

Definition

Pencil grip is only one component of handwriting. Most children naturally develop a pencil grip that is comfortable for them. In any kinder or school class a variety of pencil grips will be seen. Acceptable pencil grips include those shown in Figure 1.

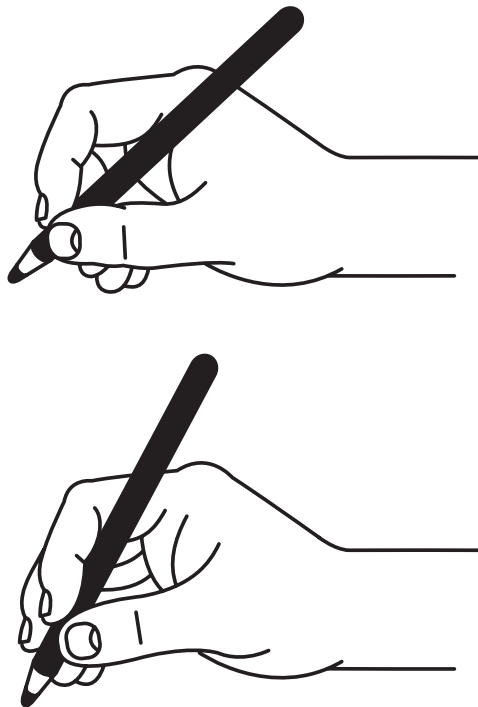


Figure 1: Acceptable pencil grips.

A pencil grip is only a problem if a child has difficulty writing legibly, at a reasonable speed, or complains of a sore or tired hand when writing.

If an awkward grip pattern becomes a habit it is more difficult to change later. Pencil grips are easier to change in kinder and the early school years.

Encourage your child to hold her pencil in a way that allows her hand and fingers to move freely and easily when writing or drawing. General guidelines for a good pencil grip, as shown in figure 2, include:

- ▶ the pencil is held in a stable position between the thumb, index and middle fingers
- ▶ the ring and little fingers are bent and rest comfortably on the table
- ▶ the index finger and thumb form an open space
- ▶ the wrist is bent back slightly, and the forearm is resting on the table
- ▶ the pencil is held about 1–2 cm from the tip.

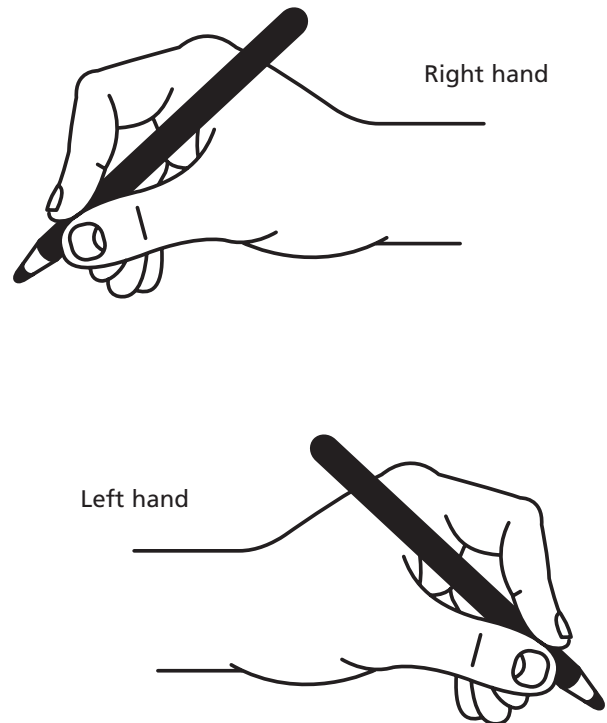


Figure 2: A good pencil grip.

Helpful strategies

- ▶ Show your child the correct finger and thumb positioning for holding the pencil and help him place his fingers and thumb in these positions.
- ▶ Try a commercially available pencil grip. Your child, however, will need to learn how to correctly and consistently hold the grip. Pencil grips are available from your occupational therapist.
- ▶ Encourage your child to practice for a few minutes each day until your child automatically and consistently uses a suitable pencil grip.
- ▶ Give feedback to your child to help him become aware of his finger and thumb positions and praise him whenever he demonstrates a suitable pencil grip.
- ▶ Encourage your child to do lots of fun and interesting drawing and writing activities using different types of textas, coloured pencils, crayons and chalks so he is motivated to practice.

