

# Teaching Handwriting: Tools that work

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# Thank you!!!

- You all are AWESOME!! I could not do what you all do everyday. Thank you 😊
- There is so much pressure on teachers and students to teach and learn so much.
- With all of the academic pressure and in a world of emails, snapchats, texting, etc. handwriting is something that seems to be forgotten.
- Hopefully this will give you all some good strategies to use in the classroom.

# Occupational Therapy

- So why is the OT the one that works on handwriting???
- OT-occupational therapy, is a type of therapy that works to improve one's function or "job of living" after an injury, illness, or condition.
- OTs work in many different settings. Schools are one setting in which OTs work.
- A child's "job" is to play and to learn—and part of learning, is learning to write 😊

# Writing is a...

## Functional, life skill.

- If their disability limits their ability to write, they may benefit from OT.
- OT evaluation will assess the students fine motor coordination, visual-motor integration, body awareness, self-care independence, motor planning, sensory processing, balance, and gross motor skills as they relate to school function.

But the problem is...we are having children without these deficits struggle with handwriting!

- Children without IEPs and no need for an IEP struggling with writing.
- Growing problem through RTI-Response to Intervention tiers
- Many referrals for screenings/evaluations for children that do not have underlying deficits that could cause handwriting difficulties.

# So what can we do? How can we help?

- Precursor skills for handwriting:
  - Good fine motor skills
  - Good visual-motor skills
  - Proper pencil grasp
  - Ability to trace lines/shapes accurately
  - Ability to draw prewriting shapes and lines
  - Good pencil control-straight lines/clear, defined strokes
  - Multi-directional coloring-good coloring movement = shows ability to make different writing strokes for letters
  - Self-care independence = maturity, good fine motor

# Times have changed...

- Kids don't play anymore. They don't use their hands anymore. **Make them use them at school!**
- Decreased motor play does impact academics-dec'd writing readiness and imagination

Incorporate **FINE MOTOR**—  
in as many activities as you can!

- Good center activities-or put them in wherever you like in your class, but **DO NOT FORGET ABOUT FINE MOTOR IMPORTANCE!!!!**
- Studies show that stronger fine motor skills in earlier childhood lead to increased academic success in the future.
- **Increased fine motor = Increased handwriting success = decreased area of the brain used for writing and motor skills = increased areas of the brain available for learning and creative thinking.**



# Favorite fine motor activities--

- Zipper, button, snap boards/vests. Or use old shirts with various size buttons, pants with snaps/clasps, zipping jackets and vests. Go to Goodwill kid's section!
- Shape drawing center-don't forget about drawing as a precursor to writing.
- Painting with a Q-tip
- Wikki Sticks-yarn with wax covering-to make letters/numbers
- Stacking objects-develop the curvature of the hands
- Linking/pushing items together
- puzzles

# fine motor activities--

- Scooping/spearing activities-spoon/fork-scoop beans into cups, spear balls of playdough
- Lacing-letter beads
- ANYTHING THAT PINCHES-BEST RESULTS! Tweezers, tongs, picking up small items- pick up letter beads
- Finger to hand and hand to finger translation skills--Picking up items, pocketing in hands, then moving item from palm to insert into slot-coins into coin banks
- Nuts/Bolts-TWIST with finger tips-don't just use one finger to move
- Squeezing small sponges with fingertips, moving water with an eyedropper

# What are your favorites???

- Ideas to share?
- Do activities with your left hand or non-dominant hand to see how students feel learning to use their hands or establishing a dominant side.

## Other suggestions with fine motor:

- Get them on their tummies when doing fine motor activities. Works on upper body and back strength-extensor strength.
- Weight bear on their hands-you have to strengthen trunk/core/upper body to have strong hands/fingers.
- Fine motor/drawing/coloring/writing using a vertical surface. Pushpin papers to wall, write on vertical dry erase board, use easel.
- Vertical Chalkboards work great!!! Can feel the writing more with chalk-gives kinesthetic feedback to hands/multi-sensory learning

# Vertical surface naturally corrects grip!

- Demonstration-what does your hand do when you raise your forearm off of table. First let your wrist dangle-flexed. Then slowly raise/extend your wrist. What position are your fingers in?
- This is why a vertical surface helps correct incorrect grip patterns.
- Also makes them move pencil/crayon/marker with fingers. Have to stabilize upper arm? Don't let them put their palm on board when writing.

