

The DfE Writing Framework: top-line messages sections 1-5

Prepared by Sarah Hubbard
Learn Sheffield Improvement Partner

DfE Writing Framework

[The writing framework - GOV.UK](#)

Amy Parry-McDermott will be joined by Sarah for the Autumn Term English Subject Leader Network meetings:

Autumn – Following the publication of DfE's Writing Framework, Amy Parry-McDermott (RoSIS) and Sarah Hubbard (Learn Sheffield) will share and discuss key messages and the implications of these for English Subject Leaders.

- Monday, 13th October at Albion House from 13:30 - 15:30 [English \(Primary\) Subject Leaders | Forge CPD](#) repeated on
- Tuesday, 21st October at Rockingham PDC from 13:30 - 15:30 [English \(Primary\) Subject Leaders | Forge CPD](#)

Spring – focus to be confirmed: Tuesday, 13th January online from 13:30 - 15:30 [English \(Primary\) Subject Leaders | Forge CPD](#).

Summer – focus to be confirmed: Thursday, 4th June at Rockingham PDC from 13:30 - 15:30. [English \(Primary\) Subject Leaders | Forge CPD](#).

Section 1:

The importance of a conceptual model for writing

It is hard to conceptualise a model or curriculum for writing; however, it is important to do so. **The model should include:**

- the knowledge and skills for writing (both transcription and composition) and how they are broken down and built cumulatively
- how writing is more than just speech written down
- the importance of talk as a crucial prerequisite for writing
- the different, and many demands that different aspects of writing place on working memory
- how writing helps learning about subject content and helps reading
- The knowledge and skills required to write in creative modes
- The importance of motivation and how to foster it.

Section 2 (1): Reception year plays a crucial role in building the foundations of writing

- In Yr R, children need regular explicit handwriting instruction **as well as** phonics instruction.
- Some children, may need to be taught how to use and manoeuvre, thumb, wrist and shoulder muscles.
- Children should be taught the correct way to hold a pencil and the correct position for writing.
- Teaching should then progress to specific handwriting lessons and practice.
- This might initially include practice in moving the pencil to master the horizontal, diagonal, vertical and circular strokes needed for writing.
- This should progress to teaching letter formation, focusing on where to start each letter, the direction of formation, its shape, position and, later on, its spacing relative to other letters.

Section 2 (2):

Reception Year – skills and knowledge for writing

- Complex, extended writing tasks should not be introduced too early, and children should master each stage before moving on.
- Simple dictation helps pupils practise transcription.
- There should be opportunities for pupils to write as part of play but it is important to recognise that not all children will take up these opportunities.
- Children need opportunities to develop their body strength and co-ordinations **as well as their fine motor skills**. This may be particularly important for some children, such as summer-born boys, who may need more intentional, intensive support alongside teaching writing to develop the fine motor skills that underpin writing.

Section 2 (3): Reception Year – developing composition

- Children need plenty of opportunities to share and elaborate on their ideas.
- They should be encouraged and supported by adults who are effective at modelling high-quality language and questioning sensitively.
- This will support them to develop and use a wide range of vocabulary and language structures.
- This, in turn, will help children to become adept at using these structures in their own writing.
- High quality interactions should be combined with shared reading, storytelling, and learning rhymes, poems and songs are crucial to foster a love of language.
- The non-statutory early years curriculum guidance **Development Matters** provides further assistance on supporting children's developing understanding of language, and on developing handwriting.

Section 2 (4): Making judgements against the Early Learning Goals for Writing

Children at the expected level of development will 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/ letters
- write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others

NB Teachers must ensure letter formation is secure BEFORE texts get longer.

Extended writing is not necessary to be judged as achieving the Early Learning Goal for Writing.

Section 2 (5):

Reception – detail about what is needed to meet the ELG

In Year 1, pupils should be instructed to:

- sit properly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly
- begin forming lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and ending at the appropriate points, as well as forming capital letters and digits 0–9
- recognize which letters belong to specific handwriting ‘families’ (i.e., letters formed using similar strokes) and practice these accordingly.

NB: Wide-lined paper is crucial at this stage. Mid-line guides can also assist students in positioning their letters accurately.

Students should transition to using paper with narrower lines once they can write legibly and comfortably on wide-lined paper.

Section 3 (1): Transcription – handwriting in Year 1

In Year 1, pupils should be instructed to:

- sit properly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly
- begin forming lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and ending at the appropriate points, as well as forming capital letters and digits 0–9
- recognise which letters belong to specific handwriting ‘families’ (i.e., letters formed using similar strokes) and practice these accordingly.

