

Improving Poor Spacing Between Letters and Words

Children need room when learning how to write. Worksheets often fail to provide enough space for children to completely write what is intended. Whenever possible, modify worksheets to provide extra space (extending lines, etc.). While there may be visual tracking, attention, or crossing 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. It is important to exaggerate spaces when demonstrating. Make sure the teacher is modeling appropriate spacing by starting at the margin, spacing between words, writing to the right side margin, starting each sentence after the preceding sentence's punctuation, etc.

Suggestions from HWT

- Start with exaggerated spaces between words of model that the child will copy to increase awareness of space.
- Use a stamp pad and have the child stamp their fingerprint between each word.
- 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."



- You can play "Sentence Doctor." The teacher writes a sentence either with no spaces, with spaces that are TOO LARGE, or with inconsistent spaces... the kids take turns playing the doctor and going up to perform surgery to fix the sick sentence and make it better.



- 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. 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."



*See reference page for Olsen(9)

Other Suggestions for Improving Spacing Problems:

- Use tongue depressors or Popsicle stick: Make up a story that some friendly spacemen had come to class and were going to help us write. Have the kids decorate the wood. They were paired with their Earth partner--the pencil. They use them between words and the spacemen were happy. Around the middle of year the spacemen went back to their home planet and most of the children were able to leave adequate space between the words without the spacemen.



- Try using graph paper. Instruct the students to leave one box open as a space between words. It comes in various sizes. It can be called scientist paper (they use it to make formulas).
- Put a dot between words.
- Draw a colored line or highlight space between words in a sentence that student has to copy to give him/her a visual cue.



- Try using M&Ms or Skittles (or other edibles) as spacers. Eat as reward.
- Try having the child take a breath or say the word "space" after each word to remind them to move the pencil.
- Let child review own work to determine if there are spaces between the words.
- Some students respond better to concrete instruction such as, "Move your pencil over before you start the next word."

*See reference page for Amundson(3)