The most frequently asked questions are listed below. Detailed answers are provided in the following pages and in other parts of the book as indicated.

1. What is the best handwriting grip? (See also page 21.)
2. What if a learner has a persistently incorrect grip?
3. What is the best handwriting position? (See also page 22.)
4. How can I support a learner with the layout of his or her work?
5. How do I help a learner with incorrect posture? (See also page 22.)
6. How do I support left-handers?
7. I'm a left-handed teacher teaching right-handed learners. What should I do?
8. How do I support a visually impaired learner to write?
9. What should I do if a learner is writing sideways, backwards, etc?
10. One of my learners is having difficulty handwriting. What might the problem be?
11. How can I help a learner having difficulty with pre-writing basic shapes?
12. One of my learners has trouble forming the shapes of letters. What should I do?
13. A learner is slow in handwriting. What should I do?
14. A learner has trouble positioning letters on the line. What should I do?
15. One of my learners exerts too much pressure on the implement. What do you suggest?
16. One of my learners produces faint/shaky handwriting and does not exert enough pressure. What do you suggest?
17. A learner's cursive writing is hard to read. What do you suggest?
18. What if a learner's handwriting is compressed?
19. Do children and students need to learn keyboard skills? (See also Appendix 5.)
20. A learner continues to struggle with handwriting despite my intervention. Where can I get additional support?
21. At what stage should learners be able to write their own name?
1 What is the best handwriting grip?

- The writing instrument is held gently so that the index finger can flex slightly.
- Pressure on the handwriting instrument and consistent tension in the fingers or hand may cause fatigue and cramp, preventing fluent handwriting.
- The instrument rests on the side of the top joint of the middle finger, with the thumb resting on the side of the instrument and the forefinger resting on top (i.e., the tripod grip).
- A small space should be visible between the thumb and forefinger.
- The fingers should not be placed too closely to the writing tip because tension will develop.
- The angle of the instrument to the paper should be about 45 degrees.
- A steep angle will also lead to greater tension.
- Some left-handers will hold the writing instrument further back from the point so that they can see what is being written.

2 What if a learner has a persistently incorrect grip?

- Use coloured markers on the barrel of the writing tool to indicate the relative position of the finger and thumb.
- Put a triangular implement grip on the writing tool, ensuring that a part of the grip is visible between the index finger and thumb.
- Provide the learner with triangular pencils, both coloured and lead pencils.
- Focus on one or two aspects of the grip at a time. For example, say 'Your thumb must be on the pencil' or 'Your pencil must point towards your right shoulder' (only for right-handers) or 'Your pointer finger should point to the tip of the pencil'.

3 What is the best handwriting position?

- The paper and body position should be comfortable for the writer, so that the writer may write with ease for long periods.
- The paper should be placed so that its base is at right angles to the forearm of the writing hand, and the body should have comfortably balanced support so that body weight does not rest on the writing arm.
- Tension in the eyes, neck, wrist, shoulders or back indicates an uncomfortable paper and/or body position, which will interfere with the optimum handwriting movement and cause fatigue.
4 How can I support a learner with the layout of his or her work?

The collection and examination of different layouts will help learners improve their own layout techniques. Learners will come to understand that:

- a planned layout can increase both the legibility and the attractiveness of the finished product
- different-sized paper and instruments require different layout techniques
- the time used to prepare a rough layout is well spent when it enhances the finished product
- the number of words per line influences the appearance of the page
- a line with too many words tends to tire the eye of the reader
- the use of wide margins emphasises the importance of the writing which they surround.

5 How do I help a learner with incorrect posture?

- Reinforce posture by setting a time limit and expecting the correct posture to be maintained during that time. Start with a short time and gradually extend it. Congratulate the learner on achieving the correct posture for the given time.
- Ensure the chair is not too close to the table.
- Organise for a check of the learner’s vision, if appropriate.

6 How do I support left-handers?

- Find a left-handed educator or parent/caregiver who writes well using the appropriate grip and movements as an assistant for the left-handers in the class. He or she can show the correct hold.
- Seat the left-hander to the left of a right-handed child so that their elbows do not bump each other.
- Check that the light comes from their right-hand side so they are not writing in their own shadow.
- Use a lower writing surface (lower the desk or have the learner sit higher).
- So the writing is not obscured, ask the learner to hold the implement at least 3cm (a rubber band can mark the spot) from the tip, or use a commercial triangular implement grip placed far enough up the barrel that the learner can see around his or her hand.
- Position the paper to the left of the midline of the body for a comfortable writing position.
- Use a fibre-tip pen or softer pencil (e.g. 2B, 4B or 6B) which causes less ‘digging’ into the paper.
- Allow learners to experiment with crossbar links (e.g. \( \text{f} \) and \( \text{f} \) (a right-to-left line is often easier for left-handers)) and letters that change direction (e.g. \( \text{b} \) and \( \text{s} \)) until they find something that suits.
I'm a left-handed teacher teaching right-handed learners. What should I do?

