

Part Three

Writing

Of the three R's, writing has been the most neglected in the elementary school curriculum for the last thirty years. The reason for this (which is scarcely known by most educators and totally unknown by the lay public) is that ever since the introduction of print-script writing in our schools in the 1930s, American children have been required to learn *two* systems of writing. And of the two, cursive writing has gotten less and less attention in the changing primary school curriculum. Prior to the introduction of print-script, or "manuscript" as it is officially called, American children were taught only one way to write: cursive, which means "running," and describes the traditional flowing form of adult handwriting in which all the letters of a word are joined. In those days, children were taught "penmanship" and by the third grade had learned to write reasonably well by third-grade standards.

However, because cursive writing is a rather difficult skill for some first-graders to learn, it was thought desirable to introduce children to the art of writing via the simplified print-script invented by an Englishman and imported into this country in the 1920s. "Manuscript," as this print-script was later called, is a mis-

nomer if there ever was one. "Manuscript" is simply a form of hand printing or lettering, very much like the kind that architects use on their drawings. But it has been considered and taught as a form of handwriting, which it really is not.

In today's curriculum, when a child reaches the third grade, he is generally considered ready to learn cursive: "real writing" or "grown-up writing" as some children call it. Unfortunately, most teachers expect the children to pick up cursive writing on their own without much practice or supervision. In addition, children are required to use their cursive handwriting extensively in their schoolwork before they have been fully trained in it. The result is poor, illegible scrawls and lots of bad handwriting habits. Some schools don't even bother to give formal instruction in cursive writing at all, expecting the students to pick it up completely on their own if they want to use it. The handwriting of these students generally reflects their lack of instruction.

This dual writing program, in which cursive writing gets the short end of the stick, has been criticized by some thoughtful educators. For example, one concerned educator,* writing in *Elementary English* of October 1960, commented:

Such a duality of learning and performance is almost unknown in the areas of reading and arithmetic where the first learnings are simply reinforced and broadened through subsequent training rather than altered and changed as in the area of handwriting.

However, this dual program in handwriting instruction seems to have been accepted by educators almost without question, for no more than one or two research studies dealing with the transitional aspect of handwriting instruction have been reported within the past two decades. However, a study recently completed by this investigator provides data which support the premise *that it is more difficult for a person to master two sets of handwriting symbols than it is for him to perfect one set*—whether that set be manuscript or cursive in style.

For many children who apparently encounter little or no difficulty at the time of transition this duality of learning and performance in handwriting appears to create few problems. However, those of us who have been primary teachers for any length of time are aware that children vary considerably in their

*Elaine Templin, "Handwriting—the Neglected R."

ability to make the transition from one handwriting style to another and that some children experience considerable loss in handwriting facility during the transitional period.

Personal observation has led this author to conclude that it is the boys who are more likely to experience difficulty in developing a legible and fluent cursive style of handwriting. Indeed, a few boys known to the author have persisted in clinging to the manuscript style of writing long after their classmates have succeeded in completing the transition. . . .

However, if tradition demands a continuance of the dual program of handwriting instruction, it would seem advisable for educators to urge that more careful guidance and more thorough instruction be provided during the period of change-over, *for it is at this level where our youth are most likely to become handwriting cripples.*

Yet it is here that the greater laxity in handwriting instruction seems to occur, for many teachers and pupils appear to view the transition as a nuisance as well as a necessity. In addition, many of them seem to believe that the cursive style of handwriting can be acquired quickly and easily since the pupils already know how to write.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. A child's ability to reproduce the manuscript symbols does not preclude his need to practice and to master the cursive symbols when they are introduced to him.

That sums up quite well why the handwriting of so many students is so poor. They must master two sets of symbols, two styles of writing, and the transition from one to the other is, in most cases, very carelessly and thoughtlessly made. Because of this, some educators have advocated teaching one writing style only. One veteran teacher of handwriting, Luella Cole, addressed herself to that problem in the *Elementary School Journal* of November 1956. She wrote:

Perhaps the commonest "fault" in these lowest grades is an over-emphasis upon printing of the letters, that is, upon manuscript writing. If this type of writing could be continued indefinitely, its introduction would be defensible. However, the permanent use of printing has at least three shortcomings. First, it is, in general, somewhat slower than cursive writing. Second, it tends, from imitation of book printing, to be written vertically—a char-

acteristic which is not in itself objectionable but which contributes to the slowness of its production for most right-handed people. Third, its use leads to the introduction of misleading spaces within words, because pupils have joined together their letters in groups of two or three but have not joined together all the letters within an entire word. Thus, such a sentence as "The earth began to tremble," emerges as "T he ear th be g an to trem ble." Even if every letter is perfectly formed, the result is still illegible because of the spacing. Since, therefore, on the judgment of the present writer, manuscript writing cannot be continued with an expectation of satisfactory permanent results, it is best never to let it become established. Whatever form a first-grade child voluntarily uses for first writing his name (block capitals, printed letters, or cursive) is acceptable for the moment, but the actual teaching should certainly introduce cursive handwriting, since these letter forms will be used throughout life.

There are other educators, however, who feel that the dual writing program, so deeply entrenched, is with us to stay, and they advocate strengthening the writing program all the way down the line, going from print-script, to slant print-script, to cursive—a three-stage program. This, however, would require a much greater emphasis on handwriting than many schools or teachers want to confer on the subject. There are also those who want to eliminate cursive writing altogether. Their views* were expressed in *Elementary English* of December 1971 as follows:

It is the position here that instruction in handwriting should consist of the development and maintenance of one writing style throughout the child's educational career; that the advantages which manuscript holds for children as a communication tool clearly point to this as the style to be utilized, and that instruction in cursive writing should be eliminated from the basic curriculum of the elementary school. . . .

