

# Curriculum Overview: Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series for K-6

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Getty-Dubay Italic  
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# Abstract

The *Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series* is a handwriting instruction program for grades K-6 based on the italic script that provides a proven, efficient curriculum to support English language proficiency goals.

Research indicates that handwriting plays a key role in literacy development for children learning to read, and handwriting instruction continues to be important for writing development through middle school. Regular, sequential handwriting instruction using evidence-based best practices supports English Language Arts (ELA) and other curricula by providing an avenue for communication through language that no other mode can offer.

However, conventional handwriting systems require significant classroom time in grades 2 and 3 to accomplish a transition from a print style to a joined-cursive style. These methods typically have low retention rates; older students who have learned handwriting in this manner tend to create

their own style of writing by using a mixture of manuscript and joined letters based on models commonly found in type.

The Getty-Dubay Italic handwriting program provides a sequential transition to cursive, building on previously-learned concepts. Print and cursive forms are unified: Letterforms of cursive italic are essentially identical to those of basic italic. Cursive italic joins most, but not all lowercase letters, and does not join capitals. Italic letterforms resemble those found in type.

The *Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series* consists of seven consumable workbooks with built-in formative self-assessment and an *Instruction Manual*, supported by alphabet cards, desk strips, wall charts, a teacher DVD, Blackline Masters and an online app for generating customized practice worksheets.

## What is italic handwriting?

Modern italic handwriting — not to be confused with “italicized” (slanted) font style — is based on an historical script that was in use in Italy as early as the sixteenth century. Clean, legible and distinctive, this script is the progenitor of the substantially more ornate nineteenth-century Spencerian script, which Palmer and others later adapted for handwriting instruction in the United States.

Italic letterforms are similar to those commonly seen in type or on screen. They are based on elliptical shapes that conform to natural hand movements with few lifts of the pen or pencil. Capitals are taken from historical Roman models. Getty-Dubay Italic recommends a 5° slope for all grades.

Current instructional practice in the United States typically assumes a sequence from a print form of writing used in K-2 to a cursive form for 2nd grade (or 3rd grade) and

older students. Conventional cursive styles commonly used in this sequence involve 100% joined letters, with letterforms that are dissimilar to those of print.

With italic handwriting, however, print (“basic italic”) and cursive (“cursive italic”) are unified. This sequence builds on previously-learned concepts; basic italic lowercase letterforms are essentially identical to those of cursive italic. Small entrance and/or exit serifs are added in the cursive italic form of 15 of these letters to facilitate joins, and the cursive **f** has a descender.

Basic italic capitals are undecorated. Italic cursive capitals contain serifs. Only one capital letterform changes in the transition from basic italic to cursive italic: capital **Y**.

Cursive italic does not contain the loops that are prevalent in conventional cursive styles taught in the United States.

### Basic italic lowercase

l i j k v w x z h n m r u y  
a d g q b p o e c s f t

### Cursive italic lowercase

l i j k v w x z h n m r u y  
a d g q b p o e c s f t

Getty-Dubay teaches lowercase letters first, in eight family groups of similar shapes, progressing from simple vertical strokes to arches and ellipses. Capital letters come next, because they account for less than 4% of all letters in English.

### Basic italic capitals

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N  
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

### Cursive italic capitals

A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Getty-Dubay Italic utilizes two join types: a diagonal join from the baseline, and a horizontal join at the waistline.

EXAMPLE OF  
DIAGONAL JOINS

village

EXAMPLE OF  
HORIZONTAL JOINS

town

These two join types are executed in eight specific ways to connect most — but not all — letters. Getty-Dubay Italic joins essentially report the movement of the pen on the paper as it moves from one letter to the next. They support the natural and rhythmic movement of the hand and promote legibility and speed. Students may choose from among many join options to explore what works best for them.

### Cursive italic (many, but not all letters are joined)

A quick brown fox jumps  
over the lazy dog.

# How does italic differ from other handwriting styles?

Italic consists of one script that transitions from print to cursive by joining most — but not all — letters. All other common handwriting curricula in the United States are based on a conventional cursive model

that requires students to learn two scripts: one for printing, another for cursive.

The cursive forms of Palmer, Zaner-Bloser, D'Nealian, Handwriting

Without Tears and similar styles are looped letterforms of 100% connected writing, whereas Italic letterforms are not looped and are connected only where they facilitate speed without a negative impact on legibility. With Getty-Dubay Italic, many of these joins are optional for the student.

