

Play, Learn and Grow...Together!

Ordsall Primary School Handwriting Progression in EYFS



Handwriting in EYFS forms the foundation for the writing curriculum in Key Stage 1. In Nursery, children develop the physical control and mark making skills required for writing, while in Reception children are taught correct letter formation alongside phonics so that they can apply these skills in words, captions and simple sentences.

This progression outlines how handwriting develops across the Early Years Foundation Stage. It reflects guidance from *The Writing Framework (DfE)* and Ofsted's *Strong Foundations in the First Years of School* and recognises that successful handwriting develops gradually through physical development, mark making, phonics and purposeful writing.

Key Principles for Handwriting in EYFS

At Ordsall Primary School:

- Writing development begins with physical development and fine motor control.
- Mark making and drawing are essential foundations for later writing.
- Talk comes before writing, with adults modelling vocabulary and language.
- Adults model correct letter formation explicitly.
- Short, frequent practice sessions are used in Reception.
- Children are encouraged to write for real purposes within play and continuous provision.
- All attempts at writing are valued and celebrated.
- Writing opportunities are provided both indoors and outdoors.

Children access mark making and writing opportunities across the provision including:

- creative areas
- role play
- small world play
- construction
- outdoor mark making
- drawing and painting
- message writing, lists and signs

Posture and Pencil Grip



Children are supported to develop comfortable and efficient writing habits.




Adults model and encourage children to:

- sit with feet flat on the floor
- hold paper steady with the non-writing hand
- position the paper at a slight angle
- hold the pencil comfortably using a tripod grip where developmentally appropriate

Pencil grip develops gradually and should not be forced prematurely. Children are supported to develop a comfortable and efficient grip through regular fine motor activities.

Pencil Grip Development

Stage	Approximate Age	What It Looks Like	Where Movement Comes From	What Children Can Do	Support Activities
Palmar Supinate 	2–3	Pencil held in whole fist, thumb on top	Shoulder	Large scribbles	Playdough squeezing, big mark making, painting walls
Digital Pronate 	Around 3	Fingers point down, palm facing paper	Elbow	Controlled scribbling	Chalk, chunky crayons, vertical drawing

<p>Four Finger Grip</p> 	3–4	Pencil held with 4 fingers	Wrist	Beginning lines & circles	Threading, pegs, stickers
<p>Static Tripod</p> 	Emerging by 4	Thumb + index + middle finger hold pencil	Wrist	Better control, shapes forming	Short crayons, easel drawing
<p>Dynamic Tripod</p> 	5+	Finger movement controls writing	Fingers	Controlled letter formation, writing becomes more fluent	Handwriting practice, fine motor tasks

Children develop grip through activities such as:

- playdough manipulation
- threading and lacing
- peg and tweezer games
- construction play
- painting and drawing
- cutting and snipping

Nursery Handwriting Progression (Age 3–4)

Focus

Physical readiness, mark making and fine motor development.

There is no expectation that children master letter formation in Nursery. Children are supported to develop the foundations required for writing through play-based learning, exploration and adult modelling.

Fine Motor and Physical Development

Children develop:

- hand strength
- coordination
- control
- whole-arm movements when drawing and colouring
- early pencil grip development
- increasing stamina for mark making

Adults support this through activities such as:

- playdough squeezing and rolling
- threading and laces
- peg boards
- construction and building
- snipping with scissors
- painting and large-scale mark making
- drawing on vertical surfaces (e.g. easels or boards)

Pre-Writing Strokes

Most children aged 3–4 begin to copy:

- vertical lines (|)
- horizontal lines (—)
- circles (○)

- simple open shapes

These movements develop the control and directional awareness needed for later letter formation.

Drawing and Symbolic Representation

Children begin to:

- draw simple people with 2–4 features
- add meaning to drawings
- talk about what they have drawn

For example:

“This is my family.”

Drawing plays an important role in developing children’s ability to represent ideas and experiences before writing develops.

Letter Awareness

Children may begin to:

- recognise some letters, particularly those in their name
- attempt to write letters using marks or shapes
- explore writing through play

Correct letter formation is not expected at this stage, although some children may begin forming letters if developmentally ready.

What Handwriting Does Not Look Like in Nursery

In Nursery, children are not expected to formally practise handwriting or repeatedly write letters.

Teaching does not focus on:

- formal handwriting worksheets
- repeated tracing of letters
- copying letters from the board
- writing on handwriting lines
- expecting correct letter formation for all children

Instead, the focus is on developing the physical, cognitive and language foundations for writing through play, exploration and meaningful mark making.

Adults support this by:

- modelling mark making and drawing
- talking with children about their marks and drawings
- providing a wide range of tools and materials
- encouraging children to give meaning to their marks

These experiences help children develop the control, confidence and understanding needed before formal handwriting begins in Reception.

