

RECENT TRENDS IN THE TEACHING  
OF HANDWRITING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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## INTRODUCTION

During the turn of the twentieth century, handwriting was taught as an art. The main purpose was to make a fancy calligrapher of every student of handwriting. Many schools had handwriting teachers who were experts in their field. As times changed less and less emphasis was placed upon handwriting as an art, and more emphasis was placed upon handwriting as a tool of communications. Also, due to many socio-economic changes in the country, much less emphasis was placed upon the teaching of handwriting. With the depression of the thirties many of the handwriting specialists were eliminated from the schools due to lack of money. Following World War II, the main emphasis in the curriculum was a well-rounded person; so social studies, health, music, physical education, student council, and safety patrol were given attention while handwriting suffered neglect. During the fifties, with the advent of the space age, science and mathematics tended to overshadow handwriting skills. Handwriting has, indeed, taken a backseat in the curriculum but it definitely has not been eliminated.

At the time of this paper, handwriting was considered as one of the language arts which also included reading, speaking, and listening. It was a tool subject. Its importance lay in the fact that it was the medium through which people could record their ideas for their own use or for the use of others. Since handwriting was a communication skill, its major purpose was to voice a thought through the written word.

Handwriting, in and of itself, had no intrinsic value. It acquired value only as it did the job of communication. At the time of this paper, many reports showed that handwriting was failing in the job of communication.

In 1957, 22 million letters wound up in the dead letter office.<sup>1</sup> American business lost more than \$70 million in 1960 because of illegible handwriting.<sup>2</sup> A midwest telephone company lost \$50 thousand in a single year because its operators couldn't write a toll ticket plainly enough for the company to charge the caller.<sup>3</sup> A Detroit department store averaged 20 thousand unreadable sales slips which held up \$65 thousand in purchases each year.<sup>4</sup>

Research proved that the handwriting today was as legible as it was in the early part of the century.<sup>5</sup> However, the question as to whether handwriting was deteriorating was found not to be as important as the fact that it was failing to meet the needs necessary for the social and business world of today.

The fact that schools were giving some thought to the teaching of handwriting was evident in the many sets of goals that had been published. These goals were basically the same and were best summed up by Greene and Petty.<sup>6</sup>

Handwriting is taught

1. to encourage pupils to use handwriting as an effective means of expression and thought.

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<sup>1</sup>"Your Handwriting Awful," Changing Times, 12:18, March, 1958.

<sup>2</sup>"Poor Penmanship Costs People Money," Nations' Business, 43:101, April, 1955.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>4</sup>Frank N. Freeman, "Does Handwriting Make a Difference in College?" College English, 21:9, October, 1959.

<sup>5</sup>Adriene Erlegacher, "Quality of Handwriting Today and Yesterday," The Elementary School Journal, 62:92, November, 1961.

<sup>6</sup>Harry A. Greene, and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1937), p. 107.

2. to help each child discover how skill in handwriting will serve his needs.
3. to strive for neatness and legibility with moderate speed in all the writing activities of pupils.
4. to establish adequate practice periods which will provide training in handwriting at all grade levels.
5. to develop in all pupils a sense of personal pride, self-appraisal, and self-improvement in the handwriting skills.
6. to analyze handwriting faults of individual pupils and seek their correction.
7. to develop correct posture and the proper use of writing tools.

These goals on paper were of little value unless they were carried out by the schools. A look at the research done in the field of handwriting revealed that many schools were doing much work with the subject of handwriting.

Handwriting in today's schools was best divided into two stages. The first stage comprised the work in the early primary grades where the letter forms of manuscript were taught and the habits of position and the use of writing materials were established. The second stage, which usually started in about the third grade, was concerned with making the transition to cursive writing and improving the skill and ease of writing in both cursive and manuscript.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this paper was to see what was actually being done with handwriting both in the field of research and in classroom instruction. The writer of this paper hoped to find some trends that could be given consideration when developing or evaluating a program of handwriting instruction in the elementary school.

The trends that were of most importance were those being used in the classroom. Since these were in practice the writer of this paper wanted to see how these practices compared with what authorities in the field of handwriting had found to be best. Of most importance were the techniques, materials, and time elements of teaching handwriting. The writer hoped to find research that would help answer some of the questions as to what were the best methods in teaching handwriting, and when were the best times to undertake these tasks.

#### VOCABULARY

Manuscript writing. Manuscript writing is the form of writing involving straight lines and circles. This form of writing is more commonly called printing or printscript.

Cursive writing. Cursive writing is the form of writing involving the joining together of letters with flowing lines to form words.

Writing devices. For the purpose of this paper, writing devices are the materials used in the process of writing.

Writing aids. Writing aids include visual aids such as workbooks, alphabet charts, and films used in teaching handwriting.

Writing instruments. Writing instruments included devices used for putting the written word on the paper. Those considered in this paper were steel pen and holder, fountain pen, ball point pen, pencil, crayon, and chalk.

Writing surfaces. Writing surfaces are those surfaces on which writing is done. The writing surfaces discussed in this paper were paper and chalkboard.

Base line. The base line was the line on lined paper on which the letters sit.

Lower-case letters. The lower-case letters are the letters of the alphabet that are more commonly called the small letters.

Spacing. Spacing in handwriting was the amount of space that was put between letters and words.

Shape. The shape of a letter is the way that a letter was formed with circles, curved lines, straight lines, or ovals.

Writing positions. For the purpose of this paper, the writing positions are the body posture of a person while writing as well as the way the instrument is held in the hand.

Finger and arm movement. The finger and arm movement is the movement the fingers and arm made while holding the writing instrument and guiding it across the writing surface.

#### MANUSCRIPT WRITING

Since about the year 1922, most elementary children's first experiences in handwriting have been in manuscript writing. The manuscript form of writing was first introduced for primary children in the twenties and has become almost universal since 1935. In a survey made by Freeman in 1946, 84 per cent of the schools were teaching manuscript writing in the first and second grades. At that time about 90 per cent of the schools began the teaching of handwriting in some form in grade one.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of this paper most schools were beginning a formal handwriting program in grade one. However, there was a growing tendency to give more attention to writing readiness. In some instances this was taken care of

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<sup>1</sup>Ada Polkinghouse, "Current Practices in Teaching Handwriting," The Elementary School Journal, 47:224, December, 1946.



in the kindergarten with such experiences involving co-ordination of muscles needed in handwriting such as painting, rhythmic activities, work with clay, use of scissors and crayons, throwing and catching a ball. Games involving the identification of left and right handedness were also included in the readiness program.<sup>1</sup> Other cases were found where the formal instruction of handwriting was postponed in grade one until children understood what handwriting was about, and had developed a real desire to acquire the skill. Emotional, mental, and muscular maturity were taken into consideration by teachers, as well as the visual ability to discriminate between small differences in letters.<sup>2</sup>

After a readiness period, most authorities agreed that instruction should be given more individually rather than teaching a whole group at once. From the very beginning the child wrote because he had something to write. Since the child had a message to convey; it was felt that writing was best taught by words or short sentences, not isolated letters. At first this message may have been a name or need to label something for a display. About the only formal drill a child was given before starting to write was learning to make straight lines and circles since these were the only two forms manuscript involved. After the child had had some experiences in writing, he was guided into more detailed corrections such as alignment, spacing, and size of letters.

