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[www.EmergeAChildsPlace.com](http://www.EmergeAChildsPlace.com)

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Disorders  
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## The Importance of Handwriting Milestones and Overcoming Early Difficulties

Even with today's digital technology, handwriting skills levy more influence on academic success than many people probably realize.<sup>1</sup> Experts have discovered that children who have trouble with handwriting also demonstrate reduced composition skills such as using simple grammar and less fluid sentences. Research suggests that these challenges combine to result in **lower grades, non-compliance with writing tasks, and lower self-esteem.**<sup>2</sup> As with other developmental milestones, some children experience difficulty acquiring handwriting skills at the same pace or with the same instruction as their classmates.

Handwriting Without Tears® (HWT) is a developmental and multisensory handwriting program popular among pediatric occupational therapists for intervention in early handwriting difficulties, and it is a protocol practiced at Emerge - A Child's Place. The method enjoys decades of clinical trial and success, and it is perhaps the intervention best supported in the scientific literature.<sup>3,4</sup> Most recently, Gwenth Roberts and colleagues followed 149 first graders in ten different classrooms and four different schools. Half received normal classroom instruction in handwriting. Half received Handwriting Without Tears. In the Minnesota Handwriting Assessment tool, children receiving HWT showed significantly greater improvement in form, size, spacing, and alignment. Interestingly, among the subset of children scoring in the bottom 25% at baseline, rates of improvement with HWT were greater than the group as a whole or any other subgroup. **Children showing the most difficulty at baseline and receiving HWT had scores approaching the best testers by the end of the year.**

The foundations of handwriting skills should develop before children reach school age, but focused training can help children of almost any age. Some fine motor skill milestones related to handwriting are:

### Ages 1 to 2:

- Scribbles
- Can turn pages 2 or 3 at a time

### Age 3:

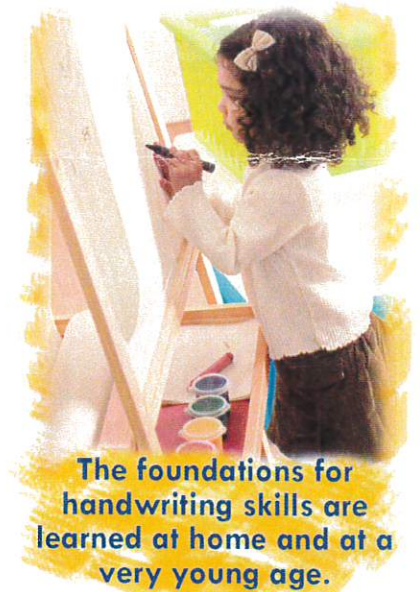
- Copies simple shapes, such as a cross or circle
- Holds pencil with thumb and forefinger, rather than fist (50%)

### Age 4:

- Copies a square
- Cuts out simple shapes
- Uses eating utensils skillfully
- Mature pencil grip

### Age 5:

- Hand preference is established
- Draws a variety of recognizable pictures
- Can copy a triangle
- Writes his or her name
- Colors within lines



When you encounter children experiencing difficulty with handwriting development, please consider a referral to Emerge. Early intervention can help ensure a bright future.

Please tell parents about Emerge - A Child's Place

## References

1. Olsen J. Handwriting Without Tears: Bridging the educational gap. *OT Practice*. 2005; 10 (1): 7-8.
2. Graham S, Harris K, Mason L, et al. Ho do primary grade teachers teach handwriting? A national survey. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. 2008; 21: 49-69.
3. Roberts G, Derkach-Ferguson A, Siever J, Rose M. An examination of the effectiveness of Handwriting Without Tears<sup>®</sup> instruction. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2014; 8:0008417414527065.
4. Marr D, Dirneo S. Outcomes associated with a summer handwriting course for elementary students. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2006; 60: 10-15.

