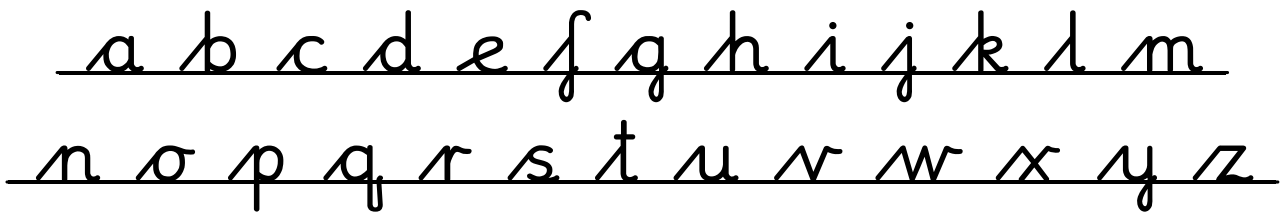


# Introduction to the Debbie Hepplewhite method of teaching fully joined handwriting



This fully joined handwriting style and the method of teaching are suitable and successful for **any age** (from around six years old). The style is designed by Debbie Hepplewhite specifically for *teaching purposes* and it works exceptionally well to provide a *fresh start* in joined handwriting for older pupils. The *diagonal line* joins soften as the writer becomes increasingly fluent. The style is taught as separate letters at first - not letter strings - and all the letters with their diagonal lead-in joins are taught to proficiency and automaticity before starting to join the letters into words. It is preferable to provide opportunities for intensive **daily** practice rather than, for example, a pace of one lesson per week.

Good handwriting is an essential skill in the quest to spell and write fluently, confidently and competently. A joined handwriting style links kinaesthetic 'muscle memory' with the relationship between the sounds of our speech and the letter shapes, letter groupings and whole written words. The ability to write neatly can raise self-esteem and provides a motivating factor in the production of written work.

## Pencil or pen hold - and posture

Teach the traditional **tripod** pencil grip. For younger learners, make this skill child-friendly by saying, "*Put your froggy legs [thumb and forefinger] on the bottom of the painted part of the pencil [not on the cone-shaped end part] with the pencil across the frog's back [back of the hand], then put the log under the frog*" [middle finger supporting the pencil to complete the tripod grip].

Emphasise the need for good sitting posture. The writing hand should rest lightly on the paper *below the words being written* so that the words are not obscured. The paper may be tilted slightly to the right (for right-handers) or to the left (for left-handers) to increase comfort. The spare hand keeps the paper secure.

## Handwriting style

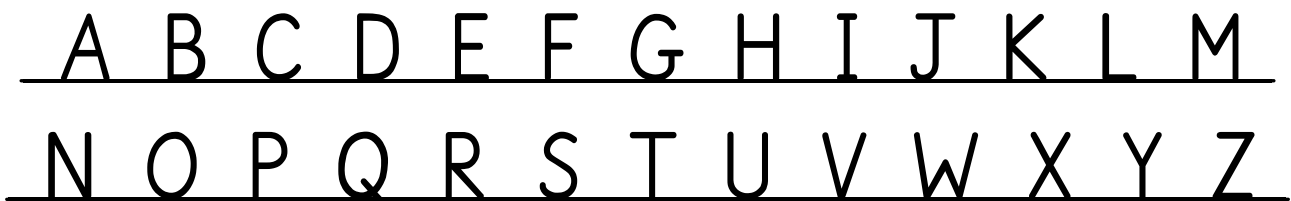
The style is an all-joined style with two main joins - a **diagonal join** which starts with the pencil point, or pen, on the writing line and a **washing line join** (or smile join). The descenders of letters *f, g, j* and *y* "...go straight down through the writing line with a thin loop..." and continue to form the beginning of the diagonal join to the following letter. The diagonal join and washing line join (or **smile** join) need to be adjusted for writing the letter *e*.

Demonstrate the two main joins by drawing two separate squares sitting on a writing line to just less than 'half height' of the space between two writing lines. In one square draw a straight line from the bottom left corner to the top right corner to form the **diagonal line join**. In the other square, draw a curved line from the top left corner to the top right corner to form the **washing line join** (or smile join).

The joins are very important for spacing letters evenly and learners need to understand that there must be a clear 'join' between all the letter shapes. Learners are taught to think carefully about which part of each letter is **the letter shape** and which part of the letter is **the join**. At first, all lower case letters are taught as discrete (separate) shapes starting with the pencil point 'on the [writing] line' to form the diagonal lead-in stroke or *leader* [see the examples below]. A lead-in stroke at the beginning of every word in lower case is considered to be very **dyslexia-friendly**. This style is not taught by writing any long letter strings of the same letter.

Not only are learners taught to form each individual letter shape to fluency, they are also taught to think carefully about the letters they write and the join **each letter needs in whole words**. This engagement with the mechanics of the writing style instead of just mindlessly copying strings of letter shapes and words results in learners **proceeding rapidly to joining any words they wish to write independently**. Some learners may be able to convert to this style almost immediately.

All upper case, or capital, letters are simple *print* letter shapes which do not join other letters. Teach that capital letters start 'from the top' or 'in the air' - that is, from just below the upper writing line (dependent upon the spacing between lines). When writing a whole word which requires a capital letter at the beginning, a small space is left after the capital letter and the second [lower case] letter starts 'on the line' and all subsequent letters in the word are joined.



## The order of teaching the lower case letter shapes

It is important to teach the letters which start like the letter *c* to fluency before the other letters. Teach, "Start on the line, diagonal join to half height, then hook over, back and round" for the letter *c*. For the subsequent letters which start like *c*, describe and model how to, "...catch the hook...". After the letters *o*, *r*, *n*, *m*, *x* which all end with washing line joins, an extra 'hook over' needs to be added to then form the *c* group of letters *c*, *a*, *d*, *s*, *g*, *o*, *q*.

<i>c</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>qu</i>	<i>f</i>
<i>l</i>	<i>t</i>		<i>h</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>k</i>		<i>e</i>
<i>r</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>	
<i>u</i>	<i>y</i>		<i>v</i>	<i>w</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>z</i>

For the full 'patter' for forming the letters, see the pdf:  
[Suggested 'patter' for the Debbie Hepplewhite method of teaching fully joined handwriting.](#)