

What Is a Tripod Grasp?

A functional tripod grasp occurs when a child holds a writing utensil using the thumb, index finger, and middle finger while the ring and little fingers are flexed into the palm for stability.

This grasp supports: efficient pencil control, improved endurance, refined fine motor precision, and development of intrinsic hand strength.

What this looks like: This is the “three-finger hold” most adults use. It helps children write more neatly, with less fatigue, and with better control.

Important Considerations: A functional grasp is more important than a visually perfect one. Consistent fine motor play supports long term development.

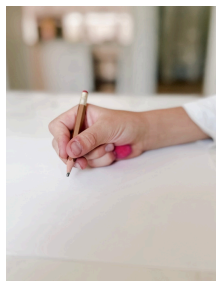
• Use Shortened Writing Tools

- Clinical Rationale: Short crayons or golf pencils limit the available surface area for grasping. This discourages immature palmar grasp patterns and promotes activation of the distal finger pads and intrinsic hand musculature necessary for tripod development.
- What this looks like: The smaller the better! When the crayon or pencil is short, your child cannot grab it with their whole hand. That naturally encourages them to use their fingertips instead.
 - Try these writing utensils:
 - Broken crayons
 - Golf pencils
 - Short colored pencils



• Promote Separation of the Sides of the Hand

- Clinical Rationale: A mature grasp requires differentiation between the radial (thumb side) and ulnar (pinky side) of the hand. The radial side manages precision tasks, while the ulnar side provides stability. Strengthening this separation improves control and coordination.
- What this looks like: The thumb, pointer, and middle fingers do the work. The ring and pinky fingers help stabilize. Teaching the hand to separate these jobs makes writing smoother.
 - Strategy: “Hide the Treasure”
 - Have your child hold a small object in their ring and pinky fingers while writing. Examples include a small pom-pom, bead, eraser, or tiny toy. This keeps the helper fingers tucked in and allows the writing fingers to move freely.



• Intentional Presentation of the Writing Tool

- Clinical Rationale: Presenting the writing utensil vertically and limiting proximal access reduces compensatory whole-hand grasping and encourages refined distal placement.
- What this looks like: Hand the child the tool. Yes, sometimes it is that simple! Cover the top 3/4 of the pencil/crayon with your hand and offer it to the child in a vertical position. This does not leave enough room for the child to grasp the pencil with their palm. If needed, gently guide the ring and pinky fingers into the palm.



• Optimize Wrist Positioning with Surface Changes

- Clinical Rationale: Efficient handwriting requires slight wrist extension (wrist gently bent backward). Flat table surfaces often promote wrist flexion, which limits finger precision and endurance. Vertical or inclined surfaces naturally facilitate wrist extension, shoulder stabilization, and improved motor control.
- What this looks like: When children write flat on a table, their wrist often bends forward, making pencil control harder. Writing on a whiteboard, paper taped to the wall, a chalkboard, a hanging clipboard, or a 3-inch binder used as a slant board helps position the wrist correctly.

