



St Martin's CE
Primary School

Handwriting

January 2026

Let your light shine



Let your light shine

St Martin's CE Primary School is a place to thrive. A warm, friendly, and ambitious school where we encourage children, staff, and our wider community to '*let their light shine*' and in doing so, shine the light of Jesus through our behaviour and actions. We believe that achievement is for all, both personal and academic, and our mission is to equip our children with the knowledge, skills, wisdom, confidence, and self-belief they need to accomplish both.

Our Christian Values

Respect, Resilience and Compassion



We aim to develop the whole child: spiritually, physically, socially, emotionally, morally and academically, to give them the best possible start in life and value themselves as unique and worthy individuals. We encourage children to have respect and compassion for themselves and others and support them to show resilience when times are difficult. Our approach is distinctly Christian, yet open and welcoming to all, with the promise by Jesus of '*life in all its fullness*' close to our hearts.

Handwriting will be taught daily and last around 10 minutes.

Teachers will model handwriting and observe children practising their handwriting to address any errors in formation.

In addition to RWI lessons pupils will have daily handwriting lessons.

In key stage 2, the focus becomes to increase legibility, consistency and quality of pupils' handwriting, with the aim of increasing the fluency and speed with which they are able to write down what they want to say.

Maintaining a correct and comfortable posture

The correct seating position and the positioning of the children's book on their table establishes good habits early on and makes a considerable difference to the quality of their handwriting. During handwriting lessons, children should be taught how to sit correctly. This will be reinforced throughout all lessons.

1. Explain why sitting comfortably helps – show them what 'poor' sitting looks like: leaning forward, close to the paper; resting their head in their hand on the table; dangling their non-writing arm or hand instead of using it to steady the paper
2. Feet flat on the floor
3. Bottom at the back of the chair
4. Pencil in one hand and the other hand on the paper



Classroom set-up

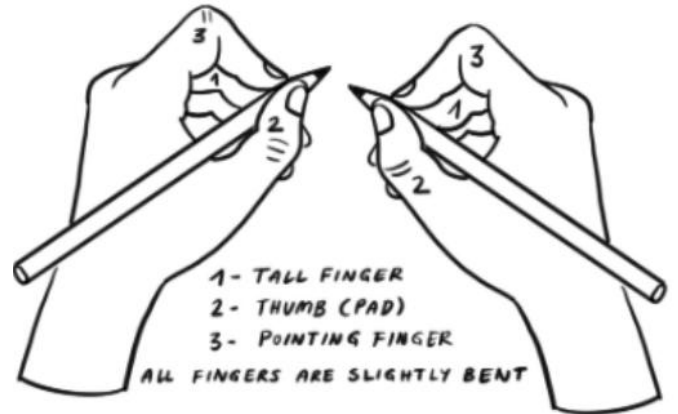
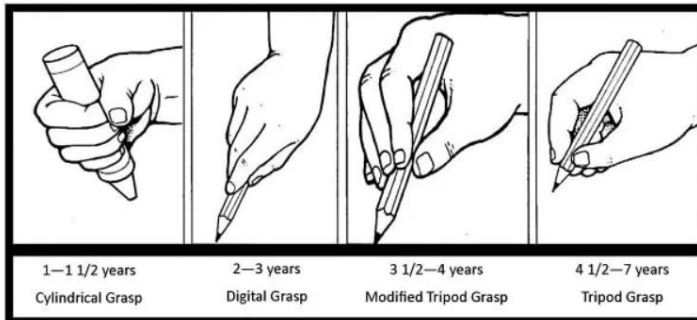
Writing implements and equipment

Pupils will have pencils sharpened and ready on tables and books in position.

*For identified pupils, adaptive equipment is available for those that struggle with underlying stability, gross and fine motor skills such as grip-supports and finger markers in place on pencils.

