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### Penmanship in Normal Schools: A Manual for Teachers

Charles E. Doner

William E. Riley

Margaret B. Toole

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
BULLETIN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
1921, NUMBER 7

WHOLE NUMBER, 127

# PENMANSHIP IN NORMAL SCHOOLS

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A MANUAL FOR TEACHERS

---

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION

CHARLES E. DONER, Chairman, State Normal Schools, Bridgewater, Framingham,  
and Salem

WILLIAM E. RILEY, State Normal School, Lowell

MARGARET B. TOOLE, State Normal School, Worcester



BOSTON  
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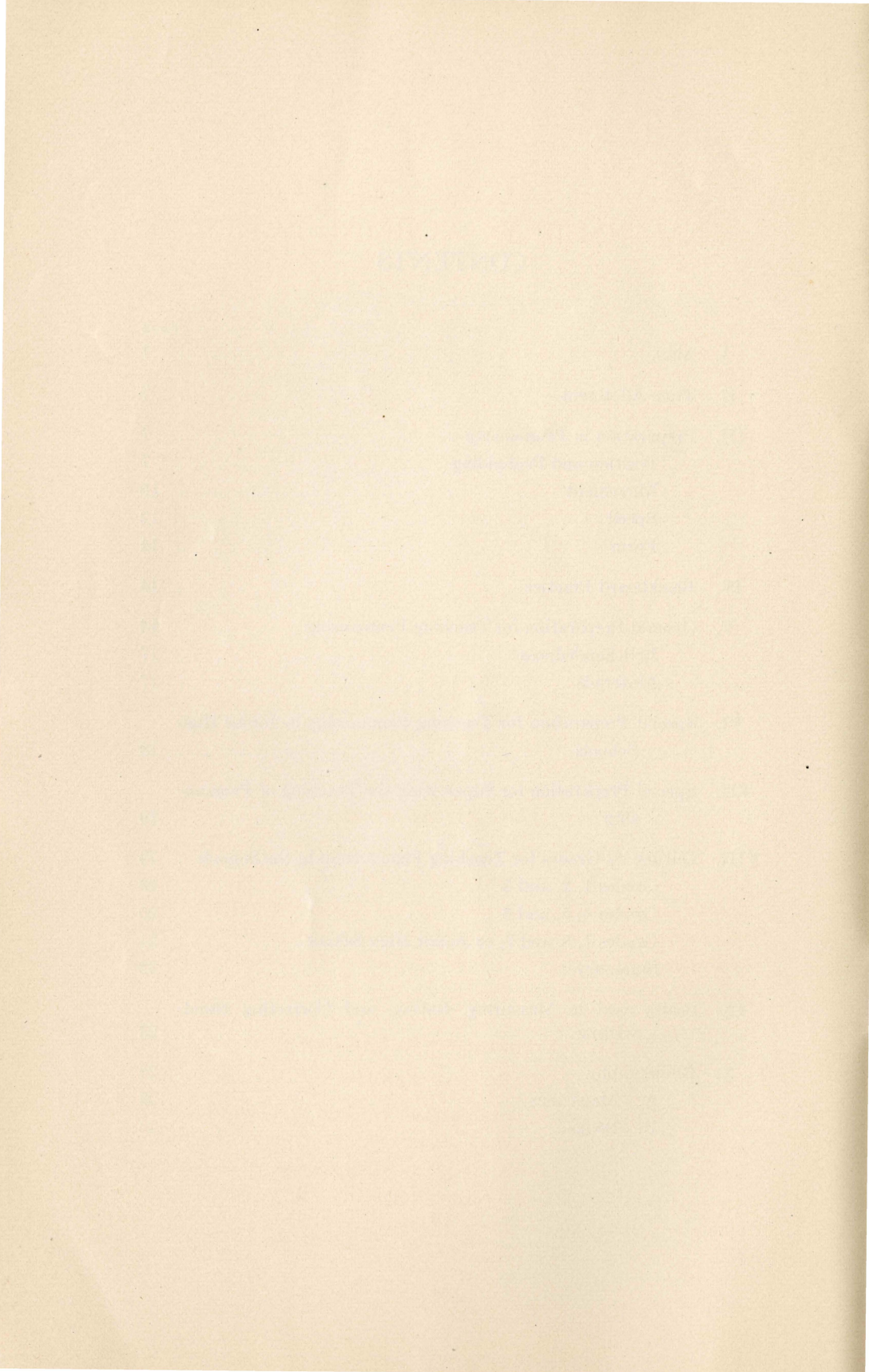


