



Assessment and the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale

The **Oxford Writing Criterion Scale** provides a method with which you can assess children's writing and set small step targets to support the individual progress of each child. This section provides guidance on how the **Oxford Writing Criterion Scale** can be used to support progress in handwriting.

About the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale

The Writing Criterion Scale was developed by assessment expert, Ros Wilson. It describes the writing journey that children make, from their first pre-writing behaviours through to a more complex and sophisticated understanding and mastery of writing skills. The Writing Criterion Scale breaks down children's writing development into small steps so that it is easy to identify the point children have reached and the steps they need to make in order to progress.

Developed over more than 15 years and informed by over 20,000 pieces of children's writing, the Writing Criterion Scale has recently undergone further development to ensure that it matches the expectations of

the 2014 National Curriculum in England, and it is now known as the **Oxford Writing Criterion Scale**.

How to use the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale

The **Oxford Writing Criterion Scale** (OWCS) is designed to enable accurate, objective assessment of writing. It is organised into a series of Standards that map to the primary year groups, from Standard 1 (Reception/PI) through to Standard 7 (Year 6/P7).

Each Standard sets out a number of criteria against which children can be assessed. The OWCS can be used to assess the following strands of writing:

- features of text type/genre
- handwriting
- spelling
- grammar
- punctuation
- writer's voice.

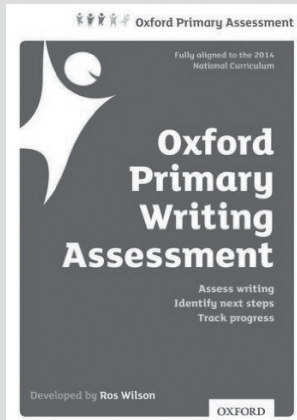
Below is a descriptor of the expectations associated with each Standard of the OWCS, with specific regards to handwriting.

Standard	End of year expectations
STANDARD 1: Reception/PI	<i>Children should be able to write three or more simple statements on a given subject that can be read without the child's help and that make sense, although letter shapes and spelling may not be fully accurate. Use of capitals and lower case letters may not be fully established.</i>
STANDARD 2: Year 1/P2	<i>Produce a paragraph or more of developed ideas independently that can be read without help from the child. Produce letter shapes which are mainly accurate, with clear spaces between most words.</i>
STANDARD 3: Year 2/P3	<i>Produce close to a side (or more) of A4 writing that is clear and coherent. Produce handwriting which is controlled, mainly regular in size and becoming neat. There may be evidence of joining.</i>
STANDARD 4: Year 3/P4	<i>Produce close to a side (or more) of A4 writing that is clear and coherent. Produce handwriting that is neat and mainly joined.</i>
STANDARD 5: Year 4/P5	<i>Produce more than a side of A4 writing that is clear and coherent. Produce handwriting that is neat and joined.</i>
STANDARD 6: Year 5/P6	<i>Produce handwriting that is fluent, neat and joined.</i>
STANDARD 7: Year 6/P7	<i>Produce handwriting that is fluent, neat and joined. Children may also be able to vary font for effect or emphasis where appropriate (e.g. print, italics, capitalization).</i>





More detailed information about the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale is provided in the *Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook* by Ros Wilson (OUP, 2005).



Using the Oxford Writing Criterion Scale for formative assessment

For assessment to be effective in informing learning, it is important that it empowers children by giving them a very clear understanding of what they can do and what they need to do next to succeed.

The OWCS facilitates this by providing both a snapshot of a child's secure skills and supporting the teacher in recognising the specific skills that are developing and/or need to be taught next in order for the child to make progress.

When setting next-step targets for each child, it is recommended that the teacher focuses on just two or three specific steps that can be shared with both pupils and parents. Once the targets have been established, the teacher should look for evidence of these skills developing across children's work.