Pencil grip

Teachers will encourage pupils to maintain correct finger positioning. Most pupils find the tripod grip the easiest to learn and support grips can help. Teachers will show pupils how to pinch the pencil with the index ('pointing') finger and the thumb, about a finger space from the end (on the coloured part just above the sharpened point); and how to rest the middle finger underneath the pencil to support it. The way a child grips the pencil will affect the quality, speed and flow of the handwriting. The grip should be relaxed, not pressing too hard on the pencil or the paper. Finger positioning using the tripod grip:



Ensuring correct paper or book positioning

Paper positioning for right-handers



Paper positioning for left-handers



***Left-handed pupils should sit to the left of a right-handed child so that they are not competing for space.**

The same above routines should be practiced until they are automatic, so that only shorthand reminders to pupils are necessary.

We will refer to these across school as '**ready to write**' routines.

Foundation Stage – Expectations – Pupils should be taught:

- Fine Motor Skills

Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing - using the tripod grip in almost all cases.

- Gross Motor Skills

Use their core muscle strength to achieve a good posture when sitting at a table or sitting on the floor.

- Writing

Write recognisable letters most of which are correctly formed.

STAGE 1

Preparation for handwriting involves developing four key areas:

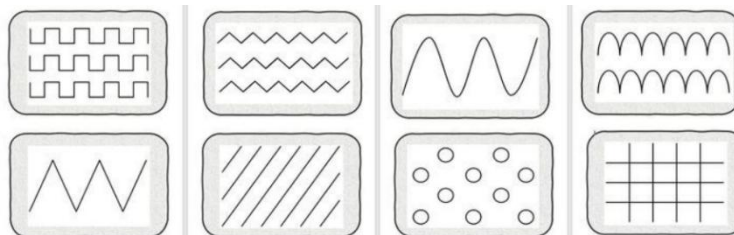
- Gross motor control: the ability to control the body
- Fine motor control: the ability to fine-tune the movements of the arm, hand and fingers
- Visual control: the ability to co-ordinate hand-eye movement
- Spatial control; the awareness of oneself in space, an awareness of direction (left/right) and plane (horizontal/vertical) and how to transfer that on to paper.

We develop these key areas through a range of activities in both child led and adult directed sessions incorporating the following;

- Playing with balls – kick, throw, catch, bounce
- Outdoor provision – playing on large play equipment e.g. climbing equipment, using large paint brushes to paint water on fences etc.
- Finger rhymes
- ‘Dough Gym’
- ‘Funky Finger’ opportunities such as threading, use of tweezers, hammering
- Dough table and use of equipment with varying degrees of strength of media, playdough, plasticine, clay
- ‘Squiggle Whilst You Wiggle’
- Writing Area and use of mark making equipment
- Craft Area with opportunities for children to experiment with a range of tools including scissors
- Tracing
- Jigsaws, peg boards and other board games
- Varying sizes of construction kits available to the children

As part of getting ready for handwriting in these key areas, the children will begin to explore patterns and basic letter shapes in as many different pre-writing mediums as possible (for example: water, sand, flour, paint, in the air, markers, pencils)

- Straight lines
- Upward loops
- Downward loops
- Circles
- Zig-zags
- Eights
- Spirals



Handwriting at St Martin's will be supported by the RWI Handwriting Stages.

STAGE 2

In handwriting lessons, pupils are introduced to each letter shape using a mnemonic. These are used to help pupils visualize the letter before the pupils begin to write it.

The letter shape is modelled by the adult while saying the pure sound and mnemonic. Following this, the letter shape is modelled while saying the pure sound.

Pupils should be supported to develop a strong 'mind' picture of the letter formation.

Pupils working within Stage 2 will use a plain book in their handwriting lessons.

For example:



Checklist: caterpillar

- ✓ start at the caterpillar's head
- ✓ curl around the body



Checklist: apple

- ✓ start at the stalk
- ✓ draw a nice round apple
- ✓ go back up to the stalk, then down
- ✓ curl the leaf at the bottom

*See Appendix 1 – Handwriting Stage 1a

STAGE 3

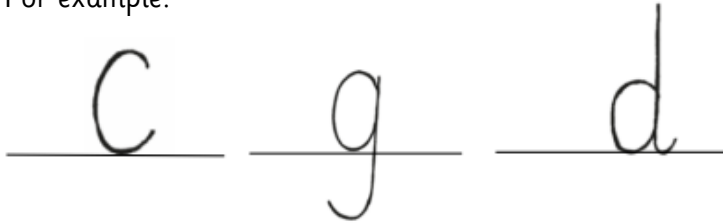
Pupils working in Stage 3, will learn how to place their letters on a line appropriately.