NB: Wide-lined paper is crucial at this stage. Mid-line guides can also assist students in positioning their letters accurately.

Students should transition to using paper with narrower lines once they can write legibly and comfortably on wide-lined paper.

Section 3 (2): Transcription – handwriting in the first few weeks of Year R

Early handwriting instruction should:

- build the foundations for handwriting, such as practising making the movements needed to form letters in the air (see Section 2: The importance of reception).
- include daily instruction, until pupils can write legibly and easily
- be taught in small steps, with lots of opportunity for practice
- be cumulative: teachers should build on what pupils have learned previously
- be consolidated before teaching moves on so that pupils do not practise letters incorrectly and revisited when further practice is needed
- be demonstrated by the teacher
- be additional to any handwriting that forms part of teaching phonics.

Section 3 (3): Transcription – impact of handwriting on many aspects of writing

- Fluent handwriting is a significant predictor of positive writing outcomes.
- The cognitive demands of handwriting can divert attention away from other elements such as composition.
- Reduced motivation – handwriting difficulties can make writing more effortful and frustrating.
- Preventing others from understanding what they have written.

Section 3 (4): Transcription – supporting children with the physical demands of writing

While teaching handwriting, teachers should encourage pupils to sit comfortably by:

- explaining why sitting comfortably helps them to write easily
- reminding pupils with pupil-friendly prompts: feet on the floor; bottom to the back of the chair; pencil in one hand and the other hand on the paper
- showing pupils what 'poor' sitting looks like
- checking whether a pupil might have a condition that might mediate against them sitting comfortably.

Section 3 (5): Transcription – the correct position for handwriting

- The right position should enable the arm to move freely and support the hand so the fingers can manipulate the writing implement in the tiny movements required to write letters.
- The easiest way to achieve this is sitting at a table.
- The paper should rest on a flat surface.
- Handwriting lessons should use paper and pencil as pupils benefit from experiencing the friction these create.

See Appendix A page 100



Section 3 (6): Spelling – in Reception and KS1 spelling is taught through phonics

- Pupils who spell well are more confident about using advanced vocabulary than poorer spellers. This is because the latter feel they need to use words they can spell correctly.
- Pupils who struggle with spelling write less, do so less fluently and produce lower-quality writing.
- Spelling follows the phonics programme from R to Yr 2; pupils need to identify phonemes before they can spell.
- Dictation supports spelling but the organisation of dictation lessons with whole classes needs careful consideration.
- Because children learn to read more quickly than they learn to spell, it is important that their reading must not be held back by whether they can spell accurately.

Section 3 (7): Transcription – organising spelling lessons

Schools need to decide how best to organise their spelling lessons. Among other options, they might consider:

- splitting a class into two or three focus groups. One group is taught by the teacher directly while the other group or groups practise spelling words independently
- teaching the whole class together and giving extra support to some pupils during the lesson.



Section 3 (8):

Transcription–orthography, morphology and etymology

Orthography: when pupils read at a glance, they build their knowledge of spelling patterns.

Morphology: relates to the parts of words that hold meaning (morphemes), such as affixes.

The explicit teaching of morphology can support spelling. **Morpheme matrices** unpack words like 'reformed' into the prefix 're–', the root word 'form' and the suffix '–ed';.

(Example of morpheme matrices – Appendix B on page 103)

Etymology: studying the origin of a word, especially when linked to morphology, promotes spelling but it may be less relevant to or useful for younger pupils than phonics, orthography and morphology because of the challenging historical, linguistic and cultural contexts.

Section 3 (9): Transcription – practising spelling

Spelling practice should be regular and consistent throughout primary school and should include:

- learning new words – teaching words before pupils encounter them in texts can be helpful; supporting pupils to say the words and understand their meanings will support them to apply learnt spellings in their writing
- practising previously taught words to develop speed and automaticity, and writing dictated sentences containing words already practised
- learning common exception words – pupils will often learn these through identifying the tricky part of the word or by using a mnemonic
- independent practice activities, so that the teacher can work with other groups or provide extra support for pupils who need it
- a handwriting task that includes the new spellings can also support pupils to commit spellings to their long-term memory
- planned opportunities to explore the morphology of words, such as using morpheme matrices
- encouragement, acknowledgement and feedback.

