LEARNING TO DRAW STROKES, SHAPES AND LETTERS

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There are three basic steps when learning how to form strokes, shapes and letters:

1. **Imitation*.*** The student *WATCHES* an adult make a line, shape or letter in the correct way (top to bottom, left to right), and immediately tries to form it. The student may even trace the original marks first.

2. **Copying*.*** After practice imitating, the student is ready to TRY to make the letter *FROM A MODEL*, which is already made on paper.

3. **Drawing*.*** This is *DRAWING FROM MEMORY*. At this stage, the student is able to remember what the shape or letter looks like and how to form it without seeing an example of it. This is the most difficult level. Most students learn to print their names when they reach this stage.

Learning how to print on paper is a very demanding skill. It requires the student to integrate many different skills. Use a variety of ways to practice letter formation before using paper and pencil.

Ways to make drawing and printing fun*:*

- Use **different writing tools** such as coloured chalk, crayons, pencil crayons, gel pens, markers (changeable, scented), pens, pencils, felt-tipped pens, paints (finger paints, water colours), shaving cream, lotions, puddings, whipping cream, silly string, etc.

- Use **different writing surfaces** such as a chalkboard, Magnadoodle, wipe off boards, or paper taped to the wall. Paint letters with water or with chalk on the sidewalk, trace letters in the air, sand, finger paint, whipping cream, etc. Write on aluminum foil, coloured construction paper, chalkboard, different types of paper (sand paper, paper bags, waxed paper, newspapers, wrapping paper, typing paper, and construction paper), use colouring books. Use of resistant surfaces transmits important information to finger and wrist muscles that may be missed with smoother surfaces (i.e., white board).

- Use **textured writing surfaces.** A bumpy or slightly textured material placed beneath the writing paper gives students additional input while writing with a pencil, marker, or crayon. Common textured materials include outdoor screen fabric, fine-grit sandpaper, fine mesh netting, and wallpaper samples.

- Fill **plastic bags for a spongy writing surface.** Fill gallon-size Ziplock ™ plastic bags with one-half cup of brightly coloured finger-paint, petroleum jelly, or hair-styling gel. The student uses the index finger to form shapes and letters on the plastic bag. Be sure no one has sharp fingernails.

- Provide **writing trays with grainy surfaces.** Fill a cafeteria tray, a plastic container, a pencil box, or a plate with dried grainy material, such as cornmeal, dried crushed leaves, dry gelatin/pudding, sand, or breakfast drink powder. Ground coffee works well, too, and the smell is often calming. Students use their index fingers for writing.

- Place **viscous material on tray for finger writing.** Use a viscous substance, such as chocolate syrup, hand lotion, pudding, Funny Foam ™, or shaving cream, in a tray, on aluminum foil, or in a plastic page protector. Creamy substances with texture (e.g., finger paint with sand) can be used, also. Students use the index finger for writing.

- Provide **finger resistance with clay writing**. Filling plastic containers or tray with modeling clay serves as a novel writing surface. Students form shapes and letters in the clay with sharpened dowels or chopsticks. These clay trays should be kept in a plastic bag to prevent dehydration. The top of a plastic container or a shallow lid from a metal canister can also serve as writing trays.
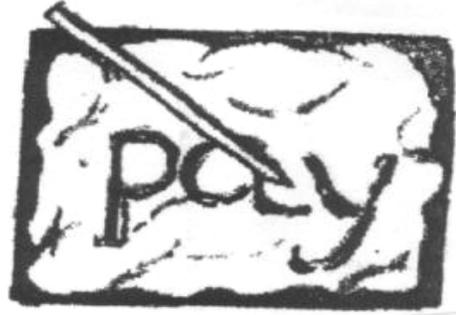
- Use **tracing to learn proper formations.** Use any three different coloured markers or crayons for tracing and re-tracing shapes and letters properly. This allows the muscles to "remember" how to make shapes/letters. "Changeable" markers and crayons also work well for Rainbow Writing.

- Provide **visual cues on paper.**

  - Dashed line paper
  - Green 'grass' baseline
  - Blue 'sky' topline
  - Highlighting
  - Graph paper (guides size and alignment of shapes/letters)
  - Green and red margins (green light go, red light stop)
  - Stop & Go paper