

Jesus Academic Skills Support: Improving your handwriting

Every year, many students worry about their handwriting. You may be unable to decipher your own notes; struggle to write legibly under pressure; or have been told by your tutors that your writing is hard to read. If you have to hand write your exams, it is in your best interests to develop your handwriting skills. If your exam scripts are deemed illegible they will need to be transcribed, which you will be charged for: so it's worth practicing!

The University grants permission for you to type instead of hand write your exams only if this is required owing to a Specific Learning Disability (SpLD) such as dyslexia or ADHD, or where there are other disability or injury reasons to do so (e.g. injury to the writing hand). If you suspect that you may require special exam arrangements for any of these reasons (whether you are currently diagnosed or would like to be assessed) please contact the Student Support Officer (student.support@jesus.ox.ac.uk).

The good news is that clear handwriting is a skill, and so can be learned. People are not born with 'neat' or 'messy' handwriting. Everyone develops their particular writing style through muscle training and repetition. The following offers some guidance and resources that can help you to improve your writing.

1. Choose a good pen

Using a biro might be convenient, but it can make your writing hard to read. Instead, try a rollerball, fine liner or fountain pen. Experiment with a range of different pens to see which works for you. The pen should be smooth to write with, wide enough to be held comfortably, and not too heavy to avoid hand-cramp.

Some relatively inexpensive pen types are:

Rollerball e.g. **Uniball Jetstream**, **Pilot hi-tecpoint** or **Pentel Energel**

Fountain pen e.g. **Pilot v-pen** or **Platinum Preppy**

Fineliner pen e.g. **Uni ball PIN** or **Staedtler Pigment Liner**

2. Space out your work

Small, tightly cramming words and letters can make it hard to read your work. If your work is difficult to read, try writing with larger letters, and with greater spacing between words. A good rule is to leave a finger-width of space between each word. You might also want to try writing on alternate lines: this can make your writing easier to read.



3. Identify problem characters

Write out: 'the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' five times in lower case, and five times in block capitals. Examine your work to see if there are any specific 'problem' characters: e.g. do your 'e's and 'c's look too similar? Are your 'f's always messy? Once you have identified problem characters, work on learning to re-form those characters.

4. Write regularly

Nobody is born with beautiful or messy handwriting. You can achieve clear writing through muscle memory and regular practice. If you usually type your academic work, try to find other ways to write regularly: writing down your shopping lists, meal plans, notes, a diary etc. Practice really does make perfect – it is better to hand write a little bit regularly than to try to cram in a lot of practice the week before an exam.

5. Drill practice

Work on writing quickly but legibly by following the drill sheet on the intranet. When you have finished an exercise, try to notice where you could improve in future. Work on writing clearly as well as quickly.

There are three different exercises:

1. 1 Minute Drills

Try to complete the three sentences in one minute. Focus not only on writing quickly, but also on writing clearly: you need to be able to read your own writing at the end!

2. Fast/Slow Drills

Write each word quickly, then the same word again slowly, then repeat. When you are done, look at the difference in clarity, and focus on improving that aspect next time. Things to look out for are: spacing, character size, character legibility.

3. Timed Drill

Set a stopwatch or timer and try to complete the entire sheet legibly within 5 minutes. Every time you complete the sheet, work on either speeding up or completing the work more legibly.



Quick practice: 1 minute

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

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**Fast / Slow: write each word quickly,
then slowly, then quickly again etc.**

The The The The The The The The

quick quick quick quick quick quick

brown brown brown brown brown

fox fox fox fox fox fox fox fox

jumps jumps jumps jumps jumps jumps

over over over over over over over

the the the the the the the the

lazy lazy lazy lazy lazy lazy lazy

dog dog dog dog dog dog dog dog

big big big big big big big big

pressure pressure pressure pressure

argument argument argument argument

however however however however

necessary necessary necessary necessary

**Fast / Slow: write each word quickly,
then slowly, then quickly again etc.**

question question question question

evidence evidence evidence evidence

moreover moreover moreover moreover

important important important important

writing writing writing writing writing

discovery discovery discovery discovery

since since since since since since

measure measure measure measure

proof proof proof proof proof proof

small small small small small small

reign reign reign reign reign reign

need need need need need need

size size size size size size size size

hide hide hide hide hide hide hide

Timed practice: time yourself writing as quickly as possible, then check for legibility.

On 27 June 1571 Queen Elizabeth I issued letters patent for the foundation of 'Jhesus Colledge within the City and University of Oxforth'. In 2021 the College therefore celebrates the 450th anniversary of the royal charter, and a new landmark in the history of our institution. Mere survival over the intervening centuries is impressive, but more so is the steady adherence to some of the central purposes set out by the queen: 'the extension of good literature of every sort', 'the knowledge of languages' and, above all, 'the education of youth in [...] methodological learning'.