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PENPALS *for*  
*Handwriting*

# National Handwriting Day Pack



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- Shapes and patterns
- Ten ideas for hand and finger play
- Ten ideas for developing handwriting through making and modelling
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- Uppercase alphabet
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Discover more at [cambridge.org/penpals](https://www.cambridge.org/penpals)



# Nine ideas to encourage writing

Handwriting is something that should be practised little and often. In this digital age, it is often challenging to find opportunities to get children to practise at home and at school. Here are nine ideas to encourage and inspire your class to write.

## 1. Shopping Lists

This is a great task that can be adapted depending on the age of the children. The younger children could draw the items, the older children can write down the names or just add one or two items if they can't manage the whole list.

## 2. To do lists

Ask them to write down a daily "to do" list. This could include making breakfast, packing a lunch and going to nursery or school. This promotes independence and also makes them think about their own tasks. You could get them to write down all the things they have to do in the morning before they go to school or nursery and include pictures. For example get dressed, brush my teeth, have breakfast etc. They can then put this in their bedroom as a reminder!

## 3. Cards/postcards

Ask the class to write a postcard to a friend and encourage them to write about their local town or village. Younger children who haven't yet learnt letter formation can draw pictures instead, this will still help them develop the fine motor skills needed for writing.

## 4. Holiday Journals

Over the school holidays, ask your class to create a holiday journal or scrap book where they record their activities and adventures. They could keep pictures, tickets or leaflets and stick them in their journal while adding notes. It may be too much to write every day, depending on their age, but they could do it at the end of the week and write about the best things that happened.

## 5. Book or film review

Show your class book or film reviews online and suggest they write one of their own. Ask them to describe what the book or film was about, what they particularly liked about it and what they didn't like. Finally ask them to score the book or film out of 5.





# Nine ideas to encourage writing

## 6. Play date or Party invitations

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Encourage the class to write invitations to a party. Alternatively, they could write a card or note to invite a friend to come over and play.

## 7. Letters to the past

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Why not get parents involved? Ask them to write a short note to their child and encourage them to write back. It's also a good idea to keep the same note going back and forth, folding each time so that they have to open the message for added excitement.

## 8. Pen pals

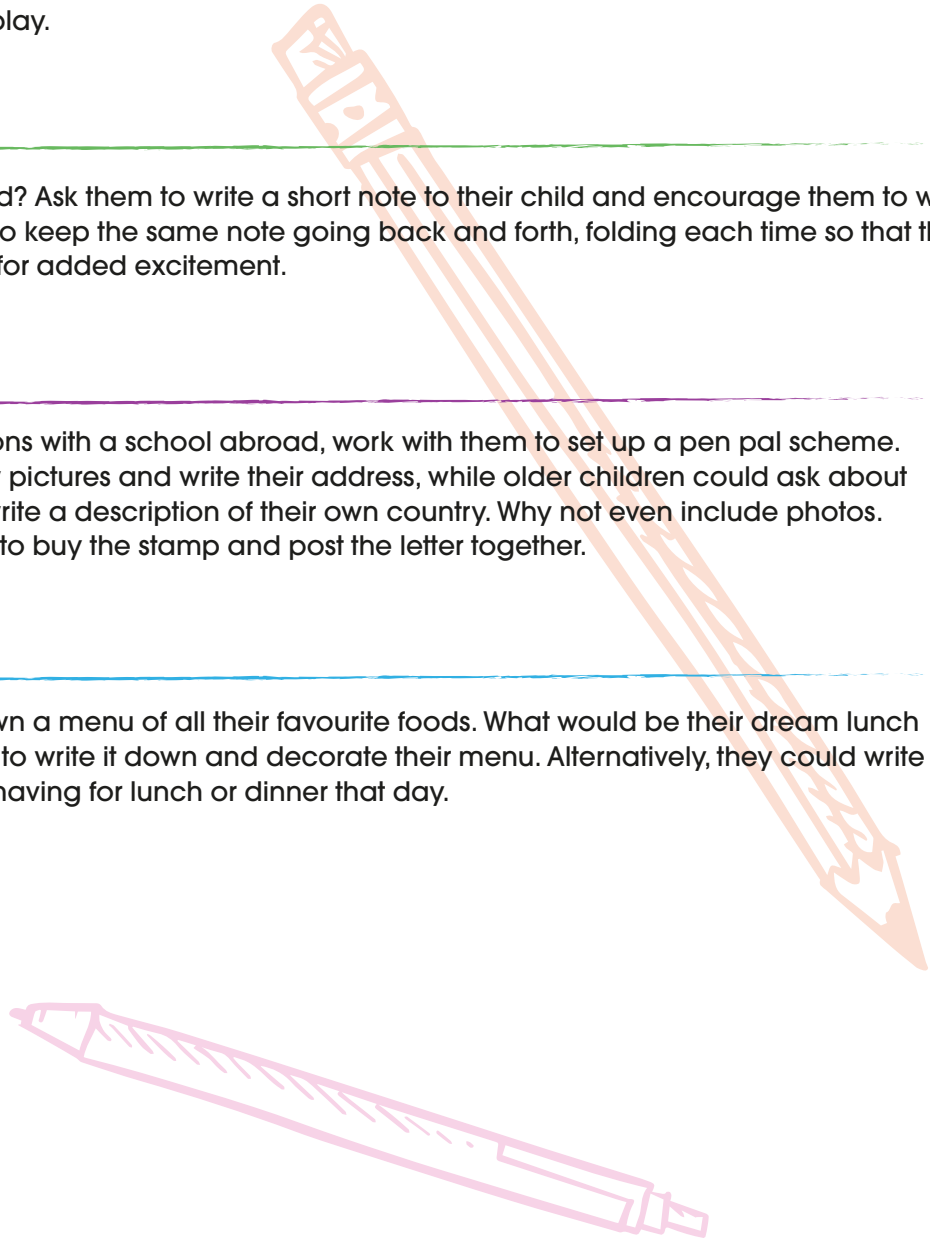
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If your school has connections with a school abroad, work with them to set up a pen pal scheme. A younger child could draw pictures and write their address, while older children could ask about their pen pal's home and write a description of their own country. Why not even include photos. Take them to the post office to buy the stamp and post the letter together.

