

Fine-Motor
Activity

RECIPES

for
Handwriting
Readiness

15 Fun Recipes
to get children ready
for handwriting



Fine-Motor Activity Recipes for Handwriting Readiness

A Note About Handwriting and Fine-Motor Skills Development

The 15 play activities provided in this recipe book utilize “ingredients” (materials and objects) that are on hand in most classrooms or can be easily obtained. These activities

- are designed for preschool-aged children.
- make connections to content-area skills and concepts.
- develop fine motor skills—everything from shoulder stability to tripod grasp—that will help children get ready for handwriting.



OT-Approved

Zaner-Bloser would like to thank school-based Occupational Therapist, Carol Armann, OTR/L, for her help in developing and demonstrating these activities.

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Tweezing for Coins

This activity can be used to introduce students to the value of different coins as they work on developing a tripod grasp—a finger position that produces a strong, efficient pencil grasp.

Ingredients

- 3 pennies
- 3 nickels
- 3 dimes
- 3 quarters
- foam pipe insulation
- craft knife
- glue
- tweezers
- box with compartments for sorting



Target Skill
Tripod grasp



Content Connection
Math



Teacher Prep Time
10 minutes



Activity Completion Time
5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Prepare the foam pipe insulation. Cut foam pipe insulation into a 6-inch length and then in half, so that you have two 6-inch half-circle-shaped pieces. With a craft knife, make 8 vertical cuts in one of the pieces of foam, wide and deep enough for coins to stand up in them. Insert 2 pennies, 2 nickels, 2 dimes, and 2 quarters in random order into the 8 slots you just cut.

Prepare the sorting box. Glue 1 penny, 1 nickel, 1 dime, and 1 quarter in the bottom of the sorting box, each in a separate compartment.

Directions

- 1 Have the student hold the tweezers in the same manner that he or she would if holding a pencil.
- 2 Have the student pick up each coin from the prepared foam pipe insulation and place it in the correct compartment of the sorting box.

Optional Activity Modifications

For math content connection:

Have the student use tweezers to pick up coins that add up to specific values you provide, such as \$0.17 or \$0.60, and place them in an empty compartment of the sorting box.

For other sorting practice:

Have the student use tweezers to pick up coins and sort them by color (silver vs. copper), by size (small to large), or alphabetically (dime to quarter).

Clipping Together Your ABCs

This activity develops tripod grasp and hand strength (needed for efficient handwriting), fastening skills, and color sorting. It's also ideal to work into any alphabet or letter-recognition activity. NOTE: Wide refrigerator clips allow for proper finger placement.

Ingredients

- 1 set of alphabet flashcards
- 26 refrigerator clips
- small letter sets
- tape
- scissors



Target Skills

Tripod grasp
Hand strength



Content Connection

Reading



Teacher Prep Time

15 minutes



Activity Completion Time

10 minutes

Teacher Prep

Create lettered clips. Using size 12 Century Gothic font, create a 30-cell table with both uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet (**Aa** in one cell, **Bb** in one cell, etc.). Cut out each small letter set and tape one set onto each refrigerator clip.

Directions

- 1 Have the students fasten each refrigerator clip to the correct corresponding flashcard, being sure to hold the clip as he/she would hold a pencil.

Optional Activity Modifications

The activity can be set up for numbers, one-to-one correspondence, or uppercase and lowercase matching.

Beading With Both Hands

This activity assists students with establishing a hand preference. In most cases, the student will use his or her more dominant hand to place the beads on the string.

Ingredients

- 40 small beads (20 of one color, 20 of another color)
- 2 shoelaces
- 1 small cup



Target Skills

Bilateral integration
Fine pincer grasp



Content Connection

Math



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Prepare the model shoelace. Set up a math pattern (AB, AAB, etc.) on one of the shoelaces as a model to the student. Place the remaining beads in the cup.

Directions

- 1 Have the student pick up one bead at a time from the cup.
- 2 Have the student place each bead on the second shoelace in the same pattern as the model.

Cereal Letters

This activity helps students develop skills that lead to a good pencil grasp while working on letter recognition and formation.

