

Definition

The skills involved in learning to write are called prewriting skills. These include the sensorimotor skills that contribute to a child holding and using a pencil, and the ability to draw, copy, and colour.

The ideas in this handout have primarily been developed for children aged 4 years and older. If your child has difficulty holding a pencil for drawing, please refer to the handout titled 'Developing a pencil grip'. If your child changes the hand that he holds his pencil with while drawing, please refer to the handout titled 'Hand Preference'.

Helpful strategies

- ▶ Encourage your child to do prewriting activities by specifically setting up an area with a child size table and chair, and a range of fun and interesting texts, crayons, coloured pencils and paper.



- ▶ Drawing and doing activities on a vertical surface is important for this age group as it helps to develop your child's arm and hand skills. For example, encourage your child to draw on a blackboard, paint at an easel, stick magnetic letters to the fridge or put stickers on a piece of paper taped to the wall.



- ▶ Do not be too eager to teach your child how to write letters. Instead have fun drawing together, copying shapes and colouring in.
- ▶ Praise your child as her skills develop, as this will encourage her to have a positive attitude to prewriting activities and experience the feeling 'I can do this'.
- ▶ Many commercially printed activity books, such as colouring, dot to dot or mazes, are available from some newsagents, post offices, book or toy shops. Make sure they are simple and suitable for your child's age. Your child may need your help to understand what to do on each page.
- ▶ Encourage your child to do fine motor activities, as this will help your child develop good hand skills. For example, art and craft activities, playing with playdough, building with blocks.

Please talk to your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above information.

Pencil and paper activities

Drawing

- ▶ Encourage your child to do a drawing and then ask him to tell you about it when he has finished.
- ▶ Draw on a Magnadoodle or Megasketcher.
- ▶ Duo drawing – draw dots or squiggles for your child to join up and make a picture, or draw the outline of a person and get your child to draw the eyes, nose and mouth.
- ▶ Encourage your child to draw a person – if he needs help give him some verbal prompts such as “what about the arms”, “what about hair”, etc.
- ▶ Draw simple pictures such as houses, snakes, flowers, trees, spiders.
- ▶ Make birthday cards or special occasion cards.
- ▶ Make a book.

Copying

- ▶ Show your child how to draw simple lines and shapes and then get him to do it. Start with horizontal and vertical lines then progress to a circle, square and triangle. Then see if your child can draw the shape by himself.
- ▶ If your child is interested in writing his name show him how you write each individual letter and get him to copy one letter at a time. It may be easier to start with capital letters.

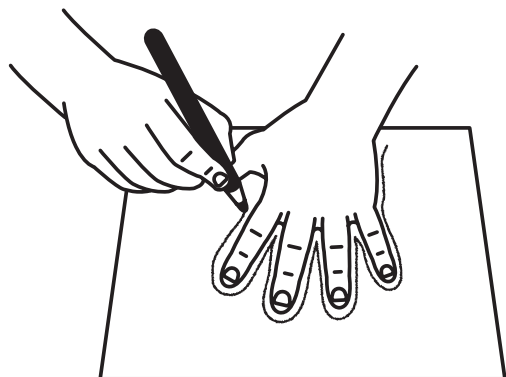
Colouring in

- ▶ Colour in shapes and pictures. Start off with simple pictures then progress to pictures with more detail. Try to colour in within the lines.
- ▶ Draw around your child's body on a large piece of paper and get him to colour in his clothing.

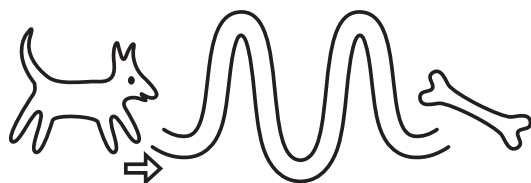


Tracing, mazes and dot to dots

- ▶ Trace around hands and feet.



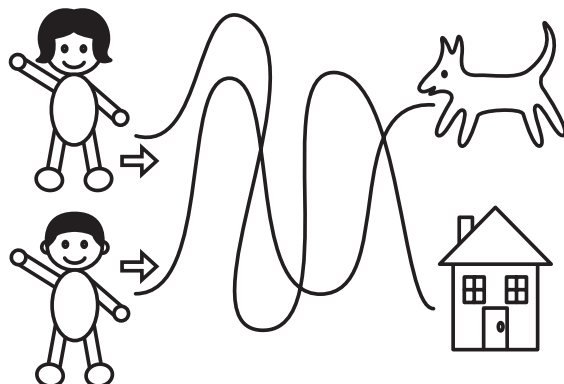
- ▶ Rainbow drawing – draw lines, shapes or simple designs. Ask your child to trace the line using different coloured pencils, textas or chalks.
- ▶ Draw simple pathways for your child to draw along. For example a straight lined road so that a car can get to a house or a dog can get to a bone. Start with straight, wide paths and progress to narrower curving paths.



- ▶ Draw simple mazes for your child. Always start on the left hand side of the paper.



- ▶ Draw single line overlapping pathways for your child to trace over.



- ▶ Try tracing lines, patterns or shapes with a finger then a pencil.
- ▶ Join dots or dashes of shapes, simple pictures or letters of your child's name.