It is important that the adult now models the letter formation on the line so that they can demonstrate and explain how the letter should be placed on the line correctly.

Note: the size of the letters may vary from letter to letter.

Pupils working within Stage 3 will use wide-lined books in their handwriting lessons.

For example:



Mnemonics should continue to be used to help pupils visualise the letter.

- m Maisie, mountain, mountain
- a round the apple, down the leaf
- s slither down the snake
- d round his bottom, up his tall neck and down to his feet
- t down the tower, across the tower
- i down the body, dot for the head
- n down Nobby, over his net
- p down the plait and over the pirate's face
- g round her face, down her hair and give her a curl
- o all around the orange
- c curl around the caterpillar
- k down the kangaroo's body, tail and leg
- u down and under, up to the top and draw the puddle
- b down the laces to the heel, round the toe
- f down the stem and draw the leaves
- e lift off the top and scoop out the egg
- l down the long leg
- h down the head to the hooves and over his back
- r down his back and then curl over his arm
- j down his body, curl and dot
- v down a wing, up a wing
- y down a horn, up a horn and under his head
- w down, up, down, up
- z zig-zag-zig
- q round her head, up past her earrings and down her hair
- x down the arm and leg and repeat the other side

STAGE 4

Pupils working in stage 4, will develop their letter formation by now focusing on controlling the size of the letters and starting to ensure correct positioning of ascenders and descenders known initially as sky and water letters. Therefore, additional lines and visual prompts are introduced e.g. sun, boat, water.

Pupils working within Stage 4 will use books with a mid-line guide in their handwriting lessons.

'Boat' letters: a c e i m n o r s u v w x z

For example:



'Water' letters: g j p q y

For example:



'Sun' letters: b d h k l t f

For example:

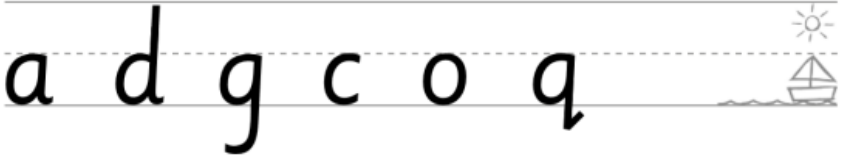





*See Appendix 2 – Handwriting Stage 1b

Key Stage 1

Year 1 National Curriculum – Pupils should be taught to:

- 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.

STAGE 5	<p>In handwriting lessons, pupils working at Stage 5, will continue to develop their understanding of the different size of letters in relation to one another by practising them in 'family' groups; 'around', 'down', 'curly' and 'zigzag.'</p>
	<p>Pupils working within Stage 5 will continue to use books with a mid-line guide.</p>
	<p>'Around' letters: a d g c o q</p>
	
	<p>'Down' letters: l h k b i j m</p>
	
<p>'Curly' letters: e s f</p>	
	
<p>Zigzag' letters with all other letters: v w z x</p>	
	
<p>Pupils will be taught to write each 'family' of lower-case letters correctly on the line, and then to write words that include letters from that family.</p>	

*See Appendix 2 – Handwriting Stage 1b

In handwriting lessons, pupils are also taught capital letters and the difference between capital letters and their matching lower-case letter.

Links to the boat, water and sun letters should be made to support pupils visualizing the size of the letters.

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

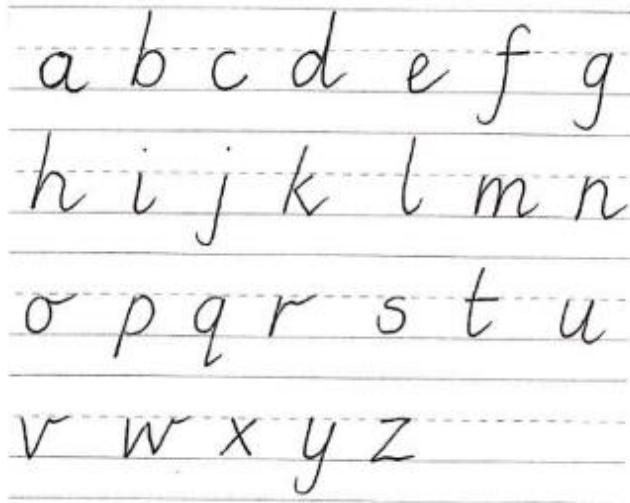
Year 2 National Curriculum – Pupils should be taught to:

- 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 unjoined
- Write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lowercase letters
- Use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters

STAGE 6

In handwriting lessons, pupils working at Stage 6, will use some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes and write words that include those.

