Build capital letters from simple strokes

A practical guide for parents, teachers and therapists

A letter becomes easier to explain when you notice its parts: a straight path, a curve, a slant or a change in direction. Choose a movement the child is working on, show it clearly, then use it in a meaningful letter.

The four groups follow the order in the Learning Without Tears Pre-K guide (2021). This sequence is not an age-based checklist. The sketches show stroke types; use the child's program models for exact letter formation.



1 Down and across

L F E H T I U

Straight lines lead this group; U adds a rounded turn.

Try it. Draw a path down and a path across. Show how those parts make L. Look for a clear stop at the corner.



2 Curved paths

C O Q G S J

C, O, Q and G share a curve. S and J use other curved paths.

Try it. Make an open curve and a closed loop. Compare C with O. Use a finger first if helpful.



3 Lines with curves

D P B

Notice how a curve connects to a straight part and how much space it takes.

Try it. Build D or P using a straight strip and a curved piece on the table. Then demonstrate how to write it.



4 Slanted paths

R K A M N V W X Y Z

R adds a slant to a line and curve; the rest give more diagonal practice.

Try it. Make two slanted lines meet at a point. Use them in V or A, following the child's letter model.

Choose a useful next step

Use any focus that fits the child's current goal. Revisit familiar movements and adjust the help provided. Include names, labels and useful writing while skills are developing; there is no need to finish every shape first.

Try a whole arm rehearsal with L

1. Show the letter and name the movement.
2. Start the arm high. Move straight down to a deliberate stop.
3. Move across to the child's right to complete L. Keep the movement controlled rather than fast.
4. Repeat once or twice, then try with a finger and a writing tool as appropriate.

Set up copying separately. Whole-arm rehearsal is a movement activity. When copying on paper, place the model flat beside the writing area, on the same plane and facing the same way as the child's paper. Keep it clear of the writing hand.

A simple practice loop

Show. Demonstrate slowly, with consistent words for the start, direction and stop.

Try. Let the child practice a few times with the help they need.

Notice. Pick one feature: "Your line stopped at the corner" or "That curve is closed."

Use. Put the letter in a name, label or familiar word, then choose the next small step.

Keep practice brief enough for comfort and engagement. Use small groups when children need different examples, pacing or cues. Continue letter-name, sound and reading instruction alongside movement practice.

Connect practice to a goal

Name the target letters, support and observable skill. Record whether the child is imitating, copying or writing from memory.

Example to individualize: Given a nearby model and no more than one verbal cue, the student will copy L with a vertical stroke, a clear corner and a horizontal stroke in 4 of 5 opportunities across three work samples.

Add a review date. Adjust the letters, cue level and criterion to the child's baseline and writing needs. This example is not a recommended target for every child.

Further reading and scope

The grouped letter order follows the 2021 Learning Without Tears Pre-K guide. Grouping related movements can help organize practice; pace and support should fit the learner. The explanations, activities and layout here are original.

Learning Without Tears: Readiness & Writing Pre-K Teacher's Guide (2021), contents pp. 2-3.
Learning Without Tears: Why aren't the letters in ABC order?
Learning Without Tears: Why is the teaching order different?

These sources explain the publisher's rationale; they do not validate this guide's activities or sample goal. Original educational resource from HandwritingEval.com. Adapt to the learner; this guide does not replace individualized evaluation or the child's program models. Not affiliated with or endorsed by Learning Without Tears.