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# PENMANSHIP IN NORMAL SCHOOLS

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## I. Aims

The first requisite in the teaching of penmanship is to develop skill. Skill must be developed through the application of the principles of efficient learning. Efficient learning will gradually lead to right habit formation. The learning of such habit depends upon correct posture, correct form, and the ability to use arm movement efficiently.

When skill in execution, which involves the habit of writing well, becomes a fixed process, the next step is the acquisition of knowledge for teaching penmanship. To secure the best results in teaching, the following specific aims must be thoroughly taught and clearly understood: (1) a knowledge of correct writing posture; (2) a knowledge of correct pencil and penholding; (3) a knowledge of correct arm movement with either right or left hand; (4) a knowledge of usable speed; (5) a knowledge of how to teach letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, and figures.

## II. Time Allotment

The time allotment assigned to the practice of penmanship should be equal to its importance and needs. The minimum should be one period a week; the maximum, one period a day; the average, two or three periods a week. The number of class practice periods will determine the amount of home study or outside preparation required.

## III. Preparation in Penmanship

### POSITION AND PENHOLDING

The sitting posture is important because it affects health as well as efficiency in writing. Since one sits much of the time in school, and since people in many occupations sit more than they stand, the sitting posture determines in no small degree one's health as well as one's efficiency.

The student should sit facing the desk rather than sidewise or diagonally in the seat. Sitting diagonally will throw the left arm off the desk and lower the shoulder, curving the upper part of the spine. Sitting diagonally on a curved seat will elevate one hip above the other, thereby curving the lower part of the spine.

Sitting with legs straightened and with feet resting on the heels while in the act of writing will cause the back to bow, thereby contracting the chest and reducing the activity of the lungs, heart, stomach, and vital organs. An erect, even-shouldered, slightly inclined posture safeguards rather than impairs health, and should be the first concern of the teacher. For study periods and purely mental work, it is well to relax by leaning backward and straightening the legs, crossing the feet if so disposed, thereby conserving vital force for manual effort when needed.

The position of the hand, pen, and paper concern writing, and unless they are adjusted in accordance with the mechanical requirements of writing, good writing cannot be evolved.

The arms should rest on the muscles in front of the elbows, the latter extending not more than 1 inch off the edge of the desk. The elbows should be between the corner of the desk and the sides of the student, depending upon the relative size of student and desk. The elbows should never project into the aisles off the ends of the desk unless the desk is small and the student large.

The hand should glide upon the nails of the little and third fingers. The *wrist* and *side of the hand* should not touch the paper, and the penholder should point over the shoulder or between the elbow and shoulder. The thumb should be further from the pen than the first finger — about opposite the first joint of the index finger.

The holder should be well shaped, of wood, cork or rubber tipped, and so designed as to keep the fingers off the pen. The pen should be of good quality, medium pointed, and semi-flexible.

The left hand should hold the paper above the writing line or along the left side. The left hand should shift the paper up and down and from left to right, and *vice versa*, as the right

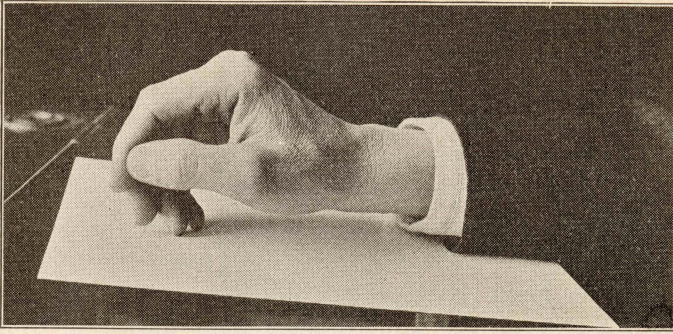


FIG. 1. — Illustrating elevated wrist and sliding rest of the fingers.

