

Section 9: Writing

Writing is not an easy task. It requires various cognitive processes: transcription, text generation and executive function to produce a coherent piece of written work. Some children find these functions challenging or are slower to process information. However, with continued practice, their writing will improve and they will get better at developing and organising their ideas.

When children begin writing, they focus on **transcription** - learning to spell, use grammar, and apply punctuation. Their writing is often short and simple with some errors.

As children's skills grow they move into **text generation (composition)** - organising and expressing ideas in writing.

Children are also required to use a special set of skills called **executive function** - plan their ideas, organise their thoughts, manage their time and maintain focus.

Working memory underpins the cognitive processes involved in writing. When working memory becomes overloaded it can negatively affect both the quality and quantity of written work.

This is why it is so important to explicitly teach handwriting skills. By making handwriting automatic, we reduce the working demands, allowing writers to focus more on content and structure.

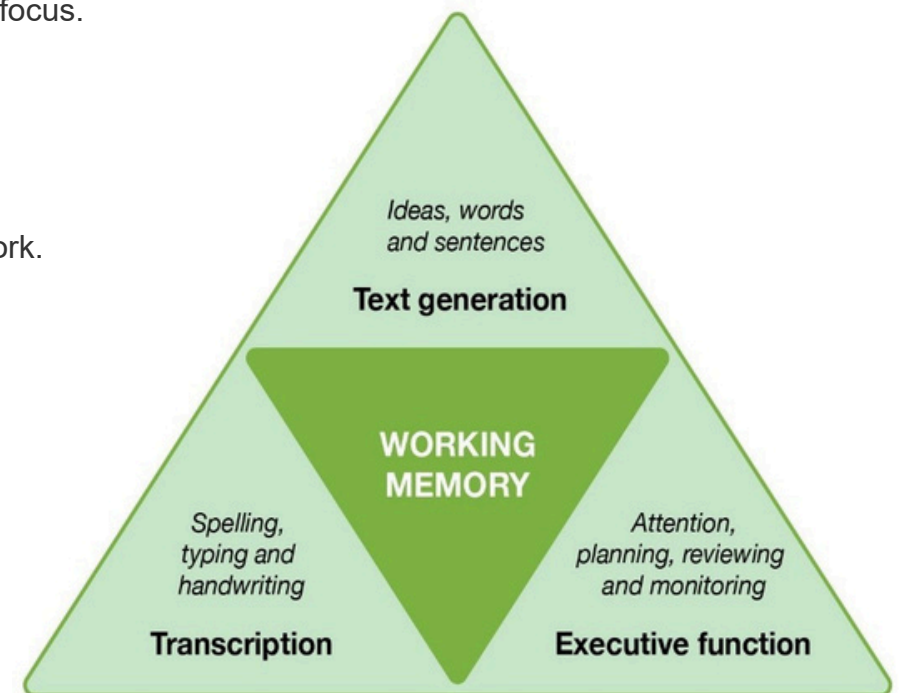


Figure 20: Based on 'The Simple View of Writing,' developed by Berninger et al. 2002

The Basics of Handwriting

Handwriting needs to be taught explicitly with guidance on how to form letters and write correctly. Some children find this challenging and may struggle with writing neatly and quickly. Children with motor skills difficulties, such as Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), or working memory difficulties, may find handwriting challenging.

Learning cursive writing, where letters are joined together, can be very beneficial. When children can write confidently in cursive, their writing will be quicker. When children are comfortable with writing, they can focus more on their ideas rather than worrying about how to write each letter. It is a good idea to teach a joined style that includes 'approach' and 'joining' strokes since most cursive letters start on a line.

As children improve their writing skills, they start to shift their focus from just forming letters to creating written pieces. At this point, it is important to motivate your child and encourage them to express their ideas.



Section 9.1

Foundation Stage (Age 4-6)

Writing



Impact

May have difficulties with starting a task

May struggle with background noise

May find it difficult to remember and follow instructions

Your child struggles to take part in writing activities

Your child may be unable to keep all of his/her ideas in his/her head and then transfer to paper

May struggle to remember sight words from memory

Practical Strategies

- Give clear instructions of the steps needed to complete an activity, using words like 'First,' 'Then.' Ask your child to repeat back the instructions to ensure he/she has remembered and understood them

- Make sure the workspace is quiet and free from distractions

- Provide a visual record of the steps needed to complete the activity, for example, using pictures

- Use drama, music, art and role-play to help your child think of great ideas and share them before beginning to write
- Record his/her ideas using a voice recorder. Listen back to these if he/she gets stuck

- Practice, Listen, Search, Select, Write strategy:
 - Parent reads 3 or 4 words - cat, hat, sat, mat and asks the child to select a specific word
 - Child listens to the words
 - Child searches across 4 words to find the word the parent has said
 - Child selects the word said by the parent
 - The child writes the word down

May be unsure how to structure or present his/her ideas

May produce a limited amount given the same time as his/her peers

Practical Strategies

- Use story maps, mind maps, flow-charts or comic strips to help your child organise ideas:
 - **Printable Resource: Story Map | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- Show examples of simple sentences that can be used
- Cut up into pieces and ask him/her to put it back together correctly
- Help your child to write his/her own simple sentences
- Provide key words that your child may wish to use when writing. Make sure your child understands and can read the words

Story Map

Setting:
Where:
When:

Major Characters:
Minor Characters:

Plot Problem:

Event 1: Event 2: Event 3:

Outcome / Resolution:

- Allow ideas to be recorded in a different way, such as creating a voice recording or writing in bullet points
- Provide key words that your child may wish to use in writing. Make sure your child understands and can read the key words

May recall words with letters in the wrong position, for example, 'hlep' for 'help'

May be confused over which way letters are written such as 'b' and 'd' or words with similar shapes like shop and stop. This affects spelling and recognising whole words

May be unable to hold words in his/her mind as he/she writes a short phrase or sentence. This often results in content that is jumbled or disorganised

Practical Strategies

- Play memory games with your child to rehearse storage of letters in a word:
 - **EA Guidance Video: Working Memory (2:33 mins)**
- Use Simultaneous Oral Spelling (SOS) routine when learning to spell. This is a multisensory approach to teaching spelling that involves writing and naming letters at the same time:
 - **EA Guidance Video: Simultaneous Oral Spelling (SOS) (4:39 mins)**

- Have visual reminders of the letter orientations on the desk so that your child can check these when writing:
 - **Printable Resources: Letter Orientation Prompt | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**

- Activities to reinforce word recognition:
 - Select correct words to 'fill the blanks' in a passage
 - Correct jumbled sentences
 - Write a sentence under a picture
 - Practice reading flashcards of sight words daily, to reinforce these words

May struggle to implement taught cursive

May have poor letter formation

Practical Strategies

- Use a multisensory approach when introducing new cursive joins
- It is useful to connect rhyme and movement to reinforce and consolidate letter formation in visual and auditory memory
- Move from big movements 'sky writing', forming large letters in the air using a finger or using chalk in the playground
- Reduce in size to writing in a sand tray or using a marker on a whiteboard and then to tracing over the letter on paper
- Finally forming the letter independently on paper
- Encourage your child to spend around 15 minutes a day
- Give your child lined paper with different line widths to choose from. Starting with wider lines can be more helpful at first
- It can be helpful to introduce related letters in groups, with related visuals:
 - The magic c letters include: 'c', 'a', 'd', 'g', 'o', and 'q' and all begin with a letter 'c' stroke
 - The 'diver letters' include: 'b', 'h', 'r', 'n', 'm', and 'p'
- Repetition helps develop letter formation securely in memory
- Correct any errors immediately to avoid wrong practice:
 - **Printable Resource - Multisensory Spelling Activities - Kinaesthetic Focus**

Impact

May have poor fine motor skills

May have an inappropriate or insufficient pencil grip

May display inappropriate seating position and posture

May struggle with positioning of paper

Practical Strategies

- Activities to strengthen the hand and develop fine motor skills:
 - Squeezing a stress ball
 - Manipulating Play-Doh
 - Cutting with scissors
 - Stringing pasta onto wool
 - Building with small blocks
 - Scrunching up paper in one hand

- Use a spray bottle or tweezers to grab and hold small items to develop a pincer grip
- Encourage your child to use a tripod grip (made by flexing the thumb, forefinger and middle finger)
- Provide a 'tripod' grip for your child's pencil

- Ensure your child's chair and table are at the right height. He/she should be able to sit with hips, feet and ankles bent at a 90-degree angle. The desk should be 2.5-5cm higher than his/her elbow when it is bent
- Try providing a writing slope to encourage correct posture

