Communication is an important skill for full and active participation in society. Handwriting is one aspect of communication. The explicit teaching of handwriting fits within a learner-centred constructivist approach as described by the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework (DETE 2001). The emphases are on holism, learners making connections across Learning Areas and a seamless transition from one stage of education to the next. Educators play a crucial role in teaching handwriting. There is, in addition, a link between learning to write letters and learning the sounds and names of letters and, therefore, learning to read as well as write.

For the purpose of this resource, the term ‘handwriting’ refers to the technique and style used by learners to communicate in handwritten text.

The term ‘writing’ refers to the construction of texts. It encompasses both the writing process and the means for recording the message. Some texts may be handwritten. Handwriting is a tool in the same way that a word-processor is a tool. Learners who use technologies such as computers to communicate are also writers. Handwriting is, however, unique. It is an important recognisable aspect of each individual.

Handwriting is not an easily acquired skill. Jones and Christensen (1999) say that the ability to generate written text requires the execution of a complex array of cognitive and metacognitive skills. Because of this, successful writers must be able to write letters and words automatically. Learners need a lot of practice in order to enable their handwriting to become automatic. In recording their ideas, thoughts and feelings, learners need a relaxed technique and style of handwriting that they can produce with confidence and sustain for increasingly longer periods of time. By practising the technique and using appropriate materials, developing writers gain the confidence and ability to produce a legible style that will help them to communicate through writing.

Handwriting is a complex skill which is closely linked to the development of a number of other skills such as visual acuity, visual perception, and coordinated use of sensory and motor systems. Children develop these skills at different times and in different ways. While some might require intervention from a trained professional such as an occupational therapist, most will learn handwriting skills as a result of strategies employed by their teacher who makes handwriting a purposeful activity and provides regular opportunities for practice.
To maximise the opportunities for learners to develop handwriting skills, it is important that all schools should have a whole-school approach to the teaching of handwriting.

Handwriting in the South Australian curriculum provides a framework of core concepts and a guide to the development of handwriting skills from the early years to the middle years of education.

Implementation of a whole-school approach to handwriting needs to be coordinated and planned in order that staff become familiar with Handwriting in the South Australian curriculum and have access to appropriate professional development, and to ensure that time is allocated each year to writing and/or reviewing the whole-school approach. Opportunities for staff sharing and mentoring should also be developed, both in staff meetings and teaching team situations. The involvement of an occupational therapist in workshops could also be helpful.

It is important that the preschool or school community is informed about how the site will develop handwriting skills and how parents/caregivers, in particular, can assist their children to acquire these. This can be achieved through articles in newsletters, class newsletters, letters to parents/caregivers and information to the governing council. A brochure for parents/caregivers is a companion document to this resource and is available from: <http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au>.

This resource is designed to help all educators, including preschool educators, support learners to develop skills in handwriting. It will help them understand the reasons for adopting the South Australian handwriting style and the benefits it provides for learners. It outlines possible areas for consideration when implementing the style in educational settings and provides detailed information regarding handwriting technique and style.

This resource, therefore, is intended for educators who:

- are introducing handwriting to learners who have not yet developed their handwriting skills
- are further developing the handwriting skills of their learners
- are helping English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to change from a writing system in another language or alphabet
- have learners whose current handwriting style is illegible or causing difficulty, and for whom intervention is required
- are working with children in settings prior to school.
The term ‘writing’ is used in the SACSA Framework across all Learning Areas, in the Early Years Band and across the Developmental Learning Outcomes. The development of handwriting skills is linked to learner well-being and the Essential Learnings, particularly Identity and Communication.

As learners work towards the following Developmental Learning Outcomes from birth to age 5 they will be developing skills which will support them to handwrite.

**SACSA Framework’s Early Years Band Age 3 to Age 5 Developmental Learning Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children are effective communicators</th>
<th>Children develop a range of physical competencies</th>
<th>Children develop a sense of being connected with others and their worlds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates an understanding that symbols are a powerful means of communication and that ideas, thoughts and concepts can be represented through them</td>
<td>• Combines gross and fine motor skills with increasing coordination</td>
<td>• Understands the functions and uses of symbols and has an awareness of the relationships between oral, written and visual representations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Represents and records thoughts using creative processes</td>
<td>• Uses physical skills for exploring creative media and creative expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Actively explores, investigates and represents their environments, using tools, equipment and media with increasing physical skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moves confidently in space and performs different movement patterns with growing spatial awareness</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from SACSA Framework, DETE 2001)
When learners enter school they are provided with opportunities to compose texts to meet the following English Learning Outcomes. Handwriting is one strategy that they use to create texts. In doing so, they are providing evidence of reaching the handwriting Outcomes for the strategies strand (1.12-3.12) highlighted below. For more information about what this might look like in the classroom, see the SACSA Companion Document Series: R–10 English teaching resource, pages 29 and 49 (DECS 2004).

