



## Fine Motor: 2- Environment

Frequently when we visit a Student in school, we start with a conversation about sitting position.

At Primary, this is often students not being able to put their feet flat, table too high etc. Often writing interventions happen outside the classroom, in different areas of the school- this can lead to sessions using wrong size seating/ table combinations.

At secondary, we would choose to visit a Science lesson, where we often see Students sat on stools with no back rest, and often high up. As a result, students struggling with handwriting will produce poor quality writing, limited amount or deploy a variety of behavioural strategies to avoid writing at all.

When next seated, lift your feet off even a few inches off the ground and you will quickly see how much work it takes to stay upright. You will likely feel it in your core and some of you may even find yourself using your hands to stabilise yourself.

So, you can imagine how the students feel when they can't touch the floor. When a chair is too big for a student you will frequently see them stand up at their desk, sit on their knees, try to touch the tips of their toes to the ground, or even put their feet on the chair in front of them to help them stabilize.

With this in mind, we have listed some key factors to consider when observing students in your school.

**Table too high:** This causes children to sit with hunched shoulders which restricts movements and affects efficient function of the hands. The child will often hold their head too close to the desk also. Ideally, a student's desk should be at the level his/her elbows rest when seated in a correctly sized chair.

Make sure their desk isn't so small or messy that there is no room to write. Organisation is often a skill that needs to be taught directly in schools in order to keep their desk clear – this is particularly observed in Secondary School.

**Table too low:** To achieve stability children will often lean forward excessively and will then use the non-dominant hand to support their head rather than the paper.



**Chair too high:** If a child's feet are not on a stable surface, then this reduces the base of support and the child has to put more effort in to maintaining their own posture rather than concentrating on their work.

**Chair too low:** The child's knees will be too low which they may find uncomfortable for long periods.

**Best Position:** The chair should allow the child to sit comfortably, with feet flat on the floor and bottom well back on the seat. If the chair is too high (and no smaller one is available), and the child's feet are not touching the floor, then a phone book, wooden step or footstool should be used to support the feet.

You are aiming for a student to be able to sit at 90o/90o/90o position.



If the chair is too low, cushions or pieces of foam can be used to raise the child. If the child's difficulties require slightly different positioning in order to achieve a good working position, then the child's Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist will explain and advise on this.

### **Left-handed writers not being able to see what they are copying**

This is often an issue for younger students who are just learning to copy letters and words. Staff often use worksheets that have a student copy a letter or word from the left side of the page onto the right side of the same page. For right handers, this is great, but for left-handed writers, their arm is often covering whatever it is that they are supposed to be copying.

This can lead them to attempt to use an awkward "hook" grasp in which they flex their wrist so that they can see what is on the page.

We have a dedicated page to Left-handed writers here;

<http://redbridgeserc.org/resources/entry/handwriting-observation-advice-and-strategy-sheets-10-17>

### **Copying from something that that looks very different than what they are asked to write on**

Be aware that when modelling how to complete a task on the Interactive board, the visual structure needs to resemble the format given to a student in a worksheet. If this is not possible, it is best to print out the slide from the presentation and allow the student to annotate/copy from it.

### Font used for worksheets

Be aware of fonts used when creating worksheets. When using a font such as this, the 'a' is recorded in this format, however we are asking a student to write using 'ɑ'.

**Comic Sans MS** is the most used font. However, I am aware that Secondary often don't like using this, due to its Primary connections.

Here you can find a range of dyslexic friendly fonts which students /staff can explore.

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>

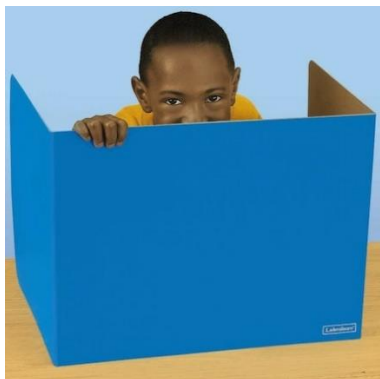
### Visual & Auditory distractions

In the schools we visit, we generally see very good classroom noise control, and students have the opportunity to learn to a calm/ quiet environment. However Primary/SEN hubs sometimes have a tendency to have a brightly coloured and visually stimulating rooms. For some of our students (with or without special needs), this can be overwhelming and distracting for a student who already struggles with writing.

A workstation, or an area where a student can move to while writing is often successful. In Secondary, talk to the student, they will often be able to suggest parts of the classroom where it is easier to concentrate or who not to sit next to who maybe distracting them (you may have to negotiate with Class Teachers who have a very rigid seating plan!)

#### Quick Fixes

A tri-fold piece of cardboard (or carboard box) or laminated manila folder "study coral" or "privacy boards" can be put up to help a student focus



### Write while standing

Historically, when working with some students who have had a significant challenge handwriting, we have set up a high table at the side of the room and they allowed them to write standing up.

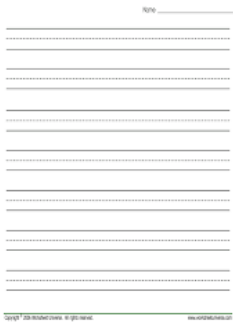
This has been very successful, when all other traditional approaches have failed.

## Paper and books used

Sometimes, especially with older students, the ability to have double spacing or clearly defined lines, can make an enormous difference to the fluency of their handwriting.