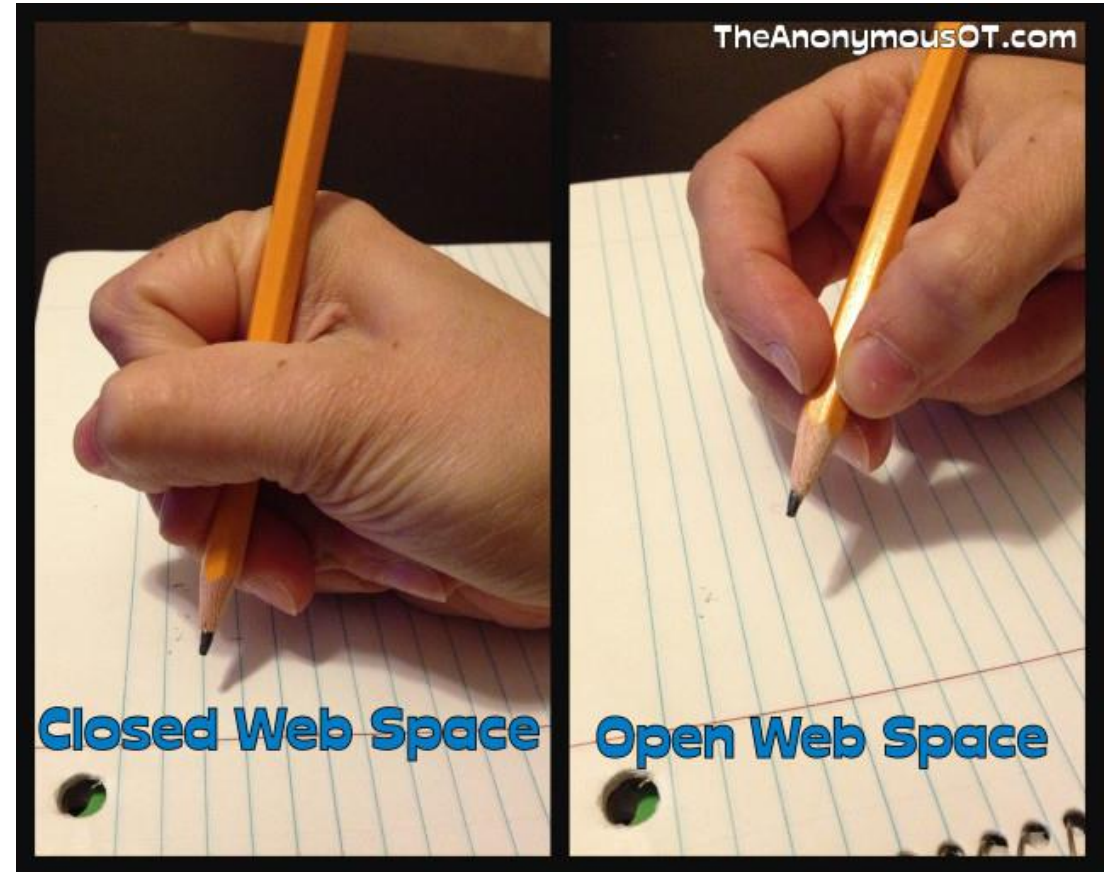
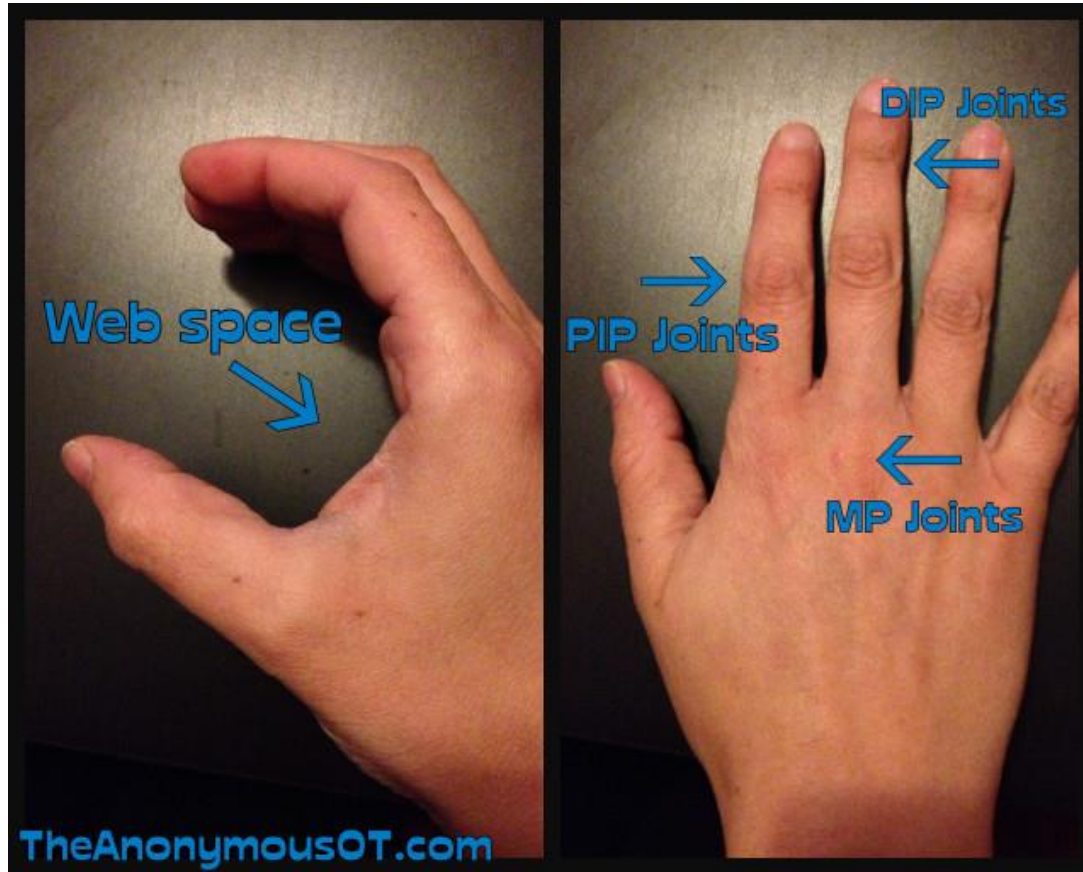
# In the end, a proper pencil grip does matter!!

