

HIAS MOODLE OPEN RESOURCE

Handwriting diagnostic

HIAS English Team
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Final version

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Overview

This document contains a diagnostic tool to help teachers assess and analyse pupils' handwriting. The resource supports evaluation of pencil grip, letter formation (lower and upper case), handwriting accuracy in sentence writing, independent writing, and the six handwriting "S Factors" (shape, space, size, sitting, speed and stringing) highlighted by the National Handwriting Association. It also includes recording grids, action-planning templates and guidance to support targeted teaching and intervention.

Points to consider when using this resource

This diagnostic is designed to identify strengths and areas for development in handwriting and should be used alongside professional judgement and examples of pupils' everyday writing.

When assessing, focus on functional handwriting outcomes, including legibility, fluency and comfort, rather than expecting a single correct pencil grip or writing style.

The resource is most effective when completed using a combination of observation, structured assessment activities and independent writing samples, enabling teachers to create tailored action plans and monitor progress over time.

NB: You might also consider using the accompanying Excel tracking and analysis tool if you prefer to maintain records electronically.

Bibliography and publications used to inform this document

Barnett, A., Henderson, S.E., Scheib, B. and Schulz, J. (2007) *Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting (DASH)*. London: Pearson Assessment.

National Handwriting Association (2026) *National Handwriting Association: Charity promoting good practice in handwriting*. Available at: <https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/> (Accessed: 8 September 2026).

Pencil grip

When observing a pupil's pencil grip, focus less on whether it looks *perfect* and more on whether it is efficient, comfortable and functional for writing. A pupil may use a non-standard grip and still write fluently and legibly.

Look at how the pencil is held. A mature grip is typically a **dynamic tripod grip**:

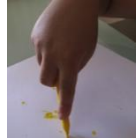
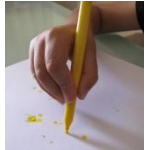
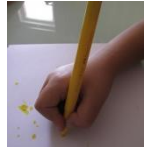
- Pencil rests on the middle finger
- Thumb and index finger control movement
- Fingers can move independently of the hand

Other common grips: digital finger grasp (uses four fingers), static tripod grasp (fingers held rigidly), basic palmar grasp (more typical in younger pupils)

Notice:

- How close fingers are to the pencil tip
- Whether fingers obscure the child's view of the writing
- If fingers slide down during writing

Pencil grip analysis and action plan

Pencil grip stage	Y/N	Areas of strength	Actions and resources	Impact
Basic palmar grasp 				
Digital finger grasp 				
Static tripod grasp 				
Dynamic tripod grasp 				

Handwriting assessment sequence steps 1 - 3

1. Accuracy of letter formation

Lower case

Say the sounds or letter names of each letter in the alphabet and ask the pupil to write the **lower-case** letter. Observe how they form the letter – starting points, directionality, lifting the pencil off the paper etc and record results in the green '*letter formation*' section of the **lower-case** grid (p 5).

Upper case

Repeat the activity and ask the pupil to write each letter in the alphabet but using the **upper-case** letter formation. Observe how they form the letter – starting points, directionality, lifting the pencil off the paper, etc, and record results in the green '*letter formation*' section of the **upper-case** grid (p 5).

2. Accuracy of handwriting in a sentence, with reduced cognitive load

Pupils must be able to spell each of the words in the following pangram (a sentence that contains all the letters of the alphabet) '*A quick fox jumps over the lazy dog and big red box*'

Dictate the pangram to the pupil.

Review the accuracy of letter formation for each **lower-case** letter when part of a sentence and record the results in the pink '*in a sentence*' section of the **lower-case** grid (p 5).

3. Independent writing review (Year 2 onwards)

Select an example of writing where the pupil has written a series of sentences with little or no scaffolding. Review the accuracy of letter formation for all lower-case and upper-case letters used. Record the results in the yellow '*independent writing*' section of the lower-case / upper-case grid as appropriate (p 3).

Letter formation record

Copy the pupil's letter formation onto the charts below.

Lower case

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z
Letter formation																										
In a sentence																										
Independent writing																										

Upper case

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
Letter formation																										
Independent writing																										

Letter formation action plan:

Incorrect letter formation	Areas of strength	Actions, strategies and resources	Review date and impact

Analysis of writing using the *S Factors*

Use the **Analysis of the writing using the *S Factors* grid** to record the *S Factors*: shape, space, size, sitting, speed and stringing. Annotate the grid with specific examples from the independent writing, eg particular letters that do not correctly sit on the line – this will enable more tailored teaching.

S Factors:



[National Handwriting Association – Charity promoting good practice in handwriting](#)

S Factors	1 - poor	2 - some	3 - many	4 - mostly	5 - secure
Shape: dynamic letter formation					
Space: between letters and words					
Size: relative to other letters					
Sitting: on the line, with descenders below the line					
Speed: consistency in the speed of writing					
Stringing: some letters together					

S Factors action plan

Area of development:	Areas of strength	Actions, strategies and resources	Review date and impact
Shape: dynamic letter formation <i>Refer to the Record Results grid</i>			
Space: between letters and words			
Size: relative to other letters			
Sitting: on the line			
Speed: consistency in relation to their peers			
Stringing: some letters together			

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