

The Art of Beautiful Handwriting

# Handwriting Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Handwriting



**1. Proper Position Includes**  
Feet flat  
Proper desk and chair height  
Slanted work surface

**2. Pencil Grip Includes**  
Pointer and thumb pinching pencil  
Soft grasp





**3. Up and Over**  
Make letters round  
Move pencil up and over

**4. Breathing**  
In through the nose  
Out through the mouth  
No holding the breath while writing





**5. Feather Touch**  
Don't push hard  
Write as lightly as possible  
No broken pencil tips

**6. Eyes Guide Hand**  
Look ahead of pencil tip  
Grasp pencil so you can see tip



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[www.BrendaMontecalvo.com](http://www.BrendaMontecalvo.com)



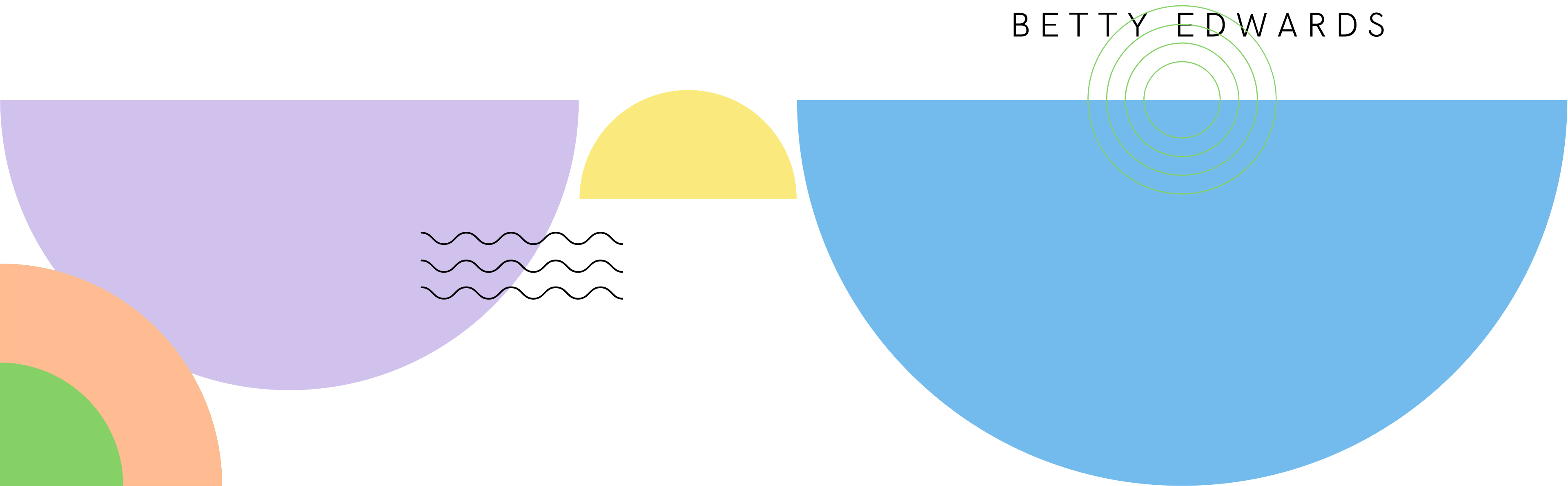
# VISUAL SECRETS FOR HANDWRITING

Brenda Montecalvo, OD

[www.BrendaMontecalvo.com](http://www.BrendaMontecalvo.com)  
[www.NovaVisionCare.com](http://www.NovaVisionCare.com)

**In all of the ways we express ourselves  
non-verbally, nothing is quite as  
personal as our handwriting.**

BETTY EDWARDS



# Save Time, Learn Faster

The Art of Beautiful Handwriting

## Handwriting Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Handwriting

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Learn to Spell Well

## Spelling Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Spelling

a e i o u  
sometimes  
y or th

**1. Vowels**  
a e i o u sometimes y  
At least one per syllable

**2. Syllables**  
Each one has a vowel  
How many in word?  
How many letters in each?

Mon-te-cal-vo  
1 2 3 4

**3. Letters in Word**  
How many total letters?

10

**4. Assign Number to Letters**  
What is first letter? M  
Last letter? o  
What is #4? l  
What is #2? t etc.

Montecalvo  
ovlacetnoM

**5. Spell Word**  
Forward  
Backward  
With no hesitation

**6. Practice Test**  
Give test like done in class  
Relearn ones not in right sequence.

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The Art of Writing

## Composition Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Composition

- 1. Stop Correcting...!**  
Grammar  
Spelling  
Penmanship
- 2. Telling Stories**  
At bedtime  
Have child add to story  
Be creative
- 3. Define...**  
Verbs  
Nouns  
Adjectives  
Adverbs
- 4. Fun Writing Materials**  
Journal  
Paper  
Desk  
Pen
- 5. Describe...**  
What an apple looks like.  
How do you set the table?
- 6. Writing Space**  
Where is your favorite spot to sit?  
Make the space creative and relaxing.

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Understand the Language of Math

## Math Made Easy

6 Steps to Master Math

- 1. Count Steps**  
Feet flat  
Proper desk and chair height  
Slanted work surface
- 2. Numberline**  
Pointer and thumb pinching pencil  
Soft grasp
- 3. Count By Sets**  
Make letters round  
Move pencil up and over
- 4. Fractions**  
In through the nose  
Out through the mouth  
No holding the breath while writing
- 5. Measuring**  
Don't push hard  
Write as light as possible
- 6. Timed Tests**  
Look ahead of pencil tip  
Grasp pencil so can see tip

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Reading Can Take You Anywhere.

## Reading Made Easy

6 Steps to Enjoy Reading

- 1. Comfortable reading posture**  
Center reading lat a slight slant  
Keep reading about 16" from eyes
- 2. Interesting Material**  
Student's favorite area of interest...  
Sports? Horses? Hunting? Friends?
- 3. Build Vocabulary**  
Define words prior to seeing them.  
Use new word in a sentence.  
Then show the written word
- 4. Silent Reading**  
Avoid lip reading.  
Ask questions after first paragraph.  
Watch eyes move along print.
- 5. Upside Down**  
Minimizes habit  
of sounding  
each word out.
- 6. Describe...**  
Characters in detail.  
What might happen next.

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# First Impressions and Handwriting

UNIVERSITY  
OF ARIZONA  
PROFESSOR  
GRADED TWO  
SETS OF  
PAPERS

---

How do you judge this handwriting?

old. The younger boy  
called Sam and he was six  
years old. They were happy.  
After a while they started playing  
football. They were playing on  
the street. They were in a good  
soon the policeman came  
and he told them off. He was  
big and strange. They felt  
scared. Eventually they stop

It was the most tiresome kite in the  
world, always wagging its tail, shaking  
its ears, breaking its string, sitting down  
on the tops of houses, getting stuck in  
trees, entangled in hedges, flopping down  
on ponds, or lying flat on the grass  
and refusing to rise higher than a yard



# Set The Stage for Good Handwriting

WRITING TOO YOUNG CREATES  
HABITS THAT INTERFERE

Development of fine motor skills are important for learning to manipulate a writing utensil comfortably and with ease.



# Neurology

J Neurosci. 2014 Sep 17; 34 (38): **Spatial and Temporal Eye-Hand Coordination Relies on the Parietal Reach Region** Eun Jung Hwang, Markus Hauschild, Melanie Wilke, Richard A. Andersen

## EYE MOVEMENTS

Coordinated eye movements are crucial for precise control of our hands

## PARIETAL REACH REGION

Spatial information processing influences how hand and eye are stimulated

## TEMPORAL COUPLING

Temporal coupling requires intact parietal reach region





# Cursive

Helps students...

Learn to read more quickly

Generate ideas more easily

Retain information more  
efficiently





# Cursive

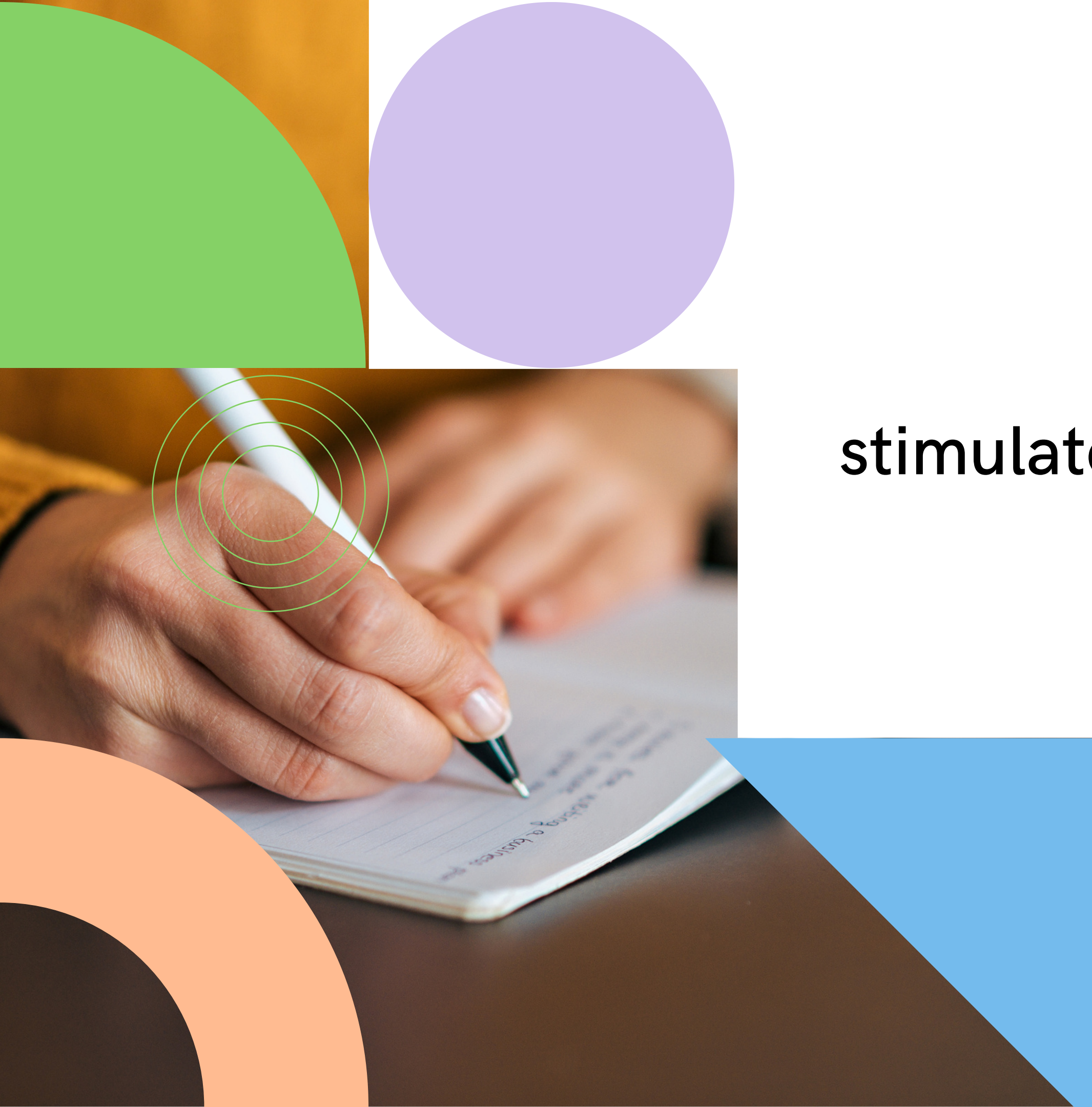
A neurocircuit is created when writing in cursive, which allows for a unique way of word recognition.





# Cursive

3 areas of the brain are  
stimulated during cursive writing.





# Cursive

Univ. of Washington noted:  
Cursive writing stimulates brain  
synapses and the synchronicity  
between both sides of the brain,  
unlike printing or typing.

May 30, 2019





# Cursive

William Klemm,

"Cursive dynamically engages widespread areas of both cerebral hemispheres."

Brain scans taken during handwriting show activation of extensive regions of the brain involved in thinking, language, and working memory.





# Cursive

Virginia Berninger, professor at the  
University of Washington  
Children in grades 2, 4, and 6 revealed  
they wrote more words, faster, and  
expressed more ideas when writing essays  
by hand versus with a keyboard.





# Cursive

There was significantly more neural activation after printing than typing in the left inferior frontal gyrus (pars orbitalis), also known as Broca's area.

Printing experience recruited the left anterior cingulate cortex more than typing experience.

There were no areas more active after typing experience than after printing experience.

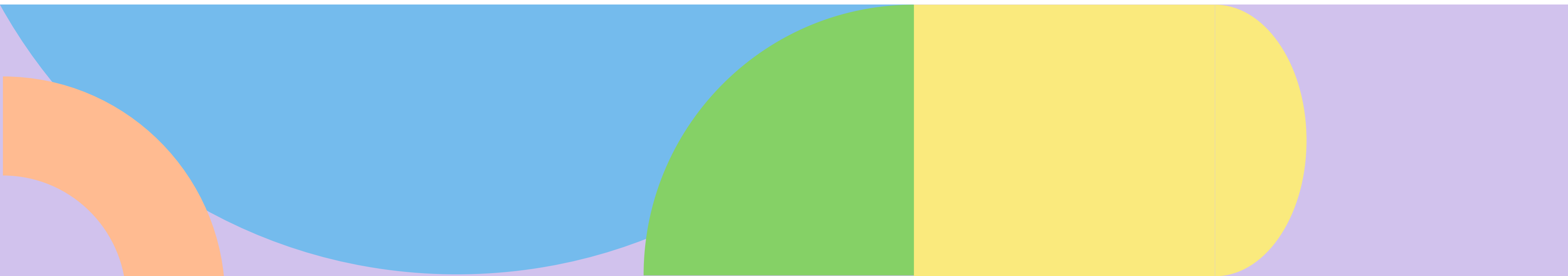


# Whole Brain Analysis Results



1. Only after practicing printing letters does the brain respond differently during letter versus shape perception
2. Free-form printing experience recruits posterior parietal regions and the precentral gyrus more than tracing experience during letter perception
3. Typing experience does not recruit any brain regions more than other sensorimotor conditions during letter perception

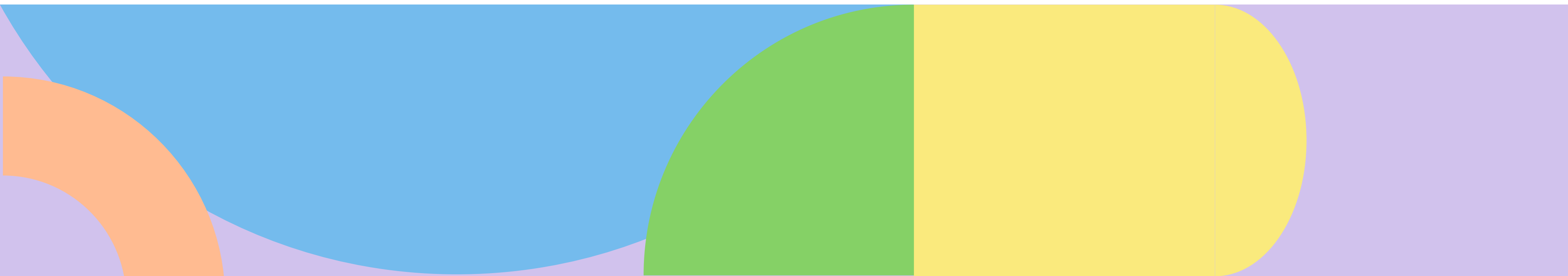
Trends Neurosci Educ. 2012 Dec; 1(1): 32–42.doi: 10.1016/j.tnec.2012.12.001 The effects of handwriting experience on functional brain development in pre-literate children Karin H. Jamesa, and Laura Engelhardt



# Visual Skills for Handwriting



- PURSUITS
- ACCOMMODATION
- SINGLE VISION
- PERIPHERAL VISION
- HAND/EYE COORDINATION





# Pursuits

When a student has problems with pursuits, he will not be able to keep the tip of the pencil on the correct line while writing.





# Accommodation

Important for seeing which line the pencil tip should be touching when writing. Eventually, this will become automatic.





# Single Vision

Diplopia makes it difficult to consistently place the letters and they can end up in the wrong place.





# Peripheral Vision

Helps for writing straight lines on the page with good spacing. The eyes should guide the hand; if peripheral vision is compressed it will be difficult for the eyes to anticipate where the pencil should go.

