

# Moving Calligraphy - Exercises

Exploring culture and the history of writing through movement

Creator: Dubravka Subotic

Age of students: 7-12

## Warm-up exercises

Everything is easy if you start with things your students already know: raising hands, standing, jumping and so on. The following exercises can be used in any class as warm-up activities.



## Writing letters

Usually, we write by hand using a pen and a piece of paper. What if we write by hand on an imaginary big paper in front of us?

- Finding your paper: This paper can be in front of us, or on the left, or above us. Maybe we need to lay down in order to write on it! The paper can move around the room. In this case, you only have time to write one letter before paper moves again.
- Moving the paper: For example, you can blow it to the next place. If you work in pairs, your friend can carry or drag it around the room for you.
- My arm is my pen: If the paper can be anywhere, so can the pen. It can be in your hand, elbow, shoulder, knee, nose or ear. This pen exercise works well for learning the body parts in new language as students can direct to each other: With which body part are we writing the next letter? Once the group is familiar with the exercise and the words, they can say the words aloud after writing them. This gives a voice to more shy students too if you have a fellow student directing the group. As an extra task, the students can write the name of a body part they are writing with, OR first letter of the writer's name. You can also say the next body part the students should write with next and they need to write the word on the imaginary paper: For example, the students start with their hand as the "pen". The teacher says "NOSE" and the student writes the word NOSE

with their hand. Once finished, the teacher calls out another body part and the students write the word with their noses.

- My other hand. We often write without thinking. You can play with your students by telling them to use their non-dominant hand for writing. You can also change direction of writing, from right to left, left to right, from up to down. This can introduce the students to different writing traditions and cultures.
- Modify the tempo of exercise: The teacher can control the speed of the exercise with their voice: if you speak slowly, the students should move slowly. You can also work with polar opposites: if you speak fast – the students can move slowly. You can use clapping, musical instruments or music to set the tempo.
- Creating personalities: Your letters, words and movements have their own personality and characteristics. Are they soft, round, sharp, BIG or gentle? These are all adjectives that can be used to create an exercise similar to the body part exercise. You can think about the origin or the culture your letters and words come from. Are you creating a pictograph that you have to press in to the rock, or a graffiti painted with a spray? Are you using a pencil or a brush? Maybe you like paper or silk?

Congratulations! You have just created your first basic choreography! It is easy, isn't it?

## Sculpting letters

The students can sculpture letters too in addition to “writing” them.

- Start with signs or letters shaped by hand. You can find various writing systems online. This part is quiet time in the work flow. Hand and finger motor skills are important for a child's development.
- Move the body in the shape of a letter (a so-called living letter). This is something everyone can do. It is also a



basic element of some of the exercises that will be explained in the next sections. Letter sculptures can be done as team work.

- Use an object for creating your letter (see picture above). Chairs or tables are objects usually found in every classroom. You can also use books or something that is in school backyard.
- Follow the leader: The students copy the shape of a letter from each other. They need to observe the pose of the first student and take the same pose in some other spot in the room. You can have 3 students taking 3 different poses or letters shapes and other students copying the letters. The idea is that one student is changing poses or letters (slowly) and others are following. At the end of the process, the students following along can guess what was the word they were “writing”.

### **Tracing letters:**

- Use paper tape to write a letter on the floor and let the students walk (and dance) on top of it. The size and style of your letters can be as you wish. The exercise can be done in your classroom.
- Print out letters or characters used in other languages on paper. Ask the students to create the pattern of the letter lying on the floor or by shaping it as a body sculpture.

### **From letters to words**

#### **Learning by observing**

You can use and combine the letter exercises to shape full words. Consider the size, writing speed and placement of the characters when the students are working with words.

#### **How to choose the right words?**

- Start with familiar words such as names, days of the week or names of the months. Short words are easier to play with.
- Words with emotional or otherwise affective meanings can be used. This may encourage the students to can talk about more serious subjects in a playful manner.

Attention: as we move to words, especially those in a new language, spelling mistakes will happen. Acknowledge the possibility of mistakes with the students before starting and remind them that making mistakes is okay and a natural part of the learning process. You can create a game about spotting the mistakes.

As students are copying or following other students writing, they have to be observant. Likewise, the student “writing” the letters should try to be clear in their movements.

### **Writing on the mirror**

Divide students in to couples.

Explain them that things are not always as we see them. They have a different side too. Our position can change like in a mirror.

