

# Fine Motor Skills... Write Out of the Box!®

## Fine Motor Development Information to Assist Parents of Young Children

By, Marianne Gibbs, EdD, OTR/L  
Gibbs Consulting, Inc.  
(281) 492-2936

[www.writeoutofthebox.com](http://www.writeoutofthebox.com)

1. **Handwriting is the Cherry on Top of the “Hand Skill Sundae”:** The highest-level skill humans perform with their hands is handwriting. Children have the most success with learning how to write when their hands are appropriately developed, their brains are cognitively ready to receive instruction in writing (which is usually between kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade), and practice is accurately performed on a consistent basis. See some basic writing-readiness guidelines on page 2. Children who write before they are developmentally ready may experience undesirable outcomes such as poor pencil grasp and letter formation habits that are very difficult to change. Respect and regard the developmental level of your child so that he/she will be most successful with writing in the long run.
2. **Provide Developmentally Appropriate Activities to Build Fine Motor Skills:** These activities do not involve pencils and worksheets! Instead, try Play Doh with a pizza cutter and mini rolling pin, jumping frogs, squeeze squirters, spin tops, locks and keys, novelty toys, hole punches, wind-up toys, peg games, tweezers, tongs, picker uppers, squeeze balls, lacing cards, animal voices, mini cards, mini slinkys, Chinese yo-yo’s, giggle tubes, Wheelo, animal grabbers, squishy balls, and putty with beads and buttons. Games such as Ants in the Pants, Don’t Break the Ice, Operation, Pick-Up Sticks, Ker Plunk, Lite Brite, puzzles, card games, and all kinds of arts and crafts encourage appropriate hand skill development. Minimize passive entertainment usage such as Game Boys, Playstation, and Xbox, etc...as these do not build efficient pencil grasp patterns.
3. **Set Your Child Up for Success:** Use of a vertical surface such as a chalkboard, easel, washer/dryer, frig, or wall when pre-writing, painting, coloring, etc... enhances successful positioning of the hand and arm. Also, providing foot support when seated at a desk/table improves hand use and control during self-feeding and when performing fine motor activities.
4. **Encourage Independence:** Let children do more for themselves so that their hands are better prepared to grasp and hold a pencil and write! Provide a variety of hand skill opportunities every day such as self-feeding with utensils, undressing/dressing, and helping with chores at home. Independence is essential for self-esteem to grow!

5. **“Rip, Snip, Cut”:** This is the sequence for scissor skill development. Mastery of the each step will lead to improved scissor use for complex patterns in the long run.  
Rip: Start with ripping paper (use scraps for mosaic art projects).  
Snip: Use scissors to snip Play Doh, Cheetos, straws, grass, index cards, card stock.  
Cut: Cut along short (1 inch) bolded straight lines on strips of thick paper progressing gradually to longer, thinner straight lines on thinner types of paper. Practice cutting along curves with paper plates after straight lines are mastered. Cutting on angles is usually performed competently by 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.
6. **Take an Appropriate, Pro-Active Approach:** You and your child’s teacher make up a team that is the key to developing the future successful handwriting abilities of your child. Providing appropriate fine motor activities at home and school is critical from 3-6 years old to achieve future efficient handwriting. Your involvement can and does make a tremendous difference! The pro-active approach you take now can reduce or eliminate the difficulties your child may have with writing in the future!

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## **General Writing-Readiness Guidelines**

### **A. Prewriting Strokes by Child’s Age in Years-Months**

<b><u>Age in Years-Months</u></b>	<b><u>Shape/Symbol Able to be Copied from a Model</u></b>
2-10	vertical line (top to bottom reinforced)
3-0	horizontal line (left to right reinforced)
3-0	circle (counter clockwise reinforced please!)
4-1	+
4-4	/
4-6	square with defined sides
4-7	\
4-11	X
5-3	triangle with defined corners

### **B. Prerequisites for Writing**

1. Exhibits hand dominance with coloring, drawing, or using a fork (may not be in place until 6 years old)
2. Able to cross midline (as in reaching across body with arm to get an object)
3. Possesses a functional pencil grasp
4. Able to understand directional terms; recognizes differences and similarities in forms
5. Able to copy basic shapes (See #A above)
6. Able to use 2 hands in an activity
7. Able to coordinate eyes and hands together
8. Able to maintain proper sitting posture
9. Oriented to print (views words in books and in the community environment)
10. Exhibits mastery of letter forms and sounds
11. Able to attend to a task for a minimum of 1 minute
12. Exhibits an interest in writing!