

Handwriting Today

Teachers guide A

Handwriting Today

The cursive handwriting programme

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Introducing *Handwriting Today*

Handwriting Today is a four-book pupil workbook series, which introduces and develops cursive handwriting skills. A unique font, Peannaireacht has been developed in Ireland specifically for use in Irish schools by a group of teachers and computer programmers. The group's leader, Helen Woods is an experienced Irish Primary Teacher who has postgraduate studies in teaching handwriting to young children.

The Peannaireacht cursive represents an opportunity for schools to use a font that allows pupils to write in a fluent and expressive manner and which represents a modern approach, blending both traditional and contemporary handwriting practice. How and when each class or school select to introduce cursive handwriting is very much a decision for that group. *Handwriting Today* is structured so its use is flexible – the four books in the series are developmental and allow for the introduction of the style at the level selected by the individual school. (For more information on how to use *Handwriting Today*, see later in these Teachers Notes.)

The fundamental principle behind the *Handwriting Today* series and the Peannaireacht cursive font is that:

It is essential for all children to develop fluent, legible and attractive handwriting.

This principle is backed up by years of extensive research which includes the following:

Good handwriting is vital for the child as difficulty with handwriting 'can hamper his/her flow of thoughts and limit his/her fluency'. (The Bullock Report 1975, p.184)

It [a good cursive style] can also have a significant influence in improving spelling since letter strings are connected when the child is writing the word. (Ireland, DES and NCCA 1999b)

Cursive handwriting is an integral part of all the well-known and successful multi-sensory teaching programmes devised to help pupils. (Ott 1997, p82)

Introducing *Handwriting Today*

Handwriting Today aims to provide a platform for the development of this overarching principle with specific focus on:

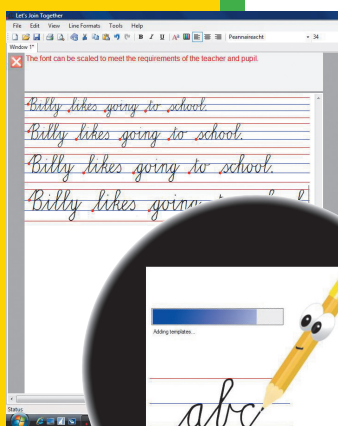
- muscular coordination;
- fine motor skills;
- a preferred writing hand;
- a comfortable and appropriate pencil grip;
- a comfortable and appropriate posture when writing;
- a positive attitude towards handwriting;
- an ability to complete patterns which develop the movement and process of handwriting;
- a visual memory of letter shapes and formations;
- a fluent, legible and attractive writing style; and
- the ability to follow instructions.

The structure of the books in the series is such that it allows progressive development in:

- the correct movement associated with the letter;
- the correct technique for writing the letter;
- the correct formation of the letter; and
- flow and fluency in writing the letter.

What will teachers receive with *Handwriting Today*?

- Over 72 activity pages for each level.
- Regular revision and consolidation.
- A teacher assessment framework.
- A programme providing a developmental approach to handwriting.
- A diversity of resources that allow for individual attention to pupil progress and a comprehensive approach to differentiation of the class handwriting programme.
- A comprehensive teachers guide, a demonstration CD and handwriting software.

