

Finger Spaces: Why Gaps Between Words Matter in Early Writing

A simple guide to helping your child in Year 1 learn to leave gaps between words when they write, making their stories and sentences easier for everyone to read.

What are finger spaces?

Finger spaces are the small gaps children leave between words when they write. In Reception (the first year of primary school) and Year 1, children move from writing single words to writing full sentences. To make sure their writing is clear, teachers encourage them to leave a space—roughly the width of their index finger—between each word. You might hear your child mention 'sausage dog spaces', which is a playful way teachers describe a gap that is just the right length, not too short and not too long.

Why words sometimes run together

It is very common for children in Year 1 to write their words close together or even squashed into one long string. This usually happens because they are focusing very hard on phonics—the method of teaching children to read and write by breaking words down into individual sounds. Because they are concentrating so much on spelling the word correctly, they simply forget to leave a gap before starting the next one. This is a natural part of learning to write and is not a cause for worry.

How this helps your child

Learning to use finger spaces is a big step in becoming a confident writer. When words are spaced out, it is much easier for the child to read their own work back to themselves to check if it makes sense. It also helps the teacher and other adults understand their ideas more clearly. By making the concept physical—literally using a finger to measure the gap—children can see exactly where one word ends and the next begins, which helps them understand how sentences are built.

Easy ways to help at home

You can support your child with short, playful activities. When they draw a picture, ask them to write a simple caption and remind them to use a 'finger space' between the words. You could also play a game where you write a sentence with no spaces and ask them to be the 'detective' who finds where the gaps should go. Every child is different, and some children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language may find this more challenging; just keep it light and encouraging.

Common questions

Parents often ask if their child is 'behind' if they still squash their words. The answer is usually no; it is a skill that develops with practice. You might also wonder if you should correct every single mistake. It is often better to praise the spaces they did get right first. Because every school uses slightly different prompts or visual aids, it is a good idea to ask your child's teacher which specific phrases or methods they use in class so you can use the same language at home.

Sources



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- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: English programmes of study
 - GOV.UK, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework