

8 FAQ'S TO SUPPORT HANDWRITING DEVELOPMENT

Questions to Consider

Suggestions to Support Handwriting

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| 1 | Does the student have enough space on his or her desk to complete the writing task? | Remove clutter from desks and tabletops. Students with poor posture might need space to lean or rest their elbows while writing. |
| 2 | Can the student place both feet squarely on the floor and still rest their elbows on the desk for support? | Be sure that when students sit, their ankles, knees and hips are bent at 90° angles and they can comfortably rest their elbows on their desks. Chairs and desks that are too tall require students to expend extra energy while writing. If students are unable to comfortably rest their feet on the floor, ask the building engineer to adjust their desk and chair heights or provide students with a short stool or a stack of books to rest their feet on. These adjustments will increase students' postural stability, which will allow them to exercise greater distal control and use their writing instruments more proficiently. |
| 3 | Does the student switch hands or complain that his or her hand hurts during long writing tasks? | Students who have established hand dominance and continue to switch hands or complain of fatigue while writing may have decreased hand strength. Provide writing tools with a greater diameter and opportunities to develop hand muscles through activities such as cutting, playing with clay, and using manipulatives. |
| 4 | Does the student use excessive force when writing as evidenced by thick marks that leave deep indentions on the paper? | Excessive force when writing may indicate decreased hand strength or difficulty processing sensory information. Provide writing tools with a greater diameter and let students experiment with placing their writing papers on top of different textures, such as bubble wrap, sandpaper, and cardboard. For example, students who press too hard while writing on top of bubble wrap will rip their papers. This will cue them to reduce the force they use on their writing instruments. The other textured materials will provide them with varied sensory feedback. This may help to build muscle memory and increase automatic letter writing. |
| 5 | Does the student use a mature pencil grip? | Some students hold their pencils incorrectly or develop inefficient habits. If students are still learning to hold writing utensils, instruct them on how to hold their pencils correctly and see whether a pencil gripper helps them to maintain this position. If students already have an established pencil grip, consult with an occupational therapist to determine whether the grip is efficient and will promote writing speed. |
| 6 | Does the student consistently rest his or her head on the desk, rub his or her eyes, squint, or close one eye when reading or writing? | Students who demonstrate any of these characteristics may have difficulty with vision. Refer these students to the school nurse for a vision screening. Remind students who have glasses to wear them as prescribed. |
| 7 | Does the student appear distracted by the amount of visual information presented on a worksheet? | Reduce the amount of visual stimulation by removing unnecessary pictures, using large fonts, reducing the amount of information on a single page, and providing well-defined spaces or lines for answers. |
| 8 | Does the student exhibit avoidance techniques? | <p>In addition to formal handwriting instruction, include supplemental writing activities for a real audience to increase their proficiency e.g. birthday/gift wish lists, websites they would like to explore, shopping lists, thank-you notes, or plans for the weekend.</p> <p>Students may be more apt to write for an extended period if they are interested, find value in the activity, and are not worried about receiving grades.</p> |

Reference: Susan Cahill, 2009