# Legible writing

Students are more likely to understand the purpose of handwriting if it is introduced and developed in authentic writing contexts. Motivation is enhanced when they realise that their writing can be purposeful and for real audiences. This happens when others read their writing. Further, teachers can emphasise that as a courtesy for the reader, the handwriting should be legible.

• Students need explicit teaching regarding the aspects of the foundation style that assist in developing fluency.

• Natural, rhythmic movements make writing speed and legibility more achievable.

• Top-starting letter formations and down-stroking make writing easier and less physically tiring.

• Quick directional changes encourage faster writing.

• Wedge-shaped letters and a sloping style make writing more readable.

### Legibility: size, shape, proportion, slope and spacing of letters

While legible and fluent handwriting is developed through correct letter formation, it is also affected by letter size, consistency of spaces within and between words, pen pressure, thickness of line and uniformity of slope. These are interrelated.

Students in the early years can be encouraged to use the necessary combination of finger, hand, wrist and arm movements to form quite small letters. For writing to be legible and produced with speed and freedom from fatigue, attention needs to be given to consistency in the size of the letter bodies and of their heads and tails. When students are writing with speed, handwriting may become smaller.

Fluent and legible handwriting is assisted by the development of consistent shape in similarly formed letters and letter families – particularly in the bodies of letters. By comparing and contrasting letters that share common characteristics and discussing where the line(s) in the letter meet each other or cross, students will better understand the proportion of letter parts.

Quick directional changes minimise retracing of letters and help writers develop a rhythm which aids speed and fluency. These add a characteristic ‘wedge’ shape to letters and often emphasise a sloping rather than a vertical style. Writing is usually sloped 10–20 degrees to the right or may be upright. Consistency in slope within and between letters also aids joining and enhances speed and fluency.

Down-stroking, which involves starting and joining most letters at the top, minimises retracing and allows for better spacing between letters. Pen lifts, which allow letters to be ‘lifted and dropped’ into place, giving the appearance of joined handwriting, enhance spacing and ensure that writing doesn’t become too compacted.

Left-handed students may need extra support with:

Letter formation - some left-handed students may prefer to use a clockwise motion for some letters, rather than anticlockwise (e.g. **o**); some left-handed students may prefer to make horizontal strokes from right to left rather than left-to right (e.g. **f**); and some left-handed students may prefer to may create some letters in an order that differs to the order used by right-handed students (e.g. **Y**). Where appropriate demonstrations or modelling should show alternate methods for left-handed students

Paper placement – this should be the opposite to the placement for right-handers

Seating location- they should always sit on the left-hand side of the table to avoid bumping into a right-handed student while writing

Pencil grasp - it is advised that left-handed students hold the pencil at least 2.5-3 cm from the point to help them to see their writing. A rubber band wound around the pencil at the desired distance from the point may help.