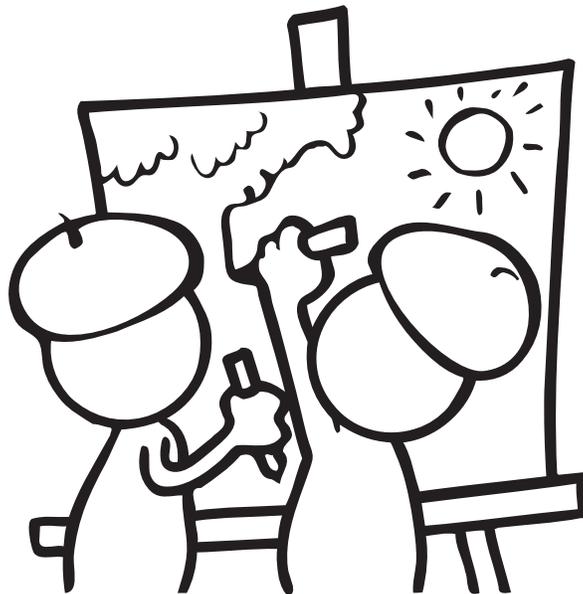


Quick Classroom Tips to Improve Handwriting

By Tara Calder, OTR/L

Children over age five spend most of the school day writing. Generally, children that write well perform better in school. In fact, studies show that young children with poor handwriting skills produce shorter, less complex written assignments than their classmates with good handwriting. The same studies also note that when children improve their handwriting, they also improve the length and complexity of their written assignments.



Although teachers in older grades do not give a separate grade for handwriting, poor handwriting can lead to lower grades on written work. When given two identical papers, one written with good handwriting and one written with poor handwriting, people consistently rate the messier papers lower in quality and content.

What Can You Do?

Today's classrooms are very busy places. It can be hard to fit one more thing in your busy day. However, a few minor changes can make a big difference. Here are some suggestions:

Warm Up

Many children need to *warm up* their hands and bodies prior to handwriting. Warming up prepares the body and encourages the brain and muscles to work together as a team. A good warm-up only needs to last 2–4 minutes. Do the following exercises for 30 to 60 seconds each:

- Jumping jacks
- Chair, desk, or wall push-ups
- Make tight fists, then open fingers wide
- Touch thumb to each finger

Vertical Surfaces

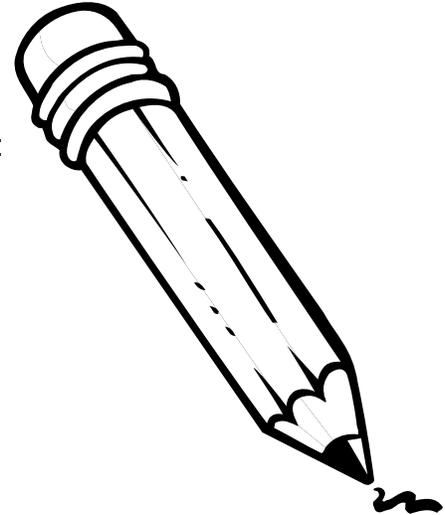
Coloring, painting, or drawing on an easel (or other *vertical surface*) develops the muscles

you use during handwriting. Whenever possible, take painting, coloring, or drawing activities off the tabletop and onto the wall or easel. This suggestion takes very little time but produces big results.

Positioning

Many children can complete legible writing assignments from almost any *position*. However, for the child with poor handwriting, poor positioning just makes handwriting harder. For proper positioning, follow these steps:

- Place feet flat on the ground with ankles, knees, and hips bent at 90°. If needed, place a telephone book under the child's feet.
- Place desk or table no higher than child's elbow (when sitting).
- Tilt paper to the left for right-handed students.
- Tilt paper to the right for left-handed students.
- Use a 20° angled writing surface (such as a large three ring binder or slant board).
- Hold the pencil in the pads of the index finger and thumb. Rest the pencil on the side of the middle finger.



Conclusion

Small changes in your classroom and daily routine can make big changes in a child's handwriting. If you still have concerns about a student's handwriting, contact your school's occupational therapist for further suggestions.

Resources

Retherford, K. S. (1996). *Normal development: A database of communication and related behaviors*. Greenville, SC: Super Duper® Publications.

American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (2008). Retrieved March 31, 2008, from www.aota.org



Helpful Products

Below is a list of Super Duper® products that may help your student to improve his/her handwriting skills. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click on the links below to see the product and description.

Webber® Slant Board and Binder

Ask for Item #OTS-225

www.superduperinc.com/O_Pages/ots225.HTM

Webber® Handwriting Paper – 1,236 Printable Page Templates on CD-ROM

Ask for Item #OTS-403

www.superduperinc.com/O_Pages/ots403.HTM

Fine Motor Fun Deck®—Hand Exercises and Prewriting Skill Cards

Ask for Item #FD-105

www.superduperinc.com/F-G_Pages/fd105.htm