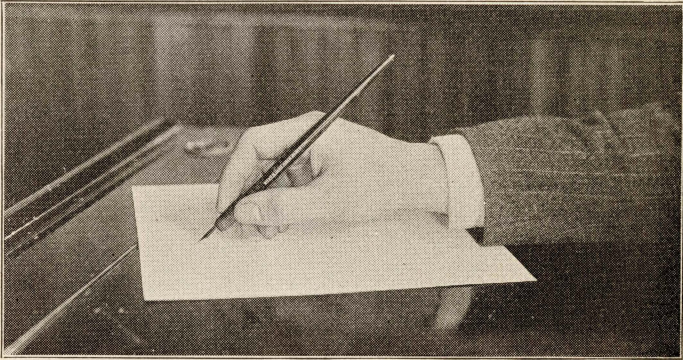


FIG. 2. — Illustrating penholding. Penholder crossing middle finger at root of nail. Penholder resting against knuckle-joint of hand. Thumb back of forefinger supporting holder against middle finger. Forefinger rounded.

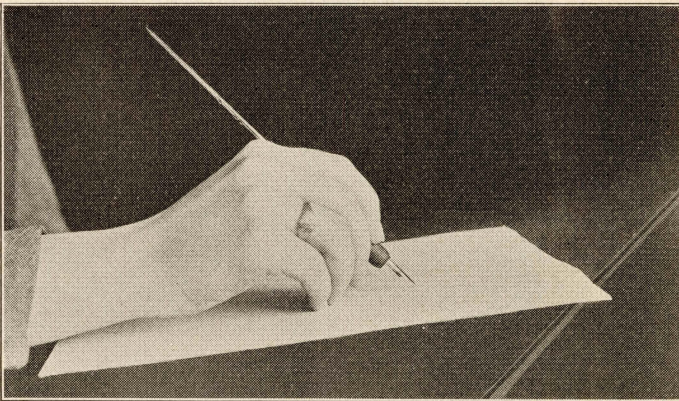


FIG. 3. — Illustrating hand as seen from the right.

forearm rest requires, for it is better to shift the paper occasionally than to crowd the arm off the desk and thus impair its efficiency.

The location and angle of the paper are as vital to excellence in writing as are the adjustment of the hand and pen. The paper should be located directly in front of the body, and should be turned or slanted so that the ruled lines thereon are about at right angles to the arm. With the paper thus located and slanted, the hand off the side, the penholder held loosely, the *wrist well elevated*, the arm resting on the muscle in front of the elbow near the corner of the desk, the penholder held lightly and pointing toward the right shoulder, the conditions should be favorable for improvement and excellence in writing.

Unless mechanical conditions are correct, manual excellence is out of the question. If one cannot apply the correct habits of position in such a way as to maintain them in all writing, then one cannot write successfully. Correct position of body, arms, hand, pen, and paper is half the battle, — the first half, the difficult half, and the indispensable half.

Let health and efficiency be the goal. Good writing will naturally follow. A word of caution. Endeavor to distinguish between the formally stiff and the naturally efficient position.

#### MOVEMENT

Arm or muscular movement is necessary for easy, rapid, legible, and graceful penmanship, because the fingers have been evolved through usage to hold rather than to propel implements.

The bones of the hand which serve as levers are too short to execute with facility the graceful lines and curves in writing.

The flexor, pulling, or closing muscles of the hand, located on the inner or palm side of the hand and forearm, are more powerful than the extensor, pushing, or opening muscles of the hand, located on the outer side of the forearm; and as a consequence, when used to propel the pen in writing, the hand tires and cramps because the pulling muscles outdo the pushing muscles.

