

## **Tools for Learning Tips for the Left-handed Student** **Compiled by C. Rockett, OTR**

Offer a **seating position** that allows the left arm to move freely. If s/he is sitting on the right side of a right-handed person, the left handed writer may feel "pushed" and tensions can mount!

- **Paper placement:** Paper for both the right and left-handed students should be tilted, not held parallel to the desk. The paper should be high enough (away from the table edge) to keep the writing hand below the line of writing to prevent a bent wrist position. Paper should be placed to the left and slanted with the right-hand corner nearest to the student's midline, not at midline. Tilting the paper makes the lines correspond to the "out to in" arc motion for writing sentences. A 20 – 30 degree slant (3-inch binder or clipboard propped on a nonslip brick) helps keep the wrist in a neutral position.
- **Dominance issues:** No one has come up with a definitive reason for why 13% of the population is left-handed, but it is thought to be genetic. The left hemisphere of the brain (right-hand dominance) controls speech, language, writing, logic, math and science. It is the linear thinking mode. The right hemisphere (left-hand dominance) controls music, art, creativity, perception, emotions and genius. This is the holistic thinking mode. This means that left-handed people are likely to be visual thinkers, be more creative, be better at 3 – D perception, and are more likely to get involved in the music and the arts. Dominance usually is preferred around the age of 4. However, studies show that some children who are normal in every way do not establish dominance until 8 or 9. TWO handed activities (legos, lacing, cutting) are paramount in the preschool and kindergarten years to give children every opportunity to develop the brain in all areas.
- If children start to write with either their left hand or right hand, encourage them to FINISH writing with the same hand. Discourage switching hands because the writing hand gets tired. Encourage a quick stretch, shake out, or loosening up of the pencil hold. Some students ease up tension in their writing hand if their helper hand is squeezing a stress ball or some other fidget.
- When writing, the helper hand holds the paper, but needs to move out of the way a lot more than for right-handed students. Tracing around shape pieces, using a ruler, etc. all help the student to learn how to use their two hands together.
- When copying or doing spelling lists, be sure to place the writing to be copied on the students' right side so they can see what they are to copy.
- Many left-handed writers make the across motion in the H, T, J., G, I from right to left. This is natural and not a problem. In the letters E, F and L, it is probably better to learn to go left to right to anchor the lines, rather than have the letters be lost in space.
- Reversals are common in left-handed students. Make sure the student understands the starting point differences. Use a jingle to help remember (**b**: Down on the bat, you're up to hit the ball; **d**: c comes before d; **p**: Dive under the line, back up to breathe; **q**: start with a g but keeping going to u).
- Pencil positions are the same for lefties. However, it is often helpful to hold the pencil a little higher on the shaft. The pencil point should point toward the left elbow, not toward the shoulder as with the right-handed student. The wrist is in neutral and resting on the table to provide stability for the hand.
- Many lefties use their right hand for other activities, such as cutting with scissors, sewing, etc. -- maybe because they modeled right handed people or because, like many of us, we are "not right" all the time!

For a quiz called **You Might be More Left-handed than You Think**, go to [www.left-handersday.com](http://www.left-handersday.com)

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

LEFT-HANDEDNESS  
Classroom Suggestions

## MAXIMIZING FINE MOTOR PERFORMANCE

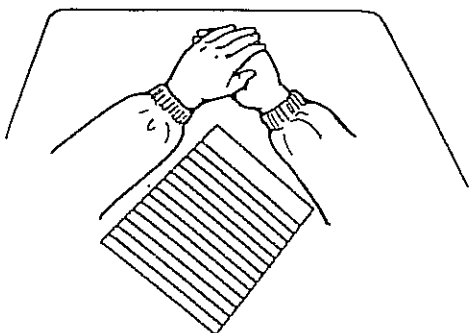
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### Purpose

