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# UNIT 14: THE MECHANICS OF WRITING

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## 14.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall look at the mechanics of writing i.e. handwriting along with some other writing conventions such as spellings, punctuation and formatting. We shall look at the natural process of development of these skills and conventions. We shall also look at suitable teaching strategies.

After you complete this unit you should be able to:

1. Understand a child's developmental level with regard to these skills.
2. Plan suitable teaching strategies.
3. Respond to the special needs of individual children, by providing the required additional support.

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## 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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The primary goal in teaching handwriting or penmanship is to produce efficiently, a free flow of ideas onto paper, with a minimum attention to its mechanics. Handwriting, spellings, punctuation and other writing conventions must be viewed as a part of the process of writing. They are like the vehicles that carry information to its destination. They need to be looked at in the context of the development of writing skills as a whole, and not in isolation. This is because these are merely the tools that give more meaning to what a child writes. If a child's writing is purposeful and driven by a need to communicate, the child will make every effort to overcome illegible handwriting or poor spellings as these become hindrances. If these become the main focus of learning, they can become major obstacles. Many children believe that they are incapable of writing simply because they are not able to overcome problems of handwriting or spellings. On the other hand, some children may get good marks on spelling tests, but make a large number of spelling errors while writing a composition, because writing a composition requires that they give attention to several things at the same time, which they are not able to do. It is therefore, important to look at the

development of these skills and conventions within the context of the development of the writing process.

In this unit we shall make an effort to look at the factors which are important for the development of some of these writing tools or conventions. We will also see how their development can be enhanced in a meaningful way.

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## 14.2 PRE-WRITING SKILLS

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Children start to learn about writing long before they go to school. They begin by imitating the grown-ups around them. Early writing is simply expression, it is the sheer joy of expressing in a new form. There is no real audience. This early writing goes through the following stages :

- scribbling
- drawing
- approximate forms that resemble letters
- pretend writing (using letter like forms and scribbles)

A little careful observation will show that the young child is awkward in her hand movements in comparison with an older child or adult. The child's movements are less steady, less accurate and less rapid. The young child needs to go through experiences which enhance her finer finger movements, her eye hand coordination and other skills which build up the base for the development of later hand writing skills. This pre-writing stage is important because children develop certain skills which assist the development of later writing skills. Many of these need to be reinforced through activities in the primary years. Some prewriting skills are given below, along with a few suggested activities for their development.

- a) **Development of spatial relations** - i.e. through a series of activities and experiences children begin to grasp concepts such as **above, below, next-to, between, before, after** and so on.
- b) **Left to right progression** - children begin to grasp the fact that writing in English progresses from left to right. This can be reinforced by moving a finger along print while reading, making them join dots from left to right or go through a sequence of picture stories from left to right. Most children however, pick up notions of left to right progression in writing on their own, through their varied experiences.
- c) **Classifying and categorising** - children begin to group objects or pictures with common characteristics. They learn about which things belong together. Initially they group objects, then pictures; later they are able to group colours and symbols. This is useful for alphabet learning at a later stage. For example, letters of the alphabet can be introduced in categories

some are tall - b d f h k l t

some are small - a c e i m n o r s u v w x

some fall - g j p q y

- d) **Visual discrimination** -(finding likenesses and differences)

For example -     -     finding the odd one out in a set of three pictures

-     matching picture cards

-     noticing symbols that are different

b b b d b b b d

c c c e c e c c

m n n m n m n n

- matching a letter of the alphabet to the same letter in a series

a      a e c o u  
h      b h l k h  
p      f t b p q

- e) **Fine muscle control** -i. e. the control over finer finger movements. Children need activities which strengthen their finger muscles, as this helps them to gain a better control. Some suitable activities are given below:
- cutting along a line
  - stringing beads
  - action rhymes using the fingers
  - finger painting
  - clay/ plasticine modelling
  - working with dough
  - threading / sewing
  - paper tearing and mosaic work
  - weaving
- f) **Eye-hand co-ordination** -Some suitable activities for developing eye-hand co-ordination are:
- colouring inside a small shape
  - tracing along a pattern
  - continuing a pattern drawing
  - pattern writing and calligraphy
  - cutting along a line
  - pasting inside a shape

