

Pre-writing skills for Children under 5

(from Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists)



All too often, young children are given writing tools to use before they are ready to use them. Young children from 3-5 use their hands to explore and learn about the environment and themselves. By developing good hand skills and other pre-writing skills you will prepare your child for the next step, which is writing.

Here are some suggestions to help your child develop good pre-writing skills:

Play and draw on vertical surfaces!

Ways to strengthen the shoulder, arm and wrist

- Use tabletop easels or bookstands so your child can do the activity while seated. Flannel boards, chalkboards, sticker games, and letter and number magnets on the refrigerator can be used to strengthen the upper body while standing.
- Try tummy-lying on the floor with arms propped on forearms to read books, colour or do puzzles.
- Play games such as tug-of-war, wheelbarrow walking or animal walks.
- Use the playground equipment, such as the climbers and monkey bars at your local park

Develop hand skills

- Change how activities are done to encourage finger use.
- Lace large beads with strings that have small plastic tips on the ends or use easy lacing cards.
- Put pennies into a piggy bank, play with finger puppets, and spinning tops.
- Use small tongs to pick up cotton balls, pom-poms, blocks, etc.
- Tear paper into strips and crumble!
- Plant sprayers or water guns: Squeeze trigger to spray designs.

Develop eye-hand coordination

- Roll, throw and catch large-sized balls.
- Play balloon volleyball, scarf toss and catch.
- Pour, ladle and spoon soapy water into different sized containers at the kitchen sink.

Develop body awareness and directionality

- Play Simon Says, and use positional terms such as up/down, back/forth, front/back.
- Sing action songs such as Hokey Pokey, Wheels on the Bus.

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Provide opportunities for Sensory Input

- Hide pennies, beads, or other small objects in playdough, sand or rice tubs for your child to find.
- Draw shapes and lines on sandpaper or carpet squares.
- Make a feelie bucket/bag in which you put everyday items such as a key, toothbrush, spoon, eraser, paper clip, etc and ask your child to identify the objects by feeling them.

Pre-writing activities (no pencils required)

- Make lines, shapes and letters by: finger painting, painting with pudding or shaving cream, painting with water on the sidewalk and even with your fingers in the sand.
- Play shape and letter matching or recognition games.
- Play with puzzles, magnetic letters and playdough.