## 9. Best Ever Menu

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Ask the children to write down a menu of all their favourite foods. What would be their dream lunch or dinner? Encourage them to write it down and decorate their menu. Alternatively, they could write a menu with what they are having for lunch or dinner that day.



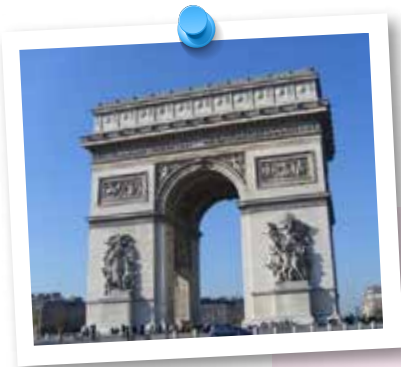


# Shapes and Patterns

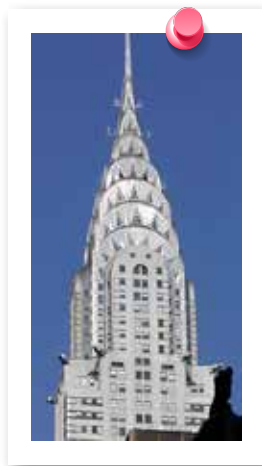
**For children to be able to handwrite fluently and quickly, they need to be able to recognise patterns and talk about shapes and movements. Get out and about with your class and explore your surroundings!**

When you are out with the children draw their attention to the shapes and patterns in their environment and the world around them. Ask them to identify common shapes and help them to develop the vocabulary for describing them. You can also ask them to trace the shapes with their hand in the sky. Take a look at our photos of iconic buildings around the world and ask them to see what shapes they can find.

