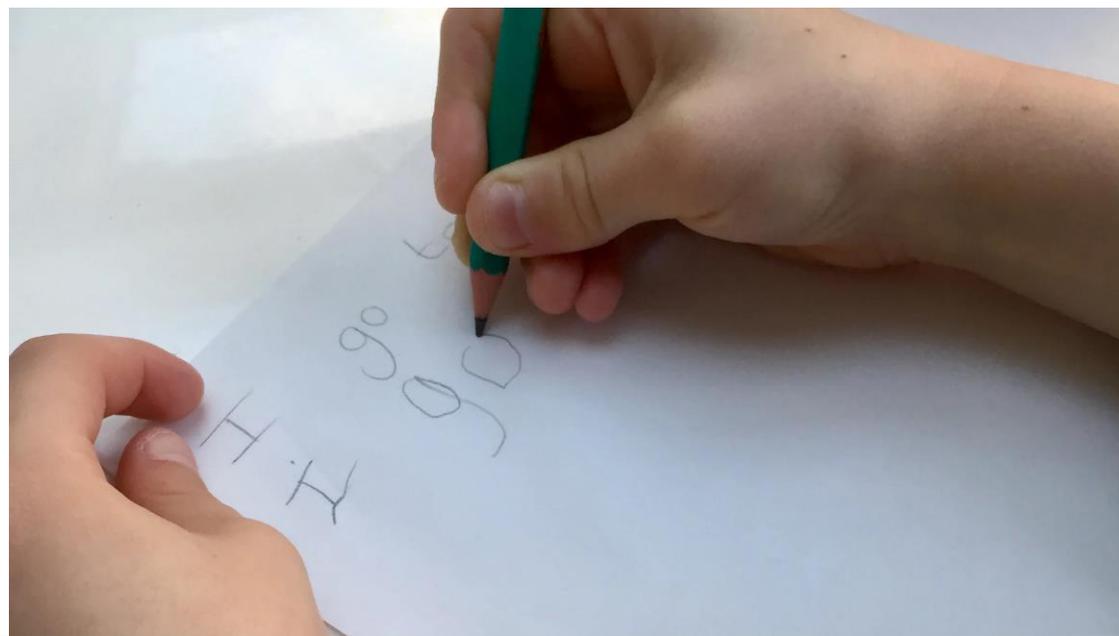
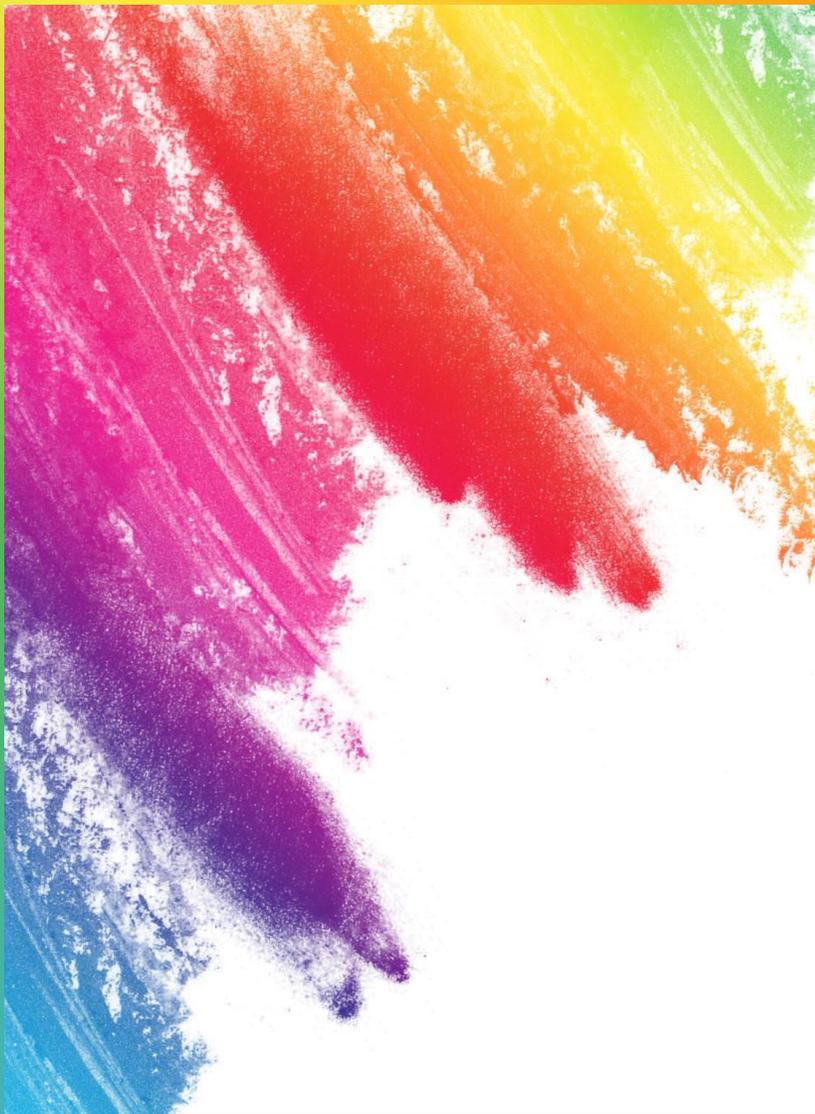


