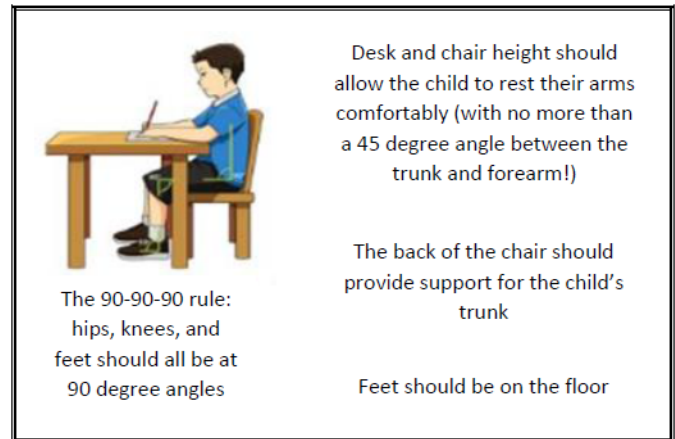


Supports for Printing

Drawing and printing are complex! We must keep ourselves steady and hold a pencil with enough but not too much pressure while also moving our fingers and thumb quickly in many different patterns. No wonder so many of us have trouble with printing! Here are some ideas to help support students as they practice this valuable, lifelong skill:

1. Stabilize the body

Students should sit at with their feet on the floor and their forearms on the table (i.e. from their elbows to their pinkie fingers) so their arms and shoulders are relaxed but stable. There can be some space between their arms and trunks but not too much.



2. Warm up the fingers and thumb

During printing, the thumb, index finger, and middle finger move the pencil while the ring finger and pinkie finger remain steady, separating the 'two sides' of the hand. To help improve your students' ability to do this, try these warm-up activities:

- Place both hands on a tabletop. Lift your thumb, index, and middle finger off the table while keeping your ring and pinkie fingers down. Then lift only your ring and pinkie fingers. Repeat five times.
- Hold a pencil with your thumb, index finger, and middle finger (i.e. tripod grasp). Try to move your fingers and thumb up to the eraser then back down.
- Find some small objects (e.g. dimes, buttons, raisins). Pick up an object with your thumb and index/middle fingers, move it into your palm, and hold it with your ring and pinkie fingers. Keep going until you're holding up to ten objects.

3. Compare learning to print to learning a new sport

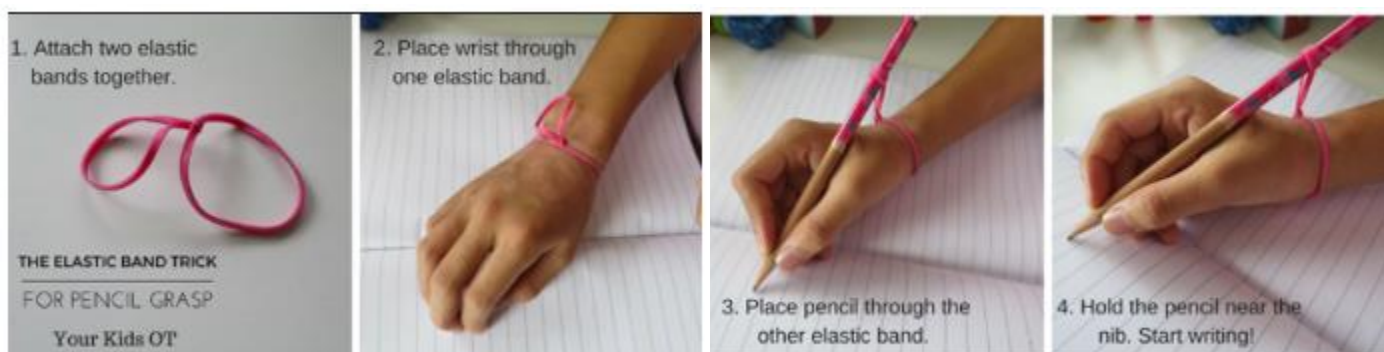
"Remember how challenging it was when you were first learning to ___? Doing something new with your muscles is hard at first because your brain needs to think a lot about what you're doing... But, as your muscles practice, they start making their own memories, so it eventually becomes automatic. Then you can focus on other things at the same time."

4. Use a comfortable grasp: The thumb, index, middle (and possibly ring) fingers move while the pinkie (and possibly ring) fingers remain steady and curled into the palm.

Many students have trouble printing by moving only their fingers and thumbs because they're grasping their pencils too tightly, forcing other muscles to over-work. Sometimes, students also have finger/thumb joints that move a lot, and this makes it challenging for them to control their pencils.

Troubleshooting:

- If your student has trouble separating the 'two sides' of their hand while printing, ask them to hold onto something soft and small (like a pom pom) with their ring and pinkie fingers while they print.
- If your student grasps their pencil too tightly, try the 'elastic band trick' with a triangular pencil or pencil grip.



- For tight grasps, also try The Pencil Grip (left) or a silicone pencil grip (right)



- If your child has joints that move a lot, try a Writing CLAW (right).



5. Practice for 15 minutes a day

Studies have shown that it takes at least 80 minutes of weekly practice to learn to print letters using consistent and efficient formation patterns. Work slowly at first so eyes and hands can work together on the best patterns and line positioning. Printing Like a Pro! is a great printing program and free to download: <http://www.childdevelopment.ca/SchoolAgeTherapy/SchoolAgeTherapyPLaPWorksheets.aspx>