Nursery Termly Progression

	Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
Focus	Gross motor control	Increasing control	Purposeful mark making
Children develop	Shoulder and arm movements Large-scale mark making Early control of tools	Improved fine motor precision Controlled mark making Early directional movement (left to right)	Copy pre-writing strokes Create simple patterns and shapes Show increased hand strength and stamina

Activities	Painting with large brushes Outdoor chalk drawing Dough squeezing and rolling Threading and large construction Large drawing movements on easels or floors	Peg boards and tweezers Cutting and snipping activities Drawing lines, circles and simple shapes Following simple paths and patterns Vertical drawing and mark making	Copying lines, zig-zags and curves Simple pattern making Drawing recognisable shapes Fine motor activities (pegs, threading, tweezers) Beginning to represent meaning through marks
-------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Reception Handwriting Progression (Age 4–5)

Focus

Correct letter formation linked to phonics.

Handwriting is taught through short, frequent sessions and is closely linked to Read Write Inc. Phonics. Children learn letter formation as new graphemes are introduced so that they can immediately apply them in both reading and writing.

Adults model correct letter formation and address incorrect formation immediately and sensitively to help children develop secure habits. Accuracy of letter formation is prioritised over speed.

Fine Motor Development

Children develop:

- a more consistent tripod grip
- improved wrist stability
- finger isolation
- improved hand–eye coordination

Adults continue to provide regular opportunities to strengthen fine motor control through play and structured activities.

Pre-Writing Shapes

Children typically become able to copy:

- a cross (+)
- a square (□)
- diagonal lines (/ \)
- an X

Triangles may still be developing for some children at this stage. These shapes help develop the control and directional movement needed for later letter formation.

Letter Formation

Children learn to form letters correctly using RWI formation rhymes.

Lower-case letters are taught in formation families so that children practise similar movement patterns together, helping them develop motor memory and fluency.

Curly Caterpillar Letters

c a o d g q e s f

Long Ladder Letters

l t i j u y

One-Armed Robot Letters

r n m h b k p

Zigzag Monster Letters

v w x z

Children practise:

- correct starting points
- correct direction of formation
- writing letters on simple lines.

Capital Letters

Capital letters are introduced later in Reception once lower-case formation is secure.

Children learn to:

- use a capital letter at the beginning of their name
- begin forming capital letters correctly.

Name Writing

By the end of Reception, most children can:

- write their name independently
- begin with a capital letter
- follow with correctly formed lower-case letters.

Drawing Development

Drawing continues to support early writing development.

Children increasingly:

- draw people with 5–7 body parts
- add details such as hair, arms and clothing
- use drawings to represent stories, experiences and ideas.

Reception Termly Progression

	Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
Focus	Writing readiness and early letter formation	Developing accurate letter formation	Increasing fluency and consistency
Children develop	Secure pencil grip and posture Fine motor strength and control Correct formation of letters taught in phonics Understanding correct starting points and direction	Increasingly secure formation of most taught lower-case letters Beginning to write on lines with increasing control Correct orientation and size of letters Beginning to write simple words and captions	Consistent formation of most lower-case letters Improved control, stamina and fluency when writing Using capital letters for names and sentence starts Writing simple sentences with clearer spacing
Activities	Fine motor activities (threading, tweezers, peg boards) Large-scale and vertical writing	Practising writing words linked to phonics Guided writing activities Writing labels, captions and simple words	Independent writing opportunities Writing simple sentences Copying short captions

	Letter formation during phonics Whiteboard practice	Writing on simple lines	Practising capital letters and spacing
--	--------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------------------

Writing Development Across EYFS

Children typically progress through the following stages.

Stage	What It Looks Like	Adult Support	Assessment Focus
Mark Making	Scribbles, lines and circles	Model mark making and provide a wide range of tools and materials	Child explores tools and movements
Meaningful Marks	Gives meaning to marks and drawings	Encourage children to talk about what they have drawn or written	Child understands that marks can represent meaning
Early Writing	Recognisable letters begin to appear	Model letter formation and link writing to phonics	Child attempts to write letters in their name or sounds they know
Emergent Writing	Writes words using the sounds they can hear	Encourage segmenting and talking about sounds in words	Child begins linking sounds to letters
Sentence Writing	Writes simple phrases or sentences	Model sentence structure and support oral rehearsal	Child writes a simple sentence that others can read

Overview of Writing Development Across EYFS

Skill Area	Nursery (3–4)	Reception (4–5)
Pencil Grip	Developing grip, whole-arm movements	More consistent tripod grip
Pre-Writing Strokes	Vertical lines, horizontal lines, circles	Crosses, squares, diagonal lines
Shapes	Simple open shapes	More controlled closed shapes
Letter Writing	Letter-like marks	Correct letter formation taught
Name Writing	May recognise letters in name	Writes name independently
Drawing	Simple figures	More detailed drawings

End of Reception Expectations (ELG)

By the end of Reception, children should be able to:

- write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed
- spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters words using phonics knowledge
- write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others.