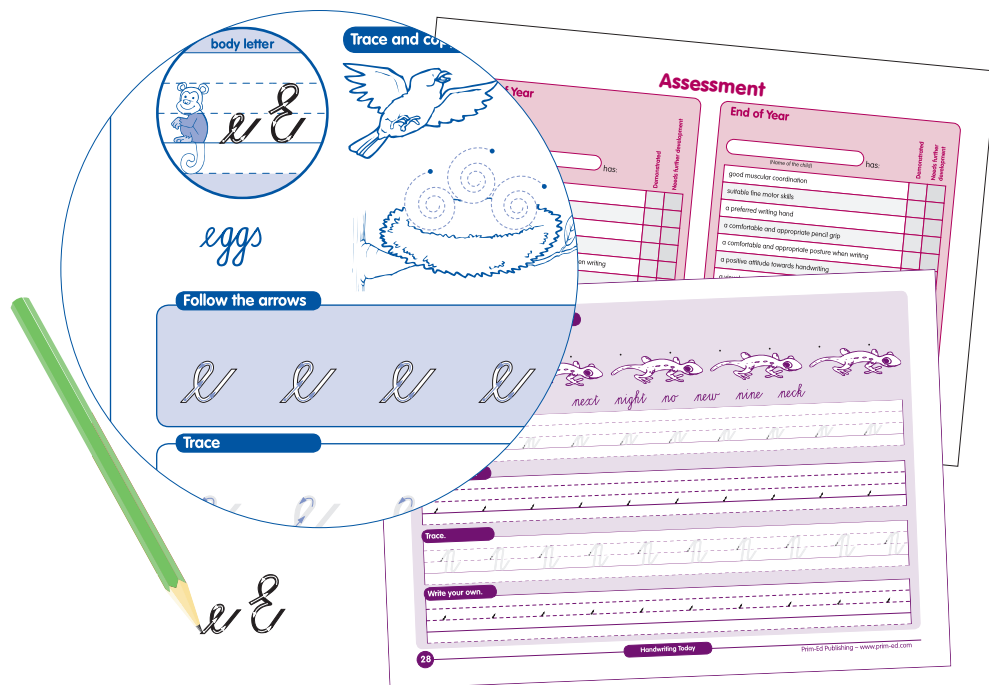


Components of

Handwriting Today

Pupil Workbooks

Four pupil workbooks, each with 72 pages of activities



Demonstration CD

A CD is provided with the teachers guide which provides an interactive demonstration of each letter and letter joins. This resource is ideal for use with interactive whiteboards and allows for teachers to demonstrate letter forms at the click of a button and for pupils to demonstrate letter formation on the whiteboard.

Comprehensive Teachers Guide

The comprehensive teachers guide provides background information on the font in use, instruction on how to use the workbooks, and additional activities to allow for differing abilities and levels of progress within the class group. Components of the teachers guide include:

- specific objectives of each level of the programme;
- explanation of letter forms and formations;
- instruction on posture, paper and grip;
- notes on 'left-handedness';
- additional notes and activities; and
- and much more.

Handwriting Software - Let's Join In

A unique component of this programme is the provision of handwriting software which allows the teacher to create further worksheets to support the learning of the font. This unique piece of software allows the teacher to manipulate line size, stroke size, and to design and create activities that meet the needs of the whole class, small groups or individual pupils.

Objectives

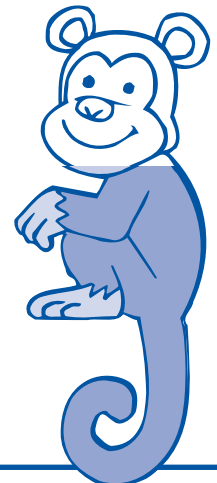
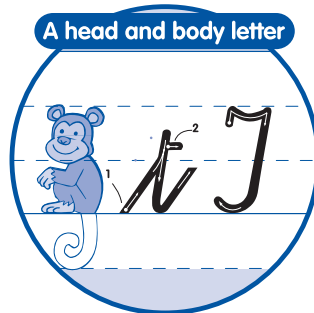
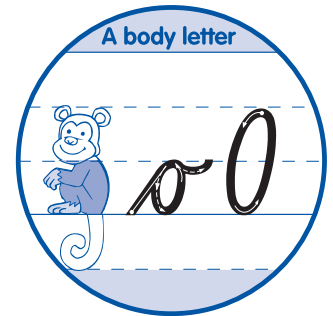
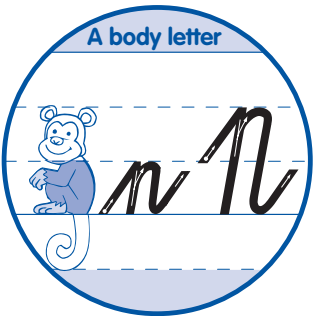
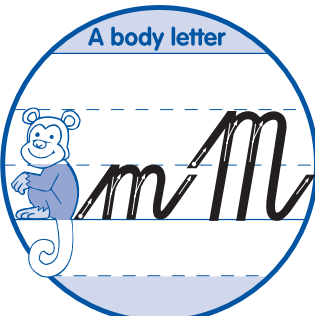
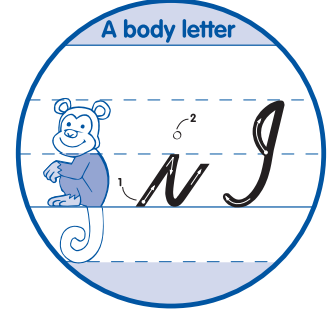
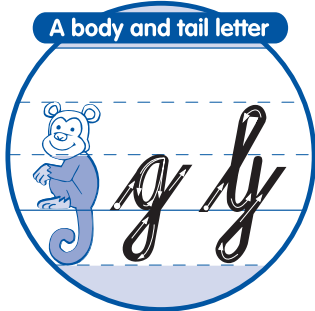
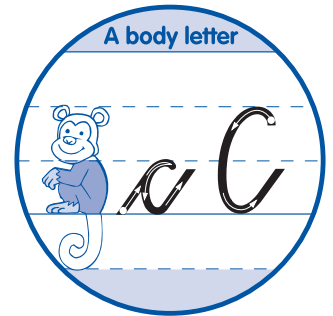
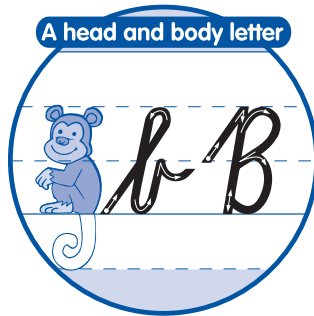
The creation of positive handwriting habits and skills at an early stage is essential as part of children's ongoing writing style development and, more importantly, as an aid to learning in all areas.