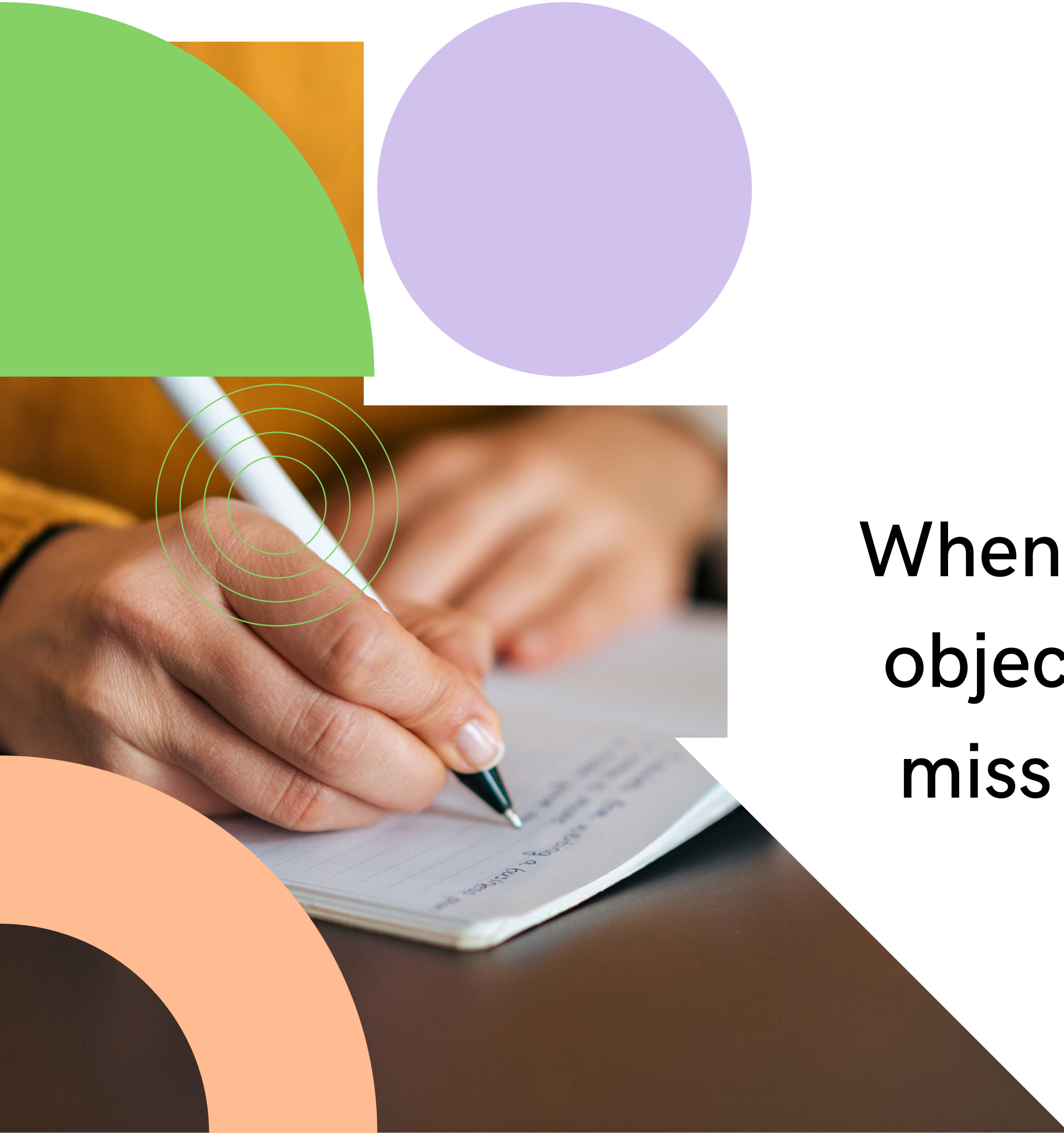
Holding one's breath while writing, or being overly stressed, can create temporarily constricted peripheral vision.





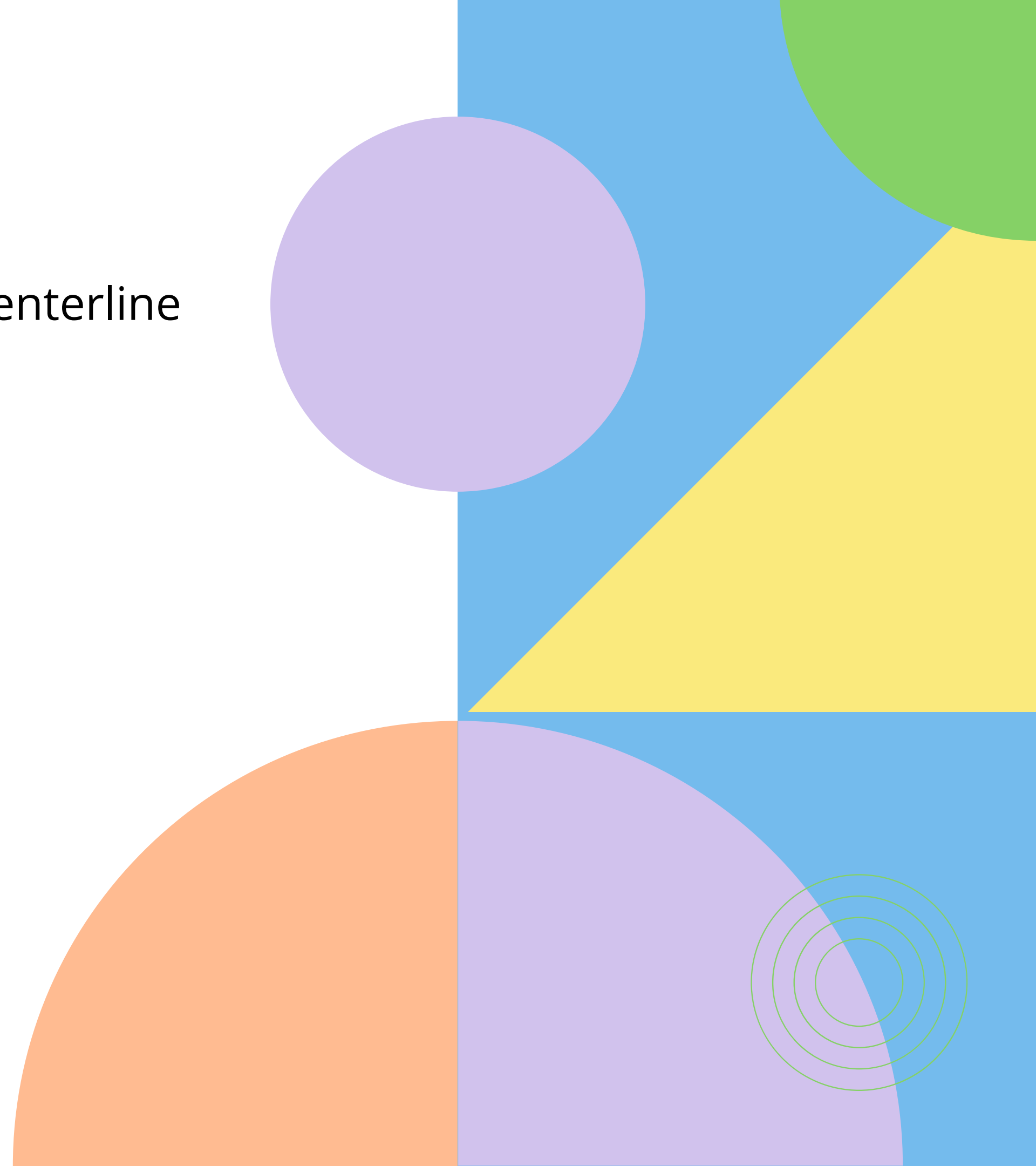
# Hand/Eye Coordination

When the eyes misjudge where objects are, then the hand can miss the object being viewed.



# Materials Needed

- Special wide-lined paper with dashed centerline
- Pencil
- Chair so feet can be flat on floor
- Table so eyes can be 16" from tabletop
- Slanted work surface (20 degrees)
- Highlighter
- 8"x11" paper
- Hard clay
- Baton
- Deck of playing cards
- Bright non-fluorescent lighting



