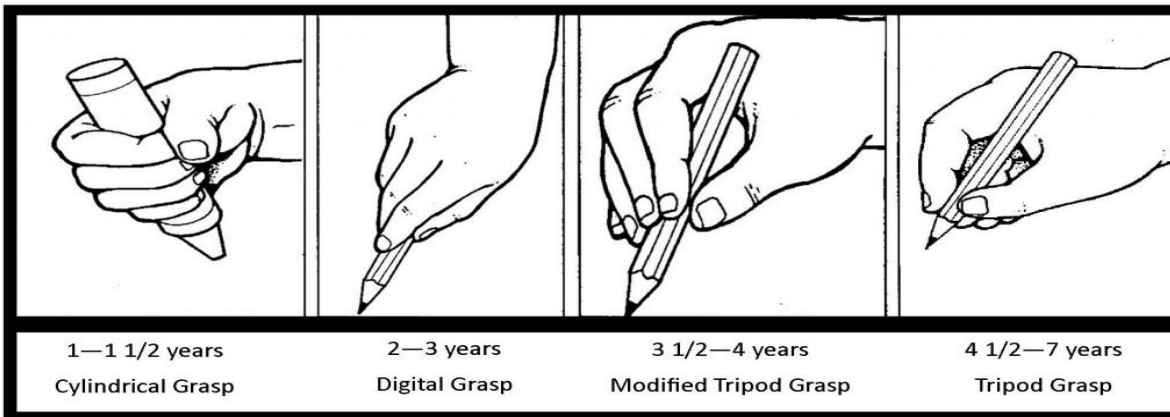


First Steps for Holding a Pencil

Hand Dominance (right-handed or left-handed) can continue to develop until the age of 5. It is okay for a child to switch hands when they are younger; however, if clear hand dominance is not beginning to emerge by 5 years of age, you can support your child in choosing a hand.

- Present materials in the middle of their body and make note of which hand they are using to grab the item. Encourage them to finish the activity using the hand they started with (no switching half way through).
- If your child switches hands half way through, “reset” by encouraging your child to change colors or writing utensil and present that utensil in the middle again.
- Make note of whether there is better skill development using one hand versus the other. For example, is your child more accurate in colouring with the right hand? Is your child better able to control their spoon when using their left hand?
- Over a few weeks determine if your child has a hand preference and if their skills are stronger using one hand. You can now encourage your child to complete all activities using the dominant hand.

Pencil grasp develops as hand strength/dexterity increases with age and exposure to fine motor activities. Typical development of grasp is as follows:



A tripod grasp provides the most control of the pencil. Variations of this grasp (lateral tripod, dynamic quadrupod, adapted tripod) are also considered to be efficient grasps for drawing and printing. Optimally, an efficient grasp should be encouraged early because a grasp pattern can be difficult to change later. An inefficient grasp may cause difficulty with pencil control, fatigue, and decreased speed of drawing/printing. However, if an inefficient grasp is already established, it should only be modified when persistently interfering with drawing/printing.

Activities and Materials:

- Build strength and movement of the fingers: Fine motor activities that do not involve a pencil. Play with playdough, open containers, beading, lacing, pegs, clothespins, etc...
- Start with short, thick writing utensils (i.e. break crayons or pieces of chalk in half)



- Start with wider markers (i.e. Pip Squeak Crayola™ markers)



- Start with bright, easy-to-mark writing utensils, For example: oil pastels or markers make a brighter mark when using less pressure compared with crayons or pencils)
- Draw a dot or place a sticker near the tip to cue the child where to place their fingers



- Vertical or slanted surfaces help get the wrist into the right position. You can use an easel, window markers, or a 3" binder turned sideways to create vertical or slanted surfaces.



- Some children do well with a verbal reminder (“Pinch your crayon”) or a visual reminder (Adult can demonstrate thumb and index/middle finger pinching or providing a picture of child holding their crayon with a more mature grasp).