

CHAPTER 8

Transitions

Transition from Copying to Independent Writing

A large amount of time in handwriting instruction is spent in copying and tracing activities with clearly visible models. Even though students may have mastered these activities, they still need systematic instruction to develop independent writing skills. The student must reach a stage where legible writing is an automatic process and letter formation is no longer a conscious, deliberate activity. Only then is the student free to concentrate on the subject area of spelling or of writing a composition or theme.

Some intermediate activities which may be used to facilitate transition from structured copying are:

Present the student with a model. Allow "x" number of seconds for the student to look at the model and then remove it. The student must then write the letter, word, or sentence from memory.

Dictate letters or words and sentences the student is capable of spelling correctly. The student must write them without models being available.

Plan language arts activities in which the student is asked to compose and write captions for pictures, titles for stories, or other short sentences.

Plan compositional activities in which the student is asked to write on a certain subject and must compose and write sentences in an organized manner.

These four activities can be used in manuscript and cursive writing activities.

Transition from Manuscript to Cursive

For many students who have just mastered manuscript, cursive writing is a confusing jumble of lines. While students are attracted to cursive because of its identification with adult behavior, there are many who encounter severe problems in the transition process. The initial stages of the transition process must be carefully handled to ensure that consistent success experiences build the necessary enthusiasm to carry the student through the process of learning cursive writing.

The first goal should be to reduce the confusing jumble of cursive lines to a rational arrangement.

When the student can confidently recognize cursive letters, letter production can then be taught through an intensive copying approach. To reduce the confusion, begin by initially working with only those cursive letters that are very similar to their manuscript counterparts. By deleting all capital letters and the lower-case letters b, e, f, r, s, z, the remaining twenty lower-case letters can be used to demonstrate the relationship between the two alphabets.

The words initially selected to demonstrate these twenty lower-case letters should be simple three-letter words that are easy to read and spell. An initial list might be cat, can, tan, pin, man. Each student should be given a colored pencil and a worksheet containing the list of words written in cursive. The teacher writes the first word, "cat," in cursive on the chalkboard and explains that there are three manuscript letters hidden in the word. With the aid of participating students, the manuscript letters, c a t, are traced over the cursive letters with colored chalk on the chalkboard. The students repeat this procedure on their worksheets using colored pencils. After the manuscript letters are identified, the word should be spelled and read. As new lists are prepared, words should be used that are simple to spell and read and that contain at least one letter previously practiced. The goal is to build confidence in working with cursive handwriting, and not to test students on reading and spelling.



After the first twenty letters are introduced and practiced, the remaining six lower-case letters can be introduced, and finally, the upper-case letters can be taught.

Transition to Other Written Activities

It is a major and legitimate concern of teachers that students will produce legible writing during a structured handwriting lesson but then turn in assignments in other subject areas that are barely readable. For these students specific techniques are necessary which will motivate them to transfer good handwriting to other subject areas.

Transition from structured handwriting lessons to other writing activities should include the following practices:

Periodic check-ups. The student must retain legibility while increasing his or her speed of writing. Periodic checks by the teacher with reports to the student regarding letter formation, slant, etc., are important.

Student self-assessment. The student needs to be able to assess his or her own handwriting and make changes where necessary.

Reinforcement. A student will make the effort to write well if there is a reason to do so. Reinforcement, such as praise and noting good handwriting during other activities, will help to motivate students to maintain quality handwriting.

Overlearning. Handwriting needs to be overlearned to the point that a student does not have to think about the mechanics of writing and can maintain legible handwriting while concentrating on other aspects of the assignment.

Stowitschek (1978) developed a program to work with students who were capable of writing legibly but did not. Using handwriting samples from other subject areas, the teacher and student together identify problems. Problems might include letters omitted, letters added, letters too large, letters too small, bottom of letters not on line, letters spaced too far apart, letters spaced too close together, letters too slanted, letter lines not connected, and parts of letters missing. The problems were then prioritized and the most serious are worked on first.