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<sup>1</sup>Leven B. Hanigan, "Handwriting in the Primary Program," The National Elementary Principal, 38:9, February, 1959.

<sup>2</sup>Virgil E. Herrick and others, The Elementary School (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 175.

The writing of the beginner was very large and done more with the arm as a whole rather than with the fingers. Many of the first experiences took place at the chalkboard or on large unlined paper at an easel. Later the child was given wide lined paper at a table. When a child was working at a table, it was found suitable to have a sample before him while he worked. "Since eye-hand co-ordination in these early stages is still developing, too much strain is imposed by looking up and down and back and forth to the blackboard. As the child becomes more skilled, he may copy from the board, but should be seated near the sample and facing it."<sup>1</sup>

Some commercial systems presented beginning handwriting with a tracing or air writing method. Gates found that when the two methods, writing actual words and tracing, were used with two groups; there was little carry-over to writing with the group that had been tracing. He felt that children should learn to write by writing actual letters and words.<sup>2</sup> From the beginning a child had to be guided in where to start a letter and what movements were required to accomplish the letter.

Some of the major rules for writing manuscript writing were listed by Rosenhaus.<sup>3</sup>

1. Alignment - all letters sit on the line
2. Proportionate height and size of letters - capital letters are all the same size, they are twice the size of short small letters

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<sup>1</sup>Harold G. Shane and others, Beginning Language Arts Instruction with Children (Columbus, Ohio:Charles E. Merrill Books, 1961), p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Gates, "Acquisition of Motor Control in Writing by Pre-School Children," Teachers College Record, 24:467, November, 1923.

<sup>3</sup>Max Rosenhaus, "Teach Manuscript Writing with 6 Rules," The Instructor, 67:52, September, 1957.

3. Spacing - the space between two wide letters is narrow while the space between two thin letters is wider
4. Circular letters - keep a h d and other circular letters circular
5. Parallel - all down strokes are straight lines
6. Vertical down - except k v w x y z, all down strokes are vertical and straight

Since the beginning of the introduction of manuscript writing in the first grade, there have been many arguments for and against its effectiveness. However, at the time of this paper, most authorities were in agreement that it was the best form of writing for beginners. These assumptions were based upon principles such as stated by Herrick.<sup>1</sup>

1. The straight line, the circle and the spacing forms of manuscript writing are more in line with the motor and eye-arm-hand co-ordinations of the young child.
2. The manuscript writing of the child is like the printed symbol he is learning to read.
3. Manuscript is generally more legible.

Hunnicutt found that children who began their writing experiences with manuscript writing seemed to write more freely, that is use a larger number of different words than did children who began with the cursive form of writing. These children who began with manuscript also seemed to spell a larger number of words correctly than did children who began with cursive writing.<sup>2</sup> Others felt that young children needed a way to express themselves without being

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<sup>1</sup>Virgil E. Herrick, "Manuscript and Cursive Writing," Childhood Education, 37:265, February, 1961.

<sup>2</sup>C. W. Hunnicutt, "New Ways With an Old R," New York State Education, 49:266, December, 1961.

hampered by mechanical manipulation so manuscript writing satisfied the child's early desire to write.<sup>1</sup>

Even though manuscript writing for beginners has become almost universal, some authorities still felt that it was a waste of student's time. They based their arguments on these objections.<sup>2</sup>

1. The socially accepted form of writing is cursive - it is a waste of time to have to change.
2. Manuscript has been criticized because of its lack of individuality.
3. Manuscript is slower and more cramped than cursive.
4. Manuscript signatures are not legal.

However, research has revealed that the last two objections listed above were not valid. Manuscript has been found to be as fast if not faster than cursive. A person's signature was found to be legal as long as it was consistent, no matter what form of writing it was in.

In recent years, some studies have been made on the continuation of manuscript writing into the upper grades with no transition to cursive writing. The results of these studies have shown some very positive results as to this becoming a more widespread means of communication to meet the needs of the people today. In a study made by Turner, manuscript writing was found to be more legible than cursive writing on the grounds that it could be read faster. Economy was gained in line space since the letters written close together and

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<sup>1</sup>Harry A. Greene, and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959) p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Virgil E. Herrick, "Manuscript and Cursive Writing," Childhood Education, 37:265, February, 1961.

more reading could be done in one eye fixation. She also found that in manuscript writing the mutilation of one letter does not affect the other letters.<sup>1</sup>

Hildreth was in favor of retaining manuscript writing on the basis that it was profitable to the economy in children's learning since children did all their learning in manuscript such as; reading, typing, and writing. She also found that in writing cursive writing, the writing instrument had to travel faster over the paper, retrace its steps many times and add flourishes. Even though the angles of the manuscript letters were sharper and more time consuming, manuscript writing was faster.<sup>2</sup>

Morphett found that children trained in manuscript writing could write faster than those trained in cursive writing after reaching the junior high age.<sup>3</sup>

The public, too, has perhaps paid the unconscious compliment of retaining manuscript writing by requiring adults to use "print" in an ever increasing number of situations such as order blanks, enrollment forms, and identification slips.

Even though the trend to adopt manuscript writing as a permanent form of writing has not become universal, many authorities felt that there was a need to sustain skill in manuscript writing after the transitional period to cursive writing. There were many times when manuscript writing was valuable such

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<sup>1</sup>Olive G. Turner, "The Comparative Legibility and Speed of Manuscript and Cursive Handwriting," The Elementary School Journal, 30:783, 1930.

<sup>2</sup>Gertrude H. Hildreth, "Should Manuscript Writing Be Continued in the Upper Grades?" The Elementary School Journal, 45:91, October, 1944.

<sup>3</sup>Mable V. Morphett, "Manuscript Writing - Some Recent Investigations," The Elementary School Journal, 37:528, March, 1937.

as for labels, records, addressing packages, drawings, maps, booklet covers, and charts. Most commercial companies were making some effort to provide skill in manuscript writing after the transition to cursive writing.

