

Modification and Adaptation of Handwriting Abilities

General Considerations:

1. Provide a quiet working area because visual and auditory distractions may decrease focus on the task of writing.
2. Ensure a comfortable seating arrangement with the child's feet on the floor and arms on the desk/table at a comfortable angle.
3. Give positive reinforcement for written work. Help children to develop an understanding of motor problems and its effects. Emphasize all the positive skills that can help them adapt.

Modifications: This approach incorporates alternate methods for completing written work in response to the written output problems experienced by the child.

1. Allow alternate response option (multiple choice, point form, fill in the blank responses) to replace essay type answers.
2. Oral presentations, where appropriate, should be encouraged, even for tests. Any evaluation system which can separate the child's knowledge of content from the ability to produce it in writing, should be encouraged (tape recorded responses to questions, use a computer for typed responses).
3. When copying from the chalkboard visual tracking and visual memory may present problems. Consider allowing alternatives such as copying material from a teacher prepared page, teacher prepared handouts and copying or borrowing notes from a peer identified as a competent note-takers.
4. Use a buddy system where one child copies all the notes using a carbon. The child who is slower with motor output can then get copies of notes that he/she was unable to complete while still attempting to copy a portion of the work. A Xeroxed copy of notes or a tape of the information can also be used.
5. In general, more time needs to be allowed for writing or copying of work. Increase time limits for submission of projects requiring written responses. The student might be allowed to write essay examinations with extended or no time limits.

Adaptations: This approach aims to accommodate the written output problems experienced by the child by providing equipment or approaches to help with the writing process.

1. Introduce the computer as a writing tool that can frequently replace the pen. Early familiarity with the keyboard should be encouraged. The use of computer technology does not in itself eliminate motor problems so children may be initially frustrated until they attain knowledge of the keyboard and its functions and gain typing speed. However, the ability to quickly edit spelling and sequencing errors by use of word processing helps to lessen the amount of rewriting and general frustration. A goal can be set for rapid and accurate typing skills by the time of entrance into secondary school.
2. Computer software programs for phonics, mathematics, language, spelling, etc. can be used to help minimize copying tasks while continuing to offer learning opportunities.
3. Since writing, in a modified form, will continue to be necessary for many tasks, the following adaptations can be tried concurrently with instruction in typing and word processing skills.
 - Use coloured chalk/highlighters to highlight paragraphs and headings to help focus on one section at a time. Be alert for red-green colour blindness and use yellow or blue chalk instead.
 - Draw horizontal or vertical lines across sections of the board to give reference points to return to when copying and typing.
 - Use a copy holder with a line guide to help with tracking and figure ground problems when reading, copying and typing.
 - Minimize visual distractions by placing the child close to the chalkboard.
 - Keep the area around the most frequently used chalkboard clear from additional written work.

This information is taken from Written Output Skills: Approaches to modification, adaptation and remediation of handwriting abilities by Janice A. Booth, Cathy Hasley, and Aileen Stalker.