The muscles of the forearm which open and close the hand should be used primarily to hold the pen and to serve as a

FIG. 4. — Illustrating the position of the left hand for holding and moving the paper; also the position of the elbows.



FIG. 5. — Illustrating relative position of arms to the paper and penholder to the arm.

## FORM

Following and accompanying the drills upon movement exercises, letter forms should be presented and practiced at a similar rate of speed and with the same movement employed in the exercises. Indeed, letter forms should be the outgrowth of exercises. Unless the exercises culminate into letters, either the exercises are wrong or the application has miscarried.

Exercises are intended to carry a student forward to an efficient, free movement from which point the movement should carry him through letter construction and execution into free, fluent, and final actions in practice, especially with beginners. For instance, before touching the pen to the paper, and in ending drills, letters, and words, let the pen swing lightly and freely from the paper while in motion. This is what produces light writing and a free movement.

### **IV. Blackboard Practice**

Blackboard practice should precede or accompany practice on paper, because it schools the eye to perceive, and trains the hand to perform the movements necessary on paper, the only differences being that it takes a finer co-ordination of effort to write small than large, and that the arm does not rest on the board as it does on the desk. The form learned in blackboard practice will "carry over" to the writing on paper. Blackboard practice in conjunction with paper practice will steadily and noticeably improve writing on paper.

### **V. General Preparation for Teaching Penmanship**

Since the possession of a good handwriting constitutes the greater part of the knowing, then the ability to write well is the first requisite in the teacher's qualification for teaching penmanship. The teacher who writes well possesses a majority of the essentials necessary to teach the art to others. One of the best equipments a teacher can possess is the ability to write well herself. There must be the practice of penmanship combined with theory to secure adequate results.

A manual or practice book should be used to minimize effort and time on the part of both teacher and pupils. The manual

should contain a graded and logical series of exercises, letter forms, words, sentences, paragraphs, and page writing. It should also contain complete and concise instructions for study and practice, and explain rate of speed in counting and writing. The copies should also be written on the board by a capable, enthusiastic teacher, and demonstrated in an inspirational way.

Letters should be presented in groups of similar appearance and construction, such as *i* and *u*, *A* and *O*, *n* and *m*, *D* and *C*, etc., presenting the easy groups first. As soon as a letter is taught, it should be applied to word writing, to be followed in turn by sentence practice. Figures should also be presented in related groups, and, since they are as important as letters, should receive much practice.

Capitals and small letters should be presented alternately, as both are needed in daily use, and because the practice of the one helps the other. Indeed, it is well to present in one lesson, if time will permit, a capital and a small letter, making use of them in word and sentence practice. The restricted movements of the small letters tend to systematize the capitals, and the freedom of the capitals has a tendency to make the small letters more free and graceful.

The legibility of letter forms depends primarily upon their angles, turns, retraces, and loops; while the facility of their execution depends upon their uniformity of size, slant, and spacing. That is, the proper location and number of turns and angles in the letter *m* are of more consequence to its legibility than its size, slant, and spacing. Uniformity in size of the minimum letters, and uniform spacing between letters, are of more vital concern to facility in execution and appearance than any particular size, slant, and spacing.

Pupils must be taught to perceive clearly the essentials of form in order to lead to definite concepts, for unless the student perceives he cannot direct his practice effectively. To study, visualize, and think good writing is next to possessing it. Think good writing, keep the writing machinery adjusted favorably while practicing writing, and good writing will result. Correlate penmanship with all other written work. This correlation should extend through both the junior and senior high schools. Indeed, if our high schools would give a little more



attention to penmanship, and not allow so much scribbling to be done in a slipshod, careless way, which causes writing to degenerate into a scrawl, the writing on the part of our young people would be kept up to a higher standard. The committee recommends that one lesson in penmanship a week be given to all the pupils in high schools. This would keep the general writing in notebooks, etc., from deteriorating.