The evidence of a growing body of comparative data would seem to support the instruction of manuscript as the writing style in the primary grades and its maintenance throughout children's educational careers. A transition to cursive writing is complicated by factors which may create unnecessary problems

*Emma E. Platter, of the University of Calgary Faculty of Education, and Ellsworth S. Woestehoff, of the University of Rochester College of Education, "Toward a Singular Style of Instruction in Handwriting."

for many children and therefore militate against a dual program of handwriting instruction.

Cursive writing style should be considered for what it really is: a complex, complicated skill that is difficult to acquire. The time allotted to introduction and maintenance of the cursive writing style might well be directed to more significant language experience.

Thus, there is considerable disagreement among educators not only on which of the two writing styles to teach but how to teach them. The ones to suffer in all this pedagogical confusion and debate are the students. For our purposes, however, let us be clear on several points. First, manuscript writing is not handwriting. It is a form of hand printing. Our language has only one universally acceptable handwriting system, and that is cursive. Second, since it is cursive writing instruction which suffers in the schools, it is cursive writing which the tutor must specialize in. Third, we share Luella Cole's view that since cursive writing is the one which will be used throughout life, it is the one to teach the child. If the time the child spends in formal instruction is to be used to the child's maximum future benefit, it should be spent learning a skill which he will be able to employ in every area of educational, personal, professional, and business life. In addition, unless you can write cursive yourself, it is not likely that you'll be able to read the handwriting of others very well. In short, cursive writing is one of the indispensable tools of literacy in our highly literate civilization, and it should be taught to every child thoroughly and systematically from grade one onward.

In teaching a child to write you must think of the task in the same way you would think of teaching the child a physical skill like playing tennis or ping-pong, or playing the violin, or crocheting, or touch typing. What is involved for optimum performance is good muscular control, relaxed nerves, good eyesight, and excellent coordination between hand and eye. To bring it down to an even simpler level, we might say that teaching a child to write is no more intellectual than teaching him how to eat with chopsticks. The task is one of physical dexterity and the earlier it is learned the better. Many a Chinese youngster of four or five can handle chopsticks quite adeptly while a Western adult might have to spend weeks practicing before he could do as well. But

first the adult would have to be taught how to hold the chopsticks correctly before being able to use them proficiently, and it would take a great deal of practice before the adult could use them as easily and automatically as the Chinese child.

The same is true in teaching a child to write cursively. Holding a pencil is perhaps a lot less difficult than holding chopsticks. Learning to form each letter and numeral legibly takes time because there are sixty-two of them—twenty-six small letters, twenty-six capitals, and ten numerals. The child must be taught how to write each letter and numeral correctly. Since writing is a physical skill which must become automatic, the child must repeat writing the letters slowly, accurately, and legibly until he does it so well that speed picks up on its own.

Because learning to write is a purely physical and muscular task, all the procedures used in mastering a physical skill must be applied. Luella Cole, after a full career of teaching children how to write, summed up these procedures in six easy-to-understand precepts:

1. Base the teaching upon careful imitation of a good model, allowing only such minor variations as are necessary because of a pupil's age or size.
2. Continue the practice of simple skills under close supervision until the pupil can execute a series of movements perfectly.
3. Teach self-diagnosis and self-correction until you feel sure that the pupil has the habit of self-appraisal.
4. Then introduce intensive practice, but without competition.
5. Permit no strain or pressure. If the pupil voluntarily tries to hurry, stop him.
6. Wait for nature to take its course in the development of speed.

How do we write? It is obvious that we write with the hand and fingers, which hold the writing instrument; the wrist, which gives the hand flexibility; and the arm, which moves the hand across the page. There has always been much dispute over how much arm movement is involved in handwriting. It is of course possible to use the hand and fingers merely to hold the writing instrument and to have the arm perform most of the movements. This form of writing was called "muscular movement penmanship" and was

more suited to writing the ornate script of the past than it is to our modern utilitarian sort of handwriting.

The most comfortable way to write is by having the forearm rest on the desk, with the elbow as the pivot from which the arm can move to the right or left, carrying the hand in the direction it has to go. But as far as shaping the letters is concerned, the fingers, hand, and wrist do most of the moving. True, we can feel the muscles in our arms contributing to the more obvious muscular activity of our hand and fingers, just as we feel the muscles in our back contributing to the more obvious muscular activity of our legs when we walk.

In fact, when we walk, we also find that swinging our arms helps us walk better, faster, and with a more even rhythm. This is exactly the extent to which the arm contributes to writing skill. We no more write with our arms than we walk with them. But they are important auxiliaries in promoting rhythm, speed, and good form. We use more arm or less arm depending on our writing position and the size of what we are writing. How much arm to use becomes a matter of personal adjustment over the years.

In walking, for example, the British army uses as much arm movement as leg movement to create the rhythmic, bold stride it is famous for. But it is hardly a natural way of walking. The same criterion must be applied to cursive handwriting skill. How much finger, hand, wrist, and arm movement is natural to the task? The child finds this out gradually by discovering what movements are needed to produce the script he wants. The script he wants should be one that is legible and as easy and comfortable as possible to write at a suitable speed.

