



Charlotte Mason
INTERNATIONAL

Doors to Discovery

Charlotte Mason
Beginning Writing,
Copywork, and Beyond

AN OPEN-AND-GO GUIDE FOR TEACHING
CHILDREN TO WRITE BASED ON
CHARLOTTE MASON PRINCIPLES

*A complete guide with materials for teaching children
to write based on Charlotte Mason principles*

Doors to Discovery

Charlotte Mason Beginning Writing, Copywork, and Beyond

AN OPEN-AND-GO GUIDE FOR TEACHING
CHILDREN TO WRITE BASED ON
CHARLOTTE MASON'S PRINCIPLES

Written by

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Doors to Discovery: Charlotte Mason Beginning Writing, Copywork, and Beyond

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SAMPLE

Charlotte Mason Method Language Arts Overview

Do you remember the lessons back in school of identifying the different parts of speech, and memorizing different rules in grammar? Unless you had a knack for it, chances are, you would be cringing at the memory of what seemed like hours of drudgery.

When I was in school, I had the seemingly uncanny ability of being able to tell if a sentence sounded right or not, even without really knowing the rule. I seemed to know, instinctively, whether the verb needed an -s at the end or not, or what tense to use.

When it came to spelling, I would also look at a word and think, “Hmm, that doesn’t look right.” Then I would try different spellings until it “looked” right, and that’s the spelling I would raise on the contest board or leave on my test paper.

It was only when I studied the Charlotte Mason method that I found an explanation for what I felt, at that time, was an unusual gift.

It turns out it isn’t so unusual, after all. Let me explain.

Maximizing exposure to words on the page

In the Charlotte Mason method, language arts is not taught like we do in the traditional school system, where we need to start by memorizing grammar, spelling and other rules from the start of our school career. Instead, it focuses on exposing the child to plenty of excellently-written literature from an early age, so that he gets a grasp of what sounds and looks right, and even what sounds beautiful.

Living Books

First, the CM method emphasizes the importance of living books. These are books that are excellently-written by someone who is passionate about the subject, resulting in books that are engaging and can stir up the imagination.

We have at least two ways of using living books in a CM homeschool, detailed in the next page.

- **Read-alouds**

This is done for children who do not have the mechanical skills of reading yet. The parent is the one who reads the stories, but the child is, technically, “reading” through listening. For example, a 6-year-old may not be able to read through A.A. Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh by himself, but he can easily follow the story when read by someone else.

- **Reading Independently**

When the child learns to read by himself, the books are slowly turned over to him to read. However, a child’s listening comprehension tends to be higher than his reading comprehension up to the age of about 12. This means that during that stage, he may be able to understand more than he’s able to read himself. Some parents use audiobooks, while the child reads along his book, to keep “feeding” him with ideas until he’s strong enough to read his books all by himself.

Copywork

Part of the Charlotte Mason method of teaching language arts is copywork. This refers to the child copying excellently-written passages, whether from Scripture, hymns, poetry, or his school books, imitating from a beautiful model.

The goal is excellent execution, so we only let him copy the passage once—a difference from many of the busywork copying we did when we were in school!

Transcription

One step after copywork is transcription. One difference is this: in copywork, the child copies letter by letter from a model right above the line he’s writing in. In transcription, he copies from a model, but writes down the words from memory, either one word at a time, or progressing to one phrase at a time.

Copywork and transcription both challenge his observation skills and teaches him to visualize in his mind’s eye the correct spelling of words, the proper punctuation, and even helps incorporate grammar structure.

Oral Narration

Narration is a foundational tool in the Charlotte Mason education. For language arts, oral narration trains a child to listen or read attentively and then tell what he has heard or read.

This is not the same as summarizing, and instead we encourage children to tell everything they remember. They may use words from the story itself, or they can use their own words, putting their own individuality into their narration.

In contrast to traditional school that requires children to write essays from a young age, we don't ask children to write any narration before the age of ten. Instead, we strengthen their telling skills through oral narration, which also gives them time to strengthen their writing and spelling before they are expected to write.

