

WRISE™

Literacy Exercise Books Rationale and Guidelines



Purpose of this document

This document brings together the research and rationale underpinning WRISE™, best-practice handwriting instruction, the instructional role of ruling and the additional design features that support literacy learning, feedback and self-regulation.

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1. The purpose and research position of WRISE™

WRISE – Writing Instruction for Schoolwide Excellence – has been developed to provide literacy exercise books that reflect the instructional and developmental demands of handwriting and writing.

Generic exercise books commonly provide one predetermined ruling based on availability or year-level convention. This can create a mismatch between the size and structure of the writing space and the skill a student is learning. WRISE provides a considered progression of line widths so that teachers can select a format responsive to:

- The instructional focus.
- The student's current letter-formation control.
- The size at which the student can write accurately.
- The degree of visual and spatial support required.
- The transition from formation to consistency, fluency and automaticity.
- The writing task and its cognitive demands.

The WRISE progression does not claim that one line width is universally optimal for every student in a particular year level. Nor does the research independently validate each exact WRISE measurement. Rather, the progression applies the established research principle that the dimensions of the writing space can affect young students' control and letter-stroke accuracy, and that access to different paper formats is preferable to unnecessarily restricting every student to one ruling.

Wider ruling can be used when the instructional priority is orientation and accurate formation, particularly when students are learning or consolidating a new letter form. As students develop greater control, consistency and automaticity, teachers can reduce the writing space. Movement through the progression should be based on observed performance and instructional purpose rather than age or year level alone.

Importantly, the line progression is not the instruction. The books provide an instructional surface designed to support:

- Explicit modelling of letter formation.
- Guided and independent practice.
- Recall, retrieval, reproduction and repetition.
- Feedback and self-evaluation.
- Application within phonics, spelling, dictation and composition.
- The development of increasingly legible, fluent and automatic handwriting.

WRISE combines consistency of page design with flexibility of line size. This gives schools a coherent range while preserving the capacity for teachers to respond to individual students.

2. Why handwriting instruction matters

Handwriting is a foundational transcription skill. It is the means through which students translate language and ideas into written form, but it is not simply a matter of presentation. The fluency and legibility with which students write affect how much they can write, the quality of what they produce and the extent to which their knowledge and ideas are accurately recognised by others.

Writing places substantial demands on working memory. Students must generate and organise ideas, select vocabulary, construct sentences, spell words, apply punctuation and monitor meaning while physically producing the text. When letter formation is slow, effortful or insufficiently automatic, attention that should be available for these higher-order processes is diverted to the act of transcription. Students may lose ideas before they can record them, produce less text or simplify what they want to say because handwriting itself is consuming too much cognitive capacity.

Ray, Dally and Lane define handwriting fluency as the ability to form upper- and lowercase letters automatically from memory. They explain that when students form letters “correctly and quickly, vital memory resources are directed away from mechanical handwriting processes and are available for spelling, generating ideas and using writing structures” (Ray et al., 2021, p. 23). Handwriting fluency therefore supports composition by releasing working-memory capacity for the thinking involved in writing.

Santangelo and Graham’s (2016) meta-analysis of handwriting instruction reported the following effects:

- Handwriting legibility: effect size 0.59
- Handwriting fluency: effect size 0.63
- Writing quality: effect size 0.84
- Writing length: effect size 1.33
- Writing fluency: effect size 0.48

These findings demonstrate that teaching handwriting improves more than the appearance of students’ work. It can improve the quality, quantity and fluency of their written composition (Santangelo & Graham, 2016).

When poor legibility causes students to be underestimated

The consequences of poor handwriting extend beyond the effort experienced by the writer. Legibility can also influence how a reader evaluates the ideas contained in a text.

Santangelo and Graham describe this as the Presentation Effect: non-content features, including legibility, can influence judgments about the quality of a student’s ideas. They report previous meta-analytic evidence showing that a less-legible version of the same paper was scored considerably more harshly than the more-legible version, with an effect size of -1.03 for school-aged writers (Graham et al., 2011, as cited in Santangelo & Graham, 2016).

This means that a student’s knowledge, vocabulary or quality of thinking may be underestimated because the physical presentation of the writing makes the content difficult to decipher or creates a diminished impression of the writer’s capability. Poor legibility can therefore prevent assessment from accurately representing what a student knows and can do.

At the same time, slow or effortful handwriting can reduce the actual quality of the writing produced. Santangelo and Graham refer to this as the Writer Effect. Until handwriting becomes sufficiently fluent and automatic, it may interfere with planning, sentence generation, spelling and the retention of ideas in working memory.

Handwriting instruction is therefore both an instructional and an equity consideration. Students need a fair opportunity to develop the transcription skills required to express their ideas fully and have those ideas evaluated on their merit.

The Not-So-Simple View of Writing

Berninger and Winn's Not-So-Simple View of Writing explains writing as the coordination of transcription, text generation, executive functions and memory systems (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Handwriting and spelling are lower-level processes in this architecture—not because they are unimportant, but because they must become accurate and automatic enough to operate in the service of higher-level composition.