Pupils working within Stage 6 will continue to use books with a mid-line guide.



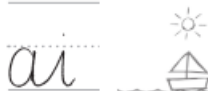


At this point, they will be taught to use f that goes below the line.

For context of using diagonal and horizontal strokes, teachers may share the two basic joins.

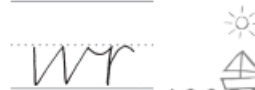


Explain to children that there are two basic joins:

- the arm join (diagonal)
- the washing line join (horizontal)

The arm join has three variations:

- a. arm to boat 
- b. arm to sun 
- c. arm to sister 

The washing line join has three variations:

- d. washing line to boat 
- e. washing line to sun 
- f. washing line to sister 

Key Stage Two

Year Three and Four National Curriculum – Pupils should be taught to:

- Use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined
- Increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting, (for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; and that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch)

STAGE 7

In handwriting lessons, pupils working at Stage 7, will begin to join letters. Pupils will be introduced to diagonal joins first before moving on to horizontal joins.

Pupils working within Stage 7 will continue to use books with a mid-line guide.

a. The arm to boat join

The arm join should not be too straight or too curly.

Phrase: 'Sweep up your arm to touch... (say letter).'

Checklist


- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the curl gentle – not too round, not too spiky
- ✓ make the 'arm' sweep up in a gentle curve
- ✓ write the downstroke of the second letter very straight


Use for joining: a c d e h i k l m n t u

to:

e i j m n p r u v w x y z

Examples:

te ti tu ty tw 

ui ue up 

ai ae aj am ar



ci ce cu cy



di dr dy de



ee ei em er



he hu hi hy



le lm lu ly



me mi mm mu



ne ni nu ny



b. The arm to sun join

The arm should meet the next letter just over halfway up. It should sweep smoothly into the sun letter.

Phrase: 'Sweep up your arm to touch... (say letter) and shoot up to the top.'

Checklist


- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the join like an arm – not too straight, not too round
- ✓ continue the line up to the top of the next letter
- ✓ write the second letter carefully


Use for joining: a e i d h k l m n t u c to: b h k l t

Examples:

ab ah al 

at eb eh el 

et ib il it 

al ch mb th da 

c. The arm to sister join

The arm should touch the sister letter's forehead and then go to the back of the head as though resting a hand.


Phrase: 'Sweep up your arm to touch... (say letter) and stroke the sister's head.'

Checklist

- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the join like an arm – not too straight, not too round
- ✓ continue the arm join over the head of the 'sister' letter – as though a hand is stroking back her hair
- ✓ go back along the head
- ✓ write the second letter carefully

Use for joining: a c d e h i k l m n t u to: a c d g o q s

Examples:

ic ld lo la 

d. The washing line to boat join

The washing line should not be too droopy (the clothes get dirty) or too tight (the line breaks in the wind).

Phrase: 'Not too droopy, not too tight.'

Checklist

- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the join like a washing line – not too droopy or too tight
- ✓ write the second letter carefully

Use for joining: v w r f o to: i j m n p r u v w x y z e

Examples:

Handwriting practice for the 'washing line to boat join' on a four-line grid. The first row shows the letters 'm' and 'u' written in cursive. The second row shows 'wi', 'wr', 'wy', and 'we', with a circular callout 'drop further' and an arrow pointing to the join between 'w' and 'i'. The third row shows 'ri', 'rr', 'ry', and 're', with another 'drop further' callout. The fourth row shows 'fi', 'fr', 'fn', 'fu', and 'fy'. The fifth row shows 'oi', 'or', 'ow', 'ou', and 'oy', with a circular callout 'start' and an arrow pointing to the beginning of the 'o'. To the right of each row is a small illustration of a boat on a wavy line representing water, with a sun above it.

e. The washing line to sun join

The washing line should meet the next letter just over halfway up. It should sweep smoothly into the tall letter.

Phrase: 'Not too droopy, not too tight – and shoot up the next letter.'

Checklist

- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the join like a washing line – not too droopy or too tight
- ✓ continue the washing line up to the top of the next letter
- ✓ write the second letter carefully

Use for joining: v w r f o to: b h k l t

Examples:

Handwriting practice for the 'washing line to sun join' on a four-line grid. The first row shows the letters 'wh', 'wl', and 'rb'. The second row shows 'rh', 'rl', 'fl', and 'ob'. The third row shows 'oh', 'ol', and 'ot'. To the right of each row is a small illustration of a boat on a wavy line representing water, with a sun above it.

f. The washing line to sister join

The washing line should touch the sister letter's forehead and then go to the back of the head – as though stroking back the sister's hair.

Phrase: 'Not too droopy, not too tight – and stroke the sister's head.'

Checklist

- ✓ write the first letter carefully
- ✓ make the join like a washing line – not too droopy or too tight
- ✓ stroke back the sister's hair
- ✓ write the second letter carefully

Use for joining: v w r f o to: a c d g o q s

Examples:

va vo



wa wo



ra ro rd rg



fa fo



oa oo od og



Letters which are left **unjoined**:

- Joins are never made after b g j p q s x y z

Once pupils can use some of the diagonal and/or horizontal joins, they will write words that include letters from that family.

STAGE 8	<p>In handwriting lessons, pupils working at Stage 8, will now use all of the diagonal and horizontal joins as well as leaving unjoined letters not joined consistently.</p> <p>Pupils working within Stage 8 will use books with narrow lines and no mid-line guide.</p>			
	<p>Diagonal joins</p> <p>Formed at the bottom of the letter.</p>	<p>Used to join:</p> <p>a c d e h i k l m n t u</p>	<p>To letters of the same height at the top:</p> <p>e j m n p r u v w x y z</p>	<p>And to these tricky letters:</p> <p>a c d g o q s</p>
	<p>Diagonal joins</p> <p>Formed at the bottom of the letter.</p>	<p>Used to join:</p> <p>a c d e h i k l m n t u</p>	<p>To ascenders:</p> <p>b f h i k t</p>	<p>And to these tricky letters:</p> <p>a c d g o q s</p>
	<p>Horizontal joins</p> <p>A horizontal curve formed at the top of the letter.</p>	<p>Used to join:</p> <p>f o r v w</p>	<p>To letters of the same height at the top:</p> <p>e j m n p r u v w x y z</p>	<p>And to these tricky letters:</p> <p>a c d g o q s</p>
	<p>Horizontal joins</p> <p>A horizontal curve formed at the top of the letter.</p>	<p>Used to join:</p> <p>f o r v w</p>	<p>To ascenders:</p> <p>b f h i k t</p>	<p>And to these tricky letters:</p> <p>a c d g o q s</p>
	<p>Unjoined letters</p>	<p>b g j p q s x y z</p>		
<p>Pupils will be embed diagonal joins first and be secure with all of these before moving onto horizontal joins.</p> <p>Once pupils are secure with joins, they will write words that include letters from that family.</p>				

Year Five and Six National Curriculum - Pupils should be taught to:

- Write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by:
 - 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

Appendix

Appendix 1 **[RWI Handwriting Stage 1a](#)**

Appendix 2 **[RWI Handwriting Stage 1b](#)**

Appendix 3 **[RWI Handwriting Stage 3](#)**

Appendix 4 **[Handwriting exercises and strengthening](#)**

Five areas support the body with handwriting:

- Shoulder Stability & Strength
- Crossing the Mid-line
- Wrist Strength & Flexibility
- Thumb and Finger Strength & Dexterity
- Whole Hand Strength & Dexterity Exercises to support each area can be found on

<https://teachhandwriting.co.uk/handwriting-warm-up-exercises.html>

Begin sessions with one warm up exercise varying the focus across the week. These exercises are designed to prepare children's muscles for the handwriting task. These can be repeated at any point you feel appropriate for the children.