

Pencil Grip

What is it? Pencil grip is the way in which someone holds and manipulates a pencil. There is no one “correct grip”, however, there are some things that make some pencil grips more efficient than others.

- A grip should feel relaxed and comfortable - something that can be maintained over a long period.
- A grip should be able to control the pencil in precise, controlled movements.
- A grip should be dynamic – with the movements coming from the ‘busy’ fingers (thumb, index & middle), whilst the ‘sleepy’ fingers (ring & little) stabilise the hand on the page. The rest of the hand and arm should stay relatively still, moving along the page as required.

Why is it important? The pencil grip itself is not important, what is important is that a child has a comfortable grip so that they can maintain it over time and that the grip means that they have efficient control over the pencil.

Stages of Motor Learning

Handwriting is a motor skill, therefore it is important to think about the stages of motor learning that children experience. Initially, children need to go through these stages with the *pencil control concepts*, they then need to start at stage one again to apply it to *letter formation* and then again into *handwriting*.

Stage 1: Thinking about it (cognitive stage)

- Children gain understanding and knowledge about different aspects of the skills.
- Activities that can help at this stage are ones that include thinking (asking questions and reflecting), looking (attending to different aspects) and doing (experiencing the movement).
- Feedback is very important. This can be either internal or external, from another child or an adult.

Stage 2: Practising it (associative stage)

- Children rely on their knowledge and previous experiences to refine their skills.
- Repetition **is not the same** thing as practice. Repetition can lead to mistakes that can become embedded and difficult to correct. Practice involves thinking and making changes.
- This stage of learning may take a long time. For handwriting, it is expected that this will take several years.

Stage 3: Doing it automatically (autonomous stage)

- Once children have reached this stage, they are able to focus on **what** they are writing, rather than on **how** they are writing.

Thinking

Looking

Doing

With a Pencil

Children **first** have the opportunity to learn and experience their pencil control skills through Thinking-Looking-Doing activities.

Children **then** have the opportunity to practice and consolidate these skills with a pencil.

How you can support this?

Aerobics – for pencils:

- ❖ Get the children to perform different movements with the pencil, such as:
 - Flip the pencil 360 degrees.
 - Climb the pole: with a tripod grip near the tip of the pencil, climb the fingers up to the top of the pencil and then back down again.
 - Pencil push-ups: with the back of the hand on the table, children hold the pencil with a tripod grasp and lift it up and down.

Broken Crayon Pictures:

Children are able to access crayons which have been snapped in half, the pointed side intact, at the writing table.

- ❖ Children can use the crayons to make marks on different types of paper.

Cotton-bud Dot to Dot:

- ❖ With a dot to dot picture, children to use a cotton-bud and paint to join the dots with small painted dots using the cotton-bud.
- ❖ Children to be encouraged to try different grips when holding the cotton-bud.
- ❖ Ask the children:
 - “How does that grip feel?”
 - “How easy is it to move the cotton bud about?”
 - “Can you do little movements?”

Cutting Shapes & Patterns:

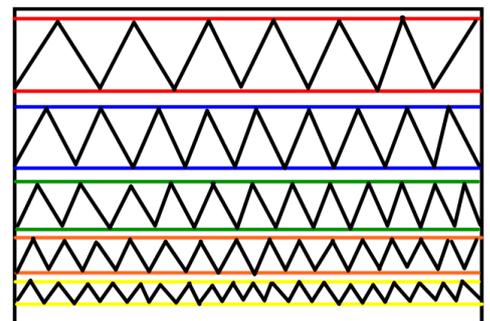
- ❖ Children to do cutting activities holding the paper with their ‘helping hand’ and cutting with their ‘doing hand’.
- ❖ Children to use their ‘busy fingers’ to operate the scissors.
- ❖ Encourage “thumb to the sky”.



Paint Patterns:

On a vertical surface, e.g. wallpaper on the wall, the adult should draw pairs of horizontal lines; each pair of lines with a different colour. The distance between the two lines should narrow as you move down. Children should be provided with different sized paintbrushes.

- ❖ Children to select and use a paintbrush to make continuous zig-zag patterns between the two lines. With each pair of lines, children should evaluate which paintbrush will allow them to continue the pattern most fluidly between the lines.



This could also be done on a horizontal surface on a smaller scale.

Patterns:

- ❖ Children to make different patterns and shapes in a filled tray using think sticks, cotton buds, etc.
- ❖ Children to try making these smaller and smaller.
- ❖ Children to be encouraged to try different grips and compare them.
- ❖ Ask the children:
 - “How does that grip feel?”
 - “How easy is it to move the ... about?”
 - “Can you do little movements?”



This can also be replicated with a pencil.