1. Arc de Triumph, Paris



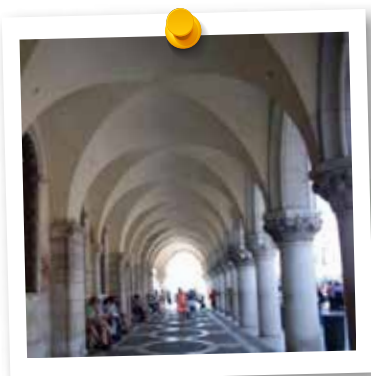
2. Chrysler Building, New York



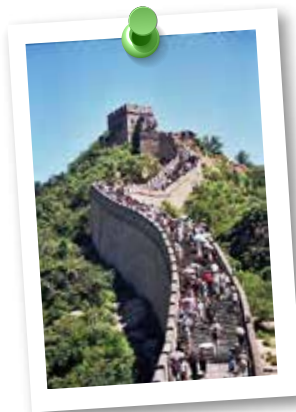
3. Eiffel Tower, Paris



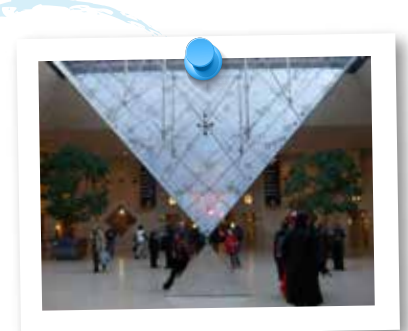
4. Doge's Palace, Venice



5. Great Wall of China



6. Louvre, Paris





# Shapes and Patterns

7. Machu Picchu, Peru



8. Stonehenge, England



9. Sydney Opera House, Sydney



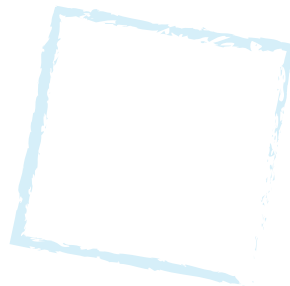
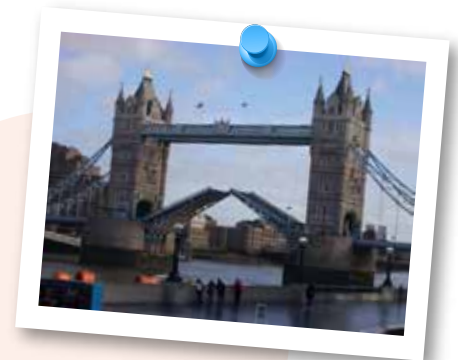
10. The Great Pyramid, Egypt



11. Tower Bridge, London



12. Tower Bridge, London  
(with the drawbridge up)





# Ten ideas for hand and finger play

Action rhymes and finger rhymes are an obvious way to help children explore the movement (stretch, curl, bend, clench, unfurl, point, etc.) and the language of hands (palms, fingers, thumbs, wrists, index, knuckles, etc.). Exercising fingers in preparation for handwriting is important as small children may find it physically tiring to hold pens and pencils – they often grip too tightly. The rhymes below are suggested for practicing different hand and finger movements, but there are many, many more. Consider building a few of these into a routine so that the children adopt the habit of warming up the hands and fingers in preparation for handwriting. You may just want to do them because they're fun!

Focus of rhyme	Suggested rhyme(s)/action	Notes for hand actions
<b>1.</b> Warming up hands and arms.	Make shapes with fingers (triangle, diamond, oval, and circle). Make letter shapes with fingers (e.g. C, O).  <b>a)</b> The Wheels on the Bus	Make circles (with thumb and forefingers for wheels) and diagonals (raised forefingers for wipers), waggle all fingers (fingers to thumbs opening and closing to show mouths moving for chattering people), etc.
	<b>b)</b> Grandmother's Glasses	Hands up to eyes in circles. Hands on head. Clap hands. Interweave fingers and rest.
<b>2.</b> Working on co-ordination of body actions and brain.	<b>c)</b> Peter Hammers	Use arms with clenched fists, one at a time, then left leg, then right leg, then nod head too.
	<b>d)</b> Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes	Touch head, shoulders, knees and toes as you sing.
<b>3.</b> Working on contrast: speed, rhythm.	<b>e)</b> Slowly, Slowly	Walk hand slowly up your arm, then quickly run it up and down for the mouse.