The style or kind of writing taught should be universal and formal rather than individual and peculiar; it should not be extreme in slant or style, but should possess the two chief essentials of writing, — plainness and fluency. When a universal or formal handwriting has been thoroughly learned, then character or individuality in style develops to suit individual needs.

A supervisor of penmanship should direct the work in writing. If there is no supervisor, then the work should be under the direction of some one of the faculty best qualified and most interested to direct the work efficiently.

The method work should be related to the practice work, sometimes supplementing it, and sometimes preceding and preparing for the practice. The most vital theory or method will grow out of the practice. Were this not true, it is questionable whether more than blackboard drills and study of method would be justified.

The value of writing to other subjects, and the influence of other subjects upon the writing habit, need critical attention in teaching.

Observation and the teaching of writing in each grade in the training school is invaluable in disclosing the differences in skill and capacity of pupils of different ages. Normal school students should receive thorough training in presenting lessons in penmanship in logical order. They should know how to classify letters according to likeness or "related groups" suited to the different grades and to the different stages of the pupils' requirements. Knowing how to present the letters by giving the simple ones first, leading up to the more difficult ones, accompanied with suitable drills for development, is an important part of penmanship training.

The gradation of writing from the simple to the complex;

the adaptation of writing to the growth periods of child development; the judging, grading, rating, or classifying of writing according to its merits should receive careful attention in the teaching of penmanship.

#### LEFT-HANDEDNESS

Left-handedness is a problem that must be dealt with wholly on the ground of each individual case. It cannot be handled on a broad scale by saying that all children who are left-handed must change to the right hand. Some children can be changed easily without any apparent ill effects, while others cannot. Try the change, insisting that the right hand be used at all times, — especially in writing, — then watch the result. If no ill effect becomes apparent, particularly in language work and spelling, then the change should be made and kept up until the use of the right hand becomes automatic. The writing and speech centers are very closely connected in the brain, and to interfere with the writing center when Nature says that a child is absolutely left-handed is claimed by some authorities to cause trouble with the oral or written language work.

If a child appears left-handed, experiment in making the change to the right hand, and, if no ill effect is manifested, continue until the habit of using the right hand is established. The best time to make the change is in the first grade, continuing through the fourth grade. If the child then persists in using the left hand when working independently, he may be allowed to continue in that way. The paper should be turned so that the writing line will have the same relation to the left forearm that it has to the right forearm in right-handed children. The down strokes should be toward the left elbow instead of toward the center of the body. To use both hands equally well, which would be ambidexterity, would be an advantage to the pupil.

#### MATERIALS

“A workman is known by his tools.” The materials need not necessarily be the most expensive. A good carpenter uses good material, always keeping it in the best of condition, and he never botches a piece of work even though he has to do it

in haste. Use good material and always keep it in good condition. A pen with a medium point is best, not too coarse or too fine. One's judgment should be exercised in the matter of using pens. A new pen seldom writes well without first moistening it with ink and then wiping it. A wet sponge is best for keeping the pen clean. Penwipers made of cotton cloth are good. A chamois skin makes a poor penwiper; it becomes greasy by handling. A pen should always be well moistened by dipping it into the ink just above the little hole in the pen. Any good fluid ink is satisfactory so long as it flows easily from the pen. A wooden, cork-tipped or rubber-tipped penholder is best, and should be of medium size. A small metal-tipped penholder should not be used for the reason that it requires gripping, and gripping prevents ease and freedom in writing. A small-grip penholder should never be used. The paper should be uniform in ruling, and the lines should be from three-eighths to one-half inch apart. One inch or one-half inch margins should be observed on both sides of the paper.