- Fine motor skills are intended to promote proper pencil grip, but some still needs an extra cue to use the most optimal grip.
- A correct grip doesn't always improve legibility, but will improve speed.
- Look for the webspace being open.
- Should see round curvature of thumb and index finger even when holding pencil.
- Watch that they are moving their pencil with their fingers, not moving their whole hand or arm.

# Most optimal grip

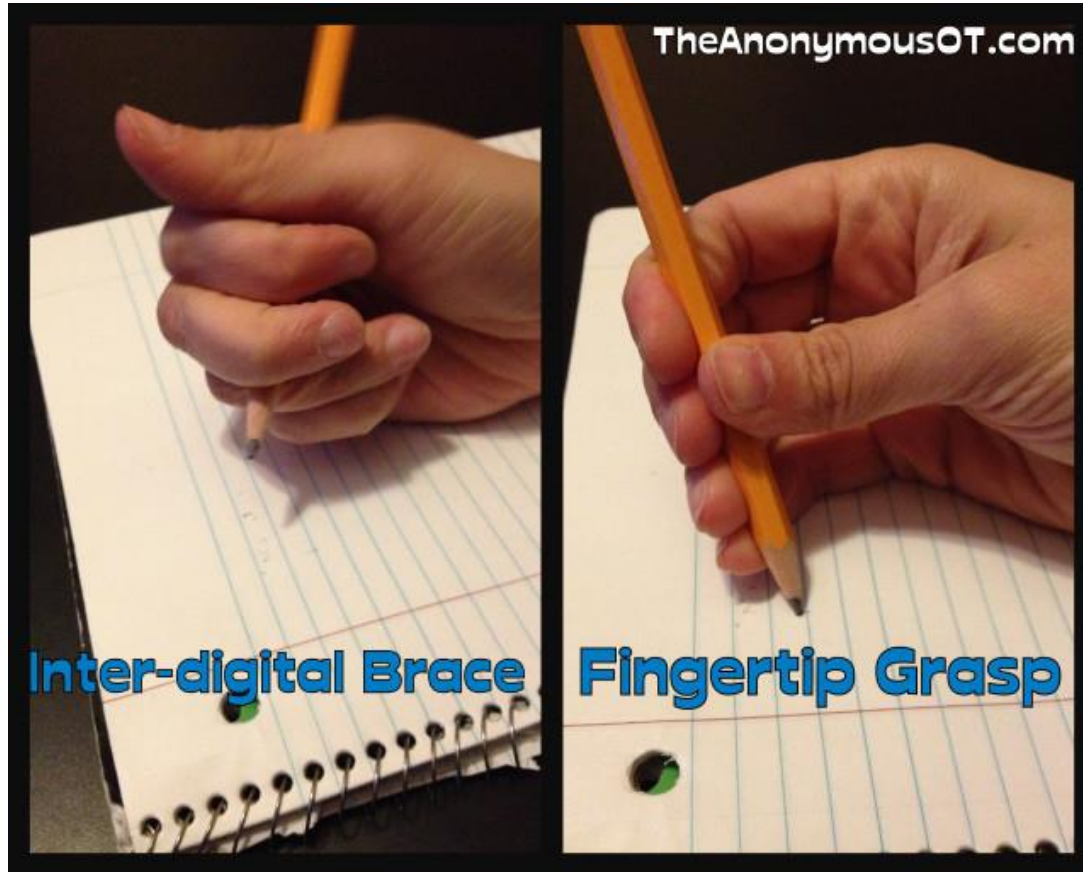
- Tripod or quadrupod grip is the most optimal. The fingers on the working/skill side of the hand are the strongest. This grip also keeps the tendons of the hand in a more open/neutral position. When more fingers are wrapped around the pencil, the tighter the grip will be.
- Less optimal grips can cause pain in the child's hand, tension and strain on joints, and lead to nerve conditions later in life, such as carpal tunnel.
- A child's grip will not always improve legibility, but it can help to decrease pain, increase writing speed, and promote good hand/joint health in the future.

# Taking care of their hands...





Not the most optimal grips...Can cause stress on joints and pain over time.



Use an old sock!

- cut out holes for only three fingers-two holes at top and one more on side of sock
- leave other fingers tucked inside sock
- have them write with sock during centers or during writing activities to teach proper grip.
- only have students with improper grips use sock. Don't make as center activity for all.



Pencil Grasp



# Just cut their crayons!

This limits the number  
of fingers they can  
place on their crayon.  
Makes them move the  
crayon with their  
fingers not their  
whole hand.

- Also use short golf pencils.





# The Alligator Trick



He opens his mouth, and then  
bites the pencil!



The alligator doesn't like how the pencil tastes, so he puckers his lips! Show your students how to pucker their lips. Then make their “alligator hand” pucker!



Pom-Poms aren't just  
for cheerleading!

- Hold the pom pom in  
their hand when  
writing using the ring  
and small fingers.

- Prevents them from  
placing those fingers  
on the pencil or  
crayon.



## Weighted pencils

- Encourages the pencil to lean back into the webspace of the hand.
- Tell the student that their hand is their “pencil’s bed!”



