

Hold On...You Have to Teach Grip

Research shows that close to 50% of three year olds have the fine motor ability to hold a small crayon correctly.* But the correct grip has to be taught to children. You can put an end to awkward or even fistied pencil grips by using direct teaching and certain strategies. Young children are pliable—they can be molded gently into good habits. Here are strategies for you to use when teaching a correct crayon grip.

Handedness

If a child is truly undecided by the time handwriting training begins, choose the hand that is more skilled to be the writing hand. Without a "dominant" hand, experience and training is divided between two hands and children develop nearly equal hand skills. But they are not as skilled with one hand as their peers who have given a dominant hand more training. To determine which hand is most skilled, take the "functional" approach. A teacher, parent, and an occupational therapist (if available) should observe the child. Watch how child colors, draws, writes, zips a jacket, eats, etc. This will allow all of the observers to determine which hand appears the more skilled. Once a dominant hand is determined, encourage the child to use the more skilled hand during writing tasks. Placing utensils, crayons or chalk on that side will help.

Little Crayons/Little Pencils

With all the fun writing tools available today it's hard to decide what is age appropriate. The best tool for Pre-K children is the crayon. Crayons create a natural resistance and build strength in the hand. Little pieces of crayon are perfect for little hands because they require children to use their fingertips correctly. They prepare the hand for using a good pencil grip. Sort little bits of crayon by color in bowls. A lazy susan makes it even more fun. Use markers, colored pencils, etc. in moderation. Don't promote pencil use very much. Children will get plenty of practice using pencils in Kindergarten when their hands are ready. When moving a child to a pencil, use a golf size pencil. Children will do better with a short pencil that's in proportion with the size of their hand. Avoid fat "primary pencils." They are too heavy and too long for little hands.

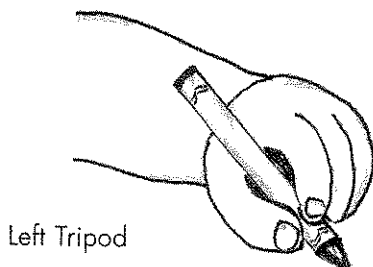
Weinraub, D.L. (1999). *The Effects of The Use of Broken Crayons Upon Grasp Development In Conjunction with Occupational Therapy*. Unpublished master's thesis, Touro College, Far Rockaway, NY.

Demonstrate Grip

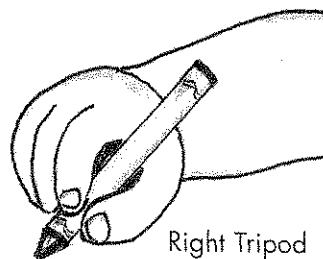
The time to teach proper grip is when a child becomes interested in coloring. Show children how to hold their crayons correctly by showing them finger placement and modeling a correct grip.

Standard and Alternate Grip

The standard grip, also called the "tripod grip" uses three fingers to hold the crayon or pencil. The thumb is bent, the index finger is pointing to the tip of the crayon and the crayon rests on the side of the middle finger. The last two fingers are curled in the palm and give the hand stability.

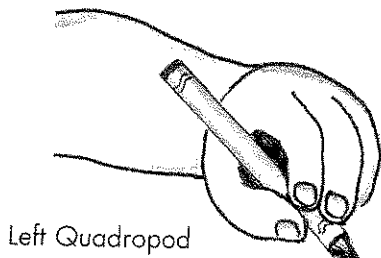


Left Tripod

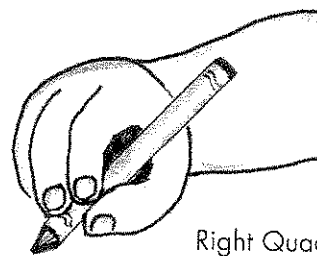


Right Tripod

An alternative grip, called the quadropod grip (four fingers) is another way children may hold their crayon. The thumb is bent, the index and middle finger point to the tip of the crayon and the crayon rests on the ring finger. This grip is efficient and should not be considered something that needs to be corrected.



Left Quadropod



Right Quadropod

Research states that close to 50% of 3-year-olds are already using a mature tripod grasp.*

*Schneck, C.M., & Henderson, A. (1990). Descriptive analysis of the developmental progression of grip position for pencil and crayon in nondysfunctional children. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 44, 893-900.

Tseng, M.H. (1998). Development of pencil grip position in preschool children. *Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 18, 207-224.

Yakimishyn, J.E. & Magill-Evans, J. (2002). Comparisons among tools, surface orientation, and pencil grasp for children 23 months of age. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 56, 564-572.