



Handwriting Screen: First Line Interventions

Handwriting Screen

Purpose

This screen was developed through Region 7 ESC and Henderson County SSA. Jill Beall, Assistive Technology Specialist, and Shannon Moltz, OTR were instrumental in its development.

The purpose of this instrument is to give teachers specific information to make informed decisions regarding referral for handwriting issues to related services personnel (OT).

Additionally, the **Intervention** section gives non-therapeutic advice on how to intervene with common problems. The documentation provides important data for the therapist as he/she assesses the student for eligibility. It also provides the teacher with data to determine how the student responds to rudimentary intervention for handwriting problems.

Look at these issues to guide your response to the handwriting screen that follows

Improper desk height

- Too high: elbows not at 90 degrees
- Too low: student leans over work

Insufficient stability

- Feet do not touch floor
- Supports self on elbows
- Stands to write

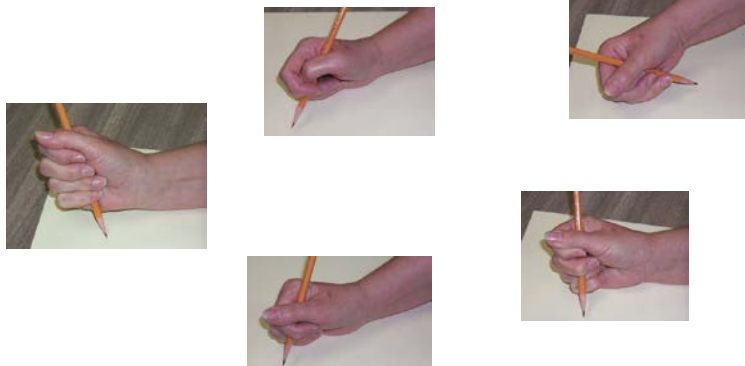
Poor posture

- Lies on desk
- Slouch
- Sits on feet
- Leans over work
- Turns head to view work

Inefficient wrist position

- Wrist does not touch table
- Wrist curls inward toward body

Inefficient Grip (see examples)



Look at these issues first:(cont.)

- Excessive pressure (pencil or paper)
- Fatigues easily
- Student complains of pain while writing
- Paper not positioned properly (see examples)
- Non-writing hand does not hold paper
- Uses arm instead of hand during writing
- Switches hand during writing
- Letters slanted to left
- Wears glasses
- Watches hand when writing
- Difficulty attending to task
- Difficulty organizing work on paper
- Excessive concentration when forming letters
- Student hurries through task
- Auditory sensitivity and distractions
- Vision screening, near and far assessments, and visual convergence
- Reading level
- Spelling skill
- Assign meaning to symbols
- Dyslexia screening results

Collection of Work Samples

Collect handwriting sample (as appropriate to student's curriculum). Check the areas where the student is having difficulty. Please attach a work sample to show examples of the handwriting issue.

Coloring samples

- Stay in the lines
- Direction of coloring
- Scribbling

ABC Letters

- Identifies all letters
- Traces only
- Requires model to correctly write letters
- Writes letters from memory, letters in isolation only
- Writes letters from memory, 2-4 letter words

Lists (spelling, vocabulary, definitions)

- Orienting writing to margin
- Stay between the lines
- Letters all the same size
- Letter formation
- Reversals
- Letter spacing

Sentences

(Copy 2 from work from student's desk or work area; Copy 2 from work copied from board or overhead)

- Orient writing to margin
- Stay in the lines
- Letters all the same size
- Letter formation
- Reversals
- Letter spacing
- Spacing between words
- Copies correct spelling
- Copies appropriate capitalization and punctuation

Paragraphs (Generated from prompt)

- Using margin
- Stay in the lines
- Letters all the same size
- Letter formation
- Reversals
- Letter spacing
- Spacing between words
- Spelling
- Grammar
- Fluency in writing
- Organization of paragraph ideas
- Organization of sentences
- Excessive erasing
- Completed in a timely manner

Addition/subtraction problems

- Lining up of digits in columns
- Number size
- Number formation
- Number spacing
- Reversals
- Organization on paper

Intervention

Please try the following intervention that fits the need identified with the screen.