Section 3 (10):

Transcription – clarification about spelling and creativity

- Spelling should not stop pupils using engaging vocab, so should come after the planning and selection of words.
- Teachers should discuss pupils' ideas and use of language before focusing, later, on punctuation, spelling and handwriting.
- Keeping a check of common errors, particularly in words that have been taught in the spelling lesson, is important, because these can then be reviewed, revised and, ideally, the correct spelling consolidated in the next spelling lesson.
- It may be useful to display these words in the classroom as a visual reminder.

Section 4 (1): Teaching Composition

Teachers should support pupils' understanding of composition and, **particularly, sentence construction**. To develop compositional knowledge teachers can:

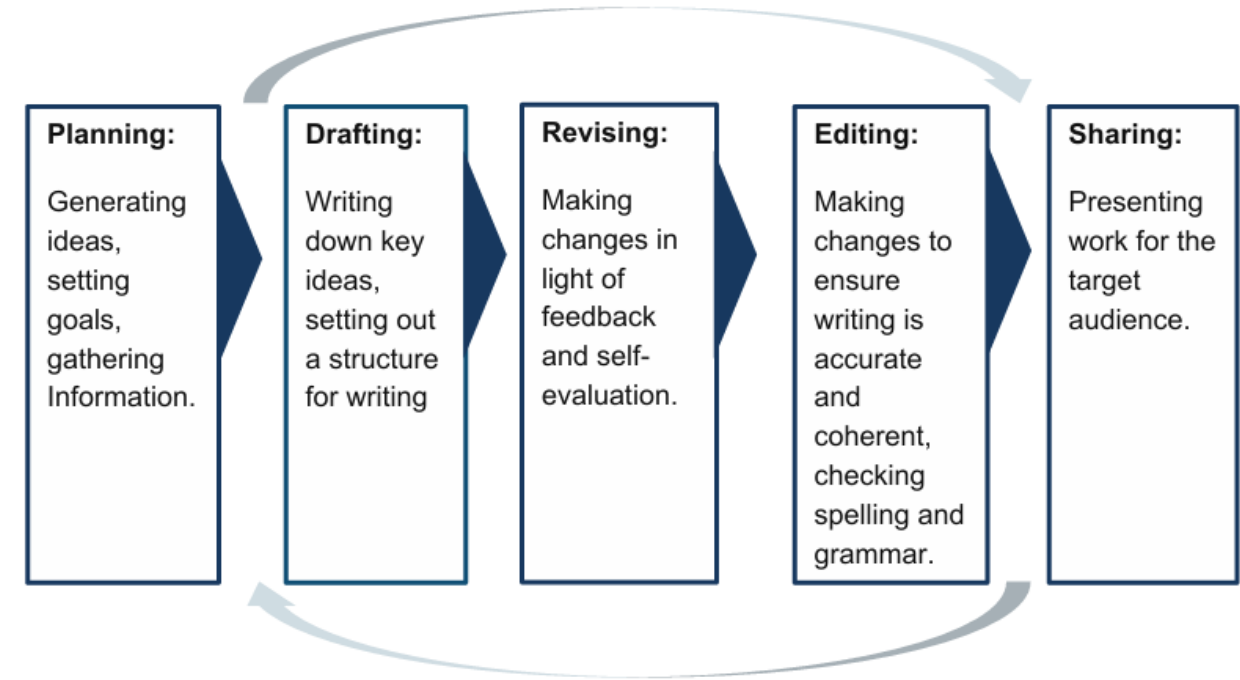
- explicitly model written language structures when speaking (such as rephrasing and extending what the pupils say)
- use voice pitch, timing and prominence of certain sounds/words to indicate sentence boundaries and varied sentence types and structures (also known as prosody), for example, emphasising a question with a high pitch at the end, or pausing to indicate a comma or ellipsis for effect
- provide pupils with sentence stems and frames to build a sentence orally and to link it to the written structure.

Section 4 (2):

Teaching composition – the writing process

- Writing is a non-linear process consisting of: planning, **drafting**, **revising** editing, sharing.
- Teaching approaches that allow a slow release of responsibility from the teacher to the pupil have been shown to be effective.
- Useful approaches include, Modelled writing (I do), Shared writing (we do), Independent writing (you do) and Guided writing.

Figure 3: An illustration of the phases of the writing process



Section 4 (3): Teaching Composition– the importance of selecting a strong model text

To develop their understanding of the structures of different types of text, pupils need to study model texts which provide 'opportunities to read, analyse, and emulate models of good writing'.