Ingredients

- 9" x 12" construction paper
- small cereal pieces
- tweezers
- glue
- marker
- 1 small cup



Target Skills

Fine pincer grasp
Tripod grasp



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

10 minutes

Teacher Prep

Prepare the letter. Cut the construction paper in half to 9" x 6". Draw a letter (or number or shape) on the paper with a marker.

Directions

- 1 Give the student a small cup of cereal and the prepared letter on construction paper.
- 2 Have the student trace the complete letter with glue.
- 3 Using tweezers placed in the hand like a pencil, have the student pick up small pieces of cereal, one at a time, and place each piece onto the letter, so that it sticks to the glue (until all of the lines are covered).

Optional Activity Modifications

For extra writing practice:

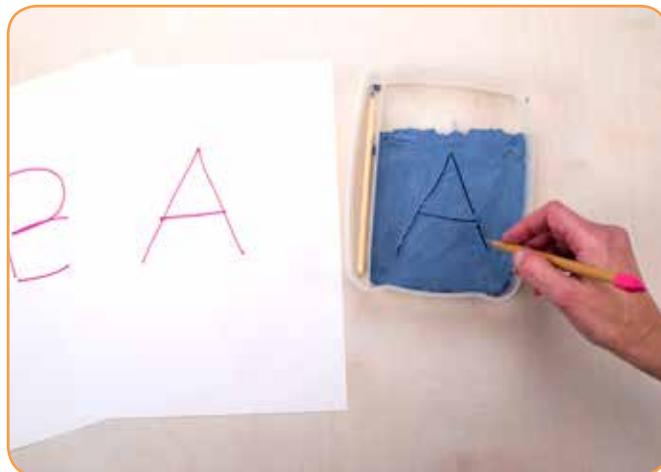
The student could first trace a letter written in pencil with a marker, followed by glue.

Clay Writing

This activity develops strength and positioning of fingers for an efficient pencil grasp. Students also work on recognizing and forming letters, numerals, and shapes. NOTE: Avoid using a pencil, which will make the clay dirty.

Ingredients

- plastic sandwich container
- pencil sharpener
- small saw
- play clay (instead of Play-Doh®, use clay, which provides more resistance to strengthen hands)
- 0.25"-diameter dowel rod
- letter, number, or shape cards



Target Skill
Tripod grasp



Teacher Prep Time
10 minutes



Activity Completion Time
5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Set up the clay. Smooth the clay into the bottom of the sandwich container.

Create the faux “pencils.” Cut the dowel rod into 6” sections. Sharpen the sections of the dowel rods like a pencil.

Directions

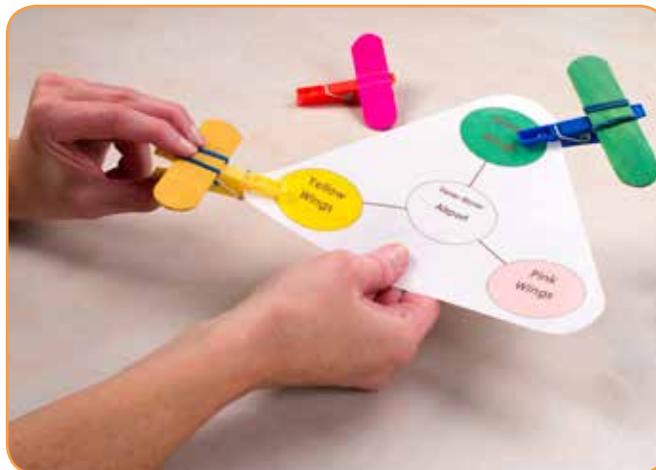
- 1 Lay out the cards and have the student draw one shape, letter, or number in the clay at a time.
- 2 Smooth the clay back out between drawing each one.

Flying Into the Airport

This activity develops tripod grasp and hand strength (needed for efficient handwriting), fastening skills, and color sorting. The popsicle sticks are added to encourage the correct finger placement.

