

Written Dictation in Handwriting at Hurst Hill

Dictation in handwriting lessons provides a purposeful way for pupils to practise accurate letter formation, spacing, and layout while applying taught phonics and spelling knowledge in meaningful contexts. It reinforces transcription fluency by moving from individual letters to words and sentences, supporting the DfE Writing Framework's emphasis on automaticity and reducing cognitive load during extended writing.

Dictation also strengthens pupils' understanding of how handwriting conventions (e.g., capital letters, ascenders, descenders) interact with spelling and punctuation, while offering immediate feedback on both form and accuracy. This approach ensures pupils develop legible, fluent handwriting alongside secure encoding skills, bridging the gap between handwriting instruction and independent writing.

Dictation strategies for writing

Pre-Dictation Preparation

- Review the modelled vocabulary and sentence structures planned for the unit.
- Ensure all dictated words and phrases match pupils' phonics and spelling knowledge.
- Display images and key vocabulary on working walls or slides to support visual memory.

Vocabulary-Aligned Dictation

- When planning, adapt modelled sentences to include phonics or spelling patterns pupils have been taught.
- Avoid dictating words beyond pupils' current phonics knowledge.
Example: After teaching *ck*, model and dictate: *The duck sat on the sack.*

Image-Supported Dictation

- Use images from the unit's stimulus (e.g., a scene from the text or film clip).
- Dictate sentences describing the image using previously taught vocabulary.
Example: Show an image of Ironman and dictate: *Ironman stood on the edge of the tower.*

Oral Rehearsal

- Model oral rehearsal during teacher thinking aloud.
- Pupils repeat dictated sentences several times before writing.
- Emphasise prosody and punctuation during rehearsal.

Gradual Release Dictation

- I do: Teacher models writing and re-reading with expression.
- We do: Pupils write dictated sentences collaboratively.
- You do: Pupils write independently after oral rehearsal.

Talking Tins for Support

- Pre-record dictated sentences for pupils who need extra scaffolding. Pupils listen and write at their own pace.

Partial Dictation Sentence Stems

- Provide stems with blanks for pupils to complete using their own ideas.
- Example: *The _____ Ironman _____ on the _____.*
- Encourages creativity while maintaining structure.

Prosody and Intent Dictation

- Dictate sentences with expressive punctuation (e.g., exclamation marks, ellipses).
- Model reading aloud with tone matching the sentence intent.
- Pupils replicate this in their writing.

Interactive Dictation for Grammar Focus

- Dictate sentences with missing grammar elements (e.g., verb or adjective).
- Example: *The hero _____ across the city.* Pupils fill in the verb.

Error Correction Dictation

- Dictate a sentence with an intentional error.
- Pupils identify and correct it (e.g., missing capital letter or incorrect tense).

Peer Dictation

- Pupils dictate modelled sentences to partners.
- Reinforces oral rehearsal and listening skills.

Dictation Progression (Years 1–6)

Heading	Year 1	Year 2	Years 3 & 4 (Lower KS2)	Years 5 & 6 (Upper KS2)
Use dictation early and regularly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent short dictations using taught GPCs and simple CEWs. • Simple sentences with capital letters + full stops. • Manageable length to avoid overload. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular dictations including Y2 spelling patterns, homophones, CEWs, contractions. • Sentences requiring wider punctuation (commas in lists, apostrophes, question/exclamation marks). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictate paragraphs or multi-sentence sections. • Include Y3/4 spelling rules: prefixes, suffixes, homophones, possessive apostrophes (plural), and words from Y3/4 word list. • Include wider punctuation: inverted commas for speech, commas to clarify meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictate longer, cohesive paragraphs across a range of genres. • Integrate Y5/6 spellings, homophones, statutory word lists. • Include complex punctuation: brackets, dashes, colons, semicolons, hyphens. • Dictation resembles real writing pupils are expected to produce.
Ensure handwriting & spelling fluency before extended writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on accurate letter formation, spacing, size. • Support automatic spelling of basic GPCs and CEWs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop speed, fluency and accuracy in handwriting. • Strengthen automaticity with Y2 spelling patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure fluent, joined handwriting (where school policy applies). • Increase speed and stamina for extended writing. • Reinforce accurate use of prefixes/suffixes and spelling patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations for fluent, joined handwriting. • Spelling should be increasingly automatic, enabling focus on authorial choices. • Dictation supports fluency needed for long, multi-paragraph texts.
Dictation can scaffold composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After writing the sentence, pupils adapt one element (add adjective/change verb). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand noun phrases, add clauses, improve verbs and vocabulary. • Edit and correct errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse dictated sentences to explore structure, cohesion and clause types. • Improve sentence quality through varied openers, conjunctions, and richer vocabulary. • Edit punctuation including speech marks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictated text serves as a model for advanced editing: cohesion, tone, register. • Pupils revise structure, vary clause types, experiment with figurative language. • Reflect on authorial intent and precision.
Support for pupils with additional needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, scaffolded tasks. • Oral rehearsal, visual prompts. • Alternatives to writing (peer scribing/oral composition). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolded tasks with clear structure. • Use chunked dictation, visual word prompts. • Teacher/peer support where transcription is a barrier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffolded vocabulary lists, chunked dictation, assistive technology if needed. • Provide structured sentence frames and error-aware feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For high-needs pupils: scaffolded steps, reduced quantity, voice-to-text, precision feedback. • Dictation used strategically to support accuracy and confidence.
Incremental progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with words → short phrases → simple sentences. • Use familiar vocabulary and basic punctuation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with spelling lists and simple clauses → progress to multi-clause sentences with subordination. • Include more punctuation types. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move from single sentences → structured paragraphs. • Dictate texts with dialogue, varied clause structures, and cohesive devices. • Introduce Y3/4 word list expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress from paragraph dictation → multi-paragraph texts. • Include ambitious vocabulary, complex punctuation and formal/technical language. • Reflects expectations for secondary-ready writing.
Feedback & review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review errors in CEWs, punctuation and letter formation. • Model corrections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on homophones, apostrophes, handwriting consistency. • Encourage self-checking strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review spelling patterns, punctuation accuracy, paragraph cohesion. • Develop self-editing and peer feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage sophisticated self-review of structure, vocabulary precision, grammar and punctuation choices. • Use feedback to refine writing style and accuracy.
Suggested Passage Length by Year Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 – 15 words • Words taught in phonics • Common exception words • Simple sentences with capital letters and full stops. • Sentences using ‘and’. • Common exception words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 – 20 words • Words with suffixes – ly, ness, ful • Contractions – can’t, didn’t, it’s • Sentences with commas in a list • Sentences with expanded noun phrases • Sentences with because, if, when, that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 – 25 words (Y3) or 25 – 30 words (Y4) • Words from the year 3/4 statutory list. • Y3 and Y4 Common exception words. • Prefixes – re-, dis-, mis-, auto-, super-. • Homophones: accept/except, affect/effect • Short paragraphs with dialogue. • Sentences using fronted adverbials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 – 35 words (Y5) or 35 – 40 words (Y6) • Words from the year 5/6 statutory list. • Y3, Y4, Y5 and Y6 Common exception words. • Multi-clause sentences using relative clauses. • Sentences using colons, semicolons and dashes. • Cohesive devices: however, consequently etc. • Short, multi-paragraph extracts in a range of genres.