

Fine Motor Skills



Fine motor movements involve the coordination of small muscles in the hands and fingers. Strong fine motor skills are essential to complete tasks such as writing, cutting, using a fork or spoon, threading beads, moving puzzle pieces, zipping, buttoning, and tying shoe laces. Without well-developed fine motor skills, a child may have difficulty learning to write or performing many of the other critical tasks presented in school.

As an Early Years setting, we are experiencing more and more children with underdeveloped fine and gross motor skills; a prime area of learning. This can be attributed to many things including the increased number of children of preschool age using iPads etc. at home.

The ability to write is a complex one, not only do children need to have the confidence to pick up a pencil and make marks on paper, they also need to be developmentally ready to write with strong core and hand muscles. The hand is a really complex piece of machinery and is made up of lots of joints and muscle groups that interconnect and work together to provide maximum dexterity.

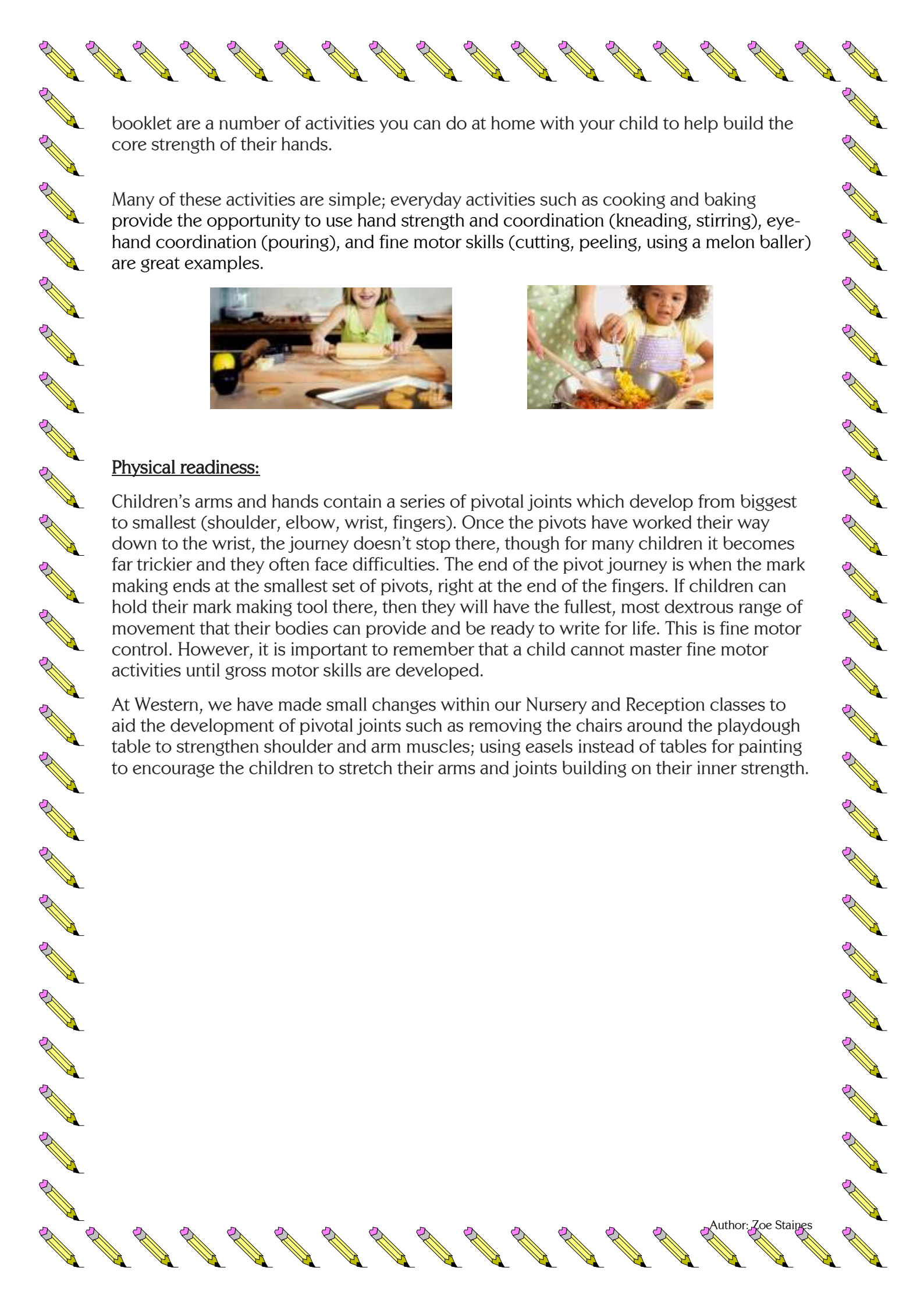
Nearly all fine motor activities, including cutting and writing, require a **dominant hand** (being left-handed or right-handed) and a **non-dominant hand**. Hand dominance can be seen as early as age three or four, although it may not be firmly established until a child reaches age six or seven. Once a child becomes comfortable with one hand as the dominant hand, the remaining hand becomes the non-dominant hand by default. While the dominant hand performs tasks such as using a pencil or scissors, the non-dominant hand acts as the “stabiliser.” For example, one hand holds the scissors when cutting while the other hand moves the paper.



