

# Common Handwriting Concerns and Ideas for Support

## PENCIL GRASP

The textbook “ideal” grasp is the tripod grasp. The pencil is held between the pads of the thumb and index finger and the side of the middle finger. These fingers form a relaxed and open circle. The back two fingers are tucked into the palm and back of the pencil rests on the web space between the base of the thumb and the base of the index finger.

Research indicates that grasp pattern does not have a significant impact on legibility or speed of handwriting. However, an inefficient grasp pattern can lead to discomfort and fatigue.

<p><b>Hand Separation</b></p>	<p>In daily life, try to incorporate ideas that support hand separation of the “work side” (thumb, index, middle) and the “stability” side (ring, little).</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="522 940 1414 1276"> <tr> <td>Squeeze spray bottles.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pick-up games with tongs, tweezers, or chopsticks.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Push coins into a small slot in the lid of a container.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Use a clothesline with clothespins.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>String small beads.</td> </tr> </table>	Squeeze spray bottles.	Pick-up games with tongs, tweezers, or chopsticks.	Push coins into a small slot in the lid of a container.	Use a clothesline with clothespins.	String small beads.
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<p><b>Writing Tools</b></p>	<p>Use tools that are the right size for the hand. Smaller hands need smaller tools.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="522 1449 1414 1822"> <tr> <td>For preschoolers through first graders, use small writing tools. Short “golf” pencils, broken crayons, small markers, and broken chalk.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Experiment with scented markers, gel pens, color changing markers, sidewalk chalk, etc.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Write on different surfaces: window markers on mirrors, markers on tin foil, chalk on black paper, crayons on corrugated cardboard, etc.</td> </tr> </table>	For preschoolers through first graders, use small writing tools. Short “golf” pencils, broken crayons, small markers, and broken chalk.	Experiment with scented markers, gel pens, color changing markers, sidewalk chalk, etc.	Write on different surfaces: window markers on mirrors, markers on tin foil, chalk on black paper, crayons on corrugated cardboard, etc.		
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<p><b>Writing Position</b></p>	<p>Pencil grasp is about more than the just hand. Ensure support of the student’s trunk, shoulder, and wrist.</p> <p>Sit with feet flat on the floor, knees bent at 90°, hips bent at 90°, and elbows at 90° to the writing surface. Use a chair with a supportive back.</p> <p>Support the paper with a flat, non-dominant hand. The wrist of the writing hand should rest gently on paper.</p> <p>Alternative: Work on a vertical surface: easel, chalkboard, whiteboard, or clipboard on the wall.</p> <p>Alternative: Work on a slanted surface like a slant board. DIY: Place paper on the high end of a horizontal 3-ring binder.</p> <p>Alternative: Work in the prone position, lying on the belly, while writing.</p>
<p><b>Pencil Grips and DIY Options</b></p>	<p>Keep an eye on the grasp pattern when using these tools. Students often continue to use the same inefficient grasp pattern on top of adapted pencil grips.</p> <p>From a tripod grasp. Use the back two fingers to press a small item, like a coin or pompom, into the palm.</p> <p>Clip a clothespin on the end of the pencil about 1.5” from the tip. Form a tripod grasp below the clothespin. The back two fingers wrap around the clothespin.</p> <p>Connect two rubber bands together. Place one around the student’s wrist and the other around the eraser end of a pencil. This will pull the pencil to rest in the student’s hand. Commercially available as the “Handi-Writer.”</p> <p>Preferred adapted pencil grips: The Pencil Grip, Crossover Grip, Stetro Grip, Solo grip, and the C.L.A.W. grip.</p>

<p><b>Special concern: Tremors</b></p>	<p>If hand tremors are a concern, try adding weight.</p> <p>Wrist weights (0.25- 0.5 lbs.)</p> <p>Purchase a weighted pencil.</p> <p>DIY: Add metal nuts to the shaft of a pencil.</p>
<p><b>Special concern: Pressing too hard.</b></p>	<p>Signs may include fatigue or pain with writing, pressure marks on fingers, frequent need to sharpen pencils, ripped paper when writing or erasing, or letter imprints on several notebook pages.</p> <p>Use stretches to relax the hand before writing.</p> <p>Take breaks while writing to shake out the hand.</p> <p>Use mechanical pencils which break easily with pressure. Practice controlling pressure to prevent this.</p> <p>Try pens or felt tip markers. Sometimes students press firmly because they want the writing to appear darker.</p> <p>Practice writing lightly on tissue paper.</p> <p>Place paper on cardboard and try not to push through.</p> <p>Write on a single sheet of paper on a hard flat surface.</p>
<p><b>Special concern: Press too lightly.</b></p>	<p>Signs: Faint writing, difficulty stabilizing the pencil, pencil sticks straight up while writing.</p> <p>Use small writing tools.</p> <p>Warm up hands with putty, playdough, or a stress ball before writing. Practice pushing and squeezing firmly.</p> <p>Warm up upper body before writing: crab walk, wheelbarrow walk, bear crawl, or wall push-ups.</p> <p>Write with a felt tip pen which requires light pressure.</p>

## HANDWRITING

Functional handwriting depends on skills in the areas of fine motor control, motor planning, visual perception, memory, and recall. When working on handwriting at home, spend only about 10 minutes each day on the task. Aim for fun, engaging, and successful quick bursts of practice.