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## 14.3 HANDWRITING

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### 14.3.1 Features of Handwriting Development

When a child first puts a pen or pencil on paper she begins the journey with a highly conscious participation in the writing process. Slowly, with time and experience, the shaping of letters into words and sentences becomes automatic. Initially children move through the space on paper making letters one after the other. This motion is called **praxis**.

Scientific studies have sought to describe the features of handwriting movement, rather than advocate one method over another. They have, however, thrown some light on the characteristics of efficient movement. Two features which come into play are :

- 1) The amount of pressure exerted
- 2) The use of space.

#### A. The Amount of Pressure Exerted

First let us look at how the pressure exerted effects handwriting. When we write a letter or a word, the pressure of the fingers on the pencil is continually changing. The change in pressure corresponds very closely with the forms being produced. If the pressures are wrong in force or timing, the movement goes astray and the form is distorted. Writing pressure is controlled by shifting the pressure from larger muscles to the smaller muscles, of the fingers. As the pressure shifts to the

smaller muscles the writing becomes more efficient. In the first stages of writing, there is great elbow movement along with movement of the whole body. Gradually, with more and more writing experience, there is reduction in the elbow movement, and an increased efficiency of the thumb and forefinger, and the speed and ease of the writing improves.

Small muscles begin to work effectively under the following conditions:

- 1) **Placement of work:** The paper needs to be slightly right of the mid line and turned at a forty-five degree angle. In this way it is possible to maintain small muscle control from the top to the bottom of the page. Otherwise, as the writer moves down the page and the hand gets closer to the body, the pressure of the large muscles comes to play. Pressure increases and the writing becomes inefficient.
- 2) **Arm and wrist placement on the table:** If the arm and wrist are not in motion, but on the table, then the action of the larger muscles is diminished, and the work of the fingers comes into play.
- 3) The pencil must be held at an angle to the paper. This reduces the full downward thrust and gives the right pressure.
- 4) Developing the **right grip** greatly assists the child to control the smaller muscles and therefore the amount of pressure exerted. While teaching a child how to hold a pencil, ask the child to hold the pencil loosely between the thumb and index finger supported by the middle finger. Sometimes children hold their pencil too tightly, or too close to the tip. The pencil should be held about an inch from the tip. Some children hold a pencil like a spoon for stirring. Gently help children to correct their grip. Many children will have developed their own grip before coming to school. If it is not too awkward, and if the child is comfortable, do not change it. Medium soft pencils are recommended till class five.
- 5) **Body position :** Proper body posture greatly effects the development of handwriting. Leaning heavily on a desk, or sitting in an incorrect position affects legibility. Proper posture for development of handwriting involves the correct desk-chair height, how one sits, desk size and top slant, paper position, and how one places the writing hand and arm.

All the above factors help the child to learn to develop a control over the small muscles of the fingers. The student has to learn to make a complicated series of pressure changes in order to produce correct forms. The pencil continually speeds up, slows down or pauses as the pressure changes. It takes a lot of practice by the learners to make these delicate changes so as to form the letters accurately.

#### B). The Use of Space

New space, as in a blank piece of paper, places great demand on a young writer. Young writers must relate the space of their own bodies to the space on the paper. Young children gradually begin to understand the space (the paper) they are dealing with in relation to their own bodies. At first children do not make any differentiation between drawing and writing. Later writing begins to be represented by continuous scribbles across a page. In the beginning underlined paper gives the children a surface free of restrictions when the attempts to write are unformed and immature. The larger the space, the easier it is for the child to explore it. In some places broadly spaced lines are introduced to allow a child to control her muscles to explore a defined space. A teacher who provides many opportunities for space exploration through art-work, movement, and pattern writing does contribute to the child's development. Initially if a child is given a blank paper she will make a chain of letters at almost any angle. The lack of ability to suppress large muscles and gain control over small muscles makes it difficult to use space with precision. As writing begins to convey meaning, words and sentence units lead to different kinds of spacing and use of space. At first children run

words and sentences together. As language develops and meaning increases, spaces begin to appear.

