

Fine Motor Skills... Write Out of the Box!®

Fine Motor Development Information to Assist Parents of Young Children

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1. Handwriting is the Cherry on Top of the “Hand Skill Sundae”: The highest-level skill humans perform with their hands is handwriting. Children have the most success with learning how to write when their hands are appropriately developed, their brains are cognitively ready to receive instruction in writing (which is usually between kindergarten and 1st grade), and practice is accurately performed on a consistent basis. See some basic writing-readiness guidelines on page 2. Children who write before they are developmentally ready may experience undesirable outcomes such as poor pencil grasp and letter formation habits that are very difficult to change. Respect and regard the developmental level of your child so that he/she will be most successful with writing in the long run.

2. Provide Developmentally Appropriate Activities to Build Fine Motor Skills: These activities do not involve pencils and worksheets! Instead, try Play Doh® with a pizza cutter and mini rolling pin, jumping frogs, squeeze squirters, spin tops, locks and keys, novelty toys, hole punches, wind-up toys, peg games, tweezers, tongs, picker uppers, squeeze balls, lacing cards, animal voices, mini cards, mini slinkys, Chinese yo-yo’s, giggle tubes, Wheelo, animal grabbers, squishy balls, and putty with beads and buttons. Games such as Ants in the Pants, Don’t Break the Ice, Operation, Pick-Up Sticks, Ker Plunk, Lite Brite, puzzles, card games, and all kinds of arts and crafts encourage appropriate hand skill development. Minimize passive entertainment usage such as Game Boys, Playstation, and Xbox, etc...as these do not build efficient pencil grasp patterns.

3. Set Your Child Up for Success: Use of a vertical surface such as a chalkboard, easel, washer/dryer, frig, or wall when pre-writing, painting, coloring, etc... enhances successful positioning of the hand and arm. Also, providing foot support when seated at a desk/table improves hand use and control during self-feeding and when performing fine motor activities.

4. Encourage Independence: Let children do more for themselves so that their hands are better prepared to grasp and hold a pencil and write! Provide a variety of hand skill opportunities every day such as self-feeding with utensils, undressing/dressing, and helping with chores at home. Independence is essential for self-esteem to grow!

5. “Rip, Snip, Cut”: This is the sequence for scissor skill development. Mastery of the each step will lead to improved scissor use for complex patterns in the long run.

Rip: Start with ripping paper (use scraps for mosaic art projects).

Snip: Use scissors to snip Play Doh®, Cheetos®, straws, grass, index cards, card stock.

Cut: Cut along short (1 inch) bolded straight lines on strips of thick paper progressing gradually to longer, thinner straight lines on thinner types of paper. Practice cutting along curves with paper plates after straight lines are mastered. Cutting on angles is usually performed competently by 1st or 2nd grade.

6. Take an Appropriate, Pro-Active Approach: You and your child’s teacher make up a team that is the key to developing the future successful handwriting abilities of your child. Providing appropriate fine motor activities at home and school is critical from 3-6 years old to achieve future efficient handwriting. Your involvement can and does make a tremendous difference! The pro-active approach you take now can reduce or eliminate the difficulties your child may have with writing in the future!

General Writing-Readiness Guidelines

A. Prewriting Strokes by Child’s Age in Years-Months

<u>Age in Years-Months</u>	<u>Shape/Symbol Able to be Copied from a Model</u>
2-10	vertical line (top to bottom reinforced)
3-0	horizontal line (left to right reinforced)
3-0	circle (counter clockwise reinforced please!)
4-1	+
4-4	/
4-6	square with defined sides
4-7	\
4-11	X
5-3	triangle with defined corners

B. Prerequisites for Writing

1. Exhibits hand dominance with coloring, drawing, or using a fork (may not be in place until 6 years old)
2. Able to cross midline (as in reaching across body with arm to get an object)
3. Possesses a functional pencil grasp
4. Able to understand directional terms; recognizes differences and similarities in forms
5. Able to copy basic shapes (See #A above)
6. Able to use 2 hands in an activity
7. Able to coordinate eyes and hands together
8. Able to maintain proper sitting posture
9. Oriented to print (views words in books and in the community environment)
10. Exhibits mastery of letter forms and sounds
11. Able to attend to a task for a minimum of 1 minute
12. Exhibits an interest in writing!

