

Pre-Writing & Handwriting Skills

How to Promote

- Encourage toddlers to scribble and draw to support pencil control
- Strengthen hands by playing with play-dough or putty to develop a functional pencil grasp
- Use tweezers during activities to assist with forming a functional grasp pattern
- Make 'worms' with play-dough and use the 'worms' to form pre-writing shapes & letters
- Practice forming letters using different objects
 - Form letters with rocks, leaves, buttons, toys, etc.
 - Write/draw with markers, crayons, paint, chalk, etc.

Pencil Grasp Developmental Sequence

12-18 months: Palmer grasp

2-3 years: Digital pronate grasp

3.4-4 years: Static tripod grasp

4-5 years: Dynamic tripod grasp

Refer to (Griffin Occupational Therapy, 2025a) for images for each grasp.



Pre-writing Shape Development (Copying)

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2 years

—

2.5 years

○

3 years

+

3.5-4 years

\\

4 years, 4 months

□

4.5 years

\\

4 years, 7 months

XX

4 years, 11 months

△

5 years, 3 months

Importance

- Writing is strongly interconnected with reading, aiding in literacy instruction
- Reading and writing skills are important for promoting success and confidence in school
- Handwriting skills can help children improve their ability to remember information

Resources

Grajo, L. C., Candler, C., & Sarafian, A. (2020). Interventions within the scope of occupational therapy to improve children's academic participation: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(2), 7402180030p1-7402180030p32. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.039016>

Griffin Occupational Therapy. (2025a, March 12). *Handwriting - what does a 'good' pencil grasp look like?* Retrieved April 25, 2025. <https://www.griffinot.com/what-does-good-pencil-grasp-look-like/>

Griffin Occupational Therapy. (2025b, March 12). *Pre-writing shapes -what are they and how to teach them?* Retrieved April 25, 2025. <https://www.griffinot.com/pre-writing-shapes-what-are-they-and-how-to-teach-them/>

Kim, Y. S. G., & Zagata, E. (2024). Enhancing reading and writing skills through systematically integrated instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 77(6), 787-799. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2307>

National Handwriting Association. (n.d.). A motivational, fun approach to developing handwriting skills.

<https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/help-for-parents/a-motivational-fun-approach-to-developing-handwriting-skills/>

Smet, N. & Lucas, C. B. (2020). Occupational therapy view of child development. In J. C. O'Brien & H. Kuhaneck (Eds.), *Case-Smith's Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents* (8th ed., pp. 76-121). Elsevier, Inc.

The Australian Parenting Website. (2023, August 25). *Handwriting skills for children.* Retrieved April 25, 2025.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/learning-ideas/handwriting>

Pre-Writing & Handwriting Intervention Ideas

Handwriting Curriculum

- Utilize programs that implement sensorimotor activities
 - Handwriting Without Tears, Size Matters, etc.
- Find a handwriting program that allows opportunities for practicing letters, whole words, and sentences
- Follow the developmental sequence of strokes when teaching letter formation.
- Model letter formation using simple verbal and visual cues

Activity-based Practice

- Research does not support isolated skill practice
- Provide opportunities to practice copying words, producing words from memory, and writing words from auditory dictation
- Create fun ways to practice handwriting such as writing silly stories, jokes, birthday cards, etc.
- Help make writing fun by allowing children to use a variety of mediums when writing such as markers, pencils, pens, etc.



Self-Evaluation of Writing

- Provide a model for children to compare their work to
- Encourage children to review their work and self-identify errors and successes
- Consider using a peer model or utilizing peer feedback
- Practice locating errors by providing the child with a mix of correctly and incorrectly produced letters or words. Have the child find the errors, explain why there is an error, and demonstrate how to correct it

Collaboration with Teachers

- Encourage teachers to provide clear and consistent feedback on letter production
- Collaborate to identify appropriate times to push-in to the classroom for OT interventions
- Review student progress and future goals frequently with the child's teacher
- Ask the teacher how you can further support the child outside of OT interventions

Resource

Grajo, L. C., Candler, C., & Sarafian, A. (2020). Interventions within the scope of occupational therapy to improve children's academic participation: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(2), 7402180030p17402180030p32. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.039016>