

Stepping Stones to Successful Writing

Christine A Chambers, OTR/L, MED
Pediatric Occupational Therapist
Abilities First, LLC
© 2015

Set the stage for success

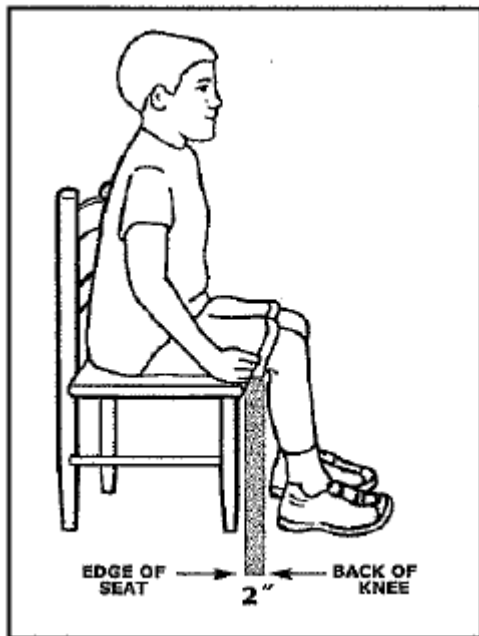
- Think about the environment
 - Where does your child study, color, or draw?
 - Table vs couch/bed vs desk
 - Preschoolers benefit from time at a child sized table or desk, too
 - Does your child need a quiet room or some background noise to be more focused?
 - How is the lighting where your child does their homework or coloring?

What can you do to set the stage?

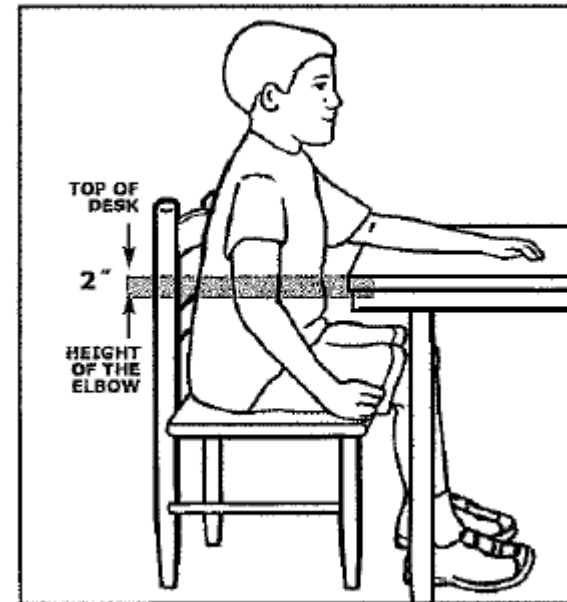
- Proper chair size
 - Feet supported
- Proper desk/table height
 - Elbow resting on desk
- Positioning the paper
- Get vertical
- Try different rooms with less visual or auditory distractions
- Lighting options

Have a Seat!

Chair Size



Desk Height



It's all about the base

- Posture
 - Core strength
 - Head control
 - Shoulder strength
 - Wrist extension
- Does your child slouch when they are sitting in a chair or on the floor?
- Do they need their hand or the table to hold their head when doing their work?

What can you do to build a strong base?

- Animal walks (bear, crab, elephant, frog, seal)
- Obstacle course with crawling and climbing over
- Wheel barrel walks
- Play in prone (on belly)
- Scooter board activities
- Therapy ball exs
- 'Paint' the wall or garage door with water using a large paint brush or roller

Hands are your #1 learning tool!

- Our ability to use our hands to manipulate our environment provides us with unlimited learning opportunities.
- Grip
 - It starts with crawling
- Hand arches
 - Form a cup or bowl with your hands
- In hand manipulation
 - Sliding things from palm to tip of fingers and back

What can you do to increase hand strength/control?