Skills for Writing





Gross Motor Skills

Children learn to control their bodies from the centre outwards and from the top downwards. At first your child will be able to manipulate the arm from the shoulder joint; gradually he or she understands how to control their hands and finally he/she learns how to make the fine finger movements needed to write. To develop gross motor skills, children need a rich diet of physical activities to develop their core strength and upper body strength.

Balance beams

Crawling through tunnels

Climbing

Carrying buckets of sand or water

Swinging/Hanging on monkey bars

Digging in the sand or soil

Swings and Slides

Cycling

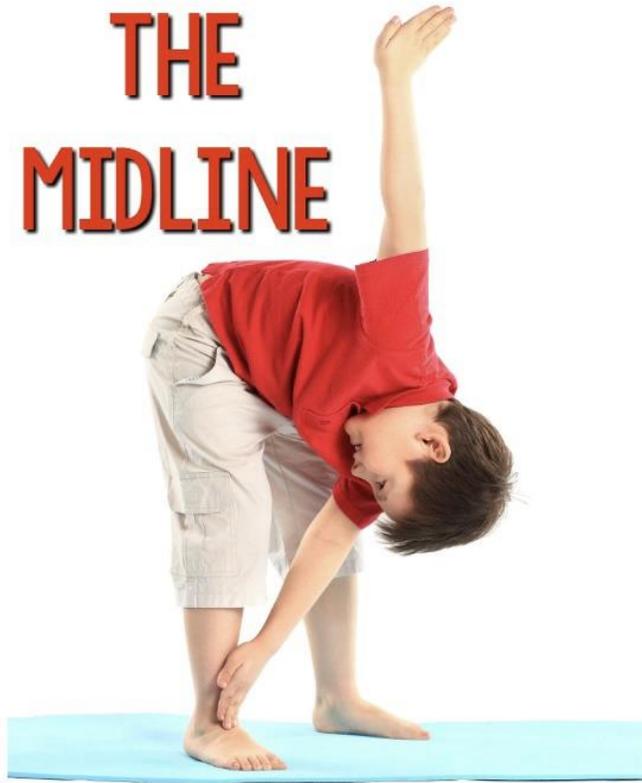
Swimming

Gymnastics

Yoga and dance sessions

Tug of war

CROSSING THE MIDLINE

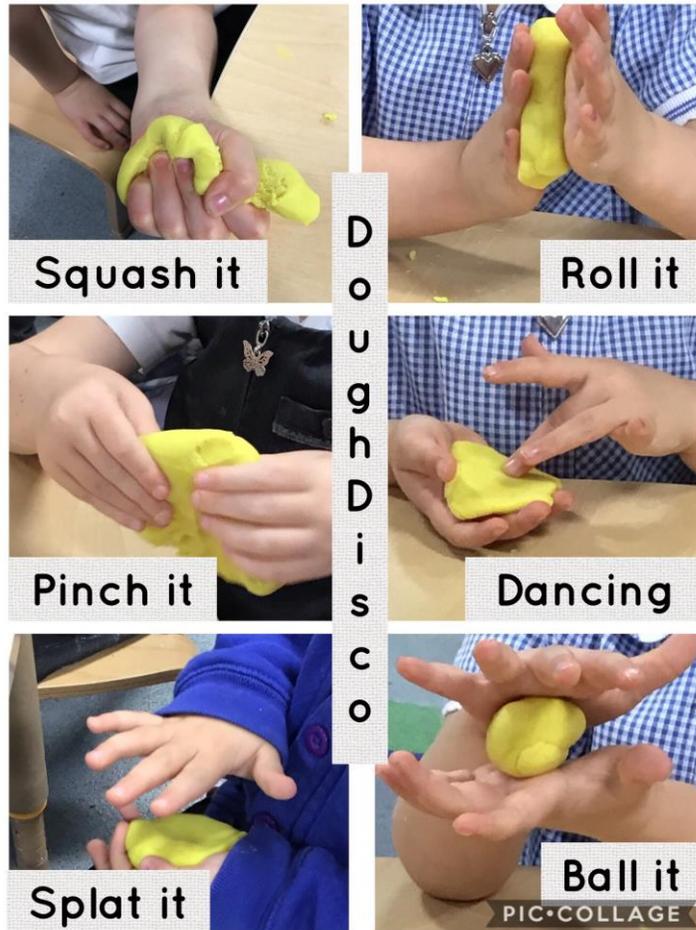


Crossing the Midline

Most of us have a dominant side to our bodies - typically, the right if you are right-handed. You will find it easier to control your movements on your dominant side, and indeed you will subconsciously focus your attention on this side of a room. In order to be able to write, your children need to be able to coordinate both sides of their bodies together, with one hand holding the paper, while the other manipulates the pen. This ability to coordinate the two sides of your body, while doing different things with each side, is known as 'bilateral integration'. It allows us to perform activities such as tying knots, or kicking a football. Your children also need to learn how to 'cross the mid line' - to be able to control their movements across the centre point of the body. It is this that will let them write without changing the pen over to their other hand midway through a line. Try these two activities to support the development of bilateral integration:

Play 'Simon Says' with a twist: Ask the children simultaneously to perform one action with one hand (pat your head) and a different action with the other (rub your tummy).

Play 'Copy me'/Mirror games: Ask the children to copy/mirror you doing actions that require you to cross the midline. Ie. Touch your left ear with your right hand. Touch your right knee with your left hand etc



Fine Motor Skill development

