

## Fine Motor Skills

**What are they?** Fine motor skills are the small movements used for control and precision during activities. Fine motor skills include hand dominance (“doing hand, helping hand”), hand separation (“busy fingers, sleepy fingers”), an efficient grasp (pincer and tripod) and in-hand manipulation (“fiddly fingers”).

**Why are they important?** Fine motor skills are the skills that control the pencil in the fingers and hand. Handwriting relies on fine motor skills being established. If a child does not have good fine motor skills they will find it difficult to develop an effective grip and pencil control.

**When children are using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) in activities, you can use a “pillow” to help them tuck away their “sleepy fingers”. A cotton wool ball can be held in the hand by the “sleepy fingers”, this allowing the children to practise using their pincer grip and tripod grasp in motor tasks.**



## Stages of Motor Learning

Handwriting is a motor skill, therefore it is important to think about the stages of motor learning that children experience. Initially, children need to go through these stages with the *pencil control concepts*, they then need to start at stage one again to apply it to *letter formation* and then again into *handwriting*.

### Stage 1: Thinking about it (cognitive stage)

- Children gain understanding and knowledge about different aspects of the skills.
- Activities that can help at this stage are ones that include thinking (asking questions and reflecting), looking (attending to different aspects) and doing (experiencing the movement).
- Feedback is very important. This can be either internal or external, from another child or an adult.

### Stage 2: Practising it (associative stage)

- Children rely on their knowledge and previous experiences to refine their skills.
- Repetition **is not the same** thing as practice. Repetition can lead to mistakes that can become embedded and difficult to correct. Practice involves thinking and making changes.
- This stage of learning may take a long time. For handwriting, it is expected that this will take several years.

### Stage 3: Doing it automatically (autonomous stage)

- Once children have reached this stage, they are able to focus on **what** they are writing, rather than on **how** they are writing.

Thinking

Looking

Doing

With a Pencil

Children **first** have the opportunity to learn and experience their pencil control skills through Thinking-Looking-Doing activities.

Children **then** have the opportunity to practice and consolidate these skills with a pencil.

## How you can support this?

### Bob the Ball:

Children will need a tennis ball with a slit cut out which acts as the mouth of Bob. They will also need materials, e.g. pasta, to feed Bob and a clothes peg.

- ❖ Children to hold Bob in their “helping hand”, using their “helping hand” to squeeze his mouth open
- ❖ With their “doing hand”, children should use their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) to open and close the clothes peg.
- ❖ Using their “doing hand” children to pick up items, e.g. pasta, to feed Bob, placing the items into Bob’s mouth.



### Bubble Wrap Pop:

- ❖ Children to use their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) of their “doing hand” to pop as many bubbles in the time given as the “helping hand” holds the bubble wrap.
- ❖ This can be repeated so that the “doing hand” and “helping hand” are reversed.
- ❖ It can also be developed where both hands are using their pincer grip to pop simultaneously.

### Bulldog Line:

- ❖ With a number of bulldog clips and a piece of washing line, children to clip as many bull dogs as they can using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) as they can in a given amount of time.
- ❖ Children to swap between their “doing hand” which is opening the bulldog clips and the “helping hand” which is holding the rope.

**This could also be done with pegs on the washing line.**

### Clips, Clasps and Screwing Jars:

**The adult should line up a number of jars which have different lids with clips, clasps and screw tops to open and close them. They should put something inside each jar which the children need to get out of the jar, e.g. a cube.**

- ❖ Children to open each of the jars using the different clips, clasps and screw top lids. They will need to use their “doing hand” to open and their “helping hand” to hold the jar. With clips and clasps they will need to use their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) to open.
- ❖ If they’ve sourced cubes from inside the jars, an additional challenge could be to build a tower.
- ❖ Children to close each of the jars.

### **Coin/ Card Flip:**

**Lay out a number of coins or playing cards out in a line. You can increase the complexity by adding more coins or cards.**

- ❖ Children to flip as many coins or cards over in a given time using their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) to flip the coins/cards.

**This can also be developed as a two person activity. On each side of the table, lay out the same number of cards or coins. Put one coin or card in the middle.**

- ❖ Children to flip over all of the coins or cards on their side of the table
- ❖ The first person to flip their coins or cards over, and flip the coin or card over in the middle finishes first.

