



Handwriting Without Tears®

Research Supporting the Handwriting Without Tears® Method

Six questions educators should ask before choosing a handwriting program. ERIC Digest [ED 409 589]. No author available. (1997).

“Educational researchers who tested the legibility of slanted manuscript found that children writing vertical manuscript performed significantly better than those writing slanted manuscript.”

“Vertical manuscript letterforms are more easily read than other styles of writing.”

“Modified italic letterforms are not consistent with the letters used in reading and spelling books; therefore children [using D’Nealian manuscript] must learn to write using one set of symbols and to read and spell using a different set of symbols.”

“It is logical to teach children to write letters that are similar to the letters they are learning to read.”

“Before starting school, many children learn how to write traditional [vertical] manuscript letters from their parents or preschool teachers. Learning a special alphabet such as [slanted] means that these children will have to relearn many of the letters they can already write. The vertical manuscript alphabet is easy to teach because there is no reteaching involved. Children are already familiar with vertical letterforms—they have learned them at home.”

“Proponents of modified italic letterforms say that initial instruction in their alphabets will facilitate the transition from manuscript to cursive writing, but there is no research available to support this claim.”

Graham, S. (1993/94). Are slanted manuscript alphabets superior to the traditional manuscript alphabet? *Childhood Education*, 71, 91-95.

According to a study by Farris (1982), “Overall, students who had been taught traditional manuscript produced more legible cursive writing than students in the D’Nealian group. Students in the D’Nealian group were more likely to misshape cursive letters, extend strokes above and below the guidelines and vary the size of letters. Consequently, in the study the production of cursive writing was not enhanced by D’Nealian instruction”

“It is possible that slanted manuscript alphabets did not lead to superior cursive writing because they do not facilitate the transition to cursive to the extent claimed.”

“In an analysis of the D’Nealian and McDougal, Littell handwriting programs (Graham, 1992), the author found that almost half (46 percent) of the cursive letters in each program are substantially different from their manuscript counterparts. An additional 21 percent of the cursive letters in D’Nealian and 26 percent of those in the McDougal, Littell program involve small changes in letter formation...in order to add a connecting stroke...Learning cursive writing in these programs is not a simple transition.”

Graham, S. (1993/94). Are slanted manuscript alphabets superior to the traditional manuscript alphabet? *Childhood Education, 71, 91-95.* (cont'd)

"In summary, the available evidence failed to substantiate the claim that the transition to cursive writing is enhanced by using a slanted manuscript alphabet."

"A slanted manuscript alphabet may not be the best choice for young children for several reasons. First, there is no credible evidence that these alphabets make a difference in children's handwriting. Making the transition to cursive writing does not appear to be enhanced by using a special alphabet like D'Nealian...Second, the use of slanted manuscript alphabets creates several practical problems for teachers...Learning a special alphabet like D'Nealian means that many children would have to relearn letters they can already write."

"Given the lack of supportive evidence and the practical problems involved in implementation, slanted manuscript letters cannot be recommended as a replacement for the traditional manuscript alphabet."

Berninger, V.W., Graham, S., & Weintraub, N. (1998). The relationship between handwriting style and speed and legibility. *The Journal of Educational Research, 91, 290-296.*

"Slanted manuscript letters are no more successful than traditional manuscript letters in enhancing the transition to cursive writing or in improving the overall legibility of students' manuscript writing."

Duvall, B. (1985). Evaluating the difficulty of four handwriting styles used for instruction. *ERS Spectrum, 3, 13-20.*

"The Zaner-Bloser manuscript style may also be inappropriate for some beginning writers...students with poor visual memory would find it difficult to write the letter forms."

Clark-Wentz, J. (1997, October). Improving students' handwriting. *OT Practice, 29-33.*

"In the Handwriting Without Tears system, creator Jan Olsen, OTR, uses only two writing lines—a baseline and a center line—which is visually less confusing than the typical school handwriting paper. This is especially helpful for students who have visual figure-ground deficits. The program encompasses techniques for prewriting through cursive skills."

Viadero, D. (1993, November/December). A new slant on penmanship. *Teacher Magazine, 20-21.*

"There are good reasons for teaching children to write with traditional vertical, rather than slanted, strokes. In all books, on environmental signs, on children's TV programs, the letters are all vertical... When children come to school, they are already familiar with that alphabet, or they may already be writing it."

Koenke, K. (1986, November). Handwriting instruction: what do we know? *The Reading Teacher, 214-216.*

"Regardless of the program, copying leads to better results than just tracing or discrimination training (which helps one to read a letter more than to write it)."

Koenke, K. (1986, November). Handwriting instruction: what do we know? *The Reading Teacher*, 214–216. (cont'd)

“What appears to be important in the development of handwriting is the amount of emphasis teachers place on legible, neat writing, and also the presence in the classroom of good handwriting models (Milone & Wasylyk, 1981)”

Manning, M. (1988, Winter). Handwriting instruction. *Childhood Education*, 112–114.

