Introducing Cursive Lowercase Handwriting

The computer has not eliminated the need for cursive writing. Because learning cursive writing calls upon many areas of the brain, this skill fosters neural connections between the right and left hemispheres. (See Chapter 5, page 171). If children aren't taught it properly, they make it up as they go along and their handwriting never becomes fluid but becomes instead a barrier to written expression. Cursive writing is learned from *correct* manuscript writing.

Grade-Level Sequence

Cursive handwriting is explicitly taught to students in second grade and above. The second-grade lesson objectives introduce cursive writing after students have perfected basic manuscript writing. Once the rules for cursive handwriting have been introduced, students are immersed in cursive by writing phonograms, then words, and then short sentences. (Following this plan enables second-graders to make the transition quickly, and their quality of writing is remarkably good after about three weeks of instruction.) Cursive handwriting is thoroughly reviewed at the beginning of third grade for teachers who wish to introduce handwriting then and briefly reviewed in grades four through six. For grade-level lesson objectives relating to cursive handwriting, see the "Planning" section in the *Second Through Sixth-Grade Teacher Guides.*

Instructional Strategies

1. Explain that the purpose of cursive writing is to develop fluency: connecting letters increases the speed of writing, improves the attention span, and fosters academic performance. Mastery of cursive writing enables students to more quickly complete daily assignments such as note taking, exam essays, and tasks that require personal communication. (Students feel successful as they develop ease with handwriting.)
2. Model (explain and demonstrate) the general rules for cursive handwriting and ask questions to check understanding.
   - All letters sit on the baseline.
   - All letters or parts of letters are of two sizes: tall or short. Short letters are half the size of tall letters.
   - All vertical (down) lines start at the top and are straight and parallel; they may slant slightly *forward* for the right-handed student or slightly *backward* for the left-handed student.
   - All upswings for lowercase letters are *forward.*
   - All lowercase letters, except *b, o, v* and *w,* end with a tiny *forward* upswing from the baseline.
   - All letters within a word are connected; if a letter ends at the *midpoint,* use a dip to connect it to the next letter.
3. Model (explain and demonstrate) cursive writing features and connecting lines.

Cursive Writing Features and Connecting Lines Between Letters

_____ a short upswing from the baseline to the midpoint

_____ a tall upswing from the baseline to just below the top line

_____ a short upswing that curves over to 2 on the clock

_____ a dip kept at the height of a short letter across to the start of the next letter, or as a tiny ending on the letters *b, o, v,* and *w*

_____ a dip that curves over to 2 on the clock

4. Model the transition from manuscript to cursive writing.
   - Model writing the manuscript alphabet on the board and emphasize that clear manuscript will facilitate the transition to cursive writing.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

   - Using a colored chalk or marker, form dotted, connecting lines over the manuscript letters as shown below.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

   - Explain that the solid lines show to what extent the letters are alike, and the colored, dotted lines show most of the differences between manuscript and cursive writing.
   - Identify similarities and differences between manuscript and cursive writing; have students articulate the differences between the two types.

5. Model precisely saying the sound or sounds and forming cursive letters that begin at 2 on the clock: *a, c, d, g, o, q.* Follow the procedures with the precise dialogue below.

DAY 1

Procedures for Introducing Cursive Letters That Begin at 2 on the Clock

"I will say the sounds and show you how each cursive letter that begins at 2 on the clock is written. Then I will listen and observe as you say the sounds and form each letter without lifting the pencil."

Show card 1.

Say sounds, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and stopping at 2; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

a

Show card 2.

Say sounds, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and finishing at 4.".

Show card 3.

Say sound, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and closing the circle at 2. Continue straight up toward the line above but do not touch it. Retrace *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 5.

Say sounds, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and stopping at 2; pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline, and curve sharply backward, forming a narrow loop that crosses at the underside of the baseline, and *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 6.

Say sounds, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and finishing at 2 *with a tiny dip.*"

Show card 8

Say, "We will write only the letter that begins at 2." Say sound, then say, "Start at 2 and go up and around the clock, touching the baseline and stopping at 2. Pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline, and curve sharply forward, forming a narrow loop that touches the down line at the underside of the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

- Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice at the board, followed by specific, immediate feedback on their performance; have them articulate the differences between each manuscript and cursive letter to enhance memory.
- Model evaluating your cursive writing; have students evaluate yours and then their formations daily to measure their progress.
- Model saying sounds and forming simple words that use these letters with the first connecting line: a short upswing over to 2 on the clock (e.g., *ad, add, ago, cad, go, dad,*); coach students as they say and write a few words to practice cursive letters with short upswings over to 2 on the clock.

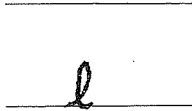## Words Written with Cursive Connecting Strokes: Example Dialogues

- Say, "Today I'll model writing *ad*, which uses the first connecting stroke: *a short upswing that curves over to 2 on the clock*. Start *ad* at 2 and go up and around to 2; pull *straight down* to the baseline; continue with a *short upswing curving over to 2*; go up and around and then straight up toward the line above, but do not touch it. Retrace, finishing *with a tiny upswing*."
- Say, "Today I'll model writing *go*, which also uses a short upswing that curves over to 2. Start at 2 and go up and around to 2; pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline; curve sharply backward, forming a narrow loop that crosses at the underside of the baseline. Continue with a short upswing curving over to 2. Go up and around to 2, *finishing with a tiny dip*."

