

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

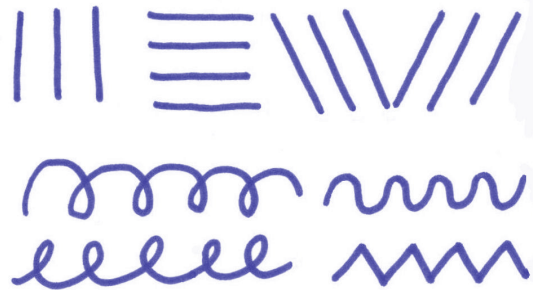
Patterns

Patterns are wonderful teaching tools because they enable a child to learn so many essential skills for writing in a way that can be enjoyable. They can also play a part in developing the skills of older pupils.

Patterning before writing

Patterns give small children experience of movements and shapes that will develop their motor skills, extend their vocabulary and build confidence.

Early patterns can include straight lines, both up and down, side to side and diagonal; zigzags; simple circles in both directions; concentric circles beginning at the centre or the outer edge; dots; spirals that wind outwards or inwards; upward loops or garlands; downward loops or arcades; figures of eight both vertical and horizontal.



The patterns can be made in a multitude of materials that provide variety, reinforce movements already experienced and can be a part of group projects and artwork. They might be made with fingers in sand, lentils, foam, paste and paint or in the air; on biscuits with tubes of icing; rolled from plasterscine or dough; made with wool or thread; in chalk in the playground; with whole bodies to make large patterns in the air or in tracks of movement on the floor, and with brushes, pencils or felt pens.



Tip



When the patterns are made with writing tools children who are sufficiently mature can be encouraged to hold their pencils or pens with an efficient grip. (Ideally, the tool is held between thumb and forefinger with the side of the middle finger completing the tripod) but young children might need to still use less mature pen holds.

Patterns that prepare for writing

Children who have experienced early pattern making can be gradually introduced to specific patterns that mimic the movements needed for writing letters. These are particularly beneficial when made at a size appropriate for the child's writing so that the fine control necessary for writing is established.

Arches or bridges made with points at the base mimic the springing movement used in the letters **r b n m h k p**.

Loops or garlands made with points at the top are good preparation for writing the letters **l i t u y**.

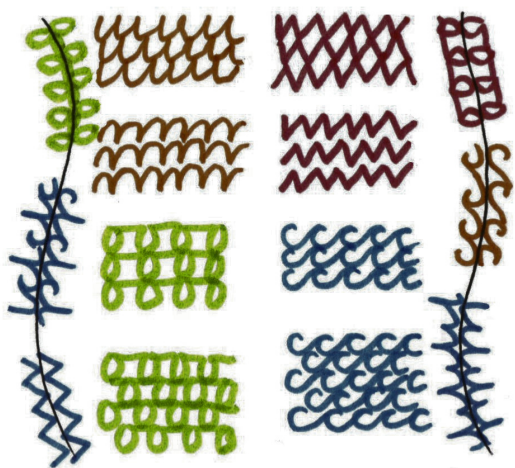
Circles made in an anticlockwise direction are good preparation for making the letters **o c d a g q s**.



and joining

Some teachers will be familiar with the set of handwriting patterns above by Christopher Jarman³. Children making these patterns are learning many movements essential for making not only single letters but also much of the knowledge and skill needed for joining up.

Note: Schools using a style of writing with looped descenders may find it useful to make a pattern from **j**, **g** or **y** as this shape does not appear in Jarman's set.



Given encouragement, children can create a wide variety of textures from lines of basic patterns fitted together in different ways to make fish scales, chain mail, waves, seaweed and many more. New patterns can be created from pairs of letters – perhaps those that require particular attention – or a group of similar-shaped letters eg. *adada* (*d* often presents difficulties) or from a set of initials.

Tip



Patterning is a useful handwriting practice that, once taught, can be continued by children in those odd minutes that sometimes occur in a school day.

Patterns make good texture or borders.

Outlines to be filled with pattern can be made by the children themselves but if the purpose of the exercise is the experience of making the patterns it is often simpler to supply a basic shape to be filled. (Children tend to draw the shapes too small or complicated for effective pattern-making or else so large that the patterning becomes boring). Some favourites are fish and hot air balloons.

