



Unlocking Handwriting – Reception

For children to reach a Good Level of Development (GLD) at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), they must reach the ‘expected’ level for the Early Learning Goals (ELG) in the prime areas of learning. Unlocking Handwriting complements and supports children to achieve the following ELGs within physical development:

Gross Motor Skills ELG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate strength, balance and coordination when playing.
Fine Motor Skills ELG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a pencil effectively in preparation for fluent writing – using the tripod grip in almost all cases. • Use a range of small tools, including scissors, paintbrushes and cutlery. • Begin to show accuracy and care when drawing.
Writing ELG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.

Unit 1 – Developing Gross and Fine Motor Skills Mastery

Gross motor and fine motor skills are a fundamental foundation for developing handwriting and so it is essential that this remains a focus of provision in Reception alongside other learning. Gross motor skills use the bigger muscles in the body to support a child's strength, co-ordination and balance. Fine motor skills refer to controlling smaller muscles (for example: hands, fingers, feet, toes, mouth and eyes). It is important to remember that fine motor skills are a part of whole-body physicality and that a joined-up approach – where both skills are considered – is essential. The success of fine motor skill development is dependent on, and underpinned by, the successful acquisition of gross motor skills. The Department for Education recommends children in the early years engage in physical activities for at least 3 hours each day. Unlocking Handwriting has some suggested activities to support children's gross and fine motor skill development. A more extensive list can be found in the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Pre-school' guide.

Gross Motor Skill Activities					
Transfer materials to another area by lifting a wheelbarrow or pulling a cart.	Practise moving along a hopscotch track. Then, change the way you move. This could be a spin on each single number or hopping along the whole track on one leg.	Practise crawling through a tunnel.	Get dressed and change into outdoor gear.	Move objects differing in weight and size to create an obstacle course. Transition along the course before lifting the items to put them away.	Create a track using sticks. Use a mini golf club to direct a ball around the track.
Fill a large bowl with water and place large weighty fruit/vegetables inside. Remove the items from the water using a spade.	Use a cube-shaped cardboard box. Write a form of movement on each side (for example: hop, duck, jump, spin, leap and skip). Use it as a dice. Roll and move as directed.	Build a tower/structure using a variety of materials (including tree stumps, planks of wood, tyres, hoops, tunnel and cones).	Use various large sheets/blankets and pegs/string to create a den.	Use a hoop as a skipping rope.	Use stilts to move around.
Balance a ball on the surface of a bat whilst walking.	Walk around on hands and feet.	Scrunch up newspaper and throw it into a bucket/target area.	Play a game of twister.	Move like a frog by crouching down with bent knees. Then, try moving like a range of other animals.	Pop bubbles by clapping. Then, try popping bubbles by stamping.

Fine Motor Skill Activities (underpinned by gross motor skills)					
Add 5 elastic bands to a bottle, can or pinecone before removing them.	Use tweezers to transfer items between bowls. This could be pompoms, petals or leaves.	Thread 10 pieces of cereal/pasta onto a pipe cleaner/straw.	Create a given shape using playdough. This could be a monster, cake or the people in their family.	Place 10 pegs around the edge of a bowl and then remove them again.	Build a tower of 10 Lego pieces/wooden blocks. Then, deconstruct by removing one piece at a time.
Place buttons onto a given template.	Thread 10 beads onto a pipe cleaner. Then, remove them one at a time.	Use stencils to draw a picture. Then, colour the picture in, being careful to stay within the lines.	Use a handheld hole-punch to punch holes into paper. Then, thread a piece of string through the holes.	Pick seeds out of sunflower heads or pick the petals from flower heads one at a time.	Piece together a puzzle. Then, take it apart one piece at a time.
Learn to tie shoelaces.	Dip a cotton bud into paint and dot along a given line that varies in shape.	Sort items using toes. This could be transferring pompoms into the correct coloured bowl.	Place counters or chickpeas along a given line that changes direction.	Post counters into small slits in a box.	Peel and place small dot stickers onto a given outline.
Cut along lines on paper that vary in shape, from straight to curved or zigzagged.	Use paint brushes to clear the pathway along lines hiding under shaving foam. This could also be done with a child's big toe.	Push 10 cocktail sticks into a lump of playdough. Then, remove them one by one.	Add Velcro spots to a ladybird and then remove them.	Use a castanet to pop bubbles.	Weave ribbons and shoelaces through an object with pre-made holes.
Use tweezers to pick 5 googly eyes out of a bowl of slime. Then, use the tweezers to put them back into the slime.	Use chopsticks to transfer 10 cotton wool balls from one area to another.	Stand dominoes closely together in a long line.	Cut out given shapes and stick them down to form a given picture. This could be a boat, house or flower.	Push a mini hairband onto each finger. Then, remove them again.	Push 5 paperclips onto the edge of an empty toilet roll tube. Then, remove them one by one.

