



WRITING



Handwriting

HELPING PUPILS TO:

- Improve handwriting that isn't legible, or is so messy it creates a bad impression
- Have a sense of their worth as a writer, both by understanding that poor handwriting isn't everything and by actually tackling the issue
- Write quickly and clearly, under pressure, in tests or exams
- Get beyond experiencing handwriting as an uncomfortable, difficult task that slows down the whole process of writing
- Recognise the importance of legible handwriting

Teachers at secondary level sometimes say that they haven't been trained to teach handwriting and are a bit uncertain about how best to help pupils. They mention poor handwriting in their marking but haven't necessarily got strategies for improvement at their fingertips. The approaches in this section give a range of practical ways of making a difference to pupils' attitudes to handwriting and the handwriting itself, which can improve their self-esteem as writers.

On the DVD there is a 12-minute video clip of one teacher, Amy Druce, working with her Year 8 nurture group on attitudes and diagnosing the problems. This clip provides support for individual teachers or departments wanting to see this kind of work in action, to get a sense of how one might start to tackle handwriting issues with pupils. The pupils' writing is included as a PDF on the DVD.

1. Diagnosing the problem (self-assessment handwriting grid)



- Give pupils a short piece of writing, a paragraph long, to copy. Watch them write and consider the aspects of the process listed below. Identify which ones need to be addressed. Focus on no more than two or three of the most important ones first, then come back to others later. Have follow-up sessions to embed what's been learnt.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| - How the pupil holds the pen | - Direction - slant |
| - Pressure of pen | - On the line |
| - Even spacing | - Legibility |
| - Forming letters (for instance, completing circles for 'a' or 'o', or giving 'q' or 'p' a decent long tail, or giving 'i' its dot) | - Speed |

You could use the handwriting assessment grid on page 102 to note your observations for discussion with individual pupils, use the same set of categories for pupils to assess their own handwriting, and re-assess their progress from time to time.

The DVD includes a 12-minute video clip of Amy Druce and a teaching assistant working with a Year 8 nurture group in this way. The pupils' writing is included as a PDF on the DVD.

2. Choosing a pen

Have a small selection of different pens available. Ask pupils to try out a few and select the one that feels most comfortable and suits them best. This can make them feel that their own particular needs are being taken into account and makes the point that you have to feel comfortable when writing. For some a very thin barrel doesn't give them quite as much grip as they need. For left-handed writers, a ball-point pen may be less likely to smudge the ink as they move it across the page than a fineliner or ink pen.

3. Writing with grid lines p.103

Provide the pupil(s) with the handwriting sheet on page 103. This shows where letters should rest and where the long strokes of letters like 'h' or 'k' should reach up to. Use this in conjunction with the 'Diagnosing the problem' approaches on pages 98 and 102.

4. Talking about attitudes and understandings p.104

Explore the attitudes of pupils and possible misunderstandings about handwriting, as a way of making them more conscious of the issue and motivating them to focus on their handwriting. The classroom material on pages 104-105 uses the statements about handwriting ('A pyramid of importance'), as a way of provoking discussion and clarifying misconceptions. Cut up the statements to allow pupils to arrange them in a pyramid.

The DVD includes a short video clip of Amy Druce doing this activity with a Year 8 nurture group.

5. A debate - does handwriting matter? p.107

Is handwriting still important, given how much people write using computers? Debating the issues is another way of drawing pupils' attention to their handwriting in an interesting way, rather than purely as a technical skill that needs to be practised, without any awareness of why this might be important. The debate activity in the classroom material is an engaging way of raising the issues.

6. Celebrity handwriting - what would their teachers have said?

    p.109

In this activity, pupils look at the handwriting of several well-known people. The classroom material on page 109 asks pupils to use both what they've learned about good handwriting, and the criteria in the grid on page 102, to write a teacher's comment on each of the celebrities' handwriting, before finding out who wrote which piece of writing. This is an activity that encourages pupils to notice what's important about clear, legible handwriting in a context that's engaging and interesting. You could also include some teachers' handwriting, if teachers in your school are happy to provide some samples for you to use!

Answers: 1. & 2. Prince William and The Duchess of Cambridge; 3. Barack Obama; 4. Lady Gaga; 5. Beyonce and 6. The Queen.