

## Assessing grip development

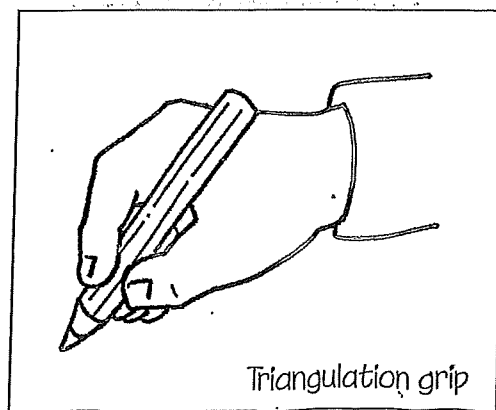
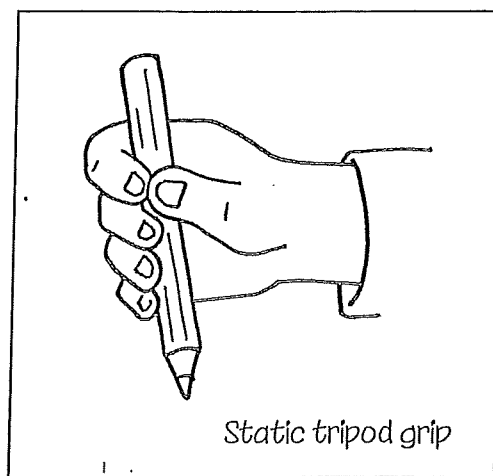
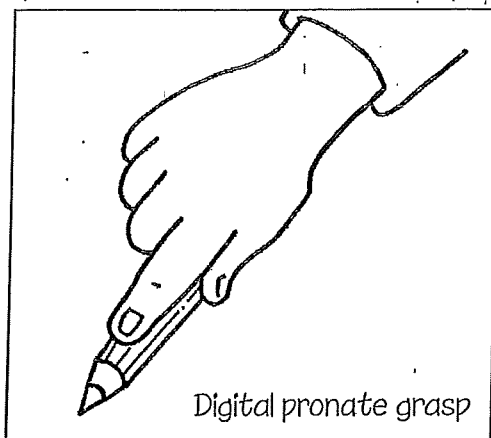
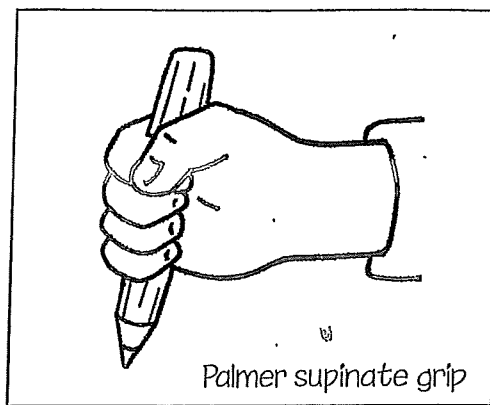
All children start their mark making journey with a **palmer supinate grip** or palm grip. This is the grip that will probably be prevalent through the entire shoulder, elbow and possibly wrist pivot development. The mark making implement is held in the palm of the hand and the fingers are clamped around it to keep it in place. There is not yet the development in the palm arches or the dexterity in the fingers to support the mark making tool being held in any other way. All of the manipulation and movement of your mark making tool is coming from a pivot further up the arm. Only when the muscles in the arm have been strengthened (and the pivots have moved from shoulder to wrist) alongside mastering the palm arches and the in-hand manipulation skills, will there be enough dexterity and strength to support a grip change.

This first grip change is likely to be a **digital pronate grasp**, although not all children go through this stage of development. It is called a digital pronate because the children primarily use one digit (finger) to pronate (rotate/manipulate) their mark making implement. To adopt a digital pronate grasp you have to be able to pivot from the wrist as you need to be able to achieve that 90° angle to get to the paper.

What often comes next is a grip that tends to be more prevalent in boys than girls. This is also a tricky grip because its development often coincides with children's ability to begin to link sounds to letters and record them as recognisable symbols or begin to recognise and write their name. This grip is called the **expanded or static tripod grip**. The mark making tool has been pushed right to the end of the fingers. The thumb is used to 'clamp' the mark making tool in place and it is mainly the little finger that is creating the range of movement.

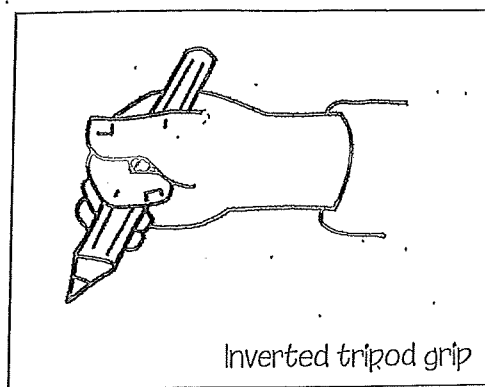
Although this is a perfectly normal stage of mark making development for some children, it is a particularly crucial one and needs to be handled with care! If a child begins to regularly record recognisable letters with this (or any other) unusual grip their brain very soon gets into the habit of thinking that this way of holding their pencil and forming letters is 'comfortable' and it becomes the norm. The more they do it, the more they are embedding this grip and range of movement.

Once children have mastered the art of holding their pencil and orientating their letter shapes with the wrong grip it can become almost impossible to get them to change. I know of many children (usually boys) who began to write with the wrong grip and were then put on torturous 'handwriting programmes' to try and correct their grip. The thing is, that they can attempt to triangulate when they are sitting in a handwriting intervention class, but when they get back into the classroom and their brain isn't just thinking about handwriting any longer then it reverts back to its 'norm' and they are back to square one. So, when you see an expanded tripod developing then that is the time to intervene and help children to transition to the 'ultimate' grip: **the triangulation!**



Another version of this grip is an **inverted tripod grip** where the child's little finger and fourth finger are behind the pencil near to the point and their index and second finger are curled around the front of it mid way up. Meanwhile their thumb is at the very top of the pencil clamping it in place against the fingers.

Children who adopt an expanded or inverted tripod grip often do this because they still lack dexterity in their final finger joints. These children need lots of opportunity to practise manipulating these joints, either by using them to pick up or manoeuvre tiny objects, or to work with a small amount of malleable material that will give a great deal of resistance like a putty.



A **triangulation or tripod grip** is where the mark making implement is held between the thumb and the forefinger and supported from behind with the middle finger. The movement of the mark making implement is controlled by the pivoting joints for the thumb and fingers. This allows for maximum flexibility and maximum range of movement and is why it is the 'ultimate grip'!

