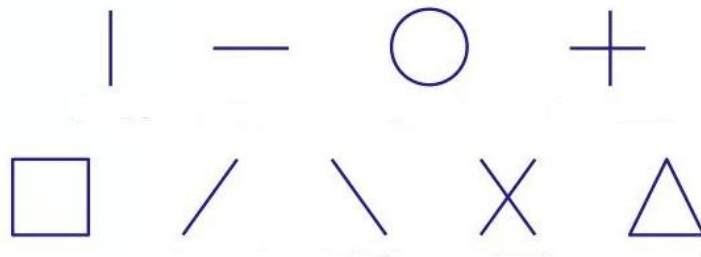


Developing Early Writing Skills

There is more to writing than just learning to make letters on paper, and it can be an extremely tricky skill to master. While many children may enjoy picking up a pencil or crayon and mark-making, it can be challenging for others. It is a good idea to encourage an interest in drawing and writing early on. Having a good understanding of the stages of early writing development is helpful and we have detailed some tips along the way to get your child engaged in mark-making whilst making it fun!

The shapes required for writing

For children to be ready to form letters they first need to master the following pre-writing shapes:



These are learnt in order, as your child develops so don't panic if your child cannot master the triangle, for example, we would not expect a child to be forming this confidently until the age of 5.

It is also important to remember that a child will not be ready to form letters until they have learnt to form *all* of these shapes. Therefore, lots of practise of these shapes in a variety of activities is a good foundation for helping them learn early writing skills.

Stage 1

Begin big! Start working on a large scale as this will be easier for your child whilst they are still trying to gain control of their mark-making tool.

Use a variety of surfaces, large sheets of paper or card, whiteboards or easels and large chunky tools are a great start for practising these shapes, shown here:



Begin with the



following shapes:



- Modelling the shapes for them is a good start, e.g. show them how to make the shapes. Draw pictures together, using the shapes, for example, make a person by drawing a circle for the head & getting your child to add in the eyes, nose, mouth, arms & legs (circles & lines).



Show your child that pencil & paper activities can be fun. You don't have to be an artist...it doesn't have to be perfect, it's about having fun together.

- A good tip is to work left to right when forming shapes, and move the tool from top to bottom. Try talking about direction when you are forming the shape such as "toward Mummy" or "going up" or "all the way down".
- The key is lots and lots of repetition, but take breaks and change the activity if your child gets bored.

Top Tip: Don't be limited to just paper and pens, you can make sensory bags (zip lock bags filled with food colouring or gel) and practise the shapes in these, or using a plate or tray of flour or shaving foam, or in play dough using play dough tools. Etch-a-skethes or Magna Doodles can be fun as well as chalkboards, paints, crayons, etc. Sit with your child and do games together!



Stage 2

Once your child is confident with the initial shapes, move on to the more advanced ones:

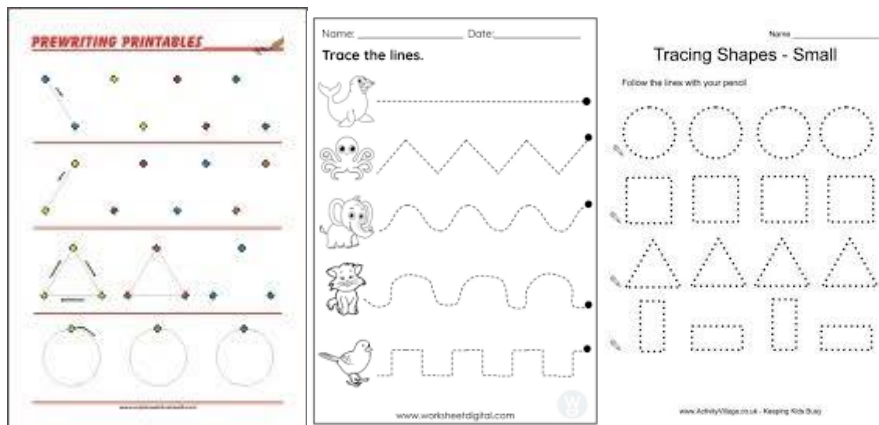


Again, practise on a larger scale and use guided support to begin with, using hand-over-hand to help them learn the movements for each shape. As your child becomes more familiar with the shape, reduce the support you give them until they are forming these independently.

Top Tip: Use stencils of the shapes made out of card at home, try dot-to-dot versions of each shape, or tracing the shape. You could make flashcards of the shapes and your child traces over your shape.

Stage 3

Slowly begin to move to a smaller scale as your child gains more control of the tool they are using; they will slowly become more confident forming shapes on a smaller scale and will be able to form them more accurately. Introduce worksheets to practise the shapes or pictures with the shapes in them. There are a wide range of pre-writing shape worksheets freely available on the internet which can be fun to complete with your child.



You could try using some scented markers or rainbow markers to complete them, this will make it fun!

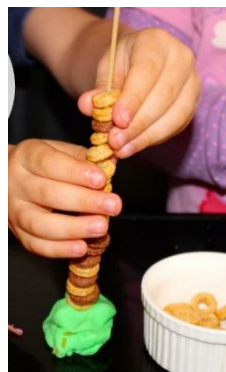
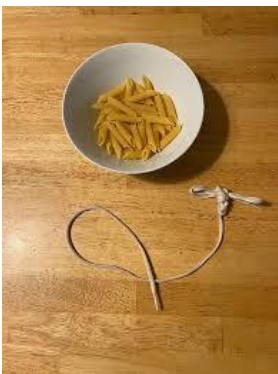
Top Tips:

- **Keep it fun and do short bursts at a time to keep your child engaged.**
- **Don't just stick to sitting at a table, change positions, lie on the floor with big sheets of paper, stand at a vertical surface, paper pinned to a wall, or a whiteboard or easel, or on all 4's out on the pavement!**
- **Break up the mark-making by incorporating games that work on improving hand grasp as part of working on early writing skills, this will keep their interest too. See below for some suggestions:**

- Use large plastic clothes pegs and ask your child to attach them to things, e.g., hanging dolls' clothes on washing line, or make themed pegs to attach to things e.g., frog pegs on to card lily pads.



- Threading pasta, cereal, buttons on to laces, straws, pipe cleaners



- Posting real or toy coins or buttons into boxes or containers



We would not generally encourage lots of screen time for young children, but if this is motivating for them, there are some great pre-writing games available to download and lots of them are free. A good way to make the most of digital devices when practising writing shapes and letters, is to use a stylus/device pen to form the shapes. This not only lets your child learn the movements and patterns needed, but also lets them practise tool grasp, which is important in preparation for pencil skills. There are a wide variety of stylus available online and the chunkier the stylus, the better, as it allows your child to gain control of the tool whilst they are still developing their skills. Some examples are shown here.



Next Steps

Once your child has mastered all of the pre-writing shapes and can form them independently, and if they are showing an interest in forming letters then now is the time to move to letter formation. There are lots of different approaches to letter formation. It is important that children learn the correct starting place for each letter as this will help your child to move onto joined writing more easily, when they are older. We have specific advice for letter formation on our website.