

Writing with Young Children

Written by
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20 years of
teaching children
to write



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Writing Guide for Parents

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When should you start when teaching your child to write?

Believe it or not, your child's writing journey begins as a baby.

The muscles they use to roll over and crawl are the same muscles that will later support their writing skills. Crawling, reaching and grabbing help strengthen their shoulder muscles, which play a key role in developing fine motor control for writing.

Fine Motor Control

Fine motor control refers to the ability to make small, precise movements using the muscles in the hands and fingers.

Grasping, pinching, lifting, placing, and pushing are all actions that help improve your young child's fine motor control.

Each of these small movements strengthens the muscles in their hands and fingers, building the coordination they'll need for writing and other tasks.

Research shows that building a strong foundation for writing begins long before a child picks up a pencil.

From an early age, physical activities that strengthen core muscles, such as crawling and rolling, play a crucial role in preparing children for writing.

The Importance of Crawling

Crawling, in particular, is vital because it helps develop the muscles in a child's shoulders, arms, and wrists, which are essential for fine motor control.

The act of balancing on all fours and coordinating hand movements strengthens the muscles and coordination they'll need when learning to hold and maneuver a pencil.

In this guide
you can expect:

20 years of
teaching
experience

When does
writing start?

Fine motor
resources

Pencil grip tips

Letter formation

Creating a love
of writing

STEPS TO

WRITE



1^o STEP

Work on fine motor control with your baby by encouraging them to crawl, explore, and engage with toys that promote movement.

Let them have fun while building strength and control in their muscles through play and exploration.



2^o STEP



Provide your child with mark-making resources like playdough, sand, and other sensory materials. Allow them to explore creating different marks and shapes, helping to develop their fine motor skills while engaging their creativity.

3^o STEP

Ensure your child learns the correct pencil grip and sees good letter formation from the start. Encourage them to use their phonics knowledge to write simple words like "cat" or "sat" in the beginning. Keep writing fun and engaging to inspire them to practice more!





Remember

All children learn at their own pace, and this variation is completely normal.

Before they can write effectively, children need to develop essential skills such as fine motor control, proper pencil grip, letter formation, and phonics knowledge. Pushing your child too early can lead to frustration and disengagement from writing, as research shows that forced writing can make children view it negatively.

Instead, parents should support their child's natural writing journey by offering enjoyable, engaging activities like sensory play and drawing. Writing requires coordination of multiple skills, and while some children may begin writing letters earlier, others may need more time to develop the necessary muscle control. Teaching children to write their names can be a great starting point, but it's crucial to keep the process fun and relaxed. A supportive environment will foster a positive attitude towards writing and encourage a lifelong love of putting pen to paper.



Fine Motor Activities

Improving fine motor activities for your child will help them on their writing journey.

- **Playdough Manipulation:** Squeezing, rolling, and flattening playdough to create shapes and figures.
- **Finger Painting:** Using fingers to apply paint on paper, which encourages creativity and dexterity.
- **Bead Stringing:** Threading large beads onto strings or shoelaces to enhance hand-eye coordination.
- **Building with Blocks:** Stacking and balancing blocks to develop coordination and control.



Useful Websites

Scholastic Parents

This site offers a variety of fun activities and tips to enhance fine motor skills in young children.

The Inspired Treehouse

A collection of creative ideas for fine motor skill activities that are easy to implement at home.

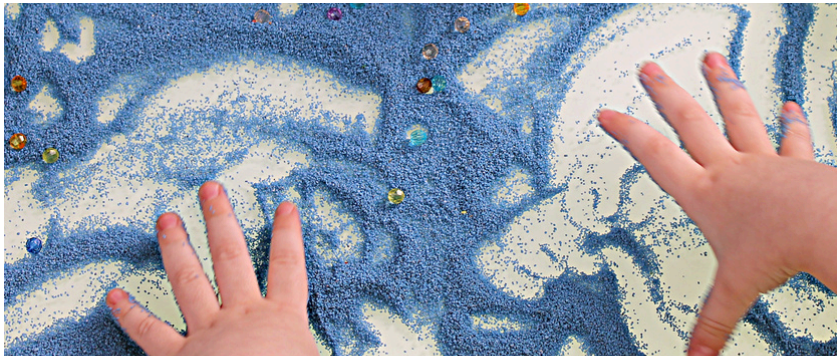
Hands On As We Grow

This blog features numerous hands-on activities designed to strengthen fine motor skills in children.