#### CURSIVE WRITING

The principles behind the adoption of manuscript writing as a permanent form of writing for the upper grades were sound and the writer of this paper feels that manuscript writing will someday become the accepted form of writing. However, at this time, society still demanded that the schools teach cursive writing. This fact was revealed in a study made by Groff. In a study of the cities in metropolitan areas, the two main reasons for schools changing to cursive writing were found to be that it was the traditionally accepted form and it was demanded by society.<sup>1</sup>

#### Time of Transition

The main point of controversy in cursive writing was when the transition from manuscript writing to cursive writing should be made. Most authorities agreed that it should be at such a point in the school program and in the development of the child that it would least interfere with his language expression. Much research had been done and opinion polls had been taken as to when was the best time for the transition. There were as many answers as studies made. Enstrom felt the child should be introduced to cursive writing by the end of the first grade or the beginning of the second grade. He felt that an early introduction to cursive writing was advisable

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<sup>1</sup>Patrick J. Groff, "From Manuscript to Cursive - Why?," The Elementary School Journal, 61:00, November, 1960.

because of the heavy workload that was required as the child moved up through the grades. The child may be slowed in this work because of lack of writing skill. He also felt that if the child saw older people using cursive writing, he would learn from outside sources, which were often not good.<sup>1</sup> Then there were others who took another extreme and felt that children should not be changed until junior high. They felt that children had had a chance to master the manuscript form of writing and could make the change more quickly.<sup>2</sup>

The most comprehensive study on the time for transition from manuscript to cursive writing was made by Freeman. In a study of 1,294 schools in every state in the union, the greatest number made the change in the second half of grade two or the first half of grade three with the preponderance in grade three. Those in favor of a change at grade three felt that the children had a desirable mastery of manuscript writing at this time and had attained sufficient maturity and motor control.<sup>3</sup>

Polkinghouse found about the same results as Freeman. He found 66 per cent of the schools making the transition in grade three or above while 17 per cent used manuscript all through the grades.<sup>4</sup> At this time, in about

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Enstrom, "After Manuscript Writing - When Shall We Begin Cursive?," The Elementary School Journal, 61:26, October, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Mable V. Morphett, "Manuscript Writing - Some Recent Investigations," The Elementary School Journal, 37:528, March, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>Frank N. Freeman, "The Transition from Manuscript to Cursive Writing," Elementary English, 21:367, October, 1958.

<sup>4</sup>Ada Polkinghouse, "Current Practices in Teaching Handwriting," The Elementary School Journal, 47:224, December, 1946.



two-thirds of the schools, the practice was to begin cursive writing in grade three.

### Individual Differences

Many authorities in the field of handwriting felt that since children's rate of motor development showed great individual differences, the practice of introducing children to handwriting instruction at a uniform age or grade level needed re-examination. Even though there was no real agreement at what grade level cursive should be introduced, they seemed to be in general agreement on the fact that the change should be an individual process rather than simply introducing a whole group at once. Authorities felt that if this were carried out for each pupil, there would be no proper grade for the introduction of cursive writing. Since individual differences in mental, psychomotor, and emotional growth would cause each case to be decided in the light of all variables. In this case, each child would begin the transition when he showed a readiness. This readiness may come for one child in the second grade while another child may not be ready until the sixth grade or later. At the time of this paper, individualized introduction to cursive writing was not a trend but some commercial companies were giving directions for ability grouping. Enstrom also listed suggestions as to what to do with one group while working with another.<sup>1</sup>

1. Pupils who are using the correct approach (position and relaxed movement) and have an adequate understanding of desirable letter shapes may simply be instructed to practice suggested material. They must know how to practice - write - check - write. Every repetition should have an objective. This should not be copy book method.

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Enstrom, "Individualize Your Group Teaching of Handwriting," The Grade Teacher, 79:48, May, 1962.



2. Pupils should be given special writing assignments - writing of special pages of prose or poetry for display, invitations, letters to pen pals.
3. Assist those pupils needing help at both desk and chalkboard.
4. The teacher should move those needing a certain kind of help to one section of the room.

#### Readiness for Transition

In making the decision as to when a child was ready for cursive writing, two readiness tests were considered. First, the child's readiness as demonstrated by his ability to co-ordinate and second, readiness from the standpoint of interest. Some examples of readiness were:<sup>1</sup>

1. The child should be able to do manuscript in a wide variety of assignments.
2. The child should be able to read simple sentences in cursive that the teacher has written on the board, bulletin boards or on his paper.
3. The child should show sufficient control of fine muscles to direct a pencil, chalk or crayon in forming recognizable lines other than a simple circle and straight line.
4. The child should be able to control the pencil, chalk or crayon in a flowing movement from form to form with some evidence of rhythm rather than in jerk and stop.
5. The child should be able and willing to make large letters rather than tight, cramped, very small ones.
6. The child should have a fairly clear idea of relative sizes of letters and parts of manuscript so that he does not confuse size and parts.
7. The child should be emotionally mature enough that he can experience a few failures or repeated partial successes without becoming upset.

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<sup>1</sup>Lucy Nulton, "Readiness to Change From Manuscript to Cursive," Elementary English, 32:382, October, 1955.

Authorities were in agreement on the fact that the transition to cursive writing from manuscript writing should be done at a slow pace even though most commercial companies did not allow for this in their manuals. Most felt the transition should be made over a period of nine to twelve weeks while manuscript remained the means by which the children did their written communications. Even after the transition to cursive writing was completed, children were allowed to use manuscript writing for their written work until they felt comfortable with cursive writing.

#### Techniques for Introducing Cursive Writing

The actual techniques as to how the transition from manuscript writing to cursive writing was made were many. Most authorities agreed that the most important thing was for the children to be made aware of the differences between manuscript and cursive writing. Cursive came from the Latin word meaning running, moving, flowing; and the connecting line is the fundamental difference between cursive writing and manuscript writing with which the children will be involved. It was found helpful, however, to take into account the following differences.<sup>1</sup>

1. Cursive writing has slant.
2. The writing instrument is not lifted after each letter.
3. The t's and x's are crossed and the i's and j's dotted after the word has been completed.
4. Spacing between the letters of a word are controlled by the end stroke of one letter and the beginning stroke of the next.

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<sup>1</sup>Handwriting Research Institute, Handwriting Made Easy (New York: Noble and Noble, 1959), p. 51.

Commercial companies differed in their ways of presenting cursive writing for the first time. Some started the child on isolated strokes calling them such names as the upper loop family, sail boats, and humpty dumpty.<sup>1</sup> Others introduced each letter in isolation. Some companies started with a word written in manuscript and showed how it was connected. This latter method was presented in two ways. Some companies connected the straight manuscript then achieved the slanted cursive by slanting the paper.

