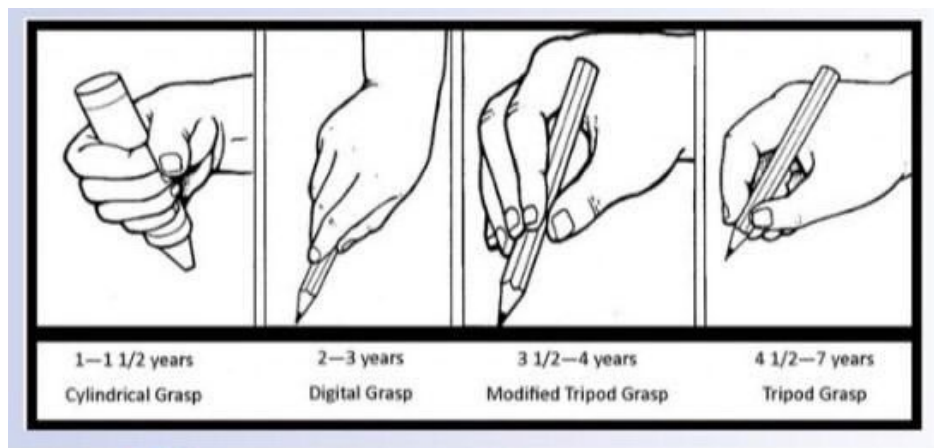


Before you start to work on pencil skills please refer to Section 12 to ensure the child is sitting correctly.

PENCIL GRASP

Children initially start to hold the pencil within their fist (age 1-1½yrs), progress to holding the pencil shaft with all their fingers (2-3 yrs) and then move to a static, then dynamic tripod grasp. Children generally follow this sequence of grasps and it is important to encourage their ability at each stage.



The **dynamic tripod grasp** (number 4) allows the most dextrous control of the pencil. The steering finger (index) is curved over the top of the pencil. The thumb is at the side and the other fingers are tucked underneath.

- Grip the pencil/pen just above where it starts narrowing to a point
- Angle of pencil should be pointing up the arm – not up to the ceiling

If the child has a poor pencil grip:

- Practice fine motor activities (to develop the muscles in the hand)
- Use a piece of tape/elastic band around the base of the pencil to prevent the fingers from slipping down the pencil point and to indicate where to hold the pencil
- Colour code the fingers/use sticky dots to indicate where each finger should hold the pencil
- Commercially available pencil grips may help to encourage a correct hold (please refer to equipment list in Appendix 1) However, they do not automatically make a child hold the pencil correctly

- Try a variety of pencils/pens with in-built grips or triangular shaped pencils (refer to Appendix 1)
- It is difficult to change a pencil grip once it has been established. We therefore want to get it 'right' from the beginning

POSITION OF PAPER

Check that the paper is in the correct position. In general the paper should be on the same side of the body as the handwriting hand.

If you use your right hand to hold the pen: Tilt your paper slightly to the right. Hold the paper still with your left hand. The top of your pen/pencil should be pointing over your right shoulder, your right elbow should be by your side.

If you use your left hand to hold the pen: Tilt the paper slightly to the left. Hold the paper still with your right hand. The top of the pen should be pointing over your left shoulder. Your left elbow should be by your side. Refer to handout on '[Advice for Left Handers](#)'.

A piece of tape fixed to the table may help as a guideline for positioning the paper.

SPACING OF WORDS

If the child exhibits difficulty in spacing out words appropriately try the following:

- Ask the child to separate words with a coloured line to identify where spaces needed – then rewrite with correct spacing

- Illustrate words with incorrect spacing and ask child to correct – ask the child to show spacing using a highlighter, correct and incorrect
- Have child match a correctly spaced sample using plastic letters
- Use appropriate size spacer e.g. finger, piece of card, pencil
- Use squared paper to practice spacing words with a square space in between words
- Give the child an exercise using target sentences and providing blank rectangular boxes into which he can insert appropriate words.

