



Handwriting Progression



Nursery to Year 6

EYFS foundations for handwriting

Nursery and Reception prepare pupils physically and teach accurate early letter formation

In EYFS, handwriting development begins with the physical foundations for controlled mark-making. Children develop core strength, postural control, shoulder and arm stability, hand strength, dexterity and control of the pivot points needed for fluent writing.

Phase	Physical development	Formation and mark-making	End-of-phase emphasis
Nursery	Develop core strength, balance, shoulder stability, arm movement, wrist control, hand strength and finger dexterity through large- and small-scale movement.	Use Dough Disco, Squiggle Whilst You Wiggle and a broad range of activities such as climbing, sweeping, painting, threading, peg work, tweezers, playdough and large mark-making. Develop movement from the shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers.	Children show increasing control of gross- and fine-motor movements, use tools with growing confidence and make purposeful marks and patterns.
Reception	Continue daily gross- and fine-motor development, including posture, core strength, shoulder stability, pencil control and comfortable grip.	Use Read Write Inc. Phonics to teach lower-case letter formation through consistent formation ditties, for example, 'around the apple and down the leaf'. Practise correct starting points, direction and orientation in meaningful phonics and writing tasks.	Children form taught lower-case letters accurately and increasingly automatically, use a comfortable grip and are physically prepared for sustained writing in Year 1.

Transition from Reception to Year 1

Year 1 builds on the accurate lower-case formation taught through RWI. Teachers identify each pupil's secure starting point, reinforce ready-to-write routines and organise letters into the Ready Steady Handwrite families. Formation is checked carefully before capital letters, digits and later joins are introduced.

Progression at a glance

The main shift in knowledge and performance from Year 1 to Year 6

Year	Primary focus	Pupils learn to	End-of-year emphasis
N	Physical readiness	Develop core strength, stability and control through gross- and fine-motor activity and purposeful mark-making.	Increasing control from shoulder and elbow to wrist and fingers.
R	Early formation	Continue physical preparation and learn accurate lower-case formation through RWI phonics ditties.	Correct starting points, direction, orientation and an increasingly comfortable grip.
Y1	Secure formation	Use ready-to-write routines; form lower-case letters by family; form capitals and digits accurately.	Correct direction, orientation, starting/finishing points and clear word spacing.
Y2	Begin joining	Maintain consistent size and spacing; introduce diagonal and horizontal joins; recognise where letters break.	Secure formation remains the priority while a joined style begins to develop.
Y3	Complete the joining sequence	Use joins from rounded letters, descenders and selected letters; leave q unjoined; apply joins in spelling words.	A fully joined, legible style is used increasingly in independent writing.
Y4	Consolidate	Apply all taught joins accurately in longer and increasingly complex words.	Consistent, fluent joined handwriting across subjects.
Y5	Increase fluency and speed	Maintain quality while writing for longer; make purposeful choices about joining and implements.	Legible and fluent writing that supports sustained composition.
Y6	Automaticity and purpose	Write efficiently at an appropriate speed; select joined or unjoined styles to suit the task.	A personal, mature and consistently legible style ready for secondary school.

Progression model Accuracy → consistency → joining → fluency → speed → purposeful choice and automaticity.

Progression by strand

What develops year by year

Strand	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Posture, grip and paper	Establish correct sitting position, comfortable tripod grip and stable paper position.	Maintain independently; refine pressure and control.	Automatic preparation; adjust paper angle, including for left-handed writers.	Consistent habits in all lessons.	Sustain an efficient, relaxed grip during longer tasks.	Independently select comfortable conditions and suitable tools.
Letter formation	Lower-case families, capitals and digits; correct direction and orientation.	Secure formation, relative size and orientation before/during joining.	Accurate forms maintained while the full joining sequence is completed.	Secure and consistent throughout fully joined writing.	Maintain clarity at increasing speed.	A mature, stable and easily read personal style.
Joining	No joins; no lead-in strokes.	Gradual diagonal and horizontal joins; learn letter breaks.	Complete remaining joins; understand q is not joined from.	Consolidate a fully joined style.	Join selectively when this improves fluency and legibility.	Choose whether to join specific letters according to task and clarity.
Size, spacing and alignment	Letters sit on the line; visible spaces between words.	Correct relative size of lower-case, capitals and digits; proportionate word spacing.	Parallel downstrokes; consistent letter and word spacing.	Even size and line spacing; ascenders/descenders remain clear.	Consistency maintained during sustained writing.	Control spacing and alignment in both quick and polished writing.
Fluency and speed	Build accurate motor patterns through repetition.	Increase flow without sacrificing formation.	Joined writing supports increasingly fluent transcription.	Increase ease, rhythm and stamina across subjects.	Write legibly and fluently with increasing speed.	Speed is appropriate to purpose and does not reduce legibility.
Presentation and purpose	Write neatly within age-appropriate tasks.	Begin to apply taught handwriting beyond lessons.	Use joined handwriting in independent writing.	Consistent presentation across the curriculum.	Choose a suitable implement; use unjoined style where appropriate.	Match style and implement to notes, forms, diagrams and final presentation.

Year 1 progression

Secure lower-case letter families, capital letters, digits and ready-to-write routines

End point Pupils form lower-case letters in the correct direction, form capitals and digits 0-9, and use clear spacing between words. Formation is accurate and confident before joining begins.

