

Pre-writing

Before children start to write letters, they need to develop fine motor skills. This can be assisted by activities to exercise the fingers and wrists, such as finger plays and dough modeling. Children also need to start copying patterns before they start copying letters.

It is important that young children are given thick pencils or crayons beginning writing activities, (large diameter to help them grip). Otherwise a pencil grip can be attached to a regular pencil.

It is important that teachers 'teach' the children how to hold the pencil. Model the pincer grip over the pencil, with thumb and first finger, then add the second finger.

Pre-Writing Skills

Before beginning to form letters, children need to:

- Have sufficient concentration to complete desktop tasks for at least 10 minutes at a time.
- Be orientated to written language.
- Be positioned well with feet on floor, sitting square onto a work surface which is the correct height.
- Maintain a steady wrist position that will enable controlled finger movements.
- Have a good ability to control pencil strokes.
- Be able to form some basic shapes that are required to form all letters: a circle, vertical and horizontal lines and diagonal lines.
- Be shown how to form the shape, before being able to copy pre-drawn shapes, as children learn to imitate shapes first before copying them.
- Be able to remember the movement patterns associated with forming shapes, to replicate the actions when copying.
- The following are some activities and advice on how to facilitate pre-writing skills in children with special needs.

Developing control of pencil strokes

- Use pre-writing/ drawing activities to develop stroke control, where the child has to draw between two lines (i.e. mazes or follow the trail activities). You can increase the difficulty of the task by decreasing the width of the lines.
- Practice drawings of defined shapes and patterns on a large vertical surface, such as a blackboard, easel or paper pinned to the wall.
- Use activities where the child has to free draw to join the items, e.g. joining lines to match items that are the same, or crossing or making a circle around pictures that are the same.
- Give lots of opportunities for drawing, tracing, painting and copying shapes and patterns to gain practice in controlling the pencil.
- Use puzzle books and worksheets with activities such as connecting objects (e.g. matching), mazes and dot to dot games that require

accuracy. Gradually increase the level of difficulty and accuracy required.

<http://www.royalfree.nhs.uk/PDF/Paed%20OT/School%20work/Pre-Writing%20Skills.pdf>