

BEFORE HANDWRITING, CHILDREN NEED TO MASTER PRE-WRITING SKILLS

Pre-writing skills are the lines, shapes, and strokes kids need to master and know *before* learning how to write letters. They develop from 1 year to 5 years old.

Pre-writing skills ARE important.

Children need to learn and master pre-writing lines, strokes, and shapes and strengthen their fine motor skills before learning how to form the letters of their name or the alphabet.

PREWRITING MILESTONES

1-2 YEARS OLD:

A baby is typically scribbling and learning to make marks on a paper. They are probably holding a crayon or marker with their whole hand. This is called a palmar supinate grasp.

As they develop more control, the next step is to imitate. Maybe you make a line or shape and then your child imitates that same line or shape.

Progression of Pre-writing Strokes		
Years	Imitate	Copy
1		
2	— ○	
3	+	— ○
4	□ / \	+
5	△	□ / \

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IMITATING VS COPYING

- Imitating is when a child watches you draw the line or shape before they try it. Copying is when there's already lines on a page and the child looks at it and then they figure out how to make those lines.
- Learning the correct formation is very important – This will impact how they form their letters as they get older.

PRE-WRITING AT 2-3 YEARS OLD :

- Learning to imitate vertical and horizontal lines. They are also learning to imitate circular lines. They are also holding their writing tool in a digital pronate grasp.

3-4 YEARS OLD PREWRITING SKILLS:

- Copy vertical and horizontal lines and a circle. They are now learning how to imitate a cross.
- Pencil grasp is progressing. They are holding it with their thumb and their fingers, but they're probably using their wrists or their shoulders to do the work.

PREWRITING AT 4-5 YEARS OLD:

- Copying a cross as well as lines and circles.
- Learning to imitate squares and diagonal lines.
- Once they learn the diagonal lines, you can teach them how to make an X. Their grasp will develop to a dynamic tripod grasp. This means the movement is coming from their hand as opposed to their wrist and shoulders.

5 YEARS OLD SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- Copy horizontal and vertical lines, circles, crosses, squares, and diagonal lines. The next shape to learn is a triangle!

- **THE OUTCOME OF POOR PRE-WRITING SKILLS**

- If 5-year-olds have not developed good pre-writing skills, this can impact the legibility of their emerging handwriting skills.
- Their letters will be sloppy because they have not learned how to make a circle properly with closure. They will rush that circle and add a line in order to make an a. If they haven't learned to form their lines and shapes from top to bottom, this will lead to poor letter and number formation. **Eventually, this impacts their speed of writing.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

In order for children to succeed in school, we have to build confidence in your child's pre-writing skills. There are a number of ways to develop and build these skills without using crayons or pencils.

- Finger paint Shaving cream chalk
- Use stickers Playdough pipe cleaners or string
- Gather some sticks outside or lolly sticks to make lines and shapes

TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT SHAPES AND LINES HELPS THEM TO DEVELOP PROPER HANDWRITING SKILLS.

It may seem silly to spend so much time working on lines and squiggles but our children really need that!

There's a developmental progression to letters, too! Children understand straight lines first, then circular lines, then diagonal lines.



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An OT video showing the Pinch and flip pencil grasp trick which we use in Primary.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92ln2VMPQ-g>

The hand out she talks about in her video is included on the next page.

ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE PROPER PENCIL GRASP

An efficient pencil grasp allows a significant amount of finger movement and does not fatigue the muscles of the hands. The most common "efficient" grasp is called a tripod grasp. The index finger and thumb pinch the pencil and the pencil rests on the tip of the third finger. In order to develop an efficient grasp, children need to move their fingers in isolation, develop good shoulder and wrist stability, and strong hand muscles. The following activities support the development of an efficient pencil grasp.

Shoulder and Wrist Stability

- Weight-bearing into the arms by crawling, crab walking, yoga poses, donkey kicks
- Drawing and coloring on a vertical surface (chalkboard, wall, easel)
- Drawing and coloring on a clipboard on the floor
- Playing on a lego wall, magnetic wall, refrigerator magnets

Hand Strength

- Pegboard games and activities
- Bead stringing and lacing activities
- Squeeze water out of sponges
- Play with play dough, silly putty
- Knead cookie dough
- Use scissors to snip construction paper
- Make slime
- Connect pop-beads
- Games that involve tweezers or tongs

Developing the Arches of the Hands

- Weight-bearing into the hands during yoga or animal walks
- Rolling dice in the palm of the hand
- Making balls out of dough or putty
- Finger plays, itsy bitsy spider, making shadow puppets

