

Tips on How to Teach Cutting with Scissors

Why Practise Cutting with Scissors?

The ability to hold and cut out with scissors is an important prewriting skill. It promotes the stability of the ring and little fingers and mobility of the thumb, pointer and middle fingers. These three fingers, the 3 Friends, are required to hold and manipulate the pencil.

Cutting also develops coordination between the two hands as one manipulates the scissors and the other the paper. Similarly, when writing, the supporting hand must hold the paper still while the preferred hand manipulates the pencil. Giving the child a head start in acquiring this skill will help them to feel confident and enjoy cutting and pasting activities.

Tips for Holding and Manipulating Scissors

1. Work out the child's hand preference. Give them the correct scissors i.e. right or left handed scissors. Right handed scissors have the top blade on the right hand side of the scissors and into this loop the right thumb is placed (see orange scissors in the image below). If the child does not have an established hand preference, supply universal or ambidextrous scissors which can be used with either hand (see image of black scissors).
2. Ensure that the scissors are appropriate for the child's age and level of skill. Shorter length blades are easier to control. Adult size scissors are not suitable for this reason. The scissors should be clean and open and close easily.
3. Teach and reinforce the optimal grip from the start:
 - Hand the scissors to the child with one loop above the other
 - Tell them to grasp the scissors with their forearm in the thumb up position. Say: 'Put your thumb up like Tricky Thumb does' or 'Thumb up for Tricky'
 - For scissors with smaller, same size loops e.g. black scissors below, the child puts their thumb into the top loop and middle finger into the bottom loop; their pointer finger supports the lower loop during opening and closing
 - For scissors with one long loop e.g. orange scissor below, position both pointer and middle finger in this loop
 - The scissors are held perpendicular to the floor with the wrist straight or bent back slightly



Left hander grip with same size scissor loops



Grip for right hander with longer loop

4. Once the child can grasp the scissors as described above, let them practise opening and closing the scissors in the air until this movement is smooth and rhythmic. Encourage them to open the scissors to less than halfway as this is more efficient when cutting. Play 'talking scissors' opening the 'mouth' wide or small as instructed.

A Child with the Desired Cutting Pattern

- Holds the scissors correctly
- Uses small movements of their thumb and middle finger to control the opening and closing of the blades
- Grasps the scissor loops securely
- Holds their last two fingers against their palm when cutting

Tips for the Cutting Process

1. Cutting materials

Cutting materials should be graded according to weight, starting with heavier paper. Heavier paper has greater stability, allowing the child to concentrate on control of the scissors. Start with thin card (greeting card thickness), construction paper then regular weight paper.

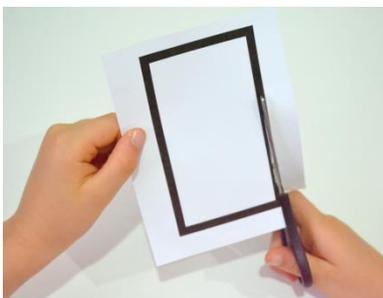
Later introduce light weight paper found in some magazines and newspaper. Non-paper items such as fabric are most difficult to cut and should be introduced once the child has mastered regular paper materials.

2. Assisting Hand

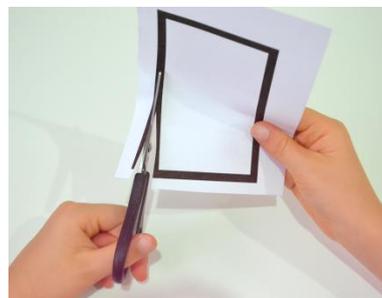
The assisting hand should be holding the paper also in the thumb up position. When cutting out a shape, the assisting hand moves the paper around, keeping the scissors in approximately the same position e.g. if cutting out a circle, cut around part of the arc before moving the paper so the cut part of the arc is then at the bottom.

3. Cutting Direction

The cutting direction for going around shapes is as follows: the right hander cuts to the right of the shape i.e. anticlockwise direction and the left hander cuts to the left of the shape i.e. clockwise direction.



Cutting direction for the right hander



Cutting direction for the left hander

The hand holding the paper and the hand holding the scissors are positioned on opposite sides of the shape. This allows the child to see the cutting blade of the scissors.