- Depending on the age of the learners, you could discuss what is similar and different about the way you hold a pen and the way they hold theirs.
- You might also talk to them about how you as a left-hander must position your hand and the paper in order to see what you are writing and how this is different for right-handed writers.
- Find a right-handed educator or parent/caregiver who writes well using the appropriate grip and movements as an assistant for the right-handers in the class. He or she can show the correct hold.

How do I support a visually impaired learner to write?

It is most important that there is good contrast between the writing implement and the writing medium. Learners can use felt-tipped pens and the paper should not be shiny. It is also important to provide additional time for practice. For older learners, you could use dark line stationery. Learners with a visual impairment may also need to be closer to their work and will require good lighting. They could also benefit from having a sloping desktop. For further information contact the South Australian School for Vision Impaired, 1B Duncan Avenue, Park Holme 5043, phone (08) 8277 5255.

What should I do if a learner is writing sideways, backwards, etc?

This is usually a normal part of development and does not need remediation. However, if this is all that the learner does, you can sit down and model writing for them, or show them examples of writing in books, or encourage them to look at their own name. If the learner persists it might be necessary to seek help from the Learning Difficulties Support team in the Department of Education and Children’s Services, or from a guidance officer through the referral process. The Specific Learning Difficulties Association of South Australia (SPELD) also provides advice with regard to handwriting difficulties.
One of my learners is having difficulty handwriting. What might be the problem?

Consider which foundation skills the learner may be having difficulties with in developing his or her handwriting skills. The problem may be in any one or combination of the following five areas.

**Vision**
In order to write, you need the ability to sustain clear binocular vision at near point.

**Postural control**
In order to write, you need the ability to:
- hold your body up against gravity
- make coordinated trunk, shoulder, forearm and wrist movements
- sit in a chair
- make subtle adjustments to these movements
- plan the motor patterns you make with your whole body.

**Visual skills**
In order to write, you need the ability to:
- track visually from top to bottom, left to right, and diagonally
- remember the form and shape of different objects
- recognise similarities between shapes
- recognise differences between shapes
- pick out important information from a busy background
- remember sequences of visual information
- look at and focus on the different aspects of the work.

**Fine motor skills**
In order to write, you need the ability to:
- use one hand as a leader, and the other to support the page
- hold a pencil
- start drawing in the correct place for individual letters
- stop drawing in the correct place for individual letters
- change direction when drawing
- plan how big the letter will be, and where to start it in relation to other letters and lines on the page.

**Visual- motor skills**
Visual- motor skills are the ability to look at something, interpret it and respond with a motor action. This is an essential skill for learning how to form letters, copy letters, and interpret what you have written.

In order to write, you need the ability to:
- copy a series of geometric shapes (including pre-writing shapes and their combinations) in order to go on to write letters
- control the pencil to form line and shape combinations automatically
  - starting and stopping drawing lines in the right places
  - combining lines in the correct sequence to form a letter
  - drawing lines in the correct size.
11 How can I help a learner having difficulty with pre-writing basic shapes?

- Determine which pre-writing basic shapes the learner can copy and the ones the learner cannot. Consider whether this will affect the learner’s ability to form particular letters accurately.
- Try different ways of teaching the shapes that the learner finds difficult (eg copying, tracing, painting, pencil and paper approaches, making the shapes, games, worksheets).
- Try different activities that involve controlling the pencil, such as mazes, colouring-in, and tracing activities. These can be practised in different ways (eg at the table with pencil and paper, drawing on whiteboards or blackboards, with paint, as part of construction).
- Try using different writing tools (such as pencils, crayons, felt-tipped pens and paint).
- Consider the size and shape of the pencil (the thicker a pencil the easier it is to grasp and control) and different density of the tips (softer leads can be easier to colour with, harder leads can look neater).
- Consider a binocular vision assessment.
One of my learners has trouble forming the shapes of letters. What should I do?

Consider the learner’s ability to consistently and accurately form the letters (shape, size, way they write the letter each time).

- Formation of letters can be taught relative to the different shapes. Always reinforce the starting place, and encourage learners to form letters the same way each time.
- Try using rhythm, words, mnemonic devices or counting to help make the pattern of forming the letters more automatic. Examples are:
  - When forming the letter o ‘you go backwards around the moon and then land on Earth’.
  - When forming the letter j ‘drop down the line and remember the fishing hook’.

Other ways of helping are provided below.

- Organise for a check of the learner’s binocular vision, if appropriate.
- Provide a whiteboard marker and laminated sheet (see Appendix 2e).

### Anti-clockwise and clockwise letters

Backwards around ... and then ...