Term	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Half term 1	Reinforce pencil grip, positional language and ready-to-write routines. Introduce Curly Cat family: c, a, d, g, o, q, e, s, f. Introduce Long Ladder family: l, i, t, u, j, y.	Introduce capital letters formed with straight lines: I, L, T, H, E, F. Introduce capitals with straight lines plus diagonals: A, K, M, N, V, W, X, Y, Z. Introduce digits with straight lines/diagonals: 4, 7.	Reinforce capital letters formed with straight lines and diagonals. Embed Curly Cat and Long Ladder families.
Half term 2	Introduce Robot Arm family: r, n, m, h, b, p, k. Introduce Zig Zag family: v, w, x, z. Reinforce Curly Cat and Long Ladder families.	Introduce capital letters with curves and straight lines: C, O, G, Q, D, B, P, R, J, U, S. Introduce/reinforce digits with curves and straight lines: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9. Reinforce Zig Zag family.	Reinforce curved capital letters and digits. Embed Robot Arm and Zig Zag families.

Year 2 progression

Introduce joins gradually while protecting secure letter formation

End point Pupils use correct relative size and spacing, start using diagonal and horizontal joins, and understand that some adjacent letters are best left unjoined.

Term	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Half term 1	Introduce diagonal joins without ascenders: up and across into small letters and rounded letters (for example ni, ai, ha, co). Introduce diagonal joins to ascenders (for example nt, cl, ck).	Reinforce diagonal joins without ascenders into small and rounded letters. Reinforce diagonal joins to ascenders.	Embed all joins taught so far and demonstrate clear letter breaks in age-appropriate spelling words.
Half term 2	Introduce horizontal joins into small and rounded letters (for example on, oi, wa, ro). Introduce horizontal joins to ascenders (for example ok, ol, wh).	Reinforce horizontal joins into small and rounded letters and to ascenders. Apply joins in known and common exception words.	Embed all taught joins, maintaining size, orientation, spacing and legibility.

Year 3 progression

Complete the joining sequence and establish a fully joined style

End point Pupils use the required diagonal and horizontal strokes, leave unsuitable combinations unjoined, and use a consistent joined style increasingly across independent writing.

Term	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Half term 1	Introduce diagonals from rounded letters b, p and s into small, tall and round letters. Introduce diagonals from x and z. Reinforce joins through statutory/spelling words.	Introduce diagonals from descenders g, j and y into small, round and tall letters. Teach no join from q: qu remains a letter break.	Embed all joins in fully joined writing using increasingly complex spelling and statutory words.
Half term 2	Continue applying joins in inflected words and longer vocabulary, maintaining clear letter shapes.	Introduce/reinforce joins from f into small, rounded and tall letters. Introduce/reinforce joins from k. Revisit joins from rounded letters.	Embed all joins in a fully joined style, including irregular words, plurals and curriculum vocabulary.

Year 4 progression

Consolidate a consistent, fully joined style

End point Pupils use joined handwriting throughout independent writing with increasing legibility, consistency, quality and fluency.

Term	Curriculum focus	Expected application
Autumn	consolidate all joins through multisyllabic words, suffixes, adverbs and curriculum vocabulary.	Use the taught style accurately in handwriting practice and increasingly in independent writing across subjects.
Spring	consolidate fully joined writing through prefixes, word families, technical vocabulary and statutory spelling patterns.	Maintain legibility and consistency while vocabulary and writing demands become more complex.
Summer	sustain a consistent style through challenging vocabulary, homophones and words from across the curriculum.	Demonstrate independence, stamina and a style suited to the purpose and audience.

Year 5 progression

Develop fluency, stamina and increasing speed

End point Pupils write legibly and fluently with increasing speed, making informed choices about letter shapes, joins and the writing implement used.

Term	Curriculum focus	Expected application
Autumn	consolidate fully joined style through Year 5 spelling patterns and statutory words; protect quality as writing length increases.	Use the taught style accurately in handwriting practice and increasingly in independent writing across subjects.
Spring	increase rhythm, fluency and speed through complex vocabulary, prefixes, suffixes and subject-specific words.	Maintain legibility and consistency while vocabulary and writing demands become more complex.
Summer	sustain legibility in longer independent pieces; practise purposeful joined and unjoined styles where appropriate.	Demonstrate independence, stamina and a style suited to the purpose and audience.

Purposeful variation Joined handwriting is not required for every task. Pupils should use an unjoined style where it improves clarity, such as labelling diagrams, recording data, writing email addresses, completing forms or using algebra.

Year 6 progression

Achieve automaticity and purposeful presentation

End point Pupils write efficiently in a mature, legible style and adjust speed, joining and presentation to match the purpose of the task.

Term	Curriculum focus	Expected application
Autumn	consolidate a mature joined style through statutory words, ambitious vocabulary and curriculum application.	Use the taught style accurately in handwriting practice and increasingly in independent writing across subjects.
Spring	refine speed and consistency while recording longer ideas; rehearse choices about joins and letter shape.	Maintain legibility and consistency while vocabulary and writing demands become more complex.
Summer	prepare for secondary school by applying a fluent style in notes and extended writing, and an unjoined style for forms, labels, algebra and email addresses.	Demonstrate independence, stamina and a style suited to the purpose and audience.

Purposeful variation Joined handwriting is not required for every task. Pupils should use an unjoined style where it improves clarity, such as labelling diagrams, recording data, writing email addresses, completing forms or using algebra.