

INFORMATION ON HOW TO USE THE **FIRST STROKES**[®] PROGRAMS WITHIN CLASSROOMS

First Strokes programs are great to use with students who struggle with handwriting. We are often asked how to use the program in a class situation. Below, is a description of how we use the programs in a class setting at **The Handwriting Clinic™** and how the program could be incorporated into a classroom in an educational setting"

To get started with the **First Strokes**[®] Programs, it is best to purchase a **First Strokes**[®] Multi-Sensory Handwriting Kit. For an additional \$25 per workbook (upper case and lower case), you can copy as many copies as you want per annual year. It is kind of like a site license. This is so that 5 years from now, if I update a book, the old copy will not be reproduced for the next 10 years! This will save you a great deal of money- being able to use one workbook to make class worksheets. We also sell the workbooks in 5-packs at a discount.

All our print workbooks teach lower case letter formation separately from upper case letter formation. We group letters by their "First Stroke". If children learn to write the First Strokes, well within the handwriting lines, then they develop good letter attack skills for the starting point for letter formation. We find that grouping letters within their First Stroke category helps students learn to form the letters with good sequencing and without letter reversals. We also have reversal strategies and reversal tip flashcards that go within the program. This helps students with dyslexia.

Materials needed are a pink and blue highlighter to use this beginning print workbook. Highlight the lines (pink on bottom, blue for middle divider and top line). The kids should FIRST practice the letters large and medium motor - in the air, in shaving cream, with q-tips dipped in paint on giant size handwriting lines, etc). Large and medium motor activities can be just a few simple activities, or a variety of fun activities. In our workshops, we give many, many FUN activities that can be used. In a class, just having the kids write the letters in the air with eyes closed helps. You can also set up a writing lab, where the teacher can set out a medium motor activity such as giant size handwriting lines that are color coded, within sheet protectors - about \$10 for 100 sheet protectors, and use wipe off markers to draw the letter giant size, with good sequencing and "touchpoints" on the writing lines.

When a child masters the letter in large and medium motor activities, then the child should do the print worksheets (copied from the workbook). The letter on the left side of the page is very large. The students should trace that letter 5 times. Then the student completes the letters on the right side of the workbook. We usually highlight the

handwriting lines with the pink and blue markers. It is always best if the students have some help when writing the letters for the first time, making sure they understand the sequencing and that they have good "touchpoints" on the writing lines.

Next the student should immediately generalize skills to writing on Zaner-Bloser paper. In educational catalogs, this paper is also marketed as red baseline/blue lined paper. The student should also have homework on this paper and the worksheet can accommodate this assignment so that the parent knows the terminology of how to help their child write the letters. This way the student will get some individual work on the letter, and the parent, teacher and child all will have the same terminology. When teaching the child to write, use very few words. We just say the colors of the writing lines at first. For example, for a circle stroke, say "up to the blue, around to the pink, and around". For a short line down stroke, say "starts on the blue, stops on the pink". For a tall line down stroke, say "starts on the top blue, stops on the pink". After a few sessions, you can start to throw in vocabulary, such as starts on the blue middle divider, stops on the pink writing line". It is just too confusing to kids, to throw in all the terminology all at once!

After about 12 sessions, most of the kids can start to generalize their skills to black lined paper, blue lined paper, etc. We believe at **The Handwriting Clinic™**, that beginning learners should start with a consistent, color coded paper. I always tell the example of my own Kindergartener who came home with 5 different kinds of handwriting paper in a one week period. That is too confusing! However, after the students have mastered handwriting with good touchpoints, start to give the student a variety of handwriting paper so that they can master and generalize this skill. This is important so that they can perform well on general curriculum.

Once a child has mastered the basic handwriting program, the student can use the Advanced Block or Advanced Snail Tails workbooks. These workbooks have the same First Stroke Terminology, but are on smaller ruled, black lined paper. These workbooks are great for older Kindergarteners who have been through the first workbook, or as a general writing or remedial writing workbook for First Graders and above. The Advanced books are very similar. The Snail Tails workbook is for students who need to learn D'Nealian style handwriting but struggle with the slant. This workbook adapts this handwriting to a vertical style, cueing the child to "touchpoint" the writing line, and then to put a very tiny "snail tail" on the letter. Students that struggle with D'Nealian handwriting do well on this book. At **The Handwriting Clinic™**, we prefer to teach block handwriting, but for First Grade and above, the Snail Tails workbook works just as well. When we have Kindergarteners come to the clinic that have to do D'Nealian handwriting at their school, we just use the beginning workbook, teaching them to touchpoint the writing line, and then to put a teeny tail on the letters that have tails. We use a highlighter to draw in the tails. Again, kids that have trouble with slant, do well with the "Snail Tails" curriculum, versus traditional D'Nealian handwriting. We have not

had any teachers complain about the lack of slant - they are just VERY happy to see a child who struggles, do well with print!

