

Visual-Motor Activities
Compiled by Deanna Iris Sava, MS, OTR/L

Several occupational therapists contributed to the ideas that were compiled into this list of visual motor activities. Thanks to all who openly shared ideas.

Letter Spacing

1. Use the following items to leave spaces between words: index finger of non-dominant hand, popsicle stick (can call it "Mr. Spacey"), eraser, triangle pencil grip, sticky strip of post-it note, shiny penny (can velcro this to desk so it's always handy), M&Ms/skittles, etc., tiddlywinks, bingo chips, marker stamps.
2. Another use of tongue depressors for K-1: Make up a story that some friendly spacemen had come to class and were going to help us write. The kids decorated the wood -- Cheerios for eyes or mouths, glitter or feathers. Then they were paired with their Earth partner -- the pencil. Some kids had big pencils and some had pencil grip pencils because this was what their own spacemen liked. They used them between words and the spacemen were happy. Around the middle of year the spacemen went back to their own home planet and most of the children were able to leave adequate space between the words without the spacemen.
3. I have been using a "space invader" for the students who learn through touch. My space invader is a wikki stick threaded onto a paper clip so it looks like alien antennas. They place the paper clip next to the word (I only use space invaders between words, not letters) then push the wikki stick down on the paper to keep it there. The interesting thing is that the kids who need this have a very difficult time placing the paper clip in the correct position and the wikki sticks really help to give that proprioceptive input they need to keep their frustration from hitting the roof.
4. There is a company called Really Good Stuff that makes a Spaceman that can be purchased (www.reallygoodstuff.org). They provide wooden clothespins with cute spacemen stickers that can be applied to them.
5. Graph paper. Instruct the students to leave one box open as a space between words.
6. Draw colored line or highlight space between words in a sentence that student has to copy to give him/her a visual cue.
7. Highlight right margin if child crams words on right side of paper rather than dropping down to next line.
8. Highlight both margins (left one green and right one red) or use Wikki Stix for the child to bump the margins with his or her pencil.
9. Place dots between words with a pencil, then erase the dots.
10. Let child review own work to determine if there are spaces between the words.
11. Write the sentence "ca nyo up layb all? Ask the student to read this exactly as it is written. When child can't read it, tell him/her that this is how his/her work looks to you...very hard to read as the spacing is all messed up. Then circle the letters to show him/her that the words are "Can you play ball?" Then ask student to write this sentence with proper spacing. Can write any sentence at student's reading level.
12. Some students respond better to concrete instruction such as, "Move your pencil over before you start the next word."
13. Sometimes I suggest to a child to write x amount of words per line across. The first few times they have half the line left for that last word. After some practice, the spacing improves. This is usually after some work on the concept of spacing with objects like blocks or erasers or beans.
14. While there are often visual tracking, attentional, and crossing the midline issues at the root of poor spatial layout of writing products, there are also instances of little or no **modeling** of

desired page layouts. Make sure the teacher is modeling starting at the margin, spacing between words, writing to the right side margin, starting each sentence after the preceding sentence's punctuation, etc.

15. Suggestions from HWT:

- Have student try to touch tips of both index fingers very close together, without touching. Challenge the student by saying, "How close can you get your fingertips without touching?" Ask the student to try to describe how small this space is. Then have them look at printed text (workbook, library book) and "check" if the letters in a word are really that close. Then ask student to write a word with the letters in the word being as close as two fingertips without touching.
- Draw a garbage truck above a word that has too much space between the letters, and draw pieces of "garbage" falling into the big spaces (box, tire, fish bones, cans). Tell the student, "Don't leave space for junk inside your words."
- For spacing between words, ask the student to hold his/her two hands together in front of him/her, cupped, because you are going to give him/her something. Then pretend to fish something out of your pocket and keep "it" inside your cupped hands. Pretend you are pouring something from your cupped hands into his/hers. Ask him/her, "What did I just give you?" Hopefully the answer will be "Nothing." You can reply, "Exactly...now you have your own supply of nothing to use when you write. Nothing IS something when you write a sentence because you need to have a space for nothing between words."
- Exaggerate spaces between words of model that the child will copy from.
- Bend the middle part of the clip up to make a handle, which made it easier to work with than the index finger or a popsicle stick.

Visual Tracking

1. Ball activities (tether balloon/ball, ball rolling hand to hand).
2. Large chalkboard drawings: make roads for small vehicles to drive on (incorporate writing with favorite stops, such as "M" for McDonald's, "W" for Walmart, or the whole word)) then progressing to fine tasks (connect the dots, mazes, etc).
3. Use tracing paper to trace and color Pokemon characters.
4. Provide multisensory input (different colored chalks, squiggle pen, finger writing in rice or Kool-Aid flavored/colored sand).
5. Letter and number guides, in different fonts, posted at the student's desk, should decrease the amount of saccades needed.
6. Flashlight chases, starting on the floor supine and having the child chase my flashlight beam with his. Lying down aids in keeping the head still and is easier.
7. Target first a stationary and then a moving target while prone swinging in a net swing.
8. Use a lot of scanning activities, starting with large scans and grading down to smaller scans (i.e., scanning on a chalkboard to scanning letters on a page).

