

Write on the Beat

**A Rhythmic Approach to Rapid Cursive Handwriting
Remediation and/or Instruction**

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Students in Prince George's County, Md., use finger paints to sense how letters "feel."

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This Program was designed to:

1. Aid the teaching of cursive handwriting by using rhythm as a primary vehicle to utilize the auditory to tactile mode of learning.
2. Use short, descriptive, rhythmic phrases for letter form strokes as an aid to memory as well as *rhythmic discipline*.
3. Remediate handwriting in older students during a fixed time frame (maximum of 4 to 8 weeks/ ie. Summer vacation)
4. Increase speed, legibility and automaticity in cursive handwriting.
5. Work *with* traditional classroom handwriting programs for those students who must adhere to mandated letter formations.
6. Provide a support structure for classroom teachers who have little training in handwriting instruction especially as it relates to students with special learning needs.
7. Provide a multisensory handwriting program for dyslexic students who need additional support in learning letter forms and developing automaticity.

What is the Same?

Unifying Principles with other Multisensory Language Instruction Handwriting Models:

1. Lower case cursive letters are grouped into four families by their initial formation strokes.
2. Lower case cursive letters all begin on the *base line* to eliminate confusion about where a letter begins.
3. Letter formation is achieved through breaking each letters into various strokes which are described in chant as the student forms the letter.
4. Pencil grip, posture, paper slant etc. may all be addressed with standard remediation techniques.

What is Different?

1. Chants for letter strokes are *rhythmic, short, descriptive*, and *FIT into a metered BEAT*. This approach is musical in that the chants aid in forcing the student to form various parts of each letter in time to a four beat cadence to curb impulsivity and rushing.
2. The cadence of the chants can be slowed down or speeded up to match the student's proficiency level. Speed can be increased gradually just as a musician might gradually increase speed with the aid of a metronome.
3. In cases of severe handwriting difficulty, this method may be used to teach letter formation and develop automaticity at the gross motor level before dealing with the issue of pencil grip. Once the student has mastered the lower case letter families and can produce them with

markers on classified ads, finger paints, water pen or other gross motor writing mode; the teacher may deal with the grip as a separate issue. Fine motor skills develop faster if the student is not trying to master too many concepts at once.

4. Each letter family is rhythmically introduced and developed according to the following principles:

**GROSS Motor Mastery Before Fine Motor Attempts With
Gradual/ Incremental Reduction in Size While developing
Gradual/Incremental Increase in Speed**

5. Handwriting is approached the way musicians approach learning music:
 - The task is analyzed and broken down into small conceptual units.
 - Mastery is achieved through repetition with incremental changes in speed.
 - Multisensory techniques are used to aid learning.
 - Rhythm, verbal repetition and alliteration are used to support memory.

Basis Program

1. Each entire family is taught in one lesson
2. Letter introduction is taught ***first*** with gross motor muscles

Examples: Sky writing
Finger or "desk" writing
Finger Painting
Magic Marker on Classified Ads (turned sideways)

* It is important to note here that for some students it may be necessary even advisable to separate learning letter form from the struggle with reforming pencil grip. The two *do not* have to be tackled simultaneously. Clear, facile cursive formation is often a strong motivation for pencil grip reform in a student who has not previously mastered this skill.

3. Each entire family is *incrementally* reduced in size over multiple repetitions and speed variations. Initially, letters might be two feet tall, then one foot, then conforming to classified ad lines but six to eight inches tall, then four inches etc. If the student has an acceptable grip and fine muscle control, the student may even move to normal or near normal size print within the first lesson.
4. Words and various combinations *within* the single family are practiced for ease and automaticity.

5. **As the student gains speed and proficiency, some words from the chants may be dropped and only the key words (underlined) retained.**
6. As soon as the student has mastered the family and can reproduce the letters with ease, relative speed with legibility, a new family can be introduced. However, it MUST be introduced with the same techniques: Gross motor before fine motor and gradual reduction in size with increase in speed.