- Putty, play dough, pizza or bread dough
 - Roll, pinch, squeeze, cut, hide/find pennies, make pizza
- Mr Mouth tennis ball-turn in hand, squeeze to open
- Clothespins
- Pick up pennies, hide in your hand and then move them to finger tips to put in bank
- Clay tray
- Cup hands to scoop sand/water or shake dice
- Hold small toy or snack with ring and little fingers
- Different sized pencils or crayons
- Spray bottles

Visual skills

- Visual motor vs visual perception
- Tracking (pursuits)
- Looking from one item to another (saccades)
- Converging your eyes on one item (fixation)
- Common issues
 - Letters float above the line
 - Dangling letters do not go below the line
 - Letters are too close together
 - Letters are too far apart

What can you do

- 'Play ball'
 - Young child-rolling
 - Preschooler-bounce catch medium ball
 - Older child-bounce/catch racquet or tennis ball
 - Try it with a balloon
- Throw at moving targets (bean bags or bath puffs)
- Flashlights: tag, drawing shapes or tracing letters
- Connect the dots, mazes, word searches
- Picture find (Where's Waldo), same/different, what's missing
- Slant board, vertical board, easel
- Start letters at the top

Attention/regulation

- How long can your child sit to color, draw or write?
- Is your child always wiggling/fidgeting in his/her chair?
- Does he/she become instantly frustrated and want to walk away?
- What is homework time like? Tears? yelling?

How can you help you child to be more calm and focused?

- Disc seat on the chair, ball chair or chair with arm rests
- Theraband on the legs of the chair
- Have a squeeze item (stress ball or putty) on the table
- Scented pencils
- Movement breaks before and during work time
- Help your child to organize their work space so all supplies are within reach
- Calm, organizing music
- Yoga, Brain Gym, movement games (Red light/green light)

Specific writing concerns

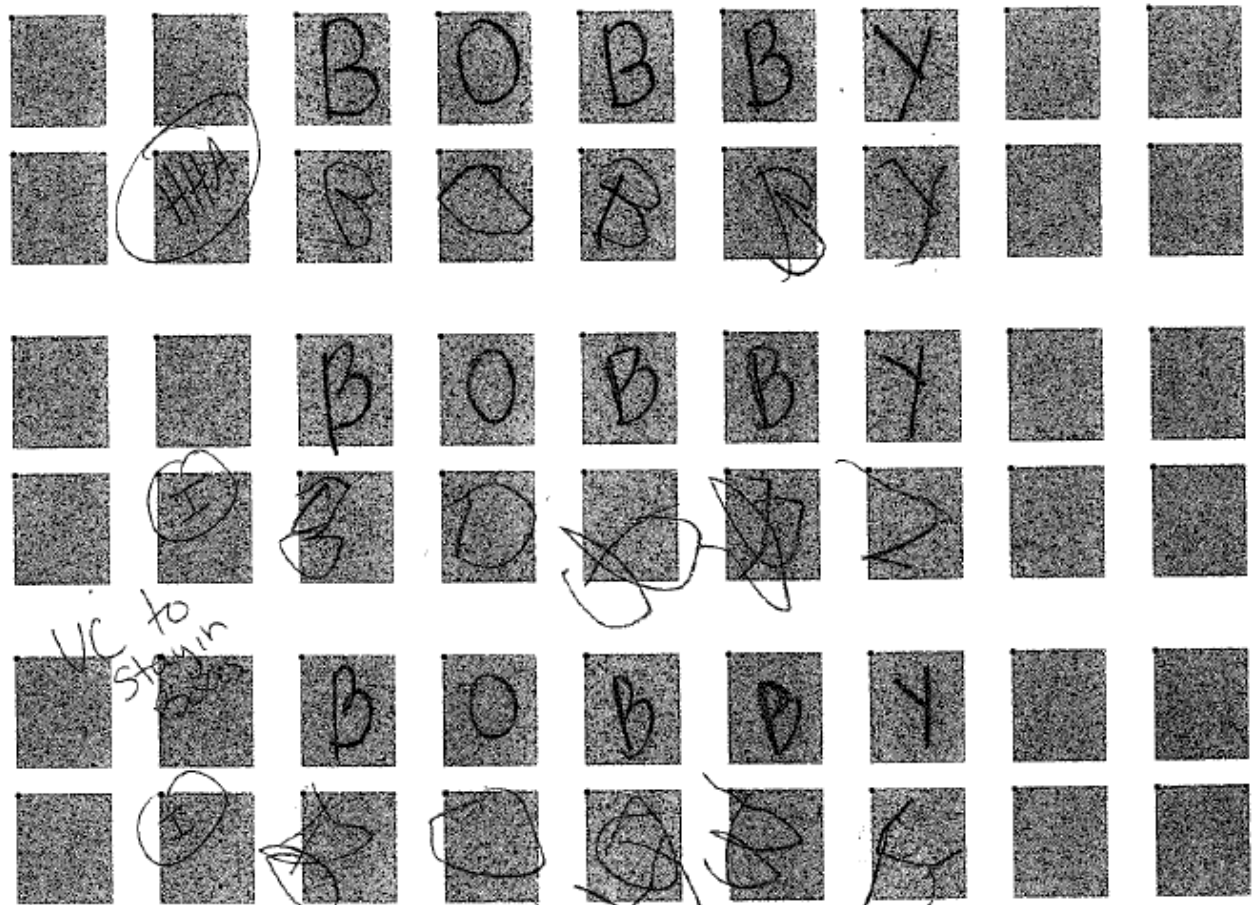
- Pushes too hard (breaks crayons/pencils)
 - Why?
 - Decreased awareness (under registration of tactile and/or proprioceptive input)
 - What to do?
 - Try bulb crayons or Laddie pencils
 - Give lots of tactile input (shaving cream, rice bin, sand, finger paints, etc)
 - Give proprioceptive input (leaf etchings, clay tray, scratch off pictures, putty exs)

Specific writing concerns

- Presses too lightly
- Weak or immature grip
 - Why?
 - Decreased hand strength; can also be either under or over registration of tactile/proprioceptive input
 - What to do?
 - Hand strengthening (putty, tongs, clothes pins)
 - Hand prep/wake up exs
 - Hold a small toy or snack with ring and little finger
 - Weighted pencil
 - Different pencil grips

Specific writing concerns

- Problems with forming shapes and letters
- Letter reversals (can occur through age 7 years)
 - Why?
 - Could be visual perceptual or motor or sensory or a combination.
 - What to do?
 - Use lots of different mediums to practice shapes and letters: chalk, crayon, marker, colored pencils, clay, shaving cream, finger paint, etc
 - Practice outside, at the table, at the easel, in the tub, etc
 - Draw letters or shapes on their back and have them



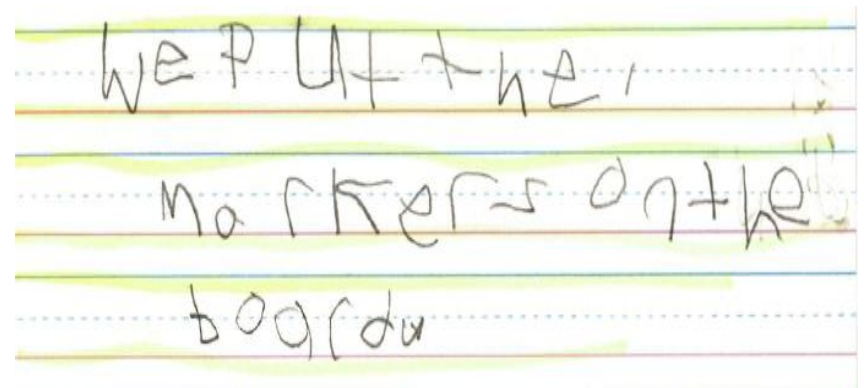
VC to
string

Starting Corner Capitals = B O B B Y Starting Corner Numbers = 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Specific writing concerns

Vertical Deviations

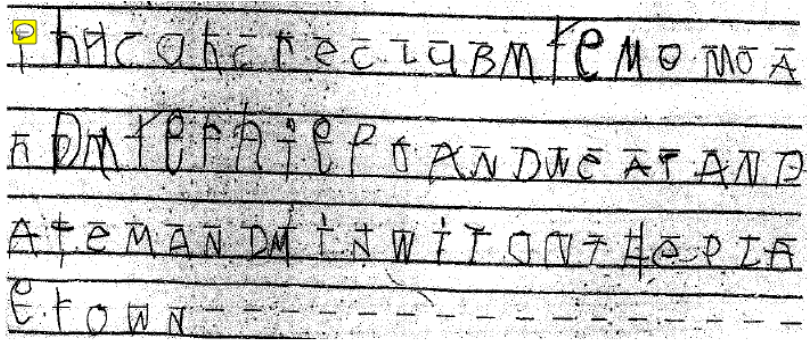
- Doesn't write on the line
 - Why?
 - Visual perceptual issues
 - What to do?
 - Activities listed under visual skills
 - Start with writing inside a box
 - Highlighted lines (top and bottom)
 - Raised line paper
 - Use Bendaroos/Wikki sticks



BOBBY

~~BOBBY~~

Specific writing concerns



Horizontal Deviations

- Too much spacing or no spacing between letters or words

One green pig giggles in my ear; Why?

