

## Starting school

# Writing skills



Being able to write is an important skill and one you will be excited about your child learning. Your child does not need to be able to write before they go to school, however there are other skills you can prime them with that will help them when they are learning to write. For children to have control over small items such as a pencil, they need to have control over their large movements. Gross motor control is the term used to describe control over whole body and limb movements. As children develop their gross motor control, this helps with their fine motor control; the control of their small movements such as those with their hands and fingers. As well as good gross and fine motor skills, children also need to develop other skills that will help them when they learn to write. These include:

- Good posture
- Balance
- An understanding of pattern
- Language for movement such as up, down and round
- Hand eye coordination
- Understanding that print carries meaning

Providing your child with some of the experiences below will support these developing skills and prepare their hands ready for writing.

### **Balance**

Encourage your child to develop their balance by walking along a line, balancing on play equipment at the park or challenging them to walk from one end of the room to the other with a cushion on their head.

### **Get active**

Physical activities such as dancing, riding a trike or playing football all support your child's gross motor skills, posture and balance.

### **Make shapes**

Activities where your child has to make shapes with their arms using their gross motor skills are very effective. This could include dancing with scarves, polishing a table, using a mop or sweeping leaves.



## **A squash and a squeeze**

Provide opportunities for your child to build strength in their hands by giving them activities where they need to squeeze, mold or manipulate materials. This could include squeezing out a sponge at bath time or when helping with the washing up, modelling with clay or dough or when making bread.

## **Fine motor skills**

Your child will need lots of activities to practice their fine motor skills. These could include puzzles, threading pasta, drawing, painting, posting, folding paper, building with construction materials and screwing and unscrewing lids.

## **Language of writing**

Use the language for movement such as "You are climbing up the ladder and now you are going down the slide!"

## **Model writing**

Let your child see you write, for example writing a note for nursery or writing a shopping list. Sound out the words as you write them.

## **Be a reader**

Let your child see you write, for example writing a note for nursery or writing a shopping list. Sound out the words as you write them.

## **Encourage**

When your child shows an interest in making marks with writing materials such as pens or pencils, give them lots of encouragement. It doesn't matter if their picture looks nothing like what they say it is or they tell you they have written their name and it is some lines and circles - value their efforts, this is early writing in action!

## **Writing, writing, everywhere!**

When your child starts to show an interest in putting pen to paper, provide a wide range of writing materials for them. This could be plain and lined paper, clipboards for them to note down what they see outside or postcards to send to Granny!

## **The correct grip**

In order to write effectively, children need to learn how to hold their pencil correctly in a tripod grip. Most children will learn to do this between the ages of 3 and 6 years. It is unhelpful to force children to hold their pencil in a particular way and if they are holding their pencil with their whole hand (often called a hammer grip) don't worry! The important thing is that they are showing an interest in using writing materials. One way to gently encourage the correct pencil grip is to provide children with very stubby chalks or crayons. This way a hammer grasp cannot be used and the hand naturally goes into a tripod grip instead.

Many parents are concerned if their child is not interested in picking up a pencil and learning to write. However, as long as you are supporting them to develop the skills above there is no need to worry, they will come to writing in their own time, prepped with the physical skills they need. For reluctant writers you could offer writing in different ways; it does not have to be done sat down at a table. For example, you could make letter shapes in a tray of flour or salt, use a paintbrush and water to make patterns on the side of the bath or have a clipboard and pencil to help you plan out a Lego model.



# Coordination activities

**Try these different coordination activities that help your child's balance, posture and motor skills.**

**Picking vegetables** - Stand shoulder width apart with your arms by your side. Then slowly bend your right knee, as you lunge down towards the floor keeping your left leg straight. Use your hands to pretend to pick a vegetable from the ground, as you then straighten your right leg, returning to your standing position. Pretend to place the vegetable into a basket in front of you. Repeat this on your left side. Encourage your child to think of different vegetables they could pick from the ground!

**Symmetrical air drawing** - Hold your arms out in front of you whilst pointing your index finger on both hands. Draw a pattern or shape in the air, ensuring your fingers and hands are moving in the same direction and doing the same actions. Encourage your child to copy your actions as they make symmetrical shapes or patterns in the air using both fingers. Encourage your child to think of shapes or patterns they could draw in the air for you to copy!

For more of our Be Coordinated activities log onto UP or view a selection **here**.





# Tray transporter

**This activity uses items from around the house to help your child's developing fine motor skills**

Gather together some small items such as dried pasta, pom pom balls and buttons together with a wooden peg, tweezers or tongs and an ice cube or muffin tray. Show your child how they can use the tweezers to pick up an item and transfer this to the tray. Invite your child to have a turn and see if they can transfer all the items into the tray provided. This helps your child's hand eye coordination and pincer grip.

For more of our Busy Hands activities log onto UP or view a selection **here**.





# Super writing

**This super activity encourages even reluctant writers to put pen to paper!**

Create super pencils for your child to use! Cut out pictures of superheroes or use small world characters and tape them to the top of your pencils. Your child could help you with this. Encourage your child to draw super pictures with their new super pencils! Why not draw some rectangles on some paper so they can make their own comic strip?

You could change the pencils you make to suit your child's interests, for example princesses, dinosaurs or animals.

