



Letter Formation Guide

When teaching children to use legible and efficient handwriting, you must sit alongside them and be a fully engaged encourager. Handwriting is rewarding to teach because kids see results from their efforts very quickly and builds a growth mindset. To begin, your child will make a LOT of c's. We're building muscle memory, fine motor strength, and stamina so keep them going. Every so often, draw a heart or star above some really well-formed letters. A smile and a nod of the head go a long way. Celebrate the good stuff with sincere enthusiasm and correct as needed. Stay positive, and you'll soon see great results!



First, each letter **c** begins **just below the dotted mid-line**. Move your pencil -going up, up, up, to the left- like a rollercoaster with the top of the rollercoaster scraping the middle line (or mid-line). Then, slide down and around to the bottom (or base line), and then curve back up again. Start each letter where you see the star. Note with your child that a c almost makes a circle. Also, to get kids going in the right direction, cue right-handed kids to make their rainbows go toward their "holding hands" (Note: that the holding hand almost makes a c with the thumb and forefinger.) Left-handed kids to go away from their holding hands.

Next, say, "If you can make a **c**, you can make an **o**. Just make a c and then close it up." An o starts like a c.

If you can make an o, you can make an **a**. Just close up the c with a straight line going up to the middle line and bouncing back down to the bottom line. These a's will not work unless your child begins like a c. There must be a rainbow so the straight line of the a runs into it when making the straight stick. When my pencil touches the mid-line I say, "Bonk" and when it touches the base line I say, "Bonk" again to remind kids to keep their pencils on their papers until they've bonked both lines—Two bonks.

Then we say, "If you can make an a, you can make a **d**. Instead of stopping at the middle line, just go straight up, way up, to the top line, and then bounce back down to the base line. To address the b/d reversal, say, "If you see a c, what you see is a d." Kids will not have reversal issues if you teach them these letter formations. A d starts like a c. *Sing, "A, b c, turn it into a d."*

If you can make an a, then you can also make a **g**. Instead of stopping at the bottom line, just bring the straight stick way down and curl a tail under the ball of the g.

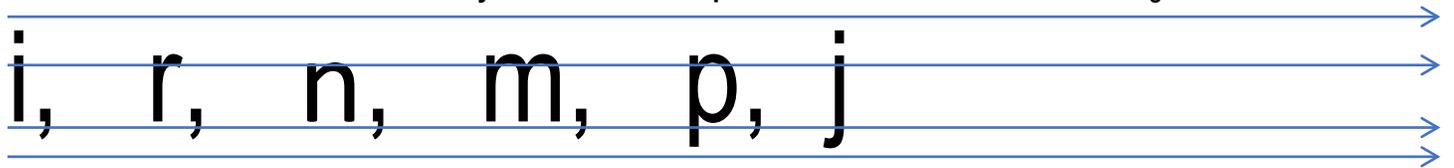
If you can make a g, you can make a **q**. just curl the tail the other way to catch the u that you'll always make after a q. In English words, q is always followed by u. A u is formed just like an a, but it doesn't have the rollercoaster on top. (qu, qu, qu)

An **s** begins like a c, too. Go up, up, up a rollercoaster, but then push in and curve back out between the mid- and baselines.

An **f** begins like a c, but it starts way up high, with the rollercoaster touching the top line not the middle line. Then, make a straight stick down. Cross the f by moving your pencil horizontally, moving from left to right on the middle line. Left-handed writers will push their pencils across to make the crossing line while right-handed writers pull their pencils across to cross the f.

To make an **e**, simply make the same kind of line you made to cross the f, just begin the line below the middle line, and, without lifting your pencil, make a c around it.

Please be sure your child understands that some letters are small, some letters are tall, and some letters hang down. Kids must remember that **each letter can only take one or two spaces**. A letter cannot be tall *and* hang below the base line.



Begin each of the next letters **on the middle/dotted line** with a straight stick downward. Say, "down dot" over and over as kids form the letter **i** making the stick with a downward stroke and then placing a dot on top. Note: No circles for dots.

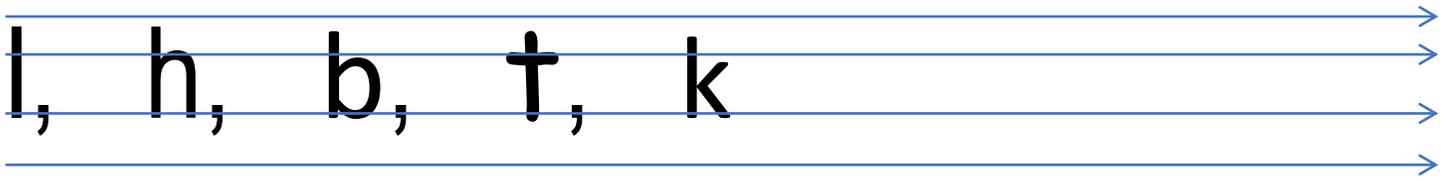
Once the letter **i** is formed correctly with automaticity, say, "If you can make an i, you can make an **r**. It's just a straight line down and then we bounce back up that same line and make a rainbow."

