

Developing handwriting skills (2-6 years)

Why develop handwriting?

Handwriting is an essential life skill. Even though many children and adults use computers and tablets at school and work, children need to write to do homework, tests and assignments. They also need handwriting skills to do many tasks later in life, like filling in forms and signing important documents.

How children learn to write

Children develop handwriting at different rates. Your child will start with scribbling and drawing, then move on to forming letters and words. Learning to write involves fine-motor skills, language, memory and concentration. It also takes lots of practice.

Toddlers generally begin to show an interest in scribbling and drawing from about two years. From around three, your child will start to draw straight and circular lines, and even put these lines and shapes together to draw people and objects. Between three and five, she might also be starting to form letters.

When your child starts school, she will learn to:

- form letters.
- recognise and spell frequently used words.
- put spaces between words.
- write letters and words of a similar size and in a line.
- write about familiar events.

Tips to help your child develop handwriting

2 years

Here are a few ideas to get your toddler drawing, scribbling and 'writing':

- Give your child chunky crayons and chalk until she has developed the finger and thumb grip she needs to hold a pencil.
- Collaborate on a drawing. For example, you could draw a centipede and your child could add lots of legs. Or you could draw a cloud and she could draw rain.
- Give your child lots of activities that involve squeezing and pinching things, like threading big beads and pinching playdough into shapes. This helps her develop the hand muscles she needs for using pencils.
- Give your child an angled drawing surface, like an easel or blackboard. This helps her make a downward stroke, which she needs for writing later on.

3-4 years

Lots of opportunities to draw will help your child develop the skills she needs for handwriting. Here's how to help:

- Encourage your child to trace simple top-to-bottom and left-to-right lines on a page, trying to stay on the lines all the way to the end. Make up a story to add interest to the activity – for example, 'Help this puppy find the way home'.
- Encourage her to practise drawing anticlockwise circles that start at the top of the page. This is the pattern we use to form letters.
- Help your child to recognise and write her name by starting with the first upper-case letter. Encourage her to trace over the letters of her name and eventually to write them.
- Give your child opportunities to write and draw with other materials – for example, drawing lines in sand, tracing over letters on signs with her finger and forming letters from playdough.

5-6 years

Here are a few tips to encourage your older child's handwriting:

- Make a place for writing at home. Have a stable chair and a surface at the level of your child's belly button.
- Ask your child's teacher for a sample sheet with the starting points for each letter clearly marked. This can help your child practise at home what she's learning at school.
- To help your child learn to form a letter, write it lightly and correctly yourself. Put a green dot at the starting point and a red one at the finishing point and get her to trace over your letter.
- Say the letter's name and practise saying the letter sound with your child as she's drawing or tracing the letter.
- Use everyday opportunities to practise writing – for example, get your child to add items to the family shopping list, or help with birthday cards.

No matter how well your child draws or writes, give her plenty of praise and encouragement for trying. And if you put her pictures on the fridge or wall, she will feel proud of her work and want to keep trying.



Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

Recommended Reads

- [Baby dinosaurs](#)
- [The day the crayons quit](#)
- [The boy who loved words](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Draw the Bus](#)
- [A to Z](#)
- [What Time is it?](#)
- [Name the Animals](#)
- [Chicka Chicka Letters](#)
- [Alphabet Trace for Kids](#)