- On the desk, the paper your child is writing on should be slightly angled
- The right side of the paper should be slightly higher for a right-handed child. For a left-handed child, the left side should be higher. The non-dominant hand is used to stabilise the page

Impact

Written letters may be inconsistent sizes

May write with inappropriate pressure (too light)

May write with inappropriate pressure (too heavy)

May begin writing in the middle of the line

Practical Strategies

- Lined paper can be supportive (a wider line may be helpful initially)
- A highlighter line could be drawn to provide your child with a reference point for correctly sizing 'small' and 'tall' letters
- This can progress to a pencil line drawn above the writing line

- Use carbon paper to see how many layers he/she has written through
- Practice writing on paper placed on top of a foam sheet (the pencil will poke through if the pressure is too hard)

- Place a small dot on the writing line to guide your child where to begin

Section 9.2

Primary Stage (Age 7-11)

Writing



Impact

May have difficulty following and remembering instructions

May be slow to begin work because he/she may have difficulty with planning, organising and completing a piece of work

May struggle to remember what he/she wants to say when they begin to write

Practical Strategies

- Explain instructions clearly and check your child's understanding of the task by asking him/her to repeat back to you what he/she has been asked to do
- Provide instructions in bullet points in a 'help box' or 'help board' shown on a whiteboard or post it notes, so the child can refer to them if needed

- Talk about what he/she wants to write. Link to own interests/experiences and prior knowledge to help retain information
- Provide visual prompt cards with headings and sub-headings, sentence or paragraph starters and writing frames
- Speak slowly and use simple terms
- Repeat key words and phrases
- Deliberately leave time between instructions to allow your child to process what he/she has heard
- Provide checklist of what needs to be done during the activity
- Use graphic organisers such as mind maps, story maps, flow charts and timelines to help your child plan work before he/she starts
- **Printable Resource: Story Map | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- **Printable Resource: Mind Map (Bubble Format)**

Impact

May have handwriting difficulties and find it hard to form letters

May produce a limited quantity of written work

Self-esteem may be impacted

Practical Strategies

- Provide other ways to record written information, such as 'Dictate' in Microsoft Word, which is 'Speech-to-Text' technology. Read&Write has a predictive text feature which can speed up typing and assist with spelling

- Provide other ways to record written information:
 - [EA Guidance: Microsoft Dictate Help Sheet | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit](#)
 - [Read&Write for Windows: Support Tools for Students with Dyslexia](#)
 - [Read&Write Quick Reference Guides | Texthelp](#)

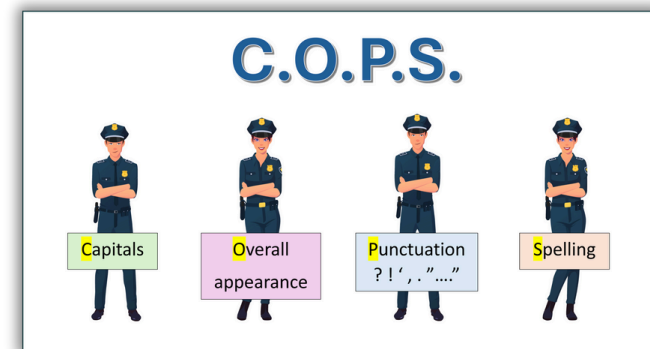
- Provide specific praise for the efforts shown and encourage to do more
- Allow 'thinking time' when posing questions orally. A child with processing difficulties may not respond immediately even though he/she knows the answer
- Give shorter activities to enable your child to master the concepts whilst avoiding the frustration of not being able to finish all the assigned work
- Be aware that timed tasks may be a source of anxiety for some children with speed of processing difficulties

Your child may write sentences with limited or no punctuation

Your child may struggle to recognise spelling patterns and often spends a significant amount of time attempting to recall words

Practical Strategies

- Use a highlighter to find and highlight all the full stops or question marks in a page of text to support knowledge of punctuation and help learn their symbols and meanings
- Encourage your child to check his/her work using the 'COPS' mnemonic, which stands for:
 - Capital letters
 - Omissions (missing words)
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling
- **Printable Resource: COPS Proofreading for Dictated Sentences | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- **Printable Resource: COPS Proofreading Prompt | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**



- Patterns and sequences which are consistent in sound and spelling reduce the burden on working memory by helping your child to 'reason by analogy', realising that if he/she can spell one word, then he/she can spell related words, for example, **stamp**, **damp**, **camp**

