

CHAPTER 3

Manuscript and Cursive Alphabet Forms

Manuscript/Cursive Alphabet Controversy

It is not the intent of this book to trace a detailed research history of the relative merits of manuscript and cursive style alphabets. There are, however, strong proponents of both writing styles. Early (1973) declared:

I want to enter the lists as a strong advocate of the exclusive use of cursive writing in early elementary grades. I am unalterably opposed to the present practice of teaching manuscript ("printing") in the first two (or three) grades, and teaching cursive writing later. I feel that this practice is illogically conceived, that it ignores basic developmental factors, that it is an example of faulty pedagogy, and that the practice is downright harmful to learning-disabled children. I feel quite strongly that manuscript writing should be taught only to freshmen in college who are taking courses in engineering drawing. All other writing should be taught as cursive, beginning with the child's very first writing experiences in the first grade (page 105).

In opposition to the above approach, Plattor and Woestehoff (1971) observed:

The evidence of a growing body of comparative data would seem to support the introduction of manuscript as the writing style in the primary grades and its maintenance throughout the children's educational careers. A transition to cursive writing is complicated by factors which may create unnecessary problems for many children and therefore militate

against a dual program of handwriting instruction. (age 1011)

For most teachers the debate is more academic than practical because they teach to a prescribed curriculum and have little choice in the matter of handwriting style selection. The typical elementary school will teach manuscript in the first two grades and make a transition to cursive at the end of the second grade or early in the third grade.

Modified Script Alphabet

One approach that is being used to resolve the debate between pro-cursive and pro-manuscript advocates is to develop a modified script. This modified script combines elements of both manuscript and cursive alphabets. This is a common approach to writing in many northern European countries.

The usual approach in teaching with a modified script is to modify manuscript letters to make them more continuous; teach the letters individually and use them unconnected in words; and then add connecting strokes to achieve a modified cursive style of handwriting with minimal modification to the letters.

The following modified script was advocated by Joseph and Mullins (1970):

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

Lower Case

abcdefghijklmnopq
rstuvwxyz

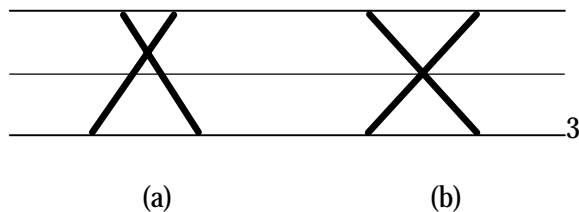
Lower Case Joined

Conventional Alphabets--Manuscript and Cursive

The majority of teachers use a conventional alphabet; however, there are still some choices to be made in alphabet selection and alphabet instruction. Since there is no nationally accepted standard alphabet, variability may occur in both letter shape and stroke sequence.

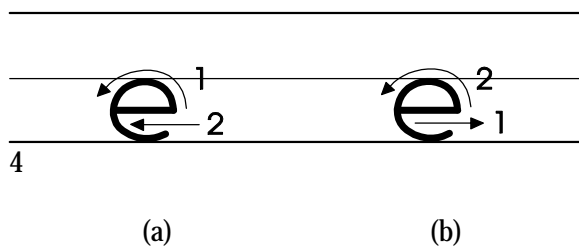
To reduce learning problems, the teacher may adapt existing alphabet styles in the following ways:

Reduce Discriminations Within Letters: The manuscript "X" can be written in two ways:



In (a) the two strokes cross slightly above the line; in (b) the cross occurs on the line. The selection of the latter form simplifies the letter since the student does not have to determine what "slightly above the line" means to make a correct letter.

Reduce Problems in the Transition From Manuscript to Cursive: The lower-case manuscript letter "e" can be taught as in (a) or in (b):

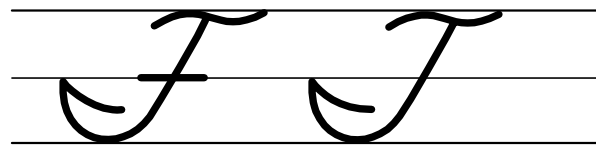


In the latter case the letter production is more consistent with the lower-case cursive letter "e." The transition from the manuscript letter to the cursive letter requires less change.

Reduce Discrimination Problems Between Letters: If the cursive capital "F" and "T" are written as in (a), they appear very similar. The two letters can also be written as in (b), and the discrimination between the letters is now easier.

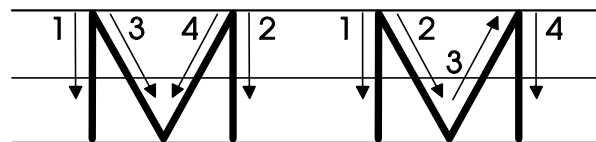


(a)



(b)

Select Stroke Patterns Which Preserve Left-to-Right Directionality: Letter reversals are often encountered in early manuscript writing efforts. It is important to preserve a left-to-right flow in manuscript. The stroking pattern for the uppercase "M" can be as in (a), in which the

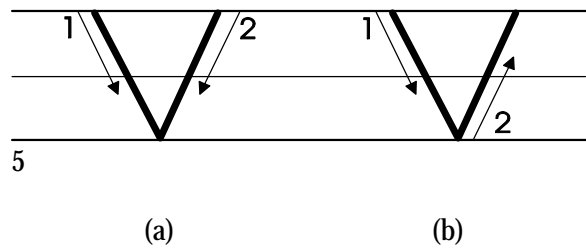


(a)

(b)

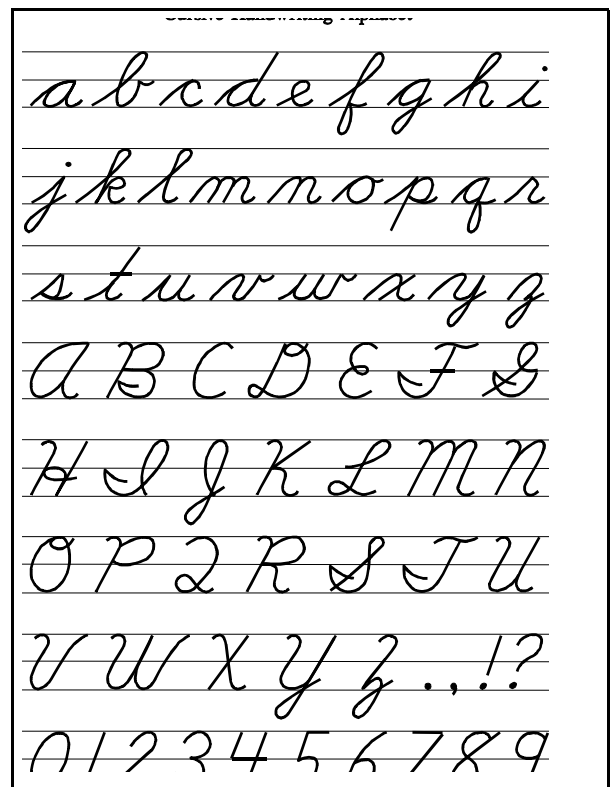
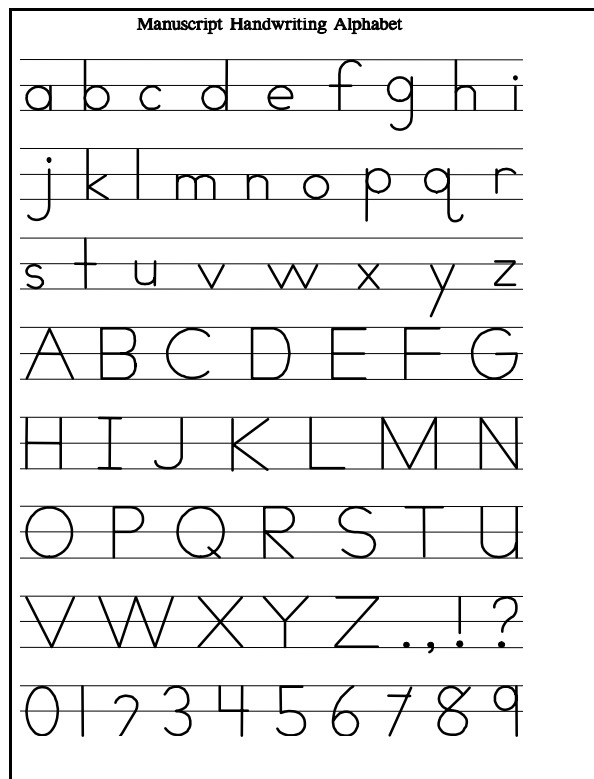
direction changes from "left to right" to "right to left" and back to "left to right." The stroking pattern may also be taught as in (b), in which the flow from left to right is consistent throughout the production of the letter.

Select Stroke Patterns That Have Long-Term Value: The manuscript letter "V" can be taught as in (a) or in (b):



In the latter case the letter production is more consistent with adult writing patterns. For many students the first form exists for a short period of time and is lost when the student begins cursive instruction.

The manuscript and cursive alphabets, which follow, represent examples of alphabets that use widely accepted letter forms, but include simplifications and stroking patterns designed to reduce writing problems (see Appendix C for a full page version of each alphabet).



The Writing of Numerals

In teaching the writing of numerals, both a manuscript form and a cursive form may be taught; or a joint form that is used in both manuscript and cursive situations may be taught. In the case of the joint form, the same numeral forms are used but are written vertically with the manuscript alphabet and are slanted with the cursive alphabet.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Manuscript Form

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Cursive form

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Joint manuscript form

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Joint cursive form