## **VI. Special Preparation for Teaching Penmanship in Junior High Schools**

There is no material difference in the training of teachers in penmanship for elementary and junior high school work. The directions under the elementary course should be carefully read and assimilated by all students who expect to teach in junior high schools. While the *kind* of instruction and practice work in the elementary course differs but little from that in the junior high school, the result in the junior high school should be of a better *quality*. The practice work should not only consist of movement drills, letter, word, sentence, and paragraph practice, but also of more advanced practice on notes, receipts, bill-heads, trial balances, much drill on figures, letter-writing, etc. Much of the practice in penmanship in junior high schools should be of the nature that will not only serve the real uses of writing in school, but should be of such practical value that it would be serviceable to the pupil should he or she leave school to enter a business office. An advanced course embodying ledger writing and business forms should be used for junior

high school practice, especially after pupils have had a good foundation in muscular movement writing.

Therefore the training of normal school students for junior high school teaching should be of such a nature as to adequately qualify them to carry on this new and important kind of penmanship work.

### **VII. Special Preparation for Supervising the Teaching of Penmanship**

Students who have a natural aptitude for penmanship, and who desire to specialize in teaching and supervising this subject, either in junior high, elementary, or private schools, should not only have a thorough course as described under "General Preparation for Teaching Penmanship," but should also take up further study and practice in special schools of penmanship, summer courses, and courses by mail. They should have training in such work as lettering, engrosser's script writing, shaded writing as used in filling certificates, diplomas, and in resolution work. This kind of work should also be included in the training of the advanced commercial students in the Salem Normal School. Commercial teachers are often asked and required to do the lettering of high school diplomas and certificates, and it is obvious that they should receive some training in this kind of work.

### **VIII. Outline by Grades for Teaching Penmanship in the Schools**

#### GRADES 1, 2, AND 3

The first writing done by a child takes place in the brain. Therefore the first writing is mental rather than manual. Perception precedes performance. Ample opportunity should be given the pupils in the beginning to *visualize, motion, and trace* correct letter forms. It is through sight, touch, and motion that the pupil takes his first steps in learning to write. There should first be board practice in large, free writing for general form — not accuracy — on words, easy sentences, letters, and pupils' names. The letters should be taught in "family groups" such as, a d g q, n m y, O D C, etc. The capitals can be taught

only as they are needed. The size of writing on the board should be two inches for minimum letters and four inches for the capitals and extended loop letters. The writing on paper should be free, — not too small and restrictive. Begin the training in right habits of posture, placing the arms and paper in proper position, adjusting and holding the pencil properly in the hand. *Correct habits of posture, penholding, and letter formation* should always receive special attention. If the writing taught is fairly large, if careful attention is given to hygienic posture, and if pencil holding is correct, the pupils will use more or less free-arm movement in writing. The use of the arm in writing should be encouraged. The larger movements of the arm should always predominate over the smaller movements of the hand or fingers. A combination of arm and *correct finger* movement is an ideal way to write. The slant should be about fifteen or twenty degrees to the right of the vertical. There should be no assigned “busy work” writing in the primary grades. All written work should be carefully supervised. Care must be taken to place correct copies before the pupils, especially upon the blackboard.

#### GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

In these grades the process should receive first emphasis. A well-finished product will naturally follow a correct process. The manner of writing, the application of the movement through muscular feeling and touch, are important essentials. This is the time to put much stress on right habits of *posture, penholding, relaxation, and wrist elevation*; also the time to make arm movement automatic in all written work, especially in grade 6. In grades 4, 5, and 6 not only *form*, but the application of movement to all written work should be made habitual. Rhythm to be established in all practice, but the writing not to be too technical in form, slant or size, yet *free*. In grade 4 all the small letters should be studied, analyzed, and practiced; in grade 5 all the capitals should be studied, analyzed, and practiced. In grade 6 all this practice should be supplemented with word, sentence, and figure practice; also in grade 6 special attention should be given to uniformity of slant of all downward strokes, uniformity of height of similar letters, and uni-

formity of size of similar letters. The practice of penmanship should have a direct bearing upon the regular written work. The size of small letters should be about one-eighth of an inch, and the size of capitals and extended loop letters should be about three-eighths of an inch. The slant should be from fifteen to twenty degrees to the right of the vertical. Teach from any of the standard manuals on the "Arm Movement Method."