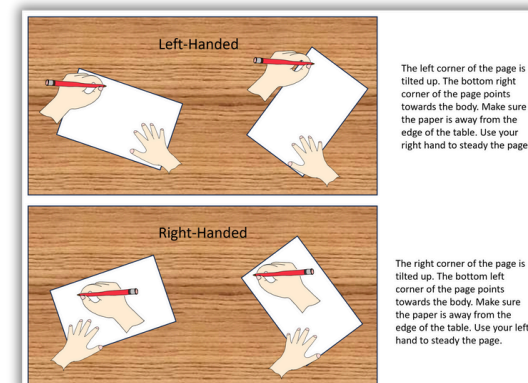
Your child struggles to follow written instructions

May struggle with positioning of paper

Practical Strategies

- Break instructions down into a step-by-step procedure
- Record bullet point instructions on sticky notes or a whiteboard so that your child can refer back to them
- Text-to-Speech could enable your child to listen to typed instructions as many times as he/she needs to, to ensure understanding. Visit Everway's dedicated landing page for **Supporting Students in Northern Ireland** to find out how to install R&W onto your device(s).
- For written instructions, use numbers rather than bullet points so that your child can keep track of where he/she is when completing an activity

- On the desk, the paper your child is writing on should be slightly angled
- The right side of the paper should be slightly higher for a right-handed child. For a left-handed child, the left side should be higher. The non-dominant hand is used to stabilise the page



Impact

Your child may struggle to spell simple words which will impact on self-esteem

May have limited vocabulary and struggle to understand topic-specific words

May struggle to spell the words when writing

Practical Strategies

- Help your child to sort his/her spellings into onset or rime groups for example, (onset) **flat, flag, fled** or (rime) **lamp, camp, stamp**
- For pupils with literacy difficulties, it can be helpful to have spelling lists that are composed of words that follow the same sound and spelling pattern, for example, (learning to spell 'snow' and 'grow' separately to 'toe' and 'hoe' or 'now' and 'how')
- Personalise spellings to suit your child this may be 4/5 each week
- Mnemonics may help your child to remember the spelling of words he/she spells incorrectly:
 - **Printable Resource: Spelling Mnemonics | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**

- Teach your child new vocabulary, such as topic-specific words, for example, if learning about volcanoes, words like 'tectonic' and 'eruption'. Explain the meanings of new words, showing a related picture wherever possible
- Provide opportunities to discuss and explore relevant vocabulary and what each word means prior to beginning to write
- **Teacher Guidance: Advice for Teachers on Spelling Rules Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**

Impact

May be unsure of correct punctuation

May be unsure of how to arrange words in the sentence and incorrect use of grammar is evident

May have poor fine motor skills

May have an inappropriate or insufficient pencil grip

Practical Strategies

- Explore sentence structure and the use of appropriate punctuation

- Model a complete sentence and progress to complex sentences using adjectives and adverbs
- Your child may still require cut up sentences or cloze procedure activities to develop knowledge of a sentence structure

- Provide opportunities for your child to develop skills by:
 - Squeezing a stress ball
 - Manipulating Play-Doh
 - Cutting with scissors
 - Stringing pasta on to wool
 - Building with small blocks

- Your child could use a spray bottle or use tweezers to grab and hold small items to develop his/her pincer grip
- Provide a 'tripod' grip for your child's pencil



May display an inappropriate seating position and posture

May have poor letter formation

Practical Strategies

- Ensure your child's seat and table are at an appropriate height for him/her to be able to sit with his/her hips, feet and ankles bent at 90 degrees, with the desk 2.5 - 5cm higher than your child's bent elbows.
- Try providing a writing slope to encourage correct posture



- Use a multisensory approach when introducing new cursive joins
- It is useful to connect rhyme and movement to reinforce and consolidate letter formation in visual and auditory memory
- Move from big movements 'sky writing,' forming large letters in the air using a finger or using chalk in the playground
- Reduce in size to writing in a sand tray or using a marker on a whiteboard and then to tracing over the letter on paper
- Finally forming the letter independently on paper
- It can be helpful to introduce related letters in groups, with related visuals:
 - The 'magic 'c' letters' include: 'c', 'a', 'd', 'g', 'o', and 'q' and all begin with a letter 'c' stroke
 - The 'diver letters' include: 'b', 'h', 'r', 'n', 'm', and 'p'

