

MSJ Community Conference 2022

Teaching manuscript to struggling readers:
The why, the what, and the how

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Does Messy Writing Matter?

Messy Writing should only be a concern if it (is):

Slow
Effortful
Illegible

Distracts attention away from ideas
Reinforces poor self-image
Reflects fuzzy letter memory

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Teaching Manuscript to Struggling Readers

- ❖ Why does handwriting matter?
- ❖ What are the necessary foundation skills for effective writing?
- ❖ How do we teach struggling readers to form their letters?

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I.
Why does handwriting matter?

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Handwriting Experience Automates Letter Recognition

The Importance of Handwriting Experience on the Development of the Literate Brain

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Left Hemisphere

- Reading System
- Letter Perception System
- Writing System

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II.
What are the necessary foundation skills for effective writing?

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What knowledge and skills are required for proficient writing?

Higher Order Abilities

- Generating content
- Vocabulary
- Spelling
- Syntax
- Organization
- Editing
- Revising

Foundation Skills Automatic Letter Recognition & Automatic Letter Writing

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Understanding Effortful Letter Formation: You Try It

Please copy the following quotation accurately. Use just one unfamiliar letter form. Instead of each t, please write **⊞**.

⊞ — ⊞

"The most important thing you can do for a young child who has experienced trauma, the best thing to do for them, is teach them to read".

-Donald Meichenbaum

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Thinking about Letter Formation interferes with Written Expression

Proficient Letter Production

- Automatic
- Requires few resources
- Transcribes thoughts

Inefficient Letter Production

- Effortful
- Demands attention
- Distracts from expression

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Case Study: Jackson

Rising 4th grade

High language & vocabulary (99th %ile)

Clear articulation

Reading fluency (1st %ile)

Dysgraphic (1st %ile)

Individual Instruction 5x/week (daily writing instruction with weekly accuracy goals)

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III.

How can you teach students to form their letters?

Teaching (& Fixing) Letter Production

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Understanding that Letter Production is a Procedural Skill
(Learning How to Do)

Letter production is a procedural skill that is learned in a similar way to driving, juggling, skiing, knitting, etc.

Key Elements of Effective Instruction

1. Explicit instruction
2. Focused practice daily
3. Reflection and feedback

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Understanding Letter Production as a Procedural Skill

Like other procedural skills:

Letter production develops best through explicit instruction, followed by accurate practice at the student's pace.

Many learners are slow and awkward at first. *This is typical, normal, and to be expected during the first and second phases of learning a new skill.*

Novice skills are vulnerable to changing environments.

Use the same writing instrument and the same writing surface everyday until the skill is automatic.

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One Approach to Teaching Handwriting

1. Find the Path: Diagnose the starting point, define a goal, scaffold the middle.
2. Plan your Scaffolding: Identify steps towards the goal.
3. Find a Sequence: Consider what to teach first, next, etc.
4. Provide Distributed Practice Time
Practice 1- 3x daily for 5 minutes each.

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1. Find the Path

Diagnose the starting point, then define a goal.



What are the issues here?

Reversals (b, d, j, z), improper placement (p, q) incorrect form (m, w, v), ascenders and descenders...

Example Goal: To write legibly on 4th grade paper.

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2. Plan Your Scaffolding

Ⓢ

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Start Point

●

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Scaffold

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

Goal

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3. Follow Your Letter Instruction Sequence

Ⓢ

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

A.

circle c c d a g o q

little e s c x y w

up high i h k f l b

down down p r m n j u y

C.

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

●

Name _____ Month _____, 2021

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

B.

circle c c d a g o q

little e s c x y w

up high i h k f l b

down down p r m n j u y

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Teaching a Letter Group: Main Steps

- ❖ Learn the first 1-2 patterns in the group
- ❖ Practice by writing 3 times on paper, while saying the sound
- ❖ Feedback
- ❖ Write 3 more times on paper
- ❖ Reflect
- ❖ Practice in at least one more session that day

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What's Next, After the First Few Letters?

- ❖ Teach the next 2-3 patterns in that same group
- ❖ Hold students accountable only for the letters in that group.
- ❖ Move on to the next letter group when all the letters in the present group are consistent.
- ❖ Do mixed review of letters after teaching two groups.

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Introducing a letter using a pattern: the circle C letters

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Teaching a Letter: Learning the Motion



- Two copies of the letter pattern.
- Show the pattern and discuss.
- Describe the motion sequence in simple words
- Connect the letter to its sound
- Trace with "scout fingers" while describing motion, then say sound
- Scaffold: I do (once), we do (twice), you do (thrice)
- Independent practice on paper (2 sets of 3)

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Writing Tools: Keep it Simple & Consistent

Use the same writing device and the same surface every day.

Novices are vulnerable to change.
(Guinosso et al., 2016)


Friction is Key



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Begin Every Practice by Checking Writing Position

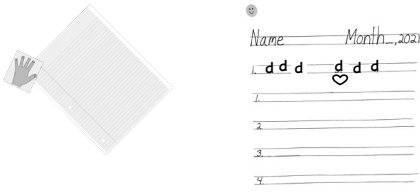


Left-handed Student Right-handed Student

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Teaching the Letter d



Name _____ Month _____, 2021

d d d d d d

1 _____

2 _____

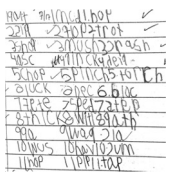
3 _____

4 _____

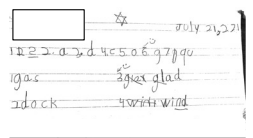
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Jackson Lessons 1-3

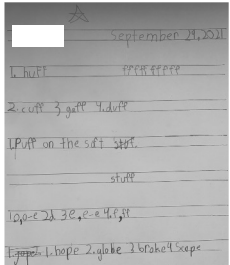


Jackson Lesson 5

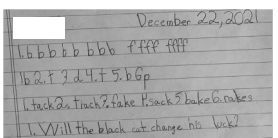


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Jackson: Lesson 34

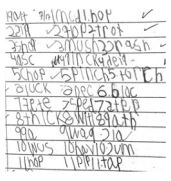


Jackson: Lesson 108

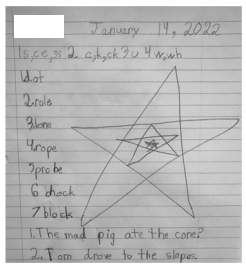


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Jackson Before & After (128 lessons)



January 14, 2022



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Improving Handwriting is not Magic

Letter writing accuracy and speed develop over time with frequent, brief practice.

Letter writing improves with practice, reflection, and feedback.

Practice: a couple of letters in the same formation group;
say the sound or letter name while writing each letter (VAKT)

Reflection: student reviews, selects best examples, explains why.

Feedback: teacher reinforces correct examples and notes when
 the best samples are produced during practice.

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Closing Thoughts

Take the long view.
 Every human deserves
 the possibility of writing.

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Proficient Writing Builds Competence and Confidence

Proficient writing supports:

- School achievement
- Personal reflection
- Effective communication
- Job training
- Employment
- College entrance
- Networking

Dykstra's Pillars that Support a Happy Adult Life

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