Ingredients

- 3 large popsicle sticks (1 red, 1 green, and 1 yellow)
- 6 clothespins (2 red, 2 green, and 2 yellow)
- 6 rubber bands
- scissors
- sand paper
- laminated “airport” graphic



Target Skills

Tripod grasp
Hand strength



Teacher Prep Time

15 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Make the planes. Cut the popsicle sticks in half with scissors and round all of the edges with sand paper to create “wings.” Using the rubber bands, secure the wings to the clothespin ends using an “X” pattern on the underside.

Create the “airport.” Under the “Insert” menu of Microsoft® Word, use SmartArt to create a graphic labeled with the words “red,” “green,” and “yellow.” This is your airport. Alternatively, you could draw this graphic and color it red, green, and yellow. Laminate the graphic airport.

Directions

- 1 Have the student place his or her index and long fingers on the wings and thumb underneath on the clothespin end.
- 2 Have the student “fly” the planes into the correct color airport gate, clipping the clothespin to the graphic.

Optional Activity Modifications

Try using ABCs or numbers on the wings to sort into the different “airport gates.”

Connect 3

This activity develops a tripod grasp needed for an efficient handwriting. NOTE: Smarties® are gluten- and casein-free, so they can be used with students with those dietary restrictions.

Ingredients

- small Connect 3 games
- tweezers
- 1 bag of Smarties® candy rolls



Target Skill
Tripod grasp



Teacher Prep Time
5 minutes



Activity Completion Time
5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Set up the game. Remove the round game pieces and set aside. Place the Smarties vertically on the ledge of the Connect 3 game.

Directions

- 1 Give the student a roll of Smarties.
- 2 Have the student grasp the tweezers like he/she is grasping a pencil.
- 3 Have the student pick up each individual Smartie from the roll and place into a Connect 3 slot. The student may or may not use his or her non-dominant hand to hold the Connect 3 game.

Optional Activity Modifications

For midline crossing:

Place the Connect 3 game to the left of the right-handed student or to the right of the left-handed student.

For sorting practice:

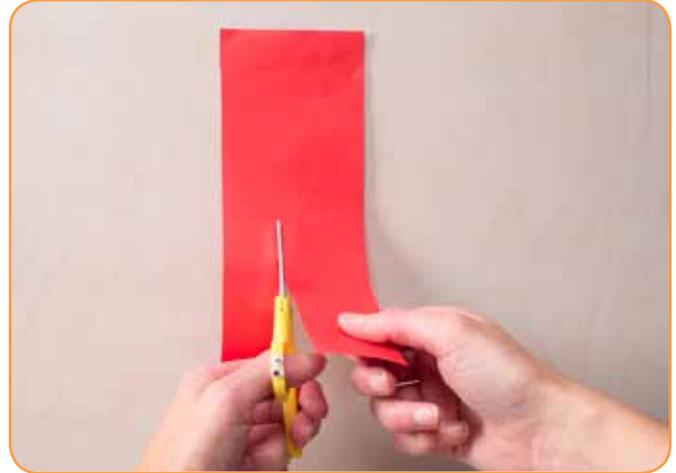
Have the student sort Smarties by color in the game slots.

Cutting Up

In this activity, working at eye level helps develop strong shoulders, which support writing/cutting hands. NOTE: Make sure to use left-handed scissors with left-handed students.

Ingredients

- thick paper (construction paper or oak tag)
- tape
- child-safe scissors



Target Skills

Forearm strength
Hand strength



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Set up large paper strips. Cut paper into 3" x 9" strips. Tape one of the short (3") ends of each strip to a wall or whiteboard at student eye level.

Directions

- 1 Have the student cut the strips into smaller strips using an upward motion.

Dino Chomper

This activity supports motor separation in the hand, which allows the hand to rest on a surface while the thumb, index finger, and long finger control a pencil and the ring and pinky fingers stay tucked into the palm.

Ingredients

- “Biting Dinosaur” toy
- 1 package of small dinosaur toys
- gray spray paint
- 1 cup or bowl



Target Skill

Hand strength



Teacher Prep Time

15 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Prepare the “cave” scene. Paint the bowl or cup gray to make a “cave.” Let it dry. Scatter the smaller dinosaurs around the outside of the “cave.”