Using small step targets

The most effective way to set and develop targets is to work with steps linked to a progressive skills ladder. On the following pages you will find a copy of the OWCS Progressive Skills Ladder for Handwriting. Skills ladders for the other strands of writing (genre, spelling, grammar, punctuation and writer's voice) can be found in the *Oxford Primary Writing Assessment Handbook*.

The Skills Ladder for Handwriting is organised according to the expectations of the year group or key stage and describes the small steps – in a rough hierarchy – that some children will need to take in their progress towards security of each skill.

This Skills Ladder can be used as a guide to target setting for individual children but should not be used rigidly, as a tick list. Children who make good progress will not need to take all of these small steps and some steps may be more or less relevant to individual children. Teachers will need to use their professional judgement and knowledge of each child in setting appropriate targets.

From Year 1/P2 onwards, each of the small steps is described in the form of a Child Speak Target. These can be given directly to children as part of the AfL process.





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Small step targets for Handwriting

Name:		Date:
Year/Key Stage	Small step target	Secure skill? (*/✓)
Reception (Pre-Writing) Children whose experience of talk, writing and language is good prior to starting school will readily demonstrate many of the pre-writing behaviours. Other children will need more exposure to these early skills before they are ready for the more formal teaching of writing to begin.	Can hold a pencil or crayon with enough control to make marks.	
	Can sit correctly at a table.	
	Can sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly.	
	Can mark-make without help.	
	Can make mark-making follow a pattern (e.g. <i>in a row or circle</i>).	
	Is trying to write letter shapes.	
	Can recognise own name within a group of others.	
	Can copy over and under patterns of letters.	
	Can use a favourite (preferred) hand when mark-making.	
	Can sound the letters in own name.	
	Can recognise and name all letter shapes. (<i>Can be further differentiated into even smaller steps by clustering small groups of like letters together.</i>)	
	Can draw the first letter of their name.	
	Is beginning to draw a range of recognisable letters.	
	Can hold and use a pencil effectively to write letters.	
	Knows writing goes from left to right in English.	
Is trying to write from left to right.		
Reception	Can write their name.	
	Can form most letters in the alphabet. (<i>More than 16</i>)	
	Is beginning to write both capital letters and small case letters, saying which they are.	
	Can form every letter of the alphabet.	
	Can write some regular words, making the letters similar in size.	
	Can usually write all letters the same size.	
	Can copy adult sentences accurately, making writing regular in size.	
	Can start most letters in the correct place. (<i>More than 16</i>)	
	Is starting to put spaces between the words written.	
	Can write all letters starting in the right place. (<i>Can be further differentiated into even smaller steps by clustering small groups of like letters together.</i>)	
	Can form all letters correctly on the line, above the line and below the line. (<i>Ascenders/descenders</i>)	
	Is beginning to write own sentences neatly and correctly.	





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Name:		Date:
Year/Key Stage	Small step target / Child speak target (Year 1 onwards)	Secure skill? (* / ✓)
Year 1 From Year 1 onwards, the targets are presented as child speak targets for sharing with the children.	I can write all letters accurately, starting and finishing in the right place. <i>(Can be further differentiated into even smaller steps by clustering small groups of like letters together.)</i>	
	I can hold my pencil correctly.	
	I sit correctly at the table when I am writing.	
	I always use capital and small letters correctly. <i>(Upper/lower case)</i>	
	I always have spaces between my words.	
	I am starting to sit my writing on the line.	
	I can draw ascenders above the other letters and descenders below the line of writing.	
	I can always write on the line, with ascenders showing clearly above small case letters and descenders below the line.	
	I can maintain neat, well-formed writing for a paragraph or more.	
Year 2	I am starting to join all my writing <i>(in accordance with the school's chosen style)</i> .	
	I can maintain accurate formation of all letters.	
	I can maintain neat, regular writing for up to a side of A4 or more.	
Key Stage 2	All my writing in school is neat, accurate, and – when appropriate – joined.	
	I can use other fonts in my handwriting for emphasis or impact (e.g. <i>capitalization, italics or print</i>).	

