

Practising speed

Objective

To practise writing quickly, fluently and legibly.

Background knowledge

Children need to develop a fluent, legible and speedy script in order to be able to write quickly. Note that the average writing speed for children aged 9 is 17–18 words per minute, aged 10 is 20 words per minute and aged 11 is 23 words per minute.

Pangrams are useful for developing this skill as they are sentences that use every letter of the alphabet at least once. Use one pangram a week and ask the children to write one out each day and time it. Once complete, the handwriting should be analysed using the photocopiable page 123 'Handwriting checklist'. Then repeat the exercise, encouraging them to do it in a faster time, but with more ticks in the checklist. The aim is to build up speed but not let legibility decrease. 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 guideline paper to consolidate before returning once more to lined paper.

High-frequency words can also provide practice for speed. As an aid to building up speed, the children can experiment with slanting their handwriting more to the right or left, or not at all.

Left-handers may wish to lift their pen from the paper while joining, thus avoiding having to push awkwardly across the page. If the ink or pencil trace disappears, do not tell them they have to produce a joining mark. However, do ensure they are joining just above the paper, rather than printing. Left-handers may also want to produce a sharper, more italic-style exit to their end-low joins. This is fine as long as they leave enough space between their words and don't cramp their letters together.

Activities

● Photocopiable page 121 'Pangrams'

The children are given six pangrams. They choose one and time how long it takes them to copy it. They can then repeat the activity every day for a week to build up speed and fluency. Encourage them to use photocopiable page 123 'Handwriting checklist' to check their accuracy. They can choose another, different pangram to practise with in the following weeks.

● Photocopiable page 122 'Six shorter pangrams'

In this activity, the children are given six shorter pangrams to copy and time individually. They can then repeat the activity several times to build up speed and fluency. Encourage them to use photocopiable page 123 'Handwriting checklist' to check their accuracy.

● Photocopiable page 123 'Handwriting checklist'

This page provides a checklist so the children can assess all the aspects of their own handwriting. Encourage them to use it regularly, and in particular when building up the speed of their writing.

Further ideas

● **Rewriting:** Using poetry, rhymes and their own writing, encourage the children to re-write a text several times and try to build up their speed while not losing legibility.

● **Against the clock:** Hold 'against the clock' writing sessions. Display a paragraph from a familiar text on the board and give the children a limited time in which to write it. Then ask them to use photocopiable page 123 'Handwriting checklist' to check their handwriting.

● **Musical:** Ask the children to write to music. Experiment with fast and slow rhythmical music.

What's on the CD-ROM

On the CD-ROM you will find:

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