Starting to Join Letters in Year 2: What to Expect and How to Help at Home

Key points

- In Year 2 (children aged 6 to 7), the National Curriculum for England, the set of subjects and skills all state-funded schools teach, asks pupils to start joining their letters, which is called joined-up handwriting.
- Joining comes after children have learned to form each letter correctly in print-style writing, so it builds on the letter shapes they already know.
- Pupils learn to use the short diagonal and horizontal strokes that link one letter to the next, and they also learn that some letters, when side by side, are best left unjoined.
- It is normal for handwriting to look less neat for a while as children learn to join letters, and this is part of learning to write, not a step backwards.
- Schools decide how and when to teach joining, so the pace and method can differ from one class to another, and your child's teacher is the best person to ask about their progress.
- Children learn to write at their own pace, so gentle, regular practice with plenty of encouragement will help more than any push for perfect writing.

Things to try at home

- Write a favourite word in shaving foam, sand or on a steamed-up window, then link the letters with one long, wavy line together.
- Draw a row of loops or zigzags on paper with a favourite pen, keeping the lines relaxed and playful, and talk about how each line connects to the next.
- Look at a book title or a sign together and spot which letters sit side by side, then talk about whether they could be linked with a stroke. Some teachers suggest pairs such as 'ai' or 'ue' as a starting point, but schools vary in what they teach first.
- Write a short, silly message together, such as a pretend picnic shopping list, and enjoy the words rather than focusing on how neat they are.
- Check that your child sits comfortably at a table and holds the pencil in a way that feels relaxed; if you are unsure about the grip, ask the school for advice.

Find out more

- Your child's class teacher or the school's handwriting policy, which will explain how your child's school teaches joining.
- GOV.UK: 'English programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2', part of the National Curriculum in England, which sets out the Year 2 handwriting expectations.
- GOV.UK: the Department for Education's National Curriculum guidance, which explains how the curriculum is organised for children in England.