and style
- develop a personalised style which is legible, fluent, durable and aesthetically pleasing (once students are writing using clearly-formed joined letters with increased fluency and automaticity).

Paper

Paper should be selected to meet individual students’ needs

Year 4 – (14mm)
Year 5-7 – (8 or 9 mm)

Writing implements

Year 4-7 – HB pencils, biros

Western Australian Curriculum: English – Year 4-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaborations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Write using clearly-formed joined letters, and develop increased fluency and automaticity (ACELY 1696)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Develop a handwriting style that is becoming legible, fluent and automatic (ACELY 1706)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Develop a handwriting style that is legible, fluent and automatic and varies according to audience and purpose (ACELY 1716)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Consolidate a personal handwriting style that is legible, fluent and automatic and supports writing for extended periods (ACELY 1727)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Assessment

Below are list of assessment guidelines that can be used for the corresponding year group. Please note that these can be adapted to accommodate the localised needs of the students.

Year P-2
- hand-eye coordination
- pencil grip and posture
- formation of lower and upper-case letters (starting place, direction, shape)
- space between words
- consistency of size
- formation of numerals

Year 3-4
- pencil grip and posture
- formation of lower and upper-case letters (starting place, direction, shape)
- joins
- fluency
- spacing
- legibility

Year 5-7
- formation of lower and upper-case letters (starting place, direction, shape)
- consistency of shape and size
- joins (diagonal, horizontal)
- use of speed loops
- fluency and automaticity
- spacing
- uniformity of slant
- aesthetic appeal
- personalised style
4. Teaching left-handed students

As English is written from left to right, some left-handed students are likely to find learning handwriting more difficult than right-handed students. Whereas a right-handed student writes away from the body and pulls the pencil, a left-handed student writes toward the body and pushes the pencil. For this reason left-handed students may require individualised support when learning to write.

Factors for teachers to consider include the following:

Page orientation
Left-handed students should position the page slightly to the left of them with the top left hand corner tilted higher than the right.

Pen/pencil grip
Left-handed writers need to grip the pencil high enough to be able to see what is being written and to avoid smudging it. It is recommended that the student grip the pencil around 2.5cm-3.8cm from the point using the tripod grip.

Position of arm and wrist
The lower arm should be perpendicular to the bottom of the page. The wrist should be straight and the writing hand should be below the writing line.

Letter formation
Up and down movements and the direction of circular letters are the same with either hand. Left-handed students may find it easier for the 'crossbar' components of letters such as t, f, A, E, F, H, T to be drawn by pulling from right to left, not left to right as with right-handed students.

Further support for left-handed students may include:
• sitting a left-handed student on the left side of writing areas so they do not bump elbows with the child next to them
• considering soft pencils that help prevent the point digging into the page
• considering moulded grips to facilitate and reinforce the correct pencil hold
• use of a desk mat illustrating how to adopt the ideal posture, pencil grip and paper position.
5. Student diversity

To ensure all students have the opportunity to progress with their learning in this area of curriculum, teachers may need to consider curriculum, instructional and environmental adjustments.

Curriculum adjustments may involve:
- drawing from learning area content at different levels along the Foundation (Pre-primary) to Year 10 sequence to adjust age-equivalent content
- using knowledge of students’ learning and support needs to personalise the teaching and learning program.

Instructional adjustments may involve:
- providing alternative opportunities for students to represent their learning (for example, using technology and augmentative and alternative communication systems).

Environmental adjustments may involve:
- providing access to alternative equipment and furnishings
- alternative input devices (keyboards, switches and voice recognition software)
- alternative writing tools (pencil grips, writing scaffolds and templates)
- use of technology and augmentative and alternative communication systems.

For further handwriting and use of software support for students with special educational needs, contact Statewide Services on 9402 6101.
6. Producing digital text

The Western Australian Curriculum: English requires that students are taught to use a range of software applications to construct and edit print and multi-modal texts.

Familiarity with both print and digital requirements for writing and creating begins in the early years and is developed systematically and concurrently. Class programs support students in learning to use a range of software including word processing software. Students will learn to make appropriate choices about whether to use handwriting or software to suit their purpose and context.

