



The writing framework

July 2025

The importance of the reception year

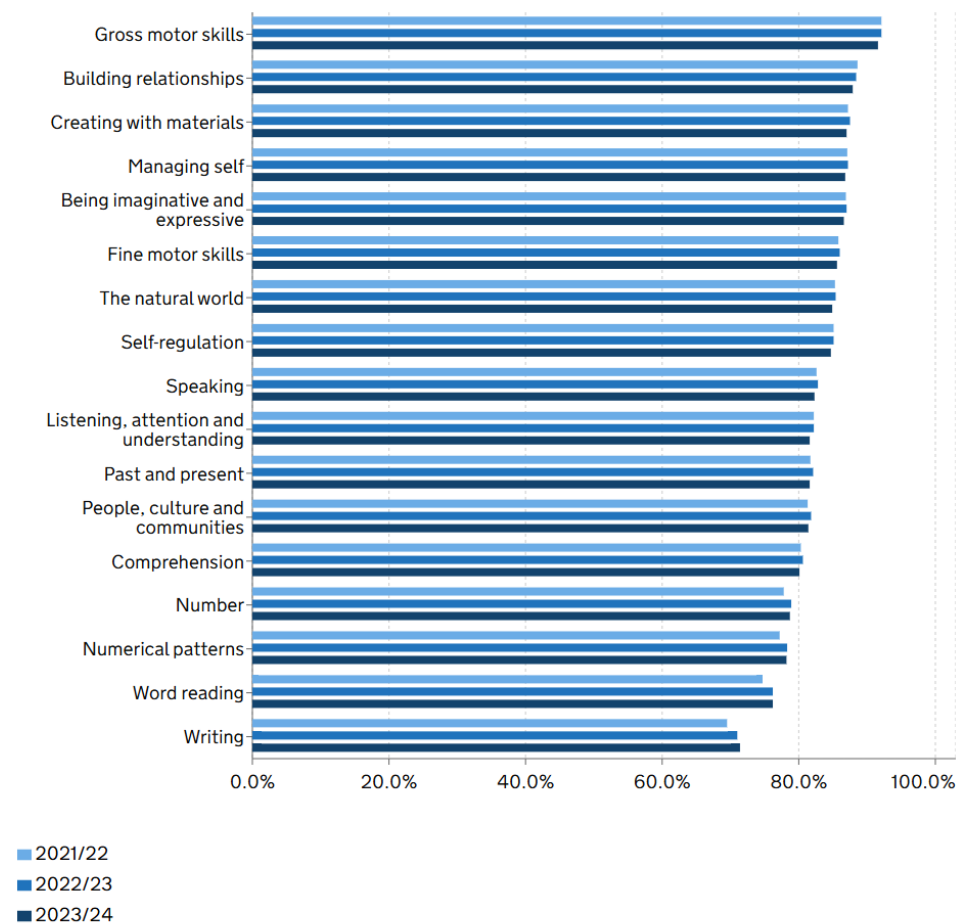
Access the writing framework:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-writing-framework>

Why?

Attainment at the end of EYFS is lowest in Writing

Figure 5: Percentage of children at the expected level by early learning goal, 2021/22 to 2023/24



Footnotes

1. The early years foundation stage profile was significantly revised in September 2021. This included changes to the 17 early learning goals and 7 areas of learning. See the methodology page for more information.
2. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Early years foundation stage profile data

Strong foundations for writing are key to later success

- ▶ Strong foundations in reception give children the best chance of later success
- ▶ **Transcription and composition: Keep things simple, do things well.**
- ▶ All children should receive regular, explicit handwriting and phonics for spelling instruction. In many schools, this will be daily
- ▶ The Government's Plan for Change sets a milestone of 75% of children reaching a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of reception by 2028. The ELG for writing is needed to achieve a GLD.
- ▶ Teachers should work to build a strong writing culture – a community of writers

Developing children's skills in communication and language is vital for success in writing

- ▶ Foster a love of language - shared reading, story telling, learning and repetition of rhymes, poems and songs
- ▶ Create opportunities for expressing thoughts and ideas
- ▶ High-quality interactions between children and adults are vital
- ▶ Model high quality language
- ▶ Question sensitively

