

The Reluctant Writer

Common Issues

- Some younger children do not show an interest in mark making and rarely choose to pick up a pencil.
- Some children struggle to follow an adult's agenda, and it can be difficult to encourage them to use a pencil.
- Child may lack motivation or interest in writing, require a lot of encouragement to initiate the task and ultimately get very little onto paper. They may not see the purpose in writing.
- A tendency to rush to get the task completed as quickly as possible, resulting in messy handwriting
- Child complains of painful or achy hands. Strategies have been tried, but the aches and pains remain, and child may begin to be reluctant to write.
- Child dislikes the feel of a pen/pencil or the sound of the pencil/pen on the paper.
- Child can express lots of great ideas verbally, but does not reflect these on paper.
- Some children can become anxious about making mistakes. This sometimes prevents them doing any work unless they feel confident they can do it perfectly.

Strategies to try

Children at the Pre-Writing stage:

- Set up an area with an appropriately sized table and chair, and a range of fun and interesting crayons, coloured pencils and paper which they can freely access throughout the day.
- If and when they do begin to mark make, you can begin copying the marks/scribbles that they are making whilst providing a verbal commentary e.g. "up and down, round and round". Slowly start taking turns, and encourage them to copy the marks that you make.
- Refer to the Multi-sensory activity ideas on our other advice sheets to consider more ways to explore simple lines and shapes which may align with areas of interest for example, using a car to follow along roads; you could even strap a crayon to the front or back of the car so it makes a mark on the paper.



For children that can write:

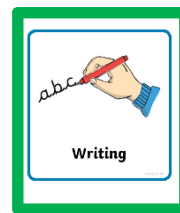
- Remind the child that it is not about quantity of writing, but quality.
- Incorporate art into writing activities – e.g. fold a piece of paper into four quarters and think of four topics. Write one topic on each square. The child can then draw a picture to represent each of the topics before writing about them.
- Choose writing activities with a purpose – allow the child to write about a topic that means something to them so they can see the purpose beyond just learning to write. Fun handwriting activities could include writing birthday cards, secret notes, diaries, letters to Father Christmas and captions to pictures.

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- Guided writing – parent/teacher and child write something together. Let the child choose the topic. The adult does the physical handwriting and the child helps to think of, and organise the ideas and sentences. Often a child's physical writing skills and stamina don't match their creativity and voice. Guided writing helps them to see what's possible with writing.
- Children who dislike the feel of the pencil/pen can be given a variety of foam/rubber pencil grips to try. They may prefer to write in pen rather than pencil. Easy flow rollerball pens glide nicely over the paper and are generally not 'scratchy' like pencils or standard handwriting pens.
- Consider additional means of recording (e.g. a scribe, typing, dictation), that the child may be more motivated by, and therefore be more able to demonstrate their learning and ideas more accurately. See additional advice sheet on use of ICT for more details.

General strategies for all ages and stages:

- Make sure the writing task is set at the 'just right level' so that the child feels able to achieve, rather than overwhelmed by the task. You may need to reduce the expectation of how much writing is completed in order for the child to engage at all.
- Keep sessions short – up to five minutes initially. Alternate 5 minutes of handwriting practice with 5 minutes of a fun activity or treat, then return to handwriting practice. A visual timer or sand timer could be used to help the child work for the time set, and know that the task will end.
- Encourage the child to take regular rest breaks, not only to rest their hand but also allow a 'brain break'.
- Use of a 'Now and Next' approach may be helpful "now we will do 5 minutes of handwriting", next we will do something fun".



NOW



NEXT

Overcoming fear of failure

- Spelling and grammar are important, but only as a way to help us communicate thoughts and ideas. Focus on the child's ideas first and leave spelling/grammar for the revision process. Encourage children who are worried about spelling to write down their whole thought in their best-guess spelling and check the spelling afterwards.
- A Social Story can be helpful to reassure that it is okay to make mistakes.
- Allow use of a rubber initially, then gradually limit use, e.g for tasks they will find difficult, but not for routine tasks.
- Frixion erasable pens may give the child confidence to write in pen as they can erase any mistakes.