The following four principles can be useful:

- the writing of texts should be integrated with the reading of similar texts
- the exemplar text needs to highlight the features, including the structural features of that specific text form, genre and type.
- teachers must scaffold the analysis of the exemplar text to ensure pupils attend to the specific features – both organisational (structural) and language features
- the texts must illustrate clearly the specific features of effective writing, where real-world model texts are inappropriate (often non-fiction texts) then teachers *may* therefore need to write the text.

Section 4 (4): Teaching Composition – establishing the audience for, and purpose of writing

In KS2, pupils should be taught to increase their awareness of their audience. They need to understand that the reader is not present and cannot give immediate feedback. Pupils need to imagine their readers and how they might respond to the text, known as:

‘writing like a reader’

Showing awareness of audience might include:

- tailoring content and vocab choices
- modifying the complexity of language and concepts according to the audience's age and level of knowledge, such as using simple terms and visuals (a picture, photo or diagram) for younger audiences and more technical language and detailed diagrams for older audiences
- adjusting tone –adopting a formal tone when writing to the local MP, but switch to a more casual tone when writing for their peers.

Section 4 (5): Teaching composition – learning about structure

Key Stage 1

- Teaching should focus on supporting pupils to articulate what they want to say, sentence by sentence.
- The NC requires pupils in year 2 to write narratives about personal experiences and those of others. However, a narrative does not need to be lengthy and complex; it might require only a few sentences.

Key Stage 2

Pupils should use simple, memorable, whole-school planning models to help them build mental models of different text structures. This supports them to structure their ideas and reduce the cognitive demands of composition.

An effective planning model should:

- clearly indicate where paragraphs will be placed in the text and what single idea each paragraph develops, with some indication of the development
- record the vocabulary and language features the text needs
- reflect a clear understanding of the purpose and audience
- always be available for pupils when they write. **See appendix D for examples of planning models**

Section 5 (1): Pupils who need the most support

Pupils who find writing difficult are likely to struggle across the curriculum. They may also have other difficulties, such as with speaking or reading or both. It is therefore important:

- to consider their needs as a whole, including how speaking and/or reading support should be prioritised
- to ensure early identification (using formative assessment for e.g.) is crucial and can pre-empt difficulties
- to reliably ascertain what the difficulty is.

NB Difficulties with writing can show up through pupils writing slowly, struggling to apply knowledge.

Section 5 (2):

Support for pupils who struggle with handwriting

Support for those who struggle with handwriting might include:

- closely observing the way in which the pupil forms a letter or letters, since the incorrect direction and sequencing of strokes to form letters are common in handwriting difficulties
- providing individual support during the handwriting lesson to improve the aspect the pupil struggles with
- providing regular instruction and opportunity to practise handwriting which should be done urgently – and the outcomes monitored
- If appropriate provide extra time to complete writing activities, since more time can be helpful for pupils who have difficulty writing
- Support pupils with writing through digital devices, particularly when transcription is a barrier to composition.

Section 5 (3):

Supporting pupils who struggle with composition

What this looks like:

- pupils may struggle to write sentences and make their writing understood
- they may find it hard to combine sentences; or to formulate and organise their ideas.

What might support look like:

- providing additional scaffolding such as sentence stems
- longer and increased opportunities for oral rehearsal
- Recording devices can help pupils play back their work in stages and can support pupils with problems with working memory.

Section 5 (4):

Support for pupils who struggle – dyslexia

Dyslexia: pupils with dyslexia do not progress as well as their peers in writing.

It is important, therefore, for schools to identify pupils who are struggling with writing early on and to consider what, if any, additional support they might need. Pupils with dyslexia may benefit from:

- explicit writing teaching in smaller, incremental steps with lots of opportunity for practice and repetition, even more than their peers so that they can achieve alongside them.
- Writing teaching which aims to reduce pupils' cognitive load, for e.g.. orally composing sentences and planning before writing
- help with the organisation of ideas (Section 4: Composition includes guidance on supporting oral composition as well as planning and structuring writing), for e.g. colour coding as a way of supporting children to structure their ideas, and modelling the
- saying of words aloud while writing. It will be important to give pupils many opportunities to use their composition skills without transcription, for example through dictation or paired writing with a peer which will help them see themselves as good writers, even if their spelling and other aspects of transcription may still require support.
- explicit teaching of orthography, morphology and etymology, alongside their peers)
- assistive technology and keyboards to help pupils to organise their ideas. NB This should not be in place of teaching the components of writing.