- a stick
- an up stick and down
- a down stick with a hook
- stop quickly
- stop when you meet
- a down stick with a flick

- An up stick with an oval
- A down stick with an oval
- Straight across, a hat and a tail
- Around, hook and down
- Down, around, up and down

### Stick letters

- f  A little around and down
- h  Start at the top and bounce
- m  Start at the top and down
- n  Start at the top and bounce
- r  Start at the top and down

### Diagonal letters

- k  Down (the straight road) and kick
- v  Down and up
- w  Down and up and down and up
- x  Slash across and again
- z  Straight across, down and across
A learner is slow in handwriting. What should I do?

If the learner writes more slowly than expected, consider the following:

- What happens to the quality and speed of writing when the learner is told to write quickly? Does he or she write more quickly or at the same speed? Does the writing change in size, or become more inconsistently spaced on the line? Does the learner tire more quickly?
- What happens when the learner perceives the need to write neatly? Does he or she write more slowly? Does the quality really change?
- For how many minutes can the learner write? At what point does the learner get tired? Does that match your expectations of his or her year level?
- Does the learner’s speed of writing change when he or she is copying, or writing from memory, or being creative?
- Does the learner write more neatly at different times in the day (e.g., in the morning when less fatigued)?

Then use the following strategies:

(1) Consider strategies in the classroom to reduce the amount of writing required by the learner:
- Could he or she receive a worksheet rather than having to copy the information?
- Could he or she use another way of recording the information other than writing (e.g., computer, tape recorder, scribe with another learner in the group, oral presentation)?
- Could time frames be extended to allow additional time for writing?
- Can written work be set when the learner is less fatigued (e.g., in the morning, or after breaks)?

(2) Confirm that the learner is aware of the quality and speed of writing required.
- Does he or she know which work (e.g., copying) needs to be written quickly?
- Does the learner know in which lessons he or she needs to write neatly?

(3) Include ‘pauses’ in the writing tasks.
- Can breaks be included during handwriting?
- Try having learners put their pencils down and shake and stretch their hands, stand up, and stretch their arms and necks. Does this alter the quality and duration of their writing?
14 A learner has trouble positioning letters on the line. What should I do?

Consider the learner’s ability to position letters accurately on the line.
- Do the letters sit too far above the line, or below the line?
- Are ‘tails’ on letters positioned under the line?
- Are there adequate spaces between letters within the words?
- Are letters drawn the same size within words?
- Are capital letters taller than lower-case ones?

Then use the following strategies:
- Try using visual cues to organise letter positions:
  - provide a framework to describe where the letter must go
  - provide a grid for each letter to be placed inside the square
  - give a grid example (marking the position on the line, below the line, above the line)
  - use different colours on a grid to remind where the letter goes.
- Consider a binocular vision assessment.

15 One of my learners exerts too much pressure on the implement. What do you suggest?

- Use a softer implement, such as a fibre-tip pen or a 4B or 6B pencil.
- Practise patterns and put on music for rhythms.
- Ask the learner to concentrate on relaxing the fingers.
- Check that the learner’s pencil grip is not too close to the tip.

16 One of my learners produces faint/shaky writing and does not exert enough pressure. What do you suggest?

- Use a softer implement, such as a fibre-tipped pen or a 4B or 6B pencil.
- Practise patterns with light and dark lines in them.
- Discuss with learners why they need to ‘press harder’.
- Consider activities such as clay moulding to develop fine motor skills.

17 A learner’s cursive writing is hard to read. What do you suggest?

- Practise the alphabet, concentrating on making letters as a series of parallel downstrokes.
- Use patterns to emphasise a downward rhythm.
- Use a slope card.
18 What if a learner's handwriting is compressed?

- Improve coordination of the fingers and arm by practising finger movement for implement rotation and moving the forearm across the page.
- Practise exaggeration of spacing to encourage fluency.
- Practise links, especially hard-to-link letters and dropping in, emphasising pen lifts.

19 Do children and students need to learn keyboard skills?

- Keyboard skills are a crucial skill to learn. For learners, communication through a keyboard will be a fundamental and growing necessity in order to take their place in society. All learners need to experiment with a keyboard, enjoy it, become familiar with it and learn the functions of the keys. All learners need to develop and practise their typing skills.
- For some learners, using a keyboard will be their only form of communication. The development of keyboard skills in those learners who are unable to write by hand is a priority for educators. It enables learners to communicate on an equitable basis.

20 A learner continues to struggle with handwriting despite my intervention. Where can I get additional support?

Some learners with particular difficulties might require more specialised help than a teacher is able to provide. You can call upon support of groups such as:

- Learning Improvement and Support Services (LISS) within the Department of Education and Children's Services
- occupational therapists, who often work in Community Health Offices in the various regions
- the Special Education Resources Unit (SERU).

21 At what stage should learners be able to write their own name?

Learners will always develop at different rates. However, most show an interest in writing symbols and letters between four-and-a-half and five years of age. It is important that learners have developed the necessary fine motor skills to enable them to manipulate writing tools.