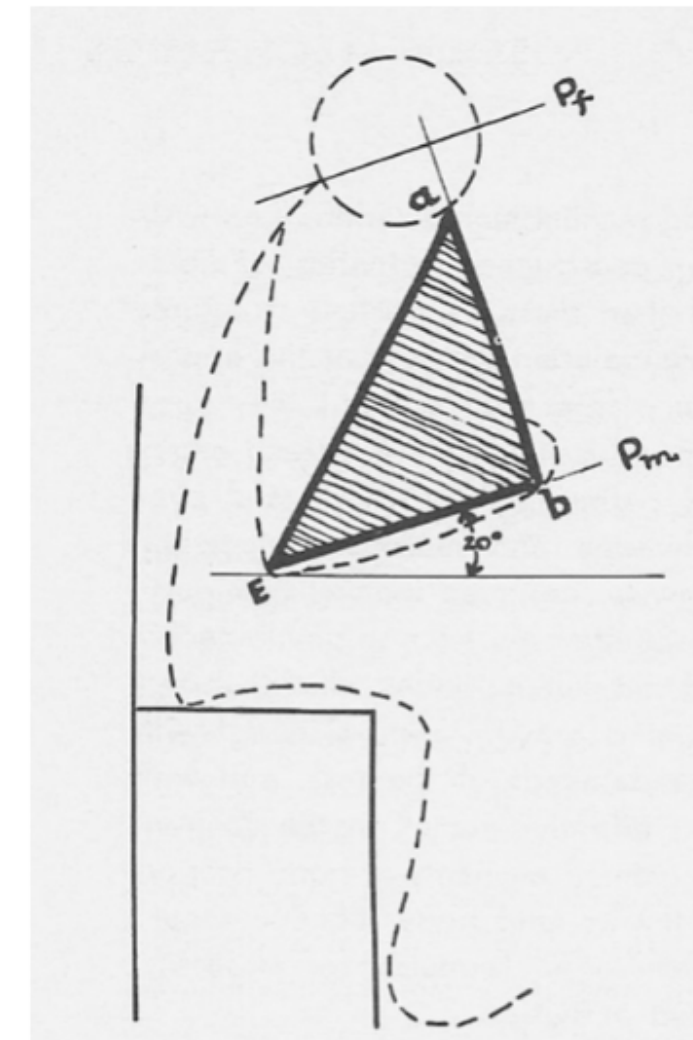


# Desk & Chair Harmon's Distance

## COMFORT IS INVALUABLE WHEN LEARNING NEW SKILLS

Darrell Boyd Harmon, PhD...

...studied the process of growth and development in school children, emphasizing the psycho-physiological and visually-centered aspects of learning, and the effect of the environment on those processes. He published work about improvement of ergonomic conditions in the classroom. He determined that improved ergonomics develops better handwriting, cognition, and performance.



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# Desk & Chair

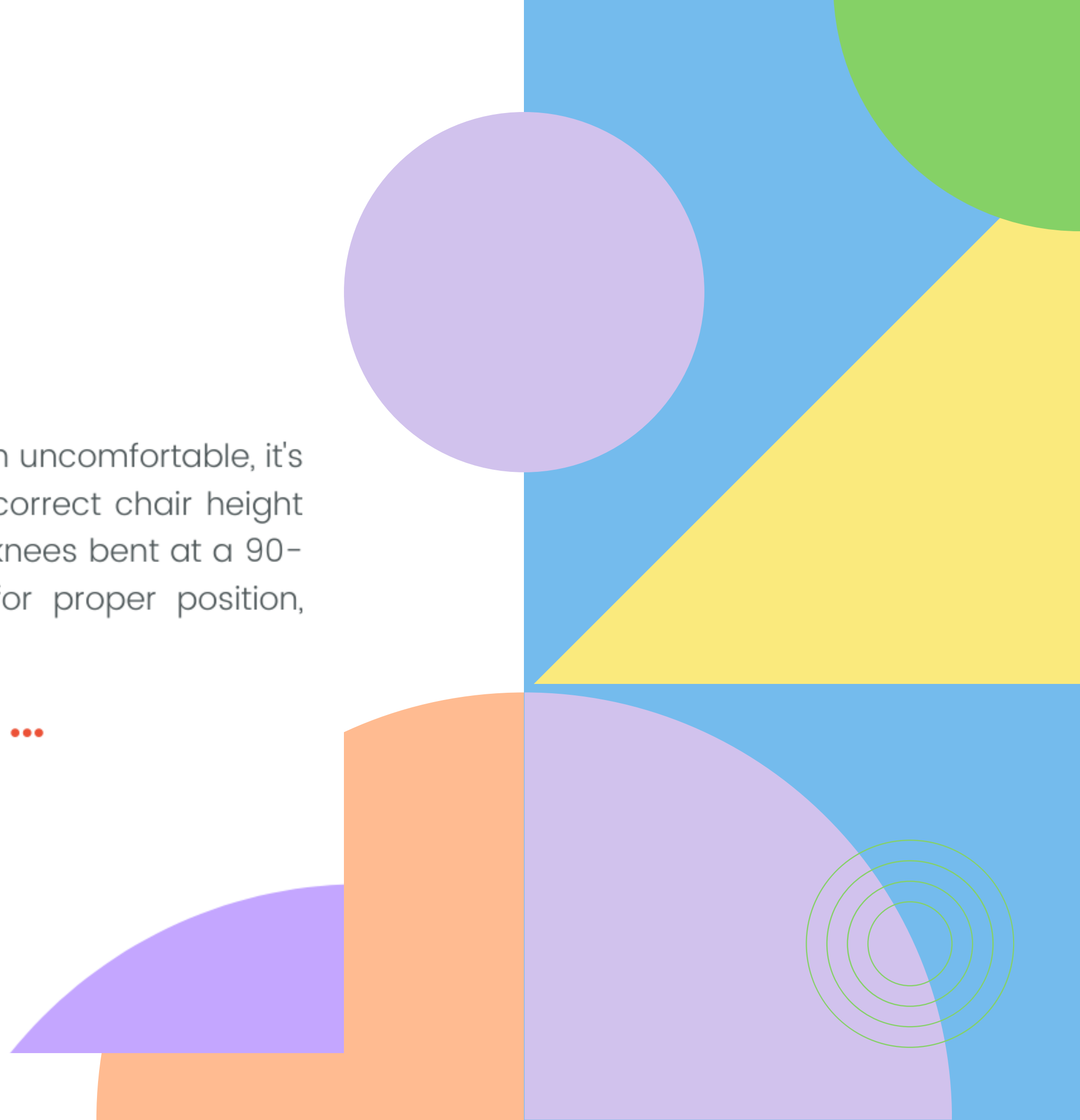
## STUDY AREA

### Modifying the Study Area

Select the correct table and chair height. When uncomfortable, it's difficult to pay attention and concentrate. A correct chair height allows the feet to be flat on the floor with the knees bent at a 90-degree angle. Dangling feet do not allow for proper position, which interferes with the eye-brain process.

### PROPER POSTURE ALLOWS FOR ...

- BETTER BODY TONICITY
- GOOD CIRCULATION
- IMPROVED ALERTNESS
- INCREASED CONCENTRATION
- MORE COMFORT





# Lighting

## BEST LIGHT SOURCE: SUNLIGHT OR CANDLELIGHT

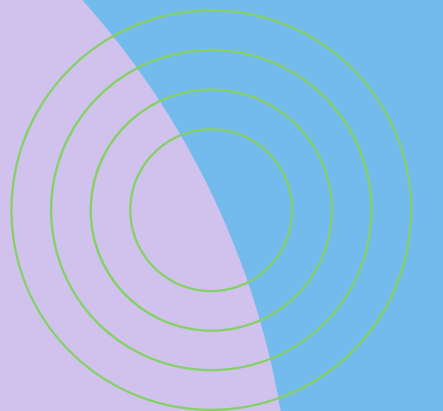
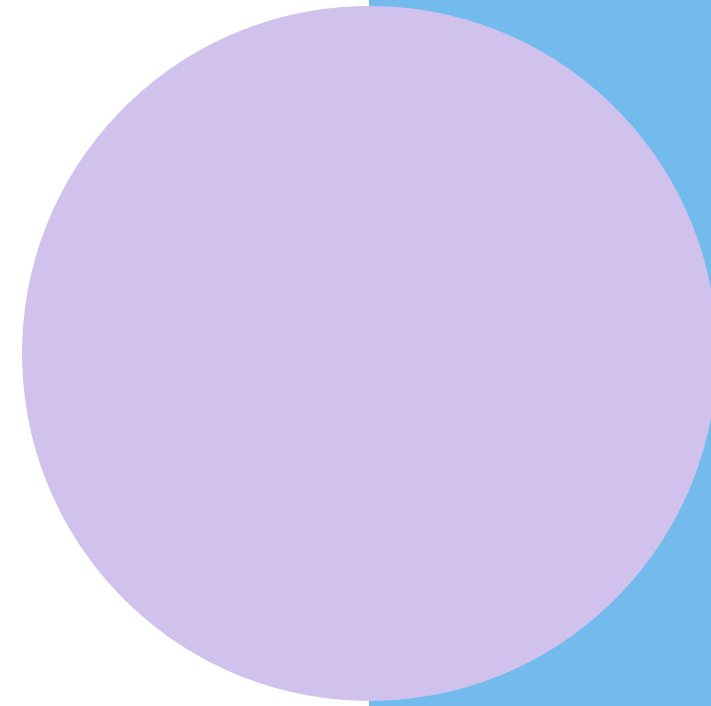
The next best is full-spectrum incandescent.

Fluorescent light, common in schools, is the most difficult under which to study and can be very disruptive to a reader's eyes and visual process. It can affect physiological systems and eye-brain processing.

