

Advisory Teaching Service

BASES

Cheltenham

Advisory Teaching Service
Battledown Centre, Harp Hill,
Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 6PZ

☎ 01452 324376
cheltenham.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Forest of
Dean

Advisory Teaching Service
Dockham Road, Cinderford
Glos. GL14 2DB

☎ 01594 823102
forest.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Gloucester

Advisory Teaching Service
4—6 Commercial Road
Gloucester. GL1 2EA

☎ 01452 426955
gloucester.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Stroud

Advisory Teaching Service
Redwood House, Room FO1, First Floor,
Beeches Green, Stroud, Glos. GL5 4AE

☎ 01452 583728
stroud.ats@gloucestershire.gov.uk

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Developing Writing Skills for Pupils with Motor Co-ordination Difficulties

Information for schools



Advisory Teaching Service

C&L / SEMH / PD Team



Motor development and pre-requisites for writing

Some pupils with delayed cognitive skills may also experience a delay in their motor development. Motor development can be divided into **gross motor** (whole body) and **fine motor** (precision) skills. Delayed motor development can impact on their ability to produce written work.

Pre-requisites for writing

- **Developmental readiness** - constructive stage of play
- **Balance** - able to sit alone and use arms freely to hold crayon and not to support the trunk to stay up-right.
- **Shoulder stability** - to stabilise the shoulder to reach and support the forearm, wrist, and hand when holding a pencil.
- **Forearm control** - to move the forearm from pronation (palm down) to a neutral thumbs-up position with control and smoothness
- **Wrist stability** - to steady the fingers for writing
- **Grasp** - to hold the tool, using a hold that is firm enough to write and move
- **Bilateral coordination** - the ability to use both hands together - one to stabilise the paper and the other to lead the action
- **Co-ordination of arm, hand and eye** - so that they all work together
- **Sensory experience** - play opportunities with sand, water, dough, cake mix, puzzles etc that provide the preparation for holding pencil



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Advice to staff

Consider how the classroom and lesson content can be adapted to meet individual needs.

Some of the following suggestions may be appropriate:

- Reduce the amount of written recording - e.g. provide multiple choice sheets
- Use number dates rather than longer written method.
- Encourage paired or group work with a designated scribe
- Praise efforts
- Use alternative methods for activities e.g. letter tiles to sequence spelling words
- Introduce ligatures (writing joins) to encourage fluency
- Consider position in class to encourage good sitting etc
- Mark work based on content/objectives rather than focus on presentation

Suggested programmes / resources

Fizzy - Gloucestershire Primary Care Trust

(available in all Gloucestershire Schools)

Hands on (Early/Off)

Advisory Teaching Service

Write from the Start

NES Arnold

Speed Up Programme

Taskmaster

Left handed Writing Skills

Mark and Heather Stuart

www.robinswoodpress.com

Writing slopes-widely available e.g.

www.thedyslexiashop.co.uk

Pencil grips - Taskmaster and many other suppliers



Practical preparation

Handwriting is complex involving the co-ordination of a lot of skills and processes. For children to be able to write legibly, fluently and quickly over a period of time they must be comfortable.

Furniture - must be the right size for the child. Use a foot block, cushion or table / chairs from another classroom. Change the angle of the writing surface by adding a writing slope if necessary.

Good sitting - furniture should allow for feet flat on floor, bottom back, thighs supported and the forearm resting comfortably on the table.

Grip tension - the grip should be just right, not too tight or too loose. If the grip is too tight or too loose, writing will be effected and specific exercises may be needed.

Choosing a writing tool - try a variety of writing tools, fat, thin, circular, octagonal, triangular. Many pens / pencils are shaped and have moulded grips built in.

Pencil grips - there are many type of grip available. The Advisory Teacher or Occupational Therapist will be able to advise on the best sort to buy and where to order them from.

Paper position - the non-writing hand should always hold the paper steady which allows the writing hand to move freely across the page. Add a non slip surface (Dycem) beneath the paper if necessary.

Right handed / left handed?

Right handed children - for a right handed child the paper should be slightly to the right of the child, tilted to about 45 degrees, for a left handed child the paper should be slightly to the left of the child tilted to about 20 degrees to the right.

Left handed children - position a left handed child on the left side of the table so that they do not bump the writing hands with their neighbour, avoid placing them with a wall to immediately to their left. These children may need special directional help with letter formations and left to right orientation (ask the SENCo for a Left Handed writing resource).

Activities to develop pre-writing skills

Sensory Activities

- Hand and finger paints
- Sand and water play
- Play dough, plasticine and clay
- Modelling



Balance

- Out door activities - climb, jump, hop, skip, run etc.
- Musical games - 'beans', statues, traffic lights
- Ball games with large ball

Shoulder stability

- Crawling games
- Obstacle courses
- Hold object at arms length e.g. egg and spoon race
- Pouring water from jugs



Forearm control

- Clapping games
- Musical instruments
- Paper, scissor, stone game

Wrist control

- Mixing and digging
- Musical instruments

Grasp

- Squeeze and use tools - playdough, soft balls
- Water play with squeezey bottles
- Building toys like Duplo, Poppoids
- Peg board and block designs



Bilateral co-ordination

- Clapping and finger rhymes
- Ball games

Activities to develop pre-writing skills

Eye-hand co-ordination

- Target games - bowling, darts or Velcro gloves
- Paper folding
- Marble runs

Getting ready to write

Writing positions

- Standing at a board, easel, table, sand pit or door
- On all 4s prone on elbows on the floor
- Sat at a table

Work big to small

- Use whole arm movements, e.g. in the air with a wand or tube
- Gradually make the movements smaller and more concise

Multi-Sensory experiences and letter formations

- Stimulate all the senses
- Use different writing tools e.g. a stick in the sand, finger paints
- Use different writing surfaces - vary the paper type, black / white boards, Magna doodles
- Feel letters and shapes hidden in bags
- Walk around letter shapes
- Write in the air using whole arm movements
- Published letter formation sheets
- Early introduction of the ligatures (joins in handwriting)
- Roll 'n' Write letters



Getting ready to write

Pencil / Crayon ideas

- Pre-writing sheets
- Shape mazes
- Dot to dots - start with joining 2 dots and progress
- Tracing
- Stencils and templates
- Bark rubbing
- Colouring within raised boundaries

Practice makes perfect

- Daily if possible
- Keep practice sessions short

Making it easier

Try to adapt the learning environment to suit the individual child's needs

Paper - different thicknesses and textures

Slopes - commercially produced slopes vary in design but can alter the angle to make writing easier

Pen / pencil grips different thicknesses and designs

Roll 'n' Write letters

Magnetic letters

Thickness of pencil / size

Furniture e.g. is seating the correct height?

