

Developing Small Motor Skills

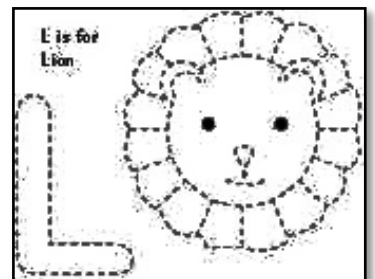
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Working with Young Children:

Activities cover a number of basic clusters:

- **Looking After Myself** - bathing and drying; washing hands; buttoning clothes; lacing and tying shoes; zipping up jumpers; carrying objects of varying size, shape and weight; opening and closing; locking and unlocking; putting objects back in order; opening and closing bottles, boxes and jars; washing and drying dishes; dealing with utensils; helping with house jobs; brushing hair; brushing teeth; and helping with food preparation and cooking.
- **Pre-Writing** - Dot-to-dot drawings of pictures, objects, shapes, numbers, letters; paper tile and mosaic work; paper folding activities; coloring in using a thick wax crayon, a thick colouring pencil down to a fine pencil – watch the child's grip on the writing tool; and doing repetitious strokes (with an increasingly smaller writing tool) – up to down, right to left, left to right, curved on the top, curved on the bottom, tall soldiers (straight up and down), soldiers in the wind (leaning over), 'hop aways' (jump up and curve away like you find in letter 'r' or 'n', 'p', 'b' and others).
- **Finger Tracing** - It is often helpful for the child to trace the pattern with his/her finger before he tries it with a pencil; and practising a pattern in sand, 'Goop', finger paint, water gives the child a sense of kinesthetic (movement) knowledge.
- **Tracing and Coloring** - Use a thick line if needed and trace along it first with the finger and then on top of it with crayons and pencils of varying size and complexity. Don't forget to try drawing beside, but not touching, the line; and trace around a variety of shapes and then colour the shapes again increasing the size and complexity gradually with a variety of writing / colouring implements.
- **Cutting** - Using a thick line to guide cutting – cut along curved lines; along lines which change to a variety of angles; a fringe for a character or eyelashes for a face; cut curved corners on a piece of art; make curved shapes; cut pictures or letters from magazines or newspapers; cut out people and objects; and cut a variety of textures from fabrics to sandpaper to paper, card and play dough or clay.
- **Collage** - use a variety of textures, sizes, textiles, objects (eg. Pasta, beads, beans and lentils, blocks, felt, paper, string, yarn, cereal, cotton) to position on outlines and fill in



with like objects.

- **Ready to Write** - Using their 'Magic Chalk' write in the air and in front of their eyes (arm outstretched); trace over letters on textured surfaces; and feel 3-dimensional letters with eyes closed to identify the letter.

When a writing tool is introduced, teach letters in cluster such that common movement types are taught together (moving simple to complex).



Materials you'll need:

- ☞ Thick wax crayons easy for little hands to grip properly;
- ☞ Thick in size, soft lead (2B) pencils;
- ☞ Unlined paper – scrap/recycled paper or use a scrap book for an on-going record;
- ☞ Lined paper – paper lined with alternating solid blue and dotted blue lines;
- ☞ 'Goop' – goop is made by adding water to cornflour to make a damp paste which behaves like thick glue – you can write in it before it flows together again;
- ☞ A quantity of play dough (recipe below) – this may be stored in the fridge for months;
- ☞ a shallow tray of water for writing in;
- ☞ a variety of coloured papers and magazines;
- ☞ A tray of damp sand for writing in using an index finger;
- ☞ A torch for writing on the walls with light in the dark;
- ☞ Small blackboard – line with alternate solid blue and dotted blue lines (dip the chalk in water before ruling the lines and they won't rub out) and both thick chalk and regular chalk; and
- ☞ Small whiteboard (or laminated cardboard works as well as you can rule the blue solid and dotted lines first) and thick whiteboard markers.