## STUDY AREA

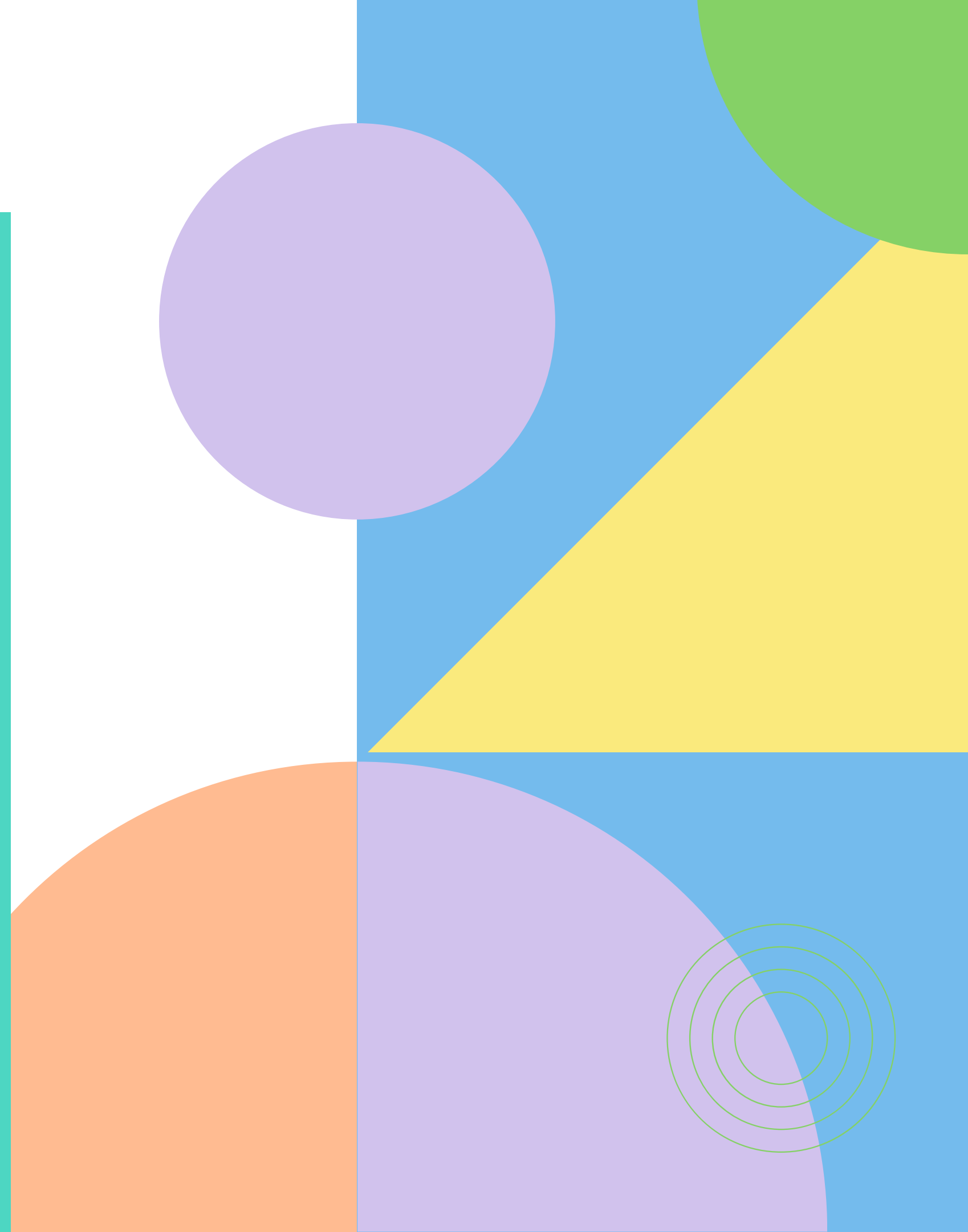
### Modifying the Study Area

If the study area does not have natural light, use full-spectrum lights. Reduce shiny surfaces and glare.



# Flourescent Lighting

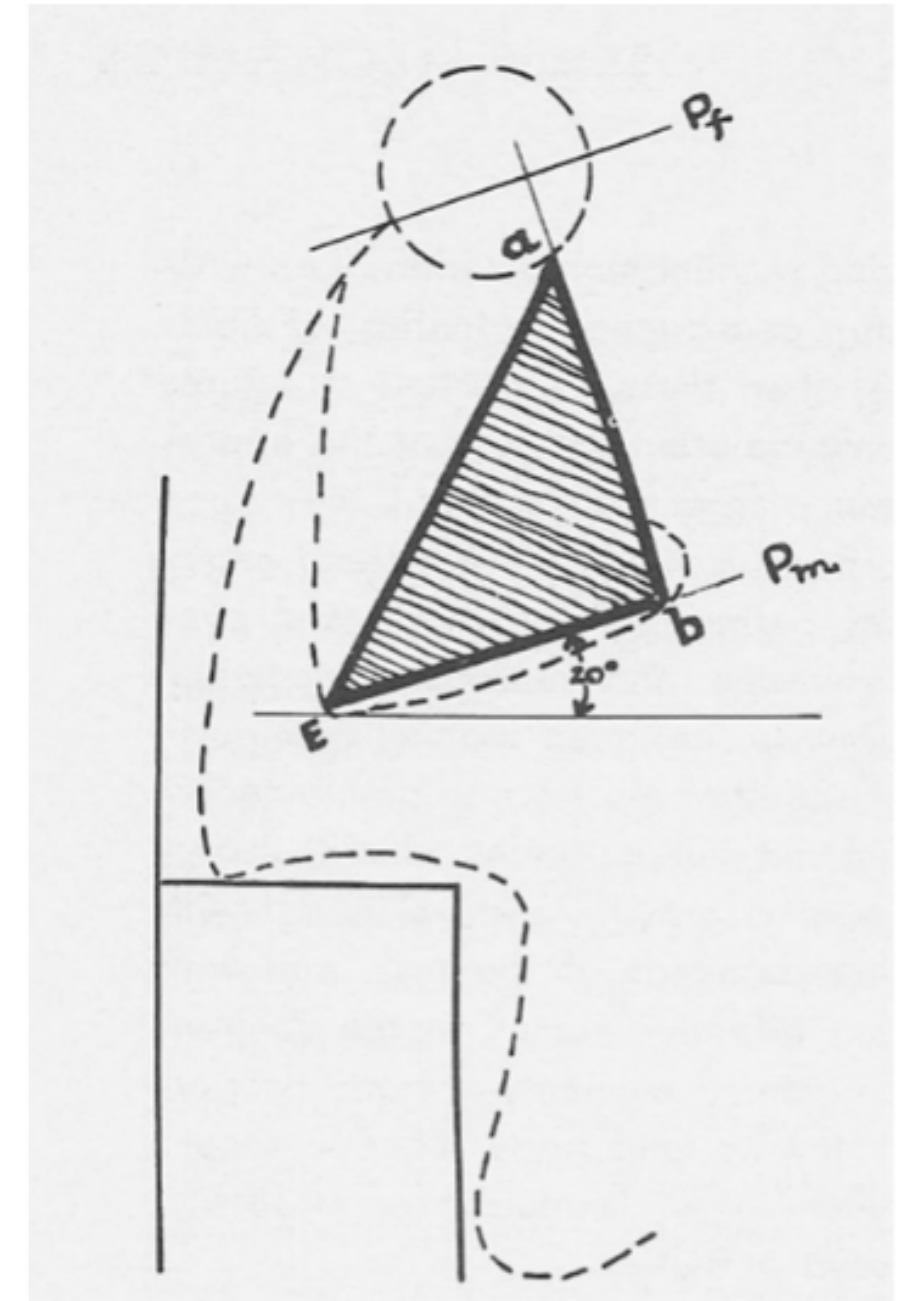
- Eye pain
- Blurred vision
- Difficulty reading or focusing
- Vertigo or dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Lethargy
- Anxiety
- Feelings of depression
- Disrupted sleep





