

# Playdough Activities to Support Handwriting Foundations

This list of playful, targeted activities is designed to strengthen the fine motor, sensory, and coordination skills essential for confident handwriting. Each activity can be done with playdough or theraputty and includes brief instructions and the developmental focus. Each description is written so that parents and therapists can easily guide a child through the activity.

## Intrinsic Hand Strength

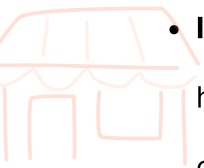
- **Pinch-and-Pull Worms** – Roll a thick dough snake and ask the child to pinch off small pieces one by one using their thumb and index finger. “Let’s roll a big dough worm together. Now use your finger and thumb to pinch off little pieces—like you’re feeding a tiny animal!”
- **Roll & Squish Race** – Have the child roll several small balls of dough with both hands, then squish each one flat using different fingers. “Roll small balls using both hands, then squish them flat—one for each finger! Can you squish them with your thumb? Now your index finger?”
- **In-Hand Rolling Challenge** – Ask the child to roll small balls using just one hand without help from a surface. “Try to roll this dough into a little ball using just one hand. No table allowed!”
- **Ball-and-Squash Stack** – Have the child roll multiple dough balls, squash them flat, and stack them like pancakes. “Make a few little balls, squish them like pancakes, then stack them to make a tall pancake tower!”
- **Squeeze Race** – Give the child a pile of small dough balls to quickly squeeze flat using their fingers and thumbs. “Let’s race! Grab a ball of dough and squeeze it flat—can you do five in a row really fast?”
- **Press-and-Hold Shapes** – Invite the child to press their fingers deep into the dough and hold the position for a few seconds before lifting off. “Push your fingers deep into the dough and count to three before lifting them off. What shape did it leave?”



## Finger Isolation and Dexterity



- **Finger Pokes** – Flatten dough and ask the child to poke it using one finger at a time, calling out the finger name. “Use just one finger at a time to poke the dough. Can you poke with your thumb? Your pinky? Say the finger’s name as you poke!”
- **Tool Time Challenge** – Set out small dough pieces and have the child move them using tongs or tweezers into a bowl. “Use tweezers to pick up these dough bits and drop them into the bowl—try not to let any escape!”
- **In-Hand Rolling Challenge** – Challenge the child to roll dough into balls using only one hand at a time. “Try to roll a ball in just one hand again. Switch hands now—can the other one do it too?”
- **Push Pin Pictures** – Encourage the child to push small pins or peg tools into the dough to make designs or pictures. “Use this peg to press little dots into the dough. Try to make a flower or a smiley face!”
- **Letter Tracing** – Carve letters into dough and ask the child to trace them slowly using their index finger. “Look, I wrote your name in the dough! Use your pointer finger to slowly trace each letter.”
- **Dough Dot Art** – Guide the child to roll tiny dough balls and place them onto a shape or pattern outline. “Roll tiny balls and place them carefully into this shape I drew. You’re making dot art!”









## Tripod and Pincer Grasp Development

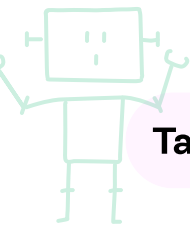
- **Pinch-and-Pull Worms** – Ask the child to pinch off small pieces of dough to encourage proper finger positioning. “Let’s pinch the dough worm into tiny pieces using just your finger and thumb.”
- **Bead Hunt** – Hide beads in dough and invite the child to dig them out using their fingertips. “Find the hidden beads in the dough using just your fingers—no peeking with your eyes!”
- **Tool Time Challenge** – Use tweezers to pick up and move small dough bits into a container. “Pick up these little dough bits with tweezers and drop them into the cup. Use your fingertips gently!”
- **Dough Peg Push** – Give the child small pegs or golf tees to push deep into a lump of dough. “Push these little pegs into the dough with your fingers. Can you make a row of them?”
- **Push Pin Pictures** – Let the child press pins into dough to form lines or shapes. “Make shapes by poking pins into the dough—like a triangle or a rainbow!”
- **Dough Dot Art** – Have the child make and place tiny dough dots into a picture or name outline. “Roll tiny dough dots and place them into the outline. Let’s spell your name or make a heart!”





