



Developed by The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies
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Write From the Start...With an “Alternative Pencil”

(Gretchen Hanser Ph.D., The Center for Literacy & Disability Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill)

Writing is undeniably an essential component of literacy instruction for students *without* disabilities. Without question it is a part of their daily instruction. In order for students with significant disabilities to develop as readers and writers, daily writing is equally, if not, more important. However, this becomes a challenge when most students with significant disabilities are unable to hold a traditional pencil. To address this challenge, the Center for Literacy & Disability Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill has developed a variety of “alternative pencils” for students with the most significant disabilities, including deaf-blindness.

All the alternative “pencils” have been designed for students who are unable to hold a traditional pencil or physically manipulate a keyboard. Instead, the alternative pencils tap into students’ other developing abilities. For example, the alphabet eye gaze frame may be helpful for students who are learning to eye gaze. The print flip chart or onscreen keyboards may be helpful for students who are learning to use switches. The Braille flip chart may be useful for students who are blind. These are just a few examples. For many of the pencils, perfect vision and/or hearing are not needed.

It is especially important to note that students **DO NOT** need to know how to independently read or spell words in order to use any of the alternative pencils. Alternative pencils should be used with students who have a range of understandings about writing, all the way from random, emergent “scribbling” to more conventional writing with recognizable words. Children without disabilities have hundreds of hours of drawing and scribbling to help them grow into more sophisticated writers. Over the past 4 years, the same type of development has been seen with students with the most significant disabilities when they are given the same opportunities with alternative pencils. Here are some of the things we have learned about writing with students with significant disabilities, including deaf-blindness:

- Pick an alternative pencil that has the most potential for students to easily use.
- Students do not need to know their letters in order to write with an alternative pencil.
- Students need access to the full alphabet in order to learn about the alphabet.
- All students, regardless of their ability, learn about writing and alternative pencils, *by* writing.
- There are no prerequisites to writing. Don’t wait! Students don’t need to be ready to write. No one is “too...anything” to begin writing with an alternative pencil.
- Pick an alternative pencil and get started now!

For more information about making and using “alternative pencils,” go to the Center for Literacy & Disability Studies, www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds. A CD, “Writing with Alternative Pencils!” is available for \$35. The CD contains all of the printable materials and files to make over 30 alternative pencils, as well as instructions for use, activities and sample writing goals. On the center’s website, click on the case studies of Jake and Matthew to see videos of some of these alternative pencils in use.



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Writing With Alternative Pencils CD, \$35

(Updated with over 30 alternative pencils!! 2/09)

Writing is typically a challenge for students with speech, sensory and motor difficulties, resulting in limited, if any opportunities to write. For professionals, it can be an overwhelming task to find a way for these students to write when they can't hold the common pencil or pen. To help address this problem, the Center for Literacy & Disability Studies has developed a range of "alternative" pencils that give students access to the full alphabet. These pencils can be used by students who are simply "scribbling" or by students who are beginning to write words. Each pencil has a brief guide with teaching strategies, sample goals, writing activities and actual student writing samples. Printable files and directions for making each of these pencils are included. This CD consists of the following alternative pencils:

- **ALPHABET EYE GAZE FRAMES:** Includes different eye gaze frame setups that use colored cards, colored letters, or black/white cards.
- **PRINT FLIP CHARTS:** Includes different flip charts that have a range of high contrast colored letters and backgrounds, including white letters on black background. Also includes supplemental flip charts with writing tool choices. A new number flip chart has been added to support literacy and math!
- **BRAILLE ALPHABET FLIP CHART:** Includes directions for making supplemental tactual symbols
- **CUSTOM ALPHABET INTELLIKEYS OVERLAYS:** Overlays can be tactualized and/or brailled (Overlays require the IntelliKeys): Includes overlays with different keyboard layouts and a range of high contrast colored letters and backgrounds.
- **SWITCH ACCESSIBLE ONSCREEN ALPHABET KEYBOARDS:** Made in IntelliTalk II/III and includes an electronic print flip chart.

Name		
Organization		
Address		
Method of Payment: Cash Check Purchase Order		
Cost: \$35.00	Quantity	Total Due

Send order & payment to: The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, CB #7335,
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