The slanted cursive method seemed to be the most widely used for the introduction of cursive writing but the straight manuscript form was found to be the most sound in regards to handwriting principles. In this form the child was never required to slant the manuscript writing and since this was a skill that was valuable to preserve, it should be kept in its proper form. Research also showed that insisting upon proper slant and alignment during the early stages tended to reduce writing to a drawing type of activity, hinder fluency in producing letters, and even stifled creative expression in written communication.<sup>2</sup> Also supporting the theory of straight manuscript was the fact that following the transition to cursive writing, most children still wrote more or less vertically for a period of time since this form of writing was new, a certain amount of time was needed for building confidence and ability before introducing technicalities.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Louise Curtiss, "Imagination is the Law to Print-Script Transition," The Catholic School Journal, 60:43, October, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Ethelyn Davison, and Rosa Cornelia Veal, The New I Learn to Write (Indianapolis, Indiana: E. C. Seale and Company, 1960) p. 70.

Much research revealed the using of only strokes or push-pull methods as questionable since good handwriting is the proper relating of motor co-ordination systems, letter forms, words and ideas in desirable patterns of speed-quality relationships.<sup>1</sup> Then since the purpose of teaching writing is for communication, the methods of introducing each letter separately fell short of the goal of communication. The child should be taught the flowing together of letters to make words from the beginning.

In teaching children to write cursive, the development of good letter formation or legibility was found to be the chief outcome, the development of other characteristics such as slant, alignment, spacing, and quality of line was important only as they contributed to good letter formation. Many handwriting courses and commercial companies commonly used grouping of letters based on easiest to hardest to form or based on similarities of formation. However, no research revealed what letters were actually easiest for children to form. The lower case letters were introduced first, usually in words. The capital letters were introduced next, usually as they appeared in the children's names. The numerals were usually introduced last but this practice was questioned by many authorities. "It seems clear from studies of practice that children are expected generally to master numerals first, although introduced last."<sup>2</sup> Since children were required to use numerals at an early age in their number and arithmetic work, many authorities felt that they should be introduced first.

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<sup>1</sup>Virgil E. Herrick, and Leland B. Jacobs, Children and the Language Arts (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:Prentice Hall, Inc., 1955), p. 271.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

### Legibility

Writing, like most physical skills, is done reflexively. After the ability has been firmly established writing is accomplished with little or no conscious thought. "Writing is like walking, sleeping, breathing and eating. After the skills are fixed, they are practiced daily with little or no improvement."<sup>1</sup> Handwriting was a muscular tool and achievement was not necessarily related to intelligence. The bright child was found to learn first but did not always possess the nervous make-up that permitted the finer co-ordination needed so their writing was not necessarily the most legible. Children possessing the greatest amount of motor co-ordination were found to have the most legible handwriting.

The child usually reached the highest peak of legibility at junior high level. There was some deterioration in formation of letters at the senior high level, while it further diminished in college. Usually the lowest level of legibility was found at the adult level.<sup>2</sup>

The four main aspects that affected the legibility of handwriting were found to be slant, speed, shape, and spacing. The slant in cursive writing was achieved mainly by the proper slant of the paper and the downward stroke of the letters. At first the child was instructed to slant the paper so that the lower edge pointed toward his body. As he gained skill he was allowed to find the most comfortable slant of the paper to achieve the right slant of the letters. A slant of letters of not more than thirty degrees from the vertical

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander W. Hunter, "Can You Read What You Write?" The Texas Outlook, 44:28, November, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Cyril C. 'O'Brien, "Measurements in Handwriting," School and Society, 86:153, March 29, 1958.

was recommended but the slants were usually slanted from sixty-five to seventy degrees.<sup>1</sup>

No two commercial companies agreed on the proper shape of any two letters or numbers. Most authorities agreed that the same standard letters should be used throughout the child's education but no one set of letters were found to be the best. However, the trend was for more simplified letters with a minimum amount of strokes and flourishes. Children were usually made to adhere to the standard form of letters until they had mastered them and then they were given some freedom to develop their own personal style.

The spacing of the letters was found to depend on the upward swing. An upward swing which was too sharp and abrupt put the letters too close together and a swing which was too long gave the appearance of being stretched. No evidence was given as to what the proper number of letters per line should be.

Speed was found not to be emphasized until at least the fourth grade and was considered least important. Many felt that speed was important in that letters should not be drawn out and material written should be finished in a reasonable period of time. Hildreth stated: "Speed is easy for all physically normal persons to attain, provided that they have first thoroughly mastered the skill. Speed is a function of age."<sup>2</sup> Some research revealed by using the Ayres Scale that the average fifth grader could write 64 letters per minute while the average sixth grader could write 71 letters per minute.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank N. Freeman, The Teaching of Handwriting (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914) p. 99.

<sup>2</sup>Gertrude H. Hildreth, "Comparative Speed of Joined and Unjoined Writing Strokes," The Journal of Educational Psychology, 36:90, February, 1945.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.

## LEFT HANDED CHILDREN

Research investigation revealed that more and more left handed children are being found in the schools today than even twenty years ago. In 1962, Enstrom found 11 per cent of the children to be left handed while in 1933, Selzer found only one or two per cent.<sup>1</sup> There were probably no more left handed children today than ever; but more teachers and parents were allowing their children to use their left hands. Research revealed that some attempts were being made to help the left handed child with writing difficulties.

Handwriting to the left handed child was found to be more than just reversing the paper and posture position. The letter characters in the English handwriting are not made in a natural way for left handed children. The natural way to draw a horizontal line is from the middle of the body outward. A right handed person draws a line naturally from left to right; a left handed person draws a line naturally from right to left. Moreover, the natural way to draw a circle is counter-clockwise for the right handed child and clockwise for the left handed child. Since English is written with a left to right progression and since most ovals in cursive writing are made counter clockwise, the writing of cursive writing is unnatural for the left handed child.<sup>2</sup> Many authorities felt that the continuation of manuscript was indeed a benefit to the left handed child. Here he could make the circles clockwise and probably gain more efficiency along his own normal tendencies.

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<sup>1</sup>E. A. Enstrom, "The Extent of the Use of the Left Hand in Handwriting," The Journal of Educational Research, 55:235, February, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Drummond, "Suggestions for the Lefties," The National Elementary Principal, 38:15, February, 1959.