see more on page 2 →





Focus of rhyme	Suggested rhyme(s)/action	Notes for hand actions
4. Working on fine control.	f) Incy Wincy Spider	Make fingers walk up opposite forearm like a spider. Raise hands and wiggle fingers for rain. Raise hands and make a wide circle for sun. Repeat first action to finish.
	g) Here is the Church	Interlace fingers, point index fingers, open thumbs, turn hands over and wiggle fingertips.
5. Rhymes for straight lines.	h) Tommy Thumb	Show each finger as you sing.
	i) Five Little Peas	Clasp one hand round the other, raise thumbs, straighten each pair of fingers in turn, slowly more hands apart and clap!
6. Rhymes for round, flowing movement.	j) Firework (Tony Mitton) k) In and Out the Dusty Bluebells	Scribble with index finger in the air. Make hands twist and turn and flow. Put hands together and launch into the air in an outward movement to exercise shoulders. Move hand in wave motion (up and down).
7. Rhymes for circles, loops and garlands.	l) The Wheels on the Bus	The wheels on the bus (makes circles for wheels), the wipers on the bus (make index fingers move back and forth), etc.
8. Rhymes for zig-zag movements	m) Jack and Jill	Zig-zag with index finger in a horizontal or vertical plane in rhythm to the rhythm.
9. Rhymes for eights (and spirals).	n) In and Out the Dusty Bluebells	Move hand in figure of eight.
10. Clapping, tapping and fists.	o) One Potato, Two Potato	Move fists up and down to bang against each other.
	p) Adapt Peter Hammers (taps, claps, etc.)	

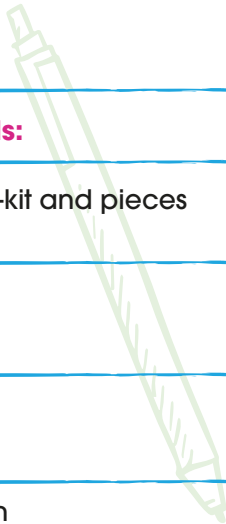




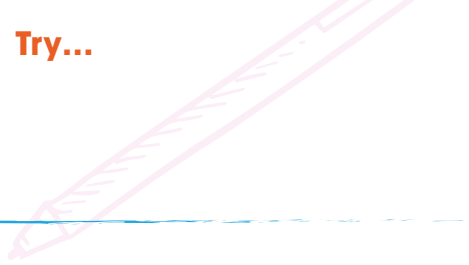
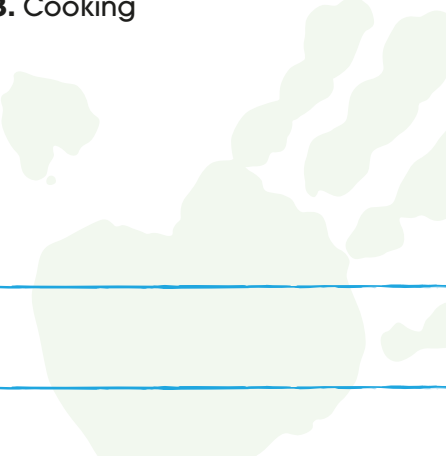
## Ten ideas for developing handwriting through making and modelling.

Making and modelling is another way of strengthening and developing fine and gross motor skills. Get out the play dough, do some baking and build things and get the hammers out (with supervision of course), all great fun at the same time getting them ready for writing.

<b>Activities</b> <i>(many of these activities involve both gross and fine motor skills)</i>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated handwriting language</b> <i>(use opportunities to talk about 'language of the hands', e.g. palm, knuckles)</i>	<b>Try...</b>
<b>Hard materials:</b>			
<b>1. Using a tool-kit and pieces of wood</b>	Hammering	Straight lines, up, down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• capital letters</li> </ul>
	Sawing	Back and forth, backwards and forwards, away, towards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• long ladders</li> </ul>
	Screwing	Turn, clockwise, anticlockwise, the other way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• zig-zags</li> </ul>
<b>2. Construction</b>	Building, connecting, manipulating, lifting, lining up, levelling	Up, down, high, low, left, right, under	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patterns with straight lines</li> </ul> <p><i>see more on page 2 →</i></p>





<b>Activities</b> <i>(many of these activities involve both gross and fine motor skills)</i>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated handwriting language</b> <i>(use opportunities to talk about 'language of the hands', e.g. palm, knuckles)</i>	<b>Try...</b>
<b>Pliable materials:</b>			
<b>3. Cooking</b>  	Kneading  Rolling with rolling pin, hands or fingers	Down, press  Away, towards, press, pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making letter-shaped biscuits.</li> <li>• Making biscuits/cakes and decorating them with tubes of icing or different shaped decorations. Decorate the biscuit shapes with different handwriting patterns.</li> </ul>
	Whisking	Round and round, clockwise, anticlockwise, the other way	
	Using cutters	Space, fingers, spread out	
<b>4. Play dough (soft)</b>	Kneading and moulding	Press, pressure, away, towards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making patterns and letters.</li> </ul>
			<i>see more on page 3 →</i>