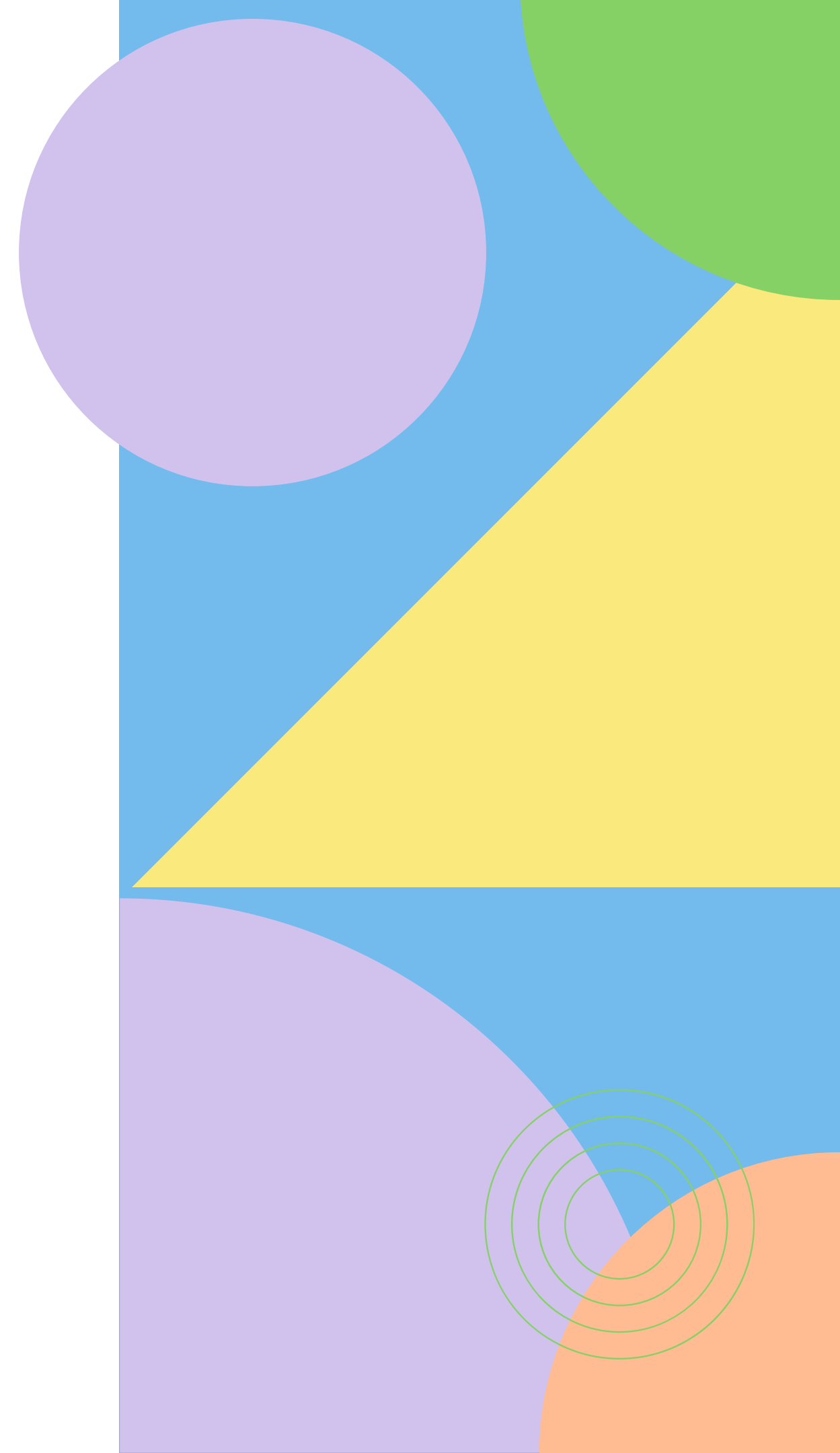
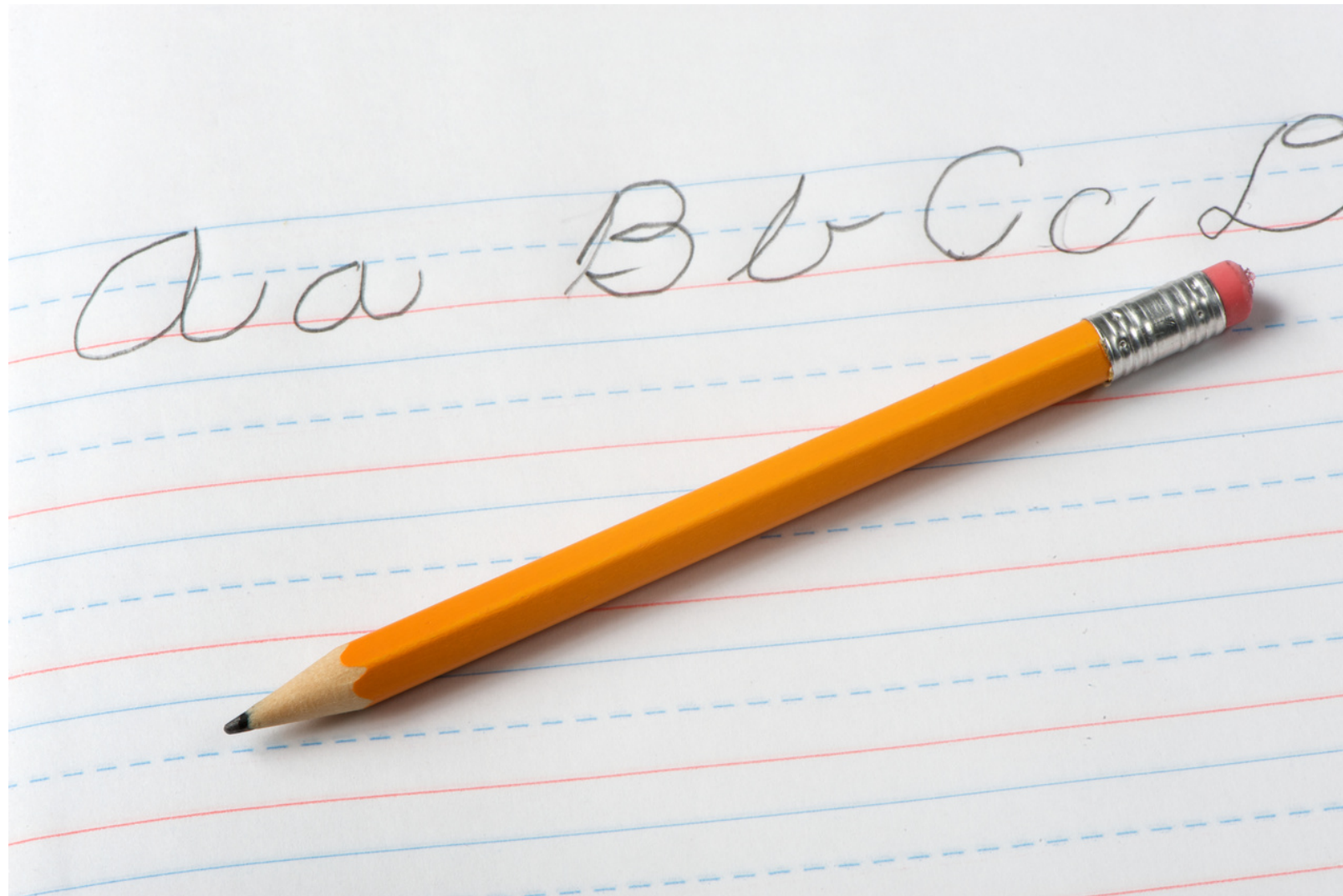
# Body Position Summary

- Feet are flat on the floor with the knees bent at a 90-degree angle.
- The student's back is straight without leaning on the back of the chair.
- The only body parts touching a surface should be the bottoms of each foot and the student's bottom on the edge of the chair.  
This creates a tripod effect.
- The non-dominant hand's palm holds the paper, and the dominant hand holds the pencil resting softly on the paper.
- The head and body should always be centered with the paper.
- There should be no head tilt or body shifted to one side.
- The paper must be at a distance equal to the distance from the knuckles to the elbow. (Harmon's Distance)



# Lined Paper

The paper needed for the exercise is the type that is used in kindergarten. It has wide lines and a dashed line in the middle of it. You can find these at school supply stores or online, or you can create your own.





# Pencil Grip

Use a standard No. 2 pencil. With a permanent marker, draw a line on the pencil about 2.5 inches from the pencil tip. This line will be used to position the fingers so the tip will not be obstructed from view while writing. The goal is for all students to be able to write well with or without a pencil grip. Pencil grips can feel quite comfortable if one needs to write for a long time, but for building this skill we do not use the grips. They can be added, if desired, once penmanship is mastered. After mastering the Visual Secrets needed for good penmanship, the student will be able to pick up any writing utensil at any time and use it to create beautiful handwritten materials.



# Pencil Grip

Pinch the pencil just above the marked line with the pointer finger and the thumb. Rest the pencil gently on the middle finger. Many times students learn handwriting before their fingers are ready to grip properly and naturally. As a result, they develop an improper pencil grip that significantly interferes with good handwriting. It will take lots of positive coaching to help change a poor pencil grip to the correct one. This is critical, though, to achieve proper placement of letters and effortless penmanship.



