



Special Needs Tip: Things to try at home based on strategies we use in school to help support your child's learning. We hope that these ideas might be helpful, but there is no obligation or expectation for you to use them.

Activities to support handwriting

There are lots of ideas to try here. Please do not feel that you need to try them all. Pick some that might appeal to you and your child. You do not need to buy special equipment.

Developing gross motor control

In order to develop good handwriting, children need good gross motor skills (large movements), particularly anything that involves the arms and shoulders. Some ideas to support this include:

- **Chair Sit-Ups:** While sitting in a hard chair, ask your child to put their hands on either side of their hips, then push down and raise their body off the chair.
- **'Paint' letters-** using large brushes (normally used for decorating) ask your child to 'paint' lines, shapes or letters with water on any 'safe' outdoor surface e.g. fences, walls, patio, etc. It is good for them to do this where possible on an upright vertical surface. The water quickly dries off, so the activity can be done again.
- **Write in air-** Ask your child to write and draw in the air using their whole arm. This can be made fun and more visible if they hold a ribbon or piece of string or even an old tie.
- **Bouncing balls-** Any game involving bouncing a ball with or without a bat will support this.

Don't forget any activity that involves climbing or stretching their arms is good.

Strengthening their hands

To write well you need strong hands. Some activities to try including:

- **Squeezing water out of sponges-** this can be done in the bath or helping with the washing up.
- **Using a water spray bottle** (plant sprays). You either ask your child to help water plants or use the spray to 'write' on a (outside) wall or even as part of a 'water fight'! Don't forget things like squeezing ketchup etc. out of a bottle uses the same muscles.
- **Any activity with scissors**
- **Rubber Band Stretch:** Wrap a rubber band around your child's first two fingers and thumb and stretch it by spreading the two fingers. Then ask them to move the fingers apart and back together without breaking the band or ping it off.
- **Write letters with washing up liquid or shaving foam.** Spread a little washing up liquid and water or shaving foam on a baking tray or plastic board. Then ask your child to write or draw in it using different fingers.
- **Activities with playdough-** You can use plasticine or make salt dough (see recipe at the bottom of the sheet). At school we use something called theraputty which can be bought online.

- Make small balls and 'sausages' rolling the dough backwards and forwards.
- Try hiding small objects (e.g. rice, lentils, or counters) in the playdough and ask your child to find them and take them out. Alternatively, ask your child to stick the objects in. If you have two children, one can put the objects in, and one can take them out! The smaller the object the more difficult this is, so start with bigger objects.
- Make 'dinosaur footprints' where the child puts their fingers into the dough and then stretches them out to make a 'footprint', then squishes it back up again.
- Make models or props for imaginative play e.g. 'food' for toys.

Don't forget activities like cat's cradle, Lego or games like 'pick up sticks' or kerplunk which are all good for this.

Activities for developing finger strength and developing pencil grip

Ideally, for a good handwriting your child will develop a 'tripod grip' so that they hold the pen or pencil firmly between the thumb and first two fingers.



To do this effectively requires strong fingers and requires different strengths from those required for using a game console. These are some activities to help with this.

- **The rice krispie challenge** This can be done with any small cereal, food or item. Put a number of the item (cereal, rice, lentils, dried beans, counters, etc.) in a small bowl. Then see how many your child can transfer to another bowl using their fingers to pick up one item at a time within a minute. If you do this over a number of days, your child can see how they improve at this over time.
- **Any card games that involves holding a 'fan' of cards**
- **Walking the ball-** Ask your child to 'walk' (move) a small ball up and down their leg using just their fingers without dropping it. Once they are good at this, ask them to use only their thumb and first two fingers. If they get really good the challenge is to walk the ball up one leg, across their stomach and down the other leg. The whole family can get involved in this one!
- **Crumple a piece of paper into a small ball** using just their tripod fingers (thumb and first two fingers). See how small and tight they can make the ball.
- **Pencil pops.** Ask your child to hold their pencil with the tripod fingers and hold the other hand with the palm facing the pencil. Ask your child to bend and stretch the fingers to enable the pencil to "pop" over to touch the palm of the other hand and then come back. Repeat a few times. Aim to increase the number of repetitions as your child improves.
- **Pencil Flips / Pencil Somersaults** Use a pencil with a rubber on the end or a pencil with a fun topper. Ask your child to touch the paper with the tip of the pencil, then flip the pencil over in their hand (without using the other hand) to have the eraser/pencil topper touch the page. How many times can they repeat this without dropping the pencil.