### English R–Year 8 overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Years Band Scope Key Ideas</th>
<th>Standard 1 Outcomes</th>
<th>Standard 2 Outcomes</th>
<th>Standard 3 Outcomes</th>
<th>Standard 4 Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children recognise some of the purposes and advantages of writing as they express feelings, ideas, information and imagination within written texts. T•C•KC1•KC2</td>
<td>1.4 Composes a range of texts that include topics of personal interest and some related ideas, and that can be understood by others. T•C•KC2</td>
<td>2.4 Composes a range of texts that include interrelated ideas and information about familiar topics and shows an awareness of different audiences, purposes and contexts. T•C•KC2</td>
<td>3.4 Composes a range of texts that include ideas and information about familiar and some unfamiliar topics and applies an understanding of audience, purpose and context. Id•T•C•KC2</td>
<td>4.4 Composes a range of texts that include detailed information and explore different perspectives about a range of issues and adjusts texts for particular audiences, purposes and contexts. Id•C•KC2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children produce written texts, drawing on the support of proficient writers as required. They identify and talk about some basic features of written and visual images. T•C•KC1•KC2</td>
<td>1.8 Experiments with aspects of language when planning and composing a range of texts about familiar experience. Id•C•KC3•KC6</td>
<td>2.8 Uses aspects of language when planning and composing a range of well-structured texts about familiar and new experience. Id•T•C•KC3</td>
<td>3.8 Selects and uses a variety of language aspects when planning and composing a range of well-structured fiction, factual and media texts about familiar, new and possible experience. Id•T•C•KC3</td>
<td>4.8 Controls and adjusts most aspects of language when planning and composing an extensive range of written and multimedia texts on different themes and issues. T•C•KC3•KC7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children share ideas and feelings as they experiment with strategies for planning, composing and reviewing their own writing. They draw on strategies for spelling high frequency and common sight words and for attempting to spell unfamiliar words. Id•T•C•KC3</td>
<td>1.12 Experiments with strategies for planning, composing and reviewing own written texts and for attempting to spell unfamiliar words. Id•T•C•KC3</td>
<td>2.12 Uses strategies for planning, composing and reviewing own texts and for consistently making informed attempts at spelling. Id•T•C•KC3</td>
<td>3.12 Selects and uses a variety of strategies for planning, composing and reviewing own written texts and for consistently spelling most common words accurately. T•C•KC3</td>
<td>4.12 Uses, compares and adjusts multiple strategies for planning, composing and reviewing written texts. T•C•KC3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Handwriting in the South Australian Curriculum
Students will also be given the opportunity to work towards Learning Outcomes in health and physical education and in arts, which will support the development of their motor skills essential for handwriting. Learning Outcome 1.1 in health and physical education, for example, reads ‘Demonstrates self-awareness and confidence in coordination and control of movement skills for widening involvement in physical activities in different settings’, while Learning Outcome 1.1. in arts reads ‘Confidently uses play and imagination to create/re-create arts works within each arts form’.

References in the SACSA Framework to handwriting include that learners in the Early Years:

- experiment with symbols and print in early writing experiences to produce a range of imaginative, fiction and factual texts such as letters, lists, e-mails, recounts, narratives, rhymes and simple descriptions. [KC6] (From the introduction to the texts and contexts strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 133)

- experiment with and practise printing, in joint and independent situations, recognising that writing has many purposes and uses. [Id] [C] [KC6] (From the introduction to the texts and contexts strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 133).

When comprehending and composing texts, children may focus on different aspects of the language to:

- analyse features of written communication (eg punctuation, spelling, handwriting, layout). (From the introduction to the language strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 140)

- recognise the ways letters, common letter patterns and the structure of sentences are used to make meaning, and attempt to include these features in their own written texts. (From the introduction to the language strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 141).

To communicate effectively with their audiences, learners:

- control aspects such as writing top to bottom, left to right, leaving spaces between words, and use correct word order and known words and phrases. (From the introduction to the language strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 141)

- understand grammar as ‘building blocks’ of meaning construction in written texts (eg identifying and using punctuation marks such as capital letters, full stops, question marks and exclamation marks). [T] [C] [KC1] (From the introduction to the strategies strand, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 146)

- use consistent size, shape and space when handwriting a published piece. (From the strategies Key Idea, Early Years Band: R–2—English, page 154).

These handwriting references in the SACSA Framework embed the learning of handwriting within the Framework.
Handwriting and learner achievement

Stevens in Hands up! (2004) describes how learners who experience difficulty with handwriting may become discouraged and feel unmotivated to attempt written tasks. This may then affect their overall achievement. Learners who need to pay considerable attention to the mechanical requirements of writing may have difficulty with higher-order writing processes, such as planning the structure and content of their written work (Amundson & Weil 1996).

Handwriting and self-esteem

Stevens (2004) also points out that illegible handwriting has been found to have secondary effects on self-esteem (Penso 1993; Malloy-Miller et al 1995; Bailey, cited in Amundson & Weil 1996). A child may view his or her handwriting as a constant visual reminder of inadequacy at school, and may lose the interest and desire to produce written work (Pasterniki, cited in Amundson & Weil 1996).

Guiding principles

The guiding principles for teaching and learning that assist handwriting are that handwriting:

• serves the writing process by allowing the writer to represent and communicate meaning
• is a physical skill which depends upon individual development, appropriate instruction and modelling
• is valued as an art and a form of personal expression.

Educators should be aware of the following implications of these guiding principles (Cann 1996):

• How children learn dictates all teaching decisions.
• Learners should be encouraged to develop a legible, fluent handwriting style to enable them to record and communicate information, ideas and thoughts.
• Writing models should be offered for learners, and they should be offered opportunities to experiment with various implements and media, to practise letter formation and styles and to identify purposes for writing.
• Through interactive writing, learners can be engaged in creating written text and be encouraged to share the writing experience.
• Handwriting should be taught as a skill that relies on habituated physical action. Teaching should be appropriate to the learner’s stage of development.
• Value is added to learners’ writing when educators appreciate the beauty of the form and acknowledge the skill and effort of the writer.