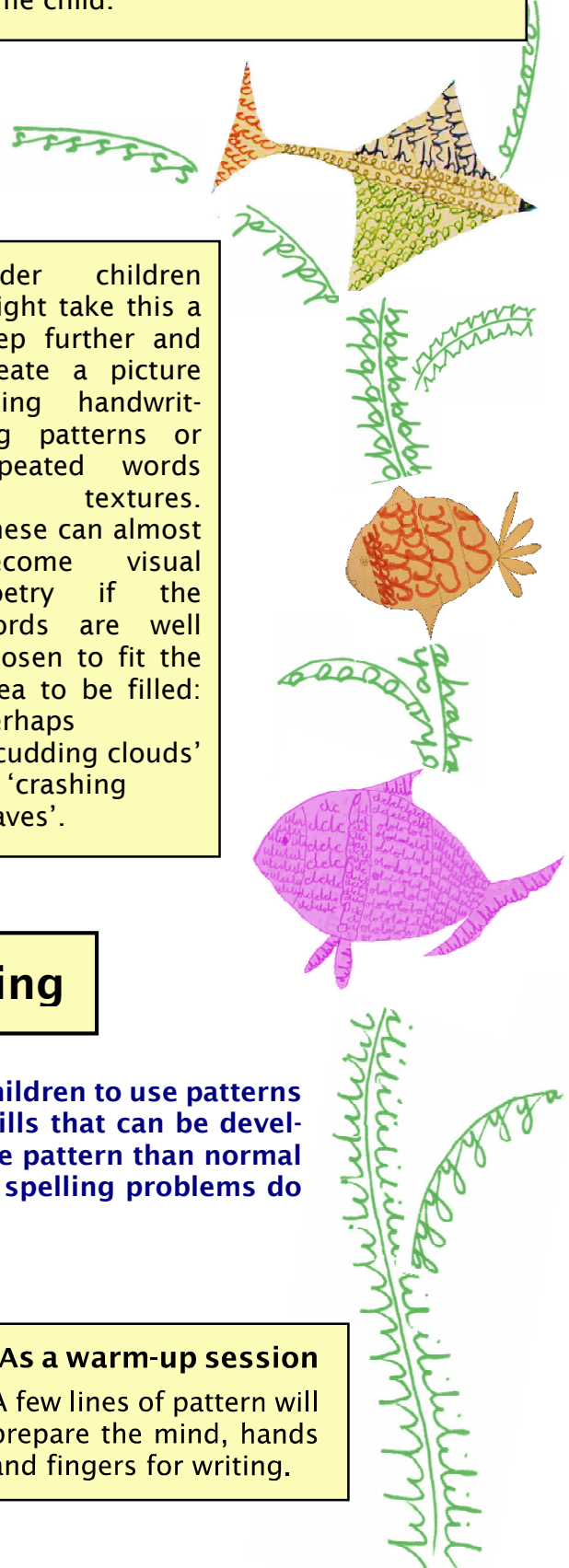
The finished shapes can be kept in a folder, combined to make a class picture or form a picture with other shapes by the same child.



Colour can give additional appeal to handwriting patterns. Fine-tipped felt pens in bright colours have the added advantage that they need little pressure to make good colours.

Older children enjoy using gel pens and these are especially effective on dark coloured paper.

Older children might take this a step further and create a picture using handwriting patterns or repeated words as textures. These can almost become visual poetry if the words are well chosen to fit the area to be filled: perhaps 'scudding clouds' or 'crashing waves'.



Patterns to support writing

There are good reasons for encouraging children to use patterns after they can write as there are many skills that can be developed more easily when making a repetitive pattern than normal writing. Complex letter combinations and spelling problems do not distract.

To maintain consistency of size

A pattern that alternates long and short strokes can reinforce the relationship between the ascenders and the x-height letters (a c e u v etc.) and letters that are frequently made too large can be paired with another.

As a warm-up session

A few lines of pattern will prepare the mind, hands and fingers for writing.

To practise a letter shape or join that presents difficulty

e.g: the join from **v** and **w** frequently causes problems, especially to **e**, and **u** is commonly not completed so **vovov**, **wewew** & **uauau** are useful exercises.

To keep letters on the writing line

Making a pattern on a ruled line can reinforce this characteristic of good writing that some children find difficult.

To create rhythm and fluency

Children are often over-anxious and tense when writing. Patterns can be unthreatening and relaxing and so become more flowing and rhythmical. This can feed across to more complex writing.



To reduce pressure

Many children find writing hard work because they put such effort into the process, gripping their pens or pencils as though they could escape and carving the letters into the paper. The experience of making a pattern as lightly as possible can be transferred to normal writing.



To increase writing speed

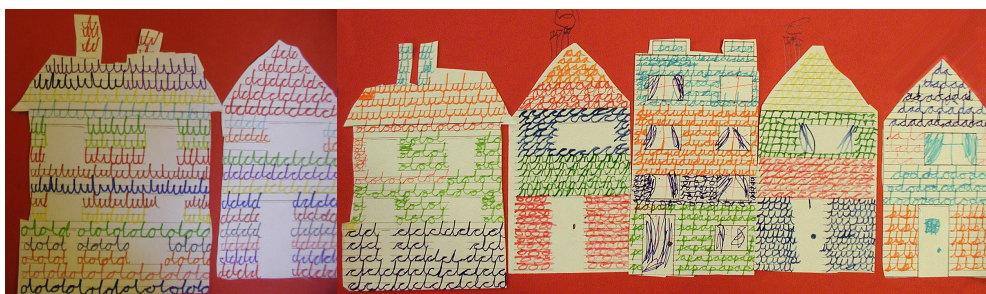
Gradually increasing speed when writing patterns can help to write words more quickly too.

To maintain consistency of slant

Writing looks so much more attractive and is more pleasant to read if the down strokes are parallel. This is easier to practise when writing a pattern such as **ululu**.

To improve the position of the body and pen hold

It is easier to concentrate on the movement and placing of body and hands while performing a repetitive pattern than when writing normally.



References

- 1 Write Dance: A Progressive Music and Movement Programme for the Development of Pre-writing and Writing Skills in Children. R. Oussoren-Voors, (2001). Paul Chapman Educational Publishing.
- 2 Penpals for Handwriting. Foundation 1 Teacher's Book. G Budgell & K Ruttle, (2003) Cambridge UP.
- 3 The Development of Handwriting Skills: A Book of Resources for Teachers. C Jarman, (2001). NAPE Enterprises.

Compiled by Gwen Dornan from an article in *Handwriting Today*, the journal of the National Handwriting Association.