The important thing to remember is whether the problem is to do with pressure or incorrect use of space, as this has its effect on composing. Any of these factors lead to slowness in writing, which in turn affects the quality and content of writing and then the child's attitude towards writing. When there are problems with handwriting, writing itself may be affected.

### 14.3.2 Some Hand-writing Conventions

In handwriting or penmanship instruction, the main concern is the legibility and efficient production of written symbols. It is important that we develop the skill of handwriting to the point where the very process of writing does not detract from the thinking process of the writer. A child who has difficulty with the mechanics of writing often avoids writing tasks. Some important writing conventions that children need to follow are :

- a) **Letters formed correctly** : It has been found that errors in the formation of certain letters account for a large proportion of illegibilities. These letters are e, n, d, t, r, i, a, h, and b. Special attention needs to be given to see that all letters are correctly formed. A school needs to make a decision on the formation of letters and see that there is consistency, particularly letters such as f, z, x, g. It is important that all the teachers form these letters in the same way.
- b) **Letter sizing** : It is customary to teach large writing in class I, and to reduce the size gradually in the following classes. The use of the fourlined copy with red and blue lines is recommended as it assists the children in the formation of tall letters, small letters as well as letters that touch the bottom line such as y or g.
- c) **Slant of letters** : Letters should slant in the same direction.
- d) **Spacing between words** : The most common errors in spacing are either crowding of lines or crowding of words in a line. It is important to ensure the right amount of space between words and between lines. Initially children can be asked to leave one finger space between words.
- e) **Legibility** : The first essential feature of good handwriting is legibility. This depends upon the formation of individual letters, although words can often be recognised even if some individual letters are not perfect. If, however, wrongly formed letters are detected before they have become habits, they can be easily corrected.
- f) **Spacing of letters within a word**: Children need to appreciate the fact that each letter needs to occupy a certain space within a word, so that the word is a readable unit. Sometimes children crowd in a few letters and give too much space to others. This is also connected to the fact that there should be uniformity in the size of letters.
- g) **Alignment**: Children need to be aware of writing along lines or between lines. They need to also be able to appreciate the slant of each line in relation to the page.

### 14.3.3 Choosing a Suitable Script

The questions regarding the suitability of a script have come under two main issues, firstly, those concerning the vertical versus the slanting writing, and secondly those concerning that of **manuscript** versus **cursive** writing.

The issue concerning vertical handwriting vs slanting handwriting has been pretty well settled in favour of writing with a moderate slant as the most widely approved style by researchers as well as by teachers.

As far as the second issue is concerned, there are two forms of handwriting which are

being taught in most primary schools. **Manuscript** handwriting is the print form in which letters of the alphabet are written separately. In the **cursive form** the alphabets are connected so that it becomes a flowing form. Other forms which try and amalgamate the best features of both these forms have also been experimented with. Choice of a suitable script is divided into three camps, those who use manuscript exclusively, those who use manuscript for the first two to three years and then switch to cursive, and those who use cursive exclusively. There is however a general agreement that manuscript is the most commonly taught form to beginners. The use of manuscript as a beginning style is advocated on the ground that it is easier to learn. Since the letters are like the printed letters that children see in books, they are easier to recognise. The letters are also easier to write because the movement of writing a word is divided up into a succession of separate movements, instead of being a complex movement in which the joinings of the letters are added to the letters themselves. Research has shown that a child does a good deal of writing in the first two classes when she uses the manuscript style.