If you lift your right arm, it will be the left one in the mirror.

The leader of the game writes a word or a character on the mirror. The other students mirror the leader’s movements and guess the word the leader writes. You can start with writing letters, short words or words on the subject you are working on.



Attention: The writing movements have to be slow and precise, so the other students can follow it. Mirroring also starts left with the left arm -that is where you should start your movement. You can also write from the top to the bottom downwards.


### **Arranging letter sculptures in to words**

Prepare lists of words with the same number of letters. Divide the students into according to the number of letters in words (for example, a four-letter word needs a group of four students). If there are more students than letters, they will be observers.

The group chooses a word and each student takes the shape of one letter. The group can position themselves randomly in the classroom. The students from other groups or the observers arrange the letters into the word. This exercise can be challenging as the observing students are looking at 3d sculptures of the letters formed by their classmates, recognizing their shapes and arranging them in to the words.

## Letter, letter on the floor

Prearrange empty space for the exercise. It can be a classroom, a PE space or the school yard. Use paper tape in this exercise.

1. Divide students into the groups or pairs. Instruct them to take a shape of the letter on the floor. Use tape to outline a letter around the body. Create words by repeating the taping process. You can also use paint to outline the letters. If you take pictures of the outlines, the letter material can be printed out and used later on.
  2. If you have larger place, let the students mark their own letter on the floor and explore it. The students can choose the first letters of their names, the month they are born in, the initial of their favorite sports teams or bands. The goal is to write as many words as possible that start with the letter. If your students are advanced learners, they can write about a theme of their choice.
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3. Before students come in to the space, trace letters on the floor. The letters should be placed randomly in the space, but they should form a word. The student's task is to familiarize themselves with the letters and to recognize the word without saying the word aloud. Next, the students should go to the one letter they like most. If you are working with young learners, you can ask them to go to the first or last letter before asking them which word is spelled on the floor.
  4. Mark a big letter on the floor and let students walk or dance over it. While moving, they can jump over the lines of letter and say the words that start with same letter. The exercise can be done as a memory game: if the letter B is on the floor, the first student steps on it and say aloud the word "Bus", the next students memorizes the word and says "Bus" and adds a new word "Burger" and so on. The students can take the shape of the word they are memorizing and saying aloud to help with the memorization process.



## From words to text:

The main tool in these exercises is movement, but let us not forget our voice and the message conveyed by it. Moving calligraphy gives a visual form to the movement and connects it to the letter. Language learning is primary focus of the exercises, but they can be used in teaching other subjects. Once we have recognized and learned new words, we can explore their meaning further through play.

## Words, associations and text

Let us say you have chosen the word SUMMER. Create the letters on the floor with, for example, tape.

Once when students have recognized the word:

1. ask them to sit near a letter they like
2. let them make a list of all words they can remember that start with the letter and have connection to the theme of summer. For example: S- sun, sea (nouns), to sweat, to swim (verbs). The students can be creative with their associations: super star -a song I was listening this summer. Explain that not all words will have the same number of characters
3. Another option is that you prepare list of new words that start on that letter. Make sure that the list contains both familiar and new words. The students will find translations in the languages they know and the meaning of those words.  
If you are working with a smaller group, you can rotate students, so that all of them work on all of the letters



## Performance

Just like letters, words can be created through movement. Aske the students to think about a word and the qualities they associate with that word. For example: Is the word soft? Does it make you happy or sad?

As students are performing their words, write them down. You can create a word cloud or a list of words.

From this selection of words, the students can create their own text. The students can pick words starting with their favorite letter or they can use all of the available words.

### Fun with newspapers

One of the best ways to learn language and enrich vocabulary is to read a newspaper and newspapers happen to be an excellent dance prop.

1. Let your students play with newspapers. Give each student a part of the biggest newspaper you can find and let them explore it. While playing, they should fin 1-5 words they are not familiar with (language or meaning-wise).
2. Ask the students to walk from one side of the room to the other like a waiter carrying the newspaper in one hand and “serve” the word to the others students. They should say the word aloud and act politely just like in a restaurant. Next, the students “serve” their words to you, the teacher, and you can create another word cloud or list.
3. Let the students choose a word that makes them happy. After choosing a word, the students can run around the space with the newspaper on their chests or in their hands and loudly say they word aloud. Collect the words in your word cloud or list. As an extra task, you can divide students into two groups. One group is moving (running)



*Dance educator Dragana Stanisavljevic explores the Moving Calligraphy method with preschool students at the Childrens' Cultural Center in Belgrade.*

wearing or carrying their newspapers and words. The other group has to collect as many words as they can hear.