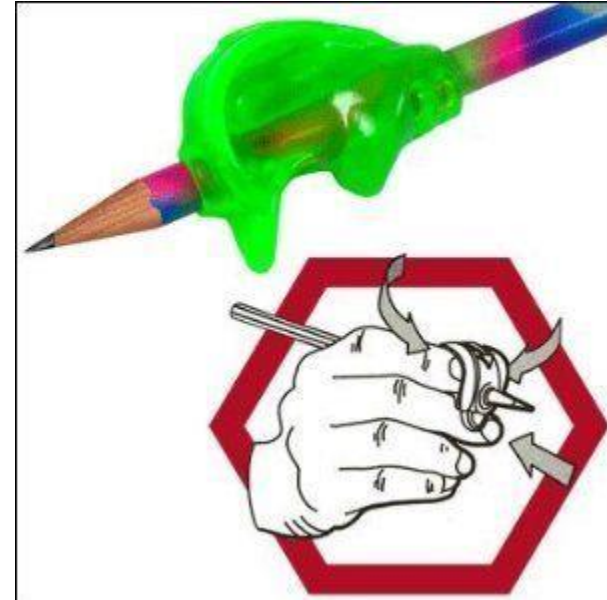
Dots on their fingers.

“Put the dots together/make the dots touch each other when holding your pencil. Then give them a friend.”



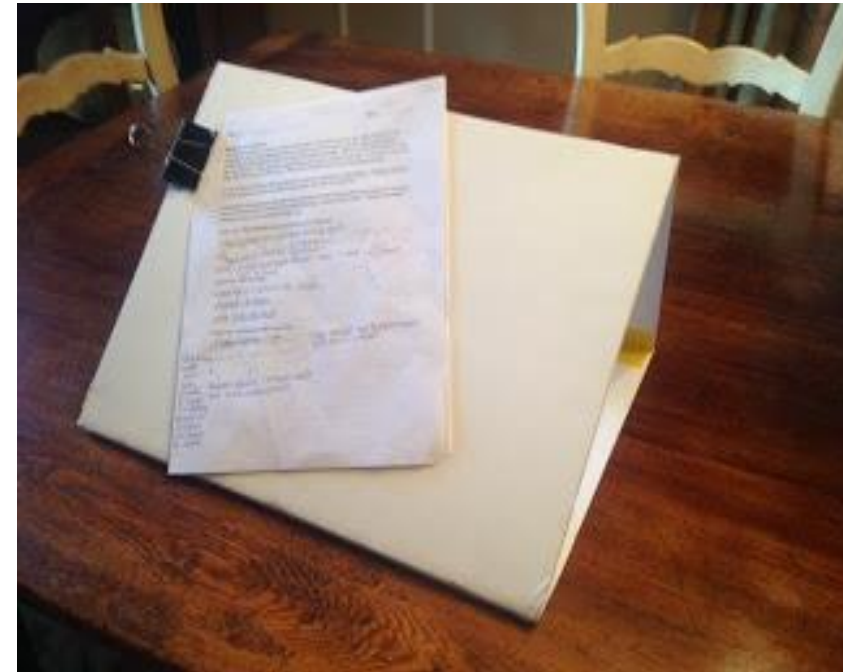


Some of my favorites...Grotto and claw grips.



# Slant boards

- The angle puts the wrist in a nice extended position, and it puts the writing surface in the line of vision which is good for posture and attention.
- Slant boards can also be useful for reading.
- Use a wide three-ring binder and a large binder clip to save \$\$\$.



Twist-n-Write—have to order refills for lead.



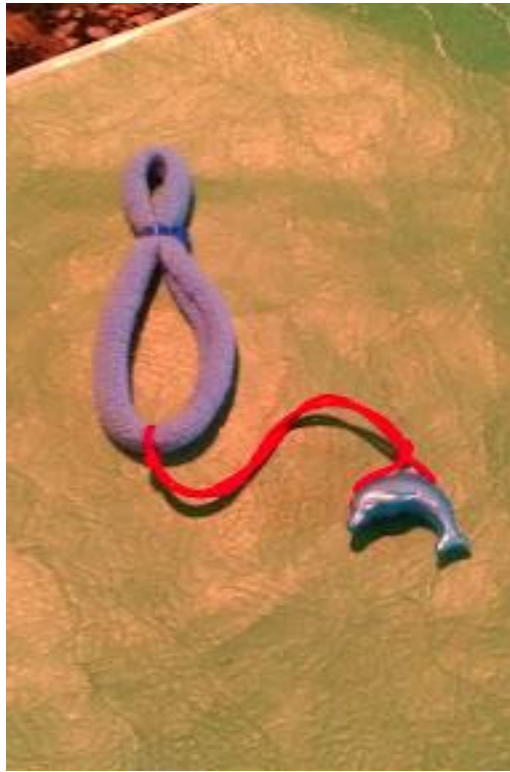
So many different types of pencil grips!!

[www.therapyshoppe.com](http://www.therapyshoppe.com)

[www.abilitations.com](http://www.abilitations.com)



# The Handi-Writer





# Proper writing position

Sit upright

In front of paper

With arms on desk

**Hold paper with non-dominant hand**

**Remember to slant paper to correct side per right or left. Can develop "hook grasp."**

\*\* I know this is very difficult, especially in a class full of little movers. We just do the best we can, and remember to prompt when able.



# We have to TEACH letter formation!

- Not “allowed” in pre-Kindergarten according to rules from Bright from the Start.
- Sometimes they do learn incorrect writing patterns—we have to break bad habits. This is from the push to learn to write too quickly and some children aren’t developmentally ready.
- There will be some variances to letter formation. I start my “f” at the bottom. 😞
- Not all letters will be perfect, but we have to make every effort to retrain.
- Will also need to teach capital letters. Don’t just skip to lowercase assuming they know all upper correctly. Easier to write. Can grasp starting at the top with easier letters first before going to lowercase.
- Refer to handout with dots for where to start. Probe all letters. Correct formation?