Thus, in teaching a child to write, the first thing we do is introduce him to a comfortable and correct way of sitting and holding the writing instrument. The instrument is held about an inch above the writing tip by three fingers: the first joint of the middle finger supporting the instrument from the bottom, the thumb holding it from the left, the index finger holding it from the top right. If you turn your hand and look directly at the pencil point you will notice that it emerges from a triangular opening made by the three fingers. The pencil is supported in this triangular opening by the three fingers, which apply the necessary subtle pressure

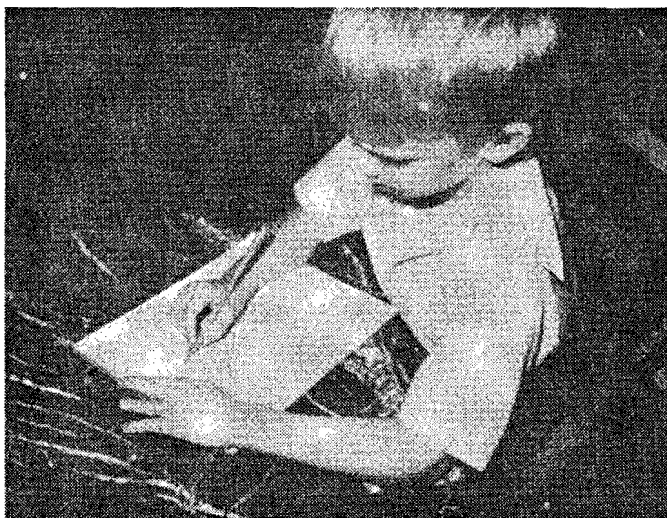
to move the pencil point in the direction the writer wants it to go. The upper part of the pencil rests in the arc made by the thumb and index finger. The fourth and fifth fingers, somewhat curled, support the writing fingers with the rest of the hand, which rests on the desk, and contribute to the hand's movement and position. This instrument-holding position is both comfortable and natural. It does not require a tight grip. In fact, the more relaxed it is, the better.

It should be pointed out that cursive writing evolved because it was natural for the human hand and arm (in the pursuit of speed, greater efficiency, fewer stops, and less fatigue) to write in a slant and to join the letters of a word. The result was the cursive alphabet. The cursive alphabet is not an arbitrary set of forms devised to make life difficult for first-graders. It is the ultimate refined product of hundreds of years of trial and error in which the need for both legibility and speed required such compromises and refinements as to maximize both. It was devised to make life easier, not more difficult, to provide man with one of his most useful tools of self-expression and communication.

Despite what some educators say about the difficulty of learning to write cursively, there is a basic simplicity at the heart of our cursive handwriting system. All cursive script can be reduced to three basic pen movements: the overcurve and undercurve, both of which originate in the oval, and the push-pull slant stroke. The entire cursive alphabet is made up of these three natural basic movements in a variety of combinations. The oval and push-pull, as writing expert E. A. Enstrom has pointed out, are nothing more than the graphic representations of the natural movements of the relaxed arm, wrist, hand, and fingers when the paper is placed at the proper angle to permit better arm leverage and vision. That is why the cursive letters took the shape they did. Cursive writing makes use of our most natural arm, wrist, hand and finger movements. There is nothing strained in these movements. The coordination that is required can be learned with practice, and learned so that in a relatively short time it becomes wholly automatic.

So first we make sure that the child is seated in the proper position, facing the desk or writing table squarely, his feet flat on the floor, his body in a natural erect position rather than humped or bent over. The paper is placed at the proper angle so that the

writing arm is perpendicular to its bottom edge. The arm, when swung left or right from its elbow pivot permits the hand to form a rainbow arc from one side of the paper to the other. The illustration shows how the child is to hold the writing instrument and the angle in which the writing paper is placed.



What kind of writing instrument should the child begin with? A regular standard-size number-two pencil or a medium-point ball-point pen would be appropriate. The ball-point pen might be preferable. You might have the child test both to see which one he works better with. Children tend to grip a ball-point pen less tightly than they do a pencil. Also, the writing is a bit faster, and more thought is given before writing because of the inability to erase. Whether you use pencil or ball-point pen or both, use standard-size instruments. Children use them as easily as they do the so-called beginners' instruments.

What kind of paper to use? We suggest using regular $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 sheets of white paper with one-half-inch rules. The texture should be good for the ball-point pen or number-two pencil. The size of the small letters at the outset can be written a half inch high, that is, the full width of the rules, so that the child learns to form them correctly. They will become smaller as writing skill increases. Any capitals written at the outset should be one-inch high, or the

width of two rules. Have the child skip two lines when going to another line of writing, so that tall letters and letters that loop below the line will not interfere with the next line of writing.

We have correlated our writing instruction with our reading instruction, so that the one will reinforce the other. Thus, in learning the alphabet (the letter names and shapes) we recommended having the child draw the alphabet letters, perhaps on large sheets of paper with pencils, crayons, or felt-tipped pens. Please note that we specified *draw* and not write. The purpose of that exercise was to help familiarize the child with the shapes of the printed letters so that he could recognize them and name them. This drawing exercise is an aid to reading and not to be considered an introduction to writing. It can be limited to only the capital letters or can be extended to include some or all of the lower case letters. However, such drawing is not to be confused with writing and it should cease as part of the instruction after the alphabet has been learned and cursive writing instruction has begun.

We start our instruction in cursive writing at the same point that we complete Lesson One in our reading instruction, in which the child begins learning the sounds the letters stand for. We have stressed repeatedly that literacy is a two-way process. The child is being taught to write as well as read. He is to become a sender of messages as well as a receiver, a talker as well as listener. For that reason we believe that the means for sending messages should be taught at the same time that the means for receiving them are taught. In fact, the physical exercise of writing is an excellent relief from the mental exercise of reading. Therefore, we suggest that the reading lesson come first, with the last ten or fifteen minutes of the session being devoted to writing. In this way, what has been learned in the reading lesson will tend to be reinforced by the purely physical writing lesson.

There are other advantages obtained in correlating the reading instruction with the writing course. The child learns to spell as he learns to write. In addition, since the letter sounds are learned in family spelling groups, the child has a chance to write the same letter forms over and over again, giving him the practice he needs to perfect the letter forms.