Cooked Play Dough Recipe

Ingredients:

½ cup salt	1 cup water
1 cup plain flour	1 tbsp veg. oil
2 tbsp cream of tartar	a couple of drops food colouring

Method:

In a middle sized saucepan mix ingredients very well – stir over heat until the mix is pliable. Cool and store in a snap lock bag with the air squeezed out.

Un-Cooked Play Dough Recipe

(...has NEVER failed in 30 years)

Ingredients:

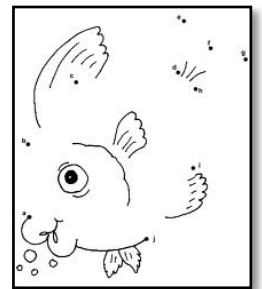
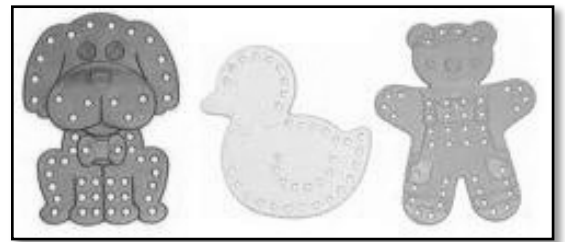
1 cup salt	1 tbsp veg. oil
2 cups plain flour	a couple of drops food colouring
½ - 1 cup water	

Method:

Combine plain flour with the salt and mix well. Add the water and food colouring a drop at a time and mix well. Stir until it starts to pull away from the sides and make a ball – add a little more flour if too wet. Knead it well and store in the fridge in a snap lock bag with air squeezed out. Lasts for 8 weeks or so.

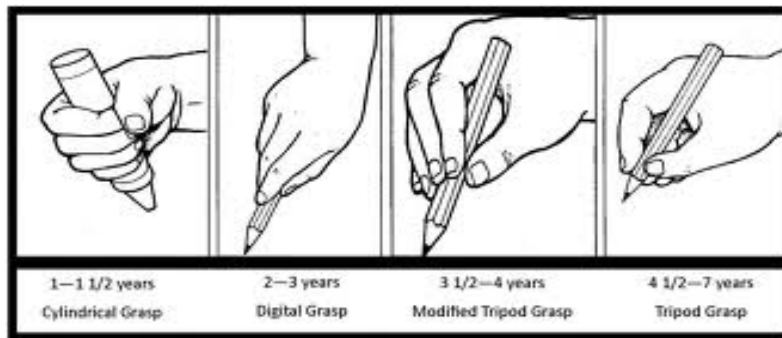
Activities:

- Threading shoe laces through holes on a heavy cardboard or plywood shapes;
- Threading shoe laces into the holes on track shoes;
- Closing shoes with hook and loop closure making sure the sides match each other properly;
- Zipping open and closing jumpers where you have to join the sides of the zip before raising it;
- Threading a belt through the belt loops and buckling and unbuckling the buckle;
- Doing up and undoing buttons;
- Join up snap fasteners (press studs);
- Using scissors for a range of cutting activities – including long sections of straight cutting; cutting curved lines, cutting zigzags; and cutting up long thin rolled 'snakes' of play dough;
- Tracing over large letters – print out the hollow letters on your computer, one letter per page, fill in the space with glue and top with glitter or sand and trace over the correct way to make the letter;
- Copy letters with Mum or Dad in a sand tray or with 'Goop';
- Make waves like the ocean between the dotted and solid lines;
- Make arches like a bridge between the dotted and solid lines;
- Make zigzag lines between the dotted and solid lines;
- Copy letters on a large piece of ruled paper with one centimeter space between the lines – this may also be done on laminated ruled paper or on a blackboard;
- Do dot-to-dot activities – I suggest buying a book of dot-to dots using the numbers 1-10 or the alphabet (you can sing that with your child to remind them which comes next) and then cut out the pages and laminate them so they can be used over and over;
- Commercial colouring in books and carefully stay inside the lines – cut out the pictures once finished and display them in their room;
- Do jigsaw puzzles so that they have to use hand eye coordination to carefully fit in the missing pieces without disturbing the rest of the puzzle pieces;
- Winding up a toy or alarm clock;
- Writing or drawing on the bath or tiles with soap crayons – these need to be cleaned off quickly or cannot be shifted – believe me on this one;
- Using shapes which stick to tiles or the side of the bath to tell a story – the shapes need to be sequenced carefully;
- Household jobs like folding the laundry – socks, undies, towels and so on – mapping the floor, vacuuming, dusting surfaces, helping to empty and stack the dishwasher, washing up plastics plates, cups and utensils and a morning tea for toy friends;
- Dressing themselves – checking that buttons match up and shoes are on the right feet;
- Play marbles – shoot the marbles into a circle, into a hole in a box or so that another marble is bumped out of the circle;
- Use shapes to trace around – make your own place mat by tracing around the fork,



