

# **Evidence Based Handwriting Instruction**

## **Self Evaluation Guide**

### **Peterson Directed Handwriting**



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## **Please Note:**

This guide is designed for use with other tools that are described in this document. Two have been provided as separate PDF files and should be included with this guide when it is distributed.

- 1.. Position\_Skill\_Eval.pdf
- 2.. Cursive\_Rubric.pdf

In addition, it is recommended in this document that teachers visit our web site Resource Library to download a set of legibility subskill posters for the classroom. If you would like to receive these pdf files via email attachment, send an email request to Rand Nelson <mrpencil@peterson-handwriting.com>. Please place “School Support Request” in the subject line. A Scope and Sequence is also available in the curriculum section. The level-by-level delineation of skills and behaviors included may prove helpful. This file may be too large for delivery via email attachment.

Our self-inking evaluation stamp is also referenced for correlation of legibility skill goals into applied work.

We can provide a great deal of support by taking advantage of the internet and email. Please consider establishing a contact person for you building. Messages with attachments may be blocked by your servers. Add Rand Nelson <mrpencil@peterson-handwriting.com> to your address book to reduce problems with delivery of messages with attachments.

A series of free training presentations are available through links on our web site Information Directory. Together they amount to mini methods course. When new teachers need help, these presentations are a great place to start.

[www.peterson-handwriting.com/Info.html](http://www.peterson-handwriting.com/Info.html)

# Introduction

The Peterson Method has always been a unique strategy for instruction - a strategy that includes movement as an objective from the beginning. This self-evaluation kit is designed to help you with needs assessment in order to select goals for improvement that your students can understand.

## The Impact of Movement Instruction

When first presented with a target letter, the student sees a picture. Our goal for handwriting lessons is to change that perception. We want the student to learn how to “see” a series of movements as well. And, the movements they learn to “see” are important - for reading skill development as well as fluent composition. All handwriting programs seek to accomplish that learning. The Peterson Method is unique because we also teach the child how to move.

The strategy for instruction and learning with the Peterson Method is a “directed” lesson - a movement exercise session. We use the voice to make “how-to-move” an important objective as we begin to develop motor patterns that can control handwriting movements. The challenge to move the pencil with the voice elicits participation of the motor system enhancing internalization. The child learns to “see” the movements much faster and gains important dynamic information in the process. You can see and hear learning happen. Please recognize that independent trace and copy activities do not present the same challenge.

If your objective for a given lesson is to teach the child to “see” the movements, or to improve control of the fluent kind of movement, you need to direct the writing of each practice trial. Independent copy activity in this type of lesson, is probably wasted effort and time. Invariably the child is practicing visual drawing movement instead of writing movement and the activity will consume far more teaching time.

## Evidence-Based Coaching

Instruction that is evidence-based offers the best chance to achieve the long term goal of fluent legibility. Unless you collect evidence along the way, you cannot really know if you are making progress toward development of good skills that will serve the child well as a tool for learning and communication. If you are not sure about progress, how can students feel good about their efforts?

## Using Samples As Evidence

Collecting periodic samples of student handwriting offers regular opportunity to build student confidence by comparison over time. When a student compares handwriting with that of another pupil on any given day, there is a completely natural, but often discouraging, result. Motor skill development differs among individuals. It is far better to compare a current student sample with a previous sample - both for student confidence and for selection of specific goals for continued improvement. It is also very helpful for you. You may discover that the student with the least legible handwriting in your class, has made the most progress. He or she may still have less skill than most others and show many needs. However, improved confidence coming from recognition of the progress thus far, offers great motivation to keep working.

## Action Plan

This plan of action has a very simple objective. Periodic assessments of student handwriting will be collected to provide graphic evidence of improvement and/or needs. Special tools have been provided by Peterson to make this process easy to manage and effective. Samples will no longer be reviewed by Peterson specialists. The plan allows regular assessment of physical language skills including position skills, legibility skills, control and fluency. It will allow us to track student progress, identify specific needs based upon evidence and take regular action to address them - during handwriting skill lessons and during all written work. Please note the schedule on page 5.

### The Process:

**With the exception of the self-inking stamp**, the tools listed above have been provided by Peterson as portable document format files for Acrobat Reader and your computer. The PDF files will allow you to print strong masters for the items listed from your computer and copy for use with your students.

A schedule has been established for actions that include collection of periodic handwriting samples from each student. The objective is to identify specific goals (conceptual and physical) for improving legibility and fluency. Periodic assessment of physical position habits - pencil grip, paper holding and sitting posture is part of the plan. Again the goal is to identify poor habits that impede both learning and production in order to work consistently for specific changes in behavior that will improve the student's ability to use handwriting as a tool.

### The Tools Included In This Guide:

- Term Progress Sample Paper for pre- instruction and post-instruction samples, grades 3 and up.
- Continuous Progress Testing Paper for collection of four unit test samples, grades 3 and up
- Fluency Tracking Form - all levels.