Impact

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Practical Strategies

- It is useful to connect rhyme and movement to reinforce and consolidate letter formation in visual and auditory memory
- Repetition helps develop letter formation securely in memory
- Correct any errors immediately to avoid wrong practice developing

- Lined paper can be supportive (a wider line may be helpful initially)
- A highlighter line could be drawn to provide your child with a reference point for correctly sizing 'small' and 'tall' letters
- This can progress to a pencil line drawn above the writing line

- Use carbon paper to see how many layers he/she has written through

- Practice writing on paper placed on top of a foam sheet (the pencil will poke through if the pressure is too hard)

- Place a **small dot** on the writing line to guide your child where to begin
- Introduce assistive technology to support writing skills:
 - **Free on C2K - Clicker 8**
- Websites to support the development of touch typing:
 - **Doorway Online Typing**
 - **BBC Bitesize Dance Mat**

Section 9.3

Post Primary Stage (Age 11+)

Writing



Impact

Your child has difficulties following and remembering your instruction

May have difficulties with planning, organising and executing a piece of work

May be unsure of how to arrange words in a sentence

May be unsure of how to structure written work, where to begin, how to formally record ideas and how to build a mental model of what they want to write

Practical Strategies

- Keep instructions simple and give one at a time – repeat key words and phrases
- Chunk information by breaking tasks into small bite-sized chunks, provide time to review and revise before your child moves on

- Break writing down into planning, monitoring and evaluation and support your child by modelling each step
- Provide your child with suggested sentence openers and connectives and model how to use these
- **Printable Resource: Recount Writing Prompts | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- Use phrases such as, 'in effect' or 'as a consequence,' can help your child to use cause and effect in writing

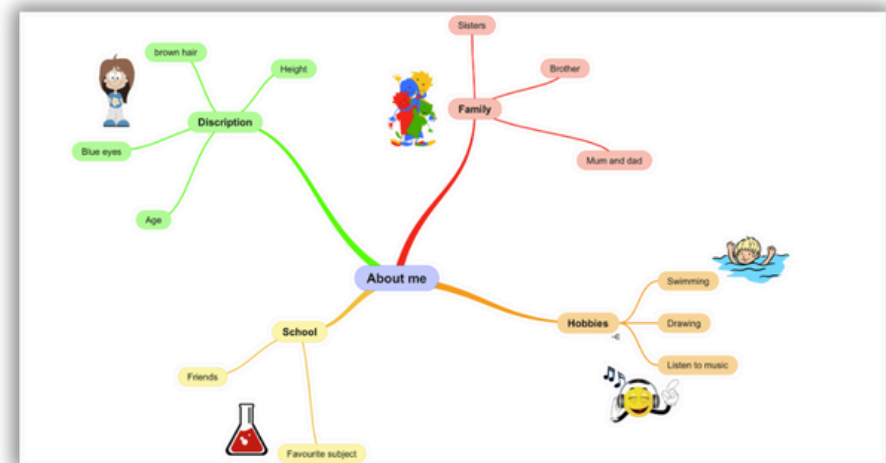
- Plan time to talk, share, think and make connections with his/her own life experiences before your child begins to write
- Provide a written or printed reminder with the instructions or steps of the task, so your child can refer to it

May use avoidance tactics when asked to write as he/she finds the task very challenging

May feel overwhelmed by the demands of the writing process due to difficulties such as the inability to concentrate and plan

Practical Strategies

- Provide suitable memory aids, for example, a word bank, mnemonics or a personalised dictionary of related vocabulary for each subject:
 - **Printable Resource: Spelling Mnemonics | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
 - **Printable Resource: Post Primary Mnemonics (Subject Specific) | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- Support the written process by providing access to alternative ways of producing written work:
 - Speech-to-Text access or Text-to-Speech access
 - Venn Diagrams for Compare and Contrast and KWL Grids
 - Relate to how he/she communicates outside school by writing (via technology on social media) and have your child transfer these writing skills. Use templates of SMS text box, blogging, short stories, captions and descriptions
 - Recording work using mind maps, graphic organisers or bullet points



May have difficulties in structuring extended writing

May have difficulties in summarising short written articles or writing about a topic

Practical Strategies

- Use the Paragraph Technique:
 - Select the theme for the paragraph
 - Select a key word
 - Introduce in the topic sentence
 - Add 3 details in the supporting sentences
 - Sum it up with a concluding sentence
- The PEEL Framework is useful for structuring any writing tasks your child may have:
 - Point: Make your point
 - Evidence: Back it up with examples
 - Explanation: Explain how evidence supports the point
 - Link: Link to the first point or next point

