

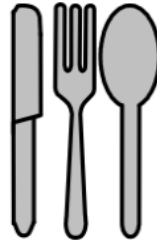
Handwriting skills



Balls



Bubbles



Cutlery



Puzzles



Playdough

Handwriting is an important skill for school aged children, as it is one of the keyways that they are expected to express their thoughts, ideas and knowledge. Research has shown that children who can write well perform at a higher academic level.

The foundations of good handwriting

Each of the following is key to helping children develop the foundation skills needed for learning to write.

Body awareness

Body awareness is an appreciation of our body position in space. Just as our eyes and ears send information about what we see and hear to the brain, our muscles and joints sense the position of our body and send these messages to the brain. This information enables you to know exactly where your body parts are and how to plan your movements.

Upper body strength

Upper body strength and stability is needed to enable a child to maintain an upright posture for handwriting.

Shoulder stability

Good upper body stability is really important. It means that all the muscles around the shoulders are working well together so that the child can control the fine movements needed for making letters, apply the right level of pressure and move from left to right across the page with ease.

Hand/eye co-ordination

This is the movements of the hand that are directed by the eyes.

Hand skills

Hand skills refer to the hand strength and dexterity in our hands; both depend on how we use the small muscles in our hands. However, we also need muscles in our arms and shoulders to provide strength and stability to coordinate movements to do things such as holding a pencil, using scissors, managing buttons, handling coins and using cutlery.

Pre-writing skills

Children use their hands to explore and learn about the environment and themselves. Developing good hand skills will prepare the child to take the next steps to mark making and writing.

Before letter formation can begin, children need to be able to draw pre-writing shapes. Initially, these will be imitated and then the child will learn how to copy prior to being able to reproduce them from memory. The child can then develop the ability to join these shapes together to write letters, i.e. vertical lines and a circle for writing letters 'b', 'd', 'p'.

Pre-writing activities – no pencils required!

- Make lines, shapes letters by: finger painting (in sand, paint, squirty cream or shaving foam); painting with water outdoors; drawing on walls/pavement with chalk.
- Play shape and letter matching or recognition games.
- Play with puzzles, magnetic letters.
- Use dough and pastry to make shapes and letters.
- Draw tracks/shapes on a wall with chalk and encourage the child to run a car along them.
- Walk on straight, curved, diagonal lines e.g. on a taped or string line. So the same with shapes.
- Encourage the child to draw over the top of previously drawn lines, then draw lines/shapes that you have drawn, then finally ask them to copy lines/shapes that have been drawn without the child seeing the drawing being done.
- Relate shapes to real life objects e.g. the wheels on the car are a circle.
- Draw around everyday objects e.g. a round yoghurt pot; a square box.
- Dot-to-dot pictures.
- Encourage an awareness of where shapes begin and end by getting the child to feel around objects (e.g. an orange is round; a Lego brick is square); encourage colouring in shapes/pictures staying inside the lines.