# Focus on capital letters in Pre-K!!!

- Capital letters are more developmentally appropriate for Prek. Bigger lines. Less complicated formation. Not as many curves.
- Yes they need exposure to lowercase.
- But, make sure they can really write all of their capital letter correctly before teaching how to write lowercase letters.
- It's okay for them to write words in all uppercase for now.
- HWT says learn to write name in all caps—I'm not 100% for that...
- They will learn later that in “real writing” you mix the two cases.



# Why is formation important if we can read the letters?!

- Do you all ever think this?
- Let's see why. Because you need to feel how your students feel, use your non-dominant hand. Make strokes starting top to bottom then bottom to top as fast as you can for 10 seconds. Try to bump the top and bottom lines when making the strokes. Go!
- Now using your non-dominant hand again, make strokes moving from top to bottom only for 10 seconds. Don't vary strokes. Start at the top every time. Go!
- Which one was neater? Which one had more equal spacing?  
Bummed the lines?

# Good formation!

- Encourages good flow when writing.
- Good flow encourages appropriate speed and will increase with age.
- Incorrect formation makes writing more laborious because it is inconsistent.
- Top to bottom formation works with gravity making it easier to write not against gravity which is more difficult.
- Establishing a good flow with print leads to good flow with cursive.
- Students do not have to put forth as much effort with writing if the skill is more automatic. They have to develop a good “flow” when writing. How you increase speed!

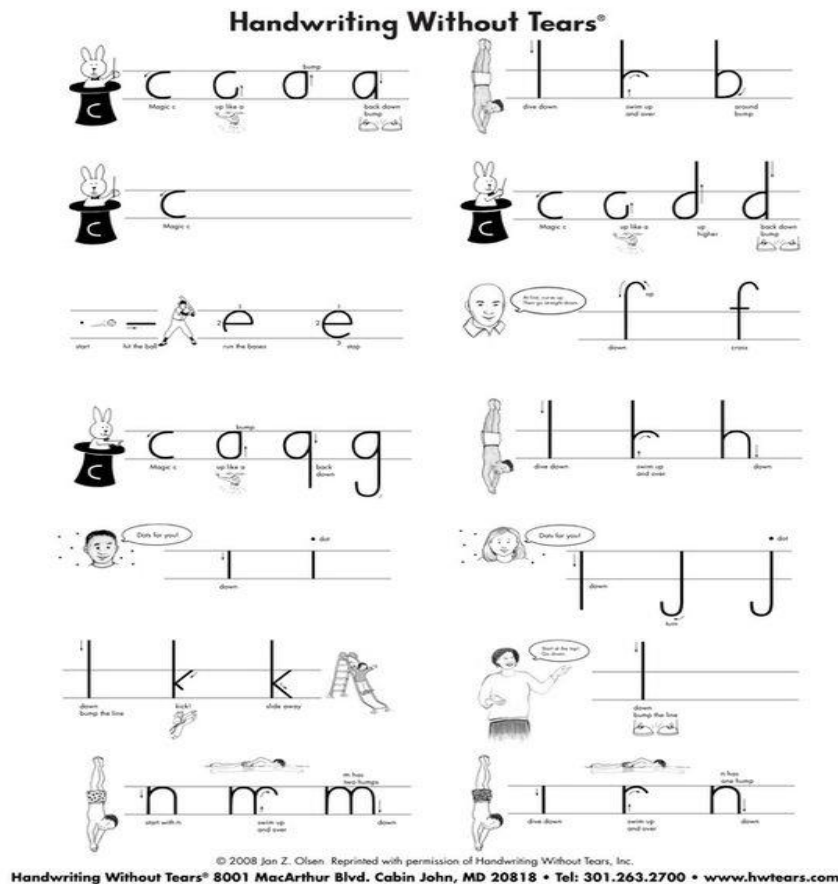
# Most common letters incorrectly formed:

- Magic “C” letters-c, o, a, d, g, q
- Diver letters- r, n, m, h, p, b
- Don’t forget about “e”
- These letters are your most important ones!!
- They are very common in words, and sometimes just correcting these letters can really help students write neater.

# Stress always starting at the TOP!!!

- Song- “Where do you start your letters?”
- Where do you start your letters? At the top!
- If you want to start a letter, then you better, better, better remember start it at the top!
- Is this the top, top, top? No, it’s the bottom. Is this the top, top, top? No, it’s the middle. Is this the top, top, top? It’s the top, top, top!
- Where do you start your letters? At the top!
- If you want to start a letter, then you better, better, better remember to start it at the top!