Palmer and similar conventional cursive styles require students to learn between

30 and 52 new letterforms (depending on the method) to make the transition from manuscript to cursive in grades 2 and 3, usually with a different slope. Getty-Dubay Italic requires only one letterform change

from basic to cursive and no change of slope.

Basic italic letterforms have few pen lifts. Twenty of the basic italic lowercase letters require

no pen lifts, and the remaining six require only one pen lift. This generally translates into more ease in drawing lowercase letters. Basic italic letters are based on oval shapes rather than the circles or tear shapes found in other systems. These traits tend to help younger writers and those with special needs (e.g., motor skill issues, dysgraphia and dyslexia).

HANDWRITING PROGRAM	CHANGE FROM MANUSCRIPT TO CURSIVE		
	SHAPE CHANGE CAPITALS	LOWERCASE	SLOPE CHANGE
Italic	1	0	None (all 5°)
Palmer	26	26	0° to 30°
Zaner-Bloser	26	22	0° to 30°
D'Nealian	18	13	None (all 17°)
HWT	15	15	None (all 0°)

THE TRANSITION FROM BASIC TO CURSIVE IN COMMON HANDWRITING METHODS.

Italic	Palmer	Zaner-Bloser	D'Nealian	HWT

THE TRANSITION FROM BASIC TO CURSIVE USING SAMPLE LETTERS a, f, Q, r AND z IN COMMON HANDWRITING METHODS.

ITALIC MAINTAINS LETTERFORMS, BUILDING ON PREVIOUS SKILLS.



# What does the research reveal about conventional handwriting methods?

Studies over the last thirty-five years show that the retention rate for conventional cursive is typically less than 1 in 3.

Conventional looped cursive handwriting systems require significant classroom time in grades 2 and 3 to accomplish the transition from print to cursive, because these systems expect students to learn new letterforms — as many as 52 — in order to do so. Motor planning and motor execution are different for print than for these forms of cursive handwriting (Meulenbroek & van Galen, 1990).

This investment of time and effort is not generally effective. A 1985 study evaluated 756 students in the 11th grade, all of whom had received instruction using a conventional looped cursive program in elementary school, and then no instruction in handwriting following that. By 11th grade, only 13% used the conventional cursive model they were taught, while 47% wrote in styles with italic traits, though they had received no instruction in italic (Duvall, 1985).

A 1998 study of legibility and speed in 9th grade writing also indicates that, depending on the task, only 30% to 35% follow through with the 100% joined conventional cursive style they are taught in elementary school. Most adopt a writing style that combines print and cursive. This style is faster and as legible or more so than 100% connected cursive writing (Graham, Berninger and Weintraub, 1998). Again, this spontaneous handwriting has commonalities with italic handwriting.

More recent research affirms that even by 5th grade, students tend to abandon the conventional cursive letterforms they learn in 2nd and 3rd grade. (Bara & Morin, 2013). Only 15% of high school seniors use conventional cursive (College Board, 2007).



RETENTION RATE FOR CONVENTIONAL CURSIVE IS TYPICALLY LESS THAN 1 IN 3.

CURSIVE ITALIC	CONVENTIONAL CURSIVE
5° slope	30° slope
Angela	Angela
Barbara	Barbara
Cecilia	Cecilia
David	David
Eugene	Eugene
Fifi	Fifi
Gregory	Gregory
Hannah	Hannah
Irving	Irving
Jojo	Jojo
Kirk	Kirk
Lillian	Lillian
Malcolm	Malcolm
Nancy	Nancy
Otto	Otto
Philippa	Philippa
Queequeg	Queequeg
Richard	Richard
Susan	Susan
Trent	Trent
Ursula	Ursula
Vivian	Vivian
Woodrow	Woodrow
Xerxes	Xerxes
Yonny	Yonny
Zanzi	Zanzi

# Standards alignment for handwriting

The research is clear that handwriting plays a key role in literacy development for young children.

*“Handwriting is not a purely motor or visual activity; it is ‘language by hand,’ which shares common processes with other kinds of language (listening, speaking and reading) ... Mastering handwriting is very important for children, as it places the earliest constraints on writing development.” (Bara et al, 2013).*

*“Handwriting experience can have significant effects on the ability of young children to recognize letters ... Handwriting serves to link visual processing with motor experience, facilitating subsequent letter recognition skills.” (James, 2017).*

Common Core State Standards English Language Arts (CCSS ELA) W.K.1 through W.K.3 align with this research. The ELA Goal, to “Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose...”, prioritizes

letter formation by hand, and implies the presence in the classroom of an appropriate methodology for this mark making.