Why fine motor activities are helpful for young children

Fine motor skills refer to the ability to maneuver pencils, crayons, markers, scissors and other small objects accurately with the fingers, thumb and hand. Above all, refining fine motor skills takes practice. But scribbling randomly on a sheet of paper and holding the pencil or crayon incorrectly actually impedes progress with fine motor skills and instills bad habits that have to be unlearned. It is much easier to train the fine motor muscles in the fingers to hold and operate pencils and scissors correctly from the start.

At Western, we are committed to helping children improve their fine and gross motor skills by providing activities and resources on a daily basis to assist this. Included in this



booklet are a number of activities you can do at home with your child to help build the core strength of their hands.

Many of these activities are simple; everyday activities such as cooking and baking provide the opportunity to use hand strength and coordination (kneading, stirring), eye-hand coordination (pouring), and fine motor skills (cutting, peeling, using a melon baller) are great examples.



Physical readiness:

Children's arms and hands contain a series of pivotal joints which develop from biggest to smallest (shoulder, elbow, wrist, fingers). Once the pivots have worked their way down to the wrist, the journey doesn't stop there, though for many children it becomes far trickier and they often face difficulties. The end of the pivot journey is when the mark making ends at the smallest set of pivots, right at the end of the fingers. If children can hold their mark making tool there, then they will have the fullest, most dextrous range of movement that their bodies can provide and be ready to write for life. This is fine motor control. However, it is important to remember that a child cannot master fine motor activities until gross motor skills are developed.

At Western, we have made small changes within our Nursery and Reception classes to aid the development of pivotal joints such as removing the chairs around the playdough table to strengthen shoulder and arm muscles; using easels instead of tables for painting to encourage the children to stretch their arms and joints building on their inner strength.

What can be done to improve gross and motor skills development?

Western has introduced funky finger and dough disco activities which take place on a daily basis. They involve a series of hand, arm, elbow, wrist, shoulder and finger exercises which work together to strengthen and develop children’s fine and gross motor dexterity, hand eye co ordination, proprioception, balance, low load control, grip and self-esteem.

Dough disco is a fun activity which combines the use of play dough with a series of hand and finger exercises designed to improve fine muscle control. It begins with large movements which work mainly on the children’s shoulder, elbow and wrist joints and gross motor skills.

These movements develop children’s fine and gross motor dexterity, hand-eye coordination and self-esteem by strengthening the children’s fine motor skills it enables them to develop their pencil grip which in turn will help develop their writing skills.

[Dough disco activities can be found on the internet and can be enjoyed at home as a fun game.](#)



Funky Finger activities are centred around fun fine motor games which use the children’s fingers to develop the muscles needed for writing. These activities are geared to developing and strengthening the children’s shoulder, elbow, wrist, finger and thumb pivots including finger isolation as well as their pincer grip, bilateral coordination and hand eye coordination.

