

Introduction

An aspiring artist in 3rd grade mentioned to me that his hand hurt if he drew for long periods of time. I examined how he was holding his pencil and saw that he was gripping it much harder than needed. I showed him how to hold his pencil properly and he told me weeks later that my advice had helped.

Then, I began to notice some of the children struggling with big rubber attachments the writing specialist had given those whose penmanship was labored and shaky. Taking a closer look I noticed that these students weren't holding their pencils properly! By 3rd grade, students should begin to achieve automaticity in handwriting. Laboring over the penmanship process will impede their ability to complete quickly any task that requires handwriting (math, language arts, fine arts, etc.), and will divert their attention from higher order thinking processes.

To fix the problem, I created a set of 10 instructions on how to write properly (below). There is a version for right-handed folks and one for left-handed folks.

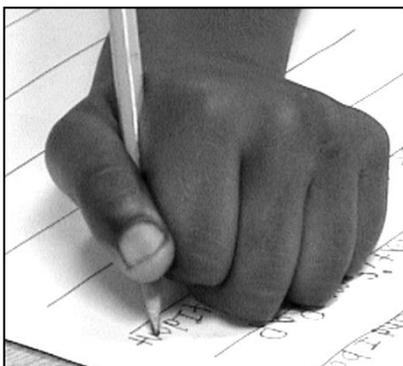
Materials

- 1 copy of instructions for each student (left- or right-handed as appropriate).
- Pencil and paper for each student and teacher.
- Desk in front of room for teacher to sit at.
- Printout of pages 2 (R.H.) or 3 (L.H.) of this file to tape onto students' desks.

Lesson Steps

- 1) Go through each of the 10 instructions. For each step, show the right way, common errors (the wrong way), and demonstrate both left and right handed positions. Check students and tell them to help their neighbors.
- 2) Point out that if they've been doing it incorrectly, it will feel wrong, at first, and changing their habits will be difficult in the short run, but worth the effort in the long run. Don't get frustrated – just practice.
- 3) Many children grip the pencil too hard, holding on for dear life. When showing steps 3 and 4, make circles in the air with a relaxed hand to show range of movement and easy fluid pencil manipulation. During steps 8 and 9, emphasize relaxed muscles in the hand. Also, demonstrate how to slide the pencil out of the grip. The pencil should slide in and out easily, and if it doesn't, they are gripping it too hard.
- 4) For students who are having major difficulties, you can tape the instructions or one section of them to the desk for constant reference initially. You will need to make frequent corrections over the next several weeks to break bad habits.
- 5) Tell them that you say, "**Fix your grip,**" that is a gentle reminder to pay attention to how they are holding the pencil.

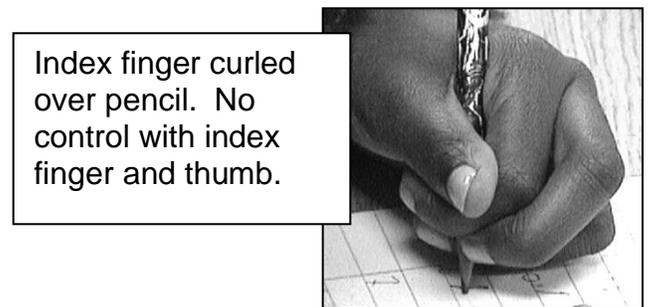
Common Errors in Handwriting Positions



Index and middle finger curled toward palm. No control with index finger and thumb.

Bent wrist and a lot of stress on tendons and veins.

Hand is resting on palm, not the side of hand.



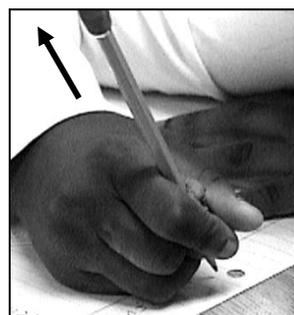
Index finger curled over pencil. No control with index finger and thumb.

Pencil not resting on middle finger.



Pencil is pointed away from the body.

