

## PRINTING SKILLS

### Occupational Therapy

## FORMING LETTERS

The correct way to make letters is from **top to bottom** and from **left to right**.

There are three basic steps when learning how to print and hand write:

### 1. Imitation

This is the first step in learning to make a shape or letter. The child *WATCHES* an adult make a letter in the correct way (top to bottom, left to right), and immediately tries to form it. The child may even trace the original marks first. This helps the child learn which part of the letter is drawn first. For example, with the letter “b”, the stick is drawn from the top to the bottom and then the ball is made clockwise.

### 2. Copying

After practice imitating, the child is ready to TRY to make the letter FROM A MODEL, which is already made on paper.

### 3. From memory

At this stage, the child is able to remember what the letter looks like and how to form it without seeing an example of it. This is the most difficult level.

Learning how to print on paper is a very demanding skill. For a child who is struggling with printing tasks, using a variety of ways to practice letter formations that don't require pencil/paper may be beneficial.

### Ways to Make Printing Fun

- Use **different writing tools** such as coloured chalk, crayons, pencil crayons, gel pens, markers (changeable, scented), pens, pencils, felt-tipped pens, paints (finger paints, water colours), shaving cream, lotions, puddings, whipping cream, etc.
- Use **different writing surfaces** such as a chalkboard, Magnadoodle, wipe off boards, or paper taped to the wall. Paint letters with water or with chalk on the sidewalk, trace letters in the air, sand, finger paint, whipping cream, etc. Write on aluminum foil, coloured construction paper, chalkboard, different types of paper (sand paper, paper

bags, waxed paper, newspapers, wrapping paper, typing paper, and construction paper), use colouring books.

### Fun Ideas You Can Try

You can do several fun activities at home to **reinforce proper letter formation**. A few are listed below:

- **Practice using chalk.** The classroom chalkboard is one of the best handwriting surfaces. Students receive resistance to muscles and joints, helping them learn letter forms and patterns. Desktop chalkboards are also a good alternative. Outdoors, practice using sidewalk chalk.
- **Use textured writing surfaces.** A bumpy or slightly textured material placed beneath the writing paper gives students additional input while writing with a pencil, marker, or crayon. Common textured materials include outdoor screen fabric, fine-grit sandpaper, fine mesh netting, and wallpaper samples.
- **Fill plastic bags for a spongy writing surface.** Fill gallon-size Ziplock™ plastic bags with one-half cup of brightly coloured finger-paint, petroleum jelly, or hair-styling gel. The student uses the index finger to write letters and words on the plastic bag. Be sure no one has sharp fingernails.
- **Provide writing trays with grainy surfaces.** Fill a cookie sheet/tray, a plastic container, or a plate with dried grainy material, such as cornmeal, dried crushed leaves, dry gelatine pudding, sand, kinetic sand or breakfast drink powder. Ground coffee works well. Students use their index fingers for writing.
- **Place viscous material on tray for finger writing.** Use a viscous substance, such as chocolate syrup, hand lotion, pudding, Funny Foam™, or shaving cream, in a tray, on aluminum foil, or in a plastic page protector. Creamy substances with texture (e.g., finger paint with sand) can be used, also. Students use the index finger for writing.
- **Build letters.** Use dough, sticks, chopsticks, blocks, etc. to build the letters. All upper case letters can be built with “Big line, Little Line, Big Curve, Little Curve”, which can make it easier to recall letter formations when using simple and repetitive vocabulary.

- **Use tracing to learn proper letter forms.** Use any three different coloured markers or crayons for tracing and re-tracing the proper letter forms. This allows the muscles to “remember” how to make letters. “Changeable” markers and crayons also work well for Rainbow Writing.
- **Use materials that provide resistance.** Using surfaces and writing tools that don’t provide friction and resistance can be motivating but may not transmit important information to finger and wrist muscles. Refrain from using dry-erase (white) boards with dry-erase markers, if you are trying to provide increased resistance.

## PRINTING TIPS

The following are *some hints* that have been compiled by School Health Occupational Therapists to help children with fine-motor issues:

### Posture is Important!

Feet are flat on the floor, head is up with eyes on paper, arms supported on the surface, and the hand that is not printing should hold the paper (i.e., gives the paper a ‘high-five’).

### Printing Legibility

When printing, it is important to have punctuation, good spacing, sizing of letters, and placement on the line to help make it legible.

- Have your child use their index finger of their non-writing hand to make the space, or use a popsicle stick to ensure that there is enough space between words.
- Trial different paper (with three lines/two lines) to help position their letters. Provide an example of how to position letters/words.
- Draw attention to the size of letters (tall, small, drop-down), and how they are placed on the line and in the spaces.
- Encourage proper punctuation and use of capitals appropriate.
- Review their work with a checklist for self-evaluation and make corrections (to sizing, spacing, positioning) to ensure someone else can read what they wrote.