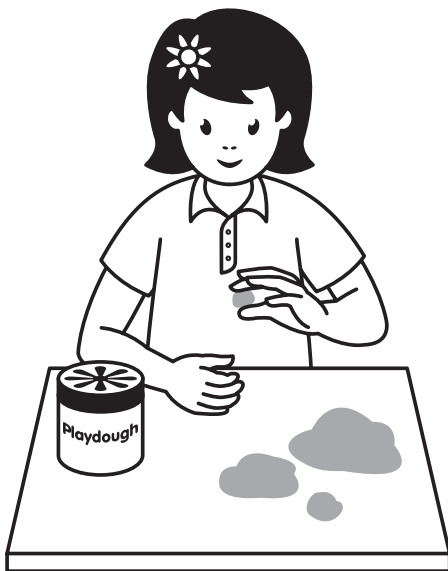
- ▶ Trace around stencil shapes made from cardboard or old ice-cream lids. Then try drawing the shape without the stencil.
- ▶ Do simple dot to dot and mazes from activity books.
- ▶ Try using changeable textas when doing the above activities. Repeated practice will help your child to develop his skills.

Please talk to your occupational therapist if you have any queries about the above activity ideas.

General activities

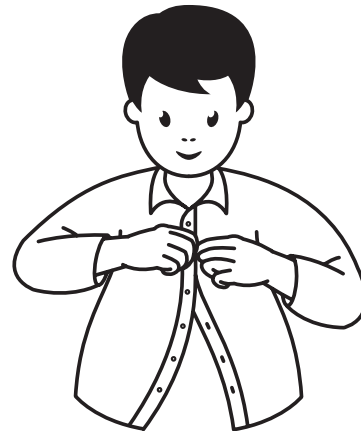
Sensory activities

- ▶ Find hidden objects in sand, rice or lentils.
- ▶ Finger painting.
- ▶ Draw in shaving cream.
- ▶ Roll, pinch, pull and squash playdough, exercise putty, or jumping putty. Roll the playdough into sausages. Make round balls by rolling the playdough between the palms of your hands. Make a bird's nest by pinching the playdough between the thumb and fingers. Pinch small pieces of playdough the size of a pea. Squash playdough balls between your thumb and index finger.



Grasp and manipulation activities

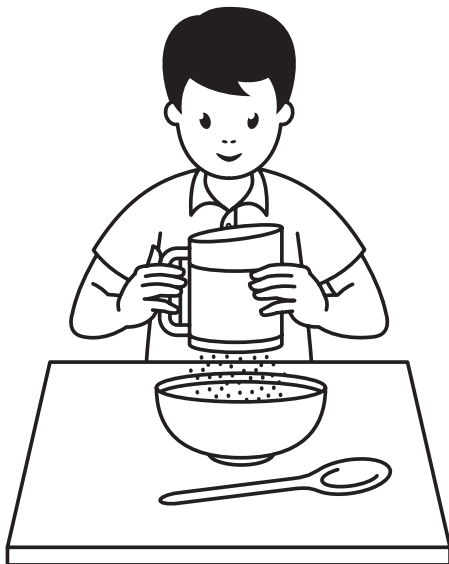
- ▶ Play commercial games such as snakes and ladders, trouble, and card games such as memory or snap.
- ▶ Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards.
- ▶ Play with marble races.
- ▶ Tear up coloured paper for pasting or collage activities.
- ▶ Decorate a picture using tissue paper. Ask your child to scrunch up small pieces of tissue paper between her thumb, index and middle fingers and glue them onto the picture.
- ▶ Button up buttons on clothing.



- ▶ Remove coins from a purse one at a time using your thumb and index finger.

Eye hand coordination activities

- ▶ Sand drawing using your index finger or a stick in dry or wet sand. Play follow the leader or draw racetracks or shapes.
- ▶ Finger games such as incy wincy spider.
- ▶ Use tweezers to pick up small beads or toys and put them into a container.
- ▶ Puzzles.
- ▶ Cooking – measuring, stirring, sifting, rolling.



- ▶ Art and craft activities using glue sticks, glitter, ink stamps, stickers and scissors.

Building and construction activities

- ▶ Building with duplo, lego, mobilo or other constructional toys.
- ▶ Make things using old boxes, egg cartons, wool, paper and sticky or masking tape.



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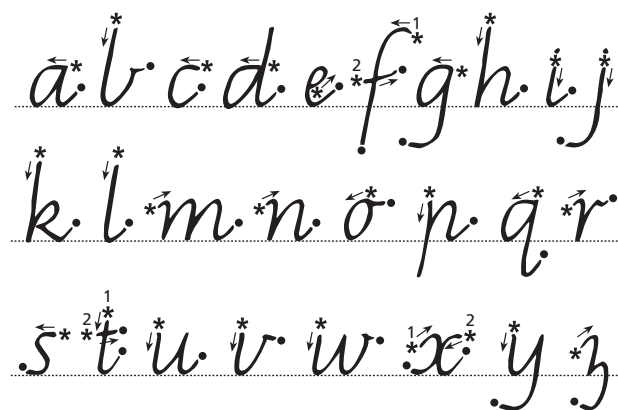
Beginning writing

Victorian Modern Cursive is the handwriting style used in Victorian primary schools. Your child will learn how to write letters and numbers correctly at school. If, however, your child is interested in writing some of the letters now, then show him how to write the letters in the correct way. The following alphabet and number samples indicate where the letter starts (*), the direction the letter goes (←) and where the letter finishes (•).

Helpful strategies

- ▶ Encourage your child to start writing on the left hand side of the paper and move towards the right.
- ▶ Encourage your child to use his free hand to hold the paper steady when writing.
- ▶ Draw a dot to help your child start the letter in the correct position.
- ▶ If your child is writing more than one word, encourage him to leave a space between each word. Using a finger or icy pole stick to mark the space can be helpful.

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Please note that all capital letters and numbers start at the top.



Please note that some left-handed writers may form the following capital letters differently.

