



Scissor Skills

Cutting with scissors is a complex task requiring many skills to work together efficiently to produce an accurate finished product. Scissor skills require the integration of fine motor, visual-perceptual and visual-motor integration skills. Difficulties in any one of these areas can make cutting tasks and the development of scissor skills quite challenging.

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In order to successfully use scissors, students rely on a number of foundational skills such as:

- Established hand dominance - one hand taking the “lead” to hold the scissors
- Bilateral coordination - using two hands in a cooperative and coordinated way; the non-dominant hand taking on the “helper” role
- Established grasp pattern and hand strength – to successfully hold onto the scissors
- Fine motor control – to open and close the scissors with a smooth action and successfully manipulate and guide the scissors where they need to go
- Visual-motor integration or hand-eye coordination – to coordinate what the eye is seeing and what the hands are doing
- Planning and organisation of the task

Pre-Scissor Skills

In order to support the development of scissor skills there are a number of activities or “pre-scissor skills” that can facilitate skill development as well as improve scissor skills if the student is already using scissors.

Pre-scissor activities include:

- Picking up small objects with large tweezers and tongs
- Punching holes in paper, with various hole punchers
- Using a stapler
- Playing with water guns and squirt bottles
- Using medicine droppers to squirt water/paint
- Cutting playdough with plastic knives
- Clipping clothes pegs of various sizes onto containers
- Encouraging finger play with songs, rhymes etc.
- Tearing paper of various thicknesses into little pieces for collage
- Crumpling paper/tin foil into a small ball using tips of fingers
- Paper folding/basic origami
- Practising sign language
- Threading and lacing
- Opening and closing plastic bottles and food containers
- Wringing out sponges and clothes
- Climbing, hanging and swinging on playground equipment

These activities facilitate the development of foundational skills which are a pre-requisite for scissor cutting.



Stages of Development for Scissor Skills

Scissor skills generally develop in the following order:

- Snipping: short cuts, random snips around the edge of paper (2–3 years)
- Continuous cutting across paper: cuts using a forward motion across the paper (3 years)
- Cutting along thick, straight lines (3½ -4 years)
- Cutting and stopping: able to control cutting to stop at a point (4–5 years)
- Cutting with direction changes: can turn corners using scissors (4–5 years)
- Cutting shapes with direction changes: learning to stop and turn the paper when they reach a corner (4 – 5 years)
- Cutting shapes with rounded edges: can continuously turn the paper during cutting (4–5 years)
- Cutting more complex shapes and figures (around 5–6 years)

How to Help Students with Scissor Skills

- Encourage students to hold scissors in their dominant hand.
- Prompt students to use scissors with their thumb in the small hole and fingers in the large hole.
- The paper being cut should be held in the non-dominant hand with the palm up. A good verbal cue is, “thumbs up” (both the one holding the scissors and the one holding the paper).
- Ensure the dominant (doing) arm rests against the side of the body to provide stability.
- Commence cutting using light weight cardboard as it is easier to control.
- Use verbal cues to help students plan their movement. For example, saying, “snip, snip, snip...” at a steady pace. Alternatively, encourage students to think of scissors as a crocodile taking large snaps at the paper and then moving forward - use a verbal cue of, “crunch, crunch like a crocodile” at a steady pace.
- When students are learning to cut corners say, “stop, turn”. Students should use their helper hand to turn the paper while keeping the scissors pointing forwards.
- Thicker lines are easier to cut along for beginners. Students will feel more success if they can cut without going off the lines. As they improve, make the guide lines thinner.
- Left-handed students should be encouraged to cut around shapes in a clockwise direction while right-handed students should cut in an anti-clockwise direction.
- Provide lots of opportunity for practice. Start with supervised opportunities and demonstrate and model for students.



Types of Scissors

There are many different types of scissors available that can help with the development of scissor skills:

- Scissors with equal sized holes may be easier for beginners.
- Scissors with a double set of holes allow for adults to provide “hand over hand” support.
- Scissors with a small spring-loaded device will help with the opening action. This can be folded back once the student becomes more proficient with the opening and closing actions.
- Scissors with different shaped blade edges can be fun and foster creativity.
- Looped scissor without holes can be easier for beginners to grip.
- Left-handed scissors – these have the blades positioned opposite to right-handed scissors, making cutting easier for left-handed students.

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

Website: www.salda.org.au

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