knife and spoon and the base of a cup or glass – colour and decorate then laminate and use;

- Dress toys and make a bow tie for Teddy or bows for dolls' hair;
- Assemble small tools or put toys together;
- Making craft activities such as collages together;
- Make and bake play dough art works;
- Separating items into piles so that the piles share common characteristics – by colour, shape, size and so on;
- Playing with padlocks and keys – the little travel variety fit little hands well;
- Practise one finger activities – playing one note on the piano five times, playing the next three – tapping out letter patterns on the computer keyboard – tapping each finger tip to the thumb three times to warm up hand muscles for writing;
- Using tweezers to pick up small items like sequins, beads, dried lentils and macaroni and put them where they want them to go for art work;
- Doing coloured paper mosaic together and picking up and placing the little coloured squares;
- Using activities such as peg and peg board art work and little hammer activities (well supervised);
- Screwing and unscrewing screws;
- Learning and using the correct pencil grip, paper position and way to sit when writing;
- Reading together and turning the pages of the books carefully at the top right hand corner;
- Placing knife, fork and spoon for meals – holding these utensils correctly; and
- Folding a serviette to place with utensils for meals.



Things to remember:

Upright working surfaces are good to promote fine motor skills as the writer puts no weight on the writing implement and allows it to move gently across the writing surface.

Examples of these are:

Vertical blackboards; easels for painting; felt boards; white boards; mega-sketchers or other magnetic drawing boards; magnet boards (or fridge); windows and mirrors; laminated cardboard.



The benefits for these include:

- having the writer's wrist positioned to develop good thumb movements;
- they help develop good fine motor muscles; and

- the writer is using the arm and shoulder muscles.

Important Notes:

- Make it fun to learn while you play. Keep that in mind when teaching fine motor skills.
- Try to incorporate activities like dress-up to teach zipping and buttons; card creations to practice writing or tracing skills; cutting and pasting to make a creation other than just a plain piece of paper, etc. Be creative and have fun!
- Sing songs that promote small motor skills – try 'Open Shut Them', 'On my head my hands I place', 'This little boy all ready for bed' and any songs that hand have and finger actions to accompany the lyrics. Poems that encourage finger actions are also very suitable.
- Use tweezers in a speed and accuracy game – you need two bowls with small items like beads or beans. The challenge is to get all the items from one bowl to another using only the tweezers.
- Tearing newspaper into strips and then crumpling them into balls to form small and large patterns when glued onto card.
- Lacing and sewing activities such as stringing beads and hollow pasta.
- Use eye droppers (available from the chemist) to "pick up" water to fill small pots.
- Play with small connecting blocks, toy cars, blocks, action figures, and intricate small toys.
- Rolling small balls out of tissue paper or crepe paper, then gluing the balls onto chart paper to fill in pictures or designs.