At the early writing stages, the more thoroughly handwriting is taught at the beginning, the less time will be necessary later on.
(Sassoon 2003, p1)

It is therefore essential for these key skills and attitudes to be developed and consolidated and, where necessary, for problems to be identified and early intervention practices applied.

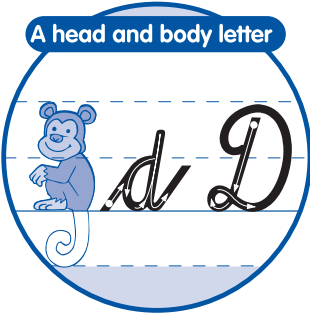
At the completion of the workbook, the child will be able to demonstrate:

- correct posture;
- suitable pencil grip;
- correct placement of workbook;
- the importance of maintaining pencils; i.e. length and sharpness;
- correct formation of lower- and upper-case letters and numbers;
- suitable speed and fluency;
- correct size and shape of letters;
- correct starting and exit points of letters;
- neat and legible handwriting;
- the ability to identify 'anticlockwise', 'clockwise' and 'downstroke' letters;
- the ability to identify 'body', 'head and body', 'body and tail' and 'head, body and tail' letter types; and
- correct use of dotted third lines.

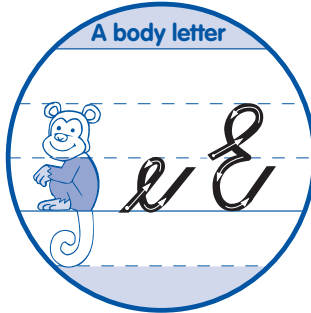


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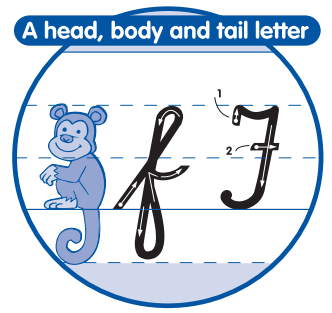
A head and body letter