Unit 2 - Establishing the Correct Pencil Grip and Writing Position

In this unit and beyond, our priority is for children to establish and maintain the correct pencil grip and writing position. It is important to note that left-handed children should receive specific direction and support to meet their needs.

Lesson	1	2
Revisit		Revisit establishing the correct pencil grip by asking children to pick up a pencil using the 'Point, Pinch and Flip' strategy. Prompt them to verbalise each step.
Teach	<p>Teach children to establish the correct pencil grip using the 'Point, Pinch and Flip' strategy. Display and refer to the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide' and 'Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide'.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Model placing a pencil on a surface and pointing the sharp end of the pencil towards your body. 2) Model using your thumb and index finger to pinch near the end of the pencil at the pointed end. 3) Model using your other hand to push the blunt end and flip the pencil into position. 4) Repeat this process with children following alongside with their own pencils. 	<p>Teach children to establish the correct writing position. Display and refer to the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide' and 'Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide'.</p> <p>Physically model and vocalise each step to achieve the correct writing position:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Sit to the back of your chair. 2) Tuck in your chair. 3) Put both feet on the floor. 4) Straighten your back. 5) Tilt the paper (right-handed children should tilt slightly to the left and left-handed children should tilt slightly to the right).
Practise	Now, repeat each step as the children follow along with you. Encourage children to verbalise each step. For example, "Point the pencil towards me. Pinch the pointed end. Flip the pencil."	Now, repeat each step as the children follow along with you on their chairs. Encourage children to verbalise each step.
Revise	Ask children to establish the correct pencil grip. Address any common misconceptions.	Ask children to establish the correct writing position. Address any common misconceptions.
Apply	Children should have regular access to writing implements to practise this skill.	Children should have regular access to writing implements stationed on tables with chairs to practise this skill.

On completion of this unit, teachers should put additional practice in place for children who are unable to independently establish the correct pencil grip using the suggested activities on the 'Developing an Effective Pencil Grip Guide'.

Unit 3 - Pre-Writing Skills Mastery

This unit covers the pre-writing skills that are essential for a child to obtain in order for them to successfully manipulate writing implements in preparation for letter formation.

Revisit – Recap establishing the writing position and establishing the correct pencil grip by referring to the ‘Unlocking Handwriting - Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide’ and ‘Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide’ and directing children to practise this. If teaching whole-class on the carpet, verbalise the steps with the children. Then, recap the ‘revisit’ section during the ‘practise’ session.

Teach – *Repeat the following teaching sequence for each focus pre-writing skill. The teach section may be delivered whole class with children seated on the carpet with whiteboards and pens before completing the practice activity in groups seated at tables.*

- 1) Tell the children the focus line and show them a pre-written example.
- 2) Use a pointing finger to form the line in the air. Model doing this right-handed and left-handed.
- 3) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten using their dominant writing hand.
- 4) Pick up a pen. Model establishing the correct pencil grip (verbalising the steps to achieve this) and model forming a shorter line in the air from top to bottom whilst using the patten.
- 5) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten with a pencil/whiteboard pen using their dominant writing hand.
- 6) Model drawing multiple lines that gradually decrease in length.
- 7) Ask the children to control the teacher’s pen by verbalising the patten.
- 8) Instruct the children to do this with a pencil on paper or with a pen on a whiteboard.

Practise – Provide each child with a pencil and the corresponding practice sheet to complete seated at a table.

Revise – Children should self-review their practice attempts and decide which line is formed most accurately. Teacher should then address any common misconception with the children (for example, correcting the direction the line should travel).

Apply – Children should be given frequent opportunities to apply these pre-writing skills to a range of different activities. Please refer to ‘Unit 2’ in ‘Unlocking Handwriting – Pre-School’ for activity ideas.