Teaching the Left-Handed Child to Write

About one in ten children is left-handed. Being left-handed does not affect a child's learning ability. Some left-handed children can be taught to write with their right hands. Others, however, find it much too awkward and exhibit general incoordination, including speech reactions. Therefore, the tutor should discuss the problem with the child's parents before deciding which course to take. It appears that hand preference is so innate that one should not interfere with the natural coordination and balance that come with the use of the preferred hand. It has been found that when the left-handed are taught the best approach to handwriting, they can often write with greater speed and higher quality than the norms established for all writers in general.

If the child is left-handed it is preferable that he be seated to your left during handwriting instruction. Since our handwriting system was devised for the convenience of the right-handed, everything has to be reversed to accommodate the left-handed, except, of course the direction of writing. Both right- and left-handed must write from left to right. However, instead of tilting the paper to the right, the left-handed child tilts it to an extreme clockwise position. He also holds the pencil about one and three-eighths inches from the point, with the eraser end directed toward the left shoulder and he keeps his hand below the writing line. This permits the left-handed child to see what he is writing and to maintain the proper leverage.

The left-handed should use the same forward slant in writing as do the right-handed. If taught correctly, the handwriting of the left-handed should look exactly the same as that of the right-handed. It is important to make sure that the left-handed child's paper is tilted extremely clockwise. Too little turning will encourage the "hook" position which creates smearing problems and is in general an inferior writing position.

The tutor will find that the left-handed child tends to reverse letters more frequently than does the right-handed child. In fact, there is a tendency to mirror-write at early stages of learning because of the natural movement of the left hand. The tutor, therefore, must supervise the left-handed child's initial hand-

writing instruction quite closely so that the child not only learns the correct left-to-right direction of writing but also recognizes his reversals when he makes them. It is important to provide enough practice at the early stages of instruction to establish correct writing habits.

If, however, a left-handed child comes to the tutor with the habit of hooking already firmly fixed, he should be taught to write by placing the paper in the same position as does the right-handed writer. He keeps his wrist somewhat on edge and flexes it while writing.

Materials Used in Handwriting Instruction

Before starting handwriting instruction, supply yourself with the proper sheets of ruled paper, pencils, and ball-point pens. You will also need to use the blackboard. In addition, prepare a set of sixty-two cards on which the twenty-six small cursive letters, the twenty-six capital cursive letters, and the ten cursive numerals have been accurately drawn. These are to be used by the child at his desk as models to copy from. A simple way to prepare such a set of cards would be to make a Xerox copy of the complete cursive alphabet, then cut out the letters and paste them on index cards, one to a card. You will also need model cards of the words the child is expected to write.

Lesson 1: Introduce the subject of handwriting by telling the child that learning to read is only half of learning to use the alphabet. The other half is writing. Reading permits us to read the messages of others. Writing permits us to send messages of our own. Just as you learn to communicate with others by both talking and listening, you must also learn to communicate by reading and writing. We also use writing to put down our own thoughts which we don't want to forget.

In writing, we use the same alphabet as we do in reading, except that the letters have been made a little differently so that they can be written quickly. This form of the alphabet is called the cursive alphabet and was invented long ago by men who wanted a fast way to write. They discovered that the fastest way to write was by joining all the letters in a word together instead of printing each letter separately.

The most important thing in writing is to make the letters correctly so that others can read them easily. To do this it is important to hold the pencil or pen in the correct way, to tilt the paper at the correct angle, and to sit in our seats so that we can write in as comfortable a position as possible.

Introduce the cursive alphabet and tell the child that he is going to learn to write all twenty-six small letters, all twenty-six capitals, and the ten numerals—one at a time.

Aa Bb Cc Dd

Ee Ff Gg Hh

Ii Jj Kk Ll

Mm Nn Oo Pp

Qq Rr Ss Tt

Uu Vv Ww

Xx Yy Zz . , ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Since the child has completed Lesson One of the Reading Primer, tell him that he is going to learn to write the letters he has already learned to read.

Introduce the cursive letter *a*. Supply the child with a large, clear model of the letter on an index card.

a *a*

Write the *a* on the blackboard. Then take your index finger and trace the letter *a* on the board, then in the air. Have the child also trace the *a* in the air, simply to get the feel of the movement. Have him then trace the *a* on the card with his index finger so that he learns where the writing point starts and where it ends. Note that the index finger is the one we write with in the sand or on vapor-covered glass. Note how much arm movement we use in writing with our index finger. Some of that arm movement is used when we write with an instrument. However, the fingers must also hold the instrument while writing. This requires a greater degree of muscular coordination than the child is accustomed to. Thus it will take him time to write the *a* on his sheet of paper. Although he has traced the letter with his finger, do not have him trace it with his pencil. You learn to write by writing, not tracing. Have him write the *a* several times, moving his pencil as directed by the arrow in the model diagram.

Make sure the child holds the writing instrument in the proper manner and is seated in a comfortable position. At the beginning, as the child is trying to master the letter form, he will apply much more energy and many more muscles than the task requires. This is because the child's muscular control and coordination is still largely undeveloped. He does not know how much energy to use and which muscles are required to make the letter correctly. So he uses much more than he needs.

Joseph S. Taylor, former District Superintendent of Schools in New York described this physiological process in his book *Supervision and Teaching of Handwriting*:

When a child first learns to write, he energizes a great many muscles not needed in the process. After writing has been made automatic, only the necessary muscles are used. While the child

is self-consciously trying to get a group of muscles to act in harmony the resulting movement is always crude and inaccurate. This is one of the reasons why the early attempts at writing are so unsuccessful. Even if the pupil correctly sees the form he is trying to imitate, he is unable to make his muscles execute his intention. Only by long practice is he able to reduce the process to habit and to achieve complete success.