While writing separate strokes is easier to learn, writing words with a continuous stroke is more efficient after it has been learned. In manuscript writing, longer pauses are made in writing the letters separately. This slows down the writing. With cursive writing however, what is gained in speed is often lost in legibility. Opinions regarding the manuscript-cursive controversy remain divided. It appears that expert opinion, common practice and research evidence favour the initial teaching of manuscript followed by a later transition to a cursive form. This transition is recommended in the second or third class.

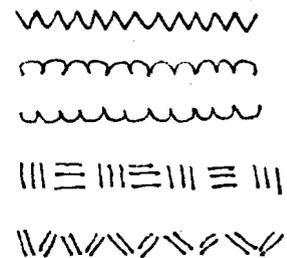
With regards to the selection and suitability of a script, **the most important fact is the need for a policy of consistency within a given school system.** Once a school has opted for a particular script, it must be followed in school and at home with the support of parents. Handwriting instruction should be included as an integral part of the school curriculum. It is important to separate transcription from composition. Children should not become anxious about their handwriting, because this can become a deterrent. The more the children write, the better they will write.

Whether one introduces a manuscript or cursive form, it is useful to introduce alphabets in pattern groups. Pattern writing exercises can be built around these. Children may be given the basic patterns given below:

**Capital Letter**

A	V	M	W
P	B	D	R
U	C	G	O
T	E	F	
K	Y	Z	

**Patterns**



**lower case letters**

- m	n	h	k	p			
- u	l	i	t	b	w		
- v	r						
- e	l						
- o							
- c	x						
- a	d	g	q	s	f	j	z

Children may be asked to make designs with these patterns. Children can do this in their extra time when they have finished work. This is a useful exercise for developing a good handwriting.



**Stage 1 : The Spelling babbler :** This is the pre-communicative spelling stage. Children learn about 6 letters of the alphabet and combine them to form words. This is done purely for the delight of writing words. Letters of the alphabet are combined into word-like units. The sounds do not match the letters. The words are not readable because the letters do not represent sounds, but the child knows that print represents words. For example: wft huk olmgot rt ftggh dfgth swzxtk frdghjhtgh and so on.

From this early pre-communicative stage the child slowly progresses towards conceptualising letters that represent sounds. This brings us to the next stage.

**Stage 2 : Invented spellings :** This is the point at which letters are used more consistently to represent words. Five general stages of invention have been noted:

1. Use of the initial consonant to represent a word. For example G (GRASS).
2. Initial and final consonant GS (GRASS)
3. Initial, final and interior consonant GRS (GRASS)
4. Initial, final and interior consonants with a vowel place holder i.e. the vowel is incorrect, but in the correct position.  
– GRES (GRASS). The spellings at this stage are semi-phonetic.
5. Transition to conventional spelling – GRASS

This stage occurs as children become independent in reading and writing, and they attend more and more to printed words. When children at this stage recognise the differences between their own invented spellings and the conventions of literacy, they begin to acquire the desire to attain the conventional form. Those words that are not familiar continue to be represented with the prior invented approach. More and more words however begin to be spelt conventionally. The child constructs a phonetic system initially - but soon this gets replaced by new spelling strategies with a greater reliance on visual memory.

#### 14.4.2 The Informal Approach

Spelling is not considered a passive process. It is dynamic and complex. Purposeful writing is considered to be an important key to learning to spell. As a child engages in more and more meaningful writing activity she begins to invent spellings. In order to invent spellings the child uses what she already knows. The child thinks about words and generates new words. The child is actively involved in the process of spelling.

##### Some Guidelines for an Informal Approach

\*Teach spellings as a part of the whole curriculum. Capitalize on opportunities to have children write and spell in other situations than the writing class i.e. in maths or science lessons.

\*Have children write frequently. Children invent and refine spellings using the skills they acquire when they write. Spelling practice occurs through free writing when children write labels, lists, stories, songs, recipes. The important thing is to make the writing activity purposeful.