### Other Tools:

- Position Skill Evaluation Tool: for all levels - A separate Acrobat file has been provided.
- Rubric for Cursive Evaluation: for grades 3 and up - a separate Acrobat file is provided.
- Self-Inking Stamp - matrix allows correlation into all written work (Available from Peterson).
- A set of legibility skill posters can be downloaded from the ideas section of the Resource Library on the Peterson Web site. [www.peterson-handwriting.com/Publications/ResourceLibrary.html](http://www.peterson-handwriting.com/Publications/ResourceLibrary.html)

## Why

Thanks to fantastic improvements in technology, real science is demonstrating powerful connections between motor learning and cognitive skill development for written language. Many teachers have for decades complained that the ever shrinking priority for handwriting was hurting language skill development and the NAEP Report consistently confirms composition skills are in dire need of attention. Less than 25% of eighth grade students tested were judged to be proficient at composing written answers on the tests. Relatively new state testing also requires that students actually write answers rather than selecting one from a list of possibilities. It is clear that handwriting skills play an important role in the scores.

The challenge to learn how to control fluent handwriting movement has been shown to stimulate important changes in sequencing and processing that no other learning activity in the regular curriculum targets. Our handwriting program addresses much more than artistic drawing of pretty handwriting papers. The goal is to automate a brain process named TRANSCRIPTION. As motor patterns are developed for symbol production, more brain power becomes available for learning and use of the skills you work hard to teach with your language program. To put ideas on paper, the pupil must use two processes at the same time. These two brain functions have been named TRANSCRIPTION and TEXT GENERATION. If you are not familiar with these terms and what they mean, please visit our web site **Information Directory** to work through the presentation about "how handwriting relates to language arts."

[www.peterson-handwriting.com/Info.htm](http://www.peterson-handwriting.com/Info.htm)

## Evidence-Based Action Schedule

School Year \_\_\_\_\_

### First Schedule First Week Of School - all teachers

**Grades 3-6** - A PDF file for Acrobat Reader has been provided that will let you print both Term Progress Paper and Continuous Progress Paper from your computer. Use the Term Progress paper to collect a pre-instruction sample on the top half of this page. This page will be saved until the end of the term when a post-instruction sample (the unit five model test) will be added. When printing the Continuous Progress pages for the four unit tests, it is best if you duplex the two pages as you copy for pupils so that all four unit tests will be available on one sheet of paper. Term Progress and Continuous Progress samples will be combined at the end of the term to provide graphic evidence of progress for each student.

**Grades 1-2** - Use regular practice paper to collect a sample of handwriting from each student. If a formal sample has not been established, please collect at least the student name and the date along with a simple sentence. Please provide a desk copy for each child rather than having the children write from a board display. Save the unit samples as the year progresses to make a Progress Book for each child at the end of the term.

### Second Schedule: All grades (Week Six)

Test Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLECT** the Unit One Model Test samples.

**Grades 1 and 2** - Use regular school practice paper for the samples. Best paper is ruled at 1/2 inch and only as wide as the pupil book page. A model test is provided in the student text. **IF YOU HAVE WIDER PAPER CUT IT TO 8.5" WIDTH** or size and spacing challenges are eliminated.

**Grades 3 and up** - Use CONTINUOUS PROGRESS TESTING PAPER.

A model test is provided in the student text so that students do not have to copy from a chart or board display. Comparison with the term-progress pretest sample should be helpful for both recognition of improvement and setting objectives for continued effort.

### Third Schedule: All grades (Week 12)

Test Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLECT** the Unit Two Test papers.

**Grades 1 and 2** use regular school practice paper for the samples. The best paper for this activity is ruled at 1/2 inch and only as wide as the pupil book page. **IF YOU HAVE WIDER PAPER CUT IT TO 8.5" WIDTH.**

**Grades 3-6** - use the CONTINUOUS PROGRESS testing paper to add the second model test from the text.

### FOURTH SCHEDULE: All grades (Week 18)

Test Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLECT** the Unit Three Test papers.

**Grades 1 and 2** - Use regular school practice paper for the samples.

**Grades 3 and up** - Use the CONTINUOUS PROGRESS testing paper to add the unit three model test from the text.

### FIFTH SCHEDULE: All grades

Test Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers should have pupils prepare the Unit Four papers for self-evaluation and motivation.

**Grades 1 and 2** - Use regular school practice paper for the samples.

**Grades 3 and up** - Use the CONTINUOUS PROGRESS testing paper.

### SIXTH SCHEDULE: All grades

Test Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Grades 1 and 2** - Use regular school practice paper for the samples.

Have the pupils create "covers" for their Handwriting Progress Book and bind all of the unit samples to illustrate progress over the term.

**Grades 3 and up** - Use the **TERM PROGRESS** testing paper. Students will write the final unit test on the bottom half of the page for comparison with the sample collected during the first week of school. This graphic illustration of term progress may be included in the student record.