Section 5 (5): Support for pupils who struggle – dyspraxia

- Pupils with developmental coordination disorder (DCD)/dyspraxia have difficulty performing and learning everyday movement tasks and this often includes difficulties with handwriting.
- They may take longer to develop the necessary movement skills to write fluently and legibly and will need ample teaching and practice.
- They may require additional handwriting intervention – many pupils with DCD/dyspraxia have difficulties with legibility and speed, sometimes both.
- Pupils with dyspraxia often miss strokes in handwriting, direct strokes incorrectly and add strokes where they are not needed. **It is therefore important to watch the pupil as they write letters, so they practise and develop the skills needed for correct letter formation.**

Section 5 (5):

Support for pupils who struggle – dyspraxia cont.

- Any handwriting difficulties that pupils with DCD/dyspraxia experience may affect all aspects of writing.
- Teachers should be aware of the impact of any co-occurring difficulty and tailor intervention and support to a pupil's individual needs, providing appropriate feedback and strategies to support development of the required skills.
- With support from specialists, teachers might consider the use of assistive technology and keyboards to help when handwriting is a problem.
- If keyboards and devices that involve fine motor skills (for example, keyboarding and swiping) are used, pupils will need explicit teaching, practice and support to develop the skills to use them.

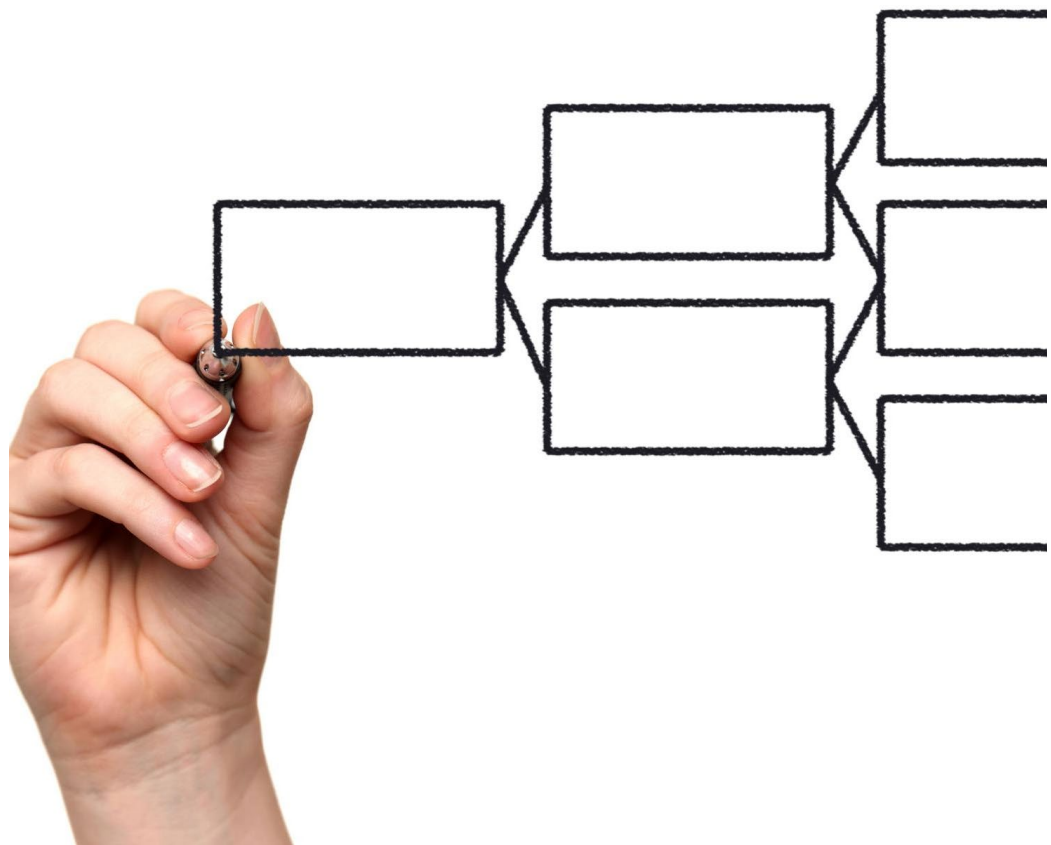
NB This should be in parallel with, not in place of, handwriting teaching.