\*Encourage children to invent spellings for words they may not have learned to spell. Inventing spellings allows children to engage in thinking about how a word sounds, and learning to transfer those sounds into alphabets. As they progress with these skills they begin to include vowel blends such as ea, ee, oa, ou and so on. They also begin to look at consonant blends such as br, cl, st, etc, as well as diagraphs th, wh, ch, sh etc., which represent a single sound. They begin to demonstrate their acquired skills, of processing sounds in the words they write.

\*De-emphasize correctness, memorization and writing mechanics. Adjust your expecta-

tions for correctness to fit the child's level of development and make allowances for inexperience and mistakes.

\*Respond to children's writings in ways that help them discover more about spelling. In your response build interest in words, make word study fun, play spelling games, answer questions about spelling and teach spelling skills. Help young writers develop a positive spelling consciousness. Poor spellers need to be provided with a broad repertoire of spelling strategies. Among these are :

- Being able to learn to sense when words are misspelled
- Being able to use a beginner's dictionary
- Making lists for high-frequency words that are often misspelled.
- Seeking adult help.
- Being able to use the context and meaning to determine the spelling.

The following practices create problems for poor spellers.

- Too many red marks and corrections
- When help is not given in context i.e. attention is not given to the context or subject matter of the written task, but only spellings are corrected.
- When the child does not get enough opportunity to do meaningful writing.

The informal approach towards spelling is based on the premise that spelling is for writing. Children may achieve high scores on phonic inventories or weekly spelling tests. But the ultimate test is what the child does within the writing process. If a child writes daily, the teacher can concentrate on the content and once or twice a week, on spelling. But if the child writes only once a week then spellings become the teachers' primary focus. More time for writing gives the teacher more time to help children take responsibility for their writing. Children are helped to re-fine their first drafts. The first draft should be looked upon only for its context. It's in the final draft that spellings need to be emphasized because by then the child is eager to share her writing with an audience and has a high stake in her writing. We will look at this in greater detail in Unit 17.

Spellings become important for two reasons. The first is that the writer may then put it behind her to focus on the content. The second is that when the spelling is poor, the audience may not be able to go beyond the irregularities to view the main force of the message.

Beginning spellers should be free to invent spellings when they write. There is no evidence that invented spellings become habitual. Poor spellers may however, habitually misspell certain words. Children who are encouraged to invent spellings refine those spellings and progress developmentally towards correctness. It is perfectly acceptable to display a young writer's piece of writing with some invented spellings. As a speller matures, emphasis on correctness should increase. Final drafts of compositions or stories should ensure correct spellings.

It is important to make parents observe children move through the developmental stages of invented spellings. They should understand that invented spellings do not lead to the formation of bad spelling habits. When children encounter new information about standard spelling, they readily modify their hypotheses and have no difficulty in adopting standard spelling. Ultimately the speller is able to use information from visual memory, as well as the knowledge of phonetic, contextual and meaning relationships to determine the correct spelling of a word. But the process takes time. Important foundations of learning to spell are set with the use of invented spelling.

### Special Needs of Second Language Learners

As has been described above, writing requires the encoding of one's language knowl-

edge into representative graphemes. To spell not yet memorised items, a child writes the letters according to how she perceives sounds of the letter sequences. So the phonological system has some influence on learning to spell. There is evidence to indicate first language interference. The confusion between 'v' and 'bh' heard in the spoken English of speakers from Bihar and Bengal or in the 's' and 'sh' sounds is an example.

The teachers own attitudes towards the children's mother-tongue, and the teachers' own language competencies in the second language, in this case English, require consideration. Teachers need to be sensitive towards native language influences. In the case of some children, for example, persistent absence of past-tense markers 'ed' may be due to the first language interference. The instructional approach then would be to emphasize the meaning of the marker rather than the sound. It would be important to give the children extra practice in this area.