Written Narration: Foundation of Written Composition

One thing that saddens me about students disliking English classes is that they usually develop that aversion from being asked to write essays long before they actually have a strong grasp of the language. This may include difficulty forming their thoughts in English (especially for students whose first language is not English), or they may not yet have the physical capability to write and spell as quickly as they would like in order to form a coherent thought on paper.

I have students coming from traditional school who shy away from any writing of any kind, possibly because of bad experiences being required to write something when they did not have the skill yet.

In the CM method, we slowly introduce written narration after age 10, and only after the child has had at least a year or two of experience and growth in oral narration.

We believe this is a very strong foundation for written composition, because long before the child needs to learn the different parts of an essay, he already knows how to formulate his thoughts to tell about the books he's read.

Studied Dictation

At about 10 years old and older, we also introduce studied dictation, a step up from copywork, where the child studies a passage and then writes them down, as dictated by

a parent or teacher, one phrase at a time, with the spelling and punctuation from memory.

Poetry

In a CM education, we also expose children to the beauty of language through poetry. From the first year, we read one poem a day, and focus on letting them experience the musicality of words. We don't narrate poetry and instead read them once a day for appreciation purposes.

Shakespeare

Shakespeare is, without a doubt, known as the master of English literature. From a young age, we give our children access to Shakespeare, using tales rewritten for children for the first few years and eventually transitioning to the actual plays.

Enjoying Language with the Charlotte Mason Method

If I were to summarize teaching language arts using the Charlotte Mason method, I would say that it helps children to enjoy the beauty of language, and gives them a strong foundation for expressing themselves.

In this age where so many are clamoring to be heard, such as in blogs and videos, I believe that children educated using the Charlotte Mason method are able to think analytically, draw from the great ideas of higher minds before him, and produce something worthwhile to make a difference in our world.

How to Use This Book

This little manual is intended as a parent's reference guide or resource on everything related to beginning writing or the technical part of writing. This includes the following:

- Printing
- Copywork
- Transcription
- Prepared Dictation
- Keeping a Commonplace Book

With that said, the scope of this book does not include how to do written narration and composition.

Overall Format for Each Section

Each section is laid out in the following way:

- **Charlotte Mason Quotes Referenced**

We believe that implementing a Charlotte Mason homeschool is more than just following a list of things to do; it's important that we as homeschooling parents unlearn our old views of education and understand the why behind what we do. Charlotte Mason's Home Education series is an excellent place to start, and this is our main source for the recommendations in this book.

In each section, we endeavor to take a look at quotes from Charlotte Mason's Home Education series. In all our resources, when applicable, we may also quote some Parents' Review articles, a sort of magazine published during Miss Mason's time where parents and teachers contributed their own thoughts and recommendations, while still adhering to her principles.

From these, we then give our best shot at interpreting and applying these principles into the modern-day homeschool.

A disclaimer is in place: when it comes to writing, there have been plenty of resources that look into the mechanics of handwriting, and we don't claim to be the only right

way to do things. However, we simply tried to put into practical steps what we believe Miss Mason is recommending in her writings.

- Tips, Steps, Suggestions

From her writings, we gleaned the tips and steps into easy-to-understand bullet headlines that will make it easy for you to apply in a practical sense. That means we try to give recommendations and suggestions that may or may not have been explicitly expressed in Miss Mason's writings.

- Sample/Suggested Lesson

Then, we have added, as possible, samples of how these can look. For example, in the concept of printing, we added images to show you the different strokes for the different letters. These are intended to be used as the parents' reference.

- Appendix

The Appendix section contains all printable pages that you may use in teaching your child to write. We understand that in Miss Mason's day, they did not use printables, perhaps with the exception of the plates in *The New Handwriting* book which she recommended. However, we include this in hopes that these printable pages may help make things easier for the busy homeschooling parent, in that the images of the letters and copywork pages are made accessible and within reach.