4. If you are working with students who do not know how to read yet, you can create objects from paper together. You can tell them you need glasses to read the newspaper. Then the students create a pair of glasses. Give every student an object they need to create. Observe the student creating the object and name and repeat the student's moves. Finally, create a sentence from these new words.

Lastly, you can wind down and ask the students to read aloud or tell you what have they found in their newspaper.

Note to the reader: These exercises form a sequence from using individual letters or characters to longer texts. The sequence advances from easier warm-ups to more challenging exercises.



## Moving Calligraphy – Background information

Exploring culture and the history of writing through movement

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### **Brief information about the project.**

Have you ever tried using movement to teach a language? It is FUN!

We are living in an ever-changing world. Today every school is a playground and a meeting point of different cultures. We believe that us teachers should take these multicultural meetings as learning opportunities which expand our skill set. There is so much to learn from our students we are working with.



*Performance POINT – Theater Patos, Smederevo, Serbia, program IDEAL*

**Moving Calligraphy** combines the art of writing with movement of the body. It gives the students a way to express their knowledge of different languages and writing styles. It also gives a safe space for the students to explore affective words. The students do not need to say such words aloud, instead they can express them through movement.

The need for second language education increases as the majority language of the community is not the primary language spoken at some of students' homes.

The **Moving Calligraphy** method gradually develops the students' language skills. It helps to connect various elements a student needs to master to become a fluent language user: the sounds of a language, orthography and lexicon. The method supports both oral and written language skills.

The following sections include instructions and tasks that can be used in classroom teaching.

Key words: calligraphy, writing, movement, language, culture, history, learning, dance

## Introduction

In this program, I would like to support the learning of spoken and written language through movement. A moving child is a learning child<sup>1</sup> and language learning is a process that has to be supported by making education interesting and engaging.

Enthusiasm about learning languages should be raised in the classroom, both on the individual and group levels. Also, support for heritage language use at home and other domains of life should be highlighted in general education. I believe that movement and therefore dance is the first “language” of a child. Movement and gestures are the lingua franca adults use as well, especially when surrounded by a new language. The use of movement to learn spoken and written language is supported by these early childhood experiences and therefore a **Moving Calligraphy** class is an organic process.

Letters, characters and words have visual shapes. The orthography of a language reflects the culture, time and political atmosphere of the speaker community.

Written characters and words also reflect the quality and characteristics of the materials they were written on and the devices used for writing.

Spoken words consist of sounds produced by the speech organs. Learning the place and manner of articulation of new sounds poses a challenge for a speaker after early childhood.

The physiology of an individual speaker also creates variation. For example, a language does not sound the same when spoken by a 5-year-old or 95-year-old. Naturally, the regional and social environments different age groups live in are reflected by the speakers’ language as well.

Another important aspect is meaning of the words. It’s not just about *how* we are writing, it is also important to focus on *what* we are writing. What are the words that are important for us? What are words we tend to repeat? Are they words we love or words we are afraid of?

Calligraphy (from Greek: καλλιγραφία) is a visual art related to writing. The contemporary calligraphic practice can be defined as "the art of giving form to signs in an expressive, harmonious, and skillful manner"<sup>2</sup>.



*Sculpting and shaping letters at the International Art Camp Kosjeric*

### **The importance of movement or WHY DANCE at schools?**

The art of dance in the school environment is proven to have many benefits. Dancing promotes social, emotional, physical and mental well-being. Unlike traditional sports, dancing does not emphasize competing, but it promotes learning of controlled and coordinated movements.

Dancing requires symbolic thinking while appealing to the students' playful side. Participating

in **Moving Calligraphy** boosts the confidence of the student and helps with developing skills necessary for self-expression.

Choreography is the art of creating a dance with sequences of movements. In a choreographed sequence, movements are selected and organized according to their symbolism, rules, timing and style among other aspects.

To remember:

“Learning style is the biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mediaville, Claude (1996). *Calligraphy: From Calligraphy to Abstract Painting*. Belgium: Scirpus-Publications.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn, R. & Griggs, S. (1988). *Learning Styles: Quiet Revolution in American Schools*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.