UNIT 6 WRITING

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, we learnt about three language skills- listening, speaking and reading and their mutual dependence. The ability to write is the last one to develop in children and is also dependent on these three skills. While learning to write, the two functions of language- ‘communication’ and ‘expression’ are very important. In this unit, we will talk about the development of communicative
ability and the development of expression in children, and learning to write in the context of these two functions. Certain techniques will also be suggested for teaching writing effectively. We should like to point out that like all other skills, writing should also be seen in a holistic perspective; while writing, you are also reading what you write and you are also in a sense speaking and listening to yourself about what you write.

Teaching will be effective only if the experience is meaningful for children. This principle has implications for teaching of letters and grammar in lower classes, as well as for teaching different types of writing in higher classes. Several classroom practices such as correction of mistakes, focus on handwriting, use of flowery language, etc., will be discussed in this unit, keeping in mind the meaning and process of writing.

### 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On reading this unit, you will:

- Understand what writing means and what is the nature of its relationship with listening, speaking and reading; you will also be able to see all these skills in a holistic perspective;
- Understand what we mean by ‘good writing’;
- Learn about the teacher’s role in teaching children writing;
- Learn about various forms of writing; and also
- Learn about various activities that can be used for developing writing skills.

### 6.2 WHAT DOES ‘WRITING’ MEAN?

Learning to write is one of the toughest landmarks in language learning. One of the reasons for this is that writing involves the use of multiple abilities at the same time. For writing, one firstly needs to develop a good set of fine motor skills which allow one to hold a pencil or a pen to make deliberate marks. After this, one needs to learn to use symbols to represent speech and then needs to acquire the skill of using language to communicate with others through writing.

What is writing? According to what is given in dictionaries, writing refers to the act of making symbols and marks on a surface which can be understood by another person. Although this definition is straightforward, it ignores the nuances involved in our everyday use of the term. For example, this definition makes no reference to the important link between language and writing and, say, a person drawing a
picture. The picture is also made on a surface and may often be understood by many other persons but we don’t call it writing.

The dictionary definition also ignores the important link between speech and writing. The actions of speaking and writing originated at significantly different times. It is not very clear when human language actually developed. Perhaps the organs we need to speak evolved more than 1.5 million years ago. It is a dark area and there are many hypotheses about it. Yet, it is estimated that spoken language arose around 1 million (10 lakh) years ago, while written language came into being around five thousand years ago. In all communities on earth, spoken language originated substantially before written language. Even today there are many communities which have only oral systems of communication. Broadly, written language came into existence as communities became increasingly larger over a period of time. The interactions among the members of the community and those with members of other communities multiplied and it became necessary to keep record of various transactions particularly those involving land, revenue and trade. Systems of writing most probably owe their origin to these developments.

‘Writing’ is a medium which can be used to express what has been spoken. Thus, writing does not represent a new language, but simply a way of representing the same language. Even so, there is a difference between these two mediums of expression. Firstly, the written word is more permanent than the spoken message. The spoken word lasts only as long as the sound of our speech lasts; written material usually lasts as long as the material on which it is written lasts. Thus, the spoken words are intangible, invisible, and temporary, while the written words are tangible, visible and permanent. Secondly, while speaking the listener is often in front of us. The content of our message consists of words as well as the gestures we use while speaking, including the tonal quality of our voices (technically called paralinguistic features). The context in which the conversation is taking place is also clear to both the listener and the speaker; so spoken sentences may look very different from their written counterparts in writing. Thirdly, while speaking, we also can correct ourselves right then and there and avoid a misunderstanding, but no such facility exists for written language. In the words of the famous writer Premchand, “The tongue does not get chopped on speaking, but the hands do get chopped on writing.” Luckily, while writing, we also have more time at our disposal than we do while speaking. Thus, we have the chance of improving our sentences and rewriting them if we wish. Therefore, writing is relatively more complex and demanding than speech.

Fourthly, while spoken language is constantly changing, written language changes very slowly since there are many social pressures to sustain its form. For example,
Hindi continues to use ओ in its script when we can rarely find an individual who pronounces this sound differently from ओ; similar is the case of the utter ओ which does not sound different from ओ. Similarly in English the words ‘bus’, ‘cup’, ‘but’ continue to be written with a ‘u’ as at some point of time they were spoken using ‘u’; similar is the case for words like ‘shut’, ‘butter’, ‘crush’ and ‘drum’. This point is important in the context of children learning to write. In the beginning, all efforts of the child at writing are informed by the way words are spoken. If these spoken sounds do not correspond to the accepted forms of writing, it increases the probability of the child making ‘mistakes’. Thus, these mistakes often represent steps in the process of learning.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1. *Writing is a medium which*
   - (a) Represents a new language
   - (b) Represents the same language in a different form
   - (c) Teaches writing
   - (d) Teaches reading

2. What skills are required for a person to be able to write?

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3. What is the difference between spoken and written language? Which of these is prone to more change?

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4. Ask someone to read a passage. Then ask them to write down what they understood of the passage. Analyse the difficulties faced and mistakes made by the person while writing.

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6.3 BEGINNING TO WRITE

6.3.1 FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Before a child can learn to write, it is necessary for him/her to develop fine motor skills (the ability to grasp). In order to encourage the development of these skills, children should be allowed to manipulate solid objects as they see fit. Holding, turning, twisting and playing with objects develops grasping ability in children. Another very important activity that provides children with enjoyment in addition to developing motor skills, essential for writing, is drawing. Therefore, children should be encouraged to draw. Children’s early drawings often resemble meaningless scribbles which later evolve into discernible shapes and figures. Apart from drawing, some other activities that help develop the motor skills necessary for writing include games such as pouring water into a container, stringing beads and flowers, making objects out of clay or dough, etc. The home environment of the child provides him/her with enough opportunity to engage in such activities. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to help children engage in such activities wherever required.

6.3.2 PRACTICING LETTERS, WORDS, SENTENCES

It is often believed that achievement of sentence writing is helped by practicing writing letters and then words again and again. This is true to a certain extent, but if children are made to engage in tedious repetition of letters and words, they may be disenchanted with writing before they even begin to write. Therefore, while individual letters and varmallas are useful in introducing children to writing, they might not be meaningful to children unless their relationship with whole words or sentences is made clear.

In teaching children to write, two things are of great importance – respecting children’s abilities and creating meaningful contexts in which they can learn. It is necessary to appreciate the fact that the child has an immense innate capability to learn language. They learn their native languages naturally through meaningful social experiences involving speaking and listening. Similarly, they grasp the rules of writing mostly through meaningful experiences involving written material. In teaching, we often act under the assumption that children need to be told everything and that they would not understand unless they are told. This, however, is not true. It is necessary to get rid of this mindset and to start respecting the capabilities of children. Children have a unique ability to write before coming to school. It is normal for children to create figures and symbols in sand, on the floor or on paper and to make up stories about them. For them, these drawings are not meaningless, but rather they represent a unique script through which they
express what they wish to say. Children should be given the opportunity to make full use of their abilities. Their learning process does not involve joining pieces of knowledge together to get the complete picture, but in fact it involves the opposite. The whole picture is formed first, and then the specifics become clear in different ways. Unless a meaningful whole is supplied, the small specifics, such as individual letters of the varnmala or alphabet, will not make sense and will be boring. This will eventually lead to developing an attitude that would be averse to even attempting to write.

Check Your Progress-2

1. How does the process of learning take place?
   (a) by putting individual pieces together to get the complete picture
   (b) forming whole picture first and then perceiving the specifics
   (c) memorising
   (d) drawing pictures

2. What do the symbols and pictures drawn by children before going to school tell us about them?
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3. What do we mean by ‘fine motor skills’? How can they be developed in children?
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4. What is the problem with starting the teaching of writing through repeatedly writing the alphabet (varnmala)?
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6.4 ELEMENTS OF GOOD HANDWRITING

We often tend to emphasise the quality of children’s handwriting right from the
time the child has started to learn how to write. While the legibility of the child’s writing is important, the meaningfulness of what she has written is even more important. The child may be able to imitate the written word beautifully, but the important question is, does (S)he understand what has been written?

6.4.1 LEGIBLE VS. GOOD HANDWRITING

In early classes, teachers often focus on ‘good’ handwriting and ‘well formed’ letters. However, it is more important that the child’s written material be meaningful. The true test of the beauty of writing is the extent to which it makes sense. The reason good handwriting is appreciated is that it is easier to read. The beauty of a person’s handwriting is no indication of his grasp over language. If a person’s handwriting is beautiful, it does not indicate that their language ability is correspondingly better. Similarly, if someone has a bad handwriting, their language ability need not be equally bad. Teachers need to appreciate the fact that in spite of uniformity of input and teachers insisting on writing only in ONE particular way, all children eventually evolve their own distinct handwriting. Hence the emphasis should be on the message rather than on the shape of letters and words. However, a teacher should make every possible effort to encourage a child to write in a legible handwriting.

6.4.2 HELPING CHILDREN DEVELOP A GOOD HANDWRITING

Children can be helped to develop good handwriting by developing some of the basics essential for writing, such as fine motor skills, visual perception, trunk control, pencil grasp and stability of shoulder through various exercises. The teacher can also develop different, entertaining approaches while teaching writing of specific letters. For example, children may be shown how the letter S resembles a snake, or the letter Q resembles a balloon. Similarly the letter ? in Hindi can be compared with a pot-bellied person. Similarly, through games, children can be made to improve some imperfect aspects of their writing such as spacing between words, letter size, alignment, etc. For example, to correct the problem of letter size, the teacher can draw circles of a specific size and ask the child to fill them with certain letters. Children should essentially be introduced to small texts that having meaning for the child. One could then build exercises based on this text but focusing on letters and words. For example, children could be asked to separate letters that involve a vertical line from those that do not.

6.4.3 HANDWRITING AND PERSONALITY

Some teachers believe that bad handwriting leads to defects in personality. Therefore, they often put children to the boring task of writing letters neatly over
and over again. Teachers need to understand that such activities intended for improving handwriting are difficult, tedious and completely unproductive. Improving handwriting does not bring about improvement in personality, since handwriting does not influence personality. Efforts to improve handwriting are likely to result in making children disinterested in writing. The focus should be on activities which make writing meaningful and therefore an interesting activity.

6.4.4 HANDWRITING AS AN INDICATOR OF DYSLEXIA AND OTHER DISABILITIES

Dyslexia refers to reading disorders. There is a sense in which every person is dyslexic. All of us make mistakes in reading. But a small percentage of children may suffer from serious reading disorders. Children who have serious problems in writing in spite of adequate input may be dyslexic. They may see the picture as a whole, and may not see their constituent parts. They have trouble processing two dimensional stimuli. This introduces problems in writing. The handwriting of a person with dyslexia is generally illegible as the letters are of irregular shapes and size and there are inconsistencies in writing the same letters or words. He/she may also experience difficulties in copying down written material. An additional factor is the physical position adopted by the child in writing.

Dyslexia shares several of its characteristics with other conditions associated with poor writing skills, such as dyspraxia (poor motor skills and planning), deficits in visual-perceptual skills etc. However, even if these symptoms are observed, one cannot conclude the presence of a disorder. Therefore, in order to ascertain if a child has a condition because of which he/she needs special help, it is necessary to seek the help of experts, such as occupational therapists.

Check Your Progress-3

1. A person who has dyslexia
   (a) always sees the complete picture
   (b) cannot see pictures
   (c) sees the pieces making up the picture
   (d) cannot draw pictures

2. Analyse the impact of the position of the hand and the grip on the pencil, on writing.

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3. **Think of ways for making letter writing interesting by introducing letters in different ways.** Try to come up with writing exercises which target problems of handwriting.

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4. **Imagine that you have a child in your class who writes words in an irregular manner and has illegible handwriting. What would you do? Explain.**

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**6.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD WRITING**

Our written language is expected to conform to certain rules of spelling and grammar. While speaking, we have the opportunity to clarify our meaning if the listener misunderstands us. In written communication, no such opportunity exists. However, this difference in standards for judging spoken and written language poses some problems for the child learning to write, since spoken language forms the basis for learning to write. If certain features of written language which do not pertain to spoken language for example spelling, punctuation etc., are emphasised right from the beginning, children may feel discouraged from writing. It is therefore important that children are allowed to write as they wish in the early stages of writing. Focus on accuracy should follow later.

Writing is the most difficult of the four language skills. It requires a command over vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure. When children graduate to writing short paragraphs, it also involves establishing links among different sentences. All these help in creating meaning. Meaning is an integral part of language but in writing one has to pay extra attention to meaning because there is no space for clarification if anything not communicated clearly. The act of writing may even be described as the act of making meaning and giving coherence to disorganised ideas. Writing aims at meaningful expression and communication. Often, these objectives get overshadowed in the classroom with an emphasis on ‘correct’ writing.
6.5.1 GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT LANGUAGE

In evaluating children’s writing, teachers tend to look for spelling and grammar mistakes. They need to understand that it is natural for children to make such mistakes while speaking and writing. None of us speaks perfectly or writes perfectly right from the beginning. There is a higher probability of making mistakes in complex sentences.

Considering the fact that there is often no one to one correspondence between the sounds of a language and their representation in writing, it is natural for different children to write differently. Again, language shows high levels of societal and regional variations. The same word is spoken differently in the different social environments of children. For example, if the Hindi word ‘shak’ is pronounced as ‘sak’ in a community, children will naturally use the letter ‘sa’ instead of ‘sha’ while writing such words. They may write ‘sak’ instead of ‘shak’ and ‘santi’ instead of ‘shanti’. Instead of considering this a blunder, we should think of it as a part and parcel of the learning process.

We may give similar examples for grammar. Many communities do not make gender distinctions in verbs while speaking Hindi. If we keep emphasising such mistakes in front of children and their parents, they will both be discouraged. It is often observed in such cases that children even drop-out of school.

To teach correct spelling and grammar to children, they should be given increasingly interesting and challenging writing material to read and should be encouraged to write in various contexts. Good spelling and grammar are not meaningful ends in themselves. Rather, the meaningful end involves effective, interesting as well as satisfactory communication.

6.5.2 KEEP THE READER IN MIND

Everything we write is meant to be read – even if by no one else, at least by ourselves. The way we write changes according to who we believe is going to read what we have written. The style of writing, grammar and choice of words are influenced by who we feel is going to read what we have written. Keeping this in mind, it is possible to undertake many activities in class which aim at sensitising children towards the reader. Questions encouraging children to think about the reader before they start writing can be designed. In this way, children can be encouraged to write keeping in mind the reader as well as for different types of readers. For example, you may write very different kinds of letters about your studies and examination to your parents on the one hand and your friends on the other.
Lucidity and brevity

Lucidity and brevity are desired characteristics of writing, since they communicate the meaning the writer wants to convey with minimum confusion and effort on the part of the reader. For clear and concise writing, children need experience not only as writers but also as readers. Reading will acquaint them with different methods employed by writers to convey their ideas to their readers.

Concise and clear writing requires planning in advance of what we want to write the ideas we want to communicate, the relationship between the ideas, the order in which we want to present them and the point of view we want to present. The child also needs to be given time to review and make changes in what (s)he has written. It has now been shown that if children are given time to read and edit what they have written, they improve their writing ability substantially. The red marks teachers are used to putting on the written output of children frustrates them considerably.

6.5.3 SIMPLE VS. FLOWERY LANGUAGE

It is a common belief that good writing is one which uses flowery language, with elaborate words and sentence structures. Although sometimes such writing can give the impression of being particularly inspired and profound, it misses its purpose if it ends up confusing the readers instead of informing them. Writing which conveys the message clearly to its readers is good writing. Therefore, children should be encouraged to use such language in writing that their meaning becomes clear.

The important thing is the ability to express oneself, not the impression one makes on others as a result of what one writes. This does not mean that only simple writing is good writing. As children’s vocabulary grows through reading and other language-related experiences, they may begin to use some uncommon words. As long as these words are appropriate to the context in which they are used, they should be encouraged. A wide range of vocabulary that allows one greater choice and freedom to express oneself is a good thing. However, priority should still be given to effective communication. Children should be taught to respect their readers and suit themselves to their needs. They should be given examples of simple, lucid writing. Honest simple writing is better than flowery pretentious writing any day. Compare (a) and (b):

(a) Most humbly with due respect I wish to inform you that if your good self is pleased to grant me two days’ leave, I’d be most grateful and obliged to your honourable office.
(b) Kindly grant me two days’ leave.

We hope you’d agree that (b) is far better than (a).

Check your Progress-4

1. What is the objective of writing?
   (a) To use flowery language
   (b) To use grammatically correct language
   (c) To write correctly.
   (d) Meaningful expression as well as communication.

2. What are the characteristics of good writing?

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3. Which is more important – meaningful writing or correct writing? Give reasons for your answer.

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4. While learning to write, why do children make mistakes involving spelling and grammar?

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5. Think of an activity in which a child’s favourite book is being used to develop good writing ability.

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6. What's the role of revising and redrafting a piece of writing in improving writing skills?

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6.6 DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN LOWER CLASSES

The development of writing in lower classes will build on the foundations provided by the other language skills—listening, speaking and reading. Also, children will learn to write effectively when the act of writing is meaningful, when it is relevant to children’s context and when it is enjoyable for them. In order to optimise conditions for them to learn to write, certain activities may be undertaken in groups or individually. The activities given below are merely suggestions, and represent a very small portion of feasible activities.

- **Picture composition:** This involves presenting children with a picture (of objects, single events, multiple events etc), and asking them to write about it. This writing can include a wide variety of compositions. They may be asked to write a story, to describe the picture, to write a dialogue between the characters, to fill in a missing gap in the picture and write about it, etc. When a series of pictures depicting a story is provided, they can be asked to write the story.

- Developing stories from given outlines: Children can be given rough outline of a story in the form of a series of words and phrases, and then asked to build a story using these words and phrases.

- Independent writing: Children can be asked to write about something that they evidently show great interest in or something that they talk about a lot. This will not only help to develop writing skills, but may point the teacher towards more techniques for facilitating learning.

- Continuing the story: Children can be told the beginning of a story, and can be asked to write what they think happened next.

- Dictation: Teacher can speak aloud some words and ask the children to write them to see if they are able to link the spoken sounds to their written forms.
Writing

- Last-letter-first: Children can be distributed in groups and can be asked to write down words one by one, such that the first letter of the word they write is the last letter of the word that came before. Through this activity, the teacher can identify the problem areas without pointing them out directly to the child.

- The teacher can let children talk about a topic of their interest and write down what they have said. This will clarify the communicative purpose of writing and will clarify the link between speech and writing.

- Rhyming words: Children can be asked to come up with words which rhyme with the given word, or are similar in sound of the given word.

While teaching children to write, the teacher must allow children to express their own views. The common practice of forcing children to rote learn a small set of model essays is very dangerous. It destroys children’s motivation to write on their own. Children will write freely if are given space to express their ideas and thoughts in writing freely.

Check Your Progress-5

1. What should be done while teaching children to write?
   (a) children should be asked to memorise and write about specific topics.
   (b) children should be asked to write the varnmala.
   (c) children should be given the opportunity to write down their thoughts.
   (d) children should be asked to write the same letter over and over again.


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3. Try out in class the activities suggested here for teaching writing in primary classes.

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4. Think of other activities involving stories which can be conducted to teach children writing.

6.7 HIGHER FORMS OF WRITING

Higher forms of writing like paragraph writing, letter writing, essay writing, story writing and poetry writing etc., are taught in schools for the development of ‘expression’, creativity and ‘communicative ability’.

Paragraph writing helps children learn how to think and write focusing on one theme. It is a good exercise for encouraging young children to express themselves coherently and also forms the basis for essay writing. It is advisable to ask children to write about things that they find relevant to their lives. These paragraphs can vary in length according to the age, writing ability and understanding of children.

Essay writing: An essay refers to a composition which ties up many ideas on a theme or topic in a coherent and sequential manner. Essays are basically of two types: reflective and emotional. An essay has different parts- an introduction, followed by the main body, followed by the conclusion. What these divisions suggest is that an essay must reflect an easy flow of thought. These thoughts must be relevant to the theme, and must flow in a logical manner. The writer must develop the topic with clarity and consistency. Unlike paragraphs, essays involve a deeper and more elaborate expression on the theme.

Worrying about the quality of the essays, teachers sometimes dictate essays to children, which children are supposed to memorise and write when asked. Such practices completely defeat the purpose of developing the ability to express oneself on a topic effectively. Importance must be given to children’s own thoughts and experiences in essays and they should be allowed to express these in writing.

Letter writing: Traditionally, letters have been written to convey messages to people living at a distance. Unlike essays, letters have a very specific communicative purpose. Therefore, they do not require the elaboration of points as required in essays. On the other hand, they do require a certain skill in writing to communicate. The style of writing will vary according to the writer’s relationship with the recipient. The writer needs to understand how the recipient will react to the content of their message.
Writing

Story writing: Story writing helps children develop the ability to think and to write. It is an activity that can be undertaken at any age. It should be introduced when children are beginning to write, so that their imagination aids their writing skills and also for older children. In the case of the latter, the aims of this exercise remain roughly the same. However, promotion of thinking skills and imaginative faculties is emphasised over learning of language. As children grow, they are expected to regard issues from different perspectives, engage in problem solving and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of writing. These skills develop through an affinity with different forms of literature. By the time they get to senior classes, children have been exposed to different forms of literature such as poems, stories, plays etc., and these further help in the development of thinking and story writing skills. In turn, story writing helps generate interest in literature and language.

Besides story writing, children can be asked to write alternative endings to stories, to take the story forward from a point of significance, to write a story from the point of view of a specific character, etc.

Poetry writing: Children in smaller classes usually know only those poems which include rhyming words. Younger children enjoy rhyme and rhyming words help in generating interest and in giving children an impression of words, because of which they can read easily. Rhyming words can also generate interest in writing and develop the skill of writing on the basis of sound. Therefore, small poem making activities may be taken up with young children. Children can be asked to make up poems either individually or in groups, with their peers. This can be an enjoyable activity.

Poetry writing becomes more complex in higher classes, because their understanding of what poems involve is richer and deeper. Poem writing activities can also be associated with developing aesthetic appreciation of this form of writing among children.

Check Your Progress-6

1. What are the kinds of poems known to children in smaller classes?
   (a) poems making use of difficult words
   (b) reflective poems
   (c) poems making use of rhyming words
   (d) small poems

2. How is letter writing different from essay writing?

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3. Write one paragraph and one essay on ‘The curiosity of children’.

4. In schools, teachers often write the essays and letters and children are expected to memorise them and write them when required. Is this the right thing to do? Give reasons for your answer.

6.8 LET US SUM UP

Writing is a language skill. Writing involves making marks on some surface to be read and understood by someone. While teaching children to write, it is important to ensure that they have developed some pre-writing abilities. These include development of fine motor skills, postural and physical development, and ability to use spoken language to express oneself clearly. The child’s readiness to write, as evident through their attempts to use writing material and to communicate.

It is essential to remember that writing must be meaningful especially for a child who is beginning to write. Children make mistakes while beginning to write because of the difference between spoken and written language. Since writing is a skill that develops with the development of other language skills like reading, speaking and listening, these should be promoted in such a way that they complement each other.

Handwriting cannot provide us with information about the child’s personality and ‘bad’ handwriting by itself does not suggest something undesirable. Children can be helped to improve their handwriting using various techniques. Importance should be given to certain desirable qualities in writing such as lucidity and brevity, as well as simplicity. Since written language is different from spoken language, children can be helped to develop their writing skills through greater exposure to written material. Such measures can be used to encourage both spelling and grammatical correctness in language.
Writing skill develops as the child grows older. With increasing age, children should be introduced to higher forms of writing such as essay, letter, poetry, etc. Each of these requires very similar yet distinct abilities which the teacher should be aware of.

6.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES


6.10 UNITS-END EXERCISES

1. Why is it necessary to acquire fine motor skills to write?

2. “The child has a unique ability to write before coming to school.” Observe a 4-5 year old child around you and give examples of this statement.

3. Spoken language changes rapidly while written language changes slowly. Explain with examples.

4. What is the importance of simplicity, lucidity and brevity in writing? Explain.

5. Analyse the differences in written and spoken language.

6. What writing difficulties are experienced by children with dyslexia?

7. What role do ‘story writing’ and ‘poetry writing’ play in learning language?

ACTIVITY

Think about activities that can be used to develop fine motor skills in children.

Think about the activities which can make a child more communicative in the classroom. How can different types of materials be used to achieve this end?