

# Steps to Handwriting

August 2020

## Presentation Overview

Julie Ring, MS, OTR/L and Ingrid Rowland, OTR/L

Handwriting involves many skills, including motor, visual perceptual, praxis/coordination, sensory processing, and cognitive/executive function skills. If there are difficulties in any of these areas, early intervention is key. An occupational therapist can provide consultation, evaluation, and treatment.

Handwriting is a lifelong skill. It impacts many skills, including written language, language, reading, knowledge retention, self-esteem/confidence, and general academic success.

### **Prewriting Readiness:**

- small muscle development for strength and in-hand manipulation skills
- hand-eye coordination
- functional pencil grasp
- ability to produce basic strokes (circles and lines)
- ability to draw simple shapes
- letter perception (recognizing forms and noticing likes/differences)
- orientation to printed language (left-right discrimination).

### **Handwriting General concepts:**

- children are developmentally ready to begin working on handwriting skills between 4-6 years old
- early learning should focus on motor plans, not size, alignment
- hand/body warm up play/exercises help before writing work
- have proper seated positioning - see handout eastsideot.com
- teach uppercase first, then lowercase
- cluster similar letter forms, such as c - o,a,d,g,q
- separate commonly confused letters, such as b/d and p/q
- letter reversals are not unusual through 2nd grade
- repetition is critical - do short, but frequent lessons/practice
- Make it fun! Use preferred topics, interesting lists, write letters to family/friends, create stories
- use multi-sensory strategies - see handout eastsideot.com

### **Common Handwriting Programs:**

#### *Learning/Handwriting Without Tears*

- Created by an OT, commonly used by OTs, used in some school districts
- Prewriting, handwriting (manuscript and cursive), keyboarding programs
- <https://www.lwtears.com>

### *Zaner-Bloser*

- Common program in school districts
- Prewriting, handwriting (manuscript and cursive)
- <https://www.zaner-bloser.com/handwriting/zaner-bloser-handwriting/index.php>

### *Size Matters*

- Created by an OT and commonly used by OTs
- Program concepts can be applied to other general handwriting programs, such as Zaner-Bloser
- Simplifies teaching of letter sizing and alignment. 3 letter sizes;
  - Size 1 = “tall letters” (touch top and bottom paper lines)
  - Size 2 = “short letters” (touch middle and bottom paper lines)
  - Size 3 = “drop” or “go under” letters (touch middle line and drops below the bottom line).
- <https://realotsolutions.com>

### **Common Handwriting Supports**

- An OT can determine if handwriting intervention is indicated
- Private practice OT has a broad scope of practice and can address all areas of need, including strength, coordination, visual perception, sensory processing, regulation, and executive function.
- School OTs often have a more narrow scope of practice, primarily supporting fine motor delays
- See a SLP if there are concerns with speech/language
- Get a vision exam if there are concerns with vision (developmental optometrists can provide specialized evaluations and vision therapy)
- Visual supports may include things such as visual cue cards, handwriting checklists, adaptive paper, graphic organizers
- Fine motor supports may include things such as pencil grips, adaptive pencils/pens, slant board, hand exercises and fine motor development activities
- Sensory supports may include things such as alternative pencil grips (soft, squishy, textured), blotter, alternative seating, noise reduction headphones, reduction of visual distractions, and movement breaks
- Core/body supports may include things such as proper seated positioning (chair & desk sizing, along with adaptations such as footstools, cushions), and alternative seating, such as cube chairs.

Please see **additional information and resources** on [eastsideot.com](http://eastsideot.com), including;

- Multi-sensory Handwriting Ideas
- Seated Positioning for Handwriting
- Common Core Writing Standards
- Fine motor development, Sensory processing, and Vision