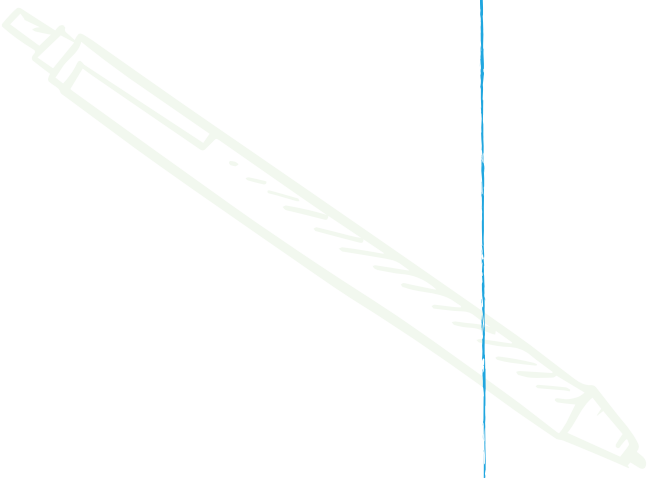
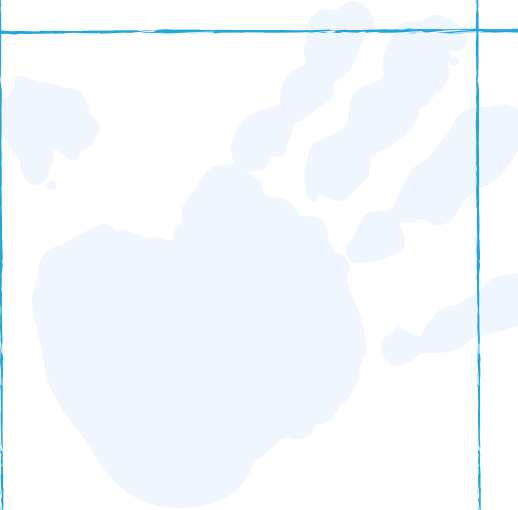




<b>Activities</b> <i>(many of these activities involve both gross and fine motor skills)</i>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated handwriting language</b> <i>(use opportunities to talk about 'language of the hands', e.g. palm, knuckles)</i>	<b>Try...</b>
<b>Pliable materials:</b>			
<b>5.</b> Plasticine (hard)	Plasticine will strengthen the muscles more effectively as it is harder and requires more force	round and round, clockwise, anticlockwise, the other way, space, fingers, spread out, carve, scratch, rub, scrape, make holes, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making patterns and letters.</li> <li>• Making models (e.g. people, a park).</li> <li>• Making a series of laminated mats that feature letter shapes and patterns. Encourage the children to overlay the patterns with their Plasticine or dough.</li> </ul>
<b>6.</b> Clay (sticky and hard but may change form if water is added)	Making sausages pressing flat or rolling out flat		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push objects and tools into it to make patterns</li> </ul>
<b>Precision, control and pincer grip:</b>			
<b>7.</b> Sewing	Pincer hold if using a bodkin or similar	Up, down, back again hold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using plastic coffee stirrers from fast food chains for threading.</li> </ul>
<b>8.</b> Weaving	Hand-eye co-ordination to control the up/down, push/pull repetition of sewing or threading	Under, over, round and round	<p><i>see more on page 4 →</i></p>