Diffuseness in movement is tiresome because of the needless expenditure of energy. The young writer grips his penholder and holds many of the larger muscles of the body taut that are not concerned in the movement at all. Hence he soon tires. Habit corrects this overuse of energy and thus reduces fatigue. Conscious control of muscles requires attention. Habit hands the movement over to the lower centers and takes it out of consciousness. Walking is a very serious business to a child who is just learning how to do it. To the adult it is so nearly automatic that he can dodge automobiles and carry on a conversation at the same time. . . .

Writing at first is a coordinated movement of the voluntary kind. This means that many different muscles must be energized at just the right moment and with an exact degree of strength if the movement is to be successful. This harmony of action can be achieved only by long and careful practice. The object of the learner has been accomplished only when what was at first voluntary coordination has become involuntary or automatic.

Diffusion of effort is one of the early difficulties of the learner. He energizes groups of muscles which are not needed in writing. Nature attacks her problems of development by producing more than she needs and then picking out the best. Development means the selection of the right movements out of a total mass of diffuse movements.

Thus, the important things to stress at the beginning stages of writing is correct hand- and instrument-holding positions, comfortable seating, and accurate copying of the letter forms. At the beginning stage, the child is so intent upon copying the letter forms correctly that little refinement can be taught or expected. However, he should be instructed to follow the correct sequence of curves and strokes in every letter he writes.

How much time should be spent on each letter? As much time as necessary to learn the letter accurately from the model and

then from memory. Most schools teach all the small letters in the first year, devoting approximately two weeks of practice to each letter. The capitals are learned in the second year. Since cursive writing is not introduced in most schools until the third grade, the tutored child will have an excellent head start. Thus, this handwriting course of instruction should take two years to complete. It should keep pace, more or less, with the reading instruction, but with reading perhaps somewhat ahead.

In the beginning, while good writing habits are being formed, speed is of no importance. Correct letter formation is our primary goal, and enough time should be given so that each letter is learned thoroughly. When it is a matter of creating lifelong habits, what is taught at the beginning should be taught well.

Lesson 2: Introduce cursive letter *m*. Provide the child with a large, clear model of the letter.

m *m*

Write the *m* on the blackboard. Point out its physical characteristics. Then take your index finger and trace the *m* first on the board, then in the air. Have the child also trace the *m* in the air, simply to get the feel of the movement. Have him then trace the *m* on the card with his index finger. Then have him write a line of *m*'s on his paper.

Lesson 3: The child has already learned to write *a* and *m*. Show him now how to write the word *am* by joining the two letters together.

am

Provide the child with a model *am* on a card to copy from. Then write the word on the blackboard to show how the letters are joined. Point out that you can write the entire word without lifting your pen or pencil from the paper. Have the child practice writing *am* several times. Always make sure that the child is maintaining the correct positions while writing.

Lesson 4: Introduce the cursive letter *n* in the same manner used to introduce cursive *m*. Compare the *n* to *m*.

n *m*

Have the child write a line of *n*'s.

Lesson 5: The child has already learned to write *a* and *n*. Introduce him to the word *an* by showing him how the two letters are joined together.

an

Have the child write the word *an* several times.

Lesson 6: Review. Have the child write *am* and *an* several times, pointing out the difference between *m* and *n*. Check the child's writing position.

Lesson 7: Introduce the cursive letter *s*. Follow the same procedures used in the previous lessons.

s *s*

Lesson 8: The child has already learned to write *a* and *s*. Show him how to write the word *as*.

as

Lesson 9: Introduce the cursive letter *t*. Follow same procedures used in previous lessons.

t *t*

Have the child note the details of the letter, particularly that it is half as much taller than *a* and is crossed.

Lesson 10: The child has already learned to write *a* and *t*. Write *at* on the board and have the child note the height of the *t* in relation to the *a*. Provide a word card and have the child write *at* on his paper several times.

at

Lesson 11: Review. Have the child practice writing *as*, *at*, *am*, and *an*. Make sure the child leaves enough space between the words.

Lesson 12: Introduce the cursive letter *x*. Follow the same procedures used in earlier lessons.

x

x

Lesson 13: The child has already learned to write *a* and *x*. Now teach him to join these two letters to write the word *ax*.

ax

Lesson 14: See if the child can tackle such three-letter words as *tax*, *tan*, *mat*, *sat*, made up of letters he has already learned to write. Supply him with models to copy from. Do not be concerned if the child lifts his pencil off the paper in the middle of the words. A three-letter word may be too fatiguing for him to negotiate without a pause. While the tutor should be aware of the slant of the writing and the spacing between the letters, the most important thing at this time is still the correctness of writing position and letter forms.

tax tan mat sat

Lesson 15: Introduce the cursive letter *h*. This is the first loop letter the child has been introduced to. Have the child write a line of *h*'s.

h *h*

Lesson 16: With his newly learned *h* have the child write the words *hat*, *ham*, *has*. Provide the child with model word cards from which to copy.

hat ham has

Lesson 17: Introduce the child to cursive capital letter *S*. While the rest of the capital letters will be taken up after completing the small letters, we are introducing the capital *S* at this point to teach the child additional concepts.

S *S*

Explain that capital letters are used at the beginning of proper names and sentences. Write the name *Sam* to illustrate. Have the child practice writing the capital *S* from a card model.

Lesson 18: Have the child write his first sentence: *Sam sat*. Explain that a sentence is a group of words forming a complete thought. It begins with a capital letter and ends with an end mark, in this case a period. If the sentence is a question, we end it with a question mark.

Sam sat.

Sam sat?