Teaching Mama

A compilation of engaging fine motor activities for young children, along with explanations of their benefits.

Early Writing: Explained



What does early writing look like?

Mark making is the first step towards writing, and children can create marks in a variety of ways, not just with traditional writing materials. They can use sand, shaving foam, paint, crayons, anything that allows them to experiment and explore.

This stage is crucial because it helps children understand that the movements of their arms and fingers can create marks. While their early marks may seem random or unintentional, as they develop their skills and creativity, these marks gradually evolve into purposeful shapes. Over time, children begin to use these marks to represent their thoughts through drawing or early writing attempts.



Letter Formation

We are still in the early stages of writing, where children need to grasp how to form letters before they can begin putting pencil to paper.

There are several engaging ways to encourage proper letter formation, making the writing process easier for your child. They can practice by writing in the air, forming letters in sand, paint, or shaving foam, and even tracing letters with their finger on a parent's back!

But why is letter formation so important? When children focus on how to create each letter, they may struggle to concentrate on the content of their writing. By developing muscle memory for letter formation, your child will be able to write more quickly and coherently as they grow older.

How Writing Develops in Young Children

Step 1: Writing Begins as Movement

Writing starts with the development of physical control. As babies gain mastery over their movements, the muscles involved in writing strengthen and become more precise.

Step 2: Playing and Exploring

Through play and exploration, children manipulate toys and interact with their environments. These activities promote purposeful movements and enhance their fine motor control.

Step 3: Finger Manipulation

As children engage with age-appropriate tools such as tweezers, grabbers, and playdough, they further develop their fine motor skills, which are essential for writing.

Step 4: Mark Making

Initially, the marks your child makes may appear to be random scribbles. However, this stage is crucial for fostering creativity and beginning to create marks with intention.

Step 5: Letter Formation with Manipulatives

Children begin forming letters using their fingers or various tools in materials like sand, playdough, rice, shaving foam, or paint. These tactile experiences help solidify their understanding of letter shapes.

Step 6: Pen to Paper

Finally, children learn the correct pencil grip and start forming basic letters, such as "s," "a," and "t." Mastering these three letters enables them to create words linked to their phonetic understanding.



Letter Formation on Paper

Research suggests that teaching cursive writing from the very beginning can help prevent misconceptions. However, I personally believe that, in our increasingly digital world, cursive writing may be losing its relevance.

Regardless of how you choose to introduce your child to writing on paper, it's essential to maintain a consistent approach.

In the appendix of this guide, you'll find a resource to support letter formation. Most letters begin their formation at the top, with the exceptions of "d" and "e," which start in the middle. It's beneficial to teach the capital letters alongside their lowercase counterparts.

For younger children, using chunkier pencils or writing materials can make it easier for them to grip and control their writing.



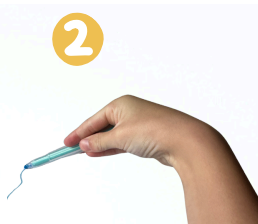
Pencil Grip

Your child's pencil grip will develop over time as they enter different stages of fine motor control.

I hesitate to put age expectations on pencil grip as each child develops in different ways, however, when they reach school age, children will be encouraged to use the tripod grip.

1. Fist Grip

A fist grip is a common early writing style where children hold the pencil tightly in their fist, often using their whole hand to move it. This grip is perfectly normal at this stage, as it allows young children to gain control over the writing tool before developing a more refined grip.