Directions

- 1 Have the student place the thumb, index finger, and long finger on the “Biting Dinosaur” trigger. (Ring and pinky finger are tucked into the palm.)
- 2 Have the student pull the “Biting Dinosaur” trigger to pick up the smaller dinosaurs and place the smaller dinosaurs into the cave by releasing the trigger.

Optional Activity Modifications

For sorting practice:

Have the student sort small dinosaurs by shape or size.

For practice with numbers and counting:

Add a dice set, and the student could pick up the corresponding number of small dinosaurs to place into the “cave.”

Golf Tee Bingo

This activity promotes an efficient pencil grasp and strong shoulders (to support the hand for writing). It also helps students learn to use two hands together on a task, which is needed in handwriting as they hold the paper while writing.

Ingredients

- 8" x 8" Bingo card printed on copy paper, with corresponding call sheet
- 1 piece of 8" x 8" Styrofoam®
- golf tees



Target Skills

Shoulder stability
Fine pincer grasp
Using two hands together



Teacher Prep Time

15 minutes



Activity Completion Time

10 minutes

Teacher Prep

Make the Styrofoam Bingo game. Tape the Bingo card onto the piece of Styrofoam. Tape the Styrofoam Bingo game to the wall or whiteboard at student eye level.

Directions

- 1 Play Bingo! Use the golf tees as markers. Have the student push a golf tee into the Bingo square to indicating the number, picture, etc., that has been called.

Optional Activity Modifications

As a small group:

A group of students could play, one being the caller and others being Bingo players with multiple Styrofoam Bingo games taped to the wall.

Ivory Snowballs

This activity supports motor separation in the hand, which allows the hand to rest on a surface while the thumb, index finger, and long finger control a pencil and the ring and pinky fingers stay tucked into the palm.

Ingredients

- 1 bar of Ivory® soap
- 1 paper plate
- a microwave
- a half-teaspoon measuring spoon



Target Skills

Fine pincer grasp
Finger strength



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Melt the soap. Microwave 1 bar of Ivory soap on a paper plate for 1–2 minutes. (Add a bit of extra water, if needed, to make the soap a pasty consistency.)

Directions

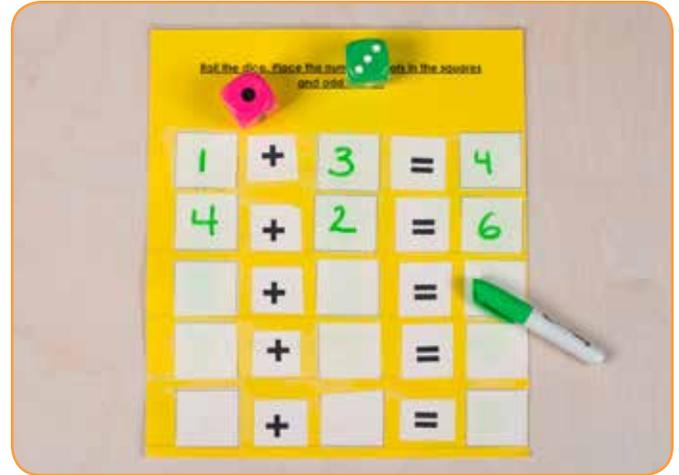
- 1 Model the activity for the student. Scoop a small amount of the melted soap into your hand with the measuring spoon. Demonstrate rolling the soap into tiny balls (the size of a pea or grape) using the pad of the thumb and index finger.
- 2 Have the student scoop up a small amount of melted soap with the measuring spoon and roll small balls using the pad of the thumb, index finger, and long finger. (Ring and pinky fingers should be tucked into the palm. The student can hold a small ball of soap with the ring and pinky fingers to keep them tucked in.)

Dice Math

This activity develops the hand arches that help the hand make small movements needed for writing. It is also ideal for working into any basic math lesson to address numeral identification, one-to-one correspondence, and simple addition.

Ingredients

- 2 dice
- a math equation template with 5 spaces
- laminating sheets
- dry-erase markers



Target Skill

Hand arch strength



Content Connection

Math



Teacher Prep Time

10 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Make the laminated math equation. Using word-processing software, such as Microsoft® Word, create a table with 5 columns and 1 row. Type characters into the table to create a math equation, such as:

	+		=	
--	---	--	---	--

Print and laminate the equation.