The Mechanical Act of Writing

If teaching our children to read is the number one worry of most mothers who think about homeschooling, possibly, teaching them to write is next on the list! We are very thankful that in the Charlotte Mason philosophy, Miss Mason also lays down guidelines for teaching beginning writing.

In this book, we hope to dig deep into what she says about printing, copywork, transcription, and prepared dictation. We will also have a short section on keeping a commonplace book.

The Goal: Perfect Execution

Now, perfection is clearly a daunting and unreasonable goal. But in the CM method, we strive for excellence, meaning, we aspire for our children to give their best effort. We push towards perfect execution, or the best that they can give to a specific process, not necessarily a perfect output.

Here is what Miss Mason has to say about writing in a way that shows best effort:

Perfect Accomplishment.—I can only offer a few hints on the teaching of writing, though much might be said. First, let the child accomplish something perfectly in every lesson—a stroke, a pothook, a letter. Let the writing lesson be short; it should not last more than five or ten minutes. Ease in writing comes by practice; but that must be secured later. In the meantime, the thing to be avoided is the habit of careless work—humpy m's, angular o's. (Vol 1 Page 233-234)

If, when we were in school, we were required to copy lines of text over and over until we fill an entire page, it's time to say goodbye to that practice. In the CM method, our goal is not quantity, but quality.

Some things to think about from this short passage that Miss Mason wrote:

1. Let the child accomplish something perfectly in every lesson.

Remember, the goal is to train our child in perfect execution. That means that we as parents also need to be aware of what he is capable of achieving in an excellent way.

2. Let the writing lesson be short.

She recommends writing lessons to be short, describing it as “not last[ing] more than five or ten minutes.”

One way of keeping true to this would be to use a timer. Set a timer at the start of the writing lesson, either to five or ten minutes. And when the timer goes off, the lesson is over, whether or not your child was able to finish.

Actually, since our goal is perfect execution and not quantity, five to ten minutes can be plenty of time to finish what we set out to do.

3. Practice comes later.

Perhaps one reason that we like the idea of copying a dozen lines of letter A's is that we believe that practice makes perfect. But Miss Mason recommends teaching our children to aspire to excellent execution from the very first, and this habit is more effective at securing good writing.

4. Avoid the habit of careless work.

One reason why CM lessons are kept short is that, when a lesson drags on and on, the child has a greater tendency to slack and slouch. In writing, especially, careless work is something that we are urged adamantly to avoid. So stick to the timer and work at a time when your child is most alert and cooperative.

A Note on Handedness

While Charlotte Mason did not specifically deal with the concept of right- or left-handedness, we assume it's because this was not something that was prevalently studied during her time. She lived during the early 1900s, and historically, it was only in the later part of that century that left-handedness became more acceptable.

Research estimates that around 10-15% of the population is left-handed, and some consider it a form of neurodivergence. This word simply means that someone is wired in a way that's different from the majority, or what we call neurotypicals. But we believe that one way is not better than another; it's just a natural human difference that we can embrace and appreciate.

When it comes to writing, handedness may affect the way a child writes his letters. Before you start "officially" teaching your child to write, we recommend you to observe which one is his dominant hand.

If you find out that your child is a leftie, understand that the direction he writes may not necessarily be the same as somebody who is right-handed. For example, a right-handed person will normally cross the letter "t" by starting from the left and moving to the right. Lefties, on the other hand, have been shown to cross their letter "t"s from the right and moving to the left—and understandably so!

This book includes examples of stroke order, and shows recommended stroke directions designed for right-handed students. If your child is left-handed, please use parental discretion in giving allowance for this type of directional difference, especially in writing horizontal strokes.

Another main difference is the way that the leftie tilts the paper; whereas a right-handed child would typically write slanting up towards the right, this position will be very uncomfortable for a left-handed child. Instead, the leftie will more likely slant his paper downwards so that he can write comfortably.

Phases in Writing

In this book, we organize the process of learning to write and copy text into the following phases:

Phase 0.5: Identifying letters

Phase 1: Printing

Phase 2: Copywork

Phase 3: Transcription

Phase 4: Prepared Dictation

We will delve into each phase as deeply as possible in the next section!

