

Preparing to Write



The Journey to Becoming a Writer

Before being able to successfully form letters to write children usually go through the following stages of development;



The Shoulder Pivot

The Elbow Pivot

The Wrist Pivot

Developing fine motor strength



Young children are developing strength in these areas of their bodies and we can help them to progress by providing certain types of activities.



The First Stage: Shoulder Pivot



This is when the muscles in the upper body; the neck, chest and back are the most well developed and the child uses these to make marks. The wrist is quite stiff at this stage and the elbow is generally straight with most of the movement coming from the shoulder. Children make big marks with equipment including long, straight lines and large, circular patterns. At this stage children are using a “palmer” grip where they hold objects (including pencils) by making a fist around them.

To support development of this shoulder pivot and to help them to move on to the next stage some good activities to try include;

Washing walls, windows and floors with sponges and brushes.

Painting with mops or rollers.

Digging in sand or soil.

Dancing or exercises encouraging big arm movements.

Drawing on upright surfaces e.g. big whiteboards, blackboards, easels.



The Second Stage: The Elbow Pivot

When children have developed strength in their shoulders and backs you will notice more movement further down the arm at the next point of pivot; the elbow. At first the shoulder area will be used in conjunction with the elbow but as strength develops the elbow will move more freely with the shoulder taking a less noticeable role.

To support development of this elbow pivot and to help children to move on to the next stage some good activities to try include;

Woodwork, particularly sawing motions.

Sweeping, using a dustpan and brush.

Drawing on large pieces of paper; upright or on the floor.

Pulling themselves up on to climbing walls/equipment.

Throwing and catching underarm. Cooking; especially stirring.



The Third Stage: The Wrist Pivot

Once the arms have become stronger the pivot changes again, moving down to the wrist. Balance has generally improved by now as well and more control is in evidence as children are more able to make smaller movements with equipment.

Usually the child's grip will be changing too; their wrist may bend and their first finger will be exerting more control over tools and writing implements.

To support development of this elbow pivot and to help children to move on to the next stage some good activities to try include;

Threading, sewing, weaving.

Dabbing with sponges or brushes, finger painting.

Splatter painting, smaller pieces of paper/areas for painting and drawing.

Finger football. Anything a little smaller and fiddly!



Developing Fine Motor control

The next step is to work on hand and finger strength so that children can develop the best pencil grip using the tiny pivots at the end of their fingers.



Some activities that help include;

Touching their thumb to each finger on the same hand in turn.

Holding up 1, 2, 3 etc fingers (and fold down the others) when singing rhymes, showing numbers.

Holding paper with one hand and cutting it with the other.

Picking up small objects with their thumb and first finger; helping to peg out the washing.

Helping to make and use playdough, plasticine.

Playing with nuts and bolts, small lego pieces, bending pipe cleaners.

References: Getting Ready to Write by Alistair Bryce-Clegg 2013

