

Verbal Path for the Formation of Letters

Rationale

Sometimes it helps students to say aloud the directions for making a letter. This “verbal path” helps students to understand the directional movement that is essential. In addition, it gives the teacher and the students a language to talk through the letter and its features. According to Marie Clay, in Becoming Literate, “it would be reasonable that **writing** letters contributes to learning about them.” In a series of experiments in Russia, students were taught to write letters in three different ways:

1. After being given a model for a letter, with instructions to copy it, 50 repetitions were required for an average child to master the task.
2. When the letter model was presented with the teacher’s verbal guidance for the actions for writing the letter, mastery occurred after an average of 10 repetitions.
3. When the student was taught to describe the features and actions for forming the letter, providing direction for himself, mastery was achieved after an average of 4 repetitions.

According to Clay’s report of the research, “children trained in this third type of program shifted to writing unfamiliar letters in varied settings without much difficulty”. For young learners, organizing the orienting for the formation of letters is important in developing “motor habits” for knowing the letters.

On the next two pages are suggestions for language for creating a verbal path to the distinctive features of manuscript lowercase and uppercase letters. In addition, the models for manuscript and cursive letter and numeral formations are included.

Modeling is crucial for placement of pencil on paper according to the letter being written.

Verbal Path for the Formation of Letters

Lowercase Letter Formation

a - around, down

b - down, up, around

c - around, stop

d - around, up, down

e - across, around, stop

f - curve, down, cross

g - around, down, curve

h - down, up, over

i - down, dot

j - down, curve, dot

k - down, slant in, slant out

l - down

m - down, up over, up over

n - down, up over

o - around

p - down, up, around

q - around, down, curve

r - down, up, over

s - around, curve, around

t - down, cross

u - down, curve up, down

v - slant down, up

w - slant down, up, down, up

x - slant right, slant left

y - slant right, slant left, down

z - across, slant, across

Verbal Path for the Formation of Letters

Uppercase Letter Formation

A - slant down, slant down, across

B - down, around, around

C - around, stop

D - down, around

E - down, across, across, across

F - down, across, across

G - around, back

H - down, down, across

I - down, across, across

J - down, curve, across

K - down, slant in, slant out

L - down, across

M - down, slant, slant, down

N - down, slant, down

O - around

P - down, around

Q - around, slant

R - down, around, slant out

S - around, curve, around

T - down, across

U - down, curve up

V - slant down, up

W - slant down, up, down, up

X - slant right, slant left

Y - slant down, up, down

Z - across, slant, across

Frequently Asked Questions

- **When do you teach handwriting?**

In the primary grades (K-2), correct handwriting formation should be demonstrated and modeled as the teacher “thinks aloud” during Interactive Writing. Also, there are frequent opportunities during small group instruction at the Emergent Stage to teach/provide guided practice for correct formation.

In the elementary grades (3-5), correct handwriting formation should be demonstrated and modeled by the teacher throughout the instructional day.

While the ELA Standards state that handwriting should be legible, the primary purpose for writing is conveying a message.

- **When should lined paper be introduced?**

Unlined paper should be used until the child demonstrates control in forming the letters. Lined paper poses too many constraints on the child's performance of letter formation. The child who gradually learns to control the production of manuscript letters on blank paper transfers easily to lined paper. Teacher observation in Pre-kindergarten through Grade 1 is crucial for making the decision to move to lined paper. Different purposes for writing may determine the type of paper used.

- **When is cursive handwriting introduced?**

In the South Carolina ELA Standards, cursive handwriting is taught in grades 2 and 3. Refer to the model for cursive letter and numeral formation.