

Tips on How to Teach Good Pencil Grip - Tripod Grasp

Why Teach and Practise Holding the Pencil Correctly?

It is very difficult to try to fix poor pencil grips. In most cases from age four, it is important to teach children how to grasp the pencil between their thumb and pointer finger with the middle finger supporting the pencil from the side. This tripod grip allows for more precise control of the pencil and causes less fatigue to the muscles in the hand and wrist. Children who hold the pencil in a fisted grip will not be able to control the pencil precisely neither will they be able to see the pencil tip when first learning to form letters.

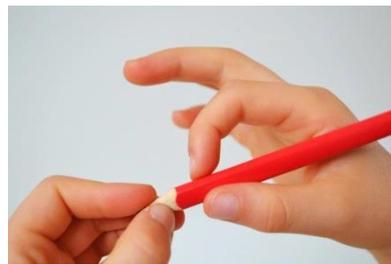
Tips for Teaching the Tripod Pencil Grip

Teach the child how to hold their pencil by following these three steps:

1. Demonstrate an 'I Spy' sign with the preferred hand i.e. thumb and pointer finger pads touching to make a circle and other three fingers pointing up (they can look through the circle to find the pencil)
2. Using the helping hand place the pencil into the preferred hand, pinching the pencil about 1.5 cm from its tip between the thumb and pointer pads (if right handed and **2.5 cm away from the tip if left handed** – so the child can see the pencil tip and their wrist does not hook or bend inwards)
3. Drop the other fingers so that the pencil rests on the side of the middle finger at the level of the last joint (some children may need to have the middle finger pad also on the pencil); the Naughty Rascals are tucked into the palm



Step 1 'I Spy' sign



Step 2 Pinch pencil



Step 3 Drop other fingers

The above three steps can be reinforced through learning the following rhyme:

*Tricky Thumb and Patty Pointer play 'I Spy',
Jump on the Pencil Car, ready to fly!
Mickey Middle slips behind for a ride,
While Ring and Little Rascals go and hide.*

Remember to refer to the story *Let's Go* (Track 9) and the hand template worksheets 49 and 50 on pp136-137. Use with the free online illustrated mini eBook *Let's Go- Learn Good Pencil Grip* with a Pencil Car Licence activity. Download it for free from the website on the 'Free Activities & Resources' page. Sing along with actions to the free video of the song *Let's Drive the Pencil Car* also online on the 'Watch Videos' page.

Tips for Reinforcing Tripod Pencil Grip

- 1.** Practise 'pinching' the pencil with thumb and pointer fingers.
- 2.** With a marker, draw dots on the pads of the pointer finger and thumb and side of last joint of middle finger. Tell the child to hold their pencil, making sure that the dots are not visible. If the dots are visible then they are not positioning their fingers correctly.
- 3.** Use thicker diameter writing tools, a fat triangular pencil is ideal. Pencils, wax crayons and chalk are also good as they provide more resistance on the writing surface giving the child more kinaesthetic feedback than pens and whiteboard markers.
- 4.** Hold a cotton wool ball in the ring and little fingers while writing as a reminder to learn to keep them tucked into the palm. Keeping the last two fingers curled in the palm supports the hand better allowing for increased pencil control.
- 5.** If the child keeps wrapping their thumb over the pointer finger while holding the pencil explain that Tricky Thumb and Patty Pointer do not sit on each other's laps when they drive the car. Likewise when their thumb and pointer finger holds the pencil they should not touch each other.

Should pencil grip difficulties persist, an occupational therapist will be able to advise on solutions such as suitable pencil grips and specific hand exercises.