


## *An All-Purpose Handwriting Lesson*

I reproduce an entire booklet for each student, to minimize distribution time, then teach two letter forms a day in the order they appear in this booklet. The lesson and practice take about 15 minutes a day during the first quarter. After all letter forms have been introduced and practiced, I hold students accountable for legible and correct handwriting in all dictation and final draft writing. If I notice that students are having difficulty with a letter, I do a review lesson.

1. Inform students of the letter they'll be learning to write today and point it out in the alphabet of D'Nealian letter cards which should be permanently posted in the classroom.
2. Draw lines on the board such as those on the student worksheets, with a solid top line, a solid bottom line, and a dotted center line. Or use a transparency with blank lines. Shine the transparency on the chalkboard and write your model letters on the chalkboard using the lines as guides. A thermal overhead may be made for this purpose (see following pages).
3. Model correct formation of one letter form as you tell students:
  - Where to begin the letter. All lower-case cursive letters begin at the bottom line.
  - Which direction to go.
  - Where to touch the base line, center line, and/or top line.
  - When to change directions.
  - When to make a line straight and when to make it curved.
  - When to pick up the pencil to make a second stroke.
  - How to end, or finish, the letter.
4. Look carefully at the letter just written. Point out specific criterion that make it a good letter. For example:

	—	There is a sharp point here.
	-----	This line is straight until near the bottom
This is traced so it		where it splits off.
looks like one line.		There is a small triangle here.
5. Model another perfect letter, verbalizing where you start and how you form the letter. For example: on *a*, “go up, around, up, straight down, finish.”
6. Have students tell you what makes it a good letter, naming specific criterion.
7. Tell students you're going to write three *a*'s and only two of them will be good. Have students tell you which letter is *not* good and *why*, based on the criterion you defined. Then erase the poor example and write a perfect one in its place.
8. Repeat step seven with a few other common errors, including going outside the lines, going in the wrong direction, using the wrong slant or a mixed slant, etc. Erase and correct any incorrectly formed letters after the mistakes have been identified.
9. Finish direct instruction with a brief review of how the letter is formed and the criterion for a good letter.

10. On the worksheet, have students trace the letters on lines 1–3, verbalizing quietly, “up, around, up, straight down, finish” or other directions depending on the letter. If they make a mistake, they should *gently* erase and correct it immediately. Circulate around the room, helping individuals and monitoring to be sure that letters are formed carefully and correctly. Stress excellence over speed, and watch carefully for directional errors. Reteach and help students correct any errors immediately. Poor practice should not be allowed.
11. Some students will trace quickly, others slowly. Signal the whole group to move on to line four when you feel the time is right, whether or not they’re finished with lines 1–3. It is not necessary for every student to complete every practice on the worksheet. Emphasize quality with reasonable speed. There are a lot of opportunities for practice on the worksheet in order that faster students can use their extra time for extra practice.
12. Have students trace and complete letters on lines four and five, then look back and circle any letters they formed perfectly according to the criterion. On lines six and seven, the starting point of the letter is marked. Students write the letter, beginning at the marked point. When finished, they circle any perfectly-formed letters and erase and fix any poorly-formed ones.
13. On lines eight and nine, students write letters without any aids. They should keep them in straight columns, circle perfect ones, and erase and correct any mistakes.
14. Have students look for the *best* letter they wrote on their worksheet and give it a star. *Why* is it the best? I carry a reward stamp and I circulate during handwriting practice and stamp perfect letters I see on student papers.
15. Students who finish before you call time may practice letters you’ve previously introduced on line ten, or you may dictate review letters to the entire group. Since cursive letters are not introduced in order, I put a blank yellow Post-It note under each letter we’ve practiced on the wall alphabet to help students keep track.