## **The Handwriting Legibility Subskills**

The Peterson Method guides instruction of a complex array of concepts and skills. It is process oriented instruction. Putting thoughts on paper is the most complex form of symbolic language application. This is true because legibility and fluency are the goals. It means that there is a need to develop control of the writing movements. To improve control for applied legibility, we need to present clear goals for practice. In addition to pencil holding, paper holding and posture, the process of handwriting can be broken down into six subskills that are related by movement.

It would be more accurate to say sub processes, but using the word “skills” seems more understandable for children. The subskills we use for evaluation and coaching are all PROCESS oriented goals that are really inseparable but individually observable. These subskills make it possible to provide a focused, understandable goal that a student can work to achieve - during handwriting exercises and applied work. Because they are all related by ergonomics and movement, improvement of one usually has a positive effect on the others.

### **Skill # 1 Form**

Legibility depends upon the formation of letters. It’s easy to worry about accuracy. There is however, a process component that is actually more important - particularly at primary levels. Start point, direction of movement and stroke sequence are the process factors for the skill of form. Because the brain is very good at association, a rather wide variance in the shape will be legible. Focus on the process at first - start point, strokes direction and sequence. As directed practice improves control and rhythm, the shapes produced will improve also. If we focus entirely on shape accuracy, something the child cannot achieve with fluent movement at the outset, we force reliance upon the more accurate visual feedback system - to the detriment of fluent movement and internalization.

### **Skill # 2 Downstrokes/Slant**

When letters lean in different directions or back against the grain of left-to-right eye movement, legibility suffers. This observable result also may indicate that the movements are being executed by less than desirable muscle groups or multiple muscle groups. When students learn to move so that downstrokes are consistent, it is a sign that one muscle group is learning to control the movements. Forward slant, even with vertical print letters, is usually a good sign of emerging fluency. Back slant however, is usually directionality issue. Make sure the child knows which direction to move and that writing arm or hand position is not a contributing factor.

### **Skill # 3 Size**

We call it size but it is really proportion. Size is a description that the children can understand. In manuscript writing we make tall letter parts and small letter parts. Internalization of the movement pattern is the initial goal and can be achieved on unlined paper or the chalkboard. Learning how to use lines for start points is the next step. It is also one reason for beginning with a separate stroke process. Anchoring skill (touching the pencil to a target) is necessary for both size and spacing. Learning how to look ahead to select goals for anchoring start points, and control of that anchoring movement for touching lines, takes practice. Both are critical objectives for print legibility. The skill can be taught and greatly improved with basic stroke instruction before the more complex sequences needed for letter construction are introduced.

With cursive, size/proportion is controlled by one or the other of two forward movements, the overcurve or undercurve used to begin each letter and produce subsequent parts of a multipart form. Both of these movements should be lateral slides that move out to right and up. They can, if position skills are decent, be controlled by one set of muscles despite the different shapes produced. One set of muscles translates to better control and legibility at fluent production speed later on.

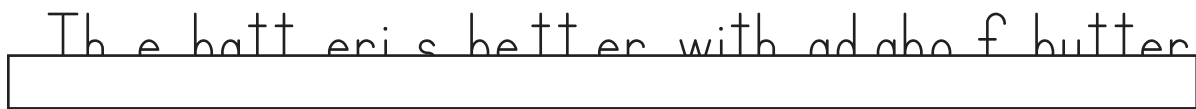
Position skills play a critical role in the cursive process. If the child’s writing presents a lack of proportion (tall and small parts are about the same size) check position skills. Paper position, writing arm entry and/or poor pencil grip can cause the hand to cover the image area. This makes it extremely difficult at best, to look ahead to goals for anchoring in print or goals for the lateral strokes that control size in cursive.

## Skill # 4 Spacing

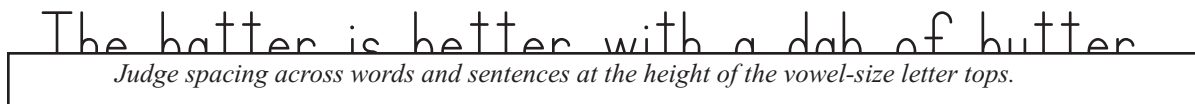
In print writing the goal for spacing is to master start-point selection. The child needs to learn how to select start points that will keep letters close together within words and to space words apart. The concept of close together and far apart can be taught in the beginning with the relatively simple basic strokes. Directing the practice of pairs or sets of downstrokes will establish understanding easily. Write sets of tall and small downstrokes to teach and practice spacing and size skills at the same time.

You can expect to see spacing problems in applied work for quite a while. Young children are not “thinking in words” until they internalize letter patterns and develop some spelling skills and word patterns. They typically are producing one letter at a time. Internalization is likely the more intrusive factor. The child who is trying to recall the shape as if it were a picture, is consumed by the effort to create the shape. He or she cannot think about the word package - for writing or for spelling.