# Use letter stories/songs/rhymes to help remember! Copies available!



# May not matter in K or 1<sup>st</sup>...

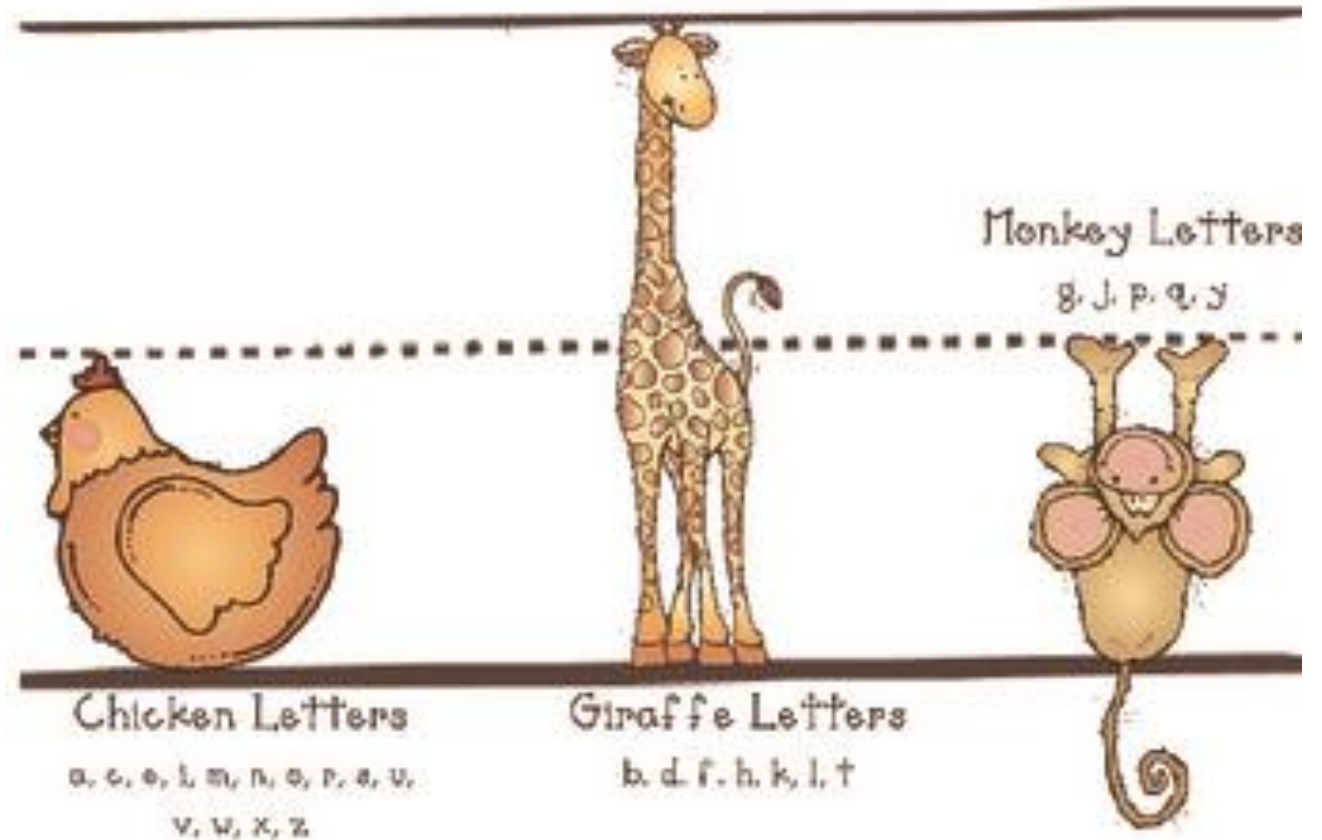
- But, incorrect formation patterns always impact student's later.
- When writing demands increase, they have to write more information and write faster.
- If they do not have good formation or good flow, the writing legibility will decrease because they are trying to write faster.
- Usually catches up with them in 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade—that's when the referrals start. SOOOOO hard to break those habits then.
- Catch it now!!!

# Correct line placement

- We have to teach where and how to place letters on the lines correctly.
- We all use so many different types of paper with different lines: Wide three-lined paper, narrow three-lined paper, bottom line only, a top and bottom line only, a box to write in, spaces or dotted lines to write letters on, etc.
- Cues to touch the fence (middle line), go to the worm (bottom line), up to the sky (top line), etc.
- Do your student's really know how to use the paper you're giving them?
- They get confused on where to put their letters.
- Try to pick one type of paper or narrow down the ones your student's are given.

Great visual!!

Teaches correct  
letter  
placement on  
the lines of  
paper.