Studies of handwriting with older children indicate a correlation between ease of writing and compositional skill.

*“Students’ sentence-writing skills, the amount they write, and the quality of their [compositional] writing all improve along with their handwriting ... ” (Graham, 2009).*

Regular, sequential handwriting instruction using evidence-based best practices supports ELA and other curricula by providing an avenue for communication through language that no other mode can offer.

Continued development of students’ handwriting, using a program that promotes ease and legibility, therefore supports the CCSS ELA standards in “Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas”, “Production and Distribution of Writing” and “Range of Writing”.

## Background

The *Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series* was created in 1979 by Barbara Getty and Inga Dubay. Getty and Dubay are internationally known handwriting and calligraphy experts and educators. They have trained over 4,500 medical professionals in handwriting best practices and have presented their work at the World Health Organization in Copenhagen, Denmark and the International Patient Safety Conference in Florence, Italy. Their *New York Times* Op-Ed (“The Write Stuff”,

September 4, 2009) makes the case for italic handwriting as a solution to the poor state of handwriting in America.

The *Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series* is currently in use in public, private, charter and home schools nationally and abroad. The program provides a proven, efficient curriculum that allows classroom handwriting instruction to support Common Core State Standards English Language Proficiency Goals.

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# What are the necessary materials of the Getty-Dubay Italic program?

The *Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series* incorporates formative self-assessment and developmentally-appropriate content. A unique “Look, Plan, and Practice” system is built into the student workbooks. Worksheets are designed for students to learn within their zone of proximal development by incorporating content from science, language arts and social studies, and by providing many personal-choice options. A free online app allows teachers and students to create PDF worksheets for

basic italic and cursive italic practice using their own text, for informal acceleration and to support other curricula (e.g., via vocabulary lists, lists of state capitals, poetry, etc.).

Each grade level of workbook is self-contained. Books C through G (for grades 2 through 6) include a review of basic italic, as well as instruction and practice in cursive letters and joins. Therefore, implementation in schools may be made in all grades at once.

## Consumable instruction workbooks for student grades K - 6

Book A (Kindergarten), 4th Ed. 2016, 72pp. (ISBN 978-0-9827762-3-0)

Book B (1st grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 64pp. (ISBN 978-0-9649215-6-6)

Book C (2nd grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 68pp. (ISBN 978-0-9827762-0-9)

Book D (3rd grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 88pp. (ISBN 978-0-9649215-7-3)

Book E (4th grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 64pp. (ISBN 978-0-9649215-8-0)

Book F (5th grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 64pp. (ISBN 978-0-9649215-5-9)

Book G (6th grade), 4th Ed. 2016, 64pp. (ISBN 978-0-9827762-5-4)

A teacher Instruction Manual for all grade levels K - 6, 4th Ed. 2009, 108pp. (ISBN 978-0-9649215-4-2)

## Teaching Aids

Alphabet Cards – basic italic and numerals

Wall charts – cursive italic and numerals

Desk strips – basic italic, cursive italic and numerals

## Digital Media

“Write Now! Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting”, 55 minute DVD (2009)

Blackline Masters: CD-ROM of additional practice worksheets for Books A – G

# Citations

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Graham, S. “Want to Improve Children’s Writing? Don’t Neglect Their Handwriting.” *American Educator*, Winter 2009.

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## Scope & Sequence

## Program Goal

To write neat, legible handwriting  
without prompts  
as a scaffold to English Language Literacy

## The Student

holds and uses writing tool correctly

sits correctly

positions the paper correctly

writes letters in a top-to-bottom progression  
(except d and e)

writes all lowercase letters (8 family groups)

writes his/her name in basic italic

writes numerals

writes words and sentences in basic italic

writes with a consistent letter slope

evaluates his/her own handwriting according to letter shapes, slope, and strokes

uses correct spacing within words and between words to develop legible handwriting

writes words, sentences and paragraphs in  
basic italic

uses margins and headings appropriately

writes the cursive italic joins 1-5

continues to use basic italic for maps, charts, posters, forms, etc.

reads looped cursive

writes cursive italic joins 1-8

writes cursive italic capitals

writes his/her name in cursive italic

is able to make various join option choices

can discern among various historical scripts

experiences writing with an edged pen

[illegible]