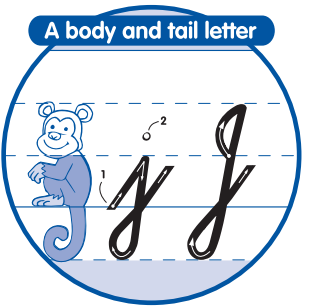
A body letter



A head, body and tail letter



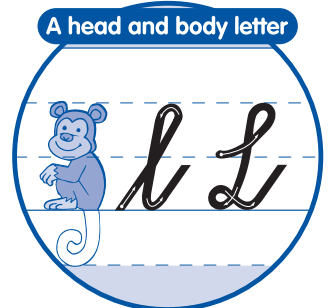
A body and tail letter



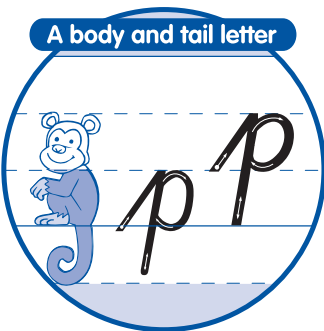
A head and body letter



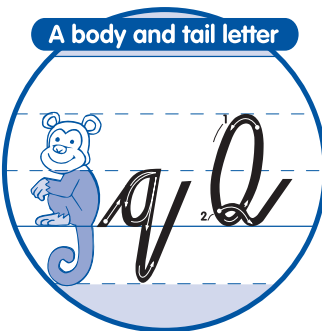
A head and body letter



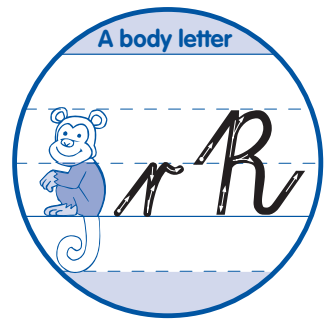
A body and tail letter



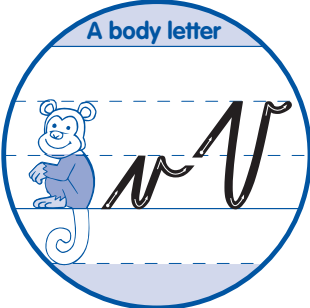
A body and tail letter



A body letter



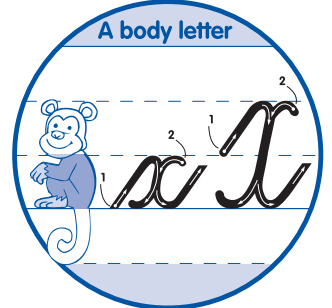
A body letter



A body letter



A body letter



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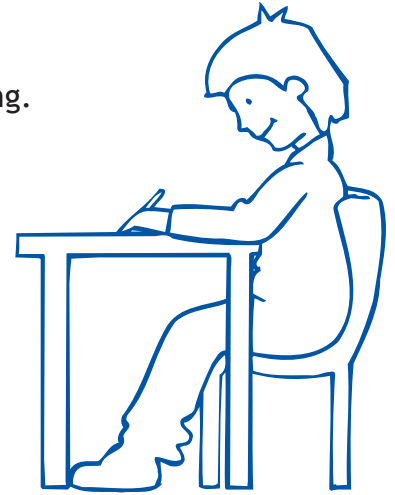
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Posture, Paper and Grip

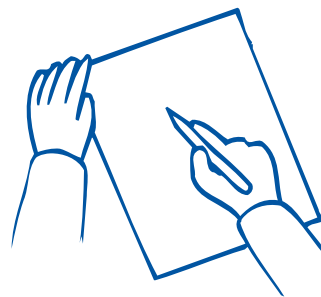
It is essential that pupils develop good habits to ensure they are comfortable while handwriting. The correct posture is illustrated here.



The correct paper position for left- and right-handers is shown.



left-hander



right-hander

The correct pencil grip for left- and right-handers is known as the 'precision grip' and is shown below.



left-hander



right-hander

Left-handedness

Left-handed pupils not only use a different hand to write with, they need to position their workbook differently from other pupils and need to form some capital letters differently.

Teachers should not attempt to change pupils' 'handedness' for handwriting. A left-handed pupil is more than capable of developing a legible and fluent style of handwriting.

When to Use *Handwriting Today*

Handwriting Today provides a series of four workbooks which are designed to provide a developmental framework that allows pupils to progress their handwriting to a fluent and accurate style. The timing of the introduction, and the ongoing use of, the four levels of *Handwriting Today* remains the decision of the classroom teacher or school, as the needs of the pupils, combined with any school-based handwriting policy, will provide the necessary direction.

Notwithstanding this, the series has been designed for flexibility which can see one workbook per year used over a four-year period, or, alternatively, applied at a faster pace for more able or older pupils.

The progressional development that underpins *Handwriting Today* provides the necessary flexibility to meet the demands of, not only individual pupils, but also of a whole class.

Below is a summary of the contents of each pupil workbook.

Handwriting Today Book A

Book A starts with pre-writing activities; pre-writing tracing patterns and activities are also included on each letter page. Letters, both lower-case and upper-case are introduced in Book A, where young writers can practise letter shapes and formations. As Book A is almost entirely visual-based, it can be introduced at a range of ages. Even though words are introduced, (showing each letter in the context of language), children are required to write and practise individual letters only.

Handwriting Today Book B

Book B provides revision of lower-case and capital letters. It looks at creating joins and practising various letter combinations all of which lead to the writing of words.

Handwriting Today Book C

Book C builds on previous joins, combining multiple joins into words, and groups of words and sentences.

Handwriting Today Book D

Book D provides the opportunity for children to practise their writing in the context of everyday usage and cross-curricula themes. Revision of letter formation and joining is included. A strong emphasis is placed on the development of fluency and accuracy and the nature of activities will allow the teacher to work with individual students.

How to Use *Handwriting Today*

At the beginning of each lesson teachers should demonstrate and discuss:

- the type of letter—in this case, it is a body letter;
- the starting point of the lower-case letter and how it is formed;
- the starting point of the upper-case letter and how it is formed; and
- the direction of the letter; e.g. anticlockwise.

The 'Trace and copy' activity develops the correct pencil hold and a fluid writing movement. In this instance, it is developing the anticlockwise direction required for writing the letter 'e'. Teachers should encourage the pupils to colour the artwork to further develop fine motor skills. Pupils trace the first pattern, then complete the remainder using the starting point provided.

Pupils track the letter at the correct size.

Special attention is paid to where the letter begins on the line.

The handwriting practice sheet for the letter 'e' includes several components:

- Illustration:** A blue line drawing of a bird sitting on a nest with two eggs. The nest is on a branch with leaves. A small circle with a mouse and the text 'body letter e' is also present.
- Trace and copy:** A label pointing to the first 'e' in the tracing row.
- Follow the arrows:** A label pointing to the first 'e' in the tracing row.
- Tracing:** A row of ten 'e' characters for tracing. The first 'e' is solid, and the others are dashed with arrows indicating the anticlockwise direction.
- Trace:** A row of ten dashed 'e' characters for tracing.
- Write your own:** A row of ten 'e' characters for independent writing. The first is solid, and the others are dashed with arrows indicating the starting point and direction.
- Page Number:** 12
- Page Title:** Handwriting Today
- Page Footer:** Prim-Ed Publishing – www.prim-ed.com

This tracing activity familiarises the pupil with the shape of the letter. The arrows guide the pupil through the correct formation of the shape, while a dot reminds the pupil where to begin each letter.

Pupils then write on their own, using the starting point, arrows and line as a guide.

How to use Handwriting Today

The 'Trace' pattern develops the correct pencil hold and fluid writing movement.

These common sight words have been included to demonstrate words that begin with 'e' and to show the letter in context of a word.

Trace

eye ear easy extra east every

Trace

Write your own.

Have a go.

Handwriting Today

13

Pupils write on their own, using the starting point and the dotted thirds as a guide.

Pupils 'have a go' at writing the letter without the starting point.

The process of tracing and writing independently is then repeated with the capital letter.

Demonstration CD

A CD is provided with the teachers guide which provides an interactive demonstration of each letter and letter joins. This resource is ideal for use with interactive whiteboards and allows for teachers to demonstrate letter forms at the click of a button and for pupils to demonstrate letter formation on the whiteboard.

Assessment

Handwriting Today

Assessment of pupil progress is an important part of any subject area in the classroom—handwriting is no different.

The *Handwriting Today* workbook series contains assessment tools to assist the teacher with assessing pupil progress and communicating that progress to parents and pupils.

1 Sharpen your pencil.



2 Sit tall with your feet on the floor.



pencil hold.



Assessment

Uses a sharp pencil.
Demonstrates correct posture.
Demonstrates correct pencil hold.
Recognises an ascending join.
Forms an ascending join correctly.
Writes neatly and legibly.
Writes on the lines provided.

Demonstrated	Needs further opportunity

General Comment

Assessment Review

At several stages throughout each book—determined by the content structure of the particular level—a ‘Review’ page is provided.

This serves as a tool to review the work completed on the previous pages and for the teacher to assess the progress of each pupil in that specific area of their handwriting.

Overall Assessment

The last page in each book provides an overall assessment checklist that allows the teacher to make an assessment of each pupil’s ability at the commencement of the school year and again at the completion of the school year. The information is provided in a format that can be easily shared with the pupil, the parents and the following year’s teacher. It is an ideal way of viewing pupil’s progress over the course of the year’s work.

Assessment

Start of Year

	Demonstrated	Needs further development
(Name of the child) has:		
good muscular coordination		
suitable fine motor skills		
a preferred writing hand		
a comfortable and appropriate pencil grip		
a comfortable and appropriate posture when writing		
a positive attitude towards handwriting		
a visual memory of letter shapes and formations		
a fluent, legible and attractive writing style		
the ability to correctly form and write the letters of the alphabet and numbers in pre-cursive style		
the ability to recognise and correctly form cursive joins		
the ability to complete patterns to develop movement and the process of handwriting		
the ability to follow instructions		

End of Year

	Demonstrated	Needs further development
(Name of the child) has:		
good muscular coordination		
suitable fine motor skills		
a preferred writing hand		
a comfortable and appropriate pencil grip		
a comfortable and appropriate posture when writing		
a positive attitude towards handwriting		
a visual memory of letter shapes and formations		
a fluent, legible and attractive writing style		
the ability to correctly form and write the letters of the alphabet and numbers in pre-cursive style		
the ability to recognise and correctly form cursive joins		
the ability to recognise and correctly use printing		
the ability to recognise and correctly form speedloops		
the ability to complete patterns to develop movement and the process of handwriting		
the ability to follow instructions		

As a child develops proficiency and fluency in their handwriting, it is possible that he or she will encounter a range of problems which can be quickly remediated with early identification and the use of effective strategies. These include:

(i) **Faulty grip**

Possible faults in this area include an overtight grip; undue pressure on the page; position of the pencil; and incorrect distance of the grip from the point of the writing implement.

Remediation:

- Pupil holds pencil between thumb and middle finger and taps pencil with the index finger.
- Teacher places tape on the pencil at the correct gripping point.
- The use of a commercial pencil grip.

(Note: see page 8.)

(ii) **Incorrect formation of letters**

Incorrect formation is easily observed, especially in the 'letter focused' early levels of *Handwriting Today*. Finished work from other subject areas should also be observed to ensure children are carrying correct practice into their day-to-day handwriting style.

Remediation:

- The structure of *Handwriting Today* groups letters into common structural elements, which allows for the ongoing remediation of incorrect letter formation.
- The practise of certain appropriate letter patterns will assist the pupils to develop a formation pattern necessary for correct letter formation.

(iii) **Reversal and inversion**

In this case, the child is substituting letters such as 'b' for 'd' and 'w' for 'm'.

Remediation:

- Focus on the letter writing direction of the pupil i.e. left to right.
- This is, at times, a sign of the child's immaturity and may be something he or she will grow out of with correct attention.
- Use of visual discrimination.
- Requiring the child to sound out the letters and words once written, as well as when he/she writes.

Note: an advantage of using a cursive or manuscript style is that this problem occurs less due to the flow and connection of letters.

(iv) Positioning of paper

Incorrect paper position can create writing that is inconsistent; for example, work may commence well, but deteriorate as the child starts positioning the paper incorrectly.

Remediation:

- Teach children to move their paper up and away as they work.
- Teach children to angle the paper correctly (approximately 60° to the left for right-handers)
- Encourage pupils to identify their writing posture as being constant; i.e. head, hands, arm etc. stay in the same position, while the paper moves.

(Note: see page 8.)

(v) Writing posture and position

(Note: see page 8.)

(vi) Writing implements

- Pencils should not be too short, too blunt, or too sharp.
- How do we deal with errors? Create a set of rules; e.g. erasers or no erasers.
- Use appropriate line sizes to suit the pupil's level of handwriting development.

(vi) Teaching problems

- Do your pupils see handwriting as a boring subject?
- Are pupils asked to write amounts of text as punishment?
- Are you asking pupils to transfer large amounts of text from the blackboard/whiteboard to their page. Many children struggle not with handwriting, but with the transfer of text from the blackboard/whiteboard to the page

Remediation:

It's simple, if you are reading this, then none of the above exist because you are using *Handwriting Today* and *Let's Join In* software.