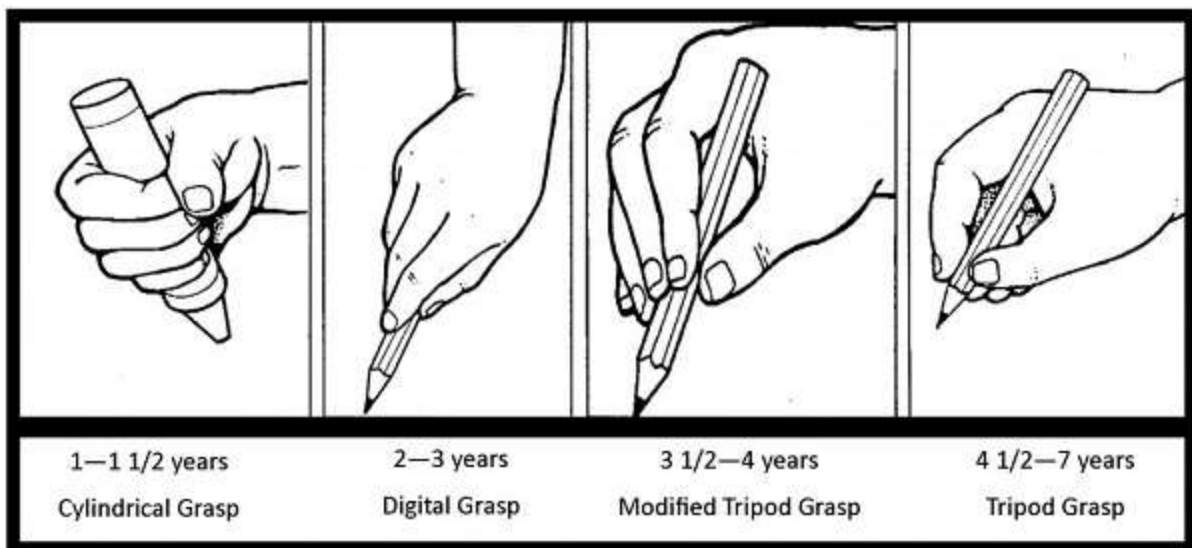


To make funky fingers more accessible to different children's levels, we consider a child's grip by using a variety of objects of different sizes and also their ability to use their own fingers to manipulate resources to pick up small objects. We use this information to create activities that will challenge and extend the children. As the children become proficient in their skills, we increase the dexterity challenge of the activities.

All these activities and games are building towards a secure and confident pencil grip which will help the children throughout their school career. This is of the utmost importance at Western and is a primary focus throughout Early Years.

Pencil Grips

There are four stages to grip development which are used when assessing the children, each of which are linked to their pivotal stage; for example a child at grip stage one is still operating from the shoulder so will need activities which work on strengthening their elbow pivots.



You will see evidence of the children's progression in each of our Early Years' classrooms and the stage they are most comfortable with when mark making.

Areas of provision within the classrooms provide lots of opportunities for mark making and teachers and practitioners help the children to hold their pencils to the grip they are most comfortable with.

Fine Motor Activities to try at home:

Fine Motor Skills

Use a colander and pipe cleaners.
Can you thread the pipe cleaners through the holes?
How many can you thread in a minute?



Fine Motor Skills

How many beads or buttons can you thread on a lace or string?
Can you make a pattern using different colours?



Fine Motor Skills

Use small building bricks to make a construction.
Can you push the bricks together and then pull them apart?



Fine Motor Skills

Use your thumb and finger to practise winding up toys. Watch them go, can you have a wind-up race?



Fine Motor Skills

Use tweezers to see how many pieces of pasta, rice or pom-poms you can pick up.



Fine Motor Skills

Can you make a chain of paper clips?
Can you make a chain longer than a pencil, a ruler, a book or your table?



Fine Motor Skills

How quickly can you do up buttons or zips on a jacket or coat?



Fine Motor Skills

Pick up dominoes and make a long line next to each other, then knock them down!



Fine Motor Skills

Chop up straws into small parts. Thread onto string or ribbon to make a necklace or bracelet.



Fine Motor Skills

Use colourful sticky dots, to peel and stick to create a dotted picture!



Fine Motor Skills

Use pegs to hang out washing on a washing line. How many pieces can you hang out using two pegs?