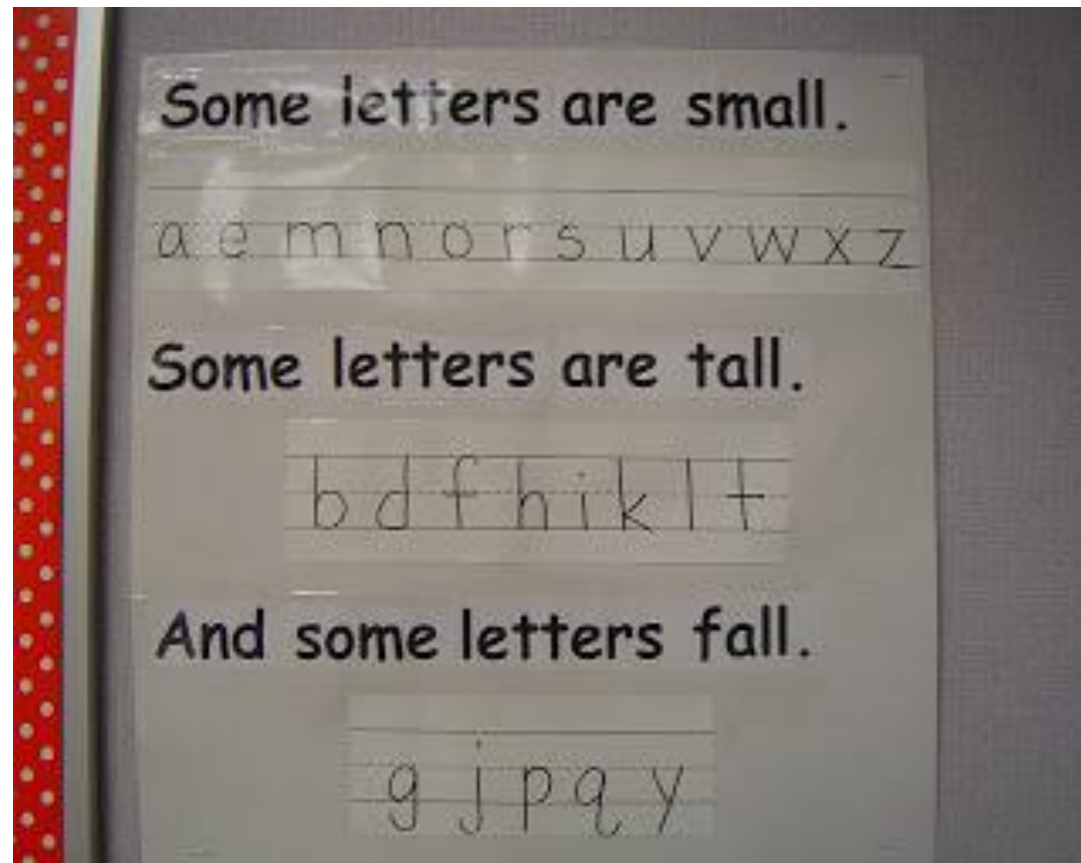


# Teaching formation



- Wet
  - Dry
  - Try
- 
- Can do on small chalkboard, big chalkboard, or outside on sidewalk with sidewalk chalk.
  - Dollar store small chalkboards

Another good example and rhyme for students.



# Build letters!

- These are Handwriting Without Tears wooden letter pieces.
- There are patterns you can make on your own and laminate.
- Make as center activity.
- Good for PreK because is only capital letters. Have seen some for lowercase.



# Bright lines

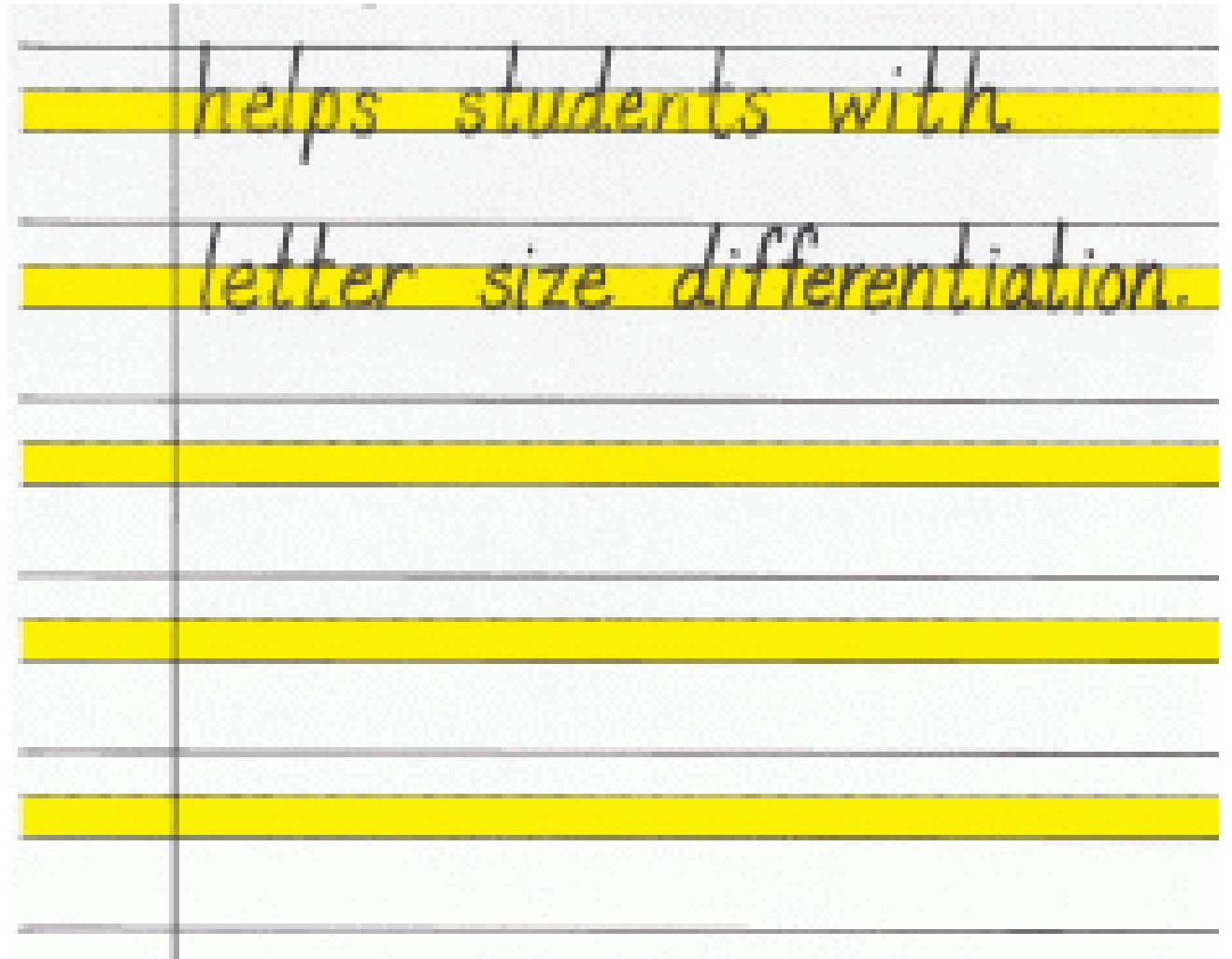
## Adaptive paper

This paper is great for teaching letter placement, and you can make yourself.