Since the letters were backward to the left handed child there was a tendency to turn the hand upside down which was especially true in the change from manuscript writing to cursive writing. This upside down position was done mainly so the writer could see what he was writing and to keep from smearing his work. Some ways of preventing this were found. One way was to let the left handed child use a hard lead pencil or a good non-smear ball point pen. Another way of helping the left handed child from turning the wrist was to slant the top of the paper to the right. With much patience and training it was found that the left handed child could be taught to keep his hand below the base line. Giving the child much board work was found profitable since it was almost impossible for the child to turn the wrist while writing at the board. Drummond stated: "If the child cannot write any other way than with his wrist upside down, it was best to let him write upside down rather than cause an antagonistic, disgruntled lefty."<sup>1</sup>

The left handed child was also found to have a tendency to write back-hand or vertical. This was found to be improved somewhat by the correct slant of the paper. However, as long as the letters were neat and legible and easy to read, many authorities felt that there was little reason to change the slant of the writing. "A consistent slant makes legible writing so the child should be allowed to find a comfortable slant as long as it is legible."<sup>2</sup>

Various seating arrangements were used for the left handed child; seating the child next to the aisles, next to the windows, or on the opposite side from the window. The important point seemed to be to have the light come

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<sup>1</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.



over the right shoulder and have the child's left arm free from obstruction.<sup>1</sup>

There were many controversies as to whether a child should be changed from the left to right hand. If the child was ambidextrous, it was found that most authorities were encouraging using the right hand. However, the trend has swung from never letting the child use the left hand to definitely making him. Some felt that after a child's speech habits were established, there was little danger in encouraging or even forcing a change in hands. If parents insisted upon a child being taught to use his right hand, this could be done with patience. "Often the scolding and nagging and punishing that accompany a change do more damage than the change itself."<sup>2</sup>

#### TIME ALLOTMENTS

The length of time that the teacher devoted to direct instruction in handwriting differed according to the needs of the group, but most authorities agreed that no period should extend beyond the point of saturation where fatigue or loss of interest canceled the values that the children received.

The actual time given to formal handwriting instruction was consistent. In the Wisconsin survey these time allotments were revealed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Virgil E. Herrick, and Leland B. Jacobs, Children and the Language Arts (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959) p. 279.

<sup>2</sup>Wesley E. Scott, "Handwriting in Philadelphia's Secondary Schools," Education, 80:391, March, 1960.

<sup>3</sup>Virgil E. Herrick, and Leland B. Jacobs, Children and the Language Arts (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955) p. 268.

1. Slightly over forty minutes per week were given to grades one through six.
2. Around forty minutes per week were given to grades four through six.
3. A little more than thirty minutes per week were given to grades seven through eight.

Other examinations of school programs revealed that from the first through the sixth grade, five periods per week were preferred practice, especially in first and second grade where instruction was begun. Three periods a week, usually on alternate days, were next in preference. Most elementary schools, then tended to provide either daily periods for formal handwriting instruction or have periods of handwriting instruction on alternate days.

These trends agreed very closely with the feelings of the authorities. Most authorities felt that when children were learning to write in either style, systematic instruction in regular periods generally required sixty to seventy-five minutes a week. Freeman felt that in the first five grades frequent periods of ten minutes each would give better results than periods of greater length held less frequently. He felt it was probably never advantageous to extend the practice period beyond twenty minutes.<sup>1</sup> Some felt that daily lessons after the fourth grade were not needed. "Daily lessons often become boring drill and could be better spent stressing the writing in other work rather than the handwriting period."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank N. Freeman, The Teaching of Handwriting (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914) p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Horn, "Questions for Research on Handwriting," The Elementary School Journal, 62:306, March, 1962.

## HANDWRITING DEVICES

## Writing Aids

Many different aids were found to be in use in the process of teaching children to write. The copy book or workbook probably caused the most controversy. Some regarded it as an advantage in teaching writing because it presented to the child what was regarded as a perfect model for him to imitate. The belief was that the more perfect the model which was set before the child, the closer would be his approximation to it. There were several fallacies, however, in this belief. In the first place, the engraved model was a lifeless result of writing and the process of writing itself. The child could very much better imitate the process of performing an act than the result of the act after it had been completed. Therefore, the sight of a teacher's writing presented to the child a much clearer form of the process of writing which he had to develop.<sup>1</sup>

The copy book was found to be of value in that it usually outlined a systematic program of work in all phases; it followed the unit plan of grouping letters; and it contained provisions for presentation, diagnosis, practice, and testing. To the inexperienced or imperfectly trained teacher this comprehensive and ready-made program was extremely useful. The copy book was also useful to the teacher who attempted to carry on work at several levels simultaneously. The new work or letter form could be presented to the group in a brief instructional period and the children could practice on their own.

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<sup>1</sup>Frank N. Freeman, The Teaching of Handwriting (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914) p. 75.

However, too much of this type of program did not meet the requirements for the functional program.

Another aid used commonly, especially in the first and second grades, was the display of permanent alphabet cards. These were written across the top of the chalkboard, printed on tagboard by the teacher, or purchased commercially. These were found valuable for children first learning the letter formations but some authorities suggested that after this level the cards should not be displayed permanently. They felt that much more benefit was derived from the cards when they were kept together on a conveniently placed hook so that students or the teacher could remove a particular letter when the occasion arose for specific attention to it. The two main arguments against having all the letters permanently displayed were that children become so accustomed to seeing them that they actually paid no attention to them and that some youngsters may depended too much on the cards, rather than on their own ability to remember the letters.

Some commercial companies also made small desk copies of alphabet cards available. These cards were found to be good for the child just learning manuscript or cursive. It was found that the child could record his ideas much faster if he didn't have to look up to see every letter with which he needed help.

A few commercial companies mentioned having records and filmstrips available for the teaching of handwriting. However, no indication was given as to how much these devices were actually being used in the classroom.

## Writing Instruments

There were many different instruments reported being used. Most beginners were started with crayon and chalk and soon were using the large beginner's pencil which measured about 9.8 millimeters in circumference. This pencil was usually used throughout the first grade with a change to a slightly smaller pencil in the second grade. The second grade pencil measured about 8.6 millimeters in circumference. In most schools, when cursive was delayed until third grade, the children were given small, regular sized, pencils during the second half of the second grade. Most schools agreed upon a relatively soft lead. Wiles found that the size of the handwriting tool had little effect either on handwriting achievement or on physical reaction accompanying handwriting. He found no justification for allowing beginners to employ handwriting instruments other than those standard and recommended for use throughout life.<sup>1</sup>

The use of ink was usually postponed until after the children had learned to write fluently and legibly with pencils with most schools beginning ink in grade four. Then ink was used for formal writing including the final draft of assigned compositions in any subject.

The main types of instruments being used for ink were the steel pen and holder, fountain pen, and the ball point pen. Many authorities questioned the use of the steel pen and holder for use in the classroom since it has been replaced by the ball point pen for public use. Due to its inconvenience of having to be dipped, it has been replaced by the fountain pen for personal use.

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<sup>1</sup>Marion E. Wiles, "The Effects of Different Sizes of Tools Upon the Handwriting of Beginners," The Elementary School Journal, 43:414, March, 1943.