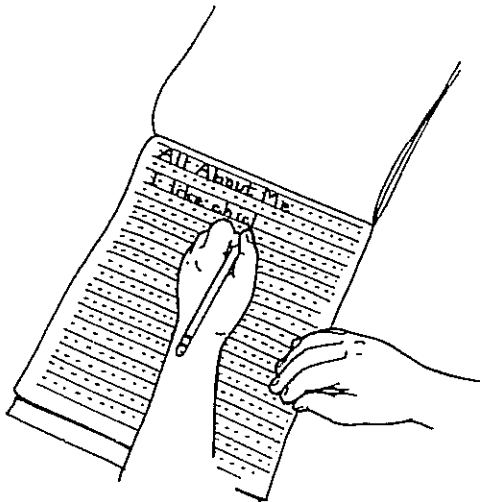
To maximize fine motor performance of the left-handed child

### Learning to Write

1. Identify left-handed children as early as possible (preferably before teaching how to hold a pencil for writing), and group them together when teaching writing. This will help them to learn the correct habits, rather than causing confusion or incorrect patterns when they try to copy grip and body and paper positioning from their right-handed neighbors.
2. Teach correct habits from the beginning so that the left-handed child doesn't try to write like a right-handed child and develop compensatory grip positions which will make writing more difficult later. Provide individualized instruction (or group instruction, if several lefties are learning together) for paper positioning, grip and hand positioning, coordination of finger and arm movement, and handwriting slant.
3. Use visual or physical cues for helping the child to develop habits for paper, grip, and arm positioning.
  - Tape an illustration of the desired positioning on upper left-hand corner of the desk.
  - Tape paper on the desk in the desired position.
  - Place tape on the desk around the paper to form an outline, to remind child of the ideal paper position. A taped outline of one corner often works well.
  - Teach child to place both forearms on the desk to form the shape of a triangle. The paper should fit in the triangle, with the left side lined up with the left forearm. Without changing the slant, move the paper to the left of child's midline (center of the body).
4. Use cards or letter strips that show model letters with left-handed slant for teaching letter formation. If your handwriting program includes tracing of letters, make sure that this child is tracing letters with the correct slant. If practice sheets with left-handed slants are not available, write the letter with the correct slant for child to trace, or eliminate the tracing stage.
5. When preparing writing practice sheets, place the sample letter (or word) at the top or on the right side of the page instead of on the left side, so it will not be covered by the left hand as the child writes.



6. Provide writing books that illustrate left-handed slant.
7. It is hard or impossible to write large letters on paper with the left hand without blocking view of part of the letter with the hand. Writing letters on the chalkboard, at shoulder level or lower, makes it easier to see the letters above the hand, even as they are formed. This also helps children to get the idea of writing on paper so letters are visible above the hand.
8. During all writing activities, monitor position and grip. Check to see that the writing line and written letters are clearly visible above or to the right of the child's left hand, and that the child's wrist is straight or slightly extended. If they are not, practice additional grip and positioning activities.



### Pre-Cursive and Cursive Writing Practice

1. Before beginning cursive writing, try to establish correct position and grip so letters and words are always visible above or to the right of the hand.
2. Pushing the pencil from left to right across the page is more difficult than pulling it, as right-handers do; so left-handed children often have difficulty coordinating arm and finger movement smoothly for cursive writing. Practice of pre-cursive finger and arm coordination activities can improve these skills. It is especially helpful if these skills are mastered before cursive writing is presented. In this way, the child is more likely to learn cursive letters and connections using movement patterns which are smooth and well controlled.
3. Slant-top desks provide more support for the forearm and are sometimes helpful for left-handed children who are having difficulty with smooth arm movement during cursive writing.
4. Encourage coordinated use of forearm and finger movements during all classroom cursive writing. The fingers should form the letters as the forearm moves smoothly from left to right for horizontal movement along the line. The wrist should remain fairly straight or extended (bent back) slightly. When learning letters, have children practice coordinating arm and finger movement by repeating and connecting each letter across the line.
5. Prepare paper with guidelines for most efficient slant, and reproduce it for classroom use. This can help child use downstrokes which are pulled straight back toward the left elbow. For some left-handed children, the most efficient position, depending on paper slant, is vertical writing with no slant. In this case, vertical writing should be encouraged.