Component	Instructional meaning
Transcription	Handwriting or keyboarding and spelling: accurate, efficient production of written language.
Text generation	Generating and translating ideas into words, sentences and connected text.
Executive functions	Planning, attention, goal setting, monitoring, reviewing and revising.
Working Memory	Working, short-term and long-term memory coordinate writing processes.

Ray, Dally and Lane's 4Rs model

The 4Rs model explains handwriting fluency through four interdependent cognitive and perceptual-motor processes: Recall, Retrieve, Reproduce and Repeat (Ray, Dally, & Lane, 2021). Fluency is not simply fast movement; it depends on accurate representations, reliable retrieval, coordinated production and sufficient correct practice.

Process	Teacher meaning
Recall	Activate the letter's name, sound, visual form and movement pathway.
Retrieve	Access the motor plan without relying continuously on a visible model.
Reproduce	Produce the letter independently with accurate orientation, formation and placement.
Repeat	Use purposeful, monitored repetition to strengthen accuracy, consistency and fluency.

3. What brain imaging contributes to the evidence

Brain-imaging evidence adds an important dimension to the case for handwriting, particularly during the period in which young children are learning to recognise and produce letters.

In James and Engelhardt's study, preliterate five-year-old children learned letters and shapes through three different experiences:

- Printing them freehand.
- Tracing them.
- Typing them on a keyboard.

The children were subsequently shown the letters and shapes while undergoing functional magnetic resonance imaging. A previously identified neural network associated with letter processing and reading was recruited during letter perception after children had printed the letters by hand. The same pattern was not found after typing or tracing the letters.

"These findings demonstrate that handwriting is important for the early recruitment in letter processing of brain regions known to underlie successful reading" (James & Engelhardt, 2012, p. 32).

The study suggests that self-generated letter production provides a qualitatively different learning experience from pressing a key or following a predetermined tracing path. When children print letters themselves, they must:

- Recall or attend to the letter's form.
- Plan the movements needed to produce it.
- Coordinate visual and motor information.
- Monitor the emerging form.
- Adjust their movements.
- Produce variable examples that are recognisably instances of the same letter.

This variability may be particularly important. A young child's independently produced letters are not identical. Each attempt varies slightly while preserving the defining features of the letter. This may help the brain develop a flexible category for recognising the same letter across different fonts, sizes and handwritten forms.

Connection with the 4Rs model

The brain-imaging evidence aligns closely with Ray, Dally and Lane's 4Rs model:

- Recall: The student activates a mental representation of the letter.
- Retrieve: The student accesses the motor plan for producing it.
- Reproduce: The student independently produces the letter through coordinated visual and motor activity.
- Repeat: Repeated, variable productions strengthen recognition, retrieval and increasingly fluent execution.

The evidence therefore supports instruction in which students actively produce letters rather than spending most of their practice tracing or passively viewing completed forms. Tracing may have a limited scaffolding role, but it should not replace recall, retrieval and independent reproduction.

What the brain scans do and do not establish

The fMRI findings support the proposition that handwriting experience contributes to the early development of neural systems used in letter perception and reading. They do not, by themselves, establish that:

- Handwriting is superior to typing for every learning task.
- Children should not be taught keyboarding.
- One handwriting script is neurologically superior to another.
- Cursive is neurologically superior to manuscript.
- A particular line width or ruling produces greater brain activation.
- Tracing has no instructional use in any context.
- Brain activation automatically translates into improved long-term academic achievement.

Freehand letter production engages the developing relationship between visual letter recognition and motor experience in ways that tracing and typing do not replicate. This provides neurological support for teaching young students to recall, retrieve and independently reproduce letters as part of early literacy instruction.

4. What should be taught

Effective handwriting instruction has two interrelated goals:

- Legibility – letters and words can be read easily and consistently.
- Fluency – letters can be produced accurately, efficiently and increasingly automatically.

To achieve these goals, students should be explicitly taught:

- Accurate and efficient letter formation.
- Secure knowledge of upper- and lowercase letter forms.
- Consistent starting points and movement sequences.
- Appropriate letter size, proportion, orientation and alignment.
- Appropriate spacing between letters and words.
- Increasing speed without loss of legibility.
- Recall and production of letters from memory.
- A functional pencil grip, paper position and writing posture.
- The ability to apply handwriting during spelling, dictation, sentence writing and extended composition.
- The ability to monitor and evaluate the legibility and efficiency of one's own writing.

Handwriting should be explicitly taught as a distinct transcription skill, while also being connected purposefully with phonics, spelling and written composition. Students require specific instruction in letter formation, but they must also apply what they have learned when writing words, sentences and connected text.

“What I propose in this paper is that teachers need to provide handwriting instruction both outside and during children’s actual writing. First, teachers should take a proactive stand and explicitly and directly help students establish the habits and patterns that facilitate the development of legible and rapid handwriting” (Graham, 1992, p. 5).

This balances explicit skill instruction with meaningful application. Handwriting should not be left to develop incidentally, but neither should it consist solely of disconnected copying.

Physical foundations for efficient handwriting

Posture

Teach a stable seated position: feet supported, body facing the writing surface, shoulders relaxed and the non-writing hand stabilising the page. Posture should support efficient movement rather than create tension or rigidity.

Pencil grasp

Teach and reinforce a functional, efficient grasp. A dynamic tripod is commonly used, but the instructional priority is a grasp that permits control, visibility, endurance and fluent finger movement without pain or excessive pressure.

Paper position

Model page placement and angle explicitly. The paper should be positioned so the student can see the writing line, move comfortably across the page and maintain a stable wrist and forearm position.

IMPORTANT DISTINCTION Fine-motor experiences can prepare the system for writing, but they are not a substitute for explicit instruction in letter identity, formation, retrieval and fluent production.

5. How handwriting should be taught

Explicit and systematic instruction

Teachers should explicitly model how each letter is formed, including:

- Where the letter begins.
- The direction and sequence of movements.
- Where the pencil is lifted, where relevant.
- How the letter is positioned in relation to the baseline and other guides.
- The language used to describe the movement.
- How the letter's size and form compare with other letters.

Letters can be organised into groups that share common formation patterns. This reduces unnecessary variation and helps students recognise recurring movements.

Students need guided practice immediately after modelling, followed by independent production and timely feedback. Teachers should identify inefficient movements early, before they become established habits.

"It is important to keep in mind that handwriting is a motor skill and that regular practice in forming individual letters is essential in the early stages of development" (Graham, 1992, p. 5).

"This does not imply that students should spend hours copying rows of letters. Quality of practice is more important than quantity" (Graham, 1992, p. 5).

Practice should therefore be brief, frequent, attentive and accurate. Repetition is necessary, but repeated errors do not build effective automaticity.

The 4Rs model

Karen Ray, Kerry Dally and Alison Lane's 4Rs model provides a useful framework for understanding how handwriting fluency develops. The four interdependent processes are:

1. Recall

Students recall the orthographic code or stored mental representation of the letter or word.

They must know what the letter looks like and connect its form with its name and sound. Instruction should therefore strengthen relationships between:

- Letter name.
- Letter sound.
- Letter shape.
- Letter formation.

2. Retrieve

Students retrieve the motor plan associated with the recalled letter form.

They need to access an efficient, established sequence of movements rather than reconstructing the letter through trial and error each time they write it.

3. Reproduce

Students reproduce the letter using the retrieved motor plan.

Successful reproduction draws on perceptual-motor abilities, including fine-motor and visual-motor skills. At this stage, the student executes the movement accurately and positions the letter appropriately on the page.

4. Repeat

Students repeat the process sufficiently for letter production to become efficient and increasingly automatic.

Repetition should be purposeful and supported by feedback. The goal is not the number of letters copied, but the consolidation of an accurate mental representation and efficient motor plan.

"The 4Rs model (Recall, Retrieve, Reproduce, Repeat) for handwriting fluency acquisition incorporates both cognitive and perceptual motor processes for beginning writers" (Ray et al., 2021, p. 24).

The model is significant because it demonstrates that handwriting is not simply a fine-motor activity. Fluency requires memory, orthographic knowledge, retrieval of a motor plan, perceptual-motor execution and sufficient accurate repetition working together. The model is proposed as a practice framework for evidence-based classroom instruction and for updating handwriting interventions. Ray, Dally and Lane's policy brief provides the complete model.

Practice from memory, not copying alone

Copying can support early practice, but fluent handwriting ultimately requires students to recall and reproduce letters without continuous access to a model. Instruction should gradually move from:

- Teacher modelling.
- Guided formation with visual and verbal prompts.
- Supported practice.
- Delayed copying or cover-copy-compare.
- Retrieval and production from memory.
- Application in words, sentences and connected text.

This progression strengthens the stored representation of the letter and the student's ability to retrieve its motor plan independently.

Feedback and self-evaluation

Feedback should be immediate, specific and connected to the element being taught. It may address:

- Starting point.
- Direction.
- Movement sequence.
- Shape.
- Size and proportion.
- Placement on the baseline.
- Spacing.
- Fluency or efficiency.

Students should also learn to evaluate their own writing against a small number of clear criteria. Graham's review and Santangelo and Graham's meta-analysis identify self-evaluation as a potentially beneficial component of handwriting instruction, although it should be used alongside explicit teaching rather than as a replacement for it.

Meaningful application

Once a formation pattern has been introduced, students should apply it when writing:

- Letters from memory.
- Phonically controlled words.
- Previously taught spelling patterns.
- Dictated words and sentences.
- Sentences connected to curriculum content.
- Extended written responses and compositions.