The ball point pen seemed to have widespread acceptance, but there were many indications that it had adverse effect on legibility, an unevenness in the writing was noted. The ink of the ball point did not flow as evenly as the fountain pen and extra pressure was necessary. "Until improvement eliminates these shortcomings which cause muscular fatigue and cuts speed, it seemed inadvisable for educators to place this writing tool in the hands of elementary pupils."<sup>1</sup>

Even though the authorities were not fully in favor of the ball point pen at this time, it along with the fountain pen, rose in frequency at the fourth grade and was the most preferred at the sixth grade.<sup>2</sup>

No matter what writing instrument was used, of most importance was that the writing instrument be one that could be comfortably grasped, and which was long enough to extend at least past the first knuckle.

#### Writing Surfaces

Most schools and commercial systems had a series of different kinds of paper through which the children progressed. The children were usually started on unlined paper with their very early writing experiences. Then they were changed to lined paper with about one inch spaces. These spaces were usually divided with a light line through the middle to aid the children in forming the half space letters. Later, usually in second grade, the children were changed to lined paper with five-eighths inch spaces. These spaces were not divided so that the child could learn to judge the correct size of the

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<sup>1</sup>Elaine Temple, "How Important is Handwriting Today?" The Elementary School Journal, 61:163, December, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Bernice J. Wolfson, " 'The Educational Scene' - The Teaching of Handwriting," Elementary English, 39:56, January, 1962.

letters. This paper was usually continued through the third grade or until the cursive form of letters were well mastered. Then the children were changed to lined paper with three-eighths inch spaces. After the fourth grade, the children were given some experiences with unlined paper for letters or invitations.

Another writing surface quite commonly used for the teaching of handwriting was the chalkboard. This was used quite often with beginners as well as in the other grades. It was also found to be of value for the teacher to use in presenting handwriting lessons.

## WRITING POSITIONS

### Posture

Research revealed that teachers were giving less attention to the rigid posture positions that were frequently used in the early part of the century. Mary felt that over-emphasis of posture tended to lessen interest in writing resulting in a tense self-consciousness that made it impossible for a child to produce his best work. At the time of this paper, some of the principal standards set for correct posture were:

1. Push the hips back in the seat.
2. Face the desk squarely.
3. Sit comfortably erect with the shoulders slightly forward.
4. Keep both feet flat on the floor.
5. Keep both forearms on the desk - one hand doing the writing while the other holds the paper.



6. Paper placed directly in front of the writer at a slant for cursive and straight for manuscript. Right handed pupils slant papers to the left and left handed pupils slant papers to the right.

#### Hand Position

The orthodox rule of writing teachers once was to keep the wrist level; and the pupils were often required to keep a coin upon the wrist to insure that it did not turn over. This, in its extreme, was now pretty generally recognized to be an artificial requirement and was considerably relaxed. However, this requirement was based on sound principles.

. . . since the requirement of a level wrist is made in order to place the hand in such a position that it can easily slide upon the supporting fingers. This possibility of easy movement is necessary where the extreme arm movement is used or not. If the hand rests over on the side, there is great danger that it shall remain stationary while the fingers not only form the letters but also produce the forward movement. In this case the hand becomes cramped and the finger and arm movements alternate instead of working together simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

Experiments revealed that it was not necessary to exclude the movement of the fingers, and that the combined movement of the fingers and arm was easier to acquire and was equally conducive to freedom and relaxation.<sup>2</sup> Some standards set for correct hand position were:

1. Turn the palm of the hand down so that the wrist is almost flat but not touching the desk.
2. Keep a space open at the outside of the hand. This would be closed if the hand turned too much on its side. When the hand turned on its

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<sup>1</sup>Frank N. Freeman, The Teaching of Handwriting (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914) p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Frank N. Freeman, "Does Handwriting Make a Difference in College," College English, 21:8, October, 1959.



side, too much finger movement was used.

3. The two little fingers should make runners to carry the hand along.

### Instrument Position

The pencil was held between the thumb and the second finger resting opposite the first joint. The first finger rested upon the top of the pen and kept it in place, particularly in the downward movements. The pencil also came in contact with the hand at the base of the index finger. All the fingers were bent slightly more than the one before it. The hand rests upon the two outside fingers. Freeman pointed out the most frequent mistake that is made is in holding the writing instrument.<sup>1</sup>

The mistakes which is most important to avoid are holding the fingers too straight so that they are inflexible or bending them too much and grasping the pen too tightly. The thumb and the index finger particularly are apt to be bent so that the middle joints form a sharp angle. This besides leading to cramping and fatigue, prevents flexibility.

Some rules given to children for holding the pencil were:<sup>2</sup>

1. Hold the pencil about an inch above the point between your thumb, which should be slightly bent, and the side of your second finger near the base of the fingernail. The pencil should be held a little higher for the left handed child.
2. Place the first finger lightly on top of the pencil about an inch from the point. If this finger presses down too heavily the writing will be cramped.
3. Tip the pencil toward the shoulder of the writing arm.

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<sup>1</sup>Frank N. Freeman, The Teaching of Handwriting (Boston:Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Handwriting Research Institute, Handwriting Made Easy (New York:Noble Noble, 1959) p. 55.

### Chalkboard Position

The chalkboard required a different set of muscles and a new way of holding the chalk from those used for pencil and paper. The standards set for using the chalkboard were somewhat different from those given for writing on a flat surface. These standards were:<sup>1</sup>

1. Stand erect, shoulders square, facing the chalkboard.
2. Stand back far enough so that you will have free arm movement, and you can easily see what you are writing.
3. Your elbows should be close to your body.
4. Your piece of chalk should be long enough so that you can hold it about an inch from the writing end.
5. You should write directly in front of your eyes.
6. Your chalk should be held lightly between your thumb and your first two fingers.
7. Walk from left to right as you write to keep from getting out of balance and to gain better alignment.

Teacher's writing on the chalkboard was found to be a good teaching aid if it set a good example. One aid for keeping a straight line on the board was to have the board lined with a pencil. This line could hardly be seen from a few feet away and the line stood many washings. A more permanent way of lining the board was to have it done in India ink.

### Conclusions

Even though standards for correct position were set by commercial companies and curriculum guides, Herrick found that teachers actually gave more

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

attention to body position and paper position with less attention paid to feet and wrist. The least attention was found to be given to proper finger and arm movement.<sup>1</sup>

### HANDWRITING EVALUATION

Many studies have been made to determine what made handwriting illegible. These studies were found to be of much value to teachers in evaluating handwriting. Evaluation was usually done for two reasons. First, it was done so that the teacher could assign a grade to the child's work and second, so mistakes could be detected and improved. The latter was found to be the most valid reason for evaluation.

