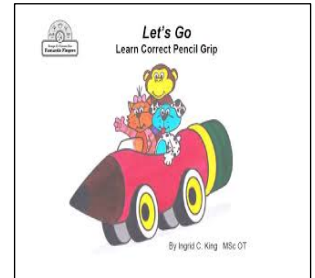




PENCIL GRASP

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In order to help students develop printing skills it is important to students to develop a good grasp on the pencil, crayon or marker. There are many different kinds of pencil grasps that are functional for students to use (refer to pictures on next page). The preferred way is to use the “Dynamic Tripod Grip” where the movement comes from the fingers and thumb. This grasp is typically developed by 4 ½ to 6 years of age (use of this grasp with movement coming from the whole hand is typically developed by 3 ½ to 4 years of age). A quadripod (thumb and three finger grasp) and a lateral tripod grasp (thumb on the pointer finger rather than the pencil) are also functional grasps.



KEY POINTS:

- The Pencil:** The pencil is grasped between the tips of the thumb and fingers and rests in the web space (not positioned vertically or pointed away from the body).
- Web Space:** There should be a nice rounded open “web space” between the thumb and index finger.
- Support:** The pinky side of the hand and forearm rest against the table surface.
- Wrist:** The wrist is bent back (extended) slightly. The side of the wrist and forearm rest on the table surface.
- Fingers:** Fingers stay on the painted part of the pencil (about one inch from the tip).

Provide regular, supervised practice periods until the correct grasp position is used automatically. If an abnormal grasp pattern becomes a habit, it is much more difficult (often impossible) to change later. Grasps are easier to change when students are young - early in kindergarten/first grade.



Helpful hints to promote a good Pencil Grasp

- Wrap masking tape or elastic around the end of the pencil or paint a ring (with liquid paper) to remind the student where to put fingers (about 1" from the tip). Teach students to pinch the pencil with their thumb and index finger.
- A variety of pencil grips are available and may help the student develop a better grasp.
- Have the student hold a small object (pom pom or eraser) with the ring and baby fingers while holding the pencil. Tucking in these fingers will increase overall hand stability.
- Attach a clothes pin to the pencil shaft. Have the student grasp the pencil with the thumb, index and middle finger and wrap the last two fingers around the clothespin.
- Teach student to make a letter 'C' with their hand. Place the pencil inside the 'C' to encourage an open web space.
- Tell students to rest shaft of pencil in the web space (between thumb and index finger). Tell them that pencils prefer to "lie down" rather than stand straight upright. Rest the pencil on the "pillow" (the soft area between the base of the thumb and index finger).
- Short (1-2 inches in length) crayons, pencils, or pieces of chalk encourage use of a tripod grasp.
- The wrist should be held and used in an extended or slightly bent-back position: If the student bends wrist forward (flexed), encourage activities that involve drawing and printing/writing at eye level on the chalkboard, easel, slant board or taping paper to the wall. Try having the student lie on their stomach on the floor propped on their forearms.
- Using the desired grasp position, place paper over a textured surface (e.g. plastic templates, rough sandpaper, or textured objects such as the bumpy plastic panels used for covering fluorescent lighting fixtures) while the student scribbles, colours or makes large drawing movements with crayon, pencil, or marker. This will help students to get the "feel" of the correct finger positioning.
- Teach a poem for remembering proper pencil grasp:

"Lay down the pencil in a soft place, with your thumb and your pointer face to face. Tall man has the pencil rest on its side, and all the other fingers go along for the ride!"
- Provide students with a variety of writing utensils. This makes pencil and paper practice fun and interesting! Select from many choices: *crayons (scented, glittered, glow in the dark), china markers (also called grease pencils), coloured pencils, felt-tipped markers (regular, overwriter, changeable color), glitter glue pens, paint brushes, musical pens, mechanical pencils, vibrating pens, etc.*