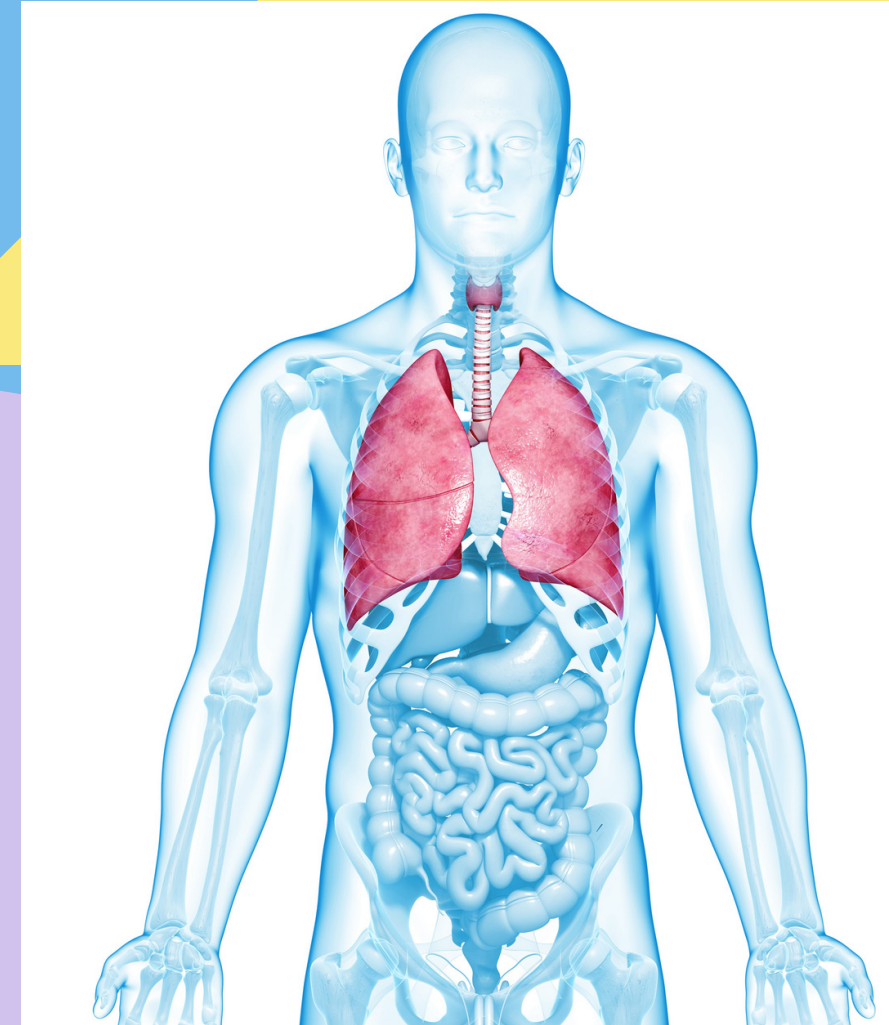


# Breathing

Breathing is very important because lack of oxygen decreases quality of performance. One of the first signs of reduced oxygen can be tunnel vision, which occurs because the blood vessels furthest from the central vision are smaller in diameter, and the blood must travel farther to provide oxygen to surrounding tissue. These vessels are often the first affected by decreased oxygen levels, thus halting vision processing.

Holding one's breath to perform a task can result in temporary tunnel vision, which affects performance.

Monitor the student's natural, regular breathing while the student performs the handwriting tasks.



# Soft Touch

How often does a pencil break right after sharpening it in the sharpener? Why does this occur? The pencil breaks due to an improper grip. When using the wrong fingers to grip a writing utensil, the writer has to push hard to manipulate the pencil, gets sore fingers, and breaks the tip. So, while participating in these handwriting activities, the student must write with a “soft touch.” This means the mark on the paper is very light, not dark. I refer to this as “feather writing,” which implies a soft, light touch.





# Eyes Lead the Hand

Writing students often grip the pencil so close to the point that their eyes cannot see where the pencil is going. The student is then writing blindly, with no regard to letter placement on the line. Thus it is critical that the pencil is gripped far enough from the tip so the eyes can see the tip of the pencil and the line on the paper.



# Eyes Lead the Hand

This is why a black line is drawn on the pencil: to guide the fingers not to get too close to the tip. If you sharpen the pencil, you will need to redraw the line so it is approximately 2.5 inches from the tip of the pencil.





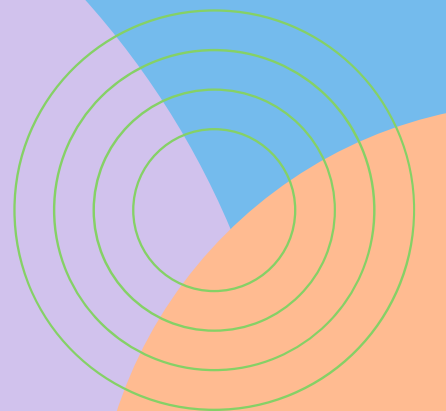
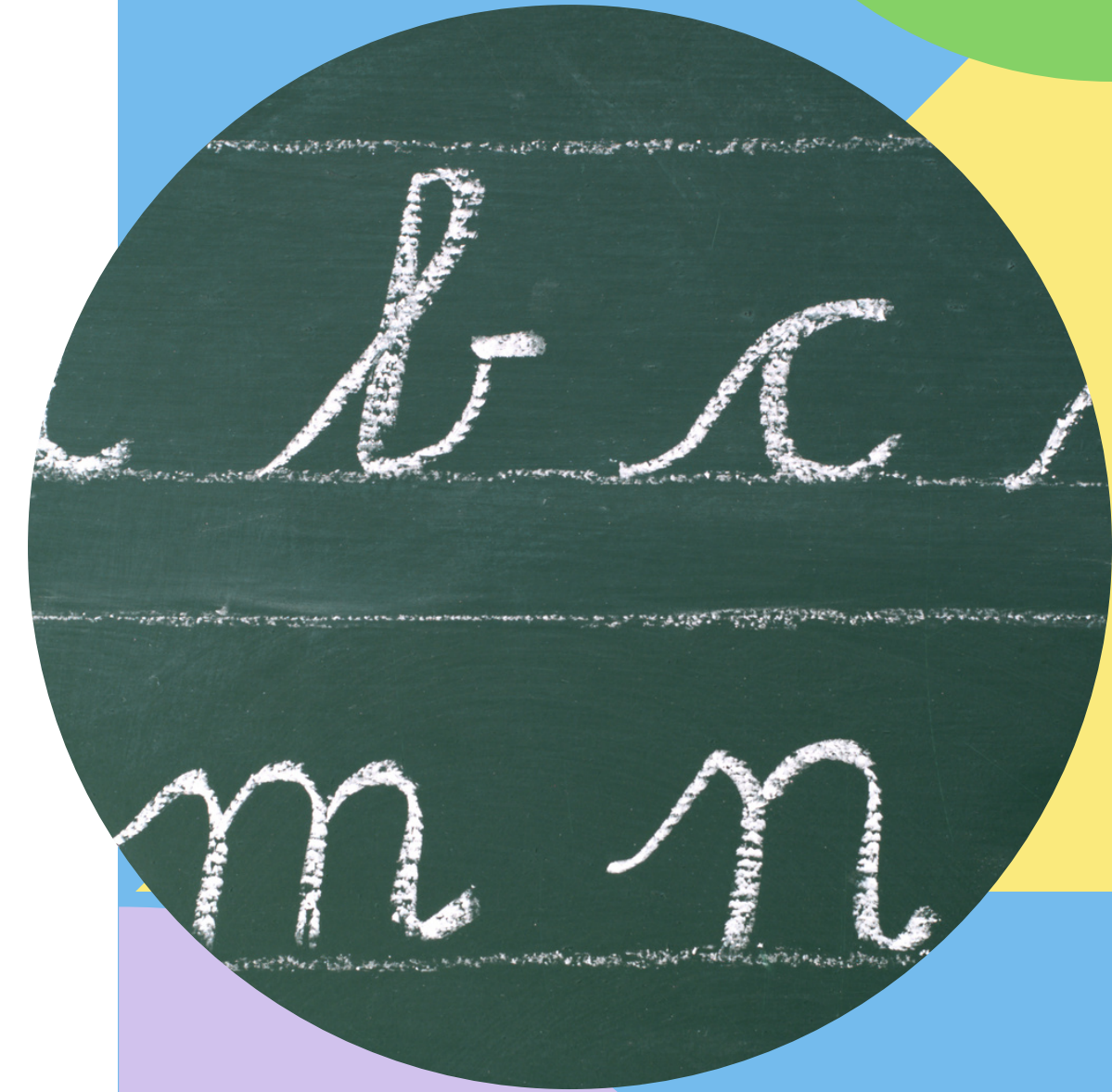
# Eyes Lead the Hand

Try writing your name while looking only at the tip of the pencil. Then try writing your name looking ahead of the tip, where the pencil will be going. Notice how much easier it is to place the letters properly when looking ahead. Coaches should note when the letter is not properly positioned. The observation of the eyes and how efficient they are in keeping fixation ahead of the pencil can be easily accomplished by placing a mirror next to the paper being used.