6. Model precisely saying the sound or sounds and forming cursive letters that begin with a short upswing: *e, i, j, p, r, s, u, v, w, y*. Follow the procedures with the precise dialogue below.

Procedures for Introducing Cursive Letters That Begin with Short Upswings

"I will say the sounds and show you how each cursive letter that begins with a short upswing is written. Then I will listen and observe as you say the sounds and form each letter without lifting the pencil."
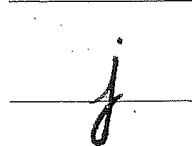
Show card 10.

Say, "Start with a short upswing and curve back sharply; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing*."
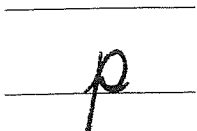
Show card 12.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing*. Form a small dot by pressing the pencil just above the letter and lifting it."
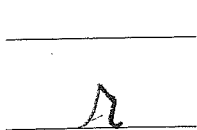
Show card 13.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline, and curve sharply backward, forming a narrow loop that crosses at the underside of the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing*. Form a small dot by pressing the pencil just above the letter and lifting it."

continued

Show card 18.

Say, "Start with a short upswing, pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline; retrace to 10 and curve around the clock, touching the baseline and curving up to 8; retrace, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 19.

Say, "The cursive *r* is very different from the manuscript *r*. Start with a short upswing; slant down slightly, and then pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"
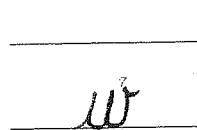
Show card 7.

Say, "The cursive *s* is very different from the manuscript *s*. Start with a short upswing; pull *straight down* to the baseline and curve backward to touch the upswing; retrace, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 21.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull straight down to the baseline, and round up to the midpoint; pull straight down to the baseline, finishing with a tiny upswing."

Show card 22.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull straight down to the baseline, and round up to 12, finishing with a tiny dip."

Show card 23.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull straight down to the baseline, and round up to the midpoint. Pull straight down to the baseline, and round up to 12, finishing with a tiny dip."

Show card 25.

Say, "Start with a short upswing; pull straight down to the baseline, and round up to the midpoint. Pull straight down the same distance below the baseline, and curve sharply backward, forming a narrow loop that crosses at the underside of the baseline, finishing with a tiny upswing.

- Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice on the board and on paper; provide immediate feedback; have students evaluate their performance.
- Model saying and writing words that begin with short upswings (e.g., *egg, sad, wed, word,*); coach students as they practice saying and writing these words on the board and on paper.

7. Model precisely saying the sounds and forming cursive letters that begin with a tall upswing: *b, f, h, k, l, t.* Follow the procedures with the precise dialogue below.

Procedures for Introducing Cursive Letters That Begin with Tall Upswings

Show card 9.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing and curve back sharply to form a narrow loop; pull *straight* down to the baseline, and curve around to 12 *at the midpoint, finishing with a tiny dip.*"

Show card 4.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing, and curve back sharply to form a narrow loop; pull *straight down* below the baseline the same distance as a short letter; curve sharply *forward* to form a narrow loop, touching the down line at the *underside* of the baseline, and *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 11.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing, and curve back sharply; pull *straight down* to the baseline, then retrace up to the midpoint, and curve around to 2. Pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 14.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing and curve back sharply; pull *straight down* to the baseline, then retrace up to the midpoint, and curve around to touch the down line. Pull out and straight to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 15.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing and curve back sharply to form a narrow loop; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

Show card 20.

Say, "Start with a tall upswing; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.* Lift the pencil. Form a tiny crossbar just above the midpoint in the direction we write."

Provide multiple opportunities for students to practice on the board and on paper; provide immediate feedback; have students evaluate their performance.

- Model saying and writing words that begin with tall upswings (e.g., *bat, bog, fat, fog, hat, hog, kit, keg, let, log, tip, top*); coach students as they practice saying and writing words on the board and on paper.
- Provide extra practice writing phonograms *b, o,* and *w* followed by *r* or *s* because the dip replaces the upswing. Notice that the *s* curves over to 8 on the clock and does not touch the dip.

br bs   or os   wr ws

8. Model precisely saying the sounds and forming cursive letters that begin at the midpoint when written alone or as the first letter in a word: *m, n, x, z.* Follow the procedures with the precise dialogue below.

Procedures for Introducing Cursive Letters That Begin at the Midpoint

m

Show card 16.

Say, "Start at the midpoint and round into a *straight line down* to the baseline; retrace to 10 and round to 2. Pull *straight down* to the baseline; retrace to 10 and round to 2. Pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

n

Show card 17.

Say, "Start at the midpoint and round into a *straight line down* to the baseline; retrace to 10 and round to 2; pull *straight down* to the baseline, *finishing with a tiny upswing.*"

x

Show card 24.

Say, "Start at 10 and round into a slanted line to the baseline, finishing with a short upswing. Lift the pencil. Start at the midpoint and slant a straight line down through the middle of the letter to the baseline."

z

Show card 26.

Say, "Start at 10 and round to 2; continue down to 6; curve slightly, and pull *straight down* the same distance below the baseline; curve back sharply to form a narrow loop that crosses at the underside of the baseline, finishing *with a tiny upswing.*"