Lesson 19: Introduce the cursive letter *d*.

d *d*

Have the child write a line of *d*'s and the words *dad*, *add*.

dad add

Lesson 20: Have the child add *d* to *an* to produce the word *and*. Show the child how to write the words *and*, *sand*, *hand*.

and sand hand

Lesson 21: Introduce the cursive letter *l*. This is another loop letter.

l l

Have the child write a line of *l*'s and the word *lad*.

lad

Lesson 22: Introduce the cursive letter *w*. Compare *w* to *m*.

w w

Have the child write a line of *w*'s and the word *wax*.

wax

Lesson 23: Introduce the cursive letter *b*. Note the loop and height of the letter.

b b

Have the child write a line of *b*'s and the words *bad*, *bat*, *ban*.

bad bat ban

Lesson 24: Introduce the cursive letter *c*.

c *c*

Have the child write a line of *c*'s and the words *cat*, *can*, *cab*.

cat can cab

Lesson 25: Introduce the cursive letter *f*. Point out the loops above and below the line.

f *f*

Have the child write a line of *f*'s and the words *fat*, *fan*, *fad*.

fat fan fad

Lesson 26: Introduce the cursive letter *g*. This is another letter with a loop below the line. Show how it starts as an *a*, then goes below the line.

g *g*

Have the child write a line of *g*'s and the words *gag*, *gab*, *gas*.

gag gab gas

Lesson 27: Introduce the cursive letter *j*. This is another letter with a loop below the line. Note the dot over the *j*.

j j

Have the child write a line of *j*'s and the words *jab*, *jam*.

jab jam

Lesson 28: Introduce the cursive letter *r*.

r r

Have the child write a line of *r*'s and the words *rag*, *ran*, *rat*.

rag ran rat

Lesson 29: Introduce the cursive letter *v*.

v v

Have the child write a line of *v*'s and the words *van*, *vat*.

van vat

Lesson 30: Introduce the cursive letter *p*.

p p

Have the child write a line of *p*'s and the words *pat*, *pan*.

pat pan

Lesson 31: Introduce the cursive letter *y*.

y y

Have the child write a line of *y*'s and the words *yam*, *yap*.

yam yap

Lesson 32: Introduce the cursive letter *z*.

z z

Have the child write a line of *z*'s and the word *zag*.

zag

Lesson 33: Introduce the cursive letter *e*.

e e

Have the child write a line of *e*'s and the words *egg*, *bed*, *fed*, *leg*.

egg bed fed leg

Lesson 34: Introduce the cursive letter *i*. Note the dot over the *i*.

i i

Have the child write a line of *i*'s and the words *in*, *is*, *it*, *if*, *ill*.

in is it if ill

Lesson 35: Introduce cursive letter *o*.

o

o

Have the child write a line of *o*'s and the words *of, on, ox, dog, hot, pop*.

of on ox dog
hot pop

Lesson 36: Introduce the cursive letter *u*.

u

u

Have the child write a line of *u*'s and the words *up, us, tub, rug*.

up us tub rug

Lesson 37: Introduce the cursive letter *q*. Compare it to *g*.

q

q

Explain that the *q* is always followed by *u* as in these words which the child should write after writing a line of *q*'s: *quit, quill*. Have the child note how the dot over the *i* helps us to visually separate the *i* from the *u*.

quit quill

Lesson 38: Introduce the cursive letter *k*.

k *k*

Have the child write a line of *k*'s and the words *kick*, *kid*, *keg*, *kit*.

kick kid keg kit

The next series of lessons (39-63) teach the cursive capital letters. Start with the initial letter of the child's own name and have him learn to write his name. Then teach the other capitals in the proper sequence. If the child is about to begin arithmetic, however, teach him to write the cursive numerals first, before going on to the rest of the capitals. The cursive numerals are covered in lessons 64 through 71. The same procedures used in teaching the small cursive letters should be used in teaching the capitals and numerals. Always watch for correct writing position, good letter forms, and do not rush the student.

Lesson 39: Introduce cursive capital letter *A*.

A *A*

Have the child write a line of *A*'s and the words *Ann*, *Anna*, *Al*.

Ann Anna Al

Lesson 40: Introduce cursive capital letter *B*.

B *B*

Have the child write a line of *B*'s and the words *Ben, Bill, Bob*.

Ben Bill Bob

Lesson 41: Introduce cursive capital letter *C*.

C C

Have the child write a line of *C*'s and the words *Cal, Carl, Carol*.

Cal Carl Carol

Lesson 42: Introduce cursive capital letter *D*.

D D

Have the child write a line of *D*'s and the words *Dan, Don, Dennis*.

Dan Don Dennis

Lesson 43: Introduce cursive capital letter *E*.

E E

Have the child write a line of *E*'s and the words *Ed, Eli, Eliza*.

Ed Eli Eliza

Lesson 44: Introduce cursive capital letter *F*.



Have the child write a line of *F*'s and the words *Fred*, *Frank*, *France*.

Fred Frank France

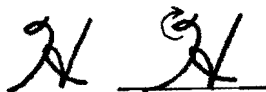
Lesson 45: Introduce cursive capital letter *G*.



Have the child write a line of *G*'s and the words *Guy*, *Gail*, *God*.

Guy Gail God

Lesson 46: Introduce cursive capital letter *H*.



Have the child write a line of *H*'s and the words *Hal*, *Helen*, *Henry*.

Hal Helen Henry

Lesson 47: Introduce cursive capital letter *I*.



Have the child write a line of *I*'s and the words *I, Ida, Inez*.

I Ida Inez

Lesson 48: Introduce cursive capital letter *J*.

J J

Have the child write a line of *J*'s and the words *Jean, John, Jim*.

Jean John Jim

Lesson 49: Introduce cursive capital letter *K*.

K K

Have the child write a line of *K*'s and the words *Ken, Kathy, Kit*.

Ken Kathy Kit

Lesson 50: Introduce cursive capital letter *L*.

L L

Have the child write a line of *L*'s and the words *Len, Lucy, Lil*.