Section 5: Pupils who need further support – Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)

DLD is a common neurodevelopmental condition where individuals experience ongoing difficulties in understanding and using spoken language. Pupils with DLD are:

- more likely to have difficulty with accurate spelling, grammar, and organising and linking ideas throughout a text.
- likely to produce texts that are shorter and use fewer and less complex sentences.
- likely to struggle with word endings such as tense markers and plurals and use fewer verbs and conjunctions.
- likely to have writing difficulties that mirror the challenges they have with spoken language, including slower processing times, poor working memory and difficulties with identifying the phonemes that make up words.

Putting the Writing Framework into Action



Theme

What It Means in Practice

Transcription from Reception

Daily handwriting and spelling practice from early years

Role of Oral Composition

Teachers model and scaffold spoken sentences before writing

Sentence-first instruction

Focus on sentence mastery before composing extended texts

Purposeful writing tasks

Writing with real audiences and meaningful contexts

Early intervention

Spot pupils at risk early and tailor scaffolds and feedback

Holistic assessment model

Use "best-fit" rather than failing for small errors

Strong leadership & CPD

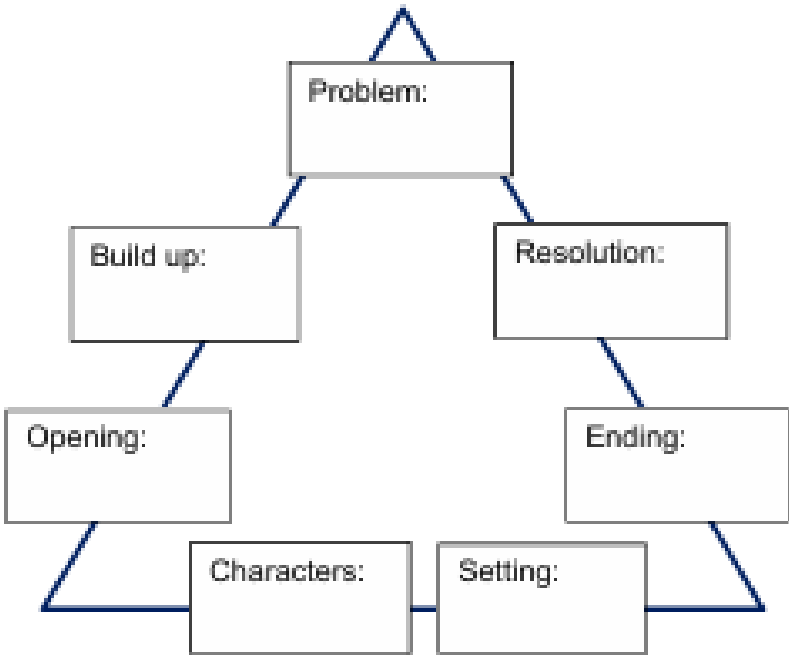
Invest in training and curriculum planning across the school

Models for whole-text structures

Figure 4: Box plan

Opening: <i>Where is it?</i> <i>Who are the characters?</i>	
Build up: <i>What happens leading up to the problem?</i>	
Problem: <i>What goes wrong?</i>	
Resolution: <i>How is the problem resolved?</i>	

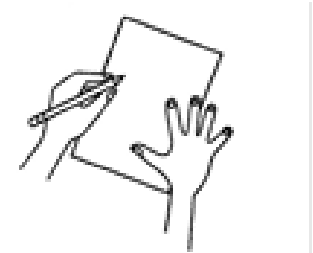
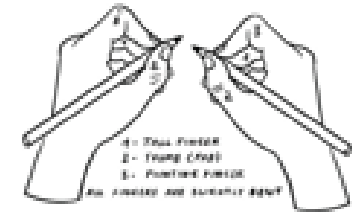
Figure 5: Story mountain



Mastering the Proper Handwriting Technique

- Most pupils find the tripod grip the easiest to learn and support grips can help.
- Teachers should show pupils how to pinch the pencil with the index ('pointing') finger and the thumb, about a finger space from the end (on the coloured part just above the sharpened point); and how to rest the middle finger underneath the pencil to support it.
- If necessary, a sticker can show pupils where to place their fingers. The way a child grips the pencil will affect the quality, speed and flow of the handwriting.
- The grip should be relaxed, not pressing too hard on the pencil or the paper.

Finger positioning using the tripod grip:



Paper positioning for left-handers:

Paper positioning for right-handers:

