

CHAPTER 7

The Left-Handed Student

There will usually be at least one left-handed student, and possibly two or three, in each classroom. The left-handed student needs the same attention, help, and encouragement as the right-handed student. The teacher must completely accept the handedness of each student so that there are no feelings of uncertainty or antagonism.

Detecting Hand Preference

Detecting hand preference is usually not a difficult task. In those few cases where difficulty is encountered, methods such as those suggested by Munroe (1951) and Hildreth (1950) are useful.

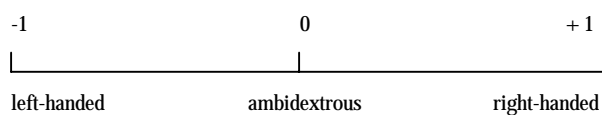
Munroe (1951) used observation of the student's preferred hand in such situations as picking up an object placed directly in front of the mid-line of the body, pretending to throw a ball, threading a needle, combing hair, brushing teeth, eating, and pointing at an object. Having the student actually do these activities may constitute a better test.

Hildreth (1950) suggested observing the student in a number of different situations, counting right- and left-handed usage, and then using the formula:

$$\text{Handedness} = \frac{\text{frequency of use of right} - \text{frequency of use of left}}{\text{frequency of use of right} + \text{frequency of use of left}}$$

or

$$\frac{\text{right} - \text{left}}{\text{right} + \text{left}}$$



Activity	Left	Right
Holds cup	X	
Holds spoon		X
Holds crayon	X	
Holds paint brush	X	
Waves hand		X
Throws ball	X	
Accepts objects	X	
Stacks blocks	X	
Points with		X
Uses scissors	X	
	—	—
	7	3

$$\text{Formula: } \frac{3 - 7}{3 + 7} = \frac{-4}{10} = -.4$$

Some generally accepted ideas regarding handedness are:

- 1.If there is a definite preference for left-handed writing, no attempt should be made to change to the right hand.
- 2.If ambidexterity or no clear-cut handedness is shown, encouragement should be given towards right-handed writing.
- 3.If poor left-handed habits are already established, better left-handed habits should be encouraged.

Adjustments for Left-Handed Students

Improper left-handed writing habits can impede a student's speed in handwriting as well as limit the

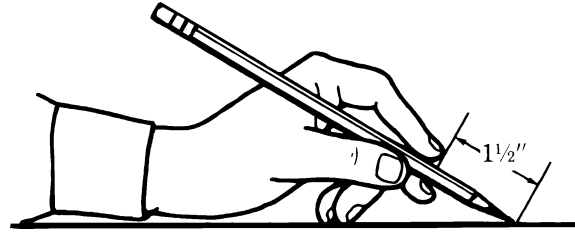
legibility of the writing. Research indicates that on the average, left-handed students reach only four-fifths of the speed of right-handed students. However, with appropriate instruction the left-handed student can achieve the same level of skill as his or her right-handed peers.

The following suggestions should reduce confusion and allow left-handed students to develop handwriting skills consistent with their right-handed peers:

1. Adjust the student's desk approximately two inches *below* normal height.
2. Adjust the lighting over the right shoulder.
3. Place the writing paper in front of the student's left shoulder with the book or reference materials at the upper right-hand side of the desk.
4. Tilt the paper to the right about 30 degrees to the extent that the left forearm approach is over the bottom center of the paper.



5. Grip the pencil farther from the point than the right-handed student (1 1/2").



6. Use a hard lead pencil since the lead will not break or smear as easily.
7. If necessary, allow the student to write cursive letters vertically or slant them to the left.

Preventing Problems for the Left-Handed Student

The left-handed student is at a disadvantage because the English language is written and read from left to right, and the left-handed student may have difficulty seeing what he or she has just written. The beginning writer is very dependent upon being able to see what has just been written in order to spell the remainder of a word and to complete the sentence in a coherent manner.

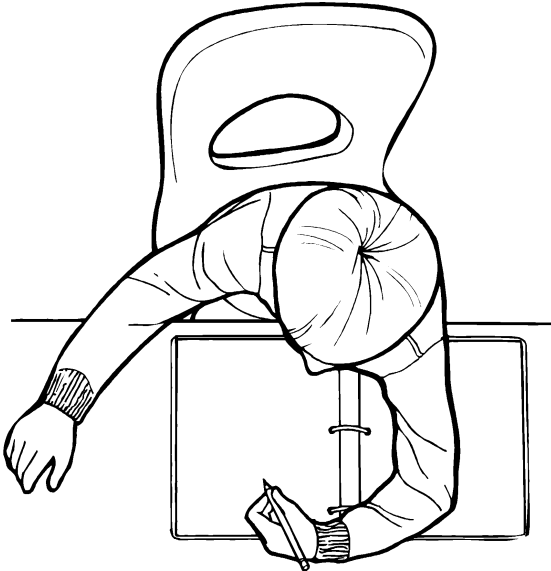
In analyzing the suggestions offered for helping the left-handed student, it is obvious that the major purpose of these suggestions is to allow the left-handed student to see what is being written.

If allowed to devise their own writing style, left-handed students may develop the "hook" position.

In this position the wrist and hand are held above the line being written. Such a position allows the student to see his or her writing, but the cramped position of the wrist and finger limits the flow of movement necessary to achieve a quality of handwriting equivalent to that of the right-handed learner.

Two related practices which are also inappropriate for left-handed students are holding paper in a vertical position and writing on paper held in a three-ring binder. Allowing the

student's writing paper to remain in a binder may force the student to adopt the "hook" position.



One of the most effective ways to prevent the "hook" position from developing is to ensure that the writing paper is always turned with the bottom line making an angle of 30 degrees to the edge of the desk for *both* manuscript and cursive writing. Some handwriting methods advocate having the paper at an angle; others suggest that the paper be vertical for teaching manuscript to both right- and left-handed students. Because a vertical position makes it difficult for left-handed students to see what they have written and because the student is most dependent on seeing his or her writing during the early stages of handwriting, it is recommended that the paper position be the same for manuscript as it is for cursive, i.e., slanted so the bottom line of the page forms an angle of approximately 30 degrees with the bottom edge of the desk. In this position students have a better view of their writing and it is almost anatomically impossible for the "hook" position to develop.

It is important to enlist the support of the parents in helping a left-handed student. At the beginning of a formal handwriting program, the suggestions for parents which follow may be copied and sent home with the left-handed student (see Appendix D for a prepared letter containing the same information.)

Suggestions for Parents of Left-Handed Students

In school your child uses his or her left hand consistently. Because of this, there are certain adjustments that need to be made to ensure your child will learn to write legibly and quickly. **We will not try to change hand preference to the right hand.**

In any written work done at home, the following may be helpful:

1. Seat your child at a table approximately two inches lower than the height used by a right-handed child.
2. Place the writing paper towards the left-hand side of the desk in front of your child's left shoulder. Place any reference material or papers to be copied to the right of your child's paper.
3. Mark the bottom right-hand corner of the writing paper with an arrow, as shown. Have your child point the arrow towards his or her left shoulder.



4. Make sure your child is holding the pencil at least 1 1/2" from the point.