#### GRADES 7, 8, AND 9 OR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The form, speed, and the application of movement are essential factors to be emphasized in these grades. The analysis of the letters, the establishment of uniform slant, spacing, and size of writing should receive special attention. Practice should consist of drills, letters, letters joined, words, sentences, figures, paragraphs, spelling words, letter writing, business forms, etc. Short speed drills should be given to establish briskness of movement; also short drills with special emphasis put upon form should be carried out in the daily or weekly drill. To emphasize *form* and *movement*, sometimes movement and sometimes form, carrying the two along together with the speed requirement is a very successful way of teaching penmanship. Pupils and teacher should make a study of, and fit the practice to, writing as a language tool, always having the penmanship progress co-ordinately with all other written subjects. This is the age best suited for intensive study and practice of thirty minutes daily with expert instruction and supervision; also the time to exact and not merely expect, for *firmness is fairness*. For size of writing divide a space, which is between two blue lines, into four equal parts, making all capitals and extended loop letters above the base line three parts, the small t, d, and p two parts, and minimum letters one part. This divides the letters into a scale of thirds. The loop letters below the line should extend down two parts, which is halfway into the space. In this practice of relative size of letters do not sacrifice speed for accuracy, but secure accuracy through repetition of speed drills. Size and slant should be such as to meet classroom and individual needs. Each pupil's writing should be uniform in slant. This does not mean, however, that the writing of all

pupils should be the same in size, slant, or spacing. Some individuality is allowable. However, individuality in writing does not mean peculiarity, but something plain and distinctive. Pupils whose writing measures up to the requirements set by the school (and if the regular written work is retained at such point) should be excused from the daily drill in penmanship. The end sought is rapid, legible penmanship written in an efficient manner. In case arm movement writing has not been taught before these grades, this would be the time to begin it and make up what should have been accomplished in former grades. Teach from any of the standard manuals on the "Arm Movement Method."

#### SUMMARY

*Grades 1, 2, 3.* — The habit-forming stage.

*Grades 4, 5, 6.* — The application stage.

*Grades 7, 8, 9, or Junior High Schools.* — The perfecting stage.

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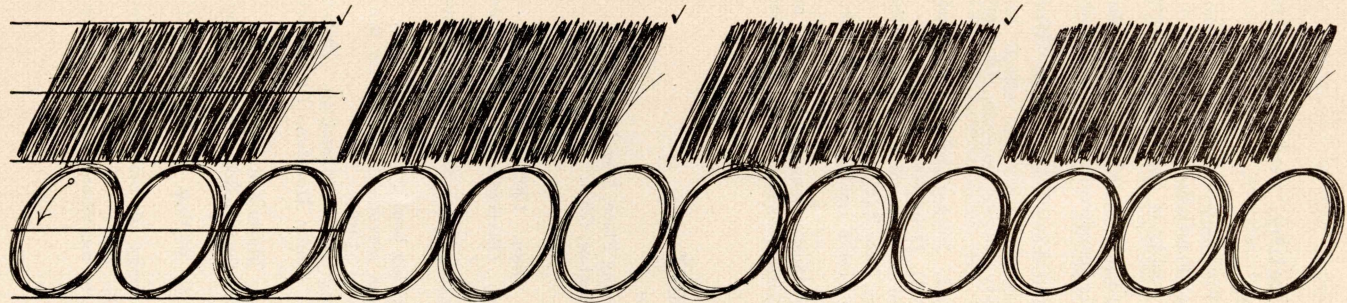
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FIGS. 8 AND 9.—LESSONS SUITABLE FOR FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD GRADES. THE RETRACING MAY BE DONE WITH A SKEWER, REVERSED PENHOLDER, OR PENCIL.



a m l  
an an an an  
On and on we go.