Directions

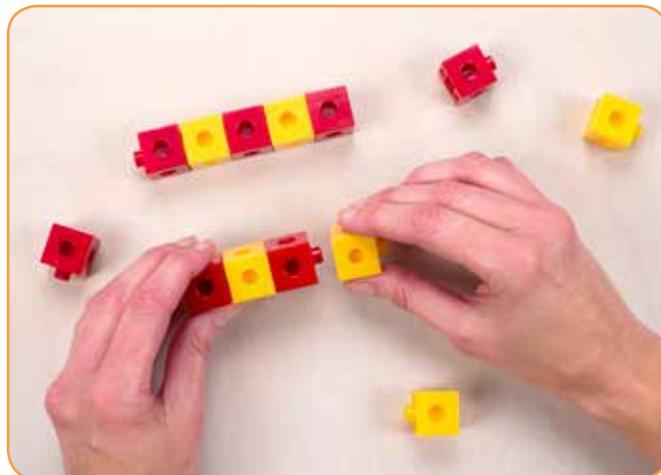
- 1 Have the student roll one die from the palm of his or her hand.
- 2 Have the student place the same number of dots (or the corresponding number) that appears on the die into the first empty slot in the equation.
- 3 Have the student repeat steps 1 and 2 with the other die and write in the second empty slot in the equation.
- 4 Have the student complete the math problem and place the solution into the last empty slot.

Snap, Snap, Sort

This activity develops the wrist and finger strength needed for precise movements in handwriting, as well as math patterning and color sorting skills.

Ingredients

- linking cubes in two or more colors



Target Skills

Wrist strength
Finger strength



Content Connection

Math



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Create the model. Using the linking cubes, create a model of a math pattern, such as AB.

Directions

- Provide the model to the student and have the student follow the math pattern provided by linking the cubes together.
- When the pattern is completed, have the student separate the cubes and sort them by color.

Optional Activity Modifications

Have the student roll a die and link the corresponding number of links together.

Sphere on a Spoon

This activity helps develop the elbow, forearm, and hand control needed to manipulate a writing utensil. Try sorting by color or matching to add skill practice to the activity.

Ingredients

- 1 wooden spoon
- 5 small rubber balls or pom-poms
- 1 small bowl



Target Skills

Elbow strength
Forearm strength
Hand strength



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Set up the activity. Place the spoon and the balls or pom-poms on a desk or table. Place the bowl on another desk or table about 5 feet apart.

Directions

- 1 Have the student hold the spoon with the palm up and arm extended.
- 2 Have the student place a ball or pom-pom on the spoon and concentrate on keeping it in place as he or she walks to the bowl across the room.
- 3 Have the student drop the ball into the bowl once it is reached.

Optional Activity Modifications

For extra challenge:

Use spoons of different sizes as well as balls of different weights and sizes.

For sorting or matching practice:

Instead of balls or pom-poms, use objects with letters, numbers, or different colors to practice sorting or matching.

Squeeze Me, Feed Me

This activity develops the hand strength needed for handwriting and is a fun way to incorporate counting and sorting practice addition.

Ingredients

- tennis ball (used tennis balls work well)
- craft knife
- large die
- 25 pennies



Target Skill

Hand strength



Content Connection

Math



Teacher Prep Time

5 minutes



Activity Completion Time

5 minutes

Teacher Prep

Create a tennis ball creature. Use the craft knife to cut a slit along the tennis ball's curved seam to create a "mouth." Use the markers to draw a face on the ball.

Directions

- 1 Have the student hold the tennis ball with thumb, index finger, and long finger of his or her dominant hand and practice squeezing to open the "mouth" of the ball.
- 2 Have the student roll the die with his or her non-dominant hand.
- 3 Referring to the number on the die, have the student squeeze the ball to pick up the corresponding number of pennies with the mouth of the tennis ball, one at a time.
- 4 Once the pennies are all used, the student can squeeze the tennis ball to dump the pennies into the cup.

Optional Activity Modifications

For sorting practice:
Use colored pom-poms instead of pennies to sort by color.