Or just highlight the bottom lines for students that need it.

Tell them to keep their “small” letters or “chicken” letters in the yellow.

Can use different color highlighter if prefer.



# HWT two-lined paper

Some teachers weren't a fan when program was used a few years ago...pick what works best for your students.

The paper is good, because it is simple.

Just put the short letters between the two lines.  
Only two lines to bump instead of three or four.

This is how to print on HWT wide double line paper. It is easy to use. The lines will help your students.

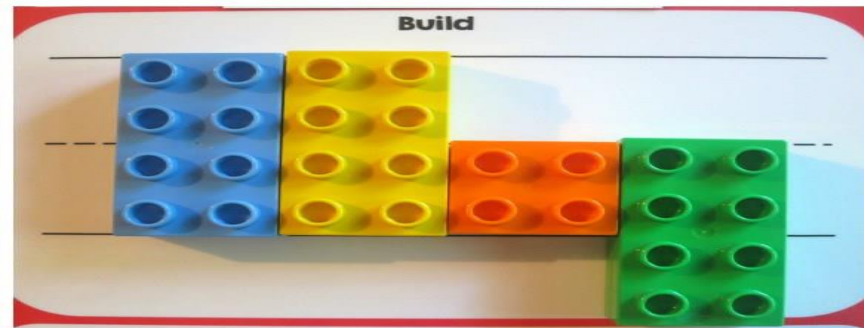
Wide Double Line  
Notebook Paper



Handwriting Without Tears®

301.263.2700 | [www.hwttears.com](http://www.hwttears.com)

Hands on activities for letter placement.  
Great for Boys—Legos! Center activity!



# **LEGO**

## **HANDWRITING MATS**

Read, Build the Shape, & Write



# Proper SPACING!!!

- Possibly THE most important aspect of writing neatly.
- Even if the words are misspelled and not on the lines, if there is proper spacing one can try to decipher the words.
- Such a foundational skills for later.
- Teaches them to slow down for higher grades when writing demands increase.



# Teaching Spacing

Put a sticker between words after finished.

Ask, "did you leave enough room for your stickers?"

Or put sticker at top of paper and say, "leave enough room for your sticker."

Small smiley stickers or star stickers work best.





# Spacing

- “Leave a whole lot of nothing.” Go around with empty bottle and sprinkle a “whole lot of nothing” between their words. Kids love it!
- Sometimes they don’t understand space, but they do get “nothing”!
- Popsicle sticks between words
- Finger spacers-but sometimes is difficult for kids with coordination issues.

# Spacing

- Come up with sentence. Write each word on a different piece of construction paper. Place paper on floor and have students jump between the papers.
- Then ask when writing, did you leave enough room to “jump between your words”???
- Cue words can be leave room for jumps!
- Make a center activity for coloring in spaces between words in sentences.

# Have weekly writing focus points...

- If you have one aspect of neat writing your class works on each week, you're not harping on every little detail everyday.
- That's too much with also focusing on content. I get that!
- Pick one area to have them pay attention to in their writing that week. Ex: Week 1- good spacing

Week 2- letters bump/touch the lines

Week 3- form Magic C letters correctly- c, o, a, d, g, q

Week 4- focus on diver letters- r, n, m, h, p, b

Week 5- diver letters below bottom line- g, j, y, q, p

# Sharpened pencils!!

- I get that it's hard to do...really I do!
- But sharpened pencils with erasers on the end really make a HUGE difference!!!
- We even write neater with a sharp point on our pencil.
- Ask paras to help with that.
- Have a sharpen pencil time in the morning.
- Always have a cup with sharpened pencils for them to use.

# Erasers!!!

- Bar erasers are sometimes all we have- I understand...
- But consider that it's one more step for students. Put down pencil, find big eraser, pick up big eraser, erase, put down eraser, pick pencil back up, then write again—wait, where's my spot? What am I writing again??
- Putting an eraser on the end of your pencil helps eliminate some of those steps.
- Need coordination activity of flipping pencil.
- Pencil top erasers are cheap.
- Put that on the school supply list for parents.
- Amazon 114 erasers for \$12.61.

Ask Paras to focus on this too...

- Make sure when paras work on writing in small groups that they are really checking on formation.
- Take advantage of the small group time to catch those errors.
- Group the letters with similar strokes in handwriting practice groups.

# PARENTS!!!!

- Teach them too!
- They may not know what all to work on!
- Send out a formation sheet at the beginning of the year.
- Send home weekly practice letters for formation.
- Some may not work on it, but some WILL!!!
- I have made that mistake before but not getting parents on board that would have really helped.



Most importantly---

- It won't improve it we don't work on it.
- Daily, consistent handwriting practice.
- No more than 5 to 10 minutes daily.
- Incorporate handwriting with other lessons too to work on carryover.