Writing composition depends on language – it's good to talk

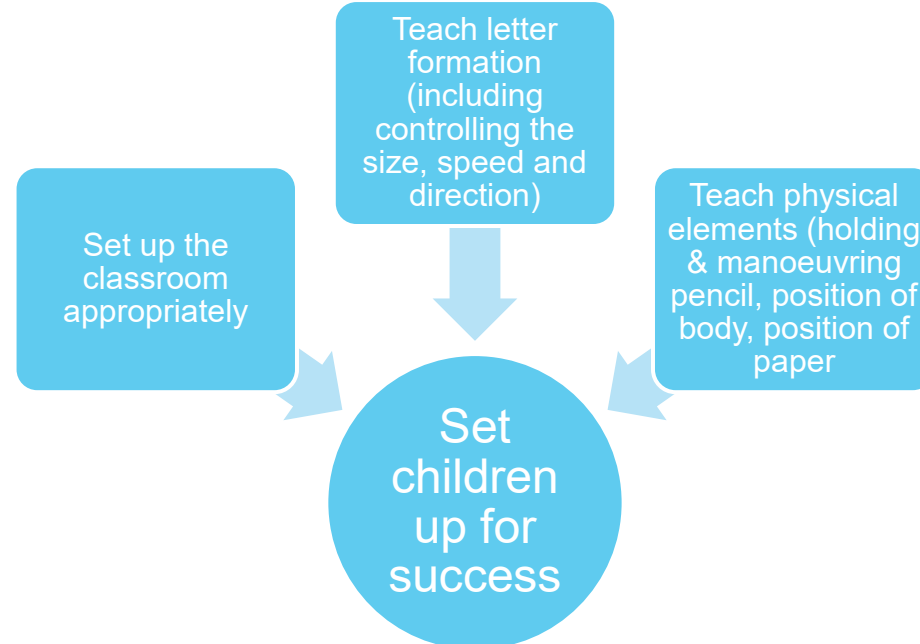
- ▶ Ofsted Strong foundations: **'The most successful schools teach the two distinct parts of writing - oral composition and transcription - separately in the early stages '**
- ▶ While children are developing their ability to form letters and spell in reception, the majority of composition will be oral.
- ▶ Children need explicit teaching, and sufficient practice, in how to compose simple sentences orally
- ▶ Provide lots of opportunities, for all children, to develop their spoken language
- ▶ Support children to make links between talking and writing
- ▶ Don't rush, build strong foundations through –
 - ▶ Plenty of oral rehearsal
 - ▶ focussing on building strong transcription skills (letter formation and phonics for spelling)
 - ▶ avoiding expecting children to attempt complex tasks too soon
 - ▶ developing quality, not length
- ▶ Ofsted: Not everything needs to be recorded in books

Achieving automaticity is key so handwriting instruction should begin early

- ▶ Mastering transcription prepares children to become writers - freeing minds to concentrate on ideas.
- ▶ Fluent handwriting is a significant predictor of positive writing outcomes.
- ▶ Regular, explicit handwriting instruction, in addition to phonics, should therefore be introduced early, in term 1 of reception for all children.
- ▶ Sufficient teaching and practice is needed so that writing becomes automatic, efficient and fluent.
- ▶ Children should be taught consistent routines for handwriting that consider posture, paper positioning and pencil hold.
- ▶ Handwriting teaching should be systematic.
- ▶ Support children with the physical skills needed for writing, alongside handwriting instruction.

Setting children up for success in handwriting

- ▶ **Ofsted:** 'In many schools, the reception and year 1 curriculum do not sufficiently emphasise the need for pupils to learn how to hold a pencil comfortably and sit at a table to write. Weaknesses in letter formation and pen grip make it difficult for pupils to learn to join their handwriting and can be significantly harder to address at a later stage'



Children need handwriting instruction in addition to phonics – teach both alongside each other




Phonics programme – teaches letters in an order that will generate most words





Handwriting programme – teaches letters in groups of letters with similar formation





Every child needs explicit and regular writing instruction from the start – don't leave anyone behind!

- ▶ Some children may just want to play, build, climb, balance. They may not choose to sit and write
 - ▶ Some children may not seem physically 'ready' to write
 - ▶ However, all children need to be taught to write so they are not left behind
 - ▶ Teach every child to write from the start so they are included and receive sufficient teaching and practice
 - ▶ Engage those that need more encouragement and support in structured activities that build foundations for writing, alongside writing instruction
 - ▶ Ensure children are supported to reach the physical development early learning goals. This will benefit handwriting
 - ▶ Some children will want to play at writing – encourage children's enjoyment of this, provide pencils and paper so they can write as they play.
 - ▶ Provide opportunities to play at writing with intention
 - ▶ Encourage every child to write and demonstrate writing and drawing in play - take care not to let it interfere with play
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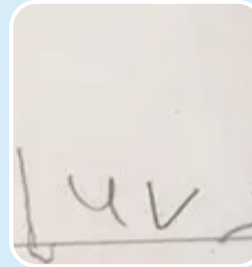
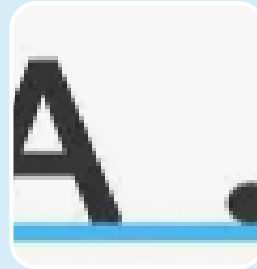
Children who need the most support