2. Digital Grasp

Digital grasp is an early writing grip where children hold the pencil between their thumb and two fingers, allowing for greater control and precision as they develop their writing skills.

3. Modified Tripod Grip

The modified tripod grip is a writing grip where children hold the pencil using their thumb, index, and middle fingers, providing better stability and control while writing.

4. Tripod Grip

The tripod grip is when a child holds the pencil with their thumb, index, and middle fingers, offering optimal control for writing.



My child can't tripod grip! HELP!

All children will develop their pencil grip in their own time, so the first tip is not to worry.

However, there are a number of things you can do to help your child with their pencil grip.

Fine Motor Activities

All the below activities will help your child to develop their tripod grip.

- **Using Tweezers:** Have children pick up small objects like pom-poms or beads with tweezers to strengthen their grip.
- **Scissors Practice:** Cutting along lines or snipping paper helps improve control and strengthens the muscles needed for writing.
- **Finger Painting:** Allowing children to use their fingers to paint encourages them to experiment with grip and movement.
- **Picking Up Small Items:** Activities like sorting small objects (like buttons or coins) into different containers using just their fingers can enhance fine motor skills.

Pencil Help

Also, providing your child with the right writing tool for them, will help develop their tripod grip.

- chunky pencils or chalk
- pencil grips that can be added onto a pencil to change its shape
- triangular pencils
- pencils with soft grips



Creating a Love of Writing

'Naughty' Writing

I had the privilege of attending writing workshops with the late [Ros Bayley](#), who shared some incredible insights on fostering a love of writing in children.

Many children perceive sitting at a table to write as a chore, reminiscent of school, which can make it feel less enjoyable. Ros introduced the concept of "naughty writing," where children can write in more relaxed and unconventional settings. For example, they might sit on the sofa, use chalk to write on the patio, or tape paper to the underside of a table, an activity that also helps strengthen their shoulder muscles!

Encouraging your child to write on a clipboard in their favorite spot or in a creative book they love can also make the experience more engaging and enjoyable.



Make It Purposeful

Children can be resistant to writing when it's purely for educational purposes, but they will thrive when writing has a clear goal.

Encourage your child to write a shopping list, create a menu for their café, or even plan dinner for the night. If you have a friend or relative who lives far away, suggest that your child write them a postcard or letter. These activities not only make writing more engaging but also help them see its real-world value.

Children love taking the initiative to write the rules for their games!

When writing serves a purpose, your child is less likely to view it as schoolwork or practice, making the experience much more enjoyable. By framing writing as a fun activity, you can help cultivate their love for it!

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg

Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn

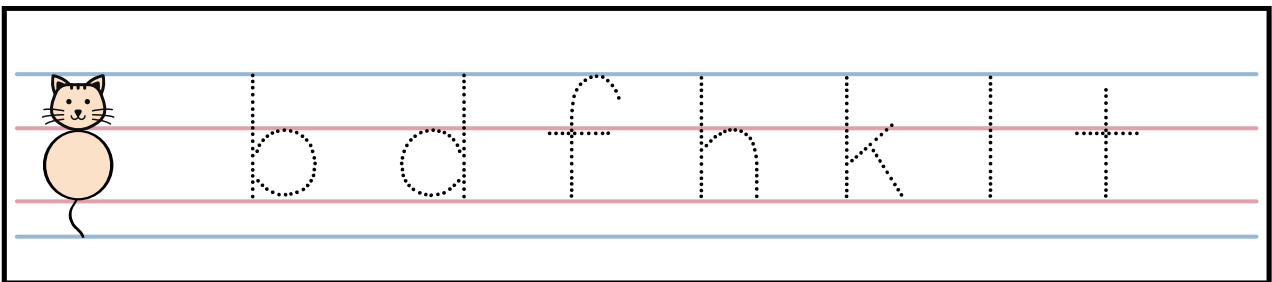
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt

Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

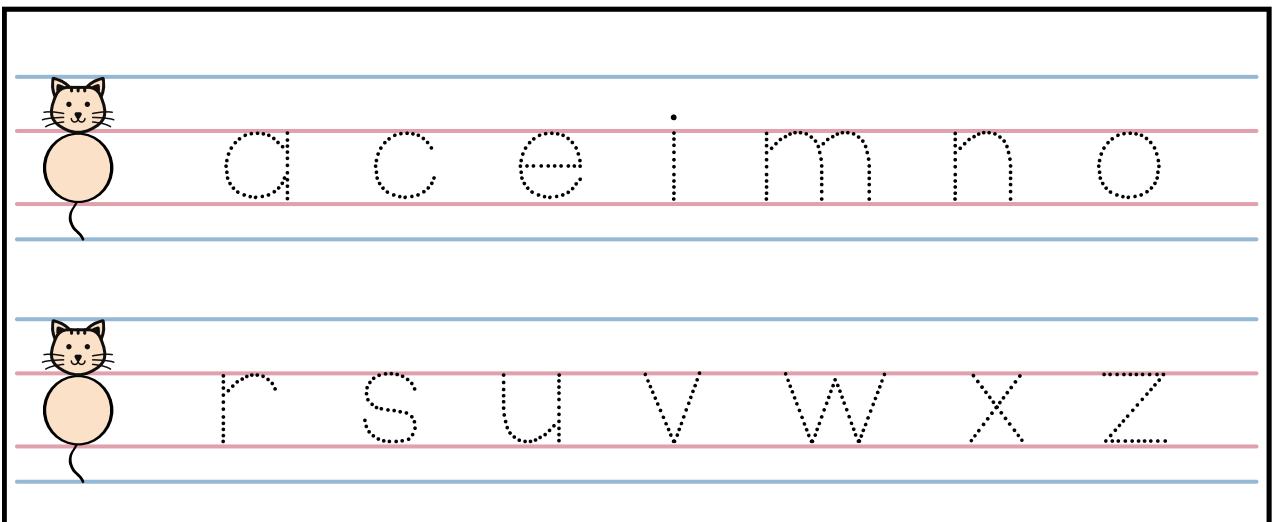
Letter Formation

Practice your lowercase letter formation using the lines to help you.

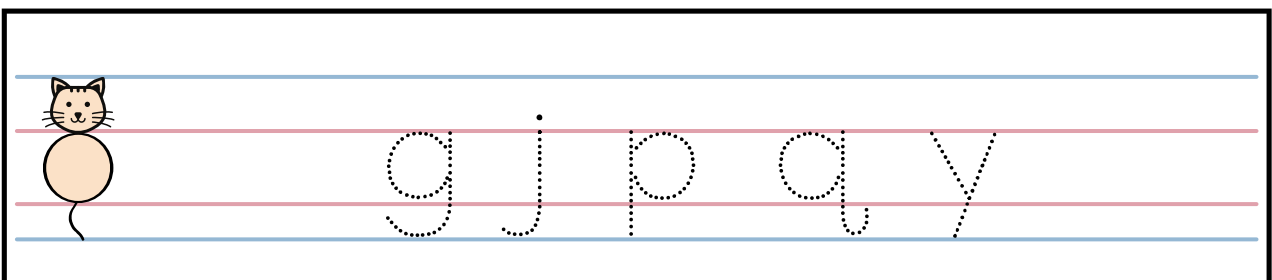
The tall letters start at the top and rest on the baseline.



The small letters sit between the midline and the baseline.