Sitting and paper position

General guidelines for a good sitting position, as shown in figure 3, include:

- ▶ bottom back on the chair
- ▶ feet flat on the floor
- ▶ forearms rest comfortably on the table
- ▶ table and chair suitable for your child's size.

The paper position should be sloped at the same angle as the writing arm and steadied with the non-writing hand (Figure 4). This will help your child see what she is writing and make it easier for her writing hand to move across the page.

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



Figure 3: A good sitting position.

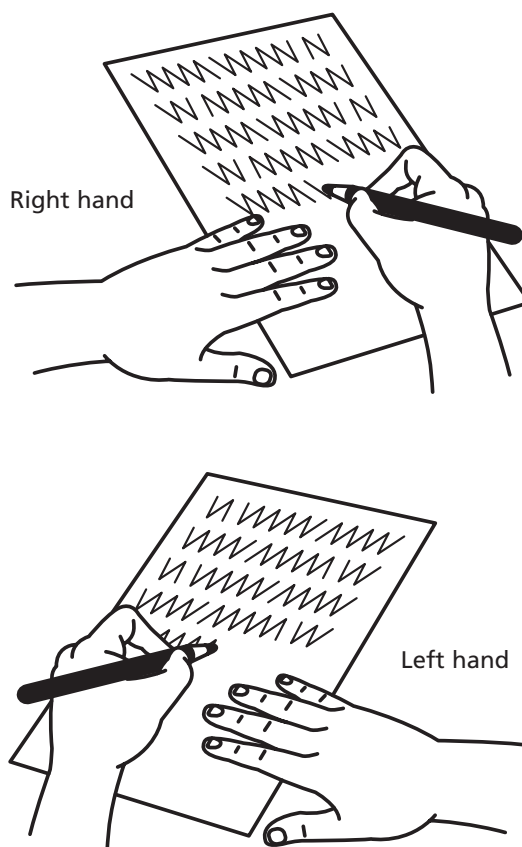
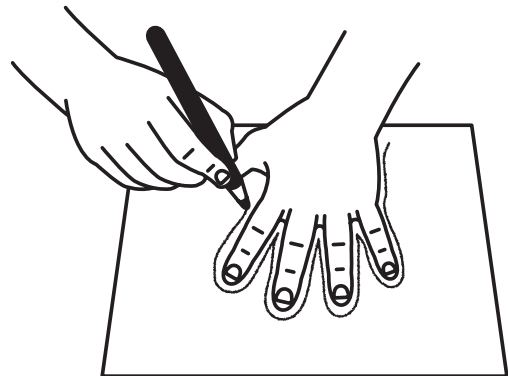
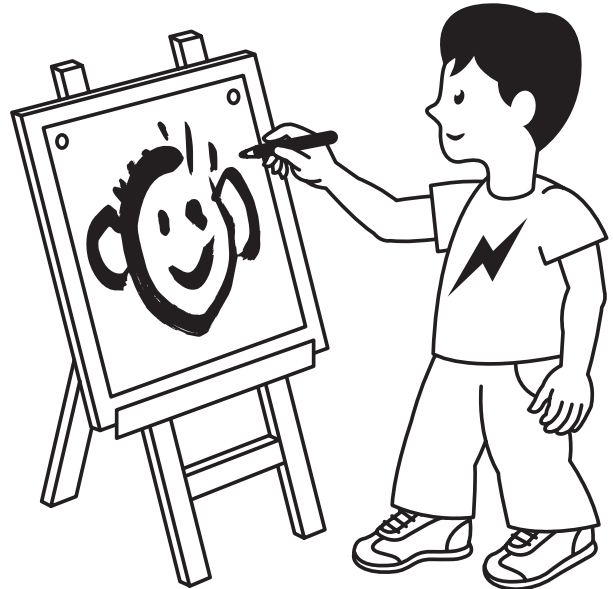


Figure 4: Correct paper position.

Fun drawing and writing activities

- ▶ Provide a range of pencils, textas, crayons and chalks. Use different coloured and sized paper and cardboard.
- ▶ Vary where your child does his activities for example, work at a table, easel, blackboard, whiteboard or draw on concrete with chalks.
- ▶ Make birthday cards or special occasion cards.
- ▶ Use colouring and activity books such as dot to dot or mazes.
- ▶ Copy and draw shapes and letters.
- ▶ Draw or write on a Magnadoodle or Megasketcher.
- ▶ Draw around hands and feet.
- ▶ Stencils or tracing.
- ▶ Duo drawing – draw some dots or squiggles and your child joins them to make a picture, or draw the outline of a person and he draws the eyes and mouth.
- ▶ Play O and X's.
- ▶ Write a shopping list.
- ▶ Make a list of your favourite football teams or favourite movies.
- ▶ Write friends' names and addresses in a book.
- ▶ Keep a diary.

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



Activities that develop and strengthen thumb and finger muscles

Encourage your child to do these activities with her preferred hand and use her thumb and index finger (and middle finger if required).

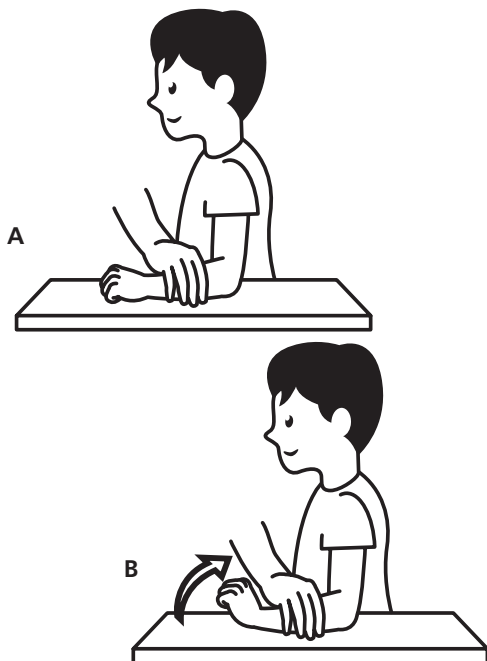
- ▶ Play finger games such as incy wincy spider.
- ▶ Do up buttons on pyjamas and clothes.
- ▶ Use tweezers to pick up small beads or toys and put them into a container.
- ▶ Remove coins from a purse one at a time.
- ▶ Roll, squeeze, push and poke playdough, clay or therapy putty. Make a birds nest by pinching the playdough between the thumb and fingers, then make eggs for the nest by rolling the playdough into balls. Encourage your child to hold small playdough balls between her thumb and index finger and squash the playdough until her fingers meet. (Pretend the playdough is a bug or egg.) Repeat with the thumb and middle finger, and then with the thumb, index and middle fingers all together.
- ▶ Encourage your child to hold an object (a coin or marble) against the palm of her hand with her ring and little fingers whilst doing some of the above activities.
- ▶ Tear up coloured paper for pasting or collage activities.
- ▶ Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards.
- ▶ Building with duplo and lego.
- ▶ Squeeze clothes pegs to remove them from the rim of a peg basket (or ice-cream container) or squeeze pegs positioned on a clothes horse to remove dolls clothes or dress ups.
- ▶ Use stickers or sticky tape to stick things down.
- ▶ Play board games such as trouble, snakes and ladders or pick up sticks.
- ▶ Water plants with a spray bottle.
- ▶ Squirt a water pistol at a target.



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

Activities that strengthen the wrist

- ▶ Encourage your child to draw or write, as much as possible, on a vertical surface as this can help your child to achieve a good wrist position. For example, use an easel, blackboard, or tape some paper to a wall.
- ▶ Encourage your child to do other activities vertically. For example, placing stickers on a window or a piece of paper taped to the wall, playing Connect 4 or threading activities.
- ▶ Rolling and kneading playdough.
- ▶ Wrist lifts – place your child's arm on the table and hold his forearm. Encourage him to make a fist and bend his wrist back as far as possible for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 to 10 times.



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