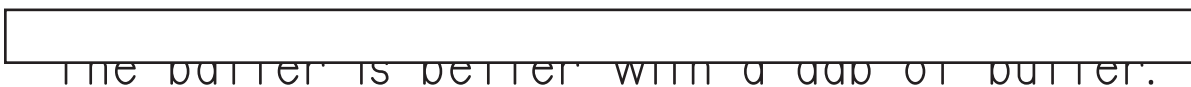
When you see poor spacing within words and sentences it can also indicate another problem. The “form production process” may not be top-down, left-to-right. One of the most frequent “form miscues” is seen with the lowercase letter “d.” Many *teachers* show a reversal without realizing it and the children pick up that process. They make the tall stick first and then add the donut part of the “d.” This right-to-left process not only extends the period of confusion for decoding “b” and “d.” It also presents a much more difficult spacing challenge. All of the letters that begin with a left-curve movement require selection of a start point that allows sufficient space for the leftward movement that starts the letter.



Covering the bottom of the letters as shown above is a quick and easy way to check spacing. You will find that the students can learn how to use a “spacing gauge” made from construction paper to judge the spacing on their class-work and handwriting practice papers.



Note how much easier it is to read the sentence when the spacing is consistent. Your students will enjoy trying to solve reading puzzles you present on the chalkboard. Write a simple sentence or a spelling word while students keep their eyes closed. Erase the bottoms of the letters. When the pupils open their eyes they must figure out the answer to the puzzle. It is also a great way to emphasize the importance of the tops of the letters. This is why we want to make the top of each letter first. It is most important for reading



There is an excellent lesson design available in the ideas section our web site Resource Library, for those who have magnetic boards. Look for “Meatballs and Spaghetti.” The chalkboard game teaches critical thinking skills for evaluation of print handwriting including spacing, size and control (touching lines).

## **Cursive Spacing**

The spacing goal for cursive is to slide between letters. We don't need to keep letters close together because the joining strokes make it easy to tell which letters are part of the word. Learning how to control the sideways movements that begin and join cursive forms is the new challenge - one that can have a positive effect on processing when "rhythmic movement" is included as an objective.

Three movements are combined in different sequences to create all 26 lowercase forms - the undercurve (rock) and the overcurve (roll) plus a slant. The rocks and rolls that join letters control spacing. The lateral movements are executed with the arm and fingers in cooperation. When printing, the arm moved the pencil to anchor at a start point for each new letter but the pencil was not touching the page. For cursive, the child must learn to look ahead to a goal and use the arm to slide to that goal while the pencil is on the paper.

We exaggerate spacing during exercise sessions to provide control practice for the arm, wrist and fingers. In applied work later on, the muscle memory will be on its own and better spacing will be maintained.

As with the skills of Slant and Size, tight cramped spacing of letters probably indicates that paper holding and/or writing arm position is less than advantageous for control of the lateral slide. A poor pencil grip may also be part of the movement blockade. Please keep in mind that poor position habits can make it very difficult for a student to learn how to use the fluent movement system. To improve the space between letters, we must slide the beginning strokes farther to the right as we join.

## **Skill # 5 Smooth Rhythm**

Learning how to move smoothly through the sequence for each letter and word involves learning that is easy to hear as it happens and to see after the traces are on the page. The more important observation is listening. The child who cannot maintain a verbal grammar of action as the pencil moves, has not internalized the information that will allow fluent legibility when attempting to use cursive as a tool.

The brain has choices for guiding movements. When the demand is for precision movement the brain relies primarily on the visual feedback system. When that system is used to guide pencil movements, the child will not be able to move with rhythm. As a result, the child will not be able to maintain a verbal chant as the pencil moves.

This very basic understanding is the foundation of the Peterson strategy and the "directed" lesson we recommend. Two key characteristics of fluent, automatic movement have been clearly identified.

1. The muscle memory guides goal oriented movements.
2. These movements can be rhythmic if practice allows the system to record the dynamic information.

As you examine student handwriting this skill is revealed by smooth gray lines and curves. When you see patching and retracing, many erasures or jerky line quality, the student needs help with internalization of the patterns. Where to start, which way to go and the goal (end point) are critical for smooth rhythm. If you have ever tried to learn a line dance by watching those on the floor who know it, you are always a step behind (and bumping other dancers). You cannot anticipate to move with the beat until you have internalized the entire sequence of steps from beginning to end. When the pupil can create multiple copies of the target form while chanting aloud, you can be sure the pattern has been internalized.

This internalization happens very quickly for the majority. However, the shapes may not be very accurate. Successful use of the lines on paper will be erratic at first. This is why the child reverts to drawing movement, the voice stops and practice becomes focused upon the wrong system. Maintain the movement objective (keep the voice working) with directed practice activities and control will improve. The muscle memory will become a much better pencil driver if it has regular opportunity to practice. DEVELOP the pattern, PRACTICE to improve control and APPLY those patterns to word integration for spelling and vocabulary.



## **Skill # 6 Control**

Like Smooth Rhythm this skill relates to all others. Our goal for practice is to improve control of the rhythmic kind of movement. We work to produce forms that become more and more similar to the models. It is important to recognize that Mother Nature controls growth and development of movement control. Primary children will have far better success with development of control at gross motor size. This is the reason we recommend that you keep the writing size large - at least in handwriting exercise sessions - for as long as possible for primary students. Two-space tall letters and one-space small letters on half-inch ruled paper allows more gross involvement. Try it yourself to see how arm movement is necessary.

