

Handwriting: what to teach and when

For information and resources about teaching handwriting see the National Handwriting Association website: <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk>

Should we teach cursive writing from the start?

In summary

- This is not a statutory requirement.
- Teaching young children cursive letters (with 'lead-in' and 'exit' strokes) can present a barrier to learning for some pupils who find these visually and physically more complex to master.
- Children who find it difficult to master cursive writing should be taught to accurately and fluently (automatically) print letters first, and then to simply and naturally join the end of one letter to the correct starting point of the next of their correctly-formed letters when they are ready to do so.

For more information, please see e.g.

[Teaching Fully Cursive Writing in Reception](#)

[Continuous Cursive – cure or curse?](#)

Statutory requirements

There are no requirements to teach fully cursive writing either in the EYFS or in the National Curriculum. Indeed, the National Curriculum for English places emphasis on the acquisition of letter shape, space and size before joins are taught and delivers clear messages that some letters are best left un-joined.

The National Curriculum reflects the position that there is no evidence supporting the notion that schemes which use "lead in" strokes and fully cursive writing are in any way superior to those in which letters start at the top and join with an exit stroke. Although "lead in strokes" are taught widely in other European countries, there is an important age difference for when formal writing is introduced, i.e. at around 7 years of age, as opposed to 4–5 years in England.

For helpful tips on handwriting in Secondary Schools, see [here](#).

Key Stage 1 and 2

	Statutory Requirements	Non-Statutory Notes and Guidance
Year 1 Age 5-6	Pupils should be taught to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly • begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place • form capital letters • form digits 0–9 • understand which letters belong to which handwriting ‘families’ (i.e. letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these. 	Handwriting requires frequent and discrete, direct teaching. Pupils should be able to form letters correctly and confidently. The size of the writing implement (pencil, pen) should not be too large for a young pupil’s hand. Whatever is being used should allow the pupil to hold it easily and correctly so that bad habits are avoided. Left-handed pupils should receive specific teaching to meet their needs.
Year 2 Age 6-7	Pupils should be taught to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another • start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left un-joined • write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower case letters • use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters 	Pupils should revise and practise correct letter formation frequently. They should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.
Years 3-4 Age 7-9	Pupils should be taught to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left un-joined • increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting (for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch). 	Pupils should be using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing. Handwriting should continue to be taught, with the aim of increasing the fluency with which pupils are able to write down what they want to say. This, in turn, will support their composition and spelling.
Years 5-6 Age 10-11	Pupils should be taught to write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choosing which shape of a letter to use when given choices and deciding whether or not to join specific letters • choosing the writing implement that is best suited for a task. 	Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task, for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an un-joined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra; and capital letters, for example, for filling in a form.