Len Lucy Lil

Lesson 51: Introduce cursive capital *M*.

M M

Have the child write a line of *M*'s and the words *Max, Mike, Millie*.

Max Mike Millie

Lesson 52: Introduce cursive capital letter *N*.

N N

Have the child write a line of *N*'s and the words *Nat, Nick, Neil*.

Nat Nick Neil

Lesson 53: Introduce cursive capital letter *O*.

O O

Have the child write a line of *O*'s and the words *Otto, Olga, Orson*.

Otto Olga Orson

Lesson 54: Introduce cursive capital letter *P*.

P P

Have the child write a line of *P*'s and the words *Pete, Peg, Polly*.

Pete Peg Polly

Lesson 55: Introduce cursive capital letter *Q*.

Q Q

Have the child write a line of *Q*'s and the words *Quentin, Queenie, Quinn*.

*Quentin Queenie
Quinn*

Lesson 56: Introduce cursive capital letter *R*.

R R

Have the child write a line of *R*'s and the words *Ron*, *Rex*, *Ricky*.

Ron Rex Ricky

Lesson 57: Introduce cursive capital letter *T*.

T T

Have the child write a line of *T*'s and the words *Tom*, *Tim*, *Tony*.

Tom Tim Tony

Lesson 58: Introduce cursive capital letter *U*.

U U

Have the child write a line of *U*'s and the words *United States* and *U.S.A.* This will also give the child a chance to review cursive capital *S*, which was learned in Lesson 17.

United States
U.S.A.

Lesson 59: Introduce cursive capital letter V.

V V

Have the child write a line of V's and the words *Vince*, *Vicky*, *Vivian*.

Vince Vicky
Vivian

Lesson 60: Introduce cursive capital letter W.

W W

Have the child write a line of W's and the words *Wilma*, *Walter*.

Wilma Walter

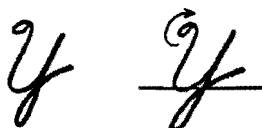
Lesson 61: Introduce cursive capital letter X.

X X

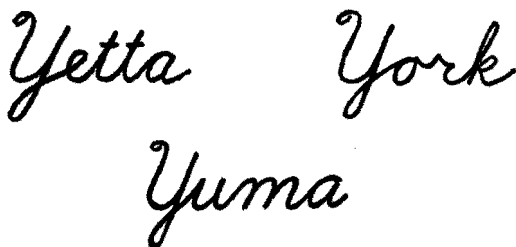
Have the child write a line of X's and the words *X-ray*, *Xavier*.

X-ray Xavier

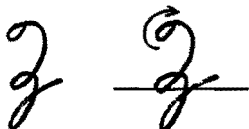
Lesson 62: Introduce cursive capital letter Y.


 Two examples of the cursive capital letter Y. The first is a simple cursive Y. The second is a cursive Y with a horizontal line underneath it, likely indicating the baseline.

Have the child write a line of Y's and the words *Yetta*, *York*, *Yuma*.


 Three words written in cursive script: 'Yetta', 'York', and 'Yuma'.

Lesson 63: Introduce cursive capital letter Z.


 Two examples of the cursive capital letter Z. The first is a simple cursive Z. The second is a cursive Z with a horizontal line underneath it, likely indicating the baseline.

Have the child write a line of Z's and the words *Zeke*, *Zoe*, *Zachary*.


 Three words written in cursive script: 'Zeke', 'Zoe', and 'Zachary'.

The following lessons teach the cursive numerals. They should be taught when the child starts learning arithmetic. Use the same techniques in teaching the cursive numerals as were used in teaching the cursive letters, with the same attention to physical position and accurate forms.

Lesson 64: Introduce cursive numerals 1 and 2.

1 1
2 2

Have the child write alternating lines of 1's and 2's.

Lesson 65: Introduce cursive numeral 3.

3 3

Have the child write a line of 3's. If he finishes this work quickly and is obviously ready to learn more, proceed to the next lesson.

Lesson 66: Introduce cursive numeral 4.

4 4

Have the child write a line of 4's. Also review 1, 2, and 3.

Lesson 67: Introduce cursive numeral 5.

5 5

Have the child write a line of 5's.

Lesson 68: Introduce cursive numeral 6.

6 6

Have the child write a line of 6's. Review 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Lesson 69: Introduce cursive numeral 7.

7 7

Have the child write a line of 7's. If he finishes this work quickly and is obviously ready to learn more, proceed to the next lesson.

Lesson 70: Introduce cursive numeral 8.

8 8

Have the child write a line of 8's.

Lesson 71: Introduce cursive numerals 9 and 0.

9 9
0 0

Have the child write alternating lines of 9's and 0's.

Lesson 72: General review of cursive numerals. Have the child write the entire numeral set in numerical order with attention to accurate form. Explain to him that these ten symbols are the basis for all arithmetic work. Have the child practice writing the numerals until he can write them correctly from dictation.

Lesson 73: Punctuation marks. Teach the question mark (?), comma (,), exclamation point (!), quotation marks (" "), and apostrophe (') as they are required in the sentences to be written by the child.

After the child has learned all of the cursive letter and numeral forms and can write them reasonably well, the tutor should concentrate on improving legibility and making sure that the child's writing habits are good. Speed is developed when the writing of legible, well-formed letters is so automatic that the child no longer need think of that aspect of his writing. On the subject of speed, Luella Cole gave this excellent advice:

The lesson from all sports is clear enough. There is only one road to speed in the use of any muscular skill: it lies through the development of perfect, undeviating form. Moreover, nothing kills good form so quickly and surely as hurrying. Far from being inversely related, speed and quality of performance are inseparable. As applied to handwriting this principle means that children should work only for correct form and should never be hurried. They should write at a deliberate rate enough words daily to be the equivalent of the swimmer's slow quarter-mile; it takes thousands of trials before even a simple motion is faultless. If this general policy was followed for the six years of elementary school, these pupils would be at the end not only good but rapid writers.

