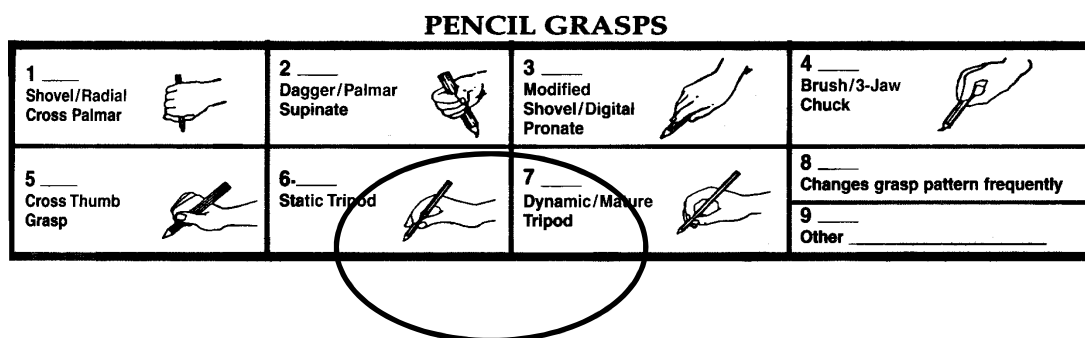


Pencil Grasp

It is best to have a static tripod or dynamic tripod grasp in Kindy /Preprimary. This is where the thumb and index finger “pinch” the pencil and the middle finger is resting underneath. The ring and little fingers are curled into the palm. The pencil then lies in the web space and rests against the skin. Some children particularly left-handers prefer to place their middle finger up onto the pencil to give more stability and this pencil grasp is fine as long as the thumb does not wrap around the pencil. Lateral thumb wraps are best avoided and if your child holds their pencil in divergent grasps now is the time to act and try different pencil grips or see an OT to set up good long term writing patterns.



Skill Progression:

1. Child holds writing utensil in their pinching fingers static tripod or quadropod grasp. The wrist is usually fixed and the child moves the whole arm to make the marks, drawing or colouring so the fingers usually don't move on the pencil shaft. When colouring the child usually will move body or wrist angle to change direction.
2. Forearm rests on table when drawing/ writing. Always watch for their arm to be on the table surface and their wrist down and on the surface. If their arm is up they are not promoting arches and mature hand grasp.
3. Child can use a dynamic grasp where the fingers move the pencil. Usually observed when colouring in smaller areas.
4. Wrist is usually anchored on the table in a mid position and the arm moves from the shoulder.

The shift from static to dynamic usually occurs in pre primary and it is divergent if a child enters year 1 without a dynamic pencil grasp.

If your child is not holding their pencil properly this is the time to address it before they get habitually ingrained to use a divergent or immature grasp. Most children who have unusual grasps do so because they are trying to stabilize the writing tool to compensate for hypermobile joints, decreased strength or stability in the hand.

Many children who have divergent pencil grasps have slightly lax hand ligaments and lack good refined hand strength and dexterity. They need a lot of good

strengthening hand games such as resistance via theraputty and seeing an OT is a wise option.

Try:

- Using a thicker pencil with distinct sides such as a Kooh –I Nor wooden pencil available online though notemaker.com.au or through Floreat Newsagency.
- Use shorter broken crayons for children who use too many fingers.
- Trial thicker pencil grips to promote pinching fingers on the pencil.
- Try using a small object held in the little finger side of the hand to promote the palmer arches to become more active.
- Play lots of games to promote finger pinching using tongs and tweezers so the child can practice the movement and muscle action in play as well as with a pencil. Use plastic tweezers for sorting, eating some snack foods and use tongs for bath play and picking up toys. Using funnels and turkey basters or eyedroppers in the bath also promote the “pinching” fingers.
- Use water pistols in the same way to warm up just the “power “ fingers. Water the outside plants, clean the shower screen, squirt the dirty dishes, annihilate the garden weeds or even wash off the chalk letters on the footpath as a game to practice strengthening those pinching fingers.
- Use a vertical surface such as a wall mounted whiteboard or easel or pin-up work to a window. This pulls the wrist back into a position of extension, which promotes strength and stability in the wrist so the fingers are able to move off a stable base.
- Before writing play with some stickers and tell them to warm up their pinching fingers. (Try also to explain that it may feel wobbly at first but they try to make their fingers pinch the pencil and it will get very easy). Use an analogy like light saber training. You can paint just the thumb and index finger nails so they can see which ones to pinch with.
- Try using very fat sharpie pens or markers or even thick pavement chalk as well as pencils.
- Try using a **write-right band** if they have trouble stabilizing their pencil and keeping it in the web space.
- If they use an I-pad and that is motivating for them, buy a thick stylus and put a pencil gripper on that if necessary. Point out that we use pinching fingers to pull apart images on the screen. Whilst this movement does not have any power or stabilization so wont increase their penmanship, they can at least practice the pinching fingers. Ensure they always curl up their ring and little fingers and **not splay them out**.
- If they have weaker hands or a flattened hand shape try the super strengthening kit from Skillbuilders. www.skillbuilders.com.au



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