Also important in the Kindergarten level, is to work on Grasp. For schools, you can buy a Pencil Gymnastics Kit, for \$19.95. It has a parent-teacher manual, a student workbook and a set of manipulatives that can be set up in a fine motor lab. The parent-teacher manual has information on grasp development and strategies for how to hold a pencil. The student workbook has digital pictures of the manipulative activities, with "challenges" for each activity - such as stacking blocks with tongs using "go" and "stop" fingers. The workbook also has tracing worksheets that can be photocopied - for free - this is the only workbook that does not require the \$25 annual license fee! The tracing worksheets have a cue to keep the hand below the writing line.

Our philosophy for cursive handwriting is that we prefer to wait till 2nd or 3rd grade to teach cursive. For 2nd grade students in private schools that have to learn AND write fulltime in cursive, we will teach cursive. We prefer to wait till the summer before or the fall during their 3rd grade year. We also put many, many students through our cursive program who are in 4th and 5th grades. We have separate classes for teenagers, who do well with cursive and legibility tricks for other writing needs. We do not use our own program; we use Loops and Other Groups by Mary Benbow, OTR. This program looks very similar to the schools program but has awesome cognitive cues, which work well with our multi-sensory philosophy. We do not use the capital letters in her program, because they do not match the capital letters taught in school. The Loops and Groups program is available to schools to purchase, and can be taught by teachers as well. In addition to the Loops and Groups program, we recommend the Sloppy Handwriting Workbook, which is a program we created to augment ANY cursive program, especially Loops and Other groups. It teaches common recognition of handwriting errors, and has practice sheets so that the students learn to write without handwriting errors. At our clinic, we use this workbook to augment our cursive program. A teacher can use one workbook and teach the strategies to the class. For \$25 for a site license, a teacher could make worksheets to augment any cursive program. The workbook also comes with some special notebook paper that has a middle divider the bottom 3rd of the space. All students 2nd grade and higher generalize to this paper, and then generalize to regular notebook paper, which looks extremely similar to this paper except for the middle divider. The Sloppy Handwriting Kit comes with a ream of 500 sheets, and we can tell teachers where more can be purchased.

We do not currently have a workbook for number formation. But, we have an awesome strategy outlined within the Instructors Manual that comes within the **First Strokes**[®] kit. We use this strategy in a 2 hour Numbers Class with very good success in getting kids to stop number reversals. Teachers can teach these strategies to students who struggle with numbers.

We also have preschool workbooks available. These workbooks are mostly tracing workbooks. A child can trace the letters on unlined paper in the workbook, as well as trace within handwriting lines. The handwriting lines should be color coded with pink and blue highlighters, similar to our beginning print workbook as outlined above. With preschoolers, the emphasis should be on large and medium motor activities, not drill and kill on handwriting paper. Our preschoolers actually do well using the First Strokes terminology (outlined in our beginning print book in our kit) on giant sized handwriting paper, or up at poster boards. In order to use the preschool workbooks, one should also have a copy of the beginning print program - the Multi-sensory Handwriting Workbook that comes in our kit. The reason you would need BOTH workbooks, is that the preschool workbook just has writing activities for the preschoolers. The other workbook has written descriptions of how to write the letters - and it is important to use the same terminology when teaching the preschoolers. Many preschoolers ages 4.5 and above can use our beginning print program rather than our preschool workbook. We NEVER teach Snail Tails or recommend D'Nealian handwriting to preschoolers. One way to tell if a child is even remotely ready for D'Nealian style handwriting is to have them draw a triangle and a diamond from memory. If they cannot do this easily, with good angles, then are not likely ready for the slant of D'Nealian style handwriting.

We use all the above techniques and workbooks with students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and students who struggle with handwriting. We also use these workbooks for students who are beginners. We have many students that do not have handwriting difficulties that use these workbooks to learn handwriting. However, we want to help the students who struggle with handwriting, and our **First Strokes**[®] Programs have been very successful with the 5 or 6 students in almost every classroom who truly struggle with handwriting!