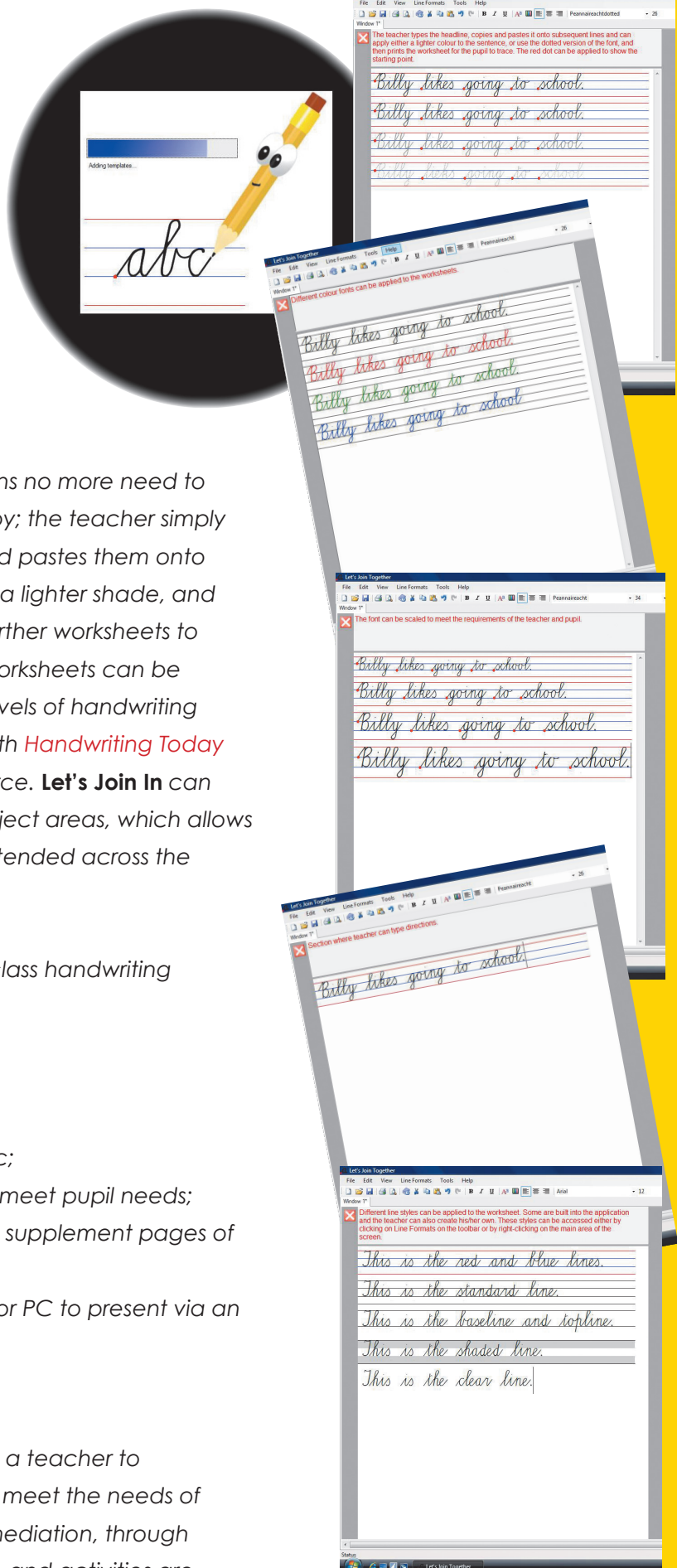
Let's Join In

Handwriting Today is the first cursive handwriting series in Ireland to have, as a component, a computerised font that mirrors the cursive writing style as taught in the four workbooks. This computerised font, Peannaireacht – which is Irish for 'handwriting' – sits within the word processing package **Let's** **Join In**. Using this unique piece of software, the teacher can create additional handwriting worksheets to meet the needs of the whole class, small groups or individual pupils. This means no more need to laboriously writing headlines for the pupil to copy; the teacher simply types the letters, words or sentences, copies and pastes them onto subsequent lines, changes the writing colour to a lighter shade, and prints. Straightaway the teacher has created further worksheets to supplement the focus of the pupil workbook. Worksheets can be customised to meet the needs of pupils at all levels of handwriting skills. **Let's Join In** can be used in conjunction with *Handwriting Today* to provide a comprehensive handwriting resource. **Let's Join In** can also be used to create worksheets for other subject areas, which allows for handwriting teaching and learning to be extended across the curriculum.

The software provides a support resource to a class handwriting programme, with features that include:

- multiple line sizes;
- multiple line configurations;
- choice of line colours;
- choice of line design—dots, dashes etc;
- ability to create one-off worksheets to meet pupil needs;
- ability to create additional activities to supplement pages of work from *Handwriting Today*;
- ability to create activities on a laptop or PC to present via an interactive whiteboard;
- and much more.

The versatility of the **Let's Join In** software allows a teacher to differentiate his/her handwriting programme to meet the needs of individual pupils requiring specific work and remediation, through to whole-class needs where additional practice and activities are required.



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