

Pencil Grip 101

(Adapted from TheAnonymousOT, April 19, 2013)

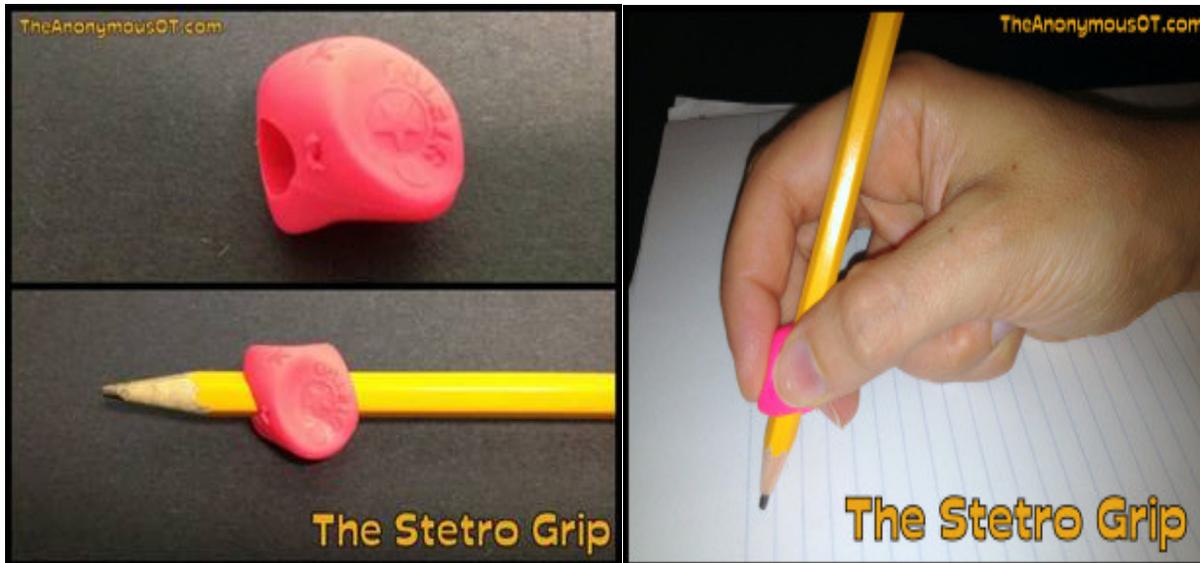
These grips are designed for the same thing: to put a child in a “correct” tripod grasp. A few can be modified for a quadrupod grasp, but essentially, they all aim for the same goal. The biggest difference between each grip is the *way* it gets you there.



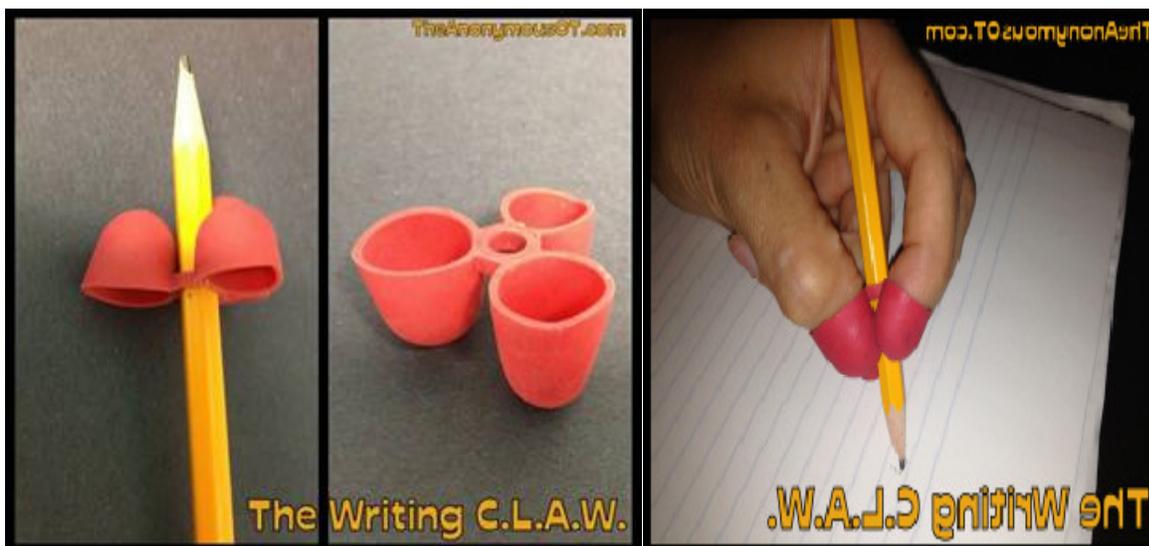
Foam Grip: Let’s start with an oldie. Have you ever considered the foam sleeve a pencil grip? This grip comes in many variations: ridges or bumps, plastic or foam. It gives the child a target area to grasp, and the grip is supposed to provide a cushion which can reduce pressure on the joints. However, it doesn’t do much in terms of actively positioning a child’s fingers.



