

## STARTING PRIMARY SCHOOL

When children start in Reception they will all be at different stages of their learning and skill development depending on their pre-school opportunities and their birthdate. The first year in primary school is a time for children to naturally develop and consolidate skills such as developing hand dominance and developing pencil grip and pre-writing skills. The ideas in this advice sheet can be used with all children to support their natural development in Reception and into Year 1 by complimenting the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. For more detailed advice and strategies for children who are having difficulties with more specific skills please see the related advice sheets.

Moving to Write is a programme developed by the Cumbria Occupational Therapy service and CCC Early Years Team and helps to consolidate early sensorimotor development and readiness for learning for children in early years and reception settings. Please contact your Early Years Advisor for more information about this.



### Good seating and positions for play and learning

Children starting school should be encouraged to use lots of different positions for play and learning, but when they do sit it is important to ensure proper positioning of the chair – it should allow the child to have hips, knees and ankles in a 90° - 90° - 90° position. Thighs should be well supported, feet flat on the floor and forearms resting on desk of appropriate height. Child should sit up, not 'hunched' as this compromises fluid movements of the arm.

For children who are having difficulties, sit them close to the teacher and the board with minimal visual distractions. Ensure that they are facing the board.

Encourage children to assume different positions in which to work and play that are comfortable for them:



### Pre-writing shapes

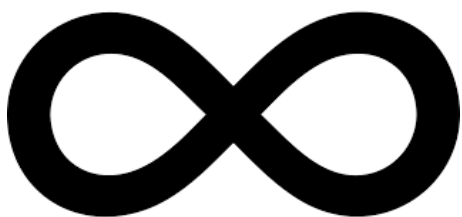
Pre-writing contains all the lines, curves and connecting points that are used to form letters:



Typically, a child who has difficulty forming these shapes will have difficulty with letter formation. For example, if a child cannot draw a diagonal line, they will struggle to write the letter 'M' which is a problem when they're called Max! It's important for children to be able to draw these shapes before being expected to write letters.

If a child has not been motivated to carry out pre-writing activities whilst in pre-school they will need to spend more time carrying out these activities in Reception before being expected to start forming letter shapes.

Have mark making equipment readily available for children to practice drawing and writing and use writing tools that will make strong and vivid marks to give the child good visual feedback e.g. oil pastels, chalks.



Lazy 8's improve visual tracking and encourages crossing midline. Try using a chalk board or shaving foam to encourage large arm movements

Children can sometimes find it easier to learn to write using different senses:

- Cut out letters from newspapers or magazines
- Draw in sand or shaving foam
- Draw big letters on a chalk board or white board to encourage crossing midline
- Use objects to form letters e.g. skipping ropes or play dough
- Make the shapes with bodies
- Write letter shapes in the air using streamers
- Draw shapes on their back and ask them to tell you what it is
- Use finger paints
- Trace over string or different textures with fingers
- Walking letter shapes



### **Crossing midline ([Being able to reach across my body](#))**

Crossing the midline means using part of one side of the body in the space of the other part. Having efficient bilateral coordination enables both feet or both hands to work together which allows you to play and work with fluid body movements. Bilateral coordination and crossing the body's midline also support a child's development of fine motor skills, ability to use tools and to visually track a moving object. Here are some ideas to help develop crossing midline:

- Play Simon says. Incorporate postures that cross the midline of the body i.e. right hand on left knee etc.
- Draw a road on a large piece of paper. Ask the child to sit on hands and knees whilst driving a car over this road. Make sure the child stays in one place so the arm has to cross the body midline.
- Sit with legs out in front and have puzzle pieces either side of legs. Use opposite arm to

pick up pieces and put puzzle together between legs.

- Play clapping games with a partner. Cross midline when clapping i.e. right hand to right hand then left hand to left hand. Make up rhymes if you can't remember any!
- See [Being able to reach across my body](#) for more information and ideas.



### Pencil grip

A tripod grasp is when the pencil is supported by the thumb, index and middle finger. The ring and little finger are bent and rest comfortably on the table.



There are developmental stages to how a pencil grip develops and if a child isn't holding a pencil in a tripod grasp it may be because they are not developmentally ready to do so. See [Writing and the development of writing](#) for more details on the development of a functional pencil grasp.

The child's grasp should always be comfortable and energy efficient for the writing task. Try using different sized pencils, triangular pencils, hard and soft lead.

For children whose pencil pressure is too hard:

- Elevate work or use easel or board on the wall
- Place a sheet of paper on a tea towel. Ask the child to draw with pencils, but not make any holes in the paper
- Wrap pen shaft with looped side of Velcro to give sensory feedback
- Put sandpaper under work

For children whose pencil pressure is too light:

- Lower work or work on the floor to increase downward pressure
- Practice using writing objects in clay or play dough, which add resistance
- Make a drawing, using crayons or pencils in which you experiment with thick lines (pressing hard) and thin lines (pressing not so hard)

## Hand dominance

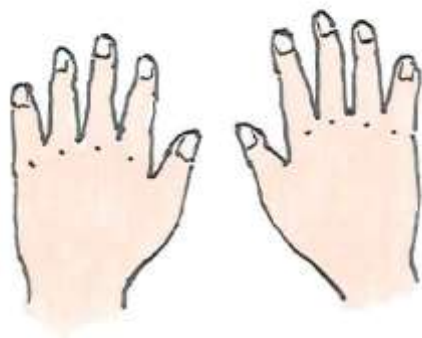
Lack of established hand preferences and the inability to know left from right is a common feature amongst children who are uncoordinated in motor skills and is often reflected in handwriting difficulties. However, it is normal for some children to not have established hand dominance when they start in Reception but they should be beginning to develop this by the end of Reception/beginning of Year 1.

### How to discover hand dominance:

Place items directly in front of the child in the midline and take note which hand they use to pick up the objects. Keep a tally of how often they use which hand.

It is okay for a child to have different hand dominance for different tasks as long as they always use the same hand for the same task.

Put a watch/bracelet or other identifying marks such as a coloured sticker on the dominant or writing hand if established, as a visual prompt.



See [Coordinating my body for play and activities](#) and [Using My Hands](#) advice sheets for lots more ideas to help develop skills needed for the classroom.

## Other ideas for the classroom

- Use Dycem (non slip surface) to help stabilise and position paper correctly
- The paper may be placed to the right of the midline and tilted in an anti-clockwise direction for right-handers (vice-versa for left handers).
- Work should be presented in small clear and concise amounts
- Worksheets should be plain and free from decoration, as this can be visually distracting and confusing.