## Bilateral Coordination

- **Roll & Squish Race** – Instruct the child to roll dough balls with both hands working together. “Use both hands to roll a bunch of balls, then squish them flat—left, right, left, right!”
  - **One-Handed Cut** – Roll a dough log and have the child stabilize it with one hand while cutting it with a plastic knife using the other. “Roll a dough log, hold it still with one hand, and use the other to slice it with your plastic knife.”
  - **Two-Hand Rolling Race** – Encourage the child to roll out identical dough balls with both hands as fast as they can. “Let’s see how fast you can roll two dough balls at once—one in each hand!”
  - **Rolling Pin Press** – Let the child use both hands on a rolling pin to flatten a sheet of dough evenly. “Use both hands to roll the pin across the dough. Can you make it flat like a pancake?”
  - **Dough Stairs** – Ask the child to create dough rectangles of different sizes and stack them in a staircase pattern. “Make flat dough rectangles in different sizes. Let’s stack them like stairs—biggest on the bottom!”
  - **Rolling Snake Maze** – Have the child roll long dough snakes and shape them into a maze on a tray or board. “Roll long dough snakes and bend them to make a path. Now walk your fingers through the maze!”
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## Tactile Discrimination

- **Bead Hunt** – Invite the child to find hidden beads inside dough using their fingers only. “Close your eyes and dig through the dough to find the hidden beads using just your fingers.”
- **Texture Match Game** – Prepare dough balls with different textures (e.g., sand, rice, glitter) and ask the child to match them by feel. “Feel these dough balls—one has sand, one has glitter. Match them just by touch!”
- **Hide and Press Shapes** – Hide small plastic shapes in dough and let the child identify them by pressing with fingers. “Feel the dough and press gently. Can you tell what shape is hiding inside?”
- **Coin Presses** – Let the child press coins into dough and then identify them based on the imprint. “Press a coin into the dough. Can you guess which one it is just from the print?”
- **Press-and-Hold Shapes** – Ask the child to press fingers into the dough and describe how it feels or what shape it made. “Push your fingers into the dough and describe what it feels like. Is it smooth? Bumpy?”



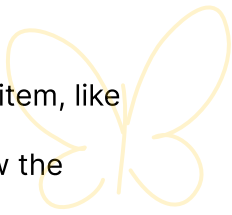

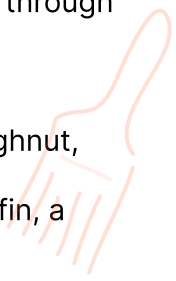
## Wrist Stability and Extension

- **Vertical Press Wall** – Lean a tray or cutting board against a wall and have the child press dough balls onto it with open hands. “Stick some dough balls onto this tray on the wall. Push them on with your whole hand!”
- **Push-and-Twist** – Give the child markers or pegs to push and twist into dough using a turning wrist motion. “Use this marker or peg to push into the dough and twist. Try to keep your wrist straight!”
- **Push Pin Pictures** – Use vertical dough surfaces or raised trays to increase wrist extension during pin work. “Use the pins to make designs on this vertical surface. Can you press without bending your wrist?”





## Motor Planning and Sequencing

- **Toothpick Towers** – Show the child how to build structures by stacking dough balls and inserting toothpicks between them. “Stack dough balls and connect them with toothpicks. Let’s build a dough tower!”
- **Dough Snake Patterns** – Ask the child to roll snakes and shape them into zigzags, loops, or letters. “Roll a snake and bend it into loops or zigzags. Can you copy this pattern?”
- **Alphabet Dough Stamps** – Flatten dough and have the child press letter stamps in sequence to form their name or short words. “Press letter stamps into the dough to spell your name or favorite word!”
- **Shape Builders** – Provide step-by-step prompts for the child to create a simple item, like a car or animal, from dough. “I’ll tell you what to make—like a fish or a car. Follow the steps one at a time.” 
- **Finger Walk Maze** – Flatten dough and carve a path. Instruct the child to “walk” two fingers through the maze. “Walk your index and middle fingers through the dough maze like little legs.” 
- **Dough Stairs** – Ask the child to build a staircase using stacked dough rectangles in order from largest to smallest. “Make different size rectangles and stack them like stairs—big at the bottom, small at the top!”
- **Rolling Snake Maze** – Let the child roll dough snakes and form a wiggly path, then drive a toy through the maze. “Roll out snakes to form a maze, then drive a tiny toy car through it!”
- **Pretend Bakery** – Invite the child to make a series of bakery items (muffin, doughnut, cookie) using visual or verbal prompts. “Let’s pretend we’re bakers! Make a muffin, a doughnut, and a cookie in that order.” 

These activities are adaptable for different ages and abilities. Repeat favorites regularly and watch children build the strength, control, and confidence needed for writing success — one squish at a time.