-Visual perceptual issues

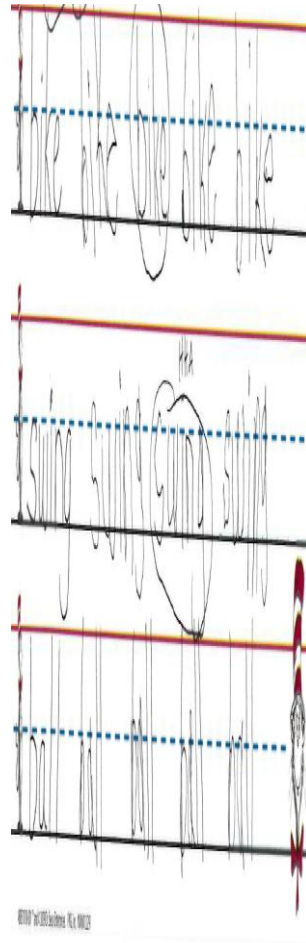
The grumpy side sings in a tree house;

- What to do?
- -Visual perceptual activities
- -Bilateral integration exs
- -Finger spacing
- -Small stamp or popsicle stick for spacing

Horizontal Deviations

I Can't Wait
for tee ball. I think
it will be so much FUN.

Printing success!



Cursive

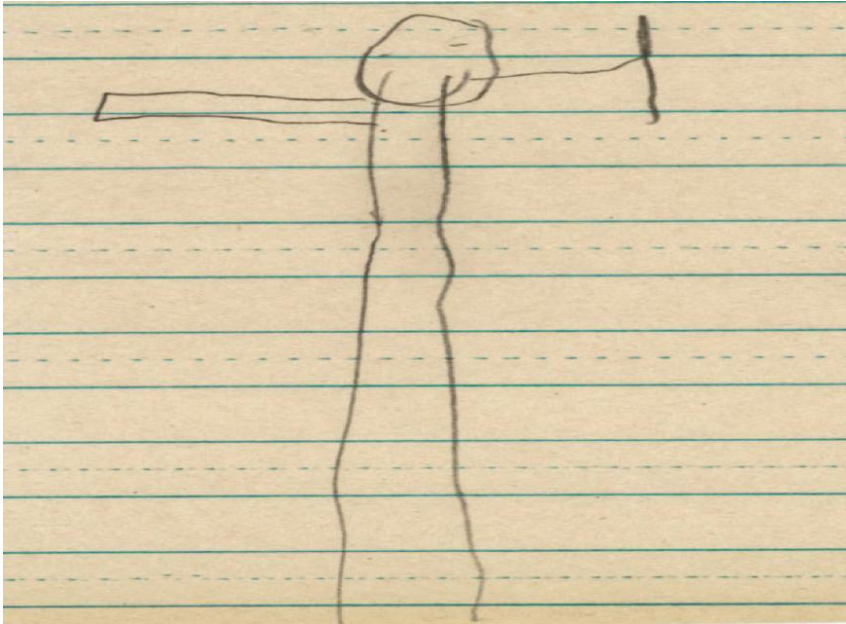
I love bible school!
I love bible school!

Spring is here and so is
Easter!

Spring is here and so is
Easter.

Draw a Person

Early DAP



More detailed DAP



Draw a Person

Initial



1 month later



Wow! Looking good!



Strategies for success

- Set up the environment
- Prepare the body
- Tap into interests
- Set end times or break times (use a timer)
- Take turns (especially with younger children)
- Do 'non preferred' tasks prior to preferred tasks
- **HAVE FUN!**

Writing vs. Keyboarding

- Handwriting is important for daily life
 - Lists (grocery or 'to do')
 - Personal letters
 - Signatures
 - Phone message
 - Ability to read others writing
- When to think about typing
 - If fatigue or illegibility is high
 - Track time to write vs type (5-6 sentences is a good measure)

Writing vs. Keyboarding

- Research on children stated that children are not motorically reading for formal typing until 4th grade
- Free typing programs
 - www.freetypinggames.net
 - www.typing.com

Helpful Resources

- Materials Websites:
 - www.abilitations.com
 - www.Achievement-Products.com
 - www.DiscountSchoolSupplyFurniture.com
 - www.FunandFunction.com
 - www.orientaltrading.com
 - I also find many of the items that I talked about at Five Below, Target and Pat Catans
- Books:
 - Handwriting without tears (www.hwt.com)
 - Loops and groups by Benbow (cursive)
- Computer games:
 - www.eyecanlearn.com

Question and answer

- Any questions on what I have presented?
- Any child specific questions?