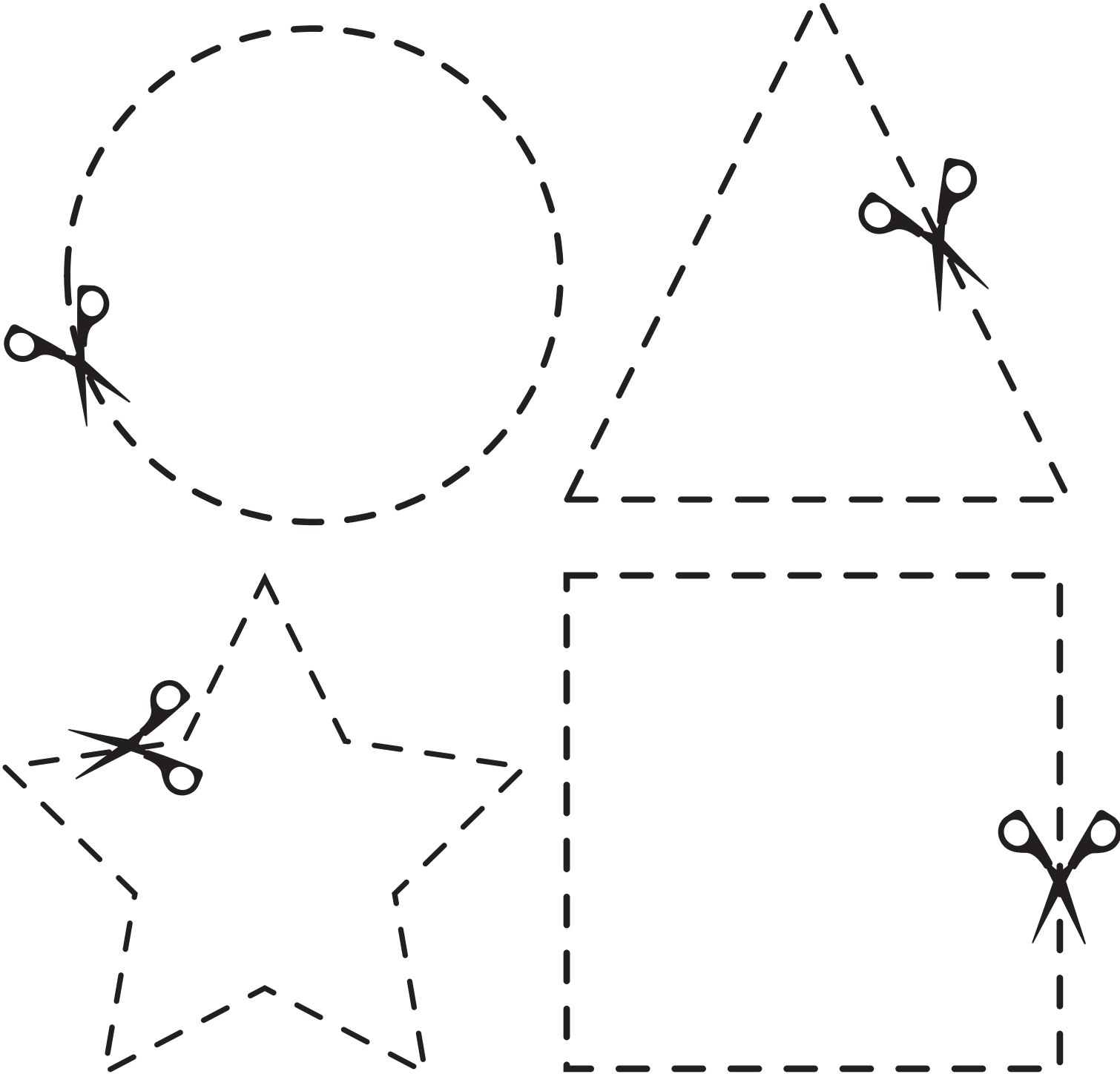


The fall letters start at the midline and fall down beyond the baseline.



Fine Motor Skill Shapes

Carefully cut out the shapes, controlling the scissors.