Please visit www.writeoutofthebox.com for more information about how to develop fine motor skills in young children.

Positioned for Success: Strategies to Try

Some students perform cutting practice better when they are seated away from the desktop or table surface. Often, scooting the chair back from the table will improve positioning and holding of scissors and/or paper automatically.

Positioned for success means that the thumb is facing up on the hand holding the scissors and that the arm is moving away from the body when cutting instead of toward it. Try these strategies when the hand or arm is curved or being used in an unorthodox position:

1. Color code thumbhole on scissors by wrapping it with tape in a contrasting color. Electrical tapes works well.
2. Tape paper to edge of desk or middle of easel so student can cut upwardly and make "fringe." This is a great technique to correctly position the arm for cutting.
3. Have the child "hold" a small roll of paper towel or newspaper under the cutting arm to ensure that the arm stays in the correct position. This is a gem of a tip!

Special Note about Left-Handed Children

A reminder that left-handed children will often use scissors with their right hand, which is perfectly typical and appropriate.

Final Note: Safety Comes First!

Young children must be appropriately supervised when learning how to use scissors.

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Scissor Skill Cutting Tips...Write Out of the Box®

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Fine motor development is necessary for acquisition of scissor skills and handwriting by young children. Having a "Cutting Box" in your classroom or home is the perfect way for children to practice ripping, snipping, and cutting. A "Cutting Box" can be a large cardboard box filled with a variety of media that children stand or sit around to practice their skills. If you have room, a baby pool is a fabulous way for children to "get into" ripping, snipping, and cutting - Fun! Here are some easy cutting tips strategies to increase proficiency when learning how to use scissors:

Sequence Progression: Rip, Snip, Cut

Ripping a variety of thick papers (i.e. construction, index cards, magazine inserts) is a pre-cutting activity for young children. The ripping action facilitates the tripod grasp with hands ripping the paper in opposite directions. Long Animal Grabbers, Bug Catchers, and Wooden Tong help children experience the "open-close" movement associated with cutting before they actually use scissors.

Snipping with scissors means that one cut does the job. Children love to snip many different items other than paper (see media types below). Try Fiskars®, which are available at Wal-Mart, Office Depot, etc.... Fiskars® are good for use with both right and left-handed students.

Cutting using multiple cut strokes is best practiced on thick paper types initially without lines. Next, incorporate bolded, straight lines to encourage cutting accuracy. Cutting on curves can start on round paper plates. Cutting on angles and complex patterns is most challenging. Termination of cutting (knowing where to stop) takes practice. Your "Cutting Box" is the perfect place to practice cutting everyday and build skills.

Media Types: Thick to Thin and Short to Long

The increased stability of thicker papers (see examples above) helps children hold paper when ripping and hold/guide the paper while cutting. As they become more proficient in their cutting and bilateral coordination skills, thinner paper types may be introduced (i.e. copy paper) for practice. Start with short bits of paper progressing to larger sheets as skills improve. Snipping is fun on non-paper types of media such as Play Doh®, grass, sandpaper, straws, and Cheetos®. Using non-paper media is a great way to increase interest in learning how cut with scissors!

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Hands-On Dominance Information for Teachers and Parents

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The establishment of hand dominance is a complex brain process. Predominant and proficient use of one hand over the other for handwriting, feeding, and performing other functional activities in daily life usually emerges in a young child between 4.5 and 6 years of age. Up to 90% of the population is right-hand dominant and 10% is left- or mixed-hand dominant. Encouraging or forcing the use of a particular hand in functional activities such as handwriting may actually lead to stuttering, stammering, and increased levels of stress within young children (Meng, 2007), not to mention inefficient hand use. Research supports us in our effort to honor the natural development of handedness in each young child as we guide him/her in the hand, head, and heart toward handwriting. Observing the emergence of hand dominance or any other aspect of child development is a gift to the teacher or parent. So, don't worry when a young child is switching hands when coloring - instead realize that you are watching that child's brain working through his/her hands to determine hand dominance for a lifetime!