- Key words may help your child to summarise:
 - First, list all the key words related to the topic (no more than 10)
 - Then, organise them into order of re-telling
 - Next, select the first key word, say a sentence out loud containing the word and write it down
 - Do this for all key words
 - Finally, edit and expand
 - Try to write 10 sentences in 10 minutes

Impact

May have difficulties in self-checking his/her work

May have a limited vocabulary due to a lack of reading experience

Your child's writing often appears overcrowded and readability is impacted

Your child's letter sizing is inconsistent

Practical Strategies

- Colour-coding can help when your child/young person is evaluating his/her own work. For example, give each success criteria a different colour and highlight examples of where the criteria has been met
- Encourage your child to think, reflect, review and monitor his /her work at each stage of the process of writing

- Ensure your child understands what any topic specific vocabulary means, for example 'tectonic', 'magma'
- Look up any new vocabulary
- Create own dictionary containing the word, the definition and a corresponding image
- Use the 'vocabulary list' feature in Read&Write

Word	Definitions	Pictures
Goggles	shut out light & bring spectacles	
Safety glasses	worn to protect the eyes	
Tripod	a three-legged rack used for support	
Test tube	glass tube closed at one end	
Washer	a flat rectangular piece of cloth or plastic used for cleaning a car usually without a handle	
Bunsen burner	a gas burner used in laboratories, has an air valve to regulate the mixture of gas and air	

- Allow your child to use the strategies and Assistive Technology that work best – focus on his/her strengths
- Some children may enjoy trying a cursive script

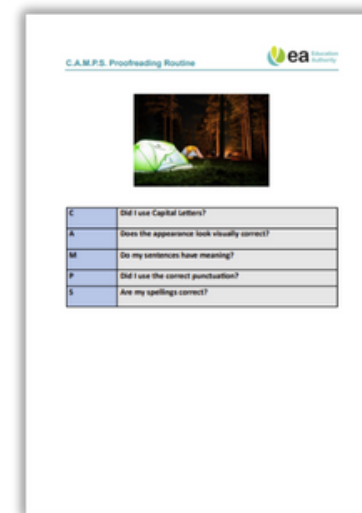
- A highlighter line drawn on your child's page can be helpful for enabling him/her to judge where tall and small letters should sit

May be unsure of how to use correct punctuation

May be reluctant to write due to handwriting and spelling difficulties

Practical Strategies

- Use a highlighter to find and highlight all the full stops or question marks in a page of text. This supports knowledge of punctuation and helps to learn their symbols and meanings
- Encourage your child to check his/her work using the 'CAMPS' mnemonic, which stands for Capitals, Appearance, Meaning, Punctuation and Spelling:
 - **Printable Resource: Proof Reading Prompt Card - CAMPS | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**



- To aid concentration, agree a set time for focused work with your child, for example, write for 20 minutes then have a 10 minute break and repeat. Use a stopwatch so your child can monitor how much time is left
- Use Assistive Technology such as voice recording, Speech-to-Text and/or predictive text to make the writing task easier

Impact

Your child may be stressed as he/she is expected to produce written pieces of work within a time scale

Writing may be slow and takes a lot of effort, which impacts on the content

May produce a limited quantity of written work

May be unable to take accurate notes at a reasonable pace. If sustaining writing speed over a prolonged period, fatigue sets in

Written work may be poorly presented, with many spelling errors

Practical Strategies

- Give frequent positive feedback focusing on the actual attempt
- Provide a completed model for your child to refer to as a visual guide

- Assist your child to produce work using Assistive Technology, for example, Read&Write prediction tool or Microsoft Dictate in Word:
 - **EA Guidance: Microsoft Dictate Help Sheet | Literacy Inclusion Toolkit**
- Read&Write has a word prediction feature which predicts what you are trying to write based on the first letters and the context

- Children/young people who are using computers to compose writing should learn to type accurately and quickly and at a speed faster than his/her handwriting. Completing a touch-typing course such as **Doorway Online** can help improve your child's typing speed

- Your child may require extra thinking time to process instructions and more time to finish tasks and tests
- For younger children (Years 8-10), give 1 min timed activities. For example, ask your child to write all the key vocabulary on a given subject