Assuring through instruction that all students understand how to mark important grammatical distinctions (such as tense, number and aspect) in their spelling requires systematic instructions in cases where there is first language interference. By classes three or four, all students should be expected to observe these writing conventions. Since there is considerable emphasis on word analysis in the primary classes, mismatch between the childrens' and teachers' language may cause problems unless the teacher clarifies the underlying phonological system. For those teachers who have nonstandard speakers in their class, points of potential confusion in lessons involving phonological knowledge including spelling could be predicted, and instruction should be designed to eliminate them.

#### **14.4.3 The Formal Approach**

Research indicates that a formal spelling programme should begin only when a child is ready to spell both intellectually and emotionally. Some of the characteristics of readiness are -

1. The child should be able to write and name all the letters of the alphabet correctly.
2. The child should be able to copy words correctly.
3. Be able to write his or her name without copying.
4. Be reading at a second class level.
5. Be able to enunciate words clearly.
6. See that words are composed of different letters.
7. Have a beginning phonetic sense and be able to recognise the common letter-sound combinations.
8. Be able to write a few simple words from memory.
9. Be able to ask for words which are required while writing and be able to express a few thoughts in writing.
10. Demonstrate an interest in learning to spell.

If a formal spelling programme is started too early, children may become very negative about learning to spell.

In the context of formal spelling instruction, there are six procedures that receive research support:

- Allot sixty to seventy-five minutes per week to formal spelling instruction.
- Present the words to be studied in a list or column form.
- Give the children a pre-test to determine which words in the lesson are unknown. Have them study the unknown words, then administer a post test.

- Have the children correct their own spelling tests under the teachers' direction.
- Teach a systematic technique for studying unknown words.
- Use spelling games to make spelling lessons more fun.

For most children effective methods for studying unknown words would include visual inspection, auditory inspection, kinesthetic reinforcement and recall. Two examples of effective techniques are:

- A) 1. Look at the word carefully
2. Say the word
  3. With eyes closed, visualize the word
  4. Cover the word and then write it
  5. Check the spelling
  6. If the word is misspelled, repeat steps 1 to 5.
- B) 1. Pronounce each word carefully
2. Look carefully at each part of the word as you say it.
  3. Say the letters in sequence
  4. Attempt to recall how the word looks, then spell it.
  5. Check this attempt to recall.
  6. Write the word.
  7. Check this spelling attempt
  8. Repeat the above steps if necessary.

Simply writing the words in question a certain number of times is not a good procedure for learning misspelled words. Long periods of spelling instruction do not increase spelling competence. It is better to have short and interesting sessions. High frequency words and often misspelled words from the childrens' writings should form the basis of building up word lists. Teach only a few rules and use the recommended practice for teaching those rules. It is important to generate a high interest amongst the students by

1. Showing the student the importance of correct spelling in practical and social situations
2. Providing the student with an efficient method of word study.
3. Limiting spelling vocabulary to words most likely needed by the student. The words are selected on the basis of frequency of use by children, degree of difficulty, universality and application to other academic subjects.
4. Encourage a feeling of pride in a correctly spelled paper.
5. Ask students to study only those words which she is unable to spell.

#### 14.4.4 Some Common Rules

Students should not be asked to memorize rules, and time should not be wasted on rules if the student can already spell the word. If a rule is being taught it should be taught inductively rather than deductively i.e. a short discussion of words like the one misspelled, and allowing children to discover the generalisation, is far better than teaching rules when the students do not see the need for a rule. Remember -

- a) Teach only a few rules and include only those that have no or few exceptions.
- b) Teach a rule only when there is a need for it.

