

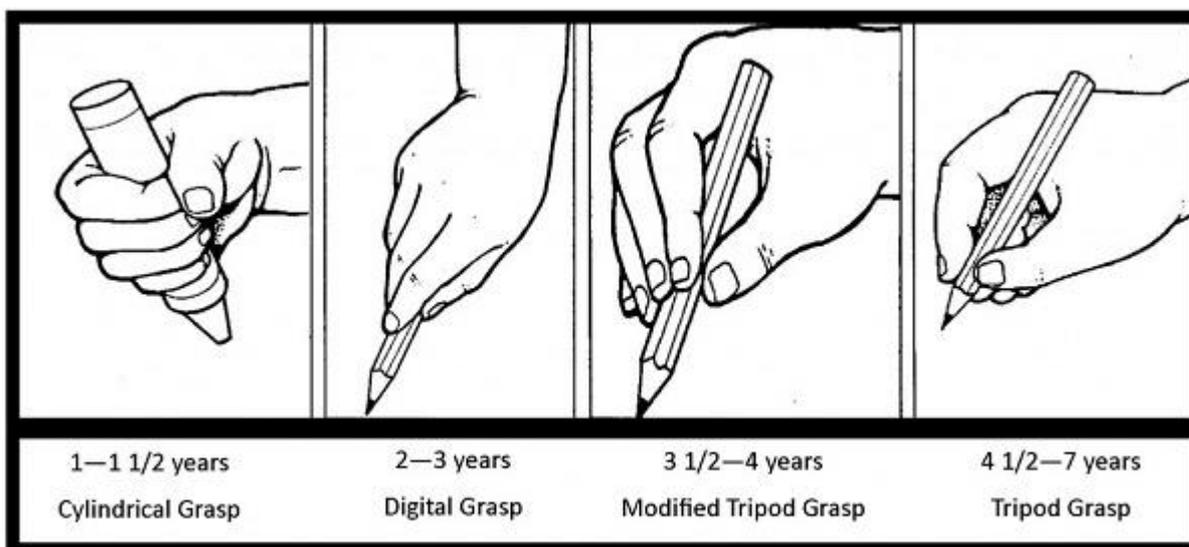
## A Guide to Writing

As parents you can support your child significantly with their writing skills by doing simple activities at home. It takes time and practise for children to learn letter formation and be able to write words and sentences independently.

### Holding a pencil

Every child is different but most children are not ready to practise formal writing with a pencil or pen until at least three and a half years of age. However, there are many informal ways of developing your child's hand eye coordination and fine motor control in preparation for writing. These include providing simple and then more complex jigsaws and puzzles, painting and chalking activities, and perhaps exploring beads and bead strings for threading. Once your child is starting to draw and paint pictures they may be ready to start engaging in activities which specifically focus on developing their tripod grip.

In order for your child to start learning to write they firstly need to learn how to hold a pencil correctly. This skill takes time to master so it can prove helpful to use a triangular pencil with a special pencil grip to begin with. Firstly, demonstrate to your child how they should hold their pencil and give them time to practise. You may decide to provide a range of coloured paper or felt tip pens for your child to refine this skill in exciting and new ways.



Once your child is able to hold a pencil, you can begin by teaching them how to write their name. Start by practising in informal ways such as using a paintbrush to make marks in a tray of paint, sand, glitter or shaving foam. Allow your child to explore the tripod grip and practise holding the paintbrush correctly first. Encourage your child to practise holding felt pens, crayons and pencil colours, by providing them with a colouring book or coloured paper. Give them time to explore and develop their fine motor control and coordination. Model the correct way to hold pens and pencils so your child becomes use to using the tripod grip. You could remind them by explaining they need to use 'Tommy thumb, Peter pointer and Toby tall' when holding their pencil. It may be helpful to use a mini whiteboard with dry-wipe marker pens or a small chalk board before progressing to more formal pen and paper methods. Children like to feel they can erase mistakes easily and this makes learning to write less stressful and pressurised. Your child can also develop their pencil control using numbers and alphabet stencils. This process takes some time, so don't expect your child to master this skill overnight!

Once your child is showing confidence with the tripod grip and has some degree of control when using writing implements, you could begin introducing them to writing. **A good indication of writing readiness is the amount of detail your child adds into drawings – the more detail the more likely they are to be ready for learning to write e.g. a drawing of a person should have a head, body, arms, legs, fingers, feet facial features: eye, eyebrows, eyelashes, nose, ears, lips etc.** Your child needs to show interest and be ready for this stage.

The name formation card with this handout shows the correct letter formation for the lower case letters in your child's name. When writing your child's name please always use a capital letter at the start and then lower case letters. This is the way your child will be taught to write their name in nursery and school – when ready to write. You can get your child to trace the letters on the card following the arrows in the correct direction – use a wipe off pen or their finger. You may also want to try writing in pen (a yellow fine line felt-tip is ideal) and your child to try tracing over each letter with their pencil. Explain to your child how each letter is formed i.e. where they should start and finish. Once they are able to trace over your writing, let them practise writing over dotted words and then progress onto writing their name independently. Children gain a great deal of self-esteem and confidence by being able to write and recognise their own name before starting school.