

AT Quick Guide

Handwriting Speeds

Handwriting Speeds for Copying Tasks

Studies compiled by Amundson (1995) show that copying rates using handwriting at the 1st grade level are about 5 words per minute (WPM) on average, but by the end of elementary school at the 5th and 6th grade level are about 10 to 12 WPM. By the end of middle school, word per minute rates for copying using handwriting rise to about 16 WPM. In 1998 study by Graham, Berninger, Weintraub and Schafer, average handwriting rates were higher. Students in this study were instructed to write as fast as they could without making errors. This study may indicate the ceiling for handwriting speeds, but may not represent handwriting speeds for typical classroom tasks.

This data on handwriting helps to establish functional keyboarding speeds. Keyboarding speed needs to be commensurate with handwriting speed or better to be functional for classroom writing tasks. Since most studies evaluate handwriting copying tasks, this normative data is best compared to copying tasks using keyboarding.

Grade Level	WPM averages for copying using handwriting (Amundson, 1995)	WPM averages for copying using handwriting (Graham, Berninger, Weintraub, & Schafer, 1998)
1	5	4
2	6	7
3	7	10
4	8	13
5	10	15
6	12	17
7	14	20
8	16	23
9		24

Handwriting Speeds for Compositional Tasks

Graham (1990) measured students' rates of production by dividing the total amount of time composing (recorded in seconds) by the total number of words produced. He found that the average compositional rate of 4th grade students with learning disabilities using handwriting was 4 to 5 words per minute, while the average handwriting rate of 6th grade students with learning disabilities during composing was about 9 words per minute (Figure 4). Composing requires more reflection and thought, so it is not unexpected that word-per-minute rates would be lower for tasks requiring composition than for copying tasks. Copying speeds provide a basis for comparing motor speed, but do not take into consideration the demands of composing. Because school assignments usually involve composing rather than copying, the benchmark for text production must take into account that composing rates will typically be lower.

Grade Level	WPM averages using handwriting when composing (Graham, 1990)
4th	4-5 WPM
6th	9 WPM

References:

- Amundson, S. J. (1995). *Evaluation tool of children's handwriting*. O.T.Kids, P.O. Box 1118, Homer, Alaska 99603.
- Graham, S. (1990). The role of production factors in learning disabled students' compositions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 781-791.
- Graham, S., Berninger, Weintraub & Shafer (1998). Development of handwriting speed and legibility in grades 1-9. *Journal of Educational Research*, 92, 42-52.