Pre-Writing Skills Mastery						
Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip					
Teach	Form vertical lines starting at the top using the patter, <i>“Start at the top and go all the way down.”</i> Form horizontal lines starting from the left using the patter, <i>“Start from the left and go over to the right.”</i>	Form a cross shape using the patter, <i>“Start at the top and go all the way down. Lift. Start from the left and cross the line over to the right.”</i>	Form a diagonal line from top left to bottom right using the patter, <i>“Start at the top and go all the way down to the right.”</i> Form a diagonal line from bottom left to top right using the patter, <i>“Start at the top and go all the way down to the left.”</i>	Form a vertical zigzag using the patter, <i>“Diagonal down to the right then down to the left.”</i> Form a horizontal zigzag using the patter, <i>“Diagonal up to the right, diagonal down to the right.”</i>	Form curved lines. 1) Starting from the bottom and curving up, over and back towards the bottom (mirroring a rainbow shape) using the patter, <i>“Start at the bottom, curve up and back down to the bottom.”</i> 2) Starting from the top that curves down and up to the top using the patter, <i>“Start at the top, curve down and back up to the top.”</i> 3) Starting at the top and going over to the left curving down (mirroring a ‘C’ shape) using the patter, <i>“Start at the top, curve over to the left and down.”</i>	Connect dots with lines to form the following shapes: 1) Straight lines to form a square 2) Diagonal lines to form a triangle 3) Curved lines to form a circle
Practise	Draw vertical lines starting at the top and horizontal lines starting from the left.	Form a cross shape.	Draw diagonal lines from top left to bottom right and from bottom left to top right.	Form vertical and horizontal zigzags.	Form curved lines (bottom to bottom, top to top and top to bottom).	Connect dots with lines to form shapes.
Revise	Self-review and identify the line formed with most accuracy.					
Apply	Use these skills during various pre-writing activities.					

Unit 4 – Lowercase Letter Formation

Revisit – Recap establishing the writing position and pencil grip by referring to the relevant guides ('Unlocking Handwriting – Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide' and 'Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide'). If teaching whole-class on the carpet, verbalise the steps with the children. Then, recap the 'revisit' section during the 'practise' session.

Teach – Repeat the following teaching sequence for each focus letter. The teach section may be delivered whole-class with children seated on the carpet with whiteboards and pens before completing the practice activity in groups seated at tables.

- 1) Tell the children the focus letter and show them a pre-written example.
- 2) Use a pointing finger to form the letter in the air. Model doing this right-handed and left-handed.
- 3) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patter using their dominant writing hand.
- 4) Pick up a pen. Model establishing the correct pencil grip (verbalising the steps to achieve this) and model forming a smaller version of the letter in the air whilst using the patter.
- 5) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patter with a pencil/whiteboard pen using their dominant writing hand.
- 6) Model drawing the letter onto lined paper that is consistent with the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Line Guides'.
- 7) Ask the children to control the teacher's pen by verbalising the patter.
- 8) Instruct the children to do this with a pencil on paper or with a pen on a whiteboard.

Practise – Provide each child with a pencil and the corresponding practice sheet to complete seated at a table.

Revise – Children should self-review their practice attempts and decide which letter is formed most accurately. The teacher should then address any common misconception with the children (for example, addressing starting the letter in the correct place).

Apply – Children should be given frequent opportunities to apply these letter formation skills through writing opportunities.

Letter Family	Down Letters						
Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip						
Teach	<i>l</i> - down and flick <i>i</i> - short down, flick, give it a dot	<i>t</i> - down and round, pencil off, across <i>u</i> - down, round, up, down and flick	<i>y</i> - down, round, up, down, give it a tail <i>j</i> - down, tail, give it a dot	<i>r</i> - down, up and over <i>n</i> - down, up, over, down and flick	<i>m</i> - down, up, over, down, up, over, down and flick <i>p</i> - down, up to the top, round to the middle	<i>h</i> - down, up to the middle, over, down and flick <i>b</i> - down, up to the middle and round to the bottom	<i>k</i> - down, up to the middle, loop and flick
Practise	<i>l</i> <i>i</i>	<i>t</i> <i>u</i>	<i>y</i> <i>j</i>	<i>r</i> <i>n</i>	<i>m</i> <i>p</i>	<i>h</i> <i>b</i>	<i>k</i>
Review	Children should self-review by circling the letter formed most accurately.						
Apply	Children should be given regular opportunities to practise this formation in their writing.						

Letter Family	Curly Letters					Zigzag Letters	
Lesson	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip						
Teach	<i>c</i> - around the curl to sit on the line <i>σ</i> - around all the way and flick	<i>a</i> - around, up, down and flick <i>d</i> - around, all the way up, down and flick	<i>g</i> - around, up, all the way down and give it a tail <i>q</i> - around, up, all the way down and flick	<i>e</i> - across and over, curl to sit on the line <i>s</i> - up and over, around the other way	<i>f</i> - over, all the way down and add a tail, pencil off and across	<i>v</i> - down, up, flick <i>w</i> - down, up, down, up, flick	<i>x</i> - across to the bottom-right, lift, across to the bottom-left <i>z</i> - straight, across, straight
Practise	<i>c</i> <i>σ</i>	<i>a</i> <i>d</i>	<i>g</i> <i>q</i>	<i>e</i> <i>s</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>v</i> <i>w</i>	<i>x</i> <i>z</i>
Review	Children should self-review by circling the letter formed most accurately.						
Apply	Children should be given regular opportunities to practise this formation in their writing.						

