



Pen hold

[Home page](#)
HANDWRITING

[Movement](#)
[Model](#)

CIRCUMSTANCES

[Activity](#)
Pen hold
[Cramp](#)
[Left hand](#)
[Repairs](#)

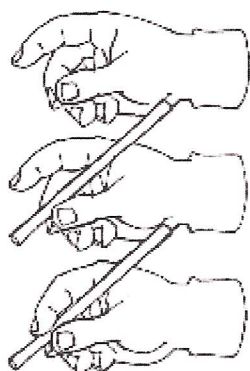
[Glossary](#)

Does it matter how you hold a pen? If you're comfortable, and your writing is all right, hold it any way you want. But if your middle finger is callused and your hand aches, you may be ready for a change.

Gripping your pen hard invites trouble. Don't hold it in a vise-like grip between your thumb and index finger. That's how writing cramp starts. Put your thumb and middle finger together instead.

The first penhold

Children don't know by instinct how to hold a pen. We have to teach them. The primary grip is a good start.



First, join the tips of the thumb and middle finger.

Then put the pen in the cleft between them.

Finally, lay the index finger on top of the pen.

To your adult hand, the primary grip may feel inflexible. It is meant only for children who don't yet have highly-developed motor skills.

How to form the primary grip

Relax your hand. Join the tips of your thumb and middle finger comfortably. Put the pen in the cleft between them so that the barrel is close to the knuckle of the index finger. Then lay the index finger on the pen. This way, the index finger pushes against the thumb and middle finger. It's much better than the thumb and index finger pushing on either side of the pen.

Writing cramp is probably the most serious consequence of a bad grip. In our approach to pen hold, it comes first.

Your hand should lie on its side and on your half-curved little finger. Keep your wrist more or less straight. Your hand should never be above the writing line and write downwards, as left-handers often do. We come to that problem on the page about [left-handedness](#).

A grip for grown-ups

As children grow, the proportions of their hands change. The children also write faster and should hold the pen differently.



In the grown-up grip, the thumb pushes against the first and second fingers.

The grown-up grip is different from the primary grip. The thumb

goes higher on the barrel and pushes against the first and second fingers. This does increase the danger of writing cramp. If it sets in, the easiest remedy is to return to the primary grip. Move your thumb down to meet the middle finger and keep it there until the cramp has faded away. More about that on the page about [writing cramp](#).

The grown-up grip is excellent for quick writing. It is not as useful for beginners. It is only an advantage, when the hand has developed some discipline.

The way we hold a pen today is a novelty. Fifty years ago, most handwriting books taught the copperplate grip: palm down and all four knuckles up.

What kind of pen?

Some people recommend thick pencils for small children. I don't think this is a good idea. Test it for yourself: give the children a few choices. When I have tried, they take thin barrels, such as ball point refills.

How to do it

Make sure that the children have the right penhold at the beginning of every class. Of course, some of them will not keep it for long. This need not worry you. They are all right as long as they know how to form a proper grip. When they need it, they can use it.



Keep handy a few triangular vinyl pen grips that slide onto pen barrels. They are remarkably useful for teaching a good grip. Triangular pencils have their advantages, too. Children don't need these things all the time. In each class, there are usually a few who do, and they won't all need them on the same day.

One bad habit you must stop before it takes hold: the pen barrel must never lie parallel to the thumb. It is not suited to the demanding control of pen movements.

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Right-handed penhold



Left-handed penhold

When a left-handed writer looks at the pen in his hand, he should see it nearly sideways. The right-hander sees it almost end-on.

Paper position

The left hand shouldn't have to pull every stem with the difficult movement of thumb, index finger and middle finger. To avoid this, we'll slant the paper to the right, and the writing to the left.



Right-handed children should put the paper directly in front of them and hold it in place with the left hand.



Left-handed children should learn to put the paper at an angle and to the left.

Writing angle

Letters that slant to the right are suitable for the right hand.



The model for the right hand is slants a little to the right.



Left-handed writing should be upright, even slightly backslanted.

Slanted writing suits the right hand. With upright or backslanted writing, the stems can be made with the natural swing of the left wrist and the fingers.

The ruler method

The hand of a left-handed writer should be just below

the baseline. Then it doesn't smudge the ink as it follows the writing from left to right.



Here's how you use a ruler to keep the left hand below the line of writing.

Lay down a ruler (a pencil will do just as well) on the baseline. The hand should be below it, and the pen nib above it. Then take the ruler away and begin writing.

You'll probably need to repeat this a few times. But it won't be long until the hand will find the right place on its own.