I would suggest all SEND Staff and Teachers- have this pack in their 'toolkit' which is free to download. This will allow you to trial a variety of paper types to see if this makes a difference for that student.

<https://www.otschoolhouse.com/single-post/Gray-Space>



## Poor lighting

Until students have mastered their visual motor skills to write without looking at their hand, taking notes during a video or in a dark classroom can be difficult for them. As the lights dim, the lines on the paper become more difficult to distinguish and you are likely to see more illegible work from your students. Try keeping half of the lights on next time you watch a video clip or provide a small reading light for the students who still need it.

## Pens

When visiting Students to look at Handwriting, I have always carried a pencil case with a variety of pens. I generally let even the youngest try them all, until they find one that is comfortable for them.

Handwriting pens provided by school, are generally scratchy and if used by others can have a worn nib, making directional writing even more challenging. Consider in your school, if having access to alternative pens such as gel pens is a reasonable adjustment. Equally I have had older students preferring to write in pencil due to the proprioceptive feedback provided to them.

The quickest and cheapest way to explore options is to have a wider range for students to try.

The most commonly chosen pen is a gel pen with a wide soft rubber grip area.



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2. Place wrist through one elastic band.

3. Place pencil through the other elastic band.

4. Hold the pencil near the nib. Start writing!

**Save** 902

<https://www.tts-group.co.uk/essential-pencil-grip-kit>

## Writing slopes

These can be very helpful, especially with younger children who are less self-conscious. I would recommend that all schools have a slope board for students to trial.

Older students can be self-conscious and prefer to use an A4 folder turned on its side or a clear slope.

It is worth SEND departments, having a couple to trial with students before purchasing.

<https://www.zieler.co.uk/8-things-you-must-know-before-you-buy-a-writing-slope/>



The screenshot shows a product page for a 'Clear Writing Slope Non-Slip with Writing Accessories'. The main image is a clear plastic writing slope with a notebook inside. Below it, there are several writing accessories: a set of colored markers, a pencil sharpener, a pencil eraser, a pencil, a pencil sharpener, a pencil, a pencil sharpener, and a pencil. The price is listed as £29.94 (incl. VAT). There is an 'ADD TO BASKET' button and a payment method selector showing icons for Visa, Mastercard, and American Express. The page also features a search bar and a navigation menu with categories like 'SENSORY TOYS', 'AUTISMADHD TOYS', 'EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES', 'OUTDOOR', 'INDOOR PLAY', 'SENSORY INTEGRATION', and 'LIGHT-UP FURNITURE'.



The image shows the 'Posture Pack', a red and black writing slope. It features a black keyboard and a black mouse on a red base. The product is shown from a top-down perspective.

**Posture Pack**  
from **£65**  
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Free next day delivery on In Stock orders over £100\*  
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## Posture Pack's design brief:

BIA Staff drove the design because we couldn't buy one for our children!

It's a great portable writing slope, with pencil / paper storage and carry handle and an optional but desirable seat wedge.

We wanted to preserve Children's Poise and Posture.

It's been known for hundreds of years that sitting on a seat that slopes forward improves posture. It's been known too that writing and reading is best at a slope of about 15 degrees. The problem for us (and hence our children) was that there was no economic package to put these important angles into practice. Nor anything that children would warm to and really use. And certainly nothing portable enough to be used at school and at home.

Posture Pack was the answer and has been an outstanding success for 20 years.

- Conceived to protect children's necks and spines, it's become a success by also helping children to read and write more easily.
- The whole family can use it to write with less tension in the arm, wrist and neck. Handwriting and drawing improve instantly.
- Can be used with laptops and tablets to raise the screen and tilt the keyboard.
- Even greater benefits will be felt by Dyspraxics and Dyslexics, which is why many Specialist Centres buy them from us.
- Many are specified every day by school occupational therapists, and bought by Education Authorities, but they are even more useful at home.
- So while you are buying one for your children don't forget yourself; it's very popular with everyone who loves writing and drawing or painting, adults and children alike.

Check out our You Tube channel- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYvQ3ULh0WWJAYVzcV7xZoQ/playlists>

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'Redbridge Seats' with 59 subscribers. The page is set to the 'PLAYLISTS' tab. On the left, there is a navigation menu with options like Home, Explore, Subscriptions, Library, History, Your videos, Watch later, SEND strategies and..., Show more, SUBSCRIPTIONS (Music, Sport, Gaming, Movies & shows), and MORE FROM YOUTUBE (YouTube Premium, Movies & shows). The main content area displays 'Created playlists' with a grid of 15 playlist thumbnails. Each thumbnail includes a video preview, a title, an update date, and a 'VIEW FULL PLAYLIST' link. The playlists cover topics such as iPads, Speech and Language, Visual impairment, ASC/ ASD/ Autism/Social Communication, Medical needs, Hearing Impairment, Emotional support and Behaviour, Communication and Signing, Physical Disability, Sensory videos, and The Value of Visual.



Website:  
[www.redbridgeserc.org](http://www.redbridgeserc.org)



Email:

You will find a variety of Fine and Gross Motor videos here.

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7MVghDNLeJz-IOeZJCxolM8n0v4wi\\_O](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7MVghDNLeJz-IOeZJCxolM8n0v4wi_O)

We have a wide range of handwriting and motor skill advice videos on our website [www.redbridgeserc.org](http://www.redbridgeserc.org)