SAMPLE

Phase 0.5: Identifying letters

We add this as the first phase, because before a child can start to write letters with pen and paper, he or she starts by recognizing letters. Miss Mason describes this process as part of learning to read. Of course, writing is not a prerequisite for learning to read, and many children are able to read before their fine motor skills are developed enough to write well.

Take a look at the first phase for a child to learn to write letters:

“But the learning of the alphabet should be made a means of cultivating the child’s observation: he should be made to see what he looks at. Make big B in the air, and let him name it; then let him make round O, and crooked S, and T for Tommy, and you name the letters as the little finger forms them with unsteady strokes in the air...”

Here we can see that long before the child starts to hold a pencil, he’s already trained to pay attention to the shape of the letters. Not only do we let him form the strokes in the air, we also encourage him to write these shapes in a tray of sand, as described below:

To make the small letters thus from memory is a work of more art, and requires more careful observation on the child’s part. A tray of sand is useful at this stage. The child draws his finger boldly through the sand, and then puts a back to his D; and behold, his first essay in making a straight line and a curve. (Vol. 1 page 201)

Let’s take a look at some of the results that these kinds of exercises can have on our child’s learning:

- First, this power of observation will serve him in good stead when he finally starts to write, and all the way to the time he needs to learn how to spell.
- Next, the multi-sensory approach to reading and writing helps even students who may struggle with dyslexia to interact with the letters using all their senses; in this case, the eyes see the letters, the vocal cords speak the sound, the ears hear the sound, and the hands and/or fingers feel the shape as they draw and even from the texture of the sand in the tray.
- Being able to draw these letters in the air and in sand gives the child boldness because it does not require as well-developed fine motor skills as it does to hold a pen or pencil. Many children who are forced to learn to write do not have their fine motor skills fully developed yet and it may end up in a lot of frustration and tears!

Phase 1: Printing

Printing is the first phase of actually writing with pencil and paper. Here is what Miss Mason says:

Printing.—*But the child should have practice in printing before he begins to write. (Vol 1 Page 234)*

What is printing? Printing is being able to write each letter clearly and from memory. We repeat what Miss Mason says here, that a child should have practice in printing before he's expected to write.

Printing Step 1: Teach capital letters first.

First, let him print the simplest of the capital letters with single curves and straight lines. When he can make the capitals and large letters, with some firmness and decision, he might go on to the smaller letters—'printed' as in the type we call 'italics,' only upright,—as simple as possible, and large. (Vol 1 Page 234)

Miss Mason advises us to teach our children to write the capital letters first, since they are made up of the more simple strokes, mainly single curves and straight lines.

For example, in teaching the letter "A" you might teach the child to make the following strokes first: / / \ \ and ——.

You might teach the letters in order from A to Z, or you may want to arrange the letters in order of difficulty of forming the strokes.

If you prefer to teach printing the letters in order of difficulty of forming the strokes, a suggested order is as follows (suggestions mine, based on CM principles):

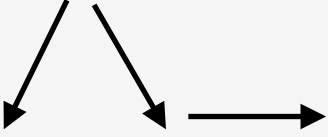
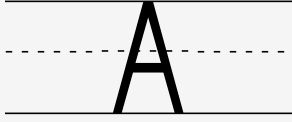


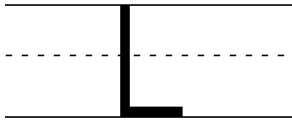

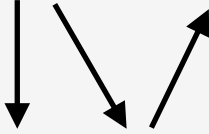





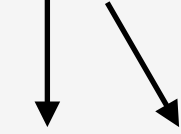



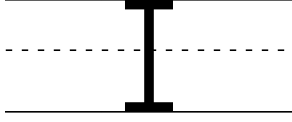



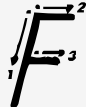
Letters with all straight lines: A, L, M, T, N, I, F, H, E, V, X, Z, Y, W, K