<b>Recall of Letter Formation</b>	<p>Easy recall of letter formation requires repetition and consistent practice.</p> <p>Use consistent verbage for the stroke order. Check with the teacher for the words they use in the classroom.</p> <p>Practice forming letters in groups. Explore Handwriting Without Tears for developmental letter groupings.</p> <p>Provide sensory opportunities for writing. Write letters in sand trays, shaving cream, or with a stick in the dirt. Build letters with playdough or wikki stix.</p> <p>Provide highlighted letters to trace. Highlighted segments are preferable to dot-to-dots as the letter is easier to visualize as a whole unit.</p> <p>Ensure access to a visual with uppercase and lowercase letter formation for easy reference and proofreading.</p>
<b>Forming Letters from Bottom</b>	<p>When writing in print, all letters should be formed from the top of the letter (except lowercase e). Using a consistent pattern of top down formation increases the speed and fluency of handwriting.</p> <p>Always demonstrate starting at the top when writing.</p> <p>Give verbal reminders that letters start at the top.</p> <p>Draw a green starting dot for each letter when tracing or copying.</p> <p>Warm up for writing by reaching up and then diving down to touch toes. Talk about top and bottom.</p>

<p><b>Reversals</b></p>	<p>It is common for individuals to have letter and number reversals until about second grade.</p> <div data-bbox="521 317 1419 558" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Focus on letter formation and consistent verbage for commonly confused letters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• d starts with letter c</li> <li>• b starts with a big line</li> <li>• s starts with a letter c</li> <li>• z goes straight across, then slides down</li> </ul> </div> <div data-bbox="521 558 1419 690" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Provide a visual of commonly confused letters with corresponding images of familiar words. Practice comparing writing to the visuals and circling reversals.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 690 1419 793" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Letter search puzzles. Find and circle the tricky letters in different colors.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 793 1419 858" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Use sensory writing recommendations above.</p> </div>
<p><b>Line Placement Errors</b></p>	<p>Print letters can be placed in 3 categories: “tall” (b d f h k l t), “short” (a c e i m n o r s u v w x z), and “drop down” letters (g j p q y).</p> <div data-bbox="521 1073 1419 1171" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Talk about the differences in starting and ending points for tall vs. short vs. drop down letters.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1171 1419 1270" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Before writing or copying a word, identify the placement of each letter.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1270 1419 1369" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Color code letters by placement category when preparing a sentence for copying.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1369 1419 1470" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Give visual input by highlighting the space between the dotted line and the bottom line.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1470 1419 1581" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Provide tactile input to the baseline with wikki stix, dried glue lines, or raised line paper.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1581 1419 1686" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Draw boxes to show the size of each letter in a word. Ex: “dog” would be tall box, short box, drop down box.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="521 1686 1419 1797" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>See above recommendations for writing on slanted or vertical surfaces.</p> </div>

<p><b>Large Letters</b></p>	<p>Draw small boxes and work on fitting the words inside each box.</p> <p>Write on graph paper with one letter per box.</p> <p>Use a small object as a visual reference for correct letter size.</p> <p>On wide ruled paper, highlight the writing space of every other line. Work on writing in the given area.</p> <p>Try 3-line paper in a wide ruled size.</p>
<p><b>Spacing</b></p>	<p>Letter spacing and word spacing can impact handwriting legibility. Letters too close together are visually confusing (ex: lo might be l-o or b). Letters too far apart or words too close together impact reading fluency and comprehension</p> <p>Letters should be separated by “spaghetti” spaces. Words should be separated by a “meatball” space.</p> <p>Write on graph paper with a blank between words.</p> <p>When writing, pause after each word and draw a highlighted line. This exaggerated task reinforces the idea of stopping between words.</p> <p>Place a coin or other small item between each word.</p> <p>Use a finger space cue.</p> <p>Make a “spaceman” stick with a popsicle stick decorated like an astronaut. Use the stick between each word.</p>
<p><b>Margins</b></p>	<p>Visual tracking may impact the starting and stopping points when writing.</p> <p>Highlight the left margin line with green “go” and the right margin line with red “stop.”</p>

	<p>Provide starting dots at the edges of each writing line.</p> <p>Consider placement of the writing paper. If the individual is not comfortable working across midline, shift the paper towards the dominant side instead of directly in the middle.</p>							
<b>Proofreading</b>	<p>For all handwriting concerns, provide a visual checklist to proofread work for common errors.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="521 625 1414 1094"> <tr> <td>Correct letter case?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Reversals?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>On the correct line?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Size?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spaces between letters?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Spaces between words?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Punctuation?</td> </tr> </table>	Correct letter case?	Reversals?	On the correct line?	Size?	Spaces between letters?	Spaces between words?	Punctuation?
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