Thus, steady practice is the only means to develop and perfect a physical skill such as handwriting. Since legibility should be the primary aim of handwriting instruction, it is useful to know where most of our letter malformations occur. One research study showed that the letter *r* accounted for about 12 percent of all writing illegibilities. It was found that seven letters—*r*, *u*, *e*, *a*, *o*, *s*, *t*—accounted for over half of the illegibility problems. The most common letter malformations were: *n*'s like *u*'s, *r*'s like *i*'s, *e*'s closed, *d*'s like *cl*'s, and *c*'s like *a*'s. Sometimes illegible letters can be read because of the context in which the word is written. Context is an important aid in reading illegible handwriting. But the illegibilities invariably slow down reading and are not always helped by context.

Four types of difficulties in letters cause over one half of all illegibilities:

- (a) failure to close letters like *a*, *g*, *d*

The image shows three cursive letters: 'a', 'g', and 'd'. Each letter is written in a way that is not fully closed at the bottom, illustrating the difficulty mentioned in the text. The 'a' has a small gap at the bottom, the 'g' has a small gap at the bottom, and the 'd' has a small gap at the bottom.

(b) closing looped letters like *e, l, f*

e l f

(c) looping non-looped strokes as in *t, i, d*

t i d

(d) straight up rather than rounded strokes of such letters as
r, l, i

r l i

The curved letters with no distinguishing characteristic cause most of the illegibilities. The three biggest troublemakers among them are the letters *r, e, and a*.

r e a

This being the case, it is quite possible to devise drills and exercises which help the child overcome the tendency to make these malformations.

There is a basic simplicity at the heart of cursive handwriting which, if understood, can suggest the way to handwriting improvement. All cursive script is reducible to three basic pen movements: the overcurve and undercurve, both of which originate in the oval, and the push-pull slant stroke. The entire cursive alphabet is made up of these three natural basic movements in a variety of combinations. The oval and push-pull are nothing more than the graphic representation of the natural movements of the relaxed arm, wrist, hand and fingers when the paper is placed at the proper angle to permit better arm leverage and vision. That is why the cursive letters took on the shape they did. Cursive writing makes use of our most natural arm, wrist, hand and finger movements. There is nothing strained in these movements. The coordination that is required can be learned with practice, learned so that in a short time it becomes wholly automatic.

Since we know the causes of most illegibilities it would be help-

ful to devise exercises that can serve as preventive measures to their development. This can be done by grouping letters into the following three categories according to their initial strokes: (a) those with an initial downward overcurve, (b) those with an initial upward overcurve, and (c) those with an initial upward undercurve. Remember, the over- and undercurves originate in the oval, and they can be executed in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction, that is, upward or downward.

Letters with an initial downward overcurve are the ones that create the closing problem. They include *a, c, d, o, g, q*.

a c d o g q

Note that only the *c* does not close, which means that exercises with all of these letters can draw the child's attention to the need for closing the letters which require closing. Practice of the downward overcurve with counterclockwise ovals could be helpful to the youngster.

Letters with an initial upward undercurve are the ones which give rise to the closed looped-letter problem. These letters with an initial upward undercurve include *b, e, f, h, i, j, k, l, p, r, s, t, u, w*.

b e f h i j k l p r s
t u w

It is obvious that the mixture of looped and non-looped letters in this category cause the problem. The solution is to make the child aware of those with loops and those without.

The looped letters are *b, e, f, h, k, l*.

b e f h k l

The non-looped letters are *i, j, p, r, s, t, u, w*.

i j p r s t u w

The trick in looping the looped letters and not looping the non-looped letters is one of practiced muscular coordination, resulting from unhurried practice of letter forms.

Letters with an initial upward overcurve include *m, n, v, x, y, z*.

m n v x y z

Practice of these initial upward overcurves, the clockwise oval, can prevent *m*'s from looking like *w*'s, *n*'s from looking like *u*'s.

As for numerals, the *1* and *7* are often hard to distinguish in careless handwriting. Also, the careless writing of *3, 5, and 8* has resulted in many calculating errors. It is estimated that these five numbers have caused business losses running into millions of dollars.

Maintain a benevolent supervision over the child's handwriting and try to diagnose his problems as they develop. To improve letter formation, have the child compare his product with the model. By comparing the two he can see how far off he is. Encourage the child to verbalize the discrepancies between his letter and the model. When a child can see and explain his error, he understands better what must be done to correct it.

After letter formation, the tutor must look for other things. Are the letters too crowded together? Is the spacing uneven? What about alignment? Do the words drift off the line? Perhaps the paper has not been placed at the proper angle. Observe the evenness of slant. Do the letters slant too much or too little, or haphazardly? Perhaps the child is not holding the pencil correctly. A poor, slow, crimped handwriting is usually the result of too much finger control at the exclusion of any other muscles. Try to get the child to relax his hand. Oval and push-pull exercises are useful in getting the child to relax his grip and to achieve more comfortable, more fluent coordinated movements of fingers, hand, wrist, and arm.

It is important to catch bad handwriting habits before they become fixed. This is why close supervision is needed during the early stages of writing instruction. Such careful initial teaching can prevent all but the rarest types of problems from developing.

While spelling and composition are beyond the scope of this primer, we suggest that handwriting practice follow essentially the same sequence as the reading instruction in this book. In this way the child will learn the most common spelling patterns in our language with their many irregularities. By learning the regular spelling patterns in the logical sound-symbol order presented in the reading primer, the child will be able to remember the spelling exceptions with little difficulty.

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