

Before letters, numbers or pictures, come simple marks. Mark making is a great start to writing and art. Marks are how children learn to express themselves and portray the world around them. So, get mark making and have some fun along the way.

A good foundation to being able to write is to develop your child's fine motor skills. This because fine motor skills enable a child to hold a pencil firmly as they are writing.

Threading is also a great way to develop fine motor skills, whether it is with beads or buttons, or making a necklace out of dried pasta.

Weaving wool around a cardboard template or strips of card through each other are also other simple activities that you could do at home.

Playing with handheld construction toys, small toys and taking part in cutting and sticking activities.

Encourage your child to experiment with confidence will mean they are well on their way to being prepared for when those marks start to form into letters and numbers when they start school.

OUTDOOR MARK-MAKING

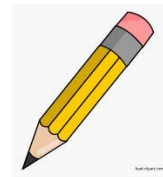
- Use brushes or squeeze bottles to 'paint' with water on a patio, fence or wall.
- Draw with sticks in damp sand or mud.
- Zoom bikes and toy cars through a puddle to make track marks.
- Draw with chunky chalks on tarmac.

MESSY MARK-MAKING

- Mix table salt with glitter in the lid of a biscuit tin or tray then make letter shapes and patterns in the 'sparkledust'.
- Draw with fingers in a tray of flour, shaving foam or 'gloop' (cornflour and water)

MESS-FREE MARKMAKING

- Magnetic drawing boards and water drawing mats



PENCIL CONTROL

As children get closer to school age, you'll probably notice their mark-making becoming more purposeful. Now's the time to encourage a three-finger 'tripod' pencil grip and introduce activities to help them learn pencil control. Give them opportunities to try their own pretend writing, perhaps by adding some scribbles to the bottom of your shopping list.



BBC BITESIZE - How to help your child improve their fine motor skills.



Teachers do not expect children to know their alphabet or be able to write sentences when they start school.

- Encourage your child to develop an interest in books and other forms of text, for example, comics, postcards, labels, and posters.
- You could visit your local library and encourage your child to choose books they would like to listen to and look at.
- Consider readings books about starting school with your child. Use these to discuss all the fun activities they will be doing at school.
- You can also develop an interest in reading, by reading notices and labels when away from home or greetings cards from family and friends.
- 'Name treasure Hunts' can be a fun way of getting your child to recognise their name - Write your child's name on paper and hide them around the house. Encourage your child to find them all.



TIPS FOR SHARING BOOKS

Share books because it...

- Helps create a special bond between parents and children
- Introduces children to art through the illustrations
- Enhances children's listening skills
- Introduces children to a wide variety of experiences
- Helps prepare children for learning to read
- Improves and enriches the quality of children's lives
- Provides fun and enjoyment for children and adults.



When to share books?

- Set aside a special time each day, such as nap time, bedtime, or after meals
- Share books when you and your child are in a relaxed mood
- Limit sharing time if your child becomes fussy or restless
- Take advantage of "waiting" times to share books e.g on trips, at the doctor's office, in line at the grocery store
- Soothe a child who is sick or cranky

How to share books

- Find a comfortable place to sit.
- Recite or sing rhymes from your favourite books.

- Turn off other distractions e.g. television, radio, or stereo
- Hold the book so your child can see the pages clearly. Introduce words such as 'Title', 'Author', 'character', 'illustrator'.
- Involve your child by having him or her point out objects, talk about the pictures, or repeat common words e.g. Who/what can you see?
 - Where is 'Fred'? (farm, beach, park etc)
 - What can you see that is yellow.
- Read with expression.
- Vary the pace of your reading, slow or fast
- Have your child select books to read.
- Reread your child's favourite books whenever asked.



BBC BITESSIZE - Top tips for reading with your child.