When grade one children are faced with writing at a small size, the demand for fine motor control will most often prevent the use of rhythmic movement. That effort will most often force the child to visual feedback movement and away from fluent movement.

As we learn more about the motor learning process it is becoming clear that there is a strong relationship between gross motor and fine motor control. The gross system appears to feed dynamic information to various muscle groups easily. However, fine motor information seems to be muscle-group specific. Try to write at adult size with your opposite hand to feel the impact. While many people can learn to do this, some more easily than others, it does require considerable work to develop fluency. In contrast, you will find it fairly easy to write at a large size with the opposite hand. A few practice trials will likely allow a surprising result. It means that we should establish good control at gross size before beginning to reduce the size. When gross patterns feed information to the fine level, much better information will be available. It means that efforts to improve skills for older students (even adults) should include gross training also.

To allow the student to develop control of the complex movements needed for composing a sentence in cursive, we need to teach control points - places to pause and pre-plan in order to control the following moves. This is the reason our cursive models exaggerate points of control. For eighteen lowercase cursive letters we exaggerate a joining control point on the baseline. A lack of understanding of the control concept leads a majority of intermediate students to give up on cursive and revert to print writing. For the majority of cursive letters a simple process explanation can make a big difference. To control the movements think, "slide, slant pause." Each pulse (out-right, back-left) contains a slide out and a slant back at which point you can pause to plan ahead if needed.

As control skills improve and word patterns are internalized by directed practice, the child can begin to produce more fluently with an adult flow. The exaggerated stop points at the end of each letter will begin to disappear as processing and pre-planning skills improve.

Please recognize that our models are purposefully designed to exaggerate the control process for the student. This is particularly true of the cursive versions included in the Peterson Method Font Family. The fonts are designed for process instruction. They are not designed to show adult flow. The reason is quite simple. What would we show? Your flowing hand or that of some other adult who has mastered control. The automatic processing called upon during a composition task will eventually become flowing cursive - but only if the motor system has internalized the correct information for control of rhythmic movements throughout words and sentences. In order to develop the ability to write fluently as you do, the student must understand the control process and practice to automate it.

## Suggestions for Report Cards from C. H. Trafford

Individual school districts have different philosophies regarding the grading of handwriting. The following thoughts are to be used by teachers only to the extent that they do not conflict with your perceptions and district policy.

Grading handwriting may be very difficult for several reasons. One must be somewhat subjective because some pupils do not have the capacity to be superior handwriters because of the physical processes involved. As a general rule, we do not recommend a “failing” grade, nor do we count a handwriting grade toward honor roll recognition.

On the other hand, there are numerous “handwriting facts” that **every child** should know and understand. You can base grades on cognitive facts as well as performance. Please refer to the teacher handbooks and the pupil books to identify such facts as letterform families, basic strokes, left-to-right progression, etc.

1. **Letter Grades.** We would suggest that outstanding performance be recognized.  
At a minimum we recommend three options:  
  
    **A or O** - Outstanding  
  
    **C or S** - Satisfactory  
  
    **D or I** - Needs Improvement
  
2. **Subdivisions.** To communicate with parents, we suggest that teachers consider some or all of the following subdivisions:
  - Can identify exact letterform start points, direction of movement, and sequence of strokes
  - Writes with consistent downstrokes
  - Uses proper size and proportion
  - Spaces words and sentences properly
  - Writes with fluency and relaxation
  - Uses line control while writing
  - Writes neatly and legibly in daily work
  - Uses good paper, pencil, and body position

Handwriting is a combination of visual and muscle skill development. To achieve maximum individual skill pupils also need to understand about writing. In addition to your teacher handbook, our Scope and Sequence of Skills and Behaviors may also be helpful to teachers as they consider methods of evaluation, diagnosis, and remediation. It can be downloaded from the curriculum section of our web site Resource Library.

### **GRADING HANDWRITING: Computation**

The PETERSON program explains six specific subskills that combine to make handwriting easy to read and write. You may compute grades using this “value” chart:

Form	Slant	Size	Spacing	Rhythm	Control
30	10	10	10	30	10

## LETTER FORMATION (Subskill #1)

This skill is clearly the most important. Give it a potential value of **30**. Examine the child's paper and deduct a point for each letterform that is made with poor sequence or the wrong parts. For example:



### Print

Started at the bottom instead of the top.



The stick was made first - the child needs to practice starting points and left-to-right sequence.

### Cursive



The u looks like a v - should slant back to end at the baseline.



Lowercase s is made with a round top instead of a sharp top.

## DOWNSTROKE CONSISTENCY (Subskill #2)

Downstrokes are important to allow the reader to scan quickly along the line. Consistency in writing indicates good muscle patterning for speed and fluency. Give it a potential value of **10**. Deduct points for obvious inconsistencies.

