

## Multi-Sensory Writing

For printing and cursive writing to be efficient, children need to develop automatic motor patterns (motor memory), i.e. they need to be able to form the letters and words without thinking about them or necessarily looking at them. It is like learning to drive a car. At first you need to think about every action: when to push in the clutch, change a gear, turn the steering wheel or brake. Eventually, you are able to do these things without focusing on them and can drive the car, even at times when distracted by the radio or conversation. For children to print or cursive write efficiently they need to be able to do it automatically; without constantly thinking about how (motor memory) to form the letters, what a letter should look like (visual memory), or how to verbally guide the movement (auditory memory). Some children have more difficulty getting to the stage of automation when learning to write. A multisensory approach to writing can provide additional sensory input to assist with learning correct letter formation. In other words using more than one sensory pathway can provide the child with additional ways to learn; thereby making the learning more efficient. Following are examples of ways to include different sensory information when learning to write.

**Kinaesthetic** (body movement) - feedback provides information regarding how it “feels” to form a letter:

- Draw large letters on chalk or dry erase boards, keeping the elbow straight.
- “Write” letters/words in the air with a straight arm.
- Tracing a letter projected on the wall with a flashlight. Dim the lights and have fun.
- Use a wand with a streamer or ribbon at the end to form letters in the air.

### **Tactile:**

- Write on sandpaper or on the sidewalk with chalk.
- Use your fingers to make shapes, letters, and numbers on a surface covered with shaving cream, pudding, finger paint, sand or mud. Try using baking soda, salt, sugar, etc.
- Use your fingers to trace letters, numbers and shapes made out of various textures. For example, sandpaper, dried glitter glue, felt, satin, etc.
- Trace letters on each other’s backs or in the palms of each other’s hands. Have your partner guess the letter.

### **Olfactory:**

- Trace letters in scented tactile media (shaving cream, play dough).
- Write with “smelly” markers.

### **Auditory:**

- Use simple but consistent auditory cues. The child can learn to talk himself or herself through a letter.
- Use auditory cues; for instance, the letter “T”: “Start at the top. Big line Down. Jump to the top and Across.”
- Once a child has learned correct letter formation, practice to music. Music can provide an opportunity to increase fluency of writing.

### **Other FUN activities:**

- ◆ Do **rainbow writing**. Form a letter. Have the child trace it with one color, then another, then another, etc. This is a great way to get the letter form into memory.
- ◆ Use a paintbrush with plain or coloured water to paint a design on the sidewalk, wall of a building, or a tree trunk.
- ◆ Trace shapes and letters with vision occluded.
- ◆ Use a variety of writing tools to increase motivation (e.g. glitter crayons, chalk, puffy glue, gel pens, colour changing markers, vibrating pens, writing tools with different textures, shapes, and/or motivating pictures/cartoons on them).
- ◆ Use a variety of writing surfaces – carpet squares with chalk, salt on black construction paper, bags of hair gel, magic marker over cellophane, grease pencils on plastic, sandpaper and charcoal, etc.
- ◆ Use beans, rice, acorns, sand, seeds, etc. to form a letter, using glue. Tracing the letter with a finger provides increased tactile input.
- ◆ Have a child form a letter with a Aqua Doodle, Magna Doodle, Etch-A-Sketch, etc.
- ◆ Practice using stencils. There are the kind you trace the outside of and easier ones that you trace along the inside of a cut out.

Practice any of the above with eyes closed. This enhances motor memory and may improve speed.