

Introducing speed and fluency

Objective

To begin to develop greater speed while maintaining legibility in handwriting.

Background knowledge

One of the main reasons for learning joined script is to enable quick, efficient, fluent handwriting. When learning joined writing, it is natural that careful letter formation takes precedence over speed. Check that the children have the basics right, such as body position, the angle of the paper and correct pencil-grip. We are aiming for the children's handwriting to be fluent, easy and comfortable. As with spelling, automaticity is the ultimate goal, so that thought processes can concentrate on the task in hand and not the technical or secretarial aspects of their work. Once any technical errors have been overcome, practising writing at speed is highly desirable. When children can write quickly and legibly, they are able to produce more written work in a given time and research has shown that children with good, joined writing can achieve up to a grade higher in GCSE exams. Note that the average writing speed for children aged 7 is 54 letters per minute, aged 8 is 57 letters per minute and aged 9 is 64 letters per minute.

Pangrams are useful for developing this skill as they are sentences that use every letter of the alphabet at least once. Choose a pangram a week and ask the children to write it out each day and time it. Once completed the handwriting needs to be analysed using 'Handwriting checklist' (see page 111). Then repeat the exercise, encouraging them to do it in a faster time, but with more ticks in the checklist/fewer errors. The aim is to build up speed but not let legibility disappear. If a persistent mistake appears, then the child needs some revision – it could be a letter form, join or so on. They should return to the guideline paper to consolidate then return to lined paper. High-frequency words can also provide practice for this.

Activities

● Photocopiable page 121 'This is me'

In this activity, the children are asked to write their name and address as quickly and neatly as they can. It may be necessary for some children to check on their full home address and practise writing it, particularly if they use English as a second language. It is important that the children can concentrate on their speed here, not the details of their address.

● Photocopiable page 122 'Speedy sentences'

As the sentences here develop from simple to complex, the children are supported in speeding up their writing as they will be rewriting parts of the sentence that they have already written. This repetition should enable them to improve both their speed and the legibility of their writing. You could discuss with the children just how the sentences are being lengthened each time. When they understand this process, they can write their own speedy sentences, which they can also use for improving their writing efficiency.

● Photocopiable page 123 'Pangrams'

Pangrams are sentences that contain all the letters of the alphabet, which makes them useful from a handwriting point of view, as the children will have practice in forming all the letters they have learned, (although the joins will differ depending upon the order of the letters). Pangrams can be rather obscure in their meaning, so make sure the children have an understanding of the examples, even if they are nonsensical. The pangrams increase in length in the examples, requiring greater concentration.

Further ideas

● **Beat the clock:** Choose some well-known proverbs or simple nursery rhymes for the children to write. Give pairs stopwatches ask them to time each other as they write the selected sentences or rhymes once or twice.

What's on the CD-ROM

On the CD-ROM you will find:

- Tramline practice areas for all three activities.
- All of the photocopiable sheets.