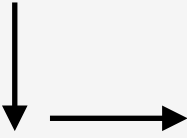
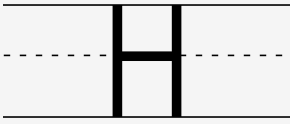

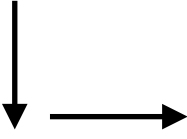
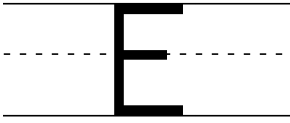

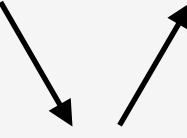
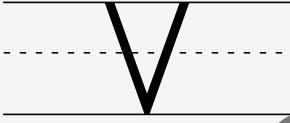

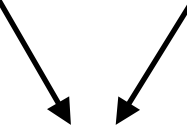
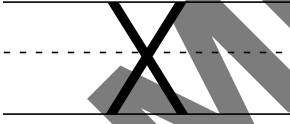




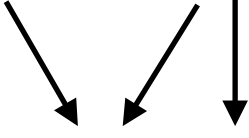
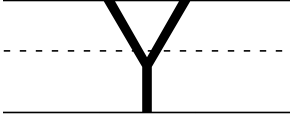

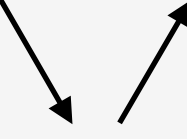
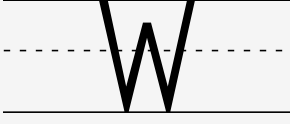

Letters with all curves: C, S, O

Letters with straight lines and curves: D, P, J, U, G, Q, B, R

In the next page, we show suggested strokes to teach, how the letter looks on lined paper, and suggested stroke order. (We used a font used for New Zealand schools; some of the strokes may not be what we use, such as the big letter G; please adjust as needed.)

You may choose to use the upright or the slanted letters based on parental preference.
 (Note: For a left-handed child, writing letters slanting to the right may not be feasible.)

Strokes	Letter	Stroke Order
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

Stroke	Letter	Stroke Order
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

SAMPLE CONTINUES A FEW PAGES LATER

Printing Step 2: Teach the small letters next.

Once he masters the capital letters to some degree of firmness, then teach the small letters, but in an upright form and in large size.

Steps in Teaching.—Let the stroke be learned first; then the pothook; then the letters of which the pothook is an element—n, m, v, w, r, h, p, y; then o, and letters of which the curve is an element a, c, g, e, x, s, q; then looped and irregular letters—b, l, f, t, etc. One letter should be perfectly formed in a day, and the next day the same elemental forms repeated in another letter, until they become familiar. (Vol 1 Page 234)

First teach the stroke (e.g. a downward line), and then the “pothook” or the curve in the stroke. For example, in teaching the letter “n,” we start by teaching the downward stroke, then the pothook, forming the letter “n.”

A suggested order is as follows:

Letters with straight lines and pothooks: n, m, v, w, r, h, p, y, u, z

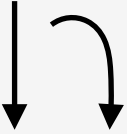
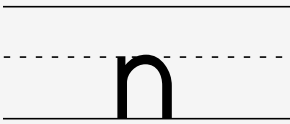

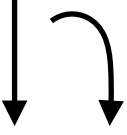
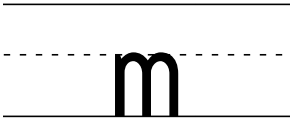


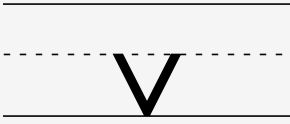

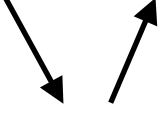






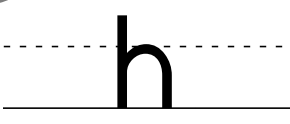

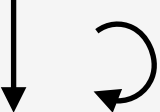


Then letter: o

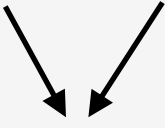
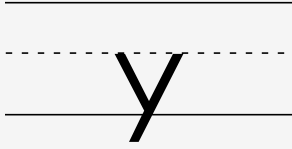