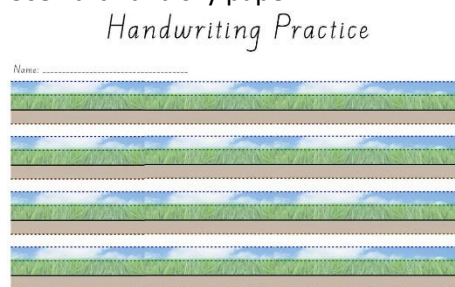
Don't forget colouring activities. Focus on staying within the lines and developing even colouring. Encourage your child to practice writing and drawing with different colours and types of pen or pencil. Try to make it fun for them.

Letter formation

Handwriting practice is always hard. It is frustrating when your child can produce beautiful handwriting when handwriting is the focus of the activity, but then struggles to reproduce it during other writing activities. We need to remember that when a child is writing and developing their own ideas they are focusing on lots of things at the same time (thinking of ideas, remembering their ideas, thinking how to put their ideas into sentences, thinking of the words to use, remembering spelling, punctuation and grammar), so it is not surprising if their handwriting sometimes suffers.

Here are some ideas for practicing with handwriting.

- **Practice drawing circles**, so that your child can draw circles of different sizes ensuring the lines meet to complete the circle.
- **Draw spirals** working in and getting smaller. It can be fun to decorate and cut these out following the lines.
- **Tracing-** Tracing is a great fine motor practice activity. It can be used with letters, numbers, shapes or pictures.
 - Traditionally, tracing is done with tracing paper, but if you don't have this you can use greaseproof paper or baking parchment.
 - Alternatively write or draw what you want your child to 'trace' using a highlighter pen or a light colour crayon and ask them to go over it following the lines. This works with a pencil where your child goes over it with a felt tip or darker coloured pen or pencil.
- **Self-evaluation** When you are doing handwriting practice with your child, ask them to identify and tick the letters and words that they have done best. Talk about why they are particularly good or clear.
- **Issues with descenders** (letters sticking up like d, b, h, k, l, t) **and ascenders** (letters sticking down like g, j, p, q, y). Getting the correct size for these letters can be hard. Remember f is doubly difficult as it fits into both groups.
 - Focus on one thing at a time either descenders or ascenders.
 - Practice these letters with other letter so the difference in size is clear
 - Use Earth and sky paper.



This reminds your child to reach the ascenders up to the sky and bury the descenders in the earth. It can be downloaded at <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-478-line-guide-ground-grass-and-sky---plain>.

Using this a few times is good to introduce this language to support what you are

doing. But don't worry, if you can't download and print. You can make your own paper with a ruler by drawing blue and brown lines.

Finally if you want a change from handwriting practice, please look at my typing ideas at <https://primarysite-prod->

sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/pirbrightvillageprimaryschool/UploadedDocument/82296440868544a18027074694def12b/typing-programmes.pdf

Play dough recipe

- 1 cupful of plain flour (about 250g)
- half a cupful of table salt (about 125g)
- about half a cupful of water (about 125ml)

Mix the flour and salt in a bowl. Add the water, mixing with a spoon or your hands as you go, until it forms a ball. This will keep for several weeks. It can be baked in a low oven if you want to keep any of your creations which can then be painted. **Don't eat!**