As well as building up their gross motor skills, your children need to develop the fine motor control required to hold and manipulate a writing tool. They need to develop strength in their wrists and hands, and also a high level of finger control. Some of the key actions required are: grip strength (make a fist to feel this action); pinch strength (hold an invisible pencil tight to feel this action); and eye to hand coordination (also known as 'visual motor integration'). Many of the games and activities you do in your early years setting will help your children develop these movements:

- At snack-time, build hand and finger strength by cutting up foods, grating, squeezing and using cloths to wipe up
- In the sand and water trays, you could be squeezing out sponges, pouring liquids from one jug to another and washing up
- Drawing on vertical surfaces helps build strength in the wrists and is also very useful for left-handed children
- Tracing around mazes is great for eye-to-hand coordination
- Squashing and squishing activities will build up lots of strength in the hands - playdough, clay, pastry, gloop and so on
- Toys that involve pop-together-and-pull-apart movements are great for building finger strength.



Developing Dexterity

If you consider the actions you use when writing, you'll see how important it is that you have a high level of dexterity. This skill is needed for lots of other activities too, including self-care tasks such as doing up buttons and pulling on clothes. Help your children develop their dexterity by:

- Doing up and undoing buttons and zips
- Threading beads
- Using tweezers and chopsticks
- Building towers
- Turning keys in locks
- Playing with peg boards
- Colouring in between the lines on a picture
- Icing biscuits
- Cutting or tearing paper around an outline.



Holding a Writing Tool

At first, children usually grasp the pencil or pen using a fist grip, which then develops into a finger grasp. The ultimate aim is for them to learn how to use a 'dynamic tripod grasp', where the pen or pencil is held between the thumb and the index and middle fingers, and they should be able to do this from about three or four years old. The child makes a tripod shape with the thumb and fingers, with the pencil resting on the soft bit between the thumb and forefinger.

We use 'Peter Parrot' to help us remember or the 'Pick and Flick' method.

Help your children learn how to control their individual fingers by singing lots of rhymes where the fingers hide or disappear, such as '10 Little Fishes'. Keep an eye on your child and encourage them to hold their writing tool correctly - bad habits are easy to get into but very hard to break.