“Research on whether teachers should encourage children to copy or trace during handwriting practice has reached general agreement that copying is preferable to tracing for initial handwriting instruction (Burkhalter & Wright, 1984; Hirsch & Niedermeyer, 1973).”

“The study (Hayes, 1982) concluded that copying can be enhanced by providing perceptual prompts, such as visual and verbal cues, resulting in significantly increased accuracy in reproducing letter forms.”

Graham, S., Harris, K.R., & Fink, B. (2000). Is handwriting casually related to learning to write? Treatment of handwriting problems in beginning writers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 620–633.

“Supplemental handwriting instruction had a more pronounced effect on all measures of handwriting performance (handwriting, letter knowledge, writing, attitudes toward writing) than did instruction in phonological awareness.”

“Students benefit from explicit and supplemental instruction in how to form and fluently write the letters of the alphabet, as they evidenced improvement in both their handwriting and compositional skills. Thus if educators want to improve the writing of students, they need to focus not just on the content and process of writing, but on transcription skills such as handwriting as well.”

“In recent years, there has been a tendency to downplay or even eliminate handwriting instruction as part of the writing program (Berninger, 1999; Graham & Weintraub, 1996), as approaches such as whole language and process writing have placed greater emphasis on content and process and much less emphasis on form. The findings from the current study as well as the investigations by Berninger et al. (1997) and Jones and Christensen (1999), however, indicate such an approach may be ill-advised with beginning writers who experience difficulty in initially mastering the intricacies of handwriting.”

Farris, P. (1991). Views and other views: handwriting instruction should not become extinct. *Language Arts*, 68, 312–314.

“According to Hoskisson and Tompkins (1987), handwriting is best taught in separate periods of direct instruction and teacher supervised practice. As soon as skills are taught, they are applied in real-life writing activities.”

“Effective handwriting programs provide opportunities for children to verbalize the rules of letter formation and to combine verbal and visual feedback with rewriting and reinforcement (Furner, 1985, Koenke, 1986).”

“Two things are critical in the handwriting teaching strategies: (1) that children be taught handwriting and (2) that they practice the handwriting skills taught (Ellis, Standal, Pennau, & Rummel, 1989)”

Armitage, D., Ratzlaff, H. (1985). The non-correlation of printing and writing skills. *Journal of Educational Research*, 78, (3), 174-177.

"As the third-grade students had been in the habit of printing with vertical strokes, the change in slant [with cursive] plus the additional factor of learning new letter forms could have caused a lack of uniformity of slant between writing samples. Hence, it is possible that initial teaching of cursive writing should include vertical letter formation with a change to slant after letter forms have been mastered."

Sheffield, B. (1996). Handwriting: a neglected cornerstone of literacy. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 46.

"Automatic legible writing is an essential basis for written expression. And yet, crowded school curriculum and neglect by educational institutions and researchers often leave no room for appropriate and sufficient attention to teaching this critical skill."

"Because kinesthetic learning is such a strong learning channel and so reliable, all children need to assimilate accurate formation of alphabet letters to a point that forming these letters requires no conscious effort."

Lamme, L. (1979). Handwriting in an early childhood curriculum, 35 (1), 20-27.

"It is best to use a standard form of manuscript printing initially to teach children to write alphabet letters. The importance of adult modeling of proper letter formation cannot be overemphasized."

Ross, E. (1990). *Introduction to teaching the language arts, 1st edition*. California: Wadsworth Publishing.

"When planning instruction, they [curriculum decision makers] should keep in mind the objectives of a good handwriting program: to help students (1) develop neat and legible handwriting for purposes of communication, (2) acquire facility in both manuscript and cursive writing so that writers may use either style, (3) gain speed and proficiency in writing, and (4) see the value of good handwriting."

"A study by LaNunziata and others (1985) showed that kindergarten children improved most in producing accurate letters when teachers modeled correct letter formation."

Case-Smith, J. (2002). Effectiveness of school-based occupational therapy intervention on handwriting. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 56, (1), 17-25.

"Olsen has written a handwriting curriculum that uses a developmental approach, grouping the letters by difficulty and teaching a handwriting style that uses simple, vertical lines."

Graham, S. (1992). Issues in handwriting instruction. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 25 (2), 1-15.

"There is no credible evidence that the new, slanted manuscript alphabets make a difference for students in general or for special needs students in particular. The transition to cursive writing does not appear to be enhanced by a special alphabet like D'Nealian."

"The writers of the slanted alphabet tended to make more misshapen letterforms, tended to extend their strokes above and below the guidelines, and had a difficult time keeping their letterforms consistent in size."