Note:

Date the intervention was started

Date the intervention was curtailed

Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

If you have any questions, please consult your Occupational Therapist.

Improper desk height

The desk may not be the most efficient height for the student if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:

- The desk may be too high if:
- The elbows are bent at greater than 90 degrees.
- The student prefers standing to write.
- The student leans on the arms or desk top.

Try:

- **Adjusting desk height**
- **Providing larger chair with footrest so feet touch floor**
- **Placing a cushion in the seat**
- **The desk may be too low if:**
- **The student leans over his/her work**
- **The student sits on knees as s/he writes**
- **The student shifts weight constantly**

Try:

- **Adjust desk height (blocks/old books under legs, adjust desk legs)**
- **Provide alternative seating (classroom table; search for appropriately sized desk within school district)**

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Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

Insufficient Stability

The student may have insufficient stability while writing if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:

- The student's feet do not touch floor
- The student shifts body weight
- The student supports self on elbows
- The student stands to write

Try:

- **Foot rests (e.g. books, boxes, etc.)**
- **Alternate desk with arm rest**
- **Bean bag in chair**
- **Back rest**

Poor Posture

The student may exhibit poor posture while writing if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:

- The student supports self on elbows
- The student lies on desk
- The student slouches
- The student sits on feet
- The student leans over work

Try:

- **Slant board,**
- **Proper paper placement**
- **Beach ball for seating,**
- **Chair push ups prior to writing activity to increase tone**
- **Stand to write**

Note:

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Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

Inefficient Wrist Position

The student may exhibit inefficient wrist position while writing if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:

- Wrist does not touch table
- Wrist curls inward toward body

Try:

- **Slant board (Empty three inch notebook sideways high side away from child)**
- **Twist a scrunchy into the shape of an “8”. Place one end around the child’s wrist and the other end around the pencil. The pressure of the scrunchy will remind the child to keep his wrist and the pencil in a more functional position.**
- **Practice writing on vertical surface (chalkboard, attach paper to wall**



Note:

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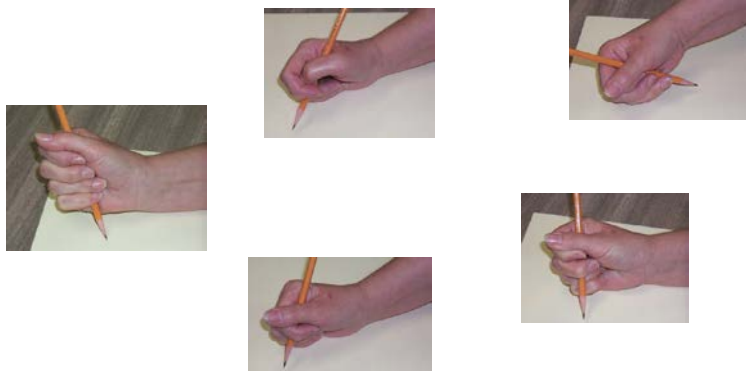
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Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

Inefficient Grip

The student may exhibit an inefficient grip while writing if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:



Try:

- Pencil grips, (see examples)
- Pencil in ball,
- Hand exercises, (consult with OT),
- Palm crayons
- Provide visual cues for pencil placement (see picture)

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Further notes

Inappropriate Pencil Pressure

The student may exhibit inappropriate pressure on the pencil or the paper while writing if he/she demonstrates one or more of the following:

- The student's fingers have red indentions where he/she grips
- The student fatigues while writing
- The student's writing causes raised lines on the back of the paper
- The student's writing is very dark or the paper is torn

Try:

- **Place paper on different surfaces: Wood surfaces, card board, sand paper, dry erase board, chalkboard**
- **Providing pencil grips**
- **Providing alternative pencils or pens**
- **Place vinyl shelf liner around pencil**
- **Place Play Doh or rubber band around sharpened end of the pencil**

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Further notes

Fatigue/Pain Demonstrated

The student complains of fatigue and/or pain while writing.