While it may be tempting to help a young child "decide" which hand will be the dominant mover and which hand will be the non-dominant stabilizer, research recommends a facilitative role for teachers and parents. We must encourage children's use of hands in play and daily activities where two hands are performing different jobs in order to develop hand dominance. Presenting toys and other items at the midline (belly button level) allows young children to use the preferred hand to grasp and use the object spontaneously, which reinforces hand dominance.

Educators and parents can help facilitate establishment of hand dominance in young children by presenting one-handed activities or implements at the midline (belly button level) to encourage spontaneous grasping with the preferred hand. One particular activity children love is finding a bead or button that is hidden in putty using only one hand.

Reference:

Meng, L. (2007). The rate of handedness conversion and related factors in left-handed children. *Laterality*, 12(2), 131-138.

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What is "W" sitting?

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"W" sitting occurs when children sit on the floor with their legs bent in the shape of a "W". Observe your students today and see how they sit on the floor at school and home. Do they sit in the "W" position?



Why do children "W" sit?

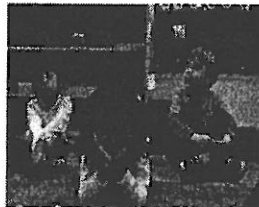
Children may develop a habit for "W" sitting as a way to establish increased stability in their bodies when they cannot assume and maintain the criss-cross (tailor) sitting position. Unfortunately, "W" sitting compromises knee and hip joint positioning, inhibits trunk stability needed for sitting, and may impact the development of proficient hand skills.

What should teachers and parents do when a child is a "W" sitter?

Teachers and parents should gently, but firmly discourage "W" sitting. I recommend allowing a variety of sitting positions especially if kiddos are struggling or have pain sitting in the criss-cross position. All of the following positions support healthy joint development and learning.

Recommended Sitting Positions:

1. Long Sit (legs straight out in front of torso)
2. Side Sit (legs bent and tucked to one side)
3. Lying on Tummy (propped up on elbows)
4. Lying on Back (propped up on elbows)
5. Sitting on a small to medium-sized ball with feet connected firmly with the ground is a fun way to sit and gain coordination at the same time.



We should expect young children to move in and out of positions when sitting on the floor - that is natural and the way kids stay alert and learn to manage their bodies in space. Just as one size does NOT fit all, one sitting position will never accommodate the sitting needs of all children. Young children learn best when their bodies are safely and comfortably positioned. When you support a variety of appropriate sitting positions, you are setting all children up for success!

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The Vertical Surface and Fine Motor Development

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What: The vertical (up and down) surface refers to the appropriate plane in which young children should perform fine motor activities in order to promote an efficient pencil grasp position. We usually think of having students work and play at fine motor tasks at the desktop level. The desktop or horizontal plane is more appropriate for older children and adults to work in.

Why: The vertical surface is the natural and preferred plane to play in for young children. The vertical plane best supports hand skill development of young children in three ways. It engages the shoulder against gravity, which promotes the development of the hand and arm for writing, it encourages an extended wrist position needed for writing, and finally it is most appropriate visually for young children.

How: There are a variety of easy to access vertical surfaces in the classroom or at home. Here is a list for you to consider using today!

Chalkboard	Easel: tabletop or stand-up
Wall: tape on butcher paper	Filing Cabinet: instant magnet center!
Refrigerator	Washer/Dryer
Table: tipped on its side	Paper taped to underside of desk or coffee table

Put the following activities into vertical and watch your children have fun while developing more efficient hand skills for writing!

Coloring	Stickers
Stamping	Play Doh®
Shaving Cream	Arts and Crafts
Magnadoodle®	Magnets
Velcro® matching games	Cutting: tape top side to surface
Painting	Experiential Writing