Some rules that are based on research findings and are of value to the speller are as follows -

1. Rules governing the addition of suffixes and inflected endings are:
  - a) Words ending in silent 'e' drop the 'e' when adding a suffix or ending beginning with a vowel, and keep the 'e' when adding an ending beginning with a consonant.
 

bake	manage
baking	managing
baker	management
  - b) When a root word ends in 'y' preceded by a consonant, the 'y' is changed to 'i' in adding endings unless the ending begins with 'i'.
 

fly	study
flies	studying
flying	studious
	studies
  - c) When a root word ends in 'y' preceded by a vowel, the root word is not changed when adding suffixes or endings.
 

play	monkey
playful	monkeys
  - d) When a one-syllable word ends in a consonant with one vowel before it, the consonant is doubled before adding an ending beginning with a vowel.
 

run	ship
running	shipping
shipment	
  - e) In words of more than one syllable, the final consonant is doubled before adding a suffix or ending if
    - 1) The last syllable is accented
    - 2) The last syllable ends in a consonant with a vowel before it
    - 3) the ending begins with a vowel.
 

begin	admit
beginning	admittance
  - 2) The letter 'q' is always followed by 'u' in common English words
 

queen	quiet	quench	quest	question	quaint
-------	-------	--------	-------	----------	--------
  - 3) No English words end in 'v'
 

love	glove	give	have	alive	leave
------	-------	------	------	-------	-------
  - 4) Proper nouns and adjectives formed from proper nouns should begin with capital letters.
 

America	American
---------	----------
  - 5) Most abbreviations end with a period
 

Nov.	Dr.	Oct.
------	-----	------
  - 6) The apostrophe is used to show the omission of letters in contractions
 

don't	haven't	isn't	can't
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7) The apostrophe is used to indicate the possessive form of nouns but not pronouns.

boy's                      its                      dog's                      theirs

8) When adding 's' to words to form plurals or to change the tense of verbs, 'es' must be added to words ending with hissing sounds (x, s, sh, ch).

glass                      watch  
glasses                      watches

9) When 's' is added to words ending in a single 'f', the 'f' is changed to 'v' and 'es' added.

half                      shelf  
halves                      shelves

10) When 'ei' or 'ie' are to be used, 'i' usually comes before 'e' except after 'c' when sounded like 'a' (Note these exceptions : leisure, neither, seize, weird)

believe neighbour

It is useful if words are arranged under predetermined spelling rules to demonstrate phonetic or structural generalisations. This helps children to see certain patterns in the spellings of words in the English language, and makes it much easier to learn these.

**Check Your Progress 2.**

How should the mechanics of writing such as handwriting and spelling be taught?

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**14.5 SOME OTHER WRITING CONVENTIONS**

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Recent research shows that learning to write is like learning to talk. Children observe other's writing, try it out themselves, practice, experiment, take chances and gradually learn conventional rules. As hypotheses are generated and tested, mistakes are made and must be accepted as a part of the child's growth process. Writing is a complex task. It involves pragmatics (rules of the language relative to a particular context), semantics (saying what is meant), syntax (the smooth flow of the message) and graphics (representing the message through graphic symbols or alphabets). Letter naming and letter combinations is only one of the skills. The broader task that lies before a child is to understand how written language functions as a symbol system.

When young children invent their own writing, they deal with the conventions of spacing and punctuation and grammatical structure rather idiosyncratically. Like spelling, as children become more confident with their writing skills they should be encouraged to use writing conventions.



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## 14.6 LET US SUM UP

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The child acquires certain tools of writing, such as handwriting, spellings, punctuation and some other writing conventions organically, as a process of growth and development. There are developmental patterns in the acquisition of these abilities and skills. Understanding these developmental patterns help a teacher to provide activities which assist this process. It enables a teacher to build up basic prerequisite skills, necessary for the development of more advanced and complex skills later on. It also helps teachers to take a more holistic view of writing, and not get bogged down with the correction of spellings and handwriting, but give as much or more importance to the ideas and thoughts that the child is trying to convey. Errors are viewed as clues which indicate the stage the child is at. They become a natural part of the growth process. They help a teacher to plan for special requirements of some children. This is crucial as it gives a child the support she may require without making writing a daunting and difficult task.

