

# Suggestions and 'patter' for the Debbie Hepplewhite method of teaching print handwriting

## Introduction

- It is recommended that a **simple print** handwriting style is taught first to all young learners alongside early phonics teaching rather than a style which includes 'lead-in strokes' for later joined handwriting.
- Establish from the outset that you are teaching the 'print' style of handwriting and that, when they are older, the children will be taught to join the letters for 'joined' handwriting. Say that it is **important to be able to print** – books are published in 'print' and print is essential for such things as labels where the greatest clarity is needed. **Ask where we use labels.**
- Talk about **fonts** – that is, different styles of letter shapes – as young learners will encounter a wide range of fonts in storybooks, environmental print and on computers. See '**Flashcards of Alphabet Letter Shapes in Different Fonts with suggestions for use**' which is available via the Free Resources page at [www.phonicsinternational.com](http://www.phonicsinternational.com) .
- Display an **Alphabet Poster** with **capital** (upper case) letters and **lower case** letters shown on writing lines and **point out that:**
  1. These are all the letter shapes for writing in the **English** language.
  2. In **English** writing, the **capital** letter shapes are used only for special reasons – like the first letter of special names of people and places and for the first letter of the first word beginning a sentence.
  3. Words are generally written in the **lower case** letters unless there is a special reason such as words meant to be said very loudly like 'WATCH OUT!' (in addition to beginning special names and beginning sentences).
  4. The capital letters **are code for the same sounds** as lower case letters. So, for example, **A** is code for the /a/ sound as in **Ann**; **a** is code for the /a/ sound as in **apple**. The letters **A** and **a** are both code for the /a/ sound.
  5. When practising letter shape formation, link with the first 'sounds' that the letters **are code for** rather than **letter names** in the first instance: for example, **Aa** "/a/" (as in **apple**), **Bb** "/b/" (as in **bat**), **Cc** "/k/" (as in **cat**) and so on.

See below the 'patter chart' for more suggestions about teaching related to the alphabet, alphabetical order, letter names and sounds.

# The sub-skills for handwriting

- 1) **Directionality:** Very young learners can have great fun being taught about the 'directionality' of letter formation – and suitable activities can be provided for whole classes and groups of children, for example:
- playing games outdoors based on letter formation such as using paintbrushes to form letter shapes with water on the playground, and using sticks in sandpits
  - forming letter shapes with art materials such as paints, chalks, play-dough, felt pens,
  - various commercial games designed for learning letter formation
  - large scale 'air writing' – making the letter shapes 'in the air' with gross motor movements whilst **saying the sounds** linked to the letters, or in response to being supplied the sounds linked to the letters by the teacher (**avoid facing the children and forming letter shapes 'backwards' – it is better to face the same way as the children and to form the letter shapes with exactly the same movements that the children need to make**)
  - writing on mini-whiteboards with dry-wipe markers (use narrow markers for small hands if possible)
  - an extension of the activities above where it is possible to include the 'writing line' to learn the letters' positions on the line – not just the shape of the letters

Note that these games and activities engage the youngest learners – but they are not a substitute for paper-and-pencil activities to practise smaller-sized letter formation.

- 2) **Tripod pencil hold or grip:** Very young learners can be taught to hold the pencil correctly from the earliest stages with lots of modelling, encouragement and kind persistent patience! Motivate with a beanbag frog that can sit on the children's table when they are trying very hard to 'remember' to hold their pencil correctly. Say, "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*]. See [www.blackberrycottageconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.blackberrycottageconsultancy.co.uk) for beanbag frogs.

Note that it is better to use 'normal-sized' pencils than fatter pencils, as small hands are able to 'grip' the narrower pencils more effectively.

- 3) **Posture and paper position:** Teach learners to sit with good posture at correct-height desks facing forwards to the front of the class wherever possible; to hold the writing implement with the correct tripod grip, slanting the paper slightly [*right for right-handers, left for left-handers*] and securing it with the spare hand – and to write from 'beneath' the words – **not** 'above' !

Reinforce these conditions constantly in a kindly way and from one year to the next. School surveys of writing habits reveal that there is a high percentage of pupils who sit badly and hold pencils poorly, hooking their wrists around and writing 'above' words and not 'beneath'.

## The 'print' style lower case letters

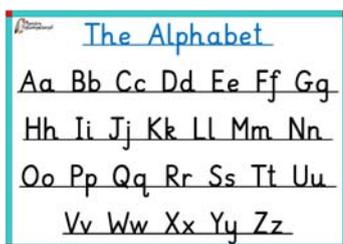
a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
n o p q r s t u v w x y z

## The 'print' style capital or upper case letters

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

- Capital letters are **exactly the same style** whether writing in print or joined handwriting.
- When writing **capital letters**, always start '*in the air*'.

## The Alphabet - posters



See [www.debbiehepplewhitehandwriting.com](http://www.debbiehepplewhitehandwriting.com) for a wide range of free alphabet and handwriting resources to download.

See [www.cursivewriting.org](http://www.cursivewriting.org) to purchase the software for Debbie Hepplewhite's print and joined handwriting fonts to create resources for school purposes.