Unit 5 – Forming Letter Families

Revisit –

- 1) Recap establishing the writing position and pencil grip by referring to the relevant guides ('Unlocking Handwriting – Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide' and 'Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide'.) If teaching whole-class on the carpet, verbalise the steps with the children. Then, recap this during the 'practise' session.
- 2) Recall the formation of the other letters in the focus letter family.

Teach – Repeat the following teaching sequence for each focus letter. The teach section may be delivered whole-class with children seated on the carpet with whiteboards and pens before completing the practice activity in groups seated at tables.

- 1) Tell the children the focus letter and which letter family it belongs to by showing them a pre-written example.
- 2) Use a pointing finger to form the letter in the air. Model doing this right-handed and left-handed.
- 3) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten using their dominant writing hand.
- 4) Pick up a pen. Model establishing the correct pencil grip (verbalising the steps to achieve this) and model forming a smaller version of the letter in the air whilst using the patten.
- 5) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten with a pencil/whiteboard pen using their dominant writing hand.
- 6) Model drawing the letter onto lined paper that is consistent with the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Line Guides'.
- 7) Ask the children to control the teacher's pen by verbalising the patten.
- 8) Instruct the children to do this with a pencil on paper or with a pen on a whiteboard.

Practise – Provide each child with a pencil and the corresponding practice sheet to complete seated at a table.

Revise – Children should self-review their practice attempts and decide which letter is formed most accurately. The teacher should then address any common misconception with the children (for example, addressing starting the letter in the correct place).

Apply – Children should be given frequent opportunities to apply these letter formation skills through writing opportunities.

Letter Family	Down Letter Family					
Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip					
		Recall formation of previously learnt 'down' letters: <i>l i t</i>	Recall formation of previously learnt 'down' letters: <i>l i t u y j</i>	Recall formation of previously learnt 'down' letters: <i>l i t u y j r n m</i>	Recall formation of previously learnt 'down' letters: <i>l i t u y j r n m p h</i>	
Teach	<i>l</i> -down and flick <i>i</i> – short down, flick, give it a dot <i>t</i> – down and round, pencil off, across	<i>u</i> – down, round, up, down and flick <i>y</i> – down, round, up, down, give it a tail <i>j</i> – down, tail, give it a dot	<i>r</i> - down, up and over <i>n</i> – down, up, over, down and flick <i>m</i> – down, up, over, down, up, over, down and flick	<i>p</i> – down, up to the top, round to the middle <i>h</i> – down, up to the middle, over, down and flick	<i>b</i> – down, up to the middle and round to the bottom <i>k</i> – down, up to the middle, loop and flick	Revisit formation of all 'down' letters.
Practise	<i>l</i> <i>i</i> <i>t</i>	<i>u</i> <i>y</i> <i>j</i>	<i>r</i> <i>n</i> <i>m</i>	<i>p</i> <i>h</i>	<i>b</i> <i>k</i>	Write all 'down' letters.
Review	Children should self-review by circling the letter formed most accurately.					
Apply	Children should be given regular opportunities to practise this formation in their writing.					

Letter Family	Curly Letter Family				Zigzag Letter Family		
Lesson	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip						
		Recall formation of previously learnt 'curly' letters: <i>c σ a</i>	Recall formation of previously learnt 'curly' letters: <i>c σ a d g q</i>			Recall formation of previously learnt 'curly' letters: <i>v w</i>	
Teach	<i>c</i> – around the curl to sit on the line <i>σ</i> – around all the way and flick <i>a</i> – around, up, down and flick	<i>d</i> – around, all the way up, down and flick <i>g</i> – around, up, all the way down and give it a tail <i>q</i> – around, up, all the way down and flick	<i>e</i> – across and over, curl to sit on the line <i>s</i> – up and over, around the other way <i>f</i> – over, all the way down and add a tail, pencil off and across	Revisit formation of all 'curly' letters	<i>v</i> – down, up, flick <i>w</i> – down, up, down, up, flick	<i>x</i> – across to the bottom-right, lift, across to the bottom-left <i>z</i> – straight, across, straight	Revisit formation of all 'zigzag' letters.
Practise	<i>c</i> <i>σ</i> <i>a</i>	<i>d</i> <i>g</i> <i>q</i>	<i>e</i> <i>s</i> <i>f</i>	Write all 'curly' letters	<i>v</i> <i>w</i>	<i>x</i> <i>z</i>	Write all 'zigzag' letters.
Review	Children should self-review by circling the letter formed most accurately.						
Apply	Children should be given regular opportunities to practise this formation in their writing.						