Triangle Grip: Here is another classic pencil grip. It can be a stand alone grip, or you might see a lot of pencils, crayons, or markers designed in this triangle shape as well. The three-sided design is supposed to provide a physical cue to promote a tripod grasp by giving each finger a designated spot. Again, it doesn’t do too much to actively change a child’s finger positioning.



Stetro Grip: This grip is small, so it works well for smaller hands. The indents provide cues for finger placement on the pencil in a tripod position. The “Solo” grip is also similar to the Stetro in the level of positioning support, just a larger overall size.



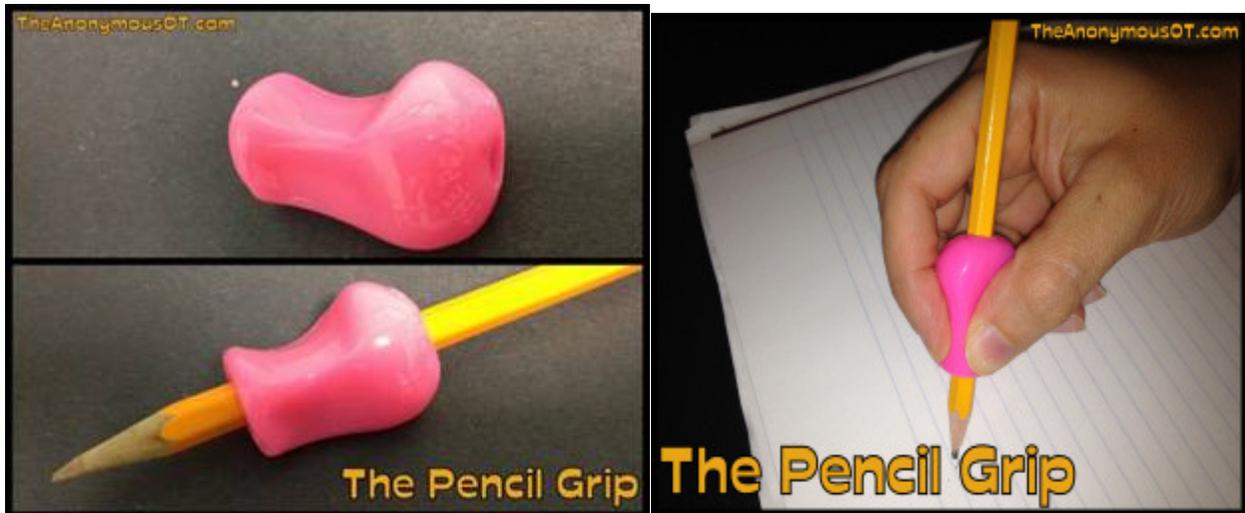
The Writing C.L.A.W.: C.L.A.W. actually stands for Controlling Letters of Adolescent/Adult Writers. This pencil grip provides a cup for each of the three fingers. In terms of the amount of positioning support, nobody really slides out of this one... a little tripod straight jacket. However, I do find that it has slightly more wiggle room in terms of actual finger movement than some of the other grips.



The Grotto Pencil Grip: The idea behind this grip is to limit any odd positioning or movement of the fingers in order to support a tripod grasp. The “Crossover” grip also looks very similar to the Grotto, but I haven’t used that one before. You’ll see the guard in the front is supposed to prevent the fingers or thumb from wrapping over.



Start Right Pencil Grip: This grip is designed to keep the web space open, as well as provide barriers to prevent the thumb and fingers from going anywhere they aren’t supposed to. You’ll see that there aren’t any indents on this grip for the fingers to slide into. It’s main job is to prevent any wandering fingers.



