

### **Gross motor skills**

Upper body muscle strength are important as they are used in most early mark making. Before a child is ready to write they will need to develop their gross motor skills to strengthen the muscles in the shoulder, arm and elbow. Children need time to explore making marks in larger form such as making giant circles and lines with their arms and it is really important to give them the opportunity to develop and strengthen the muscles in this way. They are often started at preschool settings, making marks in sand, water and using tools such as rollers and large brushes. Later, when the child is ready, they will form smaller marks and then go on to write letters.

### **Ideas to support gross motor skills**

- Paint rollers and tray with water (add soap/colouring for variation)
- Large paint brushes
- Mops/brushes – sweeping leaves, brushing water,
- Digging in sand, soil with larger tools
- Making tracks with a bike in foamy water/mud
- Long pieces of paper, chubby paint sticks/chalks
- Large boards/surfaces to chalk, paint, mark make on
- Opportunities to balance, climb and develop awareness of own body & build upper body strength.
- Activities/games that encourage the body to cross the mid line e.g. touching opposite toes, crossing elbows to knees etc.
- Ribbon/scarf/stick spinning/twirling
- Throwing and catching ball/bean bags

### **Fine motor skills**

Every child is different; they physically grow and develop at different rates. It is a very important part of a child's development to build and strengthen their fine motor skills as this supports writing later on.

There are lots of activities that can be easily created at home to help support fine motor strength.

The muscles in a child's hand that help support holding a pencil and writing typically strengthen and develop from aged 4 until 7; meaning that for some children in EYFS holding a pencil and trying to write more than a few words can be very challenging and can often make them feel disheartened.

These muscles grow and develop with time, but there are also so many fine motor skills activities out there that can support this development.

The internet is your friend for this as it has so many ideas on there – here are just a few ideas below.



*Figure 1- This is an X-ray of a preschool child's hand next to a seven year olds. This demonstrates how holding a pencil to a 4 year old can be challenging and providing larger mark making resources are important.*

## Fine motor activities

### Playdough

Playdough is such a useful malleable resource. Either buy some from the shop or the time to make the dough together as it can also provide many learning opportunities to weigh and measure.

### Best No Cook Playdough recipe

2 cups plain flour  
2 tbsp. vegetable oil (baby oil and coconut oil also work)  
½ cup salt  
1 to 1.5 cups boiling water  
*Few drops food colouring*  
*Few drops glycerine (adds stretch and shine)*

- Mix the flour, salt, cream of tartar and oil in a large bowl
- Add food colouring to the boiling water.
- Add to dry ingredients
- Stir continuously until it becomes a sticky, combined dough
- Add the glycerine (optional)
- Allow it to cool down then take it out of the bowl and knead it vigorously for couple of minutes until all of the stickiness has gone.



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**\* This is the most important part of the process, so keep at it until it's the perfect consistency!\***

*If it remains a little sticky then add a touch more flour until just right.*

Start by singing the Tommy thumb song to help support making brain/body links.

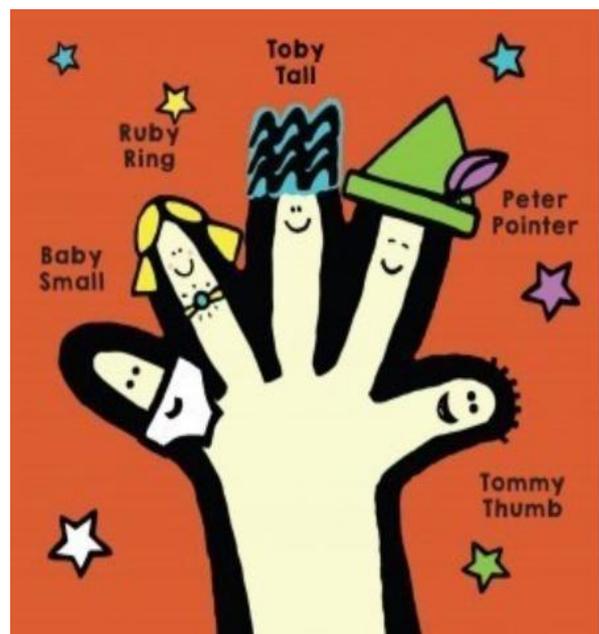
Tommy thumb, tommy thumb where are you?  
Here I am, here I am and how do you do?

Peter pointer, peter pointer where are you?  
Here I am, here I am and how do you do?

Toby tall, toby tall where are you?  
Here I am, here I am and how do you do?

Ruby ring, ruby ring where are you?  
Here I am, here I am and how do you do?

Baby small, baby small where are you?  
Here I am, here I am and how do you do?



You can have a dough disco by simply putting on your favourite songs and selecting a mixture of the following movements – either following a fixed routine or creating your own!

| Roll it        | Squeeze it    | Pat it        | Poke it      | Slap it   | Clap it |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---|---------|
| Finger dancing | pat a pancake | Roll it round | Roll it long | Make 2 little balls and roll/ squeeze in each hand, swap. |         |

There are lots of types of dough recipes you can explore and experiment with – try making cloud dough with conditioner and corn flour, make some salt dough and make decorations, make some bread dough and make yummy rolls or buy some air dough/ clay to explore with as well.



### **Threading and Weaving**

There are so many traditional threading and weaving activity packs to buy which include laces and simple threading cards. You can also easily make these yourself with card and a hole punch.

Threading activities can also include threading beads on to a string or shoe lace, or threading beads onto pipe cleaners.



Threading is hugely beneficial in building fine motor skills, although some children do not find traditional threading activities particularly exciting. In this instances some other ideas could be;

- Threading material through construction netting or a trellis
- Making a web in a large tray using tape to rescue insects from the spiders web
- Use a colander and pipe cleaners and beads to thread



### **Cutting**

Offer as many opportunities as possible to practise and develop cutting skills. You can use both normal and craft scissors (that cut different patterns) to offer variety.

- Give children old magazines or papers to cut out
- Use paper and pens to draw puppets and then cut them out.
- Cutting snowflakes, paper dolls and repeating patterns into paper.



## Other ideas to support fine motor skills

- Pompoms/beads and tweezers into a pot
- Pegs and a washing line – pegging numbers, clothes, pictures onto a washing line
- Threading buttons/beads onto string
- Peg/pin boards
- Elastic bands and loom boards
- Pipe cleaner pieces in a jar and a magnet on the outside
- Hair gel/jelly in a bag to squish
- Hammering golf tee's in a melon/pumpkin
- Using squeezers, tweezers and grippy tools



## Early Writing

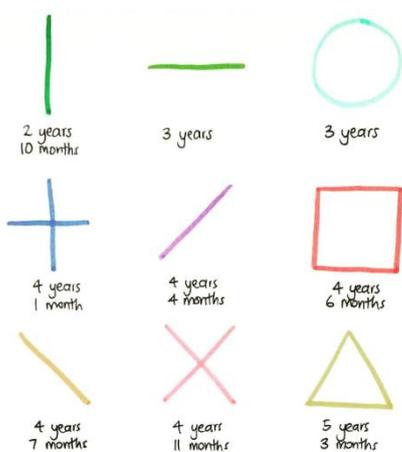
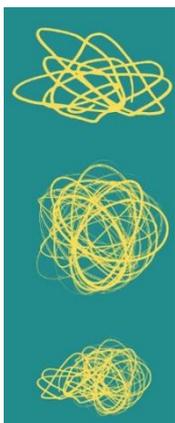


Figure 2- Before a child is able to form letters they need to be able to form these 9 basic shapes.

The picture of 'Prewriting patterns' and ages demonstrates at what age the average child is developmentally ready to make those shapes based on their ability to visually process information and produce a movement in response.

Whilst these are shapes and not letters these simple shapes will come in a child's mark making phase, usually before they are interested in copying or tracing any letters. (This is typically preschool aged children but again, all children are different and they may be just be starting to explore this in their first year at school).

It is important to support early writing by making large, motor movements and pre writing patterns. Making marks and 'scribbling' are also very important parts of early writing. Scribbling is an important step in brain development, typically coming around 2 years old onwards.



Disordered scribbles – very young children explore making marks and will explore in a multi-sensory approach. They don't realise they are in charge of the marks they are making.

Controlled scribbles - children begin to realise they are responsible for the marks they are making, their brain is making the connections between thought and action.

Named scribbles – children add meaning to their scribbles and marks – they may ascribe many meanings to the same scribble as they also explore language and play. 'This is my mummy, it's a car and the flower'.

## **Wriggle and squiggle**

To be able to have the skills to write you need to be neurologically ready; this means that you have secure brain/ body connections and have developed the muscles in your hand, have good fine motor strength, hand eye co-ordination and balance.

The most important part of squiggle wiggle is to enjoy it and have fun with it!

It is best practise to focus on one shape and letter family at a time.

*Warm up songs – Macarena, 5,6,7,8, Saturday night, hokey pokey, cha cha slide*

## **Circles and curly caterpillar letters**

Songs – proud Mary, circle of life, the twist, right round (flo rida), round round (sugababes)

Movements – large/small arm circles, hip circles, wrist rotations, neck circles, circle motions in the air, make a giant circle or circles in a pair

Language to use – round, roll, loop, round and round

Activities – ribbon circles, chalking circles, music and pens, spin circles, jumping in a circle.

Early marks- spirals in and out

Letter formation – a, d, g, q, c, o, s, f, e

## **In and out spirals,**

Songs – walking on sunshine, Dizzy (vic reeves), the twist, twist and shout,

Language to use – in and out, spiral, loop,

Movements – spirals out then in, spin in one direction then the other,

Activities – Material dancing, chalking spirals, music and pens

## **Arches and 1 arm robot letters**

Songs – daydream believer, mama do the hump, over the rainbow (Israel Kamakawiwo'ole)

Language to use – round, up, down, over the hump,

Movements – create arches/rainbow shape with 1 hand then two, go l-r then r-l, out then in, in then out, wiper arms

Activities – ribbon circles, chalking humps, music and pens, material to make rainbow dance

Early marks – humps/arches

Letter formation – r, b, n, h, m, k, p

## **Lines and long ladder letters, monster letters**

Songs – 2WEI – survivor – strong poses and arms / plank

Shout (lulu), Aga do, Move your feet (junior senior), dance monkey, galvanise (chemical bros), we will rock you

Movements – strong straight poses with body (warrior, touch opposite toes), make the plank, lie down flat, pencil jumps, make v shape with arms, scissor arms, and draw air boxes/rectangles

Jump up like a pencil saying up up, shake arms down saying down, arms up, arms down, cross horizontal midline, push arms to side/side , forwards

Language to use – down, up, across

Activities – pencil jumps and log rolls, feathers for lines on body parts, chalking/ drawing lines, squares/rectangles

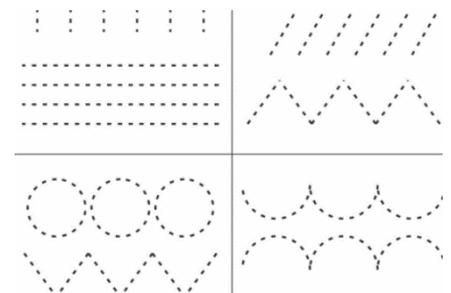
Early mark making – lines, boxes

Letter formation – l, i, t, j, y, u

### **Early writing activities**

Simple prewriting patterns include- making circles, drawing lines, zig zags, swirls, up down lines, loop the loop patterns.

- Making marks/patterns with rollers and water
- Writing with sticks in mud, wet sand
- Making gloop (cornflour and water) and writing in it
- Writing prewriting patterns or letters in sand/salt/glitter trays
- Hair gel/jelly in zip lock bag
- Painting with earbuds
- Drawing pictures and adding simple labels if able, orally explaining what the drawing is
- Making simple cards for friends and families



### **Writing Phonetically**

When starting to support your child with beginning to write words, let them hear what it sounds like to break words up into their individual sounds. Show them what happens when you change a sound. For example, say the sounds in pig separately (p-i-g), then say the word. They need to repeat this verbally to support them in developing the skill to listen to themselves making those sounds as often children focus in on listening to our voice rather than their own. This is a great example of how reading supports writing as practising to segment and blend their sounds to read words help develop the skill to segment a word to write it out. A great way to do this at home is to help your child practice breaking words apart and blending them together using their phonic cards we sent home with you or any letter toys you have at home.

## **Learning to spell**

When first learning to spell, allow children to spell words exactly as they hear them. Teach them to say each sound in a word and write down the letter or letters that represent each sound, until they have written the word. For example, they might spell lemon as l-e-m-n or giraffe as j-r-a-ff

You can practice this several times with different words. It is best to start with what we call CV (constant-vowel) then once secure moving on to CVC (constant-vowel-constant) and CVCC/CCVC words. Base the words you choose on the sounds your child is confident with for example if they are only recalling s,a,t,p,i,n only create words with them that use these sounds so they feel success and can build up their confidence. Once this confidence has been built up and they want to write you can challenge them further to explore longer words and writing these phonetically as above.

## **How does my child move on from phonetic spelling to spelling correctly?**

As your child works through the six phases of phonics they will learn and develop knowledge of set spelling rules that will help them to begin spelling more accurately with the knowledge they have learnt. This will be developed within Key Stage 1 (Year 1&2). As your child becomes secure in reading and writing with all of the sounds in Phase 2, 3 & 5 you will see them accurately spelling more and more words. Then within Phase 6 and moving into their literacy lessons they will learn about key spelling rules which will develop this further.

## **Letter formation**

With letter formation it is a fine balance; we obviously want to encourage children to write and mark make as much as possible, but it is important to try and form letters correctly as early as possible so that children don't learn bad habits that can make writing more challenging.

There are lots of fun ways to practise formation in a standalone way – such as using rollers and water, sticks in mud, gloop, sand/salt/glitter trays, shaving foam...there are lots more ideas on the internet so use them and follow your child's interests...if they love Spiderman create a web using tape and pincer out objects to practice fine motor skills and use a white chalk to form spidey letters!

We often group letters into families when teaching formation; curly caterpillar, long ladder, one arm robot and zig zag monster letters.

If your child is at the stage of writing and there are letters they are consistently forming incorrectly choose a method to practice this letter and, when they are writing, just kindly point out the error and say 'next time remember that it looks like this...' modelling the correct way of forming the letter.

