



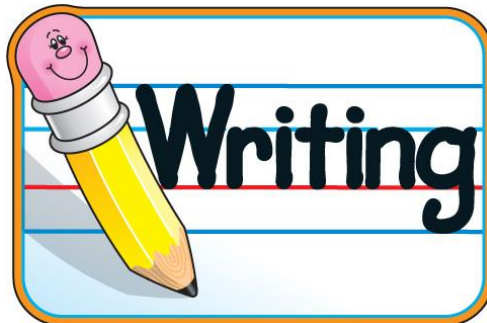
Liverpool  
City Council

# Occupational Therapy Strategies

## Handwriting – Managing Fatigue and Pain

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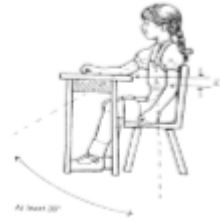
## Managing Pain

### **Posture**

Sitting with poor posture reduces arm control and can cause shoulder and back pain.

To sit with a good posture the young person should sit with:

- The young person's feet firmly on the ground.
- The young person's back supported by a sturdy backrest.
- The young person's chair pulled close to the table.
- Hip flexed at 90 degrees



### **Developing postural stability**

Participating in weight bearing activities. This promotes joint stability and strengthening.

- Crawling activities and obstacle courses– e.g. through a tunnel or under a bench.
- Animal walk Race, crab walks, bear walks, wheelbarrow races.
- Jumping and hopping games, for example hopscotch or stepping stones.
- Climbing frames, swings and slides.

### **Postural supports**

Use of a posture pack can allow the young person to sit with an improved posture. These can be very effective however do not suit everyone.



### **Shoulder stability**

If the young person fixes or tenses their shoulders or arms, they are likely to have poor shoulder stability. Fixing or tensing can help the young person to stabilise the body however it can cause their muscles to tire and fatigue quickly. Sitting with a good posture and participating in strengthening activities on a daily basis can help to develop shoulder stability and reduce fatigue and pain.

Develop shoulder and arm stability using the following exercises:

- Rolling forward and backwards on an exercises ball using hands and feet to push body back and forth.
- Press ups against the wall pushing shoulder blades together. When the young person feels strong, try floor press-ups, first on their knees, then on their toes.
- Planking, front support, back support.
- Wheelbarrow races, bunny hops, walking like different 4 legged animals.

## Hand and finger strength

Young people with reduced hand strength often have difficulties with handwriting speed as good muscle tone is needed to control pen movements. When a young person starts to experience hand fatigue or pain their writing speed reduces and they often have to stop writing to rest and stretch out their hands. This leads to further difficulties keeping up with written work in lessons or exams.

Hand strengthening activities

- Pinching and making shapes with theraputty, Play-Doh, Plasticine and clay.
- Playing games such as pick up sticks, Kerplunk, operation and crocodile dentist.
- Picking up small bits of food, for example raisins, chocolate buttons and cereals.
- Using tweezers to pick up small objects, threading, laces and craft activities.

## Grasping a Pencil

Traditionally, the tripod grasp was considered to be an optimum hold for mastering pencil control. However, many other types of pencil grip can also be functional and effective.

Younger children should be encouraged to:

- Hold their pencil with a tripod grasp.
- Rest the pencil in the thumb web space of the hand (between index finger and thumb).
- Move their pencil using finger movements (rather than arm movements).



It is often too difficult for older children to change their grasp and encouraging them to do so can cause more harm than good. Older children who experience significant difficulties with handwriting speed and pain are more likely to benefit from using IT to complete written work.

## Pencil Grips

Pencil grips can really help younger children to develop a mature grip. They also make pencils more comfortable to hold and can therefore reduce hand pain and fatigue.



## Pacing and Stretching

Taking breaks, stretching and shaking out hands will help The young person/teenager to reduce hand pain and increase writing stamina.

## Using ICT

Handwriting development tends to plateau once a child reaches secondary school. If a child continues to have handwriting difficulties at this stage they are likely to find typing and using IT as a more effective method of written communication. Typing is a less demanding motor skill so allows a child or teenager to complete more written work before becoming fatigued.

Although we would generally suggest that children continue participating in handwriting activities throughout primary school, it is a good idea to encourage The young person to start developing IT skills from a young age. This will allow The young person/teenager to type quickly if they continue to have handwriting difficulties and decide to use IT as a main form of written communication. Most secondary schools expect their pupils to complete course work on a computer, so good IT skills will also benefit children and teenagers who do not need to use IT as a primary method of communication.

It is important to note that a child is unlikely to be allowed to use a laptop in exams unless the use it as their main form of written communication in school.

## Useful Websites for Typing Programs

- [www.nessy.co.uk](http://www.nessy.co.uk)
- [www.englishtype.com](http://www.englishtype.com)
- [www.freetypinggame.net](http://www.freetypinggame.net)
- [www.learninggamesforkids.com](http://www.learninggamesforkids.com)
- <http://www.typefastertypingtutor.com/>
- [www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3c6tfr](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3c6tfr) BBC Bitesize Dance Mat
- [www.free-training-tutorial.com/typing-games-kids.html](http://www.free-training-tutorial.com/typing-games-kids.html)
- [www.education.com/games/typing/](http://www.education.com/games/typing/)
- [www.kidztype.com](http://www.kidztype.com)
- <https://www.free-training-tutorial.com/typing-games-kids.html>
- [www.tux-typing.en.softonic.com](http://www.tux-typing.en.softonic.com)
- <http://www.inclusive.co.uk/software/keyboard-typing-skills-software>.

## Useful Text Reading Software (home use)

- [www.oatsoft.org/software/readplease](http://www.oatsoft.org/software/readplease)
- [www.wordtalk.org.uk](http://www.wordtalk.org.uk)

## Useful links

- [www.backinaction.co.uk](http://www.backinaction.co.uk) (for Posture Packs)
- [www.beesneez.co.uk](http://www.beesneez.co.uk) (for angled writing slopes)
- [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) (for handwriting programmes and pencil grips)
- [www.crossboweducation.com](http://www.crossboweducation.com) (for pencil grips)
- [www.specialdirect.com](http://www.specialdirect.com) (for pencil grips)
- [www.therapyfunzone.com](http://www.therapyfunzone.com) (for fine motor activities)