

Legibility/Letter Formation

Difficulty with letter formation can often be a result of the student learning letter formation by inventive or unsupervised copying rather than by coordinated movement patterns. This may occur when students start writing before they are developmentally ready for this complicated visual and motor task. A student who copies a letter, without careful supervision, will often draw lines in small segments. This inhibits the more successful patterns in which the hand moves in one fluid motion to complete a letter. Early unsupervised copying also allows the student to reproduce a letter using inappropriate movement sequences (i.e., students learn the "O" by starting from the bottom and going up as opposed to starting at the top and going around counter clockwise). This is a difficult habit to break once the student has repeatedly practiced the wrong approach and can lead to a multitude of writing problems. Orientation of writing should be top to bottom, left to right, counter-clockwise.

Other possible reasons for poor letter formation are visual motor delays, difficulties with motor planning skills, weak visual perceptual, weak fine motor manipulative skills, poor memory. Often children who have not memorized patterns are copying letters; they are not storing formation into long-term motor memory and then cannot recall it quickly during other writing tasks in the classroom.

Activities to assist with letter formation skills:

1. Form letters using whole arm. Write letters large on chalkboard/whiteboard or in the air.
2. Construct letters with play-doh, wiki sticks, pipecleaners, yarn etc. Once letters are constructed, student should "trace" over top with pointer finger using mature strokes (bottom-top, left-right, counter-clockwise strokes)
3. Provide consistent visual models throughout your classroom. Provide writing strip in the curriculum you are teaching on the student's desk, up around the room, and a copy home to parents. Consistency is imperative!
4. Multi-sensory practice using a variety of tactile media. Rice, cornmeal, shaving cream, sand, finger paints ... Place tactile medium on/in cookie sheet, small Tupperware tub, pencil box and have student write letter using proper formation. Students can use finger, pencil, paint brush... Just be sure that they are using proper formation patterns.
5. Use green "go" dots where student should start letters. Arrows are also helpful to cue students on formation direction.
6. Wet-dry trials – on small chalkboard student writes letter (using proper formation). Use small damp sponge to "erase" over the letter. Then use a dry sponge to "dry" the letter. Repeat
7. Rainbow writing – student use multi-colored chalk to draw and re-draw letter/numbers.
8. When ready, provide lined paper. If the student is having trouble paying attention to lines, you can bring more attention to this by hi-lighting/darkening lines (increase visual contrast) or place Wiki Stick on writing line (increase visual and tactile stimuli).
9. Teach very different motor patterns for letters that are frequently reversed.
b – start at the top, big line down, up to fence, dive over, connect at the bottom
d – start with "magic c", climb all the way to sky, then slide down to grass