

HANDY TIPS FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

HANDWRITING PRACTICE TIPS

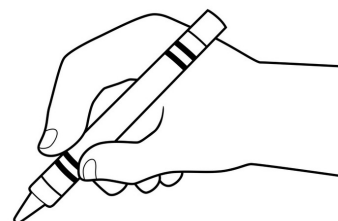
1. Practice handwriting for short periods of time, such as five to ten minutes a day. Be sure to teach each letter before letting your child practice on their own.

2. Write on a vertical surface. Writing on a vertical surface leads to an improvement in fine motor coordination. It also leads to increased strength in the upper extremities. Tape the handwriting sheets to a wall or an easel at your child's eye level.

3. Always encourage your child to hold the paper when writing. Your child should still have their non-dominant (helping) hand on the paper. *It should not hang at their side, useless, during writing tasks.

4. Emphasize starting at the top. It is important to form the letters correctly, and starting them in the right spot is a good start!

5. Hold your crayon or pencil correctly! When teaching your child how to hold their pencil, make sure they use their thumb correctly. Many children who have weak hands wrap their thumb over. The thumb and index should "pinch" the pencil. They shouldn't sit on top of one another!



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HAND STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

Below are some exercises that would help your child with their thumb and hand strength. This will encourage proper pencil grip too!

- *Use clay or play doh, especially rolled on the table or between two hands.*
- *Use a plastic knife to cut the play doh into pieces.*
- *Use a pizza cutter to cut snakes of silly putty.*
- *Tear strips of construction paper into tiny pieces to make a picture or collage (lots of orange pieces all over a plate to make a pumpkin, etc.)*
- *Use handheld spray bottles and let your child spray the plants with water.*
- *Play board games with tongs or large tweezers (Bed Bugs, Scatterpillar Scramble, Operation, etc.).*
- *Play games around the house and have your child pick up socks or washcloths with your salad tongs.*
- *Pick up crumpled papers with clothespins or tweezers.*
- *Learn how to spell your name in sign language.*
- *Use eye droppers to make colorful designs on coffee filters with food coloring and water.*
- *Roll tissue paper into small balls. Try to crumple them with one hand; it's hard!*
- *Make a slice in the top of a coffee can, push pennies through with your "pinching fingers" (thumb and index).*
- *Place your child's favorite toys in plastic containers with lids. Now, they have to open the lid to get the toy.*

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3 SIMPLE TRICKS TO GET YOUR CHILD WRITING

1. IT'S EASY TO WORK ON HANDWRITING WITHOUT PICKING UP A PENCIL OR CRAYON.

You can practice writing with a child by writing on the driveway with chalk, painting with water on the sidewalk, tracing with your finger on the tiles in the bathtub, or using shaving cream on a cookie sheet. Cut a tiny piece of a kitchen sponge, wet it, and then use it on an easel. Download the "I write words" app to your tablet or phone and use your finger or a stylus. Write your name in the sand at the beach or draw it in the dirt at the park. Children like anything that is fun and different.

2. JUST BECAUSE IT LOOKS NICE, DOESN'T MEAN IT IS CORRECT.

*Many parents don't realize that their child is developing poor writing habits. They are excited that "Jimmy" is writing his name at all. It's great that he is interested in writing and learning to write his name, but it is just as important that he learns to write the letters in his name **correctly**. Once a child develops a habit of writing a letter incorrectly, it's hard to change! Think of how many times a preschooler or kindergarten child writes their name each day. It's better to stop a child and instruct them in the proper formation of each letter than to let them write it incorrectly over and over. Writing letters with proper formation helps with legibility and speed later on. It doesn't seem as important in the younger grades, but it has a big impact later!*

3. THE WAY A CHILD WRITES A LETTER IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.

Again, letter formation is very important. So is pencil grip. The students who have difficulty writing in third and fourth grade are usually students who developed poor writing habits when they were in preschool or kindergarten. If they aren't holding their pencil correctly, they may be using the wrong muscles to write. Then, as they write, they are missing out on valuable fine motor strengthening. The most common problem is that children use their whole hand or arm instead of their fingers to move the pencil. This makes them tired as they write for longer periods of time. You can help by having them write or color while laying on their bellies. If they are using their arms and elbows to hold themselves up, then only the fingers are left to move the pencil!

Children's letters often look misshapen or lopsided. That's OK! If they write them with the proper formation and correct pencil grip, the motor control will come. First thing is first!

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What you need to know about child development:



SHOULDER STABILITY

Do You Remember When You Learned To Color?

Toddlers use their whole arm to scribble. Then, as the child progresses developmentally, they begin to rest their forearm on the table. This helps them to start using their hand and fingers (instead of their shoulder and arm) to control the crayon. They develop the ability to keep their shoulder stable during fine motor activities, which helps them to use the small muscles of their hand. This is called shoulder stability.

Shoulder stability is an important developmental milestone for children who are learning to color and write. A child should be able to rest their arm on the table and use only their fingers to move the pencil by the time they enter kindergarten.

Interesting Fact:



Babies who don't crawl for very long or can't tolerate "tummy time" are often delayed in developing shoulder stability. This makes it harder for them to learn how to write. As they reach first or second grade, they often complain that they are too tired or that their arm hurts during writing assignments. That's because they are using their entire arm to write a tiny letter, which is very hard work!

How You Can Help:

Encourage your child or your student to write on a vertical surface. Tape a worksheet to a wall and let them write standing up. The child will lean on the wall, which forces them to use their fingers! Give your student a slantboard or a six-inch binder that slants downward to the child. The wrist naturally extends upward, making the fingers do the work. For younger children, encourage laying on the tummy to read, play games, and do puzzles. Encourage crawling and wheelbarrow walking.



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What you need to know about child development:



TEACHING PENCIL AND CRAYON GRIP

Have You Taught Your Child How To Hold A Crayon?

Toddlers hold their crayon any old way! It's exciting to watch them learn to make a mark, then scribble. Eventually, we hope they learn how to stay in the lines, too.

One crucial prerequisite for coloring and writing in the lines is learning how to hold a crayon or a pencil properly.

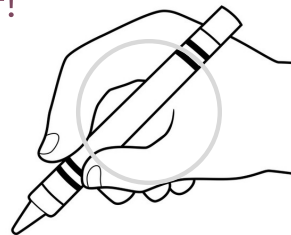
It's really important to TEACH your child how to hold a crayon. SHOW them how. Then, REMIND them of the proper position until they get it. Practice makes perfect!

For A Crayon:

The thumb and the index finger sit on the front seat.

That's the black stripe of the crayon.

There are only two seats up front, so the other fingers get in the back (tucked in). It's fine to rest the crayon on the side of the middle finger.



The thumb and the index finger should form a circle. It shouldn't be all closed up

For A Pencil:

It's really the same, except there's no black stripe to use as a visual. Teach your child to hold the pencil where the yellow paint starts. If that's too tricky, wrap a piece of colored tape around the pencil.

Remember:

- 1) The thumb and the index finger sit up front together, but they never sit on TOP of one another.
- 2) The crayon or pencil sits back on the pencil couch. (That's the space between your index and thumb).