Name: _____

date: _____

Shape Matching

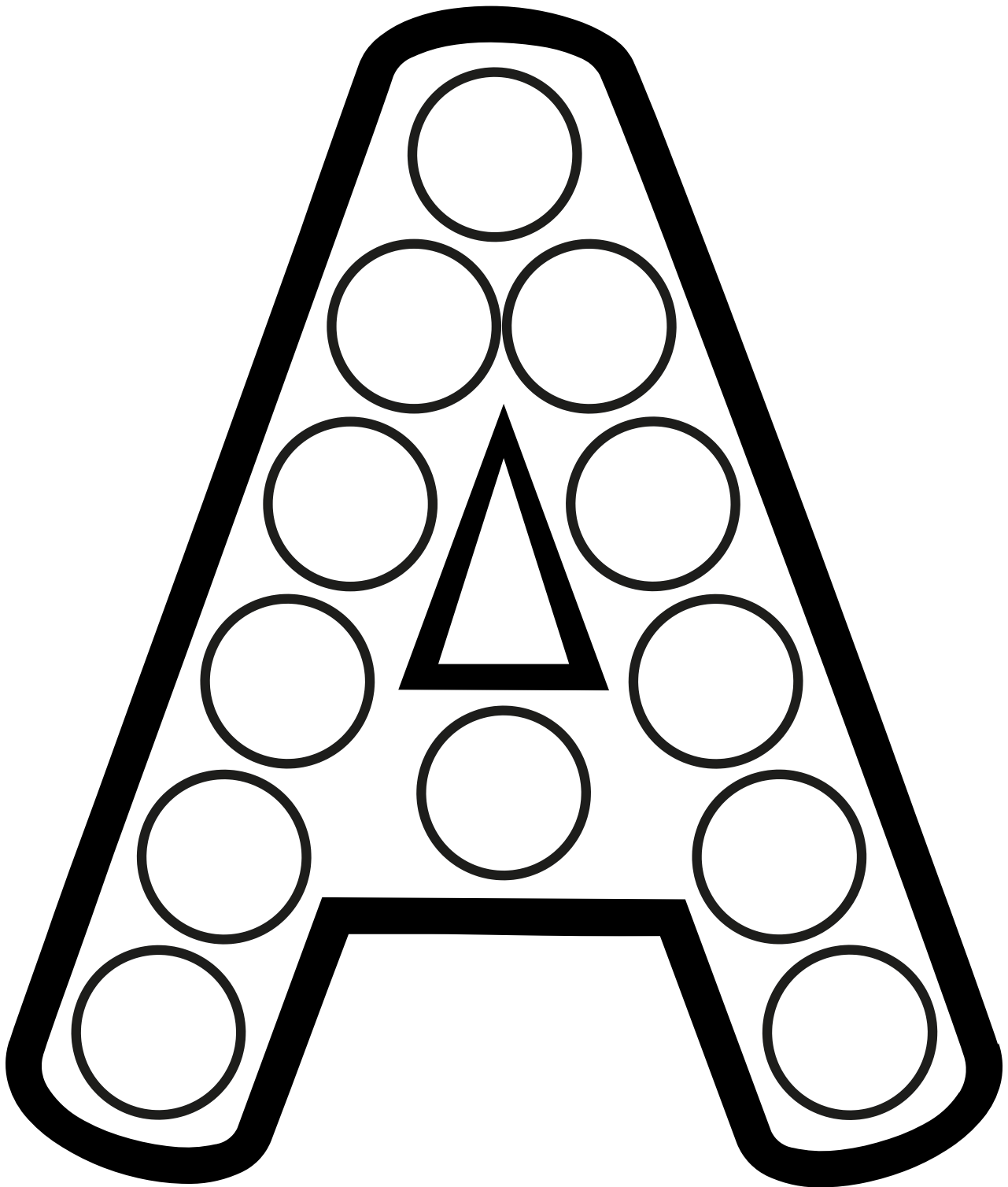
Match the same elements.