The Pencil Grip: The Pencil Grip is supposed to provide an ergonomic support in a tripod position. It comes in regular size as well as a jumbo size for smaller hands.

Pencil Grip Precautions

There is much more to correcting a pencil grasp than slapping a pencil grip on a pencil. That's kind of the equivalent of duct taping a hole in your roof. It might work for a minute, but the underlying issues still remain.

Let's say you put a grip on a pencil and the child holds it beautifully. However, what happens when you take that pencil grip away? If they were just using the grip as a crutch to melt their fingers into, they probably haven't developed the proper strength to maintain the position alone.

Another issue to think about is when children have difficulties with motor planning. If you teach them to grasp a pencil *only* with a pencil grip, it might be very challenging to wean them off. Some children look at a pencil as if it is a foreign object once the grip has been removed.

How about the children that are rigid in their routines? They might not want to give up that grip. With these children I might avoid a grip all together and focus on hand strength/dexterity and provide a visual cue such as a sticker on the pencil to demonstrate where they should place their fingers.

If the child has structural issues that caused an inefficient grasp in the first place, they might not even be able to maintain the position that the grip forces them into. That pencil grip isn't glued

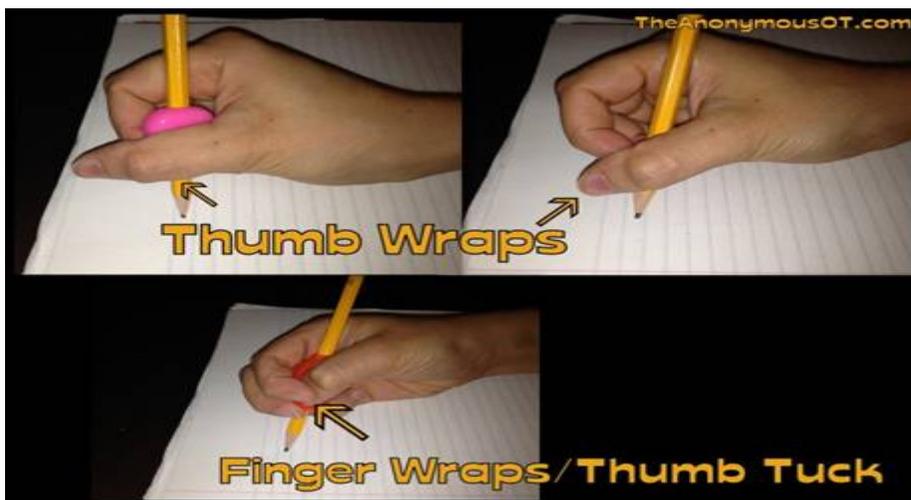
<http://theanonymousot.com/2014/04/19/pencil-grip-101/>

to their fingers in the correct position, you know. That means some children start to compensate around the pencil grip, creating more issues.

For example, this position below is technically a “tripod”, but the thumb has locked itself into hyperextension to keep from collapsing. Think of locking your knees to keep from falling over when you are tired. You don’t have a lot of flexibility or dexterity in this position.



If the child really has an issue with stability, they might start to fold their fingers or their thumbs over the grip in a fight for control. If someone has simply put the pencil grip on and walked away, a child might find themselves writing in these positions; often steam rolling right over all of the features of the grip that were supposed to keep them in place.



Or how about this compensation, can you even tell which pencil grip I am using?

Another point to think about – is the child going to actually use the grip? A lot of children I know have hidden their pencil at school or refuse to use it because it makes them look “different.” Some children start to cry or avoid homework and writing tasks because they are incredibly embarrassed by the grip. I had one child look at me with puppy dog eyes and say, “You aren’t going to make me use this at school, are you?” I mean, come on, it’s not like these things are discreet.

Making the Pencil Grip Choice

There are two different ways to look at choosing a pencil grip: are you looking to adapt or rehabilitate?

If I am looking at a child with an adaptive frame of reference, I am assuming that they will not hold a pencil in a functional way without adaptive positioning. At that point, I might need to select a pencil grip that works for them depending on the level of support they need.

If I am working with a rehabilitative frame of reference in mind, then a pencil grip might just be a step in the grasp training process. The child first needs to develop strength all in the right places. That means building a stable support by working on proximal stability, (core strength, shoulder, elbow, and wrist stability) as well as assuming a proper seated position. I also work on separating the sides of the hand and developing the palmar arches. All important components of a proper grasp.