Handwriting and spelling require their own explicit instructional attention, but their content should overlap deliberately. Students can practise the letter forms, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, spelling patterns and words currently being taught. This strengthens the relationship between handwriting, phonics, spelling and written expression.

A consistent explicit lesson sequence

- Orient: name the target letter or pattern and connect its sound, visual form and purpose.
- Model: demonstrate the starting point, movement and finished form with a concise, consistent verbal cue.
- Guide: practise together with immediate checking and corrective feedback.
- Retrieve: remove or cover the model and ask students to reproduce the target from memory.
- Repeat: use a small number of accurate, purposeful repetitions; pause to compare and correct.
- Encode and dictate: apply the taught formation through current phonics and spelling content.
- Compose and reflect: use the content in a sentence or text, then identify progress and the next focus.

EFFICIENT PRACTICE A short sequence of attentive, corrected attempts is more instructionally valuable than a page of unmonitored repetition.

6. Recommended instructional time

Effective handwriting instruction does not require an excessive allocation of curriculum time, but it does require protected, regular and cumulative instruction.

“During kindergarten and grades 1–3, it should be taught in short sessions several times a week or even daily, with 50 to 100 minutes a week devoted to its mastery” (Graham, 2009–2010, p. 21).

“Allotting 75 to 100 minutes per week to handwriting instruction (in grades 1 through 4)” (Graham, 2009–2010, p. 27).

A note on year levels: much of the research cited in this document comes from the United States, where Kindergarten broadly corresponds to Foundation and each Grade to the matching Australian Year level. US terms are retained in quotations and study descriptions.

- Short, focused sessions rather than one extended weekly lesson.
- Instruction several times each week, preferably daily in the early years.
- Approximately 50–100 minutes each week in Foundation to Year 3.
- A practical target of approximately 75–100 minutes each week across Years 1–4 where students are still developing legibility and fluency.
- Additional targeted instruction for students whose handwriting remains slow, effortful or difficult to read.

This time should include explicit modelling, guided formation, accurate retrieval and reproduction from memory, carefully monitored repetition, fluency-building and application within spelling, dictation and writing. It should not consist of 50–100 minutes of undirected copying.

Graham, Harris and Fink (2000) illustrate what this time can achieve. First-grade students experiencing handwriting difficulties received short, explicit handwriting lessons, with each 15-minute lesson structured as follows:

- Alphabet warm-up: two minutes.
- Alphabet practice: six minutes.
- Alphabet fluency activity: five minutes.
- Alphabet application or enjoyment activity: two minutes.

Compared with students in the control condition, the reported effect sizes were:

- Handwriting: 1.46.
- Sentence construction: 0.76.
- Story length: 1.21.

The gains remained evident six months after the intervention (Graham, Harris, & Fink, 2000, as summarised in Graham, 2009–2010).

“There are considerable returns for such a small investment of time, as students’ sentence-writing skills, the amount they write, and the quality of their writing all improve along with their handwriting” (Graham, 2009–2010, p. 21).

Summary

We recommend that schools protect regular time for handwriting instruction rather than rely on students acquiring handwriting incidentally through written work.

In the early years, schools should provide short, focused handwriting lessons several times each week, preferably daily, with approximately 50–100 minutes per week devoted to developing accurate, legible and increasingly fluent handwriting. Within Years 1–4, approximately 75–100 minutes per week provides a useful instructional target where students are still consolidating handwriting. This time can be distributed across explicit handwriting lessons and carefully planned application within phonics, spelling and dictation, but handwriting must retain a clearly identified instructional focus.

Handwriting and spelling can overlap productively in content, but one should not disappear inside the other. Students need explicit attention to the formation, retrieval and fluent production of letters as well as explicit attention to phoneme–grapheme correspondences and spelling patterns.

Handwriting screening, fluency and end-of-year reference points

A brief handwriting screener can help schools identify students whose legibility, fluency or automaticity may be constraining written output. Screening should inform instruction rather than merely generate data, and results are most meaningful when Tier 1 handwriting instruction is explicit, cumulative and consistent.

Why screen handwriting?

- Detect handwriting difficulties before they become established barriers.
- Identify transcription bottlenecks that may be mistaken for weak ideas, motivation or vocabulary.
- Inform targeted instruction, intervention and progress monitoring.
- Identify system-wide patterns in formation, legibility, pace, stamina and automaticity.

A practical 90-second fluency screen

- Provide a short, year-level-appropriate passage and the ruling the student normally uses.
- Ask the student to copy as quickly and neatly as possible for 90 seconds, retaining the passage punctuation.
- Count only letters that are recognisable out of context. Do not count illegible, crossed-out, reversed or unrecognisable letters; do not count spaces or punctuation.
- Convert the total to letters per minute: total legible letters ÷ 1.5.

SCORING EXAMPLE 90 legible letters in 90 seconds ÷ 1.5 = 60 legible letters per minute (LPM). Speed must always be interpreted alongside legibility.