If you can make an r, you can make an **n**. You just move your pencil down to make a straight line then bounce back up that line to make a rainbow that goes up and then all the way down and touches the ground.

If you can make an n, you can make an **m**. It's just a down, bounce, bounce—with two rainbows touching the ground.

For the letter **p**, we begin in the same manner as we did the letter r (on the dotted middle line), but we'll let the stick on the p "hang down low" and *then* bounce up to make a full rainbow that we'll then close up at the bottom.

For the letter **j**, we just make an i and let the tail "hang down low" and then curl the tail like a g tail.)



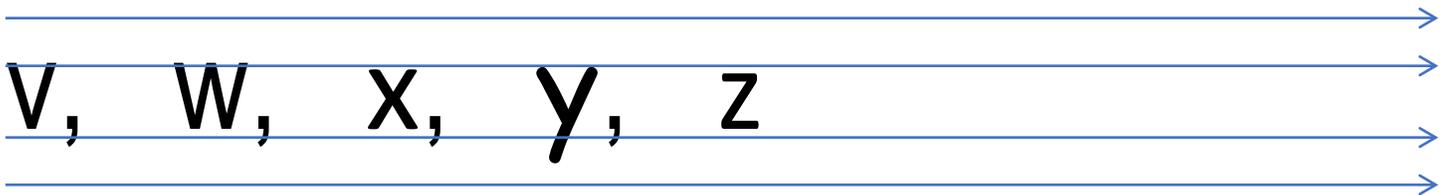
Letter **l** is formed with a straight stick down, too, but it begins—not on the dotted line—but on the top line. These letters are tall, so none of them is going to hang low. We say, "straight stick down" as we form the letter, and "It looks like a lollipop stick."

Then say, "If you can make an l, you can make an **h**. It's just a straight stick down with a bounce back up (just like an n but with a tall stick)." Say, "Down and bounce."

To make a **b**, just make an h and close it up at the bottom. Give your child a piece of Hubba Bubba bubble gum to remember that the letter that begins like an h is a b and it says /b/ like in bubble gum. As kids make the b they say, "Hubba (make the h) Bubba (turn it into a b by closing it at the bottom)." *Gone are those b/d confusions! They're not much alike at all.*

To make a **t**, just make an l and cross it in the same way we crossed the f (moving from left to right, on the middle line.)

The letter **k** is a little tricky. It's three straight sticks down. It begins with an l, but then the second move is from the dotted middle line into the stick of the l, sliding down diagonally. Then we make another line sliding down diagonally in the opposite direction to the base line. Say, "Start at the top and make a straight stick down. Lift your pencil up. The second stick is from the middle line, a little to the right of the straight stick you just made. (Note: The first diagonal line begins where the crossing line on a t would end.) Move your pencil down diagonally from the middle line to the l (R to L), then make a kick stand moving your pencil down diagonally (L to R) from the l to the base line. It should look a bit like an uppercase t (T) is leaning against a letter l.



The rest of the letters are just straight, diagonal sticks. For a **v**, we slide down a mountain and climb back up.

To make a **w**, we do that twice. I often say that this letter should be called a double v (like it is in Spanish), but it's called a double u because it often doubles as a u.

To make an **x**, we slide down diagonally like we were making a v, but instead of sliding back up, we lift our pencils back to the top and cross the first stick, in the middle, with a diagonal line going in the opposite direction—from right to left.

The letter **y** has the same movements used to make an x. Begin like the first move of a v. Lift your pencil like you're going to cross it, but instead of crossing it in the middle of the line (like an x), cross/connect it at the bottom or at the baseline, and make the line hang down low making the only straight tail.

To make a **z**, slide the pencil across the mid-line, from left to right, just as we did when crossing the f and the t -zip, then slide the pencil down diagonally (R to L)-zap and, finally, make a straight horizontal line back along the base line -zooop.

On each day of handwriting practice, you'll start with c, but you'll make fewer each day. Practice all the letters you've already taught, and then introduce the new letters for the day. This provides plenty of practice for the trickier letters.

Practice all letters until they are written tidily, efficiently, and with automaticity. After you're no longer coaching for proper formations (because they're looking so good), have your child practice forming the letters while making the sounds those letters represent. Instead of saying, "Down and bounce back up," as your child is making r's, s/he can simply say, "Rr."

After you've completed all the letters, practice writing names, familiar decodable words, etc. When children begin to focus on spelling, they tend to forget about forming letters correctly, so continue to sit alongside your child and watch every move to be sure old habits do not creep in. After practicing spelling lots of words, begin practicing writing short sentences. Then, with your encouraging guidance, move on to more demanding tasks while keeping an eye on every letter formation. Coach to correct formations. Don't say, "No." Say, "Wait. Every letter starts at the top" or "Remember, if it starts like a c it's a d" or "To make an r we go down and bounce back up." It'll stick if you don't step away too soon. Remember, it's doesn't matter if it looks right/good. What matters is whether it is tidy and was formed in an efficient manner. That's how we build outstanding writers.

This sentence has every letter in it: The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. ☺