



Fine Motor Development: Tips from an Occupational Therapist

What is Occupational Therapy (OT)?

OTs help students participate in their classroom and school environments. This can include building fine motor skills, such as cutting and writing, adapting or changing an activity based on a student's needs, working with teachers to build skills in the classroom, addressing sensory, cognitive or motor needs, helping students engage in play activities, and increasing independence in daily living skills.

Keep reading for tips of how you can help your child build fine motor skills at home!

Pre-Writing Skills

In preschool, children develop skills known as “**pre-writing skills**”. These are an important foundation for skills they will develop later in school, such as writing the alphabet.

Some pre-writing skills include:

- Hand and Finger Strength
- Bilateral Integration (using both hands for activities like cutting, writing, and stringing beads)
 - Pencil Grasp
 - Upper Body Strength
 - Visual Perception
- Learning Pre-Writing Strokes

Keep reading for activity ideas for each pre-writing skill!

Pre-Writing Skill #1: Hand & Finger Strength

- Play dough: Encourage your child to imitate you rolling, squishing, and pulling the play dough. Use tools like cookie cutters or rolling pins that require your child to use both hands
 - Tearing paper
- Cutting with scissors (have your child cut playdough or cardstock to make it more challenging)
- Squeezing a wet sponge out during water play



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Pre-Writing Skill #2: Bilateral Integration

Bilateral integration means using both hands. We use this skill to hold our paper still with one hand while we write and cut with the other hand!

- Remind your child to use their “helper hand” to hold their paper while their “worker hand” cuts or writes
- Opening containers during a cooking activity
- Stringing beads
- Have your child try to zip their own jacket, button their pants, etc.



Encourage your child to put feet flat on the floor and sit up straight during table top activities to promote good posture!

Pre-Writing Skill #3: Pencil Grasp

We want to work toward a “functional” grasp for kids to use when writing. This may involve 3 or 4 fingers on the pencil, known as a “tripod” (3) or “quadrupod” (4-finger) grasp. The following activities can help your child develop a more mature pencil grasp:

- Threading beads on pipe cleaners or lace
- Practice pinching and pulling playdough with thumb, index, and middle fingers
- Use Q-tips for painting
- Use broken crayons for coloring (bonus: have your child break crayons in half to promote hand and finger strength!)
- Practice picking up small objects and moving them with tweezers or tongs



Pre-Writing Skill #4: Core Strength

It is important to have strength in your larger muscles (abs, shoulder, etc.) in order to have stability when doing fine motor activities with small muscles (fingers and wrist). To help your child develop strength in their “core”:

- Yoga (**Cosmic Kids Yoga** is available online at www.cosmickids.com; videos can be viewed for free! **Super Stretch** is a free app that can be downloaded on a phone or tablet. For more information, check out www.adventuresofsuperstretch.com!)
- Try animal walks with your child; walk like a crab, crawl like a bear, jump like a frog. The possibilities are endless!
- Paint, draw, or color on a vertical surface (for example, tape a coloring page to an easel or the wall)
- Draw or color while laying on tummy- this activates muscles of the back for developing good posture
- Encourage lots of “outside time”!



Pre-Writing Skill #5: Visual Perception Skills

Visual perception is a child's ability to take in information from "seeing" and have the brain interpret it to give it meaning.

Activities that encourage visual perception skills:

- Puzzles
- Shape sorters
- Sorting objects by color or shape
- Playing "I Spy"
- Try highlighting the outside of shapes for coloring and cutting in the lines



Remember to have fun and choose a few activities that you can do with your child. They will be excited to try if you are!

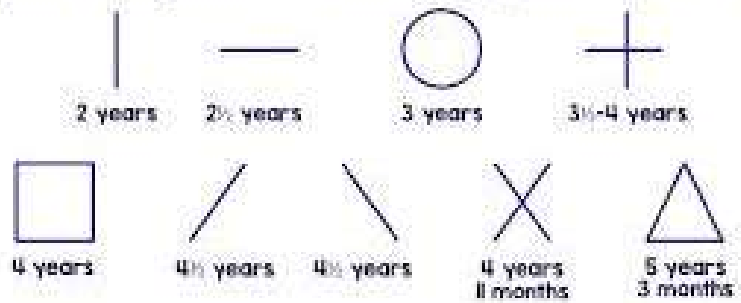
"Time spent playing with children is never wasted."

-Dawn lantero

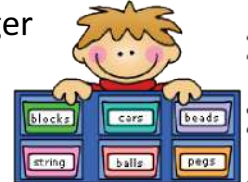


Pre-Writing Skill #6: Learning "Pre-Writing" Strokes

Children should be able to form these 9 pre-writing strokes before asking them to write.



- Above are shapes that children need to learn because they make up letters (for example, a "d" is a line down and a circle put together)
- Try creating "pre-writing" strokes with your child in different materials (i.e. in playdough, finger paint, shaving cream, etc.)
- Give them a cue as you make each shape for example "line down", "circle, stop"



Bonus: A note about scissor skills!

In order to develop scissors skills, children need a lot of **(SUPERVISED)** practice 😊

- Try cutting different materials, such as play dough, coupons, junk mail, cardstock, paper, paint chips, snip straws, etc.
- Encourage your child to hold scissors correctly by reminding them to use "thumbs up" while cutting. You can also glue googly eyes on top of the scissors or wrap the top part of the scissors in bright tape to remind them which part of the scissors should face up
- Practice with salad tongs and tweezers to get down the "open/close" motion required for cutting
- First, kids will snip at paper, then move to cutting across paper, then cutting on a line, and eventually work toward cutting shapes
- **Remember, to always monitor your child for safety when using scissors!**