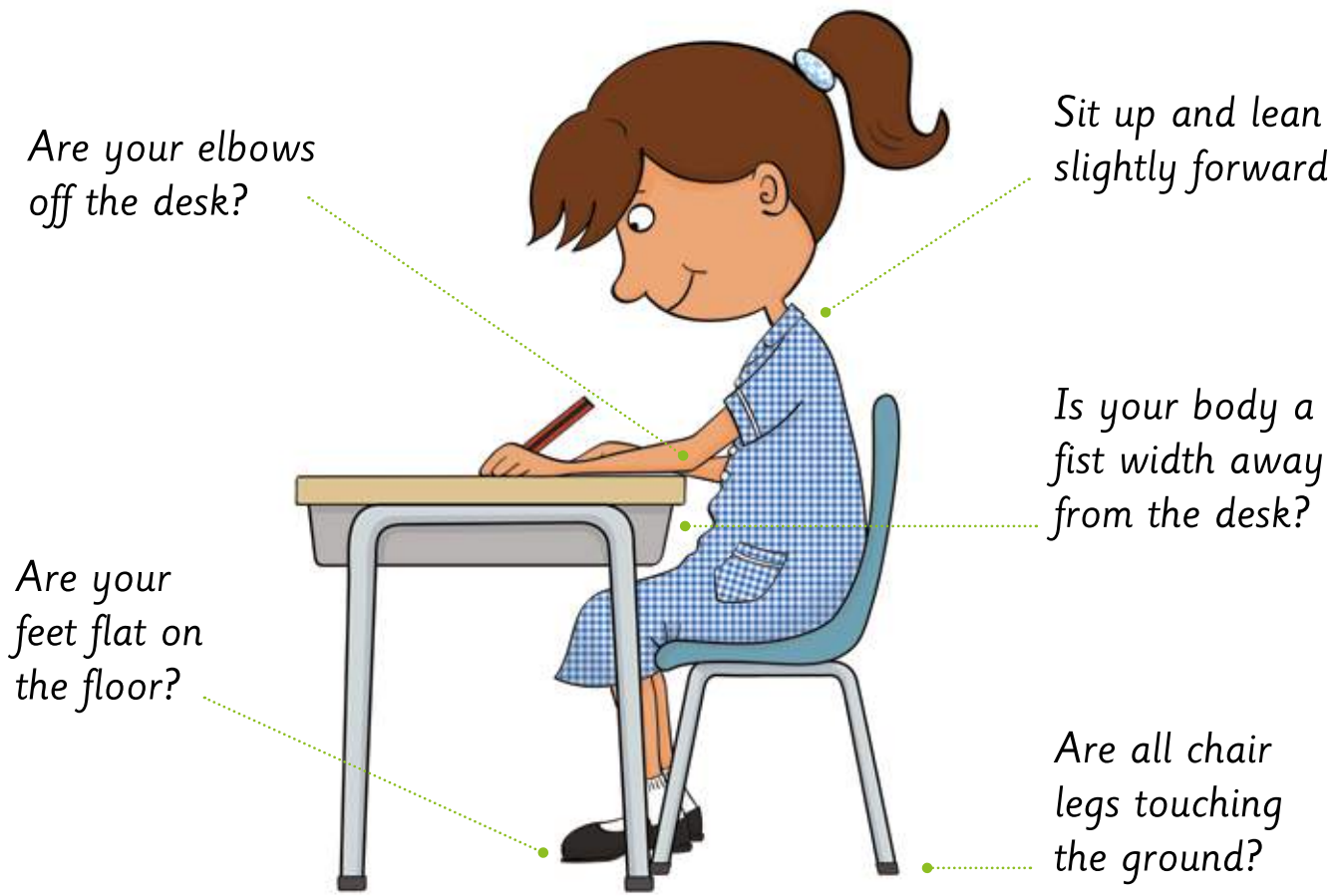
<b>Activities</b> <i>(many of these activities involve both gross and fine motor skills)</i>	<b>Actions</b>	<b>Associated handwriting language</b> <i>(use opportunities to talk about 'language of the hands', e.g. palm, knuckles)</i>	<b>Try...</b>
<p><b>Precision, control and pincer grip:</b></p> <p><b>9. Threading</b></p> 	<p>Dexterity if alternating strips of paper or fabric for weaving</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making pom-poms by winding wool round and round two Polo-shaped pieces of card. When quite fat with wool, snip all the way round the edge. Tie tightly in between the two pieces of card before removing them.</li> <li>• Children sew over their names with a bodkin needle and wool on a clean polystyrene tray.</li> <li>• Weaving with long strips of paper and then sticking the weaving behind cut-outs of pattern or letter shapes on black sugar paper.</li> <li>• Making short and long pasta necklaces: use straight, spiral or wheel pasta.</li> <li>• Threading buttons on to strings.</li> <li>• Making sequences or matching patterns to those given on laminated cards.</li> </ul>
<p><b>10. Collage</b></p>	<p>Pincer movement for picking up and sorting; pushing down, gluing</p>	<p>Big, small, up, down, high, low, left, right, under</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making different textures.</li> </ul>





# Do the **PENPALS** 7 point check!

## Are you ready for handwriting? Relax!



### Left Handers



Is there a circle gap between your thumb and finger?

Is your paper tilted at a slight angle?

### Right Handers





# The upper case alphabet

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 lower case alphabet

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