Note: copying is used in this screen as a standard measurement condition, so that results can be compared with published reference values. It is not a recommended instructional method; instruction should continue to prioritise retrieval and production from memory.

Mean handwriting speed norms

The following reference values are reported in the research summarised by Graham (2009–2010). They are means, not universal cut scores, and should be interpreted alongside legibility, instructional history, task conditions and local data.

Grade	Girls: mean legible letters/min	Boys: mean legible letters/min
Grade 1	21	17
Grade 2	36	32
Grade 3	50	45
Grade 4	66	61
Grade 5	75	71
Grade 6	91	78
Grade 7	109	91
Grade 8	118	112
Grade 9	121	114

Interpreting screening results

At or near the reference mean: handwriting pace is broadly typical, provided legibility is secure.

Moderately below: review formation, retrieval, stamina and classroom practice; provide additional fluency practice and monitor progress.

Well below: use diagnostic follow-up and targeted instruction, with short daily practice and repeated progress checks.

Cohort-wide weakness: review the quality, frequency and consistency of whole-class handwriting instruction before attributing the result only to individual students.

7. Instructionally responsive paper and ruling

The physical writing space can support or impede the skill being taught. Paper ruling should therefore be treated as an instructional design consideration, not merely as a stationery convention.

Graham reviewed a series of studies in which Kindergarten to Grade 3 students “produced more correct letter strokes when using paper with wider lines” (Graham, 1992, p. 10). Santangelo and Graham later reported two single-session studies comparing wide- and normal-ruled paper:

Waggoner et al. (1981): legibility effect size 1.19.

Leung et al. (1979): legibility effect size 1.50.

These findings indicate that wider ruling can improve letter-production accuracy for many young students. Graham’s most specific instructional conclusion was that “wide-lined paper may be especially useful when young children initially practice a newly introduced letter form” (Graham, 1992, p. 10).

The findings do not establish one universally optimal line width. Some student groups did not benefit from wider lines, and the available studies do not validate a fixed line width for each year level. The evidence instead supports access to a range of paper formats and the exercise of professional judgment.

“In considering the place of beginner’s pencils and wide-lined paper in children’s writing programs, I would like to echo a recommendation made by Coles and Goodman (1980). They proposed that several different types of paper and writing instruments be available for children to use during school” (Graham, 1992, p. 10).

“Requiring students to use only one kind of pencil or a certain size of paper may be unnecessarily restrictive, since many children already use a variety of writing instruments and material when composing at home” (Graham, 1992, p. 10).

“The only divergence from this recommendation I would like to offer concerns the use of wide-lined paper during handwriting instruction. As the research from Ohio State University illustrates, wide-lined paper may be especially useful when young children initially practice a newly introduced letter form” (Graham, 1992, p. 10).

Best practice is therefore to provide structured choice within an explicit instructional framework. Teachers select or recommend a ruling based on the skill being taught and the student’s current control, while students may use different paper formats where these better enable accurate, fluent and independent writing.

8. Curriculum, development and the role of the page

From formation to automaticity

In Foundation, the instructional emphasis is initially on orientation and accurate letter formation. At this stage, controlling letter size and maintaining consistency within increasingly complex ruling should not compete unnecessarily for attention with learning how letters are formed. Blank paper or scrapbooks can therefore provide an appropriate starting point for initial handwriting instruction and practice.

As letter formation becomes established, ruling has a different instructional purpose. Larger lines provide spatial boundaries while students consolidate formation, placement and relative size. As control develops, progressively smaller line widths increase expectations for consistency, alignment and efficient movement.

Ultimately, the goal is not simply smaller or neater handwriting. It is efficient, legible and automatic transcription — handwriting that supports, rather than competes with, the thinking required for writing.

Select and adjust line size instructionally—not by year level alone.

Important: Year levels indicate the broad curriculum progression, not a prescription for line size. Teachers should select ruling according to the handwriting skill being explicitly taught and the student's demonstrated proficiency. Students may require more or less space than the indicative progression suggests.

The instructional role of the page

The dotted midline can provide a visual scaffold while students are explicitly learning and consolidating relative letter size, placement and alignment. As control develops, progressively narrower WRISE™ rulings reduce the writing space while the midline continues to support consistent letter size. Once students no longer require a midline, standard ruled books can be used to maintain these skills with reduced visual support.

The progression is coherent and purposeful:

Orientation → Formation → Recall → Retrieve → Placement → Size → Legibility → Consistency → Fluency → Automaticity

Important qualification

The WRISE progression is evidence-informed where evidence exists, and developmentally and curriculum-informed where research does not prescribe a specific design decision. Research does not establish one optimal millimetre line width for every student in a year level.

The WRISE™ range

WRISE™ literacy exercise books are A4, 48 pages and printed in Australia on FSC-certified paper. Every book shares the same page design: Name, Class and Subject fields on the front cover, a My Literacy Goals page inside the front cover, and Learning Intention and Date fields on each writing page. Five dotted-midline ruling sizes are available, each with an indicative instructional focus:

- **30mm – orientation and formation.** Generous space while formation becomes established. In the early stages of Foundation, blank paper such as a scrapbook is recommended for learning correct letter orientation and formation before ruled pages are introduced.
- **24mm – placement and sizing.** Supports the consolidation of placement, proportion and increasingly efficient movement.
- **20mm – consistency and fluency.** Supports increasing consistency, alignment and fluent production while retaining a clear midline scaffold.
- **15mm – legibility and fluency.** Supports increasingly efficient handwriting at a more functional scale, and may be particularly supportive when students are learning joined handwriting in the middle primary years.
- **10mm – legibility and automaticity.** Supports efficient, sustained handwriting as transcription becomes increasingly automatic.

These selections are indicative rather than prescriptive. Teachers choose the ruling according to the skill being taught and the student's demonstrated proficiency.

ACARA English v9 handwriting descriptors

ACARA specifies the handwriting outcome expected at each level; it does not prescribe an exact ruling size. The descriptors below should set the instructional destination, while student work determines the support required.

Year / code	Exact content descriptor	Elaboration / achievement standard	Instructional implication
Foundation AC9EFLY08	form most lower-case and upper-case letters using learnt letter formations	Clear demonstrations of where to start and direction of movement; developing a functional pencil grip/grasp.	Prioritise orientation and formation; blank paper or wide ruling may be appropriate.
Year 1 AC9E1LY08	write words using unjoined lower-case and upper-case letters	Continue to develop a functional pencil grip/grasp; achievement standard repeats use of unjoined letters.	Consolidate formation, word spacing and positioning letters and words on a line.
Year 2 AC9E2LY08	write words legibly and with growing fluency using unjoined upper-case and lower-case letters	Consolidate a functional pencil grip/grasp; achievement standard refers to consistently legible unjoined letters.	Build legibility and growing fluency without premature size reduction.
Year 3 AC9E3LY08	write words using joined letters that are clearly formed and consistent in size	Achievement standard: letters accurately formed and consistent in size.	Teach and consolidate joins while maintaining clear formation and consistent size.
Year 4 AC9E4LY08	write words using clearly formed joined letters, with developing fluency and automaticity	Achievement standard: clearly formed letters with developing fluency.	Develop fluent retrieval and automaticity while preserving legibility.
Years 5–6	No dedicated handwriting descriptor. Year 5 level description: "From Year 5 onwards, students continue to develop legible handwriting."	No handwriting-specific achievement-standard sentence in Years 5–6.	Sustain efficient curriculum writing and provide targeted re-teaching where required.

9. Designed for the full range of literacy learning

Although WRISE provides an evidence-informed surface for explicit handwriting instruction, the books are not handwriting workbooks and are not intended to be used only for handwriting practice. They are flexible literacy exercise books designed to support the range of written work students undertake across the school day.

A single WRISE book may be organised so that students work from the front for phonics, spelling or word study and from the back for dictation. Keeping dictation in a distinct section allows teachers to review students' cumulative application of phoneme–grapheme correspondences, spelling patterns, handwriting, punctuation and sentence conventions, providing a useful source of formative assessment.

- Explicit handwriting instruction and fluency practice.
- Phonics, spelling and morphology
- Dictation.
- Text-level writing.
- Reading responses and comprehension activities.
- Written work in science, humanities, health, mathematics or any other subject area.
- Intervention, consolidation and independent practice.

Schools may allocate separate WRISE books to different components of literacy or use one book flexibly for several related purposes. The appropriate use will depend on the school's curriculum organisation, the instructional task and the needs of the student.

The WRISE ruling progression supports all of these applications. Its purpose is to provide students with an appropriately sized and consistently designed writing environment whenever they are required to record, practise, retrieve, explain or compose—not to restrict the books to handwriting lessons alone.

10. SRSD, transcription and text-level composition

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) combines explicit writing strategies with goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction and gradual release. SRSD is not a single mnemonic and is not a complete writing program in isolation. It sits alongside evidence-based instruction in handwriting, keyboarding, spelling, sentence construction, vocabulary, oral language, reading, revising and editing.

The SRSD stages, self-regulation procedures and genre strategies are not reproduced here. This section focuses on what SRSD research shows about transcription and its implications for WRISE™.

Key findings from ‘Yes, They Can’

Harris and colleagues examined whether beginning writers could develop transcription, oral language and informative composition concurrently through SRSD Plus instruction (Harris et al., 2023).

Study design

- Ninety-three Grade 1 and Grade 2 students participated; the mean age was approximately 6.68 years.
- Small-group instruction occurred for 45 minutes, three times per week, for ten weeks.
- The Plus component incorporated handwriting fluency, explicit spelling, vocabulary, oral language and sentence proficiency.
- Within each five-day unit, Days 1–2 focused primarily on vocabulary and sentence construction; Days 3–5 focused on spelling and handwriting fluency.
- Students wrote letters and words from memory rather than relying only on copying.
- Spelling instruction addressed phonological, orthographic and morphological patterns.
- Instruction used modelling, guided practice and independent practice.
- The study did not specify or test a particular ruling width or dotted-midline design.

Reported effects

Outcome	Effect size
Writing quality	1.02
Planning	1.40
Use of source information	0.48
Spelling	1.18
Vocabulary	2.29
Sentence proficiency	0.29
Lowercase alphabet fluency	–0.02 — not significant
Sentence-copying fluency	0.11 — not significant

What the findings mean

- Transcription, oral language and composition can be taught concurrently; students do not need to master handwriting before beginning meaningful composition.
- Lower-level transcription difficulties can consume working-memory resources and constrain planning, idea generation, writing quality and output.
- The intervention improved writing, planning, spelling and vocabulary, but did not significantly improve the two handwriting-fluency measures.
- Well-formedness and automaticity are different outcomes: handwriting may look better without becoming automatic.
- Formation quality and automaticity therefore require separate teaching goals and separate progress checks.

- The handwriting dosage may have been insufficient to develop automaticity; students need more deliberate and cumulative retrieval and fluency practice.

Direct recommendations for WRISE

- Teach handwriting, spelling, sentence construction and composition in tandem while protecting the distinct purpose of each lesson.
- Reduce continuous copying and increase retrieval from memory.
- Use a sequence such as model, guide, cover the model, retrieve, check, correct, repeat, dictate and compose.
- Connect handwriting practice with current phonics, spelling and morphological content.
- Introduce brief automaticity practice only after the relevant formations are secure.
- Assess formation and legibility separately from retrieval speed and automaticity.
- Adjust ruling, written quantity and composition demands according to the student's transcription capacity rather than age alone.

11. Feedback, reflection and self-regulation

WRISE books are designed not only to provide an appropriate writing surface, but also to make the processes of goal setting, feedback, self-assessment and reflection visible.

Drawing on Hattie and Timperley (2007), AITSL (2017) frames effective feedback around three questions:

- Where am I going?
- How am I going?
- Where to next?

AITSL identifies feedback at the self-regulation level—where students monitor, direct and regulate their actions—as one of the most powerful forms of feedback. It states that self-assessment is closely connected to self-regulation and that feedback at this level is “powerful in terms of deep processing and mastery of tasks” (AITSL, 2017, p. 13).

Effective feedback can have a substantial impact on learning. The AITSL Spotlight reports that high-quality feedback may contribute as much as eight additional months of learning progress and that effective feedback can almost double average student growth over a school year. The effect depends, however, on feedback being connected to a clear goal and used by the student and teacher to determine what happens next (AITSL, 2017).

Learning Intention

Each WRISE writing page includes a space for the Learning Intention. This makes the immediate instructional focus explicit—for example:

- I am learning to begin each letter in the correct place.
- I am learning to keep lowercase letters an appropriate size.
- I am learning to place letters accurately on the baseline.
- I am learning to leave clear spaces between words.
- I am learning to write a sentence with a capital letter and full stop.
- I am learning to apply a spelling pattern accurately in dictation.

The Learning Intention helps students understand what they are working to improve and gives teachers, peers and students a shared point of reference for feedback. AITSL notes that feedback relies on “clearly defined goals (including learning intentions and success criteria)” and on activities that allow progress towards those goals to be tracked (AITSL, 2017, p. 6).

The Learning Intention should identify the specific skill currently being taught. It is not intended to become a generic heading or an additional copying exercise.

Date

The date provides more than an organisational record. It allows students and teachers to return to earlier work, compare performance over time and identify evidence of progress.

A dated sequence of authentic written work can reveal changes in:

- Letter formation.
- Size and alignment.
- Spacing.
- Legibility.
- Fluency and written output.
- Spelling application.
- Sentence construction.
- Independence and consistency.

AITSL identifies tracking progress as a key component of formative assessment and feedback. When work is dated, a teacher can use the evidence across multiple entries to make instructional decisions, while students can see that improvement develops through instruction, practice and feedback rather than appearing immediately.

My Literacy Goals

The built-in My Literacy Goals page enables students to record a small number of specific, manageable goals and revisit them over time.

Goals might relate to:

- Handwriting formation, size, alignment, spacing or fluency.

- Phonics and spelling application.
- Dictation.
- Sentence construction.
- Text structure.
- Vocabulary.
- Reading responses.
- Editing and revision.

AITSL reports that there is strong evidence that setting specific goals, particularly when students understand the criteria for successful performance, significantly improves individual performance. Students who set goals, plan how to meet them and monitor their progress “learn more and do better in school” (AITSL, 2017, p. 13).

The goals should therefore be specific enough to guide action. “Improve my handwriting” is too broad. “Keep my lowercase letters resting on the baseline” gives the student, peer and teacher something observable to monitor.

Self-reflection and self-assessment

Students use the goal page and dated work samples to reflect on questions such as:

- What was I trying to improve?
- What can I now do consistently?
- What evidence can I find in my writing?
- What still requires attention?
- What will I focus on next?

