

The Development of Pre-Printing Skills

fingers. The pencil is resting on the knuckle of your middle finger while being pinched between your thumb & index finger. This type of grasp allows the greatest amount of pencil movement & precision while fatiguing the hand muscles the least. As a result, it is called an efficient pencil grasp. The development of an efficient pencil grasp will improve your child's ability to learn to print.

Bilateral Hand Skills

Bilateral hand skills refer to the ability to use your hands together to accomplish a task. It is also called lead-assist, because frequently one hand will lead an activity & the other hand will assist it. Commonly it is your dominant hand that leads the activity & your non-dominant hand that assists. For example, when drawing, the pencil is held in the dominant hand & the non-dominant hand is preventing the paper from moving. Another example is when using scissors, the lead hand is operating the scissors & the assist hand is holding & turning the paper when cutting around a corner.

Visual Motor Control

Visual motor control refers to your child's ability to coordinate their eyes, arms & hands. It is very similar to eye-hand coordination & contributes to one's ability to learn new shapes, letters & numbers, print between the lines & colour within the boundaries of a picture.

Once these 6 building blocks are established, a child is ready to develop their pre-printing skills.

Pre-Printing Skills

Pre-printing skills generally refers to your child's ability to perform the

pencil strokes necessary to print letters & numbers. Once the child is able to move & control the pencil, learning to print is a matter of combining these strokes.

As children develop, they typically learn the pre-printing strokes in a particular sequence. The first stage of pre-printing is scribbling. Between the ages of 1 & 2 years, a child will engage in random scribble. As they approach the age of 2, their scribble will develop a distinct direction. It may be horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. Up to this point, the child will scribble in whichever manner they feel like regardless if you try to get them to change. However, by 2 years the child will likely follow your lead. For example if scribble horizontally, your child should be able to imitate you & scribble horizontally as well. The same is true for vertical scribbling.

Before proceeding to the next stage, we must make the distinction between imitation & copying. It is very important to know the difference, as children will always imitate before copying. Imitation is the ability to reproduce a form after watching someone else draw it first. In contrast, copying is the ability to reproduce a form after being only shown a picture of the completed design. For example, if you show your child how to draw a vertical line & then ask them to draw one like you did, you are asking them to imitate. Now if you were to only show your child a picture of a vertical line and ask them to draw one like the picture, then you are asking them to copy.

Between the ages of 2 & 3 years, the child will become capable of

copying horizontal & vertical lines and the exact order may vary from child to child. When the child gets closer to 3 years, they will become able to copy circles.

The ability to imitate and then copy a cross or plus sign (+) should develop between the ages of 3 & 4. This will be followed by the ability to imitate & copy diagonal lines around the age of 4. By the age of 5 children should be able to imitate & then copy a square.

Within their 5th year, your child will learn to imitate & copy a triangle. As they approach 6 years of age they will learn to copy a diamond. Typically a child is ready to learn to print when they are able to consistently copy triangles.

Because of the foundation required to learn to print and the fact that most child do not master their pre-printing skills until the age of 5, it is not recommended to expect a child to print the letters & numbers upon entering Kindergarten. A child will learn to print during their Kindergarten year and their pre-school years should be spent developing their pre-printing skills.

Please refer to the therapeutic activities, crafts & games section of our website for specific activities that you & your child can use to develop their pre-printing building blocks & pre-printing skills.

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The Development of Play | to 14 Years

The Development of Play

As your child grows & develops, their manner of play will change as much as they do. Your child will change from playing alone, to playing beside another child, to playing cooperatively with other children, & finally playing in a group with a specific role.

The following summarizes the stages of play that most children go through.

15-18 Months

At this age, play is characterized by imaginative & pretend play. The child will engage in domestic mimicry, which involves imitating everyday events such as pretend food on spoons & pretending to make a meal. Children will play in the vicinity of each other, but not together. This is called *onlooker* or *solitary* play. Stacking cubes & scribbling with crayons are important. Other play activities include:

- 3 to 6 piece puzzles
- Pull & push toys
- Nest & stacking toys
- Crayons & markers

2 Years

Domestic mimicry becomes more complex and the child pretends dolls & animals are alive. As well, their interaction with toys increases & despite associative play (playing in a group & have a common goal) emerging, they mostly engage in parallel play, which is characterized by playing with the same toys along side other children with common themes, but still little interaction. Play activities include:

- Blackboard & chalk and finger paints
- Play-doh & clay
- Simple puzzles
- Duplo blocks, beads & construction toys
- Rhythm instruments
- Doll houses, dolls & clothes
- Dress up clothes, household items

3 & 4 Years

Children learn concepts such as colours, numbers, shapes, & patterns through play. Their play takes on family themes & the domestic mimicry frequently involves doing like Mommy. For example, playing with dishes becomes cleaning up & doing the dishes & playing with a doll involves caring for the baby. The difference between real & pretend is not well differentiated, but the child uses the environment creatively by taking whatever is available & turning it into play. Strong associative play & cooperation emerges & success & accomplishment is very important. Kids take great pride in their work. Play activities include:

- Tricycles, balance beams, swings, climbing toys & crawling through tunnels
- Crayons, pencils, scissors, stencils, & glue
- Play houses, puppets & Doctor's kit
- Construction toys & more complex puzzles

5 Years

Pretend dominants play at this age with children taking on character roles when playing. A degree of *bossiness* may be present as a child attempts to organize the

group. Turn taking & true cooperative play emerges. Appropriate play activities include:

- Theme toys & action figures
- Non-competitive games like checkers & dominos
- Arts & crafts

6 Years

Cooperative play should be well established & children will be interested in more structure meaning rules & playing within rules. Pretend play included the use of props & takes on a stage performance quality. Play activities include:

- Simple board games
- Props for pretend play
- Stories & themes
- Building sets

6-12 Years

Children's play becomes more games oriented & they are interested in sports & hobbies. Play activities include:

- Organized pastimes like sports & clubs
- Cooking, crafts, model kits, painting & woodworking

For more information on your child's Growth & Development, please search the Articles & Information section of our website.

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Growth & Development

Handwriting Activities

Introduction

Handwriting started to evolve in the 15th Century. By the early 20th Century the Manuscript that is used today was developed.

Handwriting allows us to express & share thoughts, feeling, & emotions. In school, Handwriting is the means through which our children demonstrate their knowledge. Unfortunately many children have difficulty with handwriting & therefore cannot demonstrate their knowledge as easily as children who do not have handwriting difficulties.

Handwriting is a skill that requires a strong foundation of skills including fine motor coordination, visual motor skills, & hand dexterity. Occupational Therapists frequently work with children who experience handwriting difficulties.

Handwriting is a valuable, and often difficult tool to teach. Many children have handwriting difficulties due to difficulties in other areas, such as right/left discrimination and fine motor coordination difficulties. In addition, proper pencil grasp is crucial for developing good handwriting.

The following activities can help your child develop their handwriting skills

Preschool

1. Boardwork tasks are good for increasing the strength in the

"writing" arm and hand. It is also simple to see the students pencil grip on the chalkboard as they write.

2. Coloring is a precursor to handwriting. By encouraging the proper crayon grasp and paper slant during coloring, students will acquire some skills necessary for handwriting.
3. Letter & number formation can be reinforced by creating them out of clay, tin foil or toothpicks.

Kindergarten through Grade 2

1. Boardwork tasks are good for increasing strength in the "writing" arm and hand. It is also simple to see the students' grip on the chalk as they write.
2. Mystery Writing: Ask one student to come to the front of the room where all other students can see. Ask the student to draw a letter/number in the air. The class must guess the letter/number the student drew.
3. Touch Writing: Have students draw numbers or letters on the back or palm of another student. The second student must guess which number was drawn on him or her.
4. Messy papers: Many students hand in papers that are messy due to frequent erasures. To remedy this problem, teachers can ask students not to erase mistakes, but rather draw a single line through the error. With this method, teachers can

also see where the students' errors lie, and assist students in overcoming these mistakes

5. Practice writing letters & numbers in or on different textures such as salt, rice, paint and sandpaper to reinforce correct letter & number formation.
6. Place foil over the top of a stencil of letters, numbers, shapes and gently rub index finger over foil to reveal the stencil.

Grade 3 through 5

1. Boardwork tasks are good for increasing strength in the "writing" arm and hand. It is also simple to see the students' grip on the chalk as they write.
2. Letter Chain: Once students have learned a series or all of the alphabet in cursive ask them to write the letters as if they were one word on the chalkboard. This will also enable the teacher to see if the student uses a static (immature - solely wrist movement during writing) or a dynamic (mature - mainly finger movement controlling the writing utensil) type of grasp. The teacher can encourage a dynamic grasp by asking students to hold their dominant wrist with the opposite hand while writing on the chalkboard. The students will have to occasionally release the wrist to move down the chalkboard.

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