

How to support your child with pencil grip at home

Progressing through the different phases of developing a correct pencil grip is an important part of childhood development. The development of an efficient pencil grip begins with children gaining strength and control in the larger muscles first, through to smaller, fine motor control. Children develop control over the large muscles of their core and arms first, before the smaller muscles of the hands. Children need to progress through all the phases mentioned in this guide to develop the control and dexterity needed to write. We recommend when using this guide that you first identify where your child is at present, and then to try some of the activities to help them to progress to the next stage. Experiment with holding a pencil in the different grips in order to feel which muscles are being used. We hope you find this to be a helpful guide.

Tips on supporting handwriting

Learning to write develops in conjunction with many underlying foundations. Below you will learn some top tips that help to prepare your child to write:

- In order to develop **postural stability**, your child needs to develop core strength. Animal walks (moving like a crab, snake, bear) are fantastic for this, as are climbing and balancing in the park and using monkey bars.
- **Tactile perception** (touch feedback from your fingers) is important. You could hide toys in a container filled with sand, beans or rice and encourage your child to find the toys by feeling for them.
- Cutting with scissors is an excellent way to develop **hand function** (when the hand and finger muscles work together). Playing with playdough and fine motor activities like threading, tying shoelaces and buttoning clothes are effective too, as is constructing with Lego.
- **Bilateral coordination** (when your hands work together) is an important part of writing. Eating with a knife and fork, holding a piece of paper while cutting., tying shoelaces, playing with construction toys, nuts and bolts, all require both hands to work together.

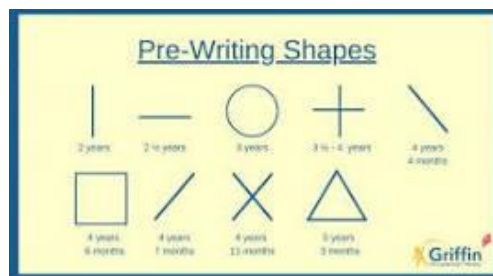
A note on name writing:

It is important to note that even if children cannot yet hold a pencil in a way that enables them to write, they can still learn to write their name using one finger and writing it in a tray filled with shaving foam or flour.

Cylindrical Grasp



In this phase, children use movement from their shoulders to move the pencil. Working on visual motor integration (VMI) is very important at this stage, as well as all of the following stages. VMI means enabling the hands to replicate what the eyes see. Children need to be able to copy the basic shapes found below, before learning to form their letters correctly. You can provide lots of opportunities to trace and draw shapes and simple drawings. Children can trace over shapes in sand, or with chalk on a board, before trying to draw shapes on their own. Writing on vertical surfaces, or moving trains around a vertical surface like a train track, is very useful. You may also try creating a map in mud or sand with a stick, driving cars around different shaped tracks and climbing.



Modified Tripod Grasp



In this grasp, children may use all of their fingers to hold the pencil. Wrist movements are used and children may hold their pencils tightly. As hand muscles develop, you should see a few finger movements emerging. Giving children more challenging shapes or materials to cut out is beneficial, as well as using a variety of art materials with your child, such as paint brushes or pastels.

Digital Grasp



As your child gains more control over arm and hand muscles, you may see this grasp being used. Continuing to work on core and shoulder muscles is essential to enable hands and fingers to move more freely and accurately. Climbing and using monkey bars strengthens these muscles and encouraging your child to climb and balance as much as possible is beneficial. Cutting with scissors, exploring with playdough, threading and playing with Lego is important to build up hand strength and finger control. Drawing on vertical surfaces, such as chalkboards, and drawing on the floor (chalk is ideal for this) is also important.

Tripod Grasp



In the tripod pencil grip, the thumb, middle and index fingers grasp the pencil. As the finger muscles develop, your child will be able to use finger movements to form letters. This grip is considered to be an effective pencil grip because it allows for the most finger movements. Activities that encourage the pincer grip, such as using tweezers to pick up pompoms, pegging clothes onto a washing line and threading beads onto string to make a bracelet will all develop the pincer grip. Using larger pens and pencils is helpful as a child develops this grasp. At school, we remind children that their thumb and index finger should pinch the pencil, with the third finger tucking behind the pencil.