

**Once children are secure in the pencil control concepts which underpin the explicit teaching of handwriting, this guidance can be used to support teachers in planning for cognitive handwriting instruction. Schools can use this alongside their handwriting programmes.**

### **What is in this guidance?**

Explicit handwriting instruction is built on children's early movement and coordination skills, and their security in the pencil control concepts of shape formation, shape manipulation, directionality, fluidity of movement, fine motor skills, pressure control and pencil grip. This guidance has been designed to support teachers in planning for their explicit instruction of handwriting once children have secure pre-handwriting skills. The guidance provides information on the teaching of individual graphemes (letters) and can be used alongside the school's handwriting programmes.

### **Introducing a grapheme – the core components**

When introducing a grapheme, there are core components which are recommended for practitioners to consider as part of their planning for learning, teaching and assessment:

- **Phoneme/ grapheme correspondence**

Children need to know what the grapheme represents, supporting them to make the connection between the phoneme and the grapheme(s) which represent the phoneme. Children also need to understand why we learn to form the graphemes.

- **Thinking-Looking-Doing**

During the cognitive stage of forming graphemes children need to have the opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding of the shape formation and direction concepts which are associated with forming the grapheme.

- **Vertical and horizontal planes**

Children need to develop their understanding of letter formation in the vertical and horizontal planes, transferring their knowledge and understanding of shape formation and direction concepts across both planes.

- **Mindful practice**

Children need to have the opportunity to practise letters mindfully, reflecting on their letter formation each time they form a letter during the associative stage. Children require mindful practice of forming letters for their letter formation to become automatic.

As long as children have developed secure pencil control concepts as a foundation to the explicit teaching of graphemes, schools can use their professional judgement, as well as being informed by handwriting programmes, as to the order in which the graphemes are taught.

### Example of a handwriting lesson introducing a grapheme

*The ideas from the Pencil Control Concepts Toolkit can be used to reinforce the concepts when introducing individual strokes and putting strokes together to form letters.*

#### Step 1: Phoneme/ grapheme correspondence

- Recapping the phoneme (the sound) and introducing the grapheme (letter) which represents the phoneme – grapheme is displayed vertically on the board and there are examples of the grapheme available for children on the horizontal plane on the carpet or at tables.

#### Step 2: Thinking-Looking-Doing (Individual strokes)

- Children are given a selection of semi-circles and straight lines (Appendix 1). Using the shapes children should form the grapheme.  
*This could also be replicated with other materials, e.g. pipe cleaners.*
- Practitioner to look at each of the shapes which make up the letter and discuss how these shapes are formed using the language concepts for direction.

#### Step 3: Vertical and horizontal planes (Individual strokes)

- Children to form the individual strokes on a vertical surface (vertical plane), e.g. on the interactive whiteboard with finger, on an easel with paint and a paintbrush, outside on the wall with a squirty bottle filled with water etc.
- Children to form these individual strokes in a filled tray (horizontal plane), e.g. a tray filled with glitter, gloop, lentils, sand, shaving foam etc.

#### Step 4: Thinking-Looking-Doing (Putting the movements together)

- Practitioner to demonstrate writing the grapheme – both vertically and horizontally.
- Practitioner to ask the children to describe “What did I do to make the letter?” using the language concepts for direction.

#### Step 5: Vertical and horizontal planes (Putting the movements together)

- In pairs, children to form the letter on a vertical surface (vertical plane), e.g. on the interactive whiteboard with finger, on an easel with paint and a paintbrush, outside on the wall with a squirty bottle filled with water etc., describing what they’re doing to their partner.
- Children to form the letter in a filled tray (horizontal plane), e.g. a tray filled with glitter, gloop, lentils, sand, shaving foam etc., describing what they’re doing to their partner.
- After each time they write the letter they should stop and reflect with a partner:
  - Does this look like the letter I want to write?
  - Did I go in the right direction?
  - Did I use the correct strokes?
  - What should I do next time?

#### Step 6: With a writing implement (on a smaller scale)

- Practitioner to demonstrate by writing the letter on a piece of paper or a whiteboard, talking through what they’re doing.
- Practitioner to show the children and reflect on the letter they’ve written:
  - Does this look like the letter I want to write?
  - Did I go in the right direction?
  - Did I use the correct strokes?
  - What should I do next time?
- Children to write the letter on paper or on a whiteboard. After each time they write the letter they should stop and reflect with a partner:
  - Does this look like the letter I want to write?
  - Did I go in the right direction?
  - Did I use the correct strokes?
  - What should I do next time?

**Appendix 1:**

Each packet should have:

- 2 large semi-circles
- 2 small semi-circles
- 2 large straight lines
- 2 small straight lines
- 2 dots.

