

## Handwriting in Montessori: Why We Teach Cursive vs. Print

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Last week my five-year-old son brought home an enormous hand-painted map of the seven continents. I was impressed by his ability to trace and paint the continents with watercolors. But what knocked me off my feet was his beautiful cursive handwriting. He had carefully written the names of each of the continents in cursive. Since when do five-year-olds learn to write in cursive? Most public schools don't even start teaching cursive writing until at least second grade, if they teach it at all. Some schools have decided that learning to print and use cursive is no longer necessary in this "age of technology."

At WBMS, learning cursive is an essential skill that is introduced to children as young as four in [Children's House](#). During Maria Montessori's extensive observations of the child, she discovered the importance of learning through movement and the senses. Research corroborates the vital hand/brain connection, proving that new pathways in the brain develop as children use their hands to explore and interact with the world. Take a moment to watch your child draw. Look at the way he or she holds the pencil and forms the lines. From their youngest age and without even knowing it, they are preparing themselves for cursive writing.

Children in a Montessori environment learn cursive in several sequential steps. They begin with the cursive sandpaper letters that they trace with their fingers. Afterward, they may form the same letters in a tray of sand. Next, the letters are written on a large chalkboard. The children LOVE filling the chalkboard with the letter sounds they are learning. The focus is on form, not size, at this point. Children are then ready for unlined paper. Eventually lined paper is introduced and children learn to shape the letters between the two parallel lines and also learn that the letters of words are hitched together.



During the next step, a child starts to express his thoughts and ideas using letters that are cut out of particle

board, called the Moveable Alphabet. In this way, he or she begin the process of “writing,” or expressing thoughts in written symbols, long before they have learned to independently form all the letters of the alphabet. The child also learns to hook the letters to one another so that the pencil flows along the paper without frequent stopping within, and between, letters.

After the child has begun to form all the symbols and has been writing stories with the Moveable Alphabet, he or she naturally starts writing words and sentences on the chalkboard and on paper writing strips. You can almost see the thoughts travel from the brain, down the arm and hand, and onto the chalkboard or paper.



When you look at the [alphabet in cursive](#) you see that it would be impossible to reverse any of the letters, for example b, d, p, or s. These letters can be very confusing to the child who is printing. Also, with printing, the capital and lower case letters are often similar, causing confusion between the two. However, the capital cursive letters are significantly different; and usually they are not connected to the following letters.

Beyond what you can observe in a classroom, studies have also shown that kids who learn cursive rather than simply manuscript writing score better on reading and spelling tests, perhaps because the linked-up cursive forces writers to think of words as wholes instead of parts. It's also worth noting that once children have learned cursive, it is very easy for them to learn print. The reverse is more difficult. Also, a child who writes in cursive can also read print, but a child who only learns print cannot read cursive.



As I glance at my son's giant watercolor map hanging prominently in our kitchen, I am proud of the skills he has learned – but more importantly, I am grateful for both how and why he has learned those skills.