

Choosing Models For Instruction

If your adoption efforts are bogged down in discussions about the “style” of letter shown in each program being considered, this document should be most helpful. It is designed to get you beyond PRODUCT considerations and into the meat of the programs you are assessing.

Consider closely the basic strategy employed for the lessons:

- 1. What specific actions are included in the learning activities?**
- 2. Do children work independently (trace and copy) or do lesson plans make it easy for you to actively control the pace by directing the movements (help children learn how to move)?**

Consider closely the movement process prescribed by each program:

- 1. How do the lesson plans and models help you to teach control of the movements that each child must learn in order to write fluently?**
- 2. How does the program help you to teach position skills to the children?**
- 3. How will the materials help you to correlate practiced skills into applied work for transfer of learning?**

There are models provided that show the same words written in the “font” of several different programs. They are shown two ways. - once as you would see them in the program text and again using the Peterson “Letter Tops Evaluation” process. We cover the bottoms of the letters to do a quick evaluation of legibility qualities.

The point of the illustration is to show that the various “fonts” are actually far more similar than they are different. Worries about the variation of letter shapes are always related to reading - particularly in primary grades. The question posed is, “Will my children be confused if letter shapes in reading or language books are different from the shapes shown in the handwriting book?”

This illustration clearly shows that children will be able to read any one of the various fonts as long as the writer knows how to control the movements well enough to make the tops the right shape. The tops of the letters provide the most important clues for decoding. However, shape differences do present considerations that are important.

The shape is created by a movement process. The following questions are intended help you to analyze the process shown by each program you are reviewing.

What is the recommended movement process we must teach the child?

How do the models presented help to communicate that movement process to the child?

How do prescribed lessons use the student models to help pupils internalize the movements?

How will prescribed lessons help you to teach skills for control of the movements?

How do the shapes relate to fluent movement?

Print Analysis

Publisher	Font	LETTER TOPS
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Peterson My name is Will. My name is Will


Note oval shape for “a.”

Handwriting
Without Tears My name is Will. My name is Will


Zaner My name is Will. My name is Will


Note circle shape for “a.”

DeNealian *My name is Will.* *My name is Will*


Note the size reduction required to fit the sentence into the same space needed by fonts shown above. The serifs cause this need. Fluent movement is goal oriented. Where do serifs end?

Peterson
Slant Print
Grade Two *My name is Will.* *My name is Will*


Palmer My name is Will. My name is Will


Cursive Shape Analysis

Peterson Directed Handwriting

Can you read my letter tops?

New Palmer

Can you read my letter tops?

Handwriting Without Tears

Can you read my letter tops?

There are important reasons behind the fact that traditional methods like Palmer and Peterson work hard to teach movement that results in forward slant. One reason relates to the fact that they were teaching cursive at a time when the tools were nib pens that had to be dipped in ink. Vertical strokes tended to put more pressure on the point. The result was a blotch instead of a stroke. It was critical therefore, that a student learn to use lateral sliding strokes to minimize the blotch problem. The other reason for slant relates to control of the strokes that create the letter tops.

Look at the tall loop tops and sharp tops in the word *letter*. To achieve the loop, an undercurve upstroke leads to a reversal of direction and a downstroke. To achieve a vertical tall loop, two sets of muscles must be used to create the shape. If the child learns to slide the undercurve rightward and then slant back to the left, the shape can be controlled by one set of muscles. The same thing is true of the round tops needed for the *n* and *m* in the words *can* and *my* as well as the roll top shape needed for *a*, *o*, *d*.

When fluent movement is one of your goals, it makes sense that better control will be achieved when one set of muscles can handle the process.

Zaner

Can you read my letter tops?

DeNealian

Can you read my letter tops?

Considering Process Distinctions

The letter tops illustration reveals that there are minimal differences between the various cursive models from different publishers. To make a choice between programs that seem to offer basically the same models you need to look into the movement process that your students must learn. More specifically, you should look at how the program teaches the pupil to control the movements as they put letters together to form cursive words. To do that you need to look at the whole not just the tops.

As you look closely at the whole product it becomes clear that different processes would be necessary to create the model as shown. Can you choose one that best illustrates for the student how to control the movements that will make letter tops the right shape?

Look at each of the models to identify control points - places where the student can pause for control. Look at the lesson plans to find out what is recommended. Where are you supposed to teach the child to pause for control? Use a pencil to mark circles on the samples at each place that obviously offers a place to stop.

Look along the baseline and note where curves demand continuous movement. Look at the tops of letters for any obvious stop point. Now you can compare the movement control process demanded by the models in each program.

Zaner

Can you read my letter tops?

DeNealian

Can you read my letter tops?

Palmer

Can you read my letter tops?

Peterson Directed Handwriting

Can you read my letter tops?

Peterson Cursive Print

Can you read my letter tops?

Peterson provides models designed to exaggerate the control process. We show models that help you to teach the child how to move with rhythm to the end of the letter. Fluent movement is goal oriented. Note that the models show a clear indication of end point for each letter. This control point allows fluent movement for letters and enables word pattern integration. As word rhythm patterns are learned the stops become curves as adult flow begins to emerge with practice.