### Common Errors in Handwriting

Some of the common defects in handwriting and their causes were found to be:<sup>2</sup>

- |                         |                                      |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Too much slant       | a. Writing arm too near body         |
|                         | b. Thumb too stiff                   |
|                         | c. Point of nib too far from finger  |
|                         | d. Paper in wrong position           |
|                         | e. Stroke in wrong direction         |
| 2. Writing too straight | a. Arm too far from body             |
|                         | b. Fingers too near nib              |
|                         | c. Index finger alone guiding pen    |
|                         | d. Incorrect position of paper       |
| 3. Writing too heavy    | a. Index finger pressing too heavily |
|                         | b. Using wrong type of pen           |
|                         | c. Penholder too small in diameter   |

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<sup>1</sup>Bernice Wolfson (ed.), "'The Educational Scene' - The Teaching of Handwriting," Elementary English, 39:56, January, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>Harry A. Greene, and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959) p. 109.

4. Writing too light
  - a. Pen held too obliquely or too straight
  - b. Eyelet of pen turned to side
  - c. Penholder too large in diameter
5. Writing too angular
  - a. Thumb too stiff
  - b. Penholder too lightly held
  - c. Movement too slow
6. Writing too irregular
  - a. Lack of freedom of movement
  - b. Movement of hand too slow
  - c. Pen gripping
  - d. Incorrect or uncomfortable position
7. Spacing too wide
  - a. Pen progresses too fast to right
  - b. Too much lateral movement

The four main traits that made handwriting acceptable were listed by Greene and Petty. They were:<sup>1</sup>

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| What makes writing pleasing in appearance | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. careful arrangement of paper</li> <li>b. neatness</li> <li>c. smooth, even quality of line</li> </ol>   |
| What makes for ease of writing            | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. good posture (body, arm, and hand)</li> <li>b. correct penholding</li> <li>c. free movement (not necessarily arm movement exclusively)</li> <li>d. rhythm (properly stressed strokes and pauses)</li> </ol> |
| What makes for speed of writing           | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. making strokes more rapidly</li> <li>b. decreasing the duration of pauses</li> </ol>  |
| What makes writing legible                | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. correct letter formation</li> <li>b. good spacing between letters and between words</li> <li>c. uniform slant</li> <li>d. satisfactory alignment</li> <li>e. appropriate size of letters</li> </ol>         |

Newland found that over 40 per cent of all errors made by both children and adults were errors in the formation of the four letters a, e, i, t and the writing of e and i were the most common of all. Newland found that the

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<sup>1</sup>Harry A. Greene, and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959) p. 108.

errors in the formation of these letters were due to failure to close letters, closing looped strokes, looping non-looped strokes, and using straight up and down strokes rather than rounded.<sup>1</sup>

Pressey's list of handwriting malformation explained the causes of these mistakes. They were:<sup>2</sup>

a made like u	l made like uncrossed t
a made like o	m made like w
c made like e	n made like u
d made like cl	n made like v
e closed	o made like a
g made like y	r made like i
h made like li	r made like s
i made like e	r made like n
i with dot right	s indistinct
i with dot left	s made like r
i dotted with circle	t made like l
Number 1 made like 7	t with cross above or to right
Malformation of 3 5 8	

These common errors were found to be of value in evaluating children's handwriting. Research revealed that carry-over from one letter to another letter could not be expected. Each letter had to have separate drill.<sup>3</sup>

### Standardized Scales

There were many standardized scales available for use in evaluation of handwriting. Probably the first scale to be developed was the Thorndike Scale for the Measurement of Merit of Handwriting. This scale consisted of 16

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest T. Newland, "An Analytical Study of the Development of Illegibilities in Handwriting from Lower Grades to Adulthood," The Journal of Educational Research, 26:256, December, 1957.

<sup>2</sup>Harry A. Greens, and Walter T. Petty, Developing Language Skills in the Elementary School (Boston:Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959) p. 463.

<sup>3</sup>Luella Cole, "A Successful Experiment in the Teaching of Handwriting by Analytic Methods," The Journal of Psychology, 1:221, 1935-36.

specimens of handwriting arranged in ascending order of merit. The handwriting was judged on beauty and character as well as speed.

The record scale to be developed was the Ayres Handwriting Scale. This scale was standardised on the basis of legibility and speed. This scale, known as the Gettysburg Edition because the specimens were based on the first four sentences of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, has been one of the most widely used handwriting scales and is now part of the New Laurel Program.

Another handwriting scale known as The American Handwriting Scale was developed by West and is now part of the Palmer System. This scale involved memory where the Thorndike and Ayres scales involved only copying familiar material. This was one of the most comprehensive of the general merit scales. The West scale provided two very distinctive features. Separate scales were provided for each grade from two to eight. The specimens have been scaled for both quality and rate, taking into account the fact that the better writing was usually done at a more rapid rate and the poor writing at a slower rate.

The Freeman Handwriting Measuring Scales, now part of the Zaner-Bloser Handwriting Program, was similar in many respects to the scales designed by West. Scales for each grade presented specimens classified as poor, satisfactory, and good.

Many other scales such as the Kittle, Minnesota, Nystrom and Progressive Stone and Smalley were found to be of value but the Ayres, Thorndike, Freeman, and West had gained the most recognition.

About one-third of the schools were found to be using some kind of standardized scale for handwriting evaluation.<sup>1</sup> However, most of the scales in use were in connection with some commercial companies.

### Self-Evaluation of Handwriting

Rather than the use of scales for evaluation, the trend today was more teacher-pupil evaluation of the child's handwriting. This was brought about by teachers realizing that there were considerable differences in the writing abilities of the pupils in any class. Pupils were encouraged to analyze their own handwriting and practice those skills that were needed. This evaluation was teacher directed, but children became more independent as they learned certain basic principles such as putting letters on the base line, making letters of correct and proportional size, and keeping spacing between words and letters correct. When the child was first beginning self-evaluation, the checking process was found to be best if limited to one item per day per line. For example, the child could check for letters on the base line in the first line one day and then another day he could check the second line of his writing for correct size of letters.

Some commercial companies have devised charts for the child to mark as he did his self-evaluation. These charts were divided into weeks or months and spaces were available for the children to check such handwriting traits as legibility, letter formations, slant, spacing within words, spacing between words, alignment, and margins. These charts were found to be of some

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<sup>1</sup>Bernice Wolfson, "'The Educational Scene' - The Teaching of Handwriting," Elementary English, 39:56, January, 1962.

value if given attention as to the proper use. However, no indications were given as to how much actual use was being made of the charts in classroom instruction.

Another way to help the children with self-evaluation was to have the child keep handwriting samples of his own handwriting over a period of time and judge these samples on legibility and other handwriting traits. Most important to this form of evaluation was having children look at their samples from the point of view of determining what could be done to improve them. This kind of examination and judgment was found to lead to purposeful practice, conscious development, and effective improvement. On this form of self-evaluation Wagner stated: "When children have the proper attitude toward handwriting, they will want to analyze and evaluate their own handwriting and to keep track of their improvement. "Such self-evaluation is one of the most valuable measurements of progress."<sup>1</sup>

#### THE HANDWRITING TEACHER

The handwriting teacher in most classrooms was found to be the regular classroom teacher. In this way handwriting was correlated with all subjects and thus became a part of a functional program. However, one handicap was found that applied to relatively few areas. This handicap was that many classroom teachers had not had any special training in the teaching of handwriting. In a study of the midwestern states, King found that 9 per cent of

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<sup>1</sup>Rosemary E. Wagner, "Writing Is For Reading," The National Education Association Journal, 45:557, December, 1956.



the teachers had had handwriting courses in college.<sup>1</sup> Some schools were taking care of this lack of training with in-service training such as workshops or classes with the more experienced teachers instructing.

The main qualification for the teachers of handwriting were found to be:<sup>2</sup>

1. The teacher should have clearly in mind the objectives she wishes to accomplish.
2. The teacher should be a good writer. Her handwriting should show uniform size, slant, spacing, and shape of letters so that it is a good model for the pupils.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The penmanship era which stressed highly elaborate and stylized writing forms has passed. Research revealed that schools were now more intent on developing legible writing which was produced comfortably and automatically. Handwriting has become more meaningful and it was not taught in isolation from other phases of the language arts or other experiences of the day. Fundamental to the success of the entire program of handwriting was the development of a desire to write well so that others could read it easily. The present trend was toward a functional program. However, the functional approach should not be confused with the purely incidental treatment of handwriting. It was found to be a combination of purposeful writing experiences and systematic training.

The child's first experiences in handwriting were in the manuscript form. These experiences usually started in the first grade. Most schools were making a transition to cursive writing in the third grade. However, some

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<sup>1</sup>Fred M. King, Handwriting Practices in our Schools Today," Elementary English, 38:486, November, 1961.

<sup>2</sup>Lucilla A. McCalmont, "Writing, From Manuscript to Cursive," The Grade Teacher, 76:86, December, 1958.

evidence was found of schools not making a change to cursive writing. They were keeping manuscript writing as a permanent form of writing. The writer of this paper felt that the principles behind this trend were sound and that it should be given consideration on a more universal basis.

The left handed child was found to be getting attention on handwriting problems and many writers in the field of handwriting felt that the left handed child should not have to follow the same rules for handwriting as the right handed child. Some evidence was given as to the value of letting the left handed child continue manuscript writing as a permanent form of writing.

The problem of individual differences in handwriting was being given some consideration. However, this trend was not universal but certainly showed prospects of becoming adopted more widely.

Many writing devices were reported being available for handwriting instruction. The two most common aids being used were the workbook and alphabet cards. Children were usually taken through a series of writing instruments. They were usually started with crayon or chalk and soon changed to a large pencil. As the child gained maturity he was changed to a series of smaller pencils. However, the advisability of this practice was questioned. Ink was started in about the fourth grade with children using ball point pens and fountain pens most frequently. The ball point pen was considered inadvisable at this time due to its many mechanical defects. However, the writer of this paper felt that many pen companies were making efforts to correct these defects. Handwriting instruction was being given on several handwriting surfaces. The chalkboard was becoming widely used in all grades. The children were usually taken through a series of lined and unlined paper.

The writing positions that were being given the most attention were the body position and paper position. Proper position of feet, wrist, and finger and arm movement were given less attention but considered to be of much importance to good handwriting.

Some handwriting scales were being used for evaluation but teachers were giving much more attention to self-evaluation. This was considered the best and most lasting form of evaluation.

The handwriting teacher was found to be the regular classroom teacher. This practice was considered good in that handwriting instruction could be functional. However, this practice was handicapped because of the lack of training of many teachers.

The writer of this paper felt that the field of handwriting was an area needing more research. From the findings of this study, the following topics were topics that should be given consideration for further research.

1. What manuscript and cursive letter shapes are easiest for children to form?
2. What method of transition from manuscript writing to cursive writing is the most efficient for children?
3. What materials can be used to supplement commercial systems?
4. What attention is actually being given to illegibilities such as e and i?
5. What constitutes adequate preparation to teach handwriting?
6. How can the instruction in handwriting become more individualized?

This research should not be undertaken for the reason of making handwriting as good as it used to be. It should be undertaken with the objective of finding ways the school could help children achieve handwriting skills that will meet their needs in the social and business world at present as well as in the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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RECENT TRENDS IN THE TEACHING  
OF HANDWRITING IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

BONNIE MARIE SIMMS

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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The purpose of this paper was to see what was being done with handwriting both in the field of research and in classroom instruction. The writer wanted to see how classroom practices compared with the research that had been done.

Since about 1935 nearly all elementary children began their writing experiences in the manuscript form. These experiences, for the majority of children, started in the first grade. However, many schools were giving attention to writing readiness before formal writing experiences.

Many authorities felt that manuscript writing should be continued into the upper grades as a permanent form of writing. However, the majority of schools changed the children from manuscript writing to cursive writing in the third grade. The trend was to continue manuscript writing along with cursive writing. Many authorities felt that cursive writing experiences should be given to children in individual instruction. This was not being practiced in the schools but certainly showed prospects of becoming a trend. Many techniques were presented as means of introducing cursive writing. No definite technique was proved to be best but much research revealed that the push pull and isolated strokes were questionable.

Much attention was being given to the left handed child. Many authorities felt that the left handed child should not have to follow the same rules for writing as the right handed child. They felt he should be given more freedom in finding a comfortable form of writing that could be produced legibly.

Most schools were giving from sixty to seventy-five minutes a week to formal handwriting instruction. The authorities felt that a handwriting period should never last over twenty minutes. Short periods held more frequently were found to be the most profitable.

Several writing devices were reported being used. The writing workbook and alphabet cards were the writing aids most commonly used. Children were usually taken through a series of writing instruments. They were started with large beginner's pencil and taken through a series of different sizes of pencils. Ink was usually introduced in the fourth grade with the fountain pen or ball point pen. Children were started on unlined paper and then taken through a series of lined paper. The width of the line on the paper was usually decreased as the child gained maturity. The chalkboard was being used with beginners as well as children in the upper grades.

The main emphasis in correct writing position was placed on body position and paper position. The correct position of the feet and wrist, and the proper finger and arm movement were also found to be of importance to good handwriting.

Some standardized scales were being used for evaluation. However, most evaluation was self-evaluation by the pupils. Self-evaluation was found to be of much value to handwriting improvement.

The handwriting teacher was the regular classroom teacher. This was of value in that handwriting could be correlated with all subjects. However, many teachers had not had proper training to teach handwriting.

At the time of this paper, handwriting was taught for the purpose of communications. Simple letter forms were being taught and the main purpose was legibility. The present trend was toward a functional approach to handwriting.