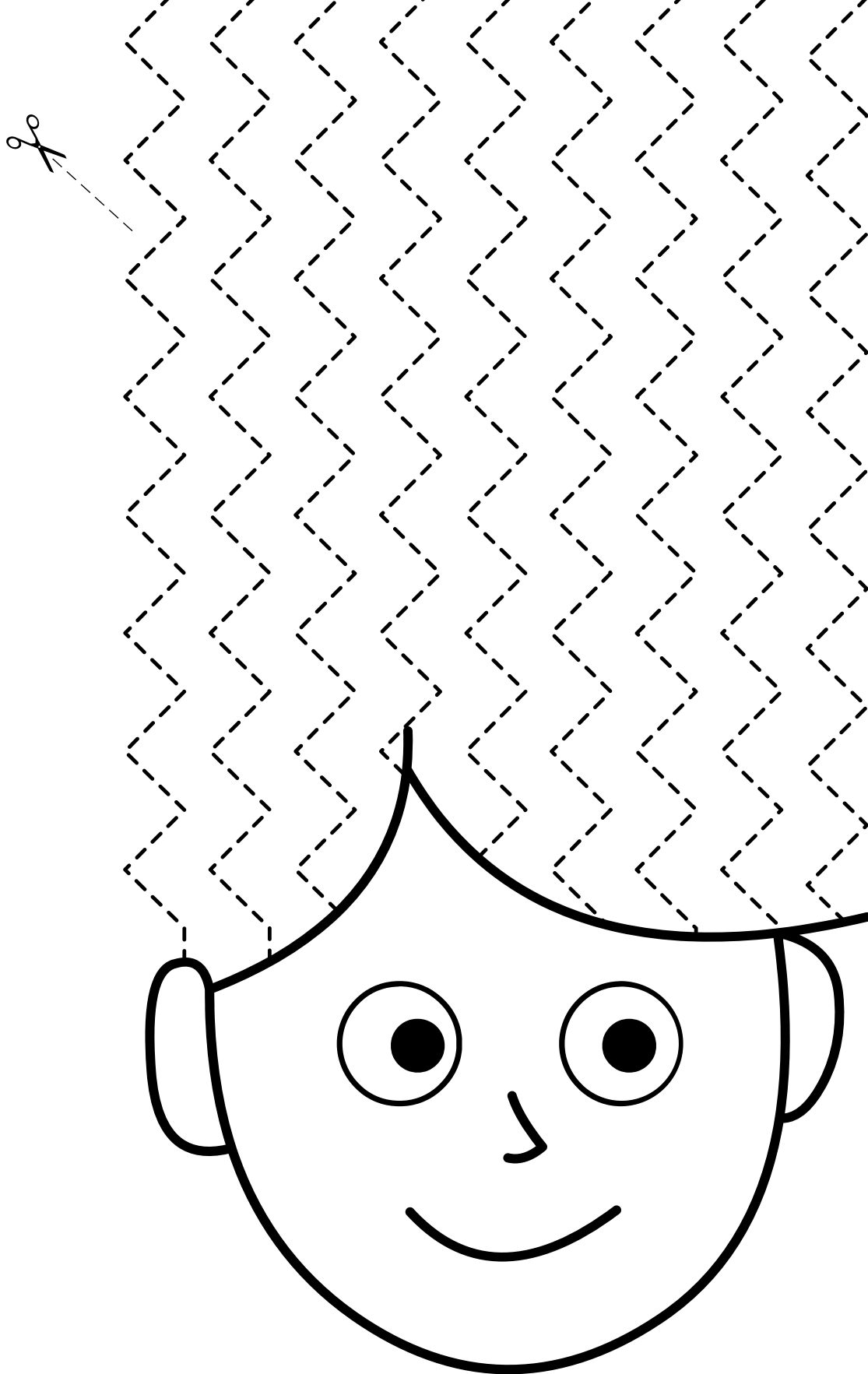


ALPHABET

Fine Motor Skill Development

Stick dot-stickers on each circle on the letter A.





FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Carefully cut along the zig-zag lines using your scissors.