## SIZE AND PROPORTION (Subskill #3)

Manuscript size depends on proper starting points and the proper use of the lines. Cursive size depends on upstrokes used for tall sharp tops and loop tops. Give size a value of **10**. Deduct for size discrepancies.

## SPACING (Subskill #4)

Manuscript writing depends on good eye-hand coordination. Spaces between words must be distinct in order to read sentences easily. Letters inside of words should be close together without touching. Cursive writing spacing depends on the length of beginning strokes, joining strokes, and ending strokes. Children need to slide the hand rightward to create adequate spacing. Give spacing a value of **10** and deduct according to the degree of the problem.

## SMOOTH RHYTHM (Subskill #5)

Handwriting position and the automatic rhythmic movements required to write fluently work together to create smoothness and a semi-automatic skill. Give this subskill a value of **30** and deduct for discrepancies.

## LINE CONTROL (Subskill #6)

In manuscript, children must control the starting points and downstroke movements in relation to the lines. In cursive, baseline or joining control contributes to the development of the other five skills. Give control a value of **10** and deduct for discrepancies.

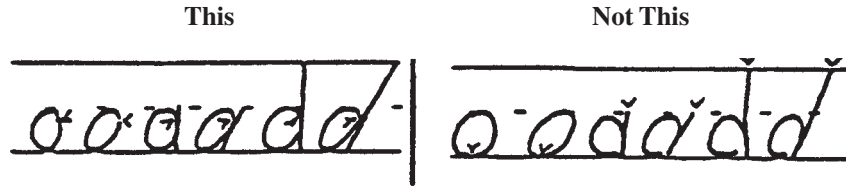
Total the number of the six skills. Legibility should be reflected by a total of at least **50** points. Excellence should be represented by a total of at least **90** points.

- 50-59** - Many needs, but legible - consider knowledge of facts to determine grade.
- 60-69** - Passing, but needs improvement
- 70-79** - Satisfactory
- 80-89** - Above average
- 90-100** - Outstanding

What to look for when evaluating LETTER FORMATION (Subskill #1):

**Printwriting**

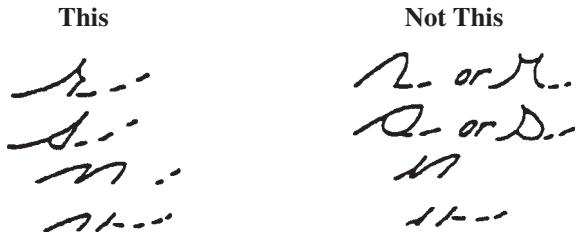
Correct starting points plus direction of movement for proper sequence



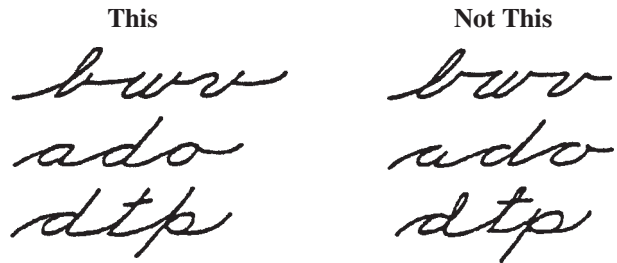
(See form sequence test, Grade 1)

**Cursive Writing**

1. Correct letter tops (round, sharp, loop). Cover the bottoms of the letters with a ruler.



2. Form details



3. Tricky downstrokes



4. Correct Sequence of movement



## Evaluating DOWNSTROKES (Subskill #2)

- Are downstrokes uniform:

### Printwriting

Vertical

This  
till

Not This  
till

Slant

This  
till

Not This  
till

Good progress in spelling and language, which would allow more speed, may stimulate a slanted manuscript product even in first grade. It will occur naturally, especially when good physical positions skills are used. Slanted manuscript may even be more appropriate for left-handed students since downstrokes should be pushed away from the body if the writing hand is to stay below the symbols being produced.

### Cursive Writing

This  
little

Not This  
little

- Do the letters lean toward the right?

### Cursive Writing

little  
Legible but slow

little  
Better Legibility at Speed

If our goal is easy, fluent communication, forward slant should be fostered.

- The slant of the writing is a function of the rightward, top-forming movement. Inconsistent slant is usually due to a less desirable approach to one or more of the physical position skills (Pencil, Paper, Posture).

- Back slant *is hard to read* It should always be discouraged because it fights the natural movement of the hand and arm as well as left-to-right ocular tracking.

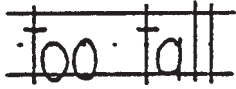


*Learning how to extend movements rightward, will allow the child to make slants travel back to the left with the same muscle group. The out-back, rhythmic sequence allows much better control during fluent application.*

Vertical upstrokes and downstrokes are usually a sign of too much reliance on finger movement. When the arm and wrist contribute, lateral movement is improved. At the very least, vertical writing indicates that something is retarding lateral movement. Usually the offending skills are paper position and/or pencil grip. When the product is vertical, the movements needed to maintain legibility in applied work, are difficult to coordinate. Rhythmic movement is usually defeated and fluency is greatly impaired if not completely impossible. Forward slant of the writing product shows that the right muscles are making the right kind of rhythmic movements.

