

## Tip Sheet

# Accommodations for Handwriting Difficulties

**When addressing handwriting it is important to distinguish between the mechanics of writing and written expression. Mechanics of writing addresses the motor component whilst written expression is a crucial part of communication and critical thinking and requires knowledge of text genres, text cohesion and coherence, and a sense of audience.**

Handwriting is a fine-motor skill that causes problems for many students with specific learning difficulties. Handwriting problems often arise from a difficulty in automatically remembering and mastering the sequence of muscle motor movements required in writing letters or numbers. For students with handwriting problems, there are a range of accommodations that can be used in the classroom to reduce the burden of handwriting.

## The following are suggested:

- **Change the demands of writing rate**

- Allow more time for written tasks including note-taking, copying, and tests.
- Permit the student to begin written projects or assignments early.
- Allow the student to type some assignments and projects.

- **Adjust the volume of written work**

- Allow the student to use voice-activated software or a scribe to dictate some assignments or tests.
- Teach and allow abbreviations in some writing (such as b/c for because). Have the student develop abbreviations in a notebook.
- Reduce copying aspects of work. For example, in mathematics, provide a worksheet with the problems already on it.
- Reduce the length requirements on written assignments.
- Limit the need for draft copies, or have the student type their final copy instead of re-writing it.

- **Change the complexity**

- Have a writing file that contains a model of cursive or print letters and a laminated template of the format required for written work (cut out holes where name, date, title, and information should go so it can be placed over A4 worksheets).
- Provide a template or blank copies of diagrams, charts etc, for completion rather than asking the student to create one from scratch.
- Remove neatness or spelling (or both) as marking criteria for assignments. Alternatively, provide two marks; a mark for content, and a qualitative mark for neatness and spelling.
- Encourage the student to use a spellchecker and have someone proofread his or her work

- **Change the tools**

- Allow the student to write in any font and in print or cursive, whichever is most legible.
- Encourage the student to use paper with a darker line or raised line to encourage writing on the baseline.
- Consider increasing or decreasing the size of the lines the student is writing on. Dotted thirds may also be beneficial for some students.

## Tip Sheet

**Accommodations for Handwriting Difficulties (continued)**

- Allow the student to write on graph paper for mathematics to assist with aligning columns of numbers.
- Allow students to write with pens or pencils of their choice.
- Allow alternatives to handwritten responses such as the use of a computer, a scribe or a digital recorder.
- **Allow students to take breaks** when writing so they can put pencils down and shake or stretch their hands. If a student is consistently reporting pain in their hand during or after writing tasks, an Occupational Therapist should be consulted.
- **Allow the use of technological aids** such as spellcheckers, word processing, and voice activated software (see information sheet on **Computer Software and Assistive Technology**). Research has shown the importance of handwriting even with the advancement of technology and the increased reliance on typing as a method of communication. The mechanical task of handwriting involves feedback to the brain about the shape of the letter being written. Typing can be beneficial when a student has increased workload and the legibility of their work deteriorates as they attempt to write faster. It is important that typing and handwriting skills are both maintained.
- If the handwriting problem is severe and impeding academic progress, **occupational therapy** may be of assistance.