

Practical Suggestions for Improving Your Child's Fine Motor Skills for Better Writing



Your primary goals are to help the child:

- a. Achieve appropriate body positioning
- b. Achieve good shoulder stability
- c. Increase muscle tone in small muscles of hand
- d. Achieve appropriate pencil grip
- e. Write with appropriate letter formation
- f. Succeed in copying from the board

**If you suspect that your child has clinically significant writing/fine motor problems, consult with a trained, certified occupational therapist. My son Mark saw an occupational therapist weekly for two years, and it changed his life for the better! Find out more at:

<https://www.aota.org/About-Occupational-Therapy.aspx>

BODY POSITIONING

1. **Prone activities**—do activities on stomach to strengthen trunk muscles
2. **90-90-90**—when the child is sitting, you want the him sitting straight with his hips and knees at a 90-degree position; feet should be flat on the floor
3. **If the child's feet** don't touch the floor, put books under his feet
4. **Seat cushion**—if the child has poor postural control, sitting on a pillow or seat cushion can help posture. A therapeutic seat cushion (my son used one) can be very helpful.



For these seat cushions and more great sensory materials, check out

Starting sensory therapy by Bonnie Arnwine (the mother of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder)

<https://www.autismcommunitystore.com/starting-sensory-therapy-by-bonnie-arnwine>

SHOULDER STABILITY

1. **Wheelbarrow walks**—hold the child’s feet and have her walk on her hands. If she is not stable enough, hold her at the knees.
2. **Write on vertical surfaces**. Write on a chalkboard or dry erase board. Tape paper on the wall at shoulder level.
3. **Wall pushups**—do pushups against the wall.
4. **Prone or Quadraped Position**—when playing, watching TV, or reading, encourage lying on the floor propped on elbows.



INCREASING MUSCLE TONE IN SMALL MUSCLES OF HAND

Use materials such as:

1. Silly putty, play dough
2. Spin toys (e.g., tops, jackstones)
3. Use squirt bottle to spray things (e.g., plants)
4. Use rubber stamps and ink pads to create pictures and designs
5. Hole punch
6. Stringing, lacing activities
7. Art projects—e.g., painting
8. Pegboard activities
9. Squeeze “squishy” balls of various textures—great during listening activities



PENCIL GRIP

If the child does not use her index, middle, and thumb finger to hold the pencil, you can do the following:

1. **Pencil Grip**—Add a rubber pencil grip to help position the fingers
2. **Small pencils**—use a golf/bowling-sized pencil to help promote her 3-finger grasp
3. Use **tongs, tweezers, eye droppers**—use the first 2 to pick up small objects or even cotton balls. Eye droppers can be used to squeeze colored liquid into containers. This strengthens the fingers and

promotes a functional pencil grip.



WRITE WITH APPROPRIATE LETTER FORMATION

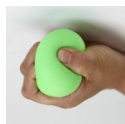
1. Handwriting Without Tears program --Handwriting Without Tears (www.hwtears.com), a developmental program, uses multisensory lessons and is virtually 100% successful. It's easy, fun, and inexpensive. Some children are confused by the slant and loops of other traditional handwriting programs. HWT is vertical and converts readily to cursive. HWT is being adopted in various states in the U.S. as well as Canadian provinces. My son Mark used this with great success!
2. When you make letters, make them large and have the child trace them with his finger
3. Write letters in various textures such as sand, shaving cream, salt.
4. Roll out play dough to form letters
5. Cut out letters in sand paper and have the child trace over them with his finger
6. On paper, place a happy face in the upper left hand corner to orient the child.



SUCCEED IN COPYING FROM THE BOARD

1. **Vision checkup**—have the child tested by an optometrist to rule out vision problems
2. **Close seat**—have the child sit in front of the class
3. **View finder**—cut a slit in a manila folder and place the folder over the child's work so that she sees only one line at a time
4. **Handout on desk**—if there are large amounts of information to copy, provide the child with a handout on her desk that she can look at

OTHER IDEAS TO INCREASE OVERALL HAND STRENGTH AND DEXTERITY



Have your child:

*Squeeze balls of varying degrees of difficulty

- *Play the pick-up-sticks game
- *Cut anything—paper, playdough, coupons for Mom and Dad!
- *Crumble Cheerios or Rice Krispies to make “sand” for pictures
- * Help with washing the car
- *Help with washing dishes
- *Help with gardening, planting
- *Practice identifying small objects in a bag without looking
- *Roll a small ball of playdough. Using the thumb, roll the ball across the finger tips, from the index to the little finger and then back.
- *Using a flashlight, make “finger shadows” against the wall
- *Drop coins one at a time into a slotted top or piggy bank
- *Place coins, on their sides, into play dough
- *Hang from monkey bars and overhead rungs
- *Mix cookie dough by hand
- *Use clothespins to pick up small pieces of crumbled paper. Pass the paper to each other and drop the pieces into a bucket
- *Push pins into foam with a paper design over the top
- *Use playdough to make dragons and pinch marks on top of the dragon
- *Tear pieces of construction paper into small pieces and glue the different colors of paper on an uncolored picture
- *Make a small mosaic picture by gluing colored rice onto a piece of paper—the child can follow a design, or do this freehand!
- *Get bubble wrap and have the child pop the bubbles



- *Make candy sculptures—use colored toothpicks and candies to make wonderful creations!
- *Using a chalkboard, write or have the child write letters or draw pictures with chalk. Have him erase them with small bits of paper towel. The child can also erase with a small piece of damp sponge. A chalkboard is better than a whiteboard because it takes more effort to write, thus increasing the child’s muscle tone and strength.
- *Have the child tear pieces of Scotch tape from a dispenser and tape pictures or other objects onto paper
- *Have the child draw on a chalkboard using small pieces of chalk—this helps with finger dexterity for writing
- *Roll and shake dice within the palm of one hand
- *Use Leggo blocks to build things
- *Roll and pull taffy
- *Drop marbles, small shells, or other small objects into spaces in an egg carton
- *Pull a rubber band as far as you can
- *Poke holes in playdough with fingers
- *Have the child paint anything—pictures, objects such as ceramic figures
- *Squeeze glitter paint from tubes