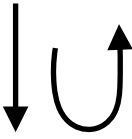
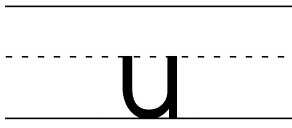




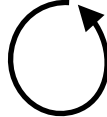
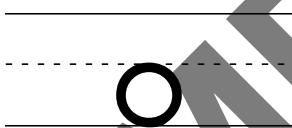




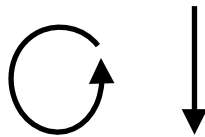


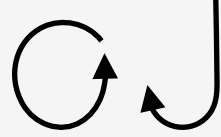


Letters with a curved element: c, a, g, e, x, s, q

Looped and irregular letters: b, l, f, t, d, i, j, k

Alternatively, you may also choose to teach the small letters in alphabetical order alongside their big letter counterparts. It seems that although Miss Mason has these suggestions, it may not necessarily be taken as an order set in stone; she also recommends *A New Handwriting* by another author who deals with the order of teaching the letters differently.

In our humble opinion, it may help to teach the letters in order of difficulty more especially if your child appears to have trouble forming the strokes and shapes. This way, you set him up for success by teaching the simpler shapes to form first. Otherwise, any other order might actually be perfectly fine.

Strokes	Letter	Stroke Order
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

Strokes	Letter	Stroke Order
		
		
		
		
		
		
		

TILL NEXT TIME

Thank you very much for journeying with us! Other Charlotte Mason resources we offer include:

- ✧ Charlotte Mason International Curriculum Kinder
- ✧ Charlotte Mason International Curriculum Form 1 (for students in Grades 1 to 3)
- ✧ Charlotte Mason International Curriculum Form 2 (for students in Grades 4 to 6)
- ✧ Charlotte Mason International Copybook
- ✧ create Handicraft Guide
- ✧ and more to come!

For more resources on Charlotte Mason and homeschooling, head on over to CharlotteMasonInternational.com. Grab a copy of our free e-book, too, and get the chance to be the first to know our latest updates!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yen Cabag is a homeschooling mom, writer, entrepreneur, and Charlotte Mason coach, trainer, and advocate, who loves reading, storytelling, and creating just about anything—from kitchen concoctions to stories, articles, songs, curriculum, and crochet pieces!

Growing up, her daily diet included a dose of Sweet Valley Twins, Sweet Valley Kids, and Sweet Valley High, only falling in love with classic books when she started learning and applying the Charlotte Mason philosophy in their homeschool and family life. Since then, her husband Mark has also jumped on the bandwagon, devouring books left and right, despite not having enjoyed it in his younger years. (Score for living books!)

Yen's favorite me-time activity is digging for treasure in one of the many branches of Booksale, while the family also loves hiking/camping up in their mountain home.

Yen and Mark are also champions for fostering and adoption, with two of their three boys coming into the family through this beautiful gift.

Are you interested in applying the Charlotte Mason philosophy to your homeschool, but don't have the first clue how to do teach your child to write or do copywork? We heard you!

The Doors to Discovery: Charlotte Mason Beginning Writing, Copywork, and Beyond is our launch-pad for a lifetime of enjoying words and writing, with suggested steps for lessons on *printing, copywork, transcription, and prepared dictation*, where you can:

- Take the guesswork out of what Charlotte Mason says about writing, copywork, and transcription lessons;
- Get started with a suggested list of how to teach your child to write the different letters;
- Save time and energy instead of needing to research on handwriting;
- Get an overview of dyslexia and dysgraphia and how to provide remediation and accommodation for it;
- Have the information on writing, printing, copywork, transcription, and prepared dictation at your fingertips so you can start anytime, anywhere;
- Follow the easy instructions in practical steps you can apply easily;
- Go deeper as needed!
- Re-use the resource over and over again for several children or over several years;
- and many more!



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