- ▶ Ensure *all pupils* get off to the best start, from the beginning and are given opportunity early on to progress. The focus should be on keeping up.
- ▶ Teach and support children during whole class teaching
- ▶ Consider children's needs as a whole, including how speaking and/or reading support should be prioritised.
- ▶ Understand the aspect a child finds difficult and adapt teaching.
- ▶ Metacognitive approaches can motivate children to engage and improve in writing.
- ▶ Focus on developing spoken language skills and oral composition.
- ▶ Provide a language-rich environment
- ▶ Be ambitious for all pupils, including those identified as having SEND.

Understand how to make judgements against the Early Learning Goal for Writing

Children at the expected level of development will:

- write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed
- spell words by identifying sounds in them and representing the sounds with a letter or letters
- write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others



Sentences and phrases can be simple rather than extended

Sentences and phrases do not need to include punctuation

Not all words need to be correctly spelt

Sentences and phrases can be transcribed (dictated)

Sentences and phrases must be readable but may contain some mistakes in letter formation

Next steps

- ▶ Read Section 2 of the [writing framework](#): 'The Importance of reception' to understand the key messages about writing in reception
- ▶ Understand the key messages and expectations over the next academic year
- ▶ Plan next steps in your trust/school/authority
- ▶ The reception year is a national priority for our Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams. This means all schools will receive support to improve reception teaching, with some schools being eligible for enhanced or more intensive offers. Read '[Giving every child the best start in life](#)' to learn more about these offers.

FAQ

- ▶ **Q: Should my school be using a writing programme?**
- ▶ A: Developing an effective writing curriculum and seeing its impact takes time, so schools should spend time carefully evaluating their current provision to identify areas for improvement.
- ▶ If leaders conclude that a programme would be beneficial for certain aspects of their writing curriculum, schools should use the guidance provided in this framework to help them review programmes, so they can be confident in their design.
- ▶ Some schools may have developed their own programmes that they prefer. If they are successful with their own writing curriculum, there is no expectation that schools should use commercially produced programmes.

FAQ

Q: Do children have to sit at tables to write?

- ▶ A: From the beginning, seating pupils at a table for handwriting will best support them to hold their pencil and position themselves properly to write. This does not mean children should be sitting at a table for the rest of the day. Before any handwriting teaching starts, pupils should have pencils sharpened, ready on tables; grip-supports and finger markers in place on pencils, if needed; paper in position; and any necessary adjusted equipment in place. All pupils can be taught to slant their paper: slightly anti-clockwise for right handers and clockwise for left-handers (Appendix A: Handwriting guidance illustrates this).
- ▶ Children should be taught to use a stable writing position which supports their forearm, wrist and hand when writing. The writing position should enable the arm to move freely and support the hand to make the tiny movements needed.

FAQ

What if a child isn't 'ready' to be taught to write?

- ▶ Teachers should have high expectations and be ambitious for all pupils and every child should receive and be included in writing instruction.
- ▶ Leaders and teachers should aim to ensure that all pupils get the best start in writing from the very beginning.
- ▶ The writing framework explains the importance of supporting children to develop the physical skills needed for them to write alongside handwriting teaching and identifying the aspect a child finds more difficult and adapting teaching to help them to progress.
- ▶ The writing framework provides guidance on supporting children who find writing more difficult, including those with Developmental coordination disorder/Dyspraxia. It is important to watch pupils as they write letters, so they practise and develop the skills needed for correct letter formation.

Should children be taught cursive handwriting?

- ▶ Pupils must learn how to form letters easily and legibly. Before beginning to join letters, pupils first need to form the shape of each letter correctly, starting and finishing each one at the correct point and ensuring that its size is properly related to other letters in the same family.
- ▶ Some handwriting programmes teach letters which join easily.
- ▶ However, the [essential criteria](#) for the validation of systematic synthetic phonics programmes, published in 2021, required validated phonics programmes to provide resources that support the teaching of lower-case and capital letters correctly, with clear start and finish points. Children in schools following a DfE validated phonics programme should therefore not be taught to join letters at first or to start every letter 'on the line' with a 'lead-in', because these practices cause unnecessary difficulty for beginners.

Contact your local English Hub

- Find your local English Hub: www.englishhubs.org
- Hubs can support schools with early language, phonics and reading for pleasure



English Hubs