### **Finger Puppet Football:**

**Children will need a multiple finger puppet and mini football. Adult should draw a dribbling track on a sheet of paper with curves and bends.**

- ❖ Using a multiple finger puppet, children to use their index finger and middle finger to move the ball from one side of the dribbling track to the other.

### **Get Building:**

- ❖ Children to use bricks, cubes or LEGO® to build something. Children to focus on using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) when picking up the bricks, cubes or LEGO®.

### **Jar – Bits and Pieces:**

**Adult to lay out a number of small bits and pieces: e.g. bricks, buttons, pipe cleaners, pom-poms etc. Children to also be given different objects which will act as “pick-ups”: e.g. bulldog clip, clothes peg, tweezers etc.**

- ❖ For each small piece, children should select one of the “pick-ups” to pick up the small piece and place it into the jar.
- ❖ Children should repeat the process for each small piece, until all of their small pieces are in the jar.
- ❖ Once all of their small pieces are in the jar, children should screw the lid onto the jar.

**This can also be done as a timed task where a number of children are completing the task simultaneously.**



### **Magic Trick:**

- ❖ Children to hold a small item, such as a coin or button, with their “busy fingers”.
- ❖ Children to use their fingers to move the item into the palm of the hand so that it disappears.
- ❖ They can then make it reappear using their “busy fingers” and hand it to someone or place it on the table.
- ❖ Children can see if they hide more than one item at once and how many they can make reappear.

### **Nuts and Bolts:**

- ❖ Children to screw the nuts on and off of bolts, using their “helping hand” to hold the bolt and their “doing hand” to screw on the nuts.

### **Pasta Lace:**

- ❖ Children to thread pieces of pasta onto a piece of lace, using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) to hold the lace and thread the pasta.

**Washing line or pipe cleaners could also be used as firmer alternatives to lace.**

### **Peg Boards and Pin Boards:**

- ❖ Children to push pegs into a peg board/ pins into a pin board, using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) to pick up and hold the pegs/pins when pushing them in. Children can use their “helping hand” to help hold the peg/pin board steady.

### **Piggy Bank:**

**The children will need a selection of different coins and a money box.**

- ❖ Children to pick up the individual coins using their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) and post them into the money box.

**This could be done as a timed task, posting as many coins in a given time.**

### **Pipettes in the Water:**

- ❖ Holding a pipette using their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger), children are to use the pipette to transfer water from one container to another container.

### Play-doh Balls:

- ❖ With a ball of play-doh, children to use their “doing hand” to roll smaller play-doh balls, using their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger) and tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger).
- ❖ These balls could be used for a different activity, e.g. finger football or feeding Bob the Ball.

### Roll it Up:

- ❖ Children to roll up a strip of crepe paper, using their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger).

**This could be done as a timed task to time how many strips can be rolled up in a given time.**

### Tearing Paper:

- ❖ Children to tear a piece of paper into strips, using their “helping hand” to hold the paper as their “doing hand” tears the strips of paper. They should use their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) when tearing the paper with their “doing hand”.

**This could be a timed task where children tear as many strips as possible in a given time.**

### Threading the Lace:

**Different materials can be used alongside the lace, e.g. colanders, lacing boards, lacing picture cards.**

- ❖ Using a “helping hand” to hold the object being laced, and using a “doing hand” to lace, holding the lace with their tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger), children thread the lace back and forth through the lacing object.

### Tweezer Tub:

**Children will need a pair of plastic tweezers, a small tub and an item to put into the tub. The size of the item will determine difficulty, e.g. chickpeas, pasta, rice.**

- ❖ Children to use the tweezers to move the chickpeas/pasta/rice from a surface into the tub. Children should use their pincer grip (thumb and forefinger)/ tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger).

**This could be done as a timed task to see how much of the tub they can fill in a given time.**

### Wind-up Toy Race:

- ❖ Children to use their “helping hand” to hold the wind-up toy whilst using the tripod grasp (thumb, forefinger and middle finger) of their “doing hand” to wind up their toy.
- ❖ Once their toy has been wound up, children should race their toys from one end of the surface to another.