Self-assessment should be criterion-referenced rather than based on whether a student simply likes the appearance of the work. Students compare their writing with the identified goal, an accurate model or agreed success criteria and make a judgment supported by evidence.

This reflects AITSL’s description of self-assessment:

“Students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the extent to which it meets goals or criteria, and revise it accordingly” (AITSL, 2017, p. 13).

Self-assessment does not develop automatically. Teachers need to model how to examine writing, identify relevant evidence and make an accurate judgment. The goal is to develop increasingly independent monitoring, not to ask students to tick a box without reflection.

Graham’s handwriting research also supports the inclusion of self-evaluation within explicit instruction. Santangelo and Graham’s meta-analysis found a promising positive effect for self-evaluation on handwriting legibility, although the small number of studies means the result should be interpreted cautiously. Self-evaluation is most useful when combined with clear modelling, explicit criteria, guided practice and feedback rather than used in isolation (Santangelo & Graham, 2016).

Peer and teacher checks

The peer and teacher columns on the WRISE goal page create a shared feedback process. They allow a peer and teacher to consider the student’s work against the same identified goal.

AITSL defines feedback as information about performance relative to a learning goal that can come from the teacher, the student or peers. It also identifies two important formative-assessment strategies:

- Activating students as instructional resources for one another.
- Activating students as owners of their own learning.

Peer assessment can help students develop a clearer understanding of what quality looks like by applying criteria to another piece of work. The peer column is not intended as a mark, reward or judgment of the student. It records a structured conversation about whether the agreed goal is evident in the work.

The teacher column provides confirmation, clarification or the next instructional step. It helps ensure that the student’s self-assessment and peer feedback remain accurate and connected to the skill being taught.

Together, the student, peer and teacher processes create a feedback loop:

- Establish a clear goal.
- Make the goal visible through the Learning Intention.
- Practise and apply the skill.
- Date the work to preserve evidence.
- Reflect and self-assess.

- Receive peer and teacher feedback.
- Identify the next goal or instructional step.

The purpose of these WRISE features

The Learning Intention, date and My Literacy Goals page are not decorative additions. Together, they help turn the exercise book into a cumulative record of learning.

They enable students and teachers to see:

- What the student is learning.
- What progress has been made.
- What evidence demonstrates that progress.
- What feedback has been received.
- What the student needs to work on next.

In this way, WRISE supports students to move gradually from relying on the teacher to monitor every aspect of their work towards becoming more reflective and self-regulated learners. The teacher retains responsibility for explicit instruction, assessment and feedback, while the student develops the capacity to understand goals, evaluate evidence and take increasing responsibility for improvement.

12. Whole-school implementation

Agree the non-negotiables

- A shared formation sequence and concise movement language.
- Protected handwriting instruction within the literacy architecture.
- A common model–guide–retrieve–apply sequence.
- Consistent criteria for selecting and changing ruling.
- Separate monitoring of formation/legibility and fluency/automaticity.

Plan access, not uniformity

Whole-school consistency does not require every student in a year level to use the same ruling. It requires shared decision rules, common language and equitable access to the support that allows each student to work towards the same curriculum expectations.

Use a teach–check–adjust cycle

- Teach the agreed focus explicitly.
- Check a short dated sample under comparable conditions.
- Identify whether the barrier is formation, retrieval, placement, size, fluency, endurance or another writing demand.
- Adjust instruction, practice conditions or ruling.
- Recheck transfer in spelling, dictation and composition.

Leadership review questions

- Can teachers explain the school's handwriting sequence and common language?
- Do students receive sufficient explicit instruction and monitored practice?
- Is ruling selected through evidence or habit?
- Can dated samples demonstrate progress over time?
- Are students who remain slow or effortful receiving targeted instruction?

13. WRISE research position: key conclusions

The evidence supports the following conclusions:

- Explicit handwriting instruction improves handwriting legibility and fluency.
- Handwriting instruction can improve writing quality, length and fluency.
- Fluent handwriting releases cognitive resources for spelling, idea generation, sentence construction and text organisation.
- Poor legibility can cause the quality of a student's ideas and knowledge to be underestimated.
- Effective instruction combines cognitive, orthographic and perceptual-motor processes.
- Students must recall letter forms, retrieve efficient motor plans, reproduce them accurately and repeat them sufficiently to develop automaticity.
- Wider ruling can improve letter-stroke accuracy for many beginning writers, particularly during the initial practice of letter forms.
- The benefit of wider ruling is not universal, and research does not establish one optimal width for every student or year level.
- Providing access to different paper formats and ruling sizes supports responsive instruction.
- Paper design should support explicit instruction, not be presented as a substitute for it.
- WRISE translates these findings into a practical exercise-book range: a consistent, curriculum-conscious writing environment with a progression of ruling sizes that enables instruction to be responsive to the skill, the task and the student.

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