

Why Cursive?

Traditional schooling teaches children to write the print alphabet first, and, later, cursive in the second or third grade. Cursive is the preferred method of writing since it is faster and can be performed in a flowing motion without replacing the pencil on the paper as often. A child's sensitive period for writing falls into the 4 to 6 year range. Why do we teach a method of writing during the sensitive period that will ultimately be replaced?

Cursive writing is actually easier for young children to learn:

- All of the letters begin in the same place and go in the same direction unlike print letters that may begin in 4 or more different points and take different directions from that point. Directionality and spatial orientation are one of the major challenges of writing.
- The letters that form a word are linked together in the same way as the sounds are blended. Spacing between words happens naturally.
- The letters for "b" and "d" are very different, eliminating some of the confusion.

Some teachers are concerned about the discrepancy between cursive letters and the print alphabet that children learn to read. I have been teaching cursive for 13 years now and have yet to encounter a student who has any problem with this. It is helpful to have some labels in the classroom written in cursive, especially those that you want the children to copy or record.

Another concern I have heard is the problem of children leaving the Montessori classroom for a traditional first or second grade classroom where they will be expected to print. It is my experience that they develop the small motor control necessary by writing the cursive alphabet. The print alphabet is familiar to them through reading. It generally takes the last month or two of school to teach print once you know a child is going into a traditional classroom or the parent can go over a workbook or two with them during the summer in preparation.

Prior to teaching cursive in the primary classroom, I taught cursive to first and second year students in a Montessori Elementary program. These students were very resistant to learning a new way of writing when they were already proficient in print. They were past their sensitive period. It was very challenging to overcome these obstacles.

This cursive curriculum includes white boards and worksheets for making "rainbow letters". Letters are grouped together in "stroke families". Each cursive letter has a story that goes with it that helps the child remember the point of interest for each stroke. Waldorf education uses this method of storytelling very efficiently in their elementary program to provide an emotional anchor for the child's memory. Sandpaper letters are also puzzles that allow the child to match the letters with their print counterparts. The curriculum is designed for maximum appeal and interest. It brings together all of the elements that I have used to successfully teach cursive writing to children ages three to six.

up and down stroke family this family likes to jump straight up

t- Tony jumped straight up very high and came straight back down. He put his arms out to the side (demonstrating making a "t" with your body) and said "t".

i- Isabel was a lot shorter. She jumped straight up and came straight back down but not as high as Tony. She reached up and left a dot to show how high she jumped.

r- Robby jumped straight up onto a bridge and came down on the other side.

u- Uncle said he could jump up and onto a bridge. He jumped straight up and came straight back down. He tried again and said "uh" but he still didn't make it.

w- Wanda said she could make it up on that shelf. She jumped straight up and came straight back down. She tried again. She tried a third time and this time she went up and onto the bridge.

s- Sally said "watch my trick". She went straight up and swung out and then back and forth.

j- Jerry jumped straight up and came straight back down. When he came back down, he fell into a hole and found his way back. He went back and left a dot to show how high he jumped.

p- Patty jumped straight up and came straight back down. She fell into the same hole but landed on her feet and jumped straight back out of the hole (posing!). She made it almost as high as she has jumped before and then did a somersault.

loop family this family likes to make back flips

e- Ellen goes up and does a back flip and comes back down.

l- Larry goes up higher because he's taller, does a back flip and comes back down.

b- Becky goes up, does a back flip and comes back up to get on the bridge.

h- Henry goes up, does a back flip, comes back down, and then he comes back up and jumps over the mountain.

k- Kelly goes up, does a back flip, comes back down, comes back up and jumps over the mountain, and then she tucks it in and kicks it out.

f- Fred goes up, does a back flip, comes back down, falls in a hole and finds his way out.

hump family this family likes to jump over the mountains

n- Nancy goes up over the mountain, lands on her feet, and jumps the next mountain.

m- Monsieur goes up over the mountain, lands on his feet, jumps the next mountain, lands on his feet, and jumps another mountain.

v- Violet goes up over the mountain, down in the valley and up to get on the bridge.

y- Yoda goes up over the mountain, down in the valley and jumps up. He comes back down into a hole and finds his way out.

x- Xavier goes up over the mountain and down in the valley. He comes back to wipe out his tracks so no one can follow him.

z- Zelma goes up over the mountain and comes down the other side. She stops a moment to decide which way to go and jumps down in a hole and finds her way out.

c family this family goes over the hill in a car

c- Carl gets in his car and goes up the hill. As he gets to the top and is going down the other side, he has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. He has to back up and come back around another way.

a- Alice gets in her car and goes up the hill. As she gets to the top and is going down the other side, she has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. She has to back and come back around another way just like Carl did except that Alice is curious and she goes up to check it out from the other side. Then she goes on her way.

o- Oscar gets in his car and goes up the hill. As he gets to the top and is going down the other side, he has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. He has to back and come back around another way. He goes to check it out from the other side and jumps onto another bridge.

d- Dana gets in her car and goes up the hill. As she gets to the top and is going down the other side, she has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. She has to back and come back around another way. She checks it out from the other side and jumps straight up and comes straight back down.

g- Gail gets in her car and goes up the hill. As she gets to the top and is going down the other side, she has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. She has to back and come back around another way. She checks it out from the other side and falls into a hole but finds her way out.

q- Quincy gets in his car and goes up the hill. As she gets to the top and is going down the other side, he has to stop (errr) and put on the brakes because the bridge is gone. He has to back and come back around another way. He checks it out from the other side and falls into the same hole as Gail. He finds another way out.