

## Prewriting skills

Before your child can learn to write, they need to be able to do certain things:

- To want to learn to write or draw. Your child is likely to become more interested as their awareness of basic colours, shapes, letter names and drawing develops
- To have the body balance and strength to sit at a desk or table
- Be able to move a pencil to different places on the paper. This needs good shoulder and arm control, and for your child to always use the same hand to hold the pencil
- Be able to guide a pencil using small movements. This needs your child to coordinate their eye and hand movements
- To be able to concentrate for long enough to write.



## Motivation

While some children love prewriting activities, other children are not so interested. If your child is not keen, keep prewriting activities short and fun. Encourage their efforts.

Be patient—it is better for your child to make slow progress than feel frustrated. Try some of the activities in this sheet rather than focussing on trying to teach them to write letters.

## Sitting at a small table

Your child will find it easier to do prewriting activities if they are well supported and balanced in the chair. It will help if they have a child-sized table and chair.

Check that your child has their:

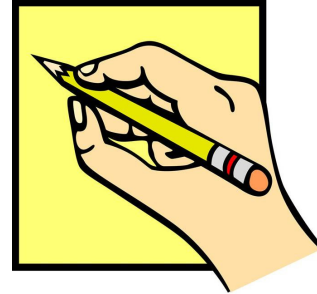
- Feet flat on the floor or supported on a foot rest
- Bottom well back on the seat, and their back supported
- Seat pushed up close to the table
- Elbows resting on the table to offer more stability to their arms
- Writing hand resting on the table surface, in contact with the paper.
- Other hand holding the paper, with their whole forearm and hand resting on the table.

## Pencil grip

Encourage your child to use a three point (tripod) pencil grip for writing and drawing as it gives better control of the pencil. The pencil should be held lightly in the triangle formed by their thumb and the first two fingers.

Your child might benefit from reminders to use a tripod grip. Try:

- Putting texta dots on their thumb and two finger tips to show them where to hold the pencil
- Using triangular-shaped pencils/crayons
- Using pencil grips, preferably the large, triangular ones
- Placing small, coloured stickers on the pencil to remind them where to put their fingers.



These items are available at most office suppliers or newsagents.

## Prewriting Patterns

Children begin with random scribbly marks. Later they begin to scribble in one direction, and after this are ready to practice the patterns involved in letter formation. Usually they learn these patterns in the following order:

1. Horizontal, vertical and circular lines
2. Crosses formed from intersecting lines
3. Diagonal lines
4. Angles formed by joining two or more lines
5. Simple drawing.

## Using the senses

It may help your child to learn writing skills if they use several senses together.

### Vision—help your child to use their eyes by:

- Writing some large letters or shapes for them to trace over
- Using different colours and different drawing tools eg pencil, chalk, texta, paint, water paint, wriggle pen, drawing tools like *Magna Doodle*
- Getting them to trace over pictures of things they are interested in
- Using stars, dots arrows to show where to start and the direction they need to move the pencil
- Making letters or shapes with pipe cleaners, building blocks, or playdough.

### Hearing—help your child use their hearing by:

- Talking about how to make a letter—where to start and the direction (up, down, around, across)
- Encouraging them to talk through the process. They can say the steps out loud to you (eg “up, down”) and to themselves when alone.

### **Movement—help your child use their sense of movement by:**

- Using chalk, tape or rope to make a large shape/pattern/letter on the ground
- Getting them to move around the pattern they have made on the ground—have fun hopping or jumping around the pattern
- Making a “wand” by attaching streamers to a cardboard tube or ruler, and waving the wand in the air to “draw” lines, shapes or letters.

### **Touch—help your child use their sense of touch by:**

- Tracing letters/patterns with their finger before drawing them
- Using a textured stencil made from sandpaper, or corrugated cardboard for your child to trace
- Using their fingers to draw in different textures like wet sand, hand cream, shaving cream or powder
- Identifying a shape by feeling it with their eyes closed
- Having someone draw a shape or letter on your child’s back for them to identify.

### **Activities your child might enjoy:**

- **Activity books**—colouring in, dot-to-dot books, mazes and puzzles. These are cheaply available through newsagents or toy shops. Check that they suit your child’s level of understanding
- **Simple craft activities**—threading, gluing, cutting, sticking
- **Activities requiring both hands to work together**—plastic building blocks, building and construction activities
- **Copying shapes, simple drawing or painting.**

### **Starting to write letters**

Once your child is ready to start writing letters, it will help to:

- Start with large movements, using big sheets of paper, before trying small movements
- Start with vertical surfaces, such as a blackboard or whiteboard, before trying horizontal surfaces such as a table
- Always move from left to right, and top to bottom to help your child learn the patterns for reading and writing
- Break the task of writing a letter into small stages
  - Step 1 Trace the letter
  - Step 2 Copy the letter
  - Step 3 Look at the letter, cover it over and write it
  - Step 4 Write the letter from memory.

## For further information

More information about Prewriting Skills and Activity Ideas is available from the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne [online] Accessed 15 October 2013 at:  
[http://www.rch.org.au/ot/infosheet/index.cfm?doc\\_id=10029](http://www.rch.org.au/ot/infosheet/index.cfm?doc_id=10029)

Also check the Disability Services resource:

- *Hand Skills: using two hands together*