Western Australian Curriculum: English – Literacy Strand – Use of software

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Construct texts using software including word processing programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Construct texts that incorporate supporting images using software including word processing programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Constructs texts featuring print, visual and audio elements using software including word processing programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Use software including word processing programs with growing speed and efficiency to construct and edit texts featuring visual, print and audio elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Use a range of software including word processing programs to construct, edit and publish written text and select edit and place visual, print and audio elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Use a range of software including word processing programs with fluency to construct, edit and publish written text and select edit and place visual, print and audio elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, learning new functions as required to create texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, to confidently create, edit and publish written and multi-modal texts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The following English content descriptions describe the knowledge, understandings, skills and processes that teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn at each year level regarding the creation of digital electronic texts. The related content elaborations provide examples of particular skills and processes students will be learning as they engage with the teaching and learning program.

Western Australian Curriculum: English Content Descriptions and Elaborations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand concepts about print and screen, including how books, film and simple digital texts work, and know some features of print, for example directionality (ACELA1433)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- learning about front and back covers; title and author, layout and navigation of digital/screen texts
- learning about simple functions of keyboard and mouse including typing letters, scrolling, selecting icons and dropdown menu identifying familiar and recurring letters and the use of upper and lower case in written texts in the classroom and community
- using familiar and common letters in handwritten and digital communications
- using simple functions of keyboard and mouse

Recognise the letters of the alphabet and know there are lower and upper case letters (ACELA1440)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct texts using software including word processing programs (ACELY1654)</th>
<th>including typing letters, scrolling, selecting icons and dropdown menu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Year 1**  
Understand concepts about print and screen, including how different types of texts are organised using page numbering, tables of content, headings and titles, navigation buttons, bars and links (ACELA 1450) | • learning about how books and digital texts are organised including page numbers, table of contents, headings, images with captions and the use of scrolling to access digital texts  
• creating digital images and composing a story or information sequence on screen using images and captions  
• adding images to digital written communications such as emails with pictures of self, classmates or location |
| Construct texts that incorporate supporting images using software including word processing programs (ACELY1664) | |
| **Year 2**  
Know some features of text organisation including page and screen layouts, alphabetical order, and different types of diagrams, for example timelines (ACELA1466) | • recognising how chapters and table of contents, alphabetical order of index and glossary operate to guide access to information  
• learning about features of screen texts including menu buttons, drop down menus, links and live connections  
• experimenting with and combining elements of software programs to create texts |
| Construct texts featuring print, visual and audio elements using software, including word processing programs (ACELY1674) | |
| **Year 3**  
Identify the features of online texts that enhance navigation (ACELA1790) | • becoming familiar with the typical features of online texts, for example navigation bars and buttons, hyperlinks and sitemaps  
• using features of relevant technologies to plan, sequence, compose and edit multimodal texts |
| Use software including word processing programs with growing speed and efficiency to construct and edit texts featuring visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1685) | |
| **Year 4**  
Identify features of online texts that enhance readability including text, navigation, links, graphics and layout (ACELA1793) | • participating in online searches for information using navigation tools and discussing similarities and differences between print and digital information  
• identifying and selecting appropriate software programs for constructing text |
| Use a range of software including word processing programs to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1697) | |
| **Year 5**  
Investigate how the organisation of texts into chapters, headings, subheadings, home pages and sub-pages for online | • writing letters in print and by email, composing with increasing fluency, accuracy and legibility and demonstrating understanding of what the audience may want to hear |
texts and according to chronology or topic can be used to predict content and assist navigation (ACELA1797)

Use a range of software including word processing programs with fluency to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1707)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 6</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, learning new functions as required to create texts (ACELY1717)</td>
<td>• selecting and combining software functions as needed to create texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, to confidently create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts (ACELY1728)</td>
<td>• understanding conventions associated with particular kinds of software and using them appropriately, for example synthesising information and ideas in dot points and sequencing information in presentations or timing scenes in animation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References
Western Australian Curriculum: English, School Curriculum and Standards Authority (Version 8.1)

Student Diversity and the Australian Curriculum, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority January 2013