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## 14.7 SUGGESTED READING

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- Coon, G.E. and Palmer, G.M. *Handwriting Research and Information (An administrators handbook)*. Scott Foresman 1993.
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## 14.8 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- \*Being aware that these skills develop as a part of an organic developmental process.
- \*These skills should not be taught in isolation but as a part of a meaningful writing activity.
- \*Expectations from children should be realistic and bear in mind the developmental level of the child.
- \*Children should be encouraged to enjoy a writing activity by experiencing their progress.
- \*Formal spelling and writing should not focus on tedious drills, but should be made enjoyable. Copying words and focusing on mechanics doesn't ensure the development of these skills. These should be done only to reinforce a child's natural development.
- \*Purposeful and frequent writing is the key to learning to spell and write conventionally.
- \*The teachers' needs to be sensitive to the needs of those children where the first language is creating interferences.

### Check Your Progress 2

1. The teacher must take care not to confuse the tools of writing with the writing itself. The message that the child is trying to convey is of primary importance, the writing, spellings and grammatical structure are aids.

2. The teacher must give the children freedom to write, write and write, knowing that  
-she can go back to the writing to change and correct  
-knowing she'll have help with the correction  
-knowing that her ideas are more important than the mechanics  
-knowing that she won't be branded "slow" or 'dumb' if she needs to re-write.
3. The teacher should spare the red pen — sit with small groups and discuss errors. Use a pencil.
4. Teach children to do their own checking . Begin with the whole group identifying and correcting structural or mechanical problems. Then give specific tasks to small groups.
5. Identify mechanical skills and watch out for chances to reinforce these skills one at a time.
6. Return to those skills repeatedly. For example children should get ample opportunity to use a newly acquired spelling in their own work.
7. Talk about mistakes as a normal part of the process. Make it clear that all writers works with dictionaries and grammar books. Correcting, editing and refining are part of the writing process.
8. The teacher gives children a range of purposeful writing activity at least once day.
9. The teacher provides formal support when the children require it.
10. The teacher plans a range of open-ended writing tasks which help children to plan and encode messages, and produce appropriate written forms of what they want to convey. The children can write letters and actually post them, they can make lists, they can write experiences and share these, they can record events on a calendar.

As far as possible all writing should be with a willing supportive audience, either the teacher, the peers, parents or the whole class.

### Check Your Progress 3

Recent research interest in spelling and the mechanics of writing has brought about a change in how teachers need to view "errors". Errors are considered a natural part of the learning process, and as indicators of the child's learning process. They provide information to the teacher about the areas of strength and weaknesses of the children in the class. They are not something that a child needs to be afraid of. The child's development needs to be examined by looking at the patterns in childrens' errors across age and time. It is vital to realise that there are developmental stages in the acquiring of different skills and conventions. Some errors are a reflection of the developmental stage the child is at , and will disappear as the child proceeds to the next stage. It is important to look at errors as clues which tell us the stage at which the child is. The teacher needs to allow children to display writing with some errors which are natural at that particular stage. This makes the child feel actively involved with the writing. We often come across beautiful samples of absolutely correct writing which is put up on school display boards. Much of this writing is really the adult's effort. In the process of refining the child's writing, it often becomes the teacher's work, and the child does not actively identify with it. Acceptance of the child's work, as it is, and then actively involving children in refining it, is a crucial factor in encouraging children to write. Periodic analysis of errors for patterns, helps and suggests the kind of formal intervention and instruction that would be useful for the class. Just as the pre-schoolers' invention of spellings demonstrates their phonemic understanding, so their errors while attempting conventional spellings demonstrate their knowledge. It is for the teacher to use this understading in designing suitable activities. The teacher needs to constantly look at the kind of errors that are being made, and on the basis of this provide the support that may be required. Children need to learn the process of self-evaluation, namely, that often a piece is rewritten and in that rewriting errors are corrected.