# Suggested 'patter' for lower case letters

Letters	Patter <span style="float: right;">[There are no 'tram lines' with this method.]</span>
<u>c</u>	This is a half-height letter which sits on the line. There are six more letters which start exactly the same way. We can call them the 'curly /k/ letters'. [Say "/k/" for young beginners rather than 'see']: <b>Start between the writing lines slightly lower than half-height:</b> Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl around (to sit on the line).
<u>a</u>	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl around. <b>Straighten up to catch the hook, then go straight down, and flick.</b>
<u>d</u>	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl around. <b>Straighten up to catch the hook, then keep going straight up (to just below the top writing line) to make a tall letter, then go straight down (to the bottom writing line), and flick.</b>
<u>s</u>	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left. <b>Curl around like a snake (which sits on the writing line).</b>
<u>g</u>	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl around. <b>Straighten up to catch the hook, then go straight down through the writing line. Curl to make a tail below the writing line from right to left.</b>
<u>o</u>	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl right around <b>to form a circle (which sits on the writing line).</b>
<u>qu</u> Go to u for u formation	This letter starts like the curly /k/ between the writing lines: Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left, and curl around. <b>Straighten up to catch the hook, then go straight down through the writing line. Loop at the bottom (from left to right) to make a small 'smile' (but notice that it curls the opposite way round to the 'tail' of the /g/).</b>
<u>f</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off in the same way as the curly /k/ letters <b>but higher up:</b> Go 'up and over the hill' from right to left then go <b>straight down through the writing line. Curl to make a tail below the writing line from right to left (like the /g/).</b>
<u>l</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off just below the top writing line: Go straight down to the bottom writing line and flick.
<u>t</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off just below the top writing line: Go straight down to the bottom line and flick. <b>Take your pencil off. Cross the stick from left to right just above the half-way point.</b>
<u>h</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off just below the top writing line: Go straight down to the bottom line. Go back up (to half-height) to form a <b>full bridge</b> , then flick.

<u>b</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off just below the top writing line: Go straight down to the bottom line. Go back up (to half-height) to form <b>half a bridge</b> then curve to meet the bottom of the stick.
<u>k</u>	This is a tall letter and it starts off just below the top writing line: Go straight down to the bottom line. Go back up (to half-height) to form <b>half a bridge</b> then <b>turn it into a bow shape</b> like this... <i>[it's really like half a bow - demonstrate a full bow shape with two loops and two tails and then rub out the left-hand side of the bow].</i>
<u>r</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down to the line: Go back up to form <b>half a bridge</b> .
<u>n</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down to the line: Go back up to form a <b>full bridge</b> , then flick.
<u>m</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down to the line. Go back up to form a <b>full bridge</b> . Then form <b>another full bridge</b> , then flick.
<u>p</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go <b>straight down through the writing line</b> . Go straight back up to form <b>half a bridge</b> which curves round to form <b>a bowl</b> which sits on the writing line.
<u>i</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down to the line, then flick. Then <b>take your pencil off</b> and put a little dot above the stick.
<u>j</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go <b>straight down through the writing line</b> . <b>Curl to make a tail</b> below the writing line from right to left (like the /g/ and the /f/). Then <b>take your pencil off</b> and put a little dot above the stick.
<u>u</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down and curl to form <b>a bowl</b> sitting on the writing line. Go back up to half-height, then straight back down to the writing line and flick.
<u>y</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Go straight down and curl to form <b>a bowl</b> sitting on the writing line. Go back up to half-height, then straight back down <b>straight through the writing line</b> . <b>Curl to make a tail</b> below the writing line from right to left (like the /g/, the /f/ and the /j/).
<u>v</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: <b>Form a single zigzag</b> which sits on the writing line.
<u>w</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: <b>Form a double zigzag</b> which sits on the writing line.
<u>x</u>	This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: <b>Form a diagonal line</b> similar to the first line of the /v/. <b>Take your pencil-point off</b> and start on the bottom writing line to form a <b>diagonal line</b> up to half height which crosses the first line.

	<p>This is a half-height letter which starts half-way between the writing lines: Form a short straight line across from left to right. Form a diagonal line <b>back down</b> to the line. Then form another short straight line <b>across from left to right</b> (which is along the bottom writing line).</p>
	<p>This is a half-height letter. Start a little bit lower than half-way between the writing lines: Set off from left to right. <b>Sweep right around</b> and continue as if you are forming the curly /k/ letter sitting on the writing line.</p>

## More about teaching linked to the alphabet

- Teach 'alphabetical order' and 'letter names' by singing an alphabet song.
- Letter names help us to remember 'alphabetical order' which is great for organising words in dictionaries and names in registers – and, later, we can learn to help one another with spelling difficult words by saying the letter names of the letters in the words in order from beginning to end. [Note that using letter names in order is a spelling convention to relay any spelling accurately – BUT the proficient speller's actual SKILL is identifying **the sounds** all-through-the-spoken-word (oral segmenting) and then allotting graphemes (letters and letter groups) for each sound.]
- Explain that letter names are not needed for learning to read and spell. We need to link the 'sounds of speech' **with the letters and letter groups** when learning to read and spell new words.

When writing on narrowly spaced lines in some exercise books, the ascenders of letters may be relatively taller, and the descenders may be relatively longer, compared with the letter formation in the generous spacing of the software programme provided by Rob and Carol Cockerham at: [www.cursivewriting.org](http://www.cursivewriting.org)

This is the spacing between lines for the print software when you underscore the print to create the writing lines.

*It is recommended that all teachers and supporting adults who write on boards and mark work should use the school's handwriting style consistently. If the pupils are infants and writing in print – the adults write in print. If the pupils are at the stage of writing in joined writing, the adults should write in the school's joined handwriting.*