PRESSURE ON THE PAPER

If the child uses **excessive** pressure when writing:

- Use large barrelled pens/pencils
- Use a sloping writing surface to support the forearm, thereby reducing pressure through the hand
- Try exercises using modelling clay or play doh to increase the awareness of the amount of pressure being used: Work on grading the force of finger and hand grip e.g. through squeezing tubes of toothpaste/glue/icing bag/sponge etc.
- Try using carbon paper and gradually not pressing through so many layers

- The pencil should be held approximately 2.5 cm from the tip although when held higher up the shaft the pressure will be less. When held closer to the top generally the pressure is greater. This is important to observe especially when the child complains of pain or when they engrave the paper

If the child does **not use enough pressure**:

- Try felt tipped pens, softer leaded pencils e.g. 2B
- Try using carbon paper to press through as many layers as possible
- Get the child to practice 'hard' and 'soft' strokes so they receive feedback on the difference
- Practice gripping toys that require a lot of pressure to activate e.g. squeeze toy to make sound /paper scrunching/ wringing cloths etc.

Weight bearing activities using shoulders and hands will help develop general strength and stability which will in turn help in grading the force within writing. Children often compensate if they have weak shoulder stability by putting extra force through the pen – try the **girdle stability exercises** in the gross motor section to develop this.

Advice for left-handers:

Writing tool and grip:

In order to see as they write and to prevent smudging, the left-hander should hold the pencil/pen at least three centimetres from the point. This can be indicated by a small elastic band around the desired area for grip or use of a stetro grip, which can be removed once the child is familiar with position.

Aim for tripod grip, i.e.

This grip, taught in early stages along with sitting and paper position should eliminate a “hooked” hand. If this has developed, it can be remedied in the following ways;

- Vertical blackboard writing using handwriting patterns. This encourages a full arm movement with greater freedom and a less cramped position. Frequent practice of large writing on paper should be provided.
- Use of a sloping writing surface. Older children may use a clipboard resting on a file or book.
- Attention to correct sitting and paper position.
- Use of thick barrel pen, crayons, felt tips for writing patterns.

A left-hander often pushes the pen/pencil across the paper. Ballpoint, Berol or fibre tip pens produce less friction, whilst specifically made left-handed nibs are available from WH Smith.

A sharp pointed pencil is not helpful to the young left-handers as they are likely to pierce the paper.

Soft pencils are more beneficial as they allow smooth movement across the paper.

Paper position and the supportive hand:

The paper should be positioned to the left of the child’s midline (centre of the body). It should be far enough to the left so the child can rest the elbow on the table and swing the forearm in a complete arc without crossing the body.

As the child writes down the page, the elbow is moved back so that the arc of movement is parallel to the next line down.

The hand is positioned so that it is always below or to the left of the writing line as the child writes from left to right across the page. If the writing goes

under the hand (as it does in right handed positioning) vision would be blocked, leading to a hunched posture.

The paper should be slanted so that the left side is parallel to the child's forearm as the child writes across the line. Many children can see their writing better if the paper is slanted to as much as 45 degrees. The paper can be taped in the desired position until the child becomes accustomed to writing in this way.

Seating

Check that the left-hander is not sitting too close to the right of a right-hander. This will avoid their arms colliding.

Some, but not all, lefthanders will find writing easier if they can sit on a higher chair BUT ensure that his feet are still firmly on the floor or a footrest.

If the desk surface is too high, the child will be unable to see the letters over their hand when writing. When copying words, numbers, writing patterns, etc, a left-hander is helped if these are placed on the right side of the page.

Making best use of lighting

Writing should not be obscured by shadow from head or hand. If there is artificial light or strong sunlight, then positioning the left-hander to receive light from the right is important.

Writing pressure

Left-handers tend to grip the barrel of a writing tool more tightly. If this tendency is observed the child should be reminded to stop writing and relax the muscles by shaking and flexing the fingers, hand and wrist.

If pressure is excessive, interleave carbon paper between writing sheets to help the child gauge how heavily or lightly he is writing. Excessive pressure is lessened if writing tools are held further from the point.

Scissors:

It is helpful if the child can experiment with both left and right-handed scissors. Right-handed scissors used in a left hand may affect the cleanness of the cut or block the cutting line from view.

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