



Supporting left handed Writers

Willingham Primary School aims to provide quality teaching and learning for all its pupils, delivering a curriculum for the development of the whole child and one that is fitting for the 21st century, in a safe, secure, happy, caring and stimulating environment.

The left-handed writer



If your child is left-handed and has a difficulty with their handwriting, you can use the suggestions and techniques below to find out if changing their body position, paper position, pen hold or hand position for writing, or changing the equipment they are using helps resolve their difficulties.

In this document you will find information on the following;

- **Body position**
- **Equipment required**
- **Paper position**
- **Pen hold and hand position**

Writing with the left hand is not the same as writing with the right hand with only a change of hand. Although left-handed writers should not be made to feel different they do have different needs from right-handed writers in developing their handwriting skills. These are often overlooked and need to be actively taught.

Left-handed writers have to push the pen across the page towards their body. This is a tiring and awkward movement. Instead of the flowing outward movement of the right-handed writer, where the elbow can move outwards, for the left-handed writer the movement towards the body tends to make the elbow come into the body,



restricting movement and creating tension. If the hand is hooked over the top of the writing, the writing can be smudged and the hand will tire quickly. Also, if the hand covers what has been written the left-handed writer will have to stop more frequently to review the content of what he has written, whereas a right-handed writer can maintain the flow of writing whilst reviewing what has been written.

However, with support there is no reason why left-handed writers should not achieve a fast, fluent and legible hand.

Body position

To aid in their writing the left-handed writer could:

- Sit with light coming from the right-hand side (if the light is coming from the left the child will be working in the shadow of their hand).
- Sit on a slightly higher chair than a right-handed writer; this enables them to see over their hand more easily and gives their arm and hand more freedom of movement.
- Sit slightly to the right of the desk space, giving them plenty of room to their left.
- Try to sit on the left hand side of right-handed writers – then their paper and elbows will not clash.
- If the child's body is stiff or hunched in any way, this will create tiredness and possibly pain. The most usual explanation for this is incorrect positioning of the paper (See: Positioning the paper for the left-handed writer).



Equipment required

Experiment with different types of pens to find out how they affect your child's writing. If using a fountain pen, never use one for a right-hander - use a broader, flexible nib, with a bulbous or reverse oblique cut end, made for left-handers. Some people find attaching a 'pencil' grip can help, especially if the pen/pencil is slippery.

Try to write on a pad of paper or something similar that will provide a smooth surface that will 'give' a little.

Some people find it easier to write on a sloping surface. Sloping writing boards are commercially available, but a ring binder turned sideways with the spine at the top can be effective for some people.

There are many suppliers of books and equipment for left-handers. Books by Rosemary Sassoon are helpful - especially 'Helping Your Handwriting' (Arnold-Wheaton, 1986) - written to be read by the older pupil, but also very helpful for ideas for younger children.

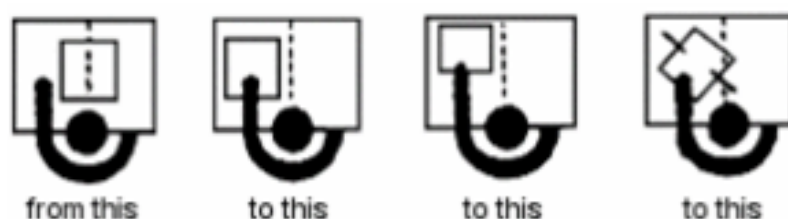
Paper position

Probably the most significant factor in helping to promote better handwriting is to look at the position of the paper. The following guidance will be helpful when working with your child.

Place the paper alongside your child on the left, push the paper away from them slightly and turn the paper so the top is angled to the right towards the table (see Figure 1). Placing the paper like this allows freer movement and enables the writing to be more vertical (severely sloping writing is harder to read). It also enables the hand to be positioned below the writing, giving a more comfortable

position, so your child can see what they are writing, and it avoids smudging.

Fig. 1



Correct position of paper for the left-handed writer.

For those left-handed writers who have developed a 'hooked' hand position (hand above the writing line) and who find it difficult to try to change to a position with the hand below the writing, there is one method of 'hooking' which is better than others.

The paper is placed as for right-handed writers, the writing wrist is on edge rather than flattened, and the wrist should flex during writing. A smooth pointed pen (eg. ball point, roller ball) should be used rather than fountain pen to prevent digging into the paper on downwards strokes.

Pen hold and hand position

Does your child complain that it hurts to write for any length of time?

Do they have to stop frequently when writing?

Would they like to write faster? Does the way they hold their pen restrict the movement of their hand and arm, or results in their letters being distorted?

If the answer is 'Yes' then they may need to experiment with different ways of holding their pen to find a way that works best for them, avoiding the problems above. Although it is important to experiment to find what is best for them, some left-handed writers can develop some very inappropriate pen holds. Your child needs to aim for their fingers, wrist and arm to move freely and loosely. Left-handed writers have a tendency to grip the pencil too tightly if they are not sitting correctly and the penhold is awkward.

The traditional way of holding a pen is called a tripod grip (See figure 2).

Fig. 2



The thumb and first finger are placed gently on either side of the pencil and the middle finger goes underneath. This way everything can move freely as you write. The left-handed writer should be encouraged to:

Try to hold the pen so that their first finger is nearer the pen point than their thumb - this allows quick changes of direction that writing needs, with the thumb nearer the point there is less control over the pen. Also it may be easier to hold the pen/pencil slightly further away from the point than a right-handed writer.

Generally the best position for the wrist is the hand slightly rotated towards to paper from the on-edge position (but avoid rotating too



much). Your child will need to find the position which is most comfortable for them.

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