# Up and Over

This part of the penmanship procedure involves noting how the letters are formed. When the hand is tired and writing is difficult, the student takes shortcuts and only moves the fingers up and down instead of making large round motions with the arm and wrist. This creates penmanship that has many pointy-topped letters. Practicing with full arm movement and making large round clockwise and counterclockwise circles should be a precursor to cursive writing. Many times this exercise is skipped to save time and the student does not develop correct hand motions to create nicely formed letters. While writing the letters, ask the student to make round letters with an up and over type of motion.





# Building Handwriting Skills



Getting the fingers ready to write. This is a developed skill, and activities will help increase the neural connection between eyes, fingers, hands, and brain. The more you do activities that require precise fine motor control, the easier good penmanship is to learn.

# Paper Crunch

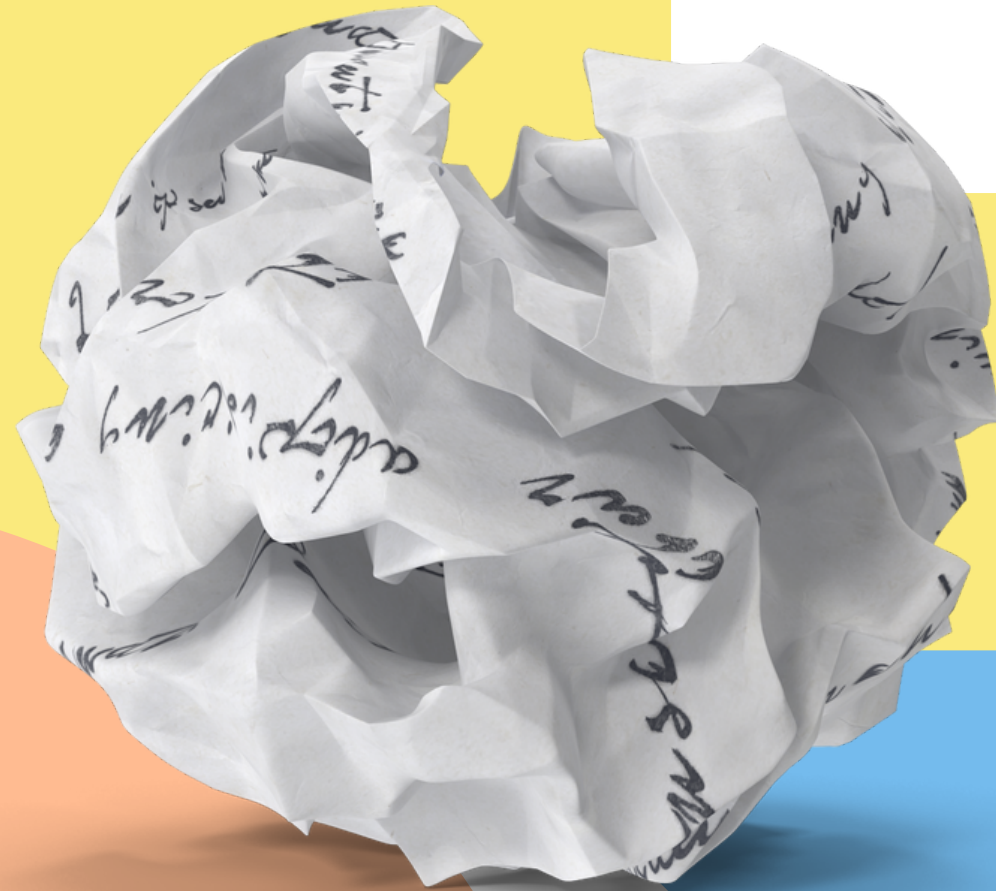
Step 1: Take one piece of 8"x11" paper and fold in half so the size of the paper is 8" x 5.5". Pinch the fold with the fingernail to make the fold more complete.

Step 2: Tear along the fold.

Step 3: After the paper is torn in half, hold each piece of paper in each hand above the head. The arms and hands do not touch any part of the body.

Step 4: Crunch the paper in each hand so that the fist covers the entire piece into a small ball of paper. Do not let the elbow, or any part of the arm touch the body while crunching the paper.

Step 5: Now, keeping hands in the air, un-crunch the ball of paper in each hand and return it to its original size.





# Finger Play



Step 1: Place hands palm-down on table. Without touching the student's fingers, the coach points to one finger and asks student to raise it off the table without moving the other fingers. Repeat with each finger.

Step 2: The coach points to the pointer finger of each hand and has student raise it at the same time, without moving the other fingers.

Step 3: Repeat with thumbs and middle, ring, and pinky fingers.

Step 4: Next the coach points to two different fingers (for example, right pointer and left ring finger). The student should raise their fingers at the same time without moving the other fingers. Repeat with different finger combinations.

Step 5: Next, indicate three fingers to be raised, and repeat. Indicate four fingers, and repeat.

# Paper Tear



Materials: Paper, Highlighter marker

Step 1: Make a mark with the highlighter at the edge of the paper, perpendicular to the edge of the paper. The mark should be about one quarter inch thick by five inches long, and fairly straight.

Step 2: The student grasps the paper with the pointer and thumb finger of each hand in a pinch configuration at the beginning of the mark

Step 3: The student rips the paper so there is an equal part of the mark on each side of the torn pieces.

Note: Do not use other fingers—only the pointer and thumb. To increase difficulty, make the mark more irregular with curves and sharp turns. To decrease difficulty, make the mark fatter and straighter.



# Clay Finger Roll

Material: Hard clay

Step 1: Take a small amount of clay, about a quarter of a teaspoon. The student rolls the clay between the dominant hand pointer finger and the dominant hand thumb into a perfect, small ball.

Step 2: Repeat with thumb and middle finger, then thumb and ring finger, then thumb and pinky.

To increase difficulty, use the non-dominant hand instead. To further increase difficulty, complete task with both hands at the same time.



# Baton Twirl

Material: Baton



Step 1: The student places the baton in dominant hand and twirls it between thumb, pointer, middle, ring, and pinky finger, then back from pinky to ring to middle to pointer to thumb.

Step 2: Repeat with non-dominant hand. Then try using a baton in each hand. Students really enjoy this activity; they are all eager to try it when it is demonstrated at workshops.



# Card Shuffle

Material: Deck of playing cards

Procedure:

Step 1: Student splits the card deck in half using only one hand. This is very difficult for small hands. To shuffle cards, split deck and weave them together by placing thumb on end, pointer finger bent in middle, and the rest of fingers holding the other end of the deck halves.

Step 2: To back-shuffle, make a bridge with hands around cards. For this, the thumbs are on top. There are several online videos on how to shuffle cards. If the student's hands are too small, use fewer cards or smaller sized cards.



# Getting Started



Each night, teach 3 letters in cursive, until all the letters of the alphabet are learned.

At the end of each session have student connect all the letters that have been learned thus far. Check proper letter position with the highlighter. If no corrections are needed, you're finished. If there are highlighted areas, ask the student try to write all of the learned letters once again.



# Getting Students Ready to Learn



## Montecalvo

VISUAL SECRETS

### DESK & CHAIR

COMFORT IS INVALUABLE WHEN LEARNING NEW SKILLS

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...studied the process of growth and development in school children, emphasizing the psycho-physiological and visually-centered aspects of learning, and the effect of the environment on those processes. He published work about improvement of ergonomic conditions in the classroom. He determined that improved ergonomics develops better handwriting, cognition, and performance.

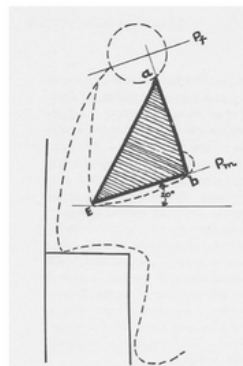
#### STUDY AREA

Modifying the Study Area

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#### PROPER POSTURE ALLOWS FOR ...

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- IMPROVED ALERTNESS
- INCREASED CONCENTRATION
- MORE COMFORT



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### HARMON'S DISTANCE

The table height should allow the student to write or read the materials on the table at a distance known as the Harmon Distance. In the illustration, "E" to "b" is the distance from the elbow to the knuckles. This is equal to the distance from "a" to "b", which is the distance the eyes should be from the reading or writing material. If the table is too high