



# Pre-Writing Skills

The skills that a student develops as a precursor to handwriting are known as pre-writing skills. These include the visual perceptual skills of scanning and tracking, and fine motor skills to control the small muscles of the hand. Pre-writing skills are essential for students to be able to hold a pencil, move the pencil fluently and produce legible writing. When these skills are underdeveloped, students often become frustrated and resistant to engage in tasks. By four years of age, most pre-writing skills have generally been developed by children, allowing them to transition to beginning handwriting (Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, 2005).

**Keywords:** *handwriting, pencil skills, pre-writing, development, fine motor*

Typically, the following skills are considered as the building blocks for beginning handwriting.

- Hand and finger strength: having strength within the hands and fingers to use the necessary muscle power to hold and control movement of a pencil.
- Crossing the mid-line: the ability to reach to the opposite side of your body with your arms and legs (e.g. writing on the left side of a piece of paper with the right hand).
- Pencil grasp: the ability to hold a pencil in a functional way to enable pencil control.
- Hand eye coordination: the ability to coordinate movements of the hands using visual stimulus, allowing us to control, guide and direct the hands for handwriting.
- Bilateral integration: using two hands together with one hand leading (e.g. holding and moving the pencil with the dominant hand while the other hand helps by holding the writing paper).
- Upper body strength: strength and stability is required in the shoulders to allow controlled hand movement for good pencil control and stability.
- Object manipulation: the skill to successfully manipulate objects (e.g. using pencils and scissors in the way they are intended to be used).
- Visual perception: the ability to interpret and make sense of visual images seen by the eyes, such as letters and numbers.
- Hand dominance: an awareness of a preferential hand used for task performance, which allows refined skills to develop.
- Hand division: using just the thumb, index and middle finger for manipulation, leaving the fourth and little finger tucked into the palm to stabilise the other fingers (Kid Sense, 2017).



## Pre-writing development

Age	Pre-writing expectation
1-2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random scribbles</li> <li>• Spontaneous scribbles in a vertical/horizontal and/or circular direction</li> </ul>
2-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imitates a horizontal line</li> <li>• Imitates a vertical line</li> <li>• Imitates a circle</li> </ul>
3-4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies a horizontal line</li> <li>• Copies a vertical line</li> <li>• Copies a circle</li> <li>• Imitates +</li> <li>• Imitates / and \</li> <li>• Imitates a square</li> </ul>
4-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies a +</li> <li>• Traces a line</li> <li>• Copies a square</li> <li>• Copies / and \</li> <li>• Imitates X</li> <li>• Imitates <math>\Delta</math></li> <li>• Grasps a pencil in writing position</li> </ul>
5-6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies X</li> <li>• Copies <math>\Delta</math></li> <li>• Recognises between big and small lines or curves</li> </ul>

(Kid Sense, 2017)

### Activities to Develop Pre-writing Skills

- Drawing or completing activities on a vertical surface – helps to develop arm and hand strength skills (e.g. painting on an easel, drawing on a blackboard, sticking magnetic letters to the fridge).
- Fine motor activities such as arts and craft, playing with playdough, building with Lego.
- Activity books, such as colouring, dot to dot or mazes and puzzles
- Colouring in - colour in shapes and pictures. Start off with simple pictures then progress to pictures with more detail. Try to emphasise colouring in within the lines.



### Activities to Develop Pre-writing Skills (cont.)

- Drawing - encourage as much drawing as possible. It can be made fun and engaging with Megasketchers, duo drawing (drawing dots or squiggles and the child makes a picture by linking them), drawing people and simple pictures such as houses, snakes, flowers, trees, spiders, etc.
- Copying – demonstrate how to draw simple lines and shapes and then get the child to copy it. Start with horizontal and vertical lines then progress to a circle, square and triangle. This method can also be used to teach children how to write their names.
- Finding hidden objects in sand, rice or lentils.
- Finger painting or drawing in shaving cream.
- Playing commercial games such as “Snakes and Ladders” or “Trouble”.
- Threading activities such as beads or lacing cards.
- Tearing up or scrunching paper.
- Button up buttons on clothing.
- Finger games such as “incy wincy spider”.
- Using tweezers to pick up small beads or toys and put them into a container.
- Cooking – measuring, stirring, sifting, rolling.

#### Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please contact Speech and Language Development Australia (SALDA). SALDA provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or [hello@salda.org.au](mailto:hello@salda.org.au)

Website: [www.salda.org.au](http://www.salda.org.au)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia)

### References

- Kid Sense Child Development Corporation Pty Ltd. (2017). *Writing Readiness (Pre-Writing) Skills*. Retrieved from <https://childdevelopment.com.au/areas-of-concern/writing/writing-readiness-pre-writing-skills/>
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