On completion of this unit, teachers should assess each child's letter formation using the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Lowercase Letter Formation Assessment' and put additional practice in place for groups of children with common misconceptions.

Unit 6 – Name Writing

Throughout the year, the children will have regularly encountered and read their names written on their books, labels and pegs. They may recognise the letters that make up their name and may even form these letters correctly by applying their knowledge of letter formation. In this unit, children will practise forming the letters in their names correctly, including learning to form the uppercase letter at the beginning of their name. Lesson 2 is designed to be repeated until most children can form their names correctly.

Name writing		
Lesson	1	2
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip	
		Revisit the uppercase letter needed for the child's name.
Teach	Group children by the first letter of their names and teach them to form their uppercase letter using the usual teaching sequence.	Children should be given a laminated copy of their name with directional arrows to complete these tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise tracing over with their finger • Practise writing over with a whiteboard pen
Practise	Children should practise forming the uppercase letter needed for their name using the corresponding practice sheet.	Children should write their name 5 times onto the line guides from the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Line guides' resource. The sheet should be prepared in advance with the child's name written in a highlighter pen for the child to trace over with their pencil before moving onto practising without this guidance.
Review	Children should self-review by circling the letter formed most accurately.	Children should identify which letters have been formed correctly and which may need more practise.
Apply	Children should be encouraged to add their name to their work/creations.	

On completion of this unit, teachers should put additional practice in place for children who are unable to independently form the letters in their name correctly.

Unit 7 - Number Formation

Revisit –

1) Recap establishing the writing position and pencil grip by referring to the relevant guides ('Unlocking Handwriting – Writing Position and Pencil Grip Teacher Guide' and 'Unlocking Handwriting – Getting Ready to Write Guide'). If teaching whole-class on the carpet, verbalise the steps with the children. Then, recap this during the 'practise' session.

Teach – Repeat the following teaching sequence for each focus number. The teach section may be delivered whole-class with children seated on the carpet with whiteboards and pens before completing the practise activity in groups seated at tables.

- 1) Tell the children the focus number and show them a pre-written example.
- 2) Use a pointing finger to form the number in the air. Model doing this right-handed and left-handed.
- 3) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten using their dominant writing hand.
- 4) Pick up a pen. Model establishing the correct pencil grip and model forming a smaller version of the number in the air whilst using the patten.
- 5) Instruct the children to do this whilst verbalising the patten with a pencil/whiteboard pen using their dominant writing hand.
- 6) Model drawing the number onto lined paper that is consistent with the 'Unlocking Handwriting – Line Guides'.
- 7) Ask the children to control the teacher's pen by verbalising the patten.
- 8) Instruct the children to do this with a pencil on paper or with a pen on a whiteboard.

Practise – Provide each child with a pencil and the corresponding practice sheet to complete seated at a table.

Revise – Children should self-review their practice attempts and decide which number is formed most accurately. The teacher should then address any common misconception with the children (for example, addressing starting the number in the correct place).

Apply – Children should be given frequent opportunities to apply these number formation skills through a range of different activities.

Number Formation						
Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6
Revisit	Writing position Pencil grip					
Teach	<p>0 – All the way around we go. That's the way we form zero.</p> <p>1 – Race down the line. Now you've won! That's the way we form a one.</p>	<p>2 – Half a heart then to the right is your clue. That's the way we form a two.</p> <p>3 – Backwards c, backwards c, that's the way we form a three.</p>	<p>4 – Down, across then down some more. That's the way we form a four.</p> <p>5 – Buzz down the line and around the hive, then across the top. That's the way we form a five.</p>	<p>6 – Around in a curve, add a loop to the mix. That's the way we form a six.</p> <p>7 – A line across first, a line down second. That's the way we form a seven.</p>	<p>8 – Draw an 's', join it up curved – not straight! That's the way we form an eight.</p> <p>9 – Around in a loop, then straight down the line. That's the way we form a nine.</p>	<p>Revisit 5</p> <p>Revisit 9</p>
Practise	0 1	2 3	4 5	6 7	8 9	<p>Revisit 5</p> <p>Revisit 9</p>
Apply	Children should be given regular opportunities to practise this formation in maths.					