oooooooooooooooo  
oooooooooooooooo

mmmmmmmmmmmm

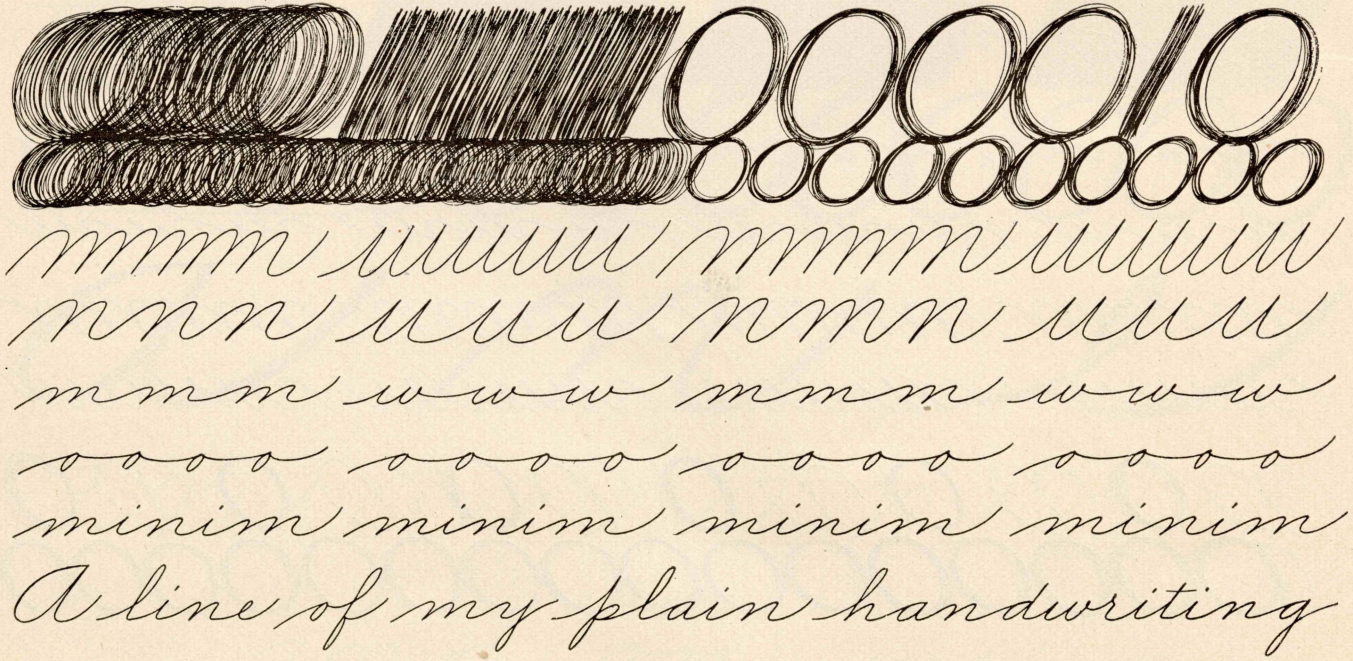
uuuuuuuuuuuuuu

mmmmmmmmmmmm

manmanmanman

Aim now to write your best.

FIGS. 10 AND 11. — LESSONS SUITABLE FOR FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH GRADES.





FIGS. 12 AND 13. — LESSONS SUITABLE FOR SEVENTH, EIGHTH, AND NINTH GRADES, OR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS.

OOOOOOO OOOOOOO O O O O O O O  
O O O O O a a a a a O O O O O O O O  
O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O O  
a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a  
One Ohio Oregon Omaha Overture  
Aim Along Again American Aim  
Over and over until you learn  
Arm movement writing is the best.

A good handwriting is not un-  
like a bank account because it can  
be depended upon in time of need.  
A good handwriting will always  
be in demand. One's writing should  
be such as to attract special attention  
because of its excellence in speed and  
quality.

FIG. 14. — STANDARD LETTER FORMS.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
n o p q r r s t u v w x y z  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 \$ % & ' ( )

FIG. 15. — ILLUSTRATING HOW TO PRACTICE ACROSS THE LINES FOR SPACING.