Try:

- **Examples under poor posture, excessive pressure, inefficient grip**
- **Check vision records; ensure that glasses are worn if necessary**
- **Place student in alternate seating**
- **Provide the student with a copy of class notes to be taken home and/or copied at desk**
- **Provide alternate lighting to address eye fatigue**

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Further notes

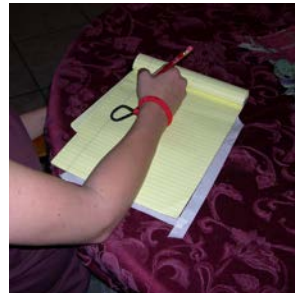
Inefficient paper positioning

The student's paper may not be positioned for efficient writing if one or more of the following are observed:

- The paper is at 90 degrees from the student's body
- The student frequently re-positions his/her paper
- The paper frequently falls from the desktop
- The paper is placed parallel to the desk line

Try:

- **Place tape pattern on desk to cue proper placement.**
- **Place the corner of the paper pointed toward the student's midline and the long side of the paper parallel to the student's dominant forearm**



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Further notes

No Hand Preference Demonstrated

The student does not exhibit hand preference while writing.

- The student switches hands during writing and/or other fine motor activities

Try:

- **Determine hand dominance by observing them reaching for items over a period of time. Document which hand is used more frequently.**
- **Use sticker/bracelet/rubber band as visual and/or tactile cue on dominant hand.**

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Further notes

Inefficient paper stabilization

The student does not use the non-dominant hand to stabilize his/her paper during writing activities.

Try:

- **Placing sticker/bracelet/rubber band on the non-dominant hand to provide visual/tactile cue**
- **Place a matching sticker on the upper corner of the student's paper and non-dominant hand to remind the student to stabilize the paper**

Note:

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Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

Non-Fluent Writing

The student watches his/her hands during writing

Try:

- **Weight the pencil e.g. rubber bands, washers/nuts on pencil.**
- **Apply weighted wrist band**
- **Have student squeeze small ball or clay/Play Doh prior to and during writing activity to increase hand awareness**

Note:

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Further notes

Attention to Task

The student has difficulty attending to or hurries through the writing task.

Try:

- **Modify/supplement student's seating with under-inflated beach balls, invert bean bag lap desk into seat, egg crate/foam, etc.**
- **Decrease visual and auditory stimuli**
- **Provide student with fidget items**
- **Provide student with individual desktop work carrels**

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Further notes

Organizing Writing on Paper

The student exhibits difficulty organizing work on paper if you observe the following:

- The work is not aligned to the left margin
- The writing is not oriented to the writing line
- The words are not spaced appropriately within sentences
- Students produce excessively large or small letters
- Columns of numbers are not aligned
- Inconsistent letter size

Try:

- **Place two black lines along left margins**
- **Use quarter inch stickers/puff glue to cue to left margin**
- **Highlight left margin and/or writing lines**
- **Make top line color different from writing line**
- **Use raised line paper (try seamstress rotary marking wheel to emphasize writing line)**
- **Try alternative writing paper (see appendix for examples)**
- **Use graph paper to align digits in math**
- **Have students write only in prepared highlighted word areas**
- **Use paper clips, pennies, highlighting tape, popsicle sticks, etc. to cue for spacing between words**
- **Trace pre-made letters on various paper textures**

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Further notes

Non-Fluent Writing

Student is able to verbalize letter formation

The student concentrates excessively while forming letters, but is able to verbalize letter formation (*example: starts at the top of the line, straight down, then draw a half circle near the bottom line*)

Try:

- Practice writing letters in isolation, practice, practice, practice
- Trace letters, use appropriate size for student's hand, repetition is important
- Spend 2 minutes, multiple times a day doing the above activities

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Comments regarding the success/failure of the intervention

Further notes

Student cannot verbalize how a letter is formed

The student concentrates excessively while forming letters and cannot verbalize how a letter is formed.

Try:

- Practice letters with eyes closed
- Write letters in the air using large arm movement patterns
- Practice writing on chalk board using large arm movement patterns
- Write letters in various tactile media (shaving cream, sand, pudding, etc.)
- Provide letter strip on desk for visual cue

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Further notes