



## Fine Motor Exercises to Improve Skills for Handwriting

*These are a variety of exercises I compiled from many different sources.*

**Materials:** play dough, modeling clay, or exercise putty ½" rubber bands ¾" marbles, wooden beads, or bouncy balls cookie sheet or other unbreakable tray zip lock sandwich bags chisel pencil erasers misc. small items-cereal, beans, macaroni pencils domino's deck of cards plastic lids- about 2" depending on student pennies small square wooden beads or dice dish or hand towel squirt gun

Towel Scrunching- works best sitting at a table where forearms can be supported. Lay the towel flat, shorter side toward student. Keeping the student's arm flat on the table, have them use their fingers to "walk" up the towel, "scrunching" it into their hand as they go. When the towel is scrunched in their hand as far as possible, reverse the process and push the towel away bit by bit.

Sideways Finger Squishes-make ½' balls of playdough or putty and put them between their fingers. Have them try to "squish" them by squeezing fingers. Work all the different fingers.

Baggie sealing- seal a zip lock bag (without sliding tab) with both hands starting in the middle and slide to the sides. Have them use the tip of their thumb opposite to their finger tip, making an "O" shape. Repeat with thumb opposing the middle, ring, and little fingers. This can be combined with another activity to put away supplies.

Eraser pick-ups- have them hold chisel erasers between their thumb and index finger tips (both hands). Use the round (pencil) side of erasers to pick up small objects or stack small cubes or dice into a tower. Domino parade- stand domino's on end about ½" apart. Have them make straight or curved lines, or design their own pattern. See how many can be lined up before they fall!

Shuffle cards- plain old card shuffling. Have them hold half of the pile in each hand with thumbs on top and the rest of the fingers at the opposite end. Shuffle both piles together. Combine this with a card game! Thumb wrestling- find a friend or family member join the student for a friendly game of thumb wrestling.

Thumb pulls/ tug-of-war- have student make an "O" by touching thumb tip to tip of index finger. Do them do same with the other hand, then link both "O's" together like a chain. Try to have a tug-of-war to pull them apart. Try using the thumbs with other fingers to do the same thing. This can also be done with a partner.

Rubber band rings- put small rubber bands (for hair) on their fingers like rings. Then they have to use their thumb to get the "rings" off without help from the other hand.

Chinese Balls- using 2 balls/marbles/beads. Have them hold both in one hand. Using just that hand, have them try to move in a circle around each other. If they are successful, have them try to reverse directions. Be patient. This one takes practice.

Penny flips- Line up 10-15 (or more) pennies, all heads or tails up. Without help from the other hand, have them flip them all over as quickly as possible. You can time them and have them race against their own times.

Inch Worm- have the student hold a pencil in writing position. Have them use their thumb and fingers to slowly inch their way to the other end.

Squirrelling- this needs a flat surface or bowl to work (someplace that will hold the small items). Using any small items (beads, cereal, candies, macaroni, little erasers, etc), pick up one at a time. When they pick up each one, have them use their fingers (same hand) to move it to their palm where their other fingers can help hold it. Have them try to hold as many at once as they can. Reverse the process, putting them back down one at a time.

Finger tug-of-war- hold an unsharpened pencil, coffee stirrer, shoe lace, etc. between thumb and fingertips. Find a partner to hold the other end the same way or have them pull against themselves using the other hand. Try it with thumbs opposed to different fingers. Which fingers feel strongest? Weakest?

Waiter/waitress tray carrying- have student practice balancing a tray or plate on top of your hand like a waiter/waitress. Have them try to walk across the room. Add (non-spillable) items one at a time for weight. Try more challenging movements while keeping the tray balanced such as sitting down, climbing stairs. Try to balance the tray with fingertips only.

Lid/disk/coin turning- have them hold a circular object such as a larger coin or plastic lid with all their fingers around the edges. Using fingers only have them rotate the lid one direction, then another. If you use a small lid, you can make it more challenging by adding a small amount of water.

Squirt-gun writing- works well outside, using the sidewalk in the summer or snow in the winter (with colored water). Have them use a squirt gun to "write" a letter or hit a target (sticker? rock? Sidewalk chalk target?).

Spider walks- have them use their hand to make a "spider" with finger legs on their leg, the table or desk, wall, etc). They can make their spider walk different directions, run, do push-ups.

Putty balls- have them pinch off, then roll small amounts of putty or play dough into pea-sized balls using their thumb and finger tips only. These can be made into pretend games (chips on a cookie, etc).

### **Overall Strengthening of Hands and Fingers:**

For a discussion of why this is important, click [here](#)

- Hole punches and staplers
- Clay or play dough -- squeeze, flatten with heavy rolling pin, use play-doh® extruding and squishing tools
- Cooking projects, especially with batter or dough
- Construction tools (hammer, saw, etc. at child's developmental level)
- Glue bottles, puffy paint, fabric paint, glitter glue in squeeze bottles
- Popbeads
- Clothespins, large tongs
- Stress balls and squeezey fidget toys
- Squeeze toys -- balloon pump, paint sprayer, large squirt gun or spray bottle
- Ziplok bags -- keep thumb tip and fingertip together rather than using a "key grip" (aka "lateral pinch").
- Buttoning, snapping