### Evaluating SIZE (Subskill #3)

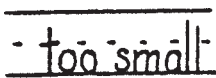
Printwriting, what to look for:



This sample should be marked for size but also for Subskill #6. This is a good example of the interrelationship of the skills.



This sample appears to be a pure size problem because the line control is evident. Arm and hand position can contribute to motions that are more circular than oval when the arm is entering the paper from the side and the hand is turned to put the “karate edge” of the palm on the paper. If the position is correct, apparently he or she “likes ‘em on the chunky side.” Please remember, you cannot slant a circle. Eventually this rounding approach will retard lateral movement and rhythmic production.



When proportion is evident, writing that is too small is usually due to a pencil grip that is too close to the point. Student writes with head on or very close to the desk. The head-down position is hard on the eyes. It is also likely that movements are all accomplished with the fingers. At some point the student will have to learn to use the arm as well for lateral flow.



Erratic starting points result in various sizes and probably are an indication of slightly lagging motor development. Most first grade pupils will show these control problems initially. The real problem is that many of these pupils may give up trying to use good physical position skills, before their control improves, in order to produce a precise product. Keep encouraging correct physical position.

### Cursive Writing

Size, like slant and spacing, is largely physical because it is created by the joining movement. Discrepancies are most often attributable to one or more of the physical attack skills (Pencil Position, Paper Position, Posture).

*Gross Motor Size for Beginners*



*Size Reduction for Transition*

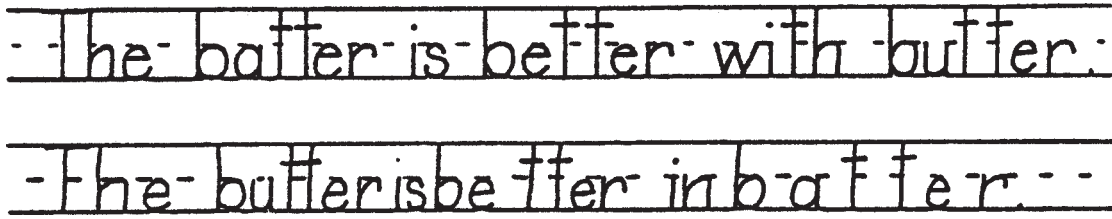
*Adult Proportion*



We want to train muscles toward a smaller size for convenience, but not by sacrificing the position skills. Small motor development is controlled by each person’s biological clock. For some, size reduction will require much more practice than for others. Generally speaking, too small is usually a bigger problem than too large. Precise, rhythm-directed exercise sessions are the key to developing control and physical position patterns.

## Evaluating SPACING (Subskill #4)

### Printwriting



Manuscript writing depends on good eye-hand coordination and is therefore affected by motor development to a great degree. Discrepancies of the type illustrated obviously are not due to motor control. These spacing discrepancies could be attributed to a lack of internalization. The pupil is too consumed by letter-building. He or she is not thinking about the word. Check pencil grip also. If the grip causes the hand to cover the writing space good start-point selection is more difficult.

Letters inside words should be close and words spaced apart in sentences for easy reading. However, when you don't recognize the word and know its "spelling" it is easy to mix up the placement of the letters. It is also important to remember, children have great difficulty with spatial transfer. Copying from a display chart or chalkboard model will also cause spacing and letter placement problems. It is always best to provide a model at the desk. Ask about the Peterson Method Font Family.

Conversely, emerging language/spelling skill will also produce poor spacing (especially in applied situations) because writing is essentially a nonvisual process. For manuscript spacing it will be necessary to continue using a physical device (thumb or finger spacing) if good spacing is to be maintained. This "eye/hand training" involves a motor skill called anchoring.

### Cursive Writing

Cursive spacing can be a nonvisual, physical movement. But first the child must learn to "look ahead" to select a goal for the joining movement in order to maintain fluent movement. It is this learning challenge that affects processing skills.

*Practice sliding to make good tops  
that are spaced apart.*

*Cover the letter bottoms and  
check the tops.*

Exaggerate rightward movement during practice sessions to help develop better transfer of movement to applied work.

*slide wide*

Can you stand your pencil on its eraser between the tops of the letters in a word?

## Evaluating SMOOTH RHYTHM (Subskill # 5)

**Printwriting and Cursive**, what to look for:

Dark line quality, patched letter parts and smeared erasures are the need indicators that are easiest to see and explain. Correcting the physical habits that contribute to these problems is often rather difficult (usually a tight, cramped pencil position and/or poor paper holding skills).

Once again, precise teaching techniques, using verbal rhythm (Action Words) to control practice movements, offer the best hope of discovering the confidence that will allow relaxation and the development of smooth movement. Remember, language and spelling skills are tied very closely to flowing communication, and that fact leads us to the skill of *control*.