Height

A high seat is often useful to left-handed writers. Some like putting a pad on their chairs.

Light

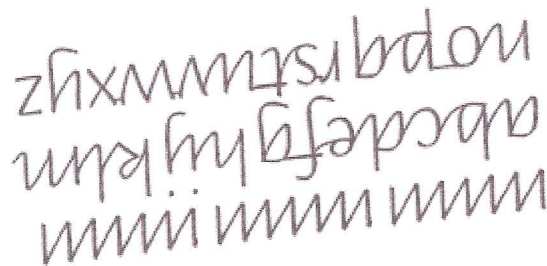
In most classrooms, the windows are on the left. With the light from the left, the pen of a left-handed child can cast a shadow on the writing. A change in seating can help.

Space

A left-handed child needs room on the desk for the left arm. When two children sit side by side, the left-handed should be on the left and right-handed on the right.

Upside-down

Some lefthanders detest backslanted writing and the paper turned to the right. They call it a straitjacket, and they have a point. There's another way.



Turning the paper around solves a couple of problems. You can write with movements that are natural to your wrist and fingers. Your hand won't smudge the ink. Many left-handed calligraphers like this approach, especially for the thicks and thins of a broad-edge pen.

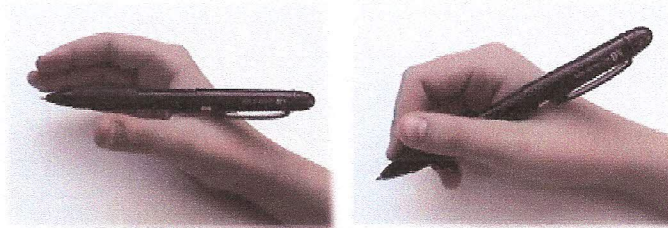
There's a disadvantage, too. You look at the letters standing on their heads. You also have to turn the model upside-down. For some children, this can be difficult. But it's worth trying.

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THE CORRECT HAND POSITION

This is relaxed position:



The pen rest on the thumb side halfway along the distal end of the middle finger, balancing on that and on that patch of skin at the web space between thumb and index finger when the whole hand is resting on its ulnar border. Then the slightly bent thumb touches the pen and the less slightly bent index finger completes the soft grip by resting on the pen now held in the triangular grip between thumb, index and middle finger.

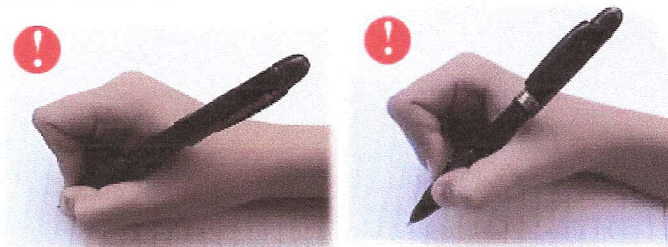


There are three (3) ways to write from this perfectly relaxed position.

- One is to wiggle the pen with most of the movement coming from the finger action;
- another is to use whole arm action with a little wrist action;
- and the most relaxed way to write is a combination of the two above ways.

BAD WRITING PRACTICE

a) Too Much Finger Squeezing



The "Death Grip" of the pen, sometimes so concentrated that that the thumb distal joint is at right angles to the proximal bone and the skin over the thumb is white from tension. Sometimes this is made worse by a similar vice like grip from the opposing index finger, also bent in a very flexed way. Together this hard squeeze presses the pen down so hard on the middle finger that it leaves an indentation in the skin. This upsets flexor tendon activity and causes problems later in life at and above the wrist joint.

b) Incorrect Positions

Some people and too many children, hold the pen at more than 45 degrees from the perfect

position, even 90 degrees up in the air and over towards the knuckles. Some even only use thumb and index finger in odd combinations. Some hold the pen between thumb and middle and ring fingers! All the aberrant positions jeopardise the action of the intrinsic muscles of the hand, and cause lasting problems in life.

WHAT TO DO

a) Show Children The Correct Hand Posture.

Check the writer's hand position while writing and try to alter it to be more relaxed in the correct posture.

b) The "Death Grip" is hard to change but can be helped by switching to a pen with a much wider body, which should be at least double the diameter of the normal pen. Slipping a rubberised tube over the normal pen is another way to increase the diameter of the pen barrel, Fatter pens and rubber slip one are available in major shops and stores selling writing materials.

c) Taking rests while writing is a very good way of cutting down the side effects or unchanged bad posture. It is hard to change posture after ten (10) or more years doing something else, but is worth persisting.