Visual Memory

1. Letters made from glue, glue/sand, or puff/fabric paint. Add food coloring to a bottle of paint/glue (not the washable kind). Stir and keep bottle upside down overnight to mix well. Write the letter on an index card with a pencil and have child squeeze bottle to form the

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letter, making sure the letter is formed properly. When the glue/paint dries, it forms a raised letter for tactile input. Have child trace the raised letter 3x with index finger of dominant hand.

2. Can also use glue to write letters on wax paper or glass, let dry and peel off letter. Can add sand and/or color.
3. Write in sand, putty, pudding, on carpet squares, etc.
4. Wikki Stix over letters written on index cards. Can also form letters out of wikki sticks, putty, with body, etc.
5. Write letters on index card with black marker. Make a green dot with marker as starting point and red dot as stopping point for letter. Then put a thin layer of glue over the letter and dry overnight.
6. When using classroom triple-lined paper, highlight bottom and dotted middle lines. Top line is where capitals and tall lowercase letters begin. This makes the paper more closely resemble the HWT two-lined paper.
7. Have the child first trace a really large letter on the board, then make the letter independently, and then write the letter with their eyes closed. It can increase the interest/sensory feedback if you are able to do this some over a bumpy surface such as an air vent cover.

Reversals

1. Check to see if child has L/R discrimination on self, others and in space.
2. Use HWT method of small chalkboard with boundaries and beginning under smiley face (placed in top left-hand corner of board frame).
3. Develop consistent use of left to right direction using a variety of media.
4. Bilateral integration activities.
5. Use the "Cognitive Override" (strategies to help the child see and feel the difference between the letters commonly reversed, such as "b" and "d". Instead of a ball-and-stick method of writing these letters, the child uses a continuous stroke to first make the vertical stroke of the letter "b", followed by the closed loop to complete the letter, reciting the "b" is for a bat and a ball -- you need the bat first, and then the ball. The "d" is made by first the letter "c" with a continuous stroke to complete the vertical stroke, reciting the "c is followed by d"). The students associate differing kinesthetic feedback for the two letters and build up a cognitive strategy to differentiate between them. Use the cognitive override strategies esp. if child is beyond second grade.
6. For the letters "a, d, g, and q" and the number "9," I cue the child to use "c up down" as the method of forming these letters. For the number "3" the cue that seems to work is: "around the tree, around the tree".
7. Have the child first trace a really large letter on the board, then make the letter independently, and then write the letter with his or her eyes closed. It can increase the interest/sensory feedback if you are able to do this some over a bumpy surface such as an air vent cover.

Visual Inattention

1. Most children respond to balloon activities. They usually want a balloon to blow up when they see me do it. After the balloon is blown up and tied, you and the child can just freely move around hitting it in the air.

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2. Another game which is great with preschools is to fill a laundry basket (or box) with balloons. Have the students hit them and kick them as you toss the balloons up out of the basket (don't let go of the basket!!). After a few minutes, have them put the balloons back in the basket. This can be repeated. When there are balloons all over the floor, it is interesting to see the students try to kick them without stepping on the balloons. It can throw them off balance and requires motor planning to negotiate.
3. You can make a two-handed bat out of 2 two-liter plastic soda bottles. The pattern came from Sensory Motor Handbook by Bissell, Fisher, Owens, and Polcyn (available from Therapy Skill Builders). The bottoms are cut off the bottles, and one bottle has the bottom edge "clipped," as in sewing curves, to allow it to fit into the other bottle. Both bottles are stuffed tightly with newspaper. Crushing newspaper within one hand is a wonderful strengthening task. Then the clipped end is pushed into the other bottle so that the capped ends are opposite each other, which makes it easier to hold onto. I blow up a round balloon or use a small palm pump for the student to blow one up. We use the balloon as a ball either in reciprocal batting with the bottle bat or in single play to see how many times we can hit the balloon before losing it (most students hit the balloon 5-10 times, but one Kindergarten-aged student hit it 50 times!). This is great for upper extremity range and strengthening as well as visual tracking. We also incorporate some writing and math in by keeping score on the chalkboard.
4. If child enjoys snacks and drinks, have him or her try straw activities. The child can blow bubbles with the straw or cut up a straw and make a necklace.
5. The child can make water paints and use an eye-dropper to drop the paint on a coffee filter. Make a butterfly by scrunching up the middle and adding a pipe cleaner for feelers. Also, do stencil pouncing motions on paper with a hard bristle brush. I do this with the paper lace doilies. The object is to fill up all the spaces (holes) with color. I put stencil tape on the back (just a little) to hold the doily on the paper while the child pounces. I mention how Tigger bounces and we may sing a song about it. Finger paints might also be a good activity.