## Evaluating LINE CONTROL (Subskill #6)

### Printwriting Considerations

For printwriting this subskill is line control. Does the student exhibit enough control to make the symbol parts touch the lines that are supposed to help us with place-in-space and size? As discussed earlier, the real problem is to develop control with good physical position rather than by sacrificing it.

The more common compromises to physical position don't really become a problem until demands for written communication increase in higher grades. The children cannot see that far ahead so don't be surprised when your patience is taxed to the limit.

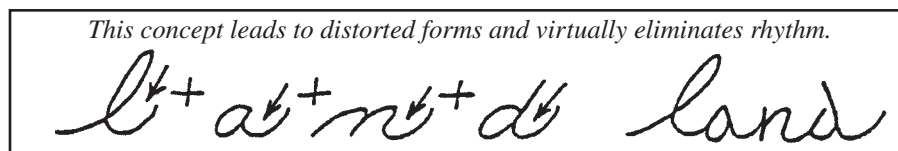
### Cursive Writing Considerations

For cursive diagnosis this subskill refers to *control of the joining movements* which create legibility. Given the average student's facility with language and average motor development, joining control is evidenced by pauses or even a "stop" just before the joining movement begins. With respect to rhythm, the joining stroke is part of the next letter - not the letter that has already been written.

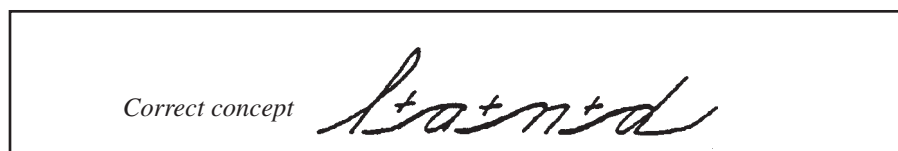


Conversely, stopping or pausing in the wrong place increases the probability of erroneous movement, creating a distorted form.

*This concept leads to distorted forms and virtually eliminates rhythm.*



*Correct concept*



Fluent movement must be pre-planned before movement begins. This requires clear understanding of stop points. The "correct concept" illustration above allows rhythmic movement for each letter in the word.

Use the self-development pages in the WE WRITE TO READ pupil books to teach the concepts. Everyone should know where each letter ends when it is used in a word.



# Tracking Fluency

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Start Time	End Time	Total Time	# of Letters	Letters/Minute

One study has been done with kindergarten and grade one pupils which shows a clear relationship between fluency for writing and reading. Reading fluency increased as handwriting fluency improved. When handwriting fluency did not improve, reading fluency did not improve. This tracking form may well offer a physical measure of need that reflects on reading progress as well as handwriting.

An objective measure of fluency is easily expressed in letters per minute. Conduct periodic timed writing exercises to establish a rough measure of fluency for comparison over time. A chart similar to the one below will allow you and the pupil to track fluency. Choose a target letter or letters, a spelling word or words. Have students write the letter, or words as many times as possible during the time allotted. Emphasize that legibility is part of the task. Iterations that are not legible will not be counted. A name writing exercise might also be a good idea. Have students count the number of letters written. Letters per minute means number of letters divided by the number of minutes. It is a simple exercise to conduct and easy to establish the tracking process. Allow only one minute for writing and no division is necessary. One caution note - if you have chosen words for the exercise, instruct the pupils to finish the word they are writing when you call stop.

I plan to improve these skill areas this year:

___ Form	___ Slant	___ Size	___ Spacing	___ Smooth Rhythm	___ Joining Control	___ Neatness
+ = Good Work;    = Need to Improve						

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Term Progress

End of Fifth Unit

___ Form	___ Slant	___ Size	___ Spacing	___ Smooth Rhythm	___ Joining Control	___ Neatness
+ = Good Work;    = Need to Improve						

Unit One Model Test Sample

Handwriting practice lines for Unit One, consisting of 14 horizontal lines.

___ Form	___ Slant	___ Size	___ Spacing	___ Smooth	___ Joining	___ Neatness
+ = Good Work;	= Need to Improve			Rhythm	Control	

Unit Two Model Test Sample

Handwriting practice lines for Unit Two, consisting of 14 horizontal lines.

___ Form	___ Slant	___ Size	___ Spacing	___ Smooth	___ Joining	___ Neatness
+ = Good Work;	= Need to Improve			Rhythm	Control	

Unit Three Model Test Sample

\_\_\_\_ Form      \_\_\_\_ Slant      \_\_\_\_ Size      \_\_\_\_ Spacing      \_\_\_\_ Smooth Rhythm      \_\_\_\_ Joining Control      \_\_\_\_ Neatness  
+ = Good Work;    = Need to Improve

Unit Four Model Test Sample

\_\_\_\_ Form      \_\_\_\_ Slant      \_\_\_\_ Size      \_\_\_\_ Spacing      \_\_\_\_ Smooth Rhythm      \_\_\_\_ Joining Control      \_\_\_\_ Neatness  
+ = Good Work;    = Need to Improve