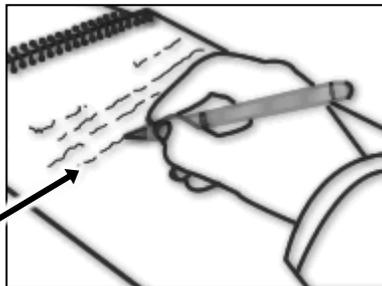
Hand is not below the writing line.



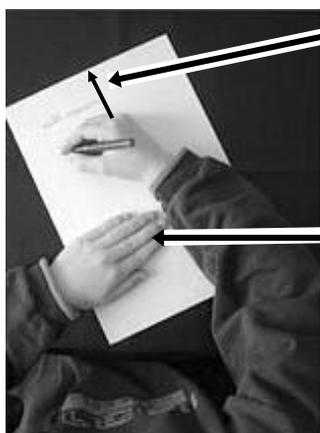
The Right Way to Write

for: *Right-Handed Folks*

Position the Paper



Writing Line



1. Tilt the top of the paper to the left.

2. Put your left hand on the paper below the writing line to hold the paper.

Hold the Pencil



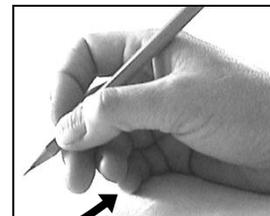
#1: thumb

3. Lightly hold the pencil in between your #1 thumb and finger #2.



4. Rest the pencil on finger #3.

5. Lightly curl fingers #4 and #5 into your palm.



Pencil on Paper



6. Sit up straight.

7. The top of the pencil points back over your right shoulder.



8. Finger #5 and the side of your hand rest on the paper.

9. Keep your wrist straight.

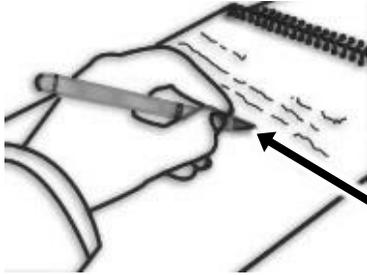


10. As you write, move your hand from left to right *below the writing line* so you don't smudge your writing.



The Correct Way to Write for: *Left-Handed* Folks

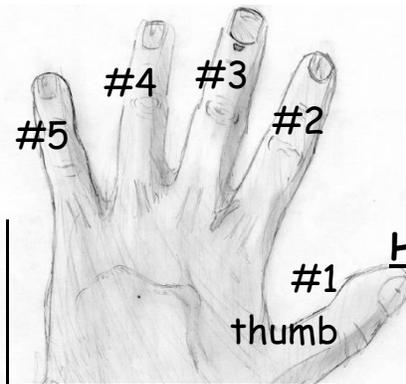
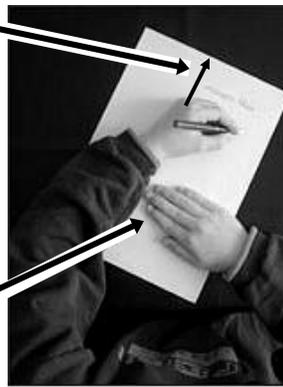
Position the Paper



Writing Line

1. Tilt the top of the paper to the right.

2. Put your right hand on the paper below the writing line to hold the paper.

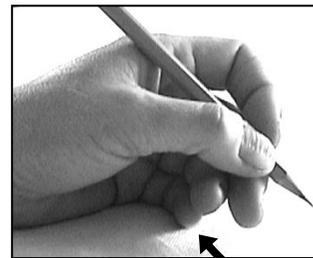


Hold the Pencil



3. Lightly hold the pencil in between your #1 thumb and finger #2.

4. Rest the pencil on finger #3.



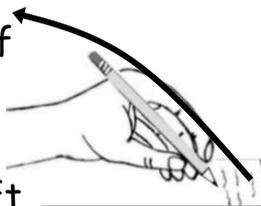
5. Lightly curl fingers #4 and #5 into your palm.

Pencil on Paper



6. Sit up straight.

7. The top of the pencil points back over your left shoulder.



8. Finger #5 and the side of your hand rest on the paper.



9. Keep your wrist straight.



10. As you write, move your hand from left to right *below the writing line* so you don't smudge your writing.