For older/experienced writers:

- Warm the hands up first – do some hand stretches by making your fingers like the arms of a sea star and stretching them out as far as you can.
- Make fists of your hands and then open up the hand one finger at a time.
- Do 'spider push ups' – spread your fingers out on a table top, lower your hand until your palm touches the table then arch up the hand again and repeat.
- Rest your finger tips on the table top and race your fingers along the table.
- Imagine you are playing scales on the piano ... or 'Chopsticks' if you'd prefer!
- If you feel your hand beginning to cramp to feel sore and tight, stop and do some exercises to relax it once more.
- Use a soft pencil – 2B is great – so it's easier to pull (right handers) or push (left handers) the pencil across the page.
- If you need to write more formally and permanently, use gel pens which, like pencils, flow easily to the paper. Felt tipped chisel headed calligraphy pens are also great as they keep your hand in position and drive a neater style of writing while being gentle on the hand and wrist.
- Make sure your paper is on an angle so that the up and down motion of writing is all that's required, not twisting the hand to make the writing slope. Left handers too need the paper angled – place paper at 11.00 o'clock with the base of desk being 9-3. Top left corner lower than top right.
- Focus on writing from the wrist as well – don't make your fingers do all the moving, they will tire, cramp up and you'll start to engrave the paper.

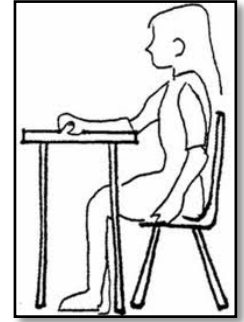
If you are still experiencing difficulty with your usual handwriting try a new style. This is Queensland Beginners' Alphabet

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVvWwXxYyZz

This then translates into cursive (Queensland Modern Cursive) like so ...

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVvWwXxYyZz

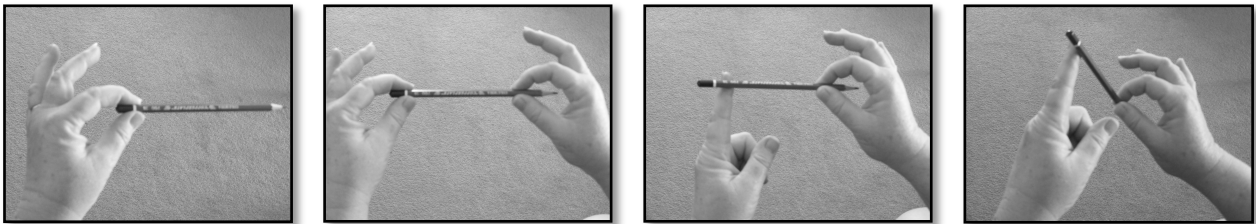
Imagine you're printing in the first font above, the cursive just has a little link to join the letters. While it is very important to learn the correct link as a child – good writing habits are being formed – just find a link which is comfortable for you as and adult.



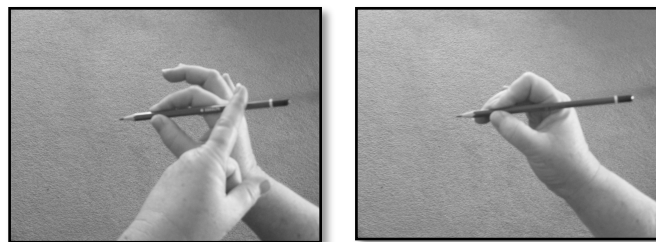
Remember good pencil or pen grip and good body position.

- 1 2 3 4 are my feet flat on the floor?**
- 5 6 7 8 is my back nice and straight?**
- 9 10 11 12 show me how your pencil's held.**

For perfect pencil grip (dynamic tripod) every time, remember this story ...



Take it by the tail ... now behind the head ... put it to bed (take the pencil all the way over with the pointer finger and thumb acting as a pivot point)



rest the pencil ...

tuck in tall man to close the door.

The pictures above show a right-hander's grip as the majority of writers are right-handed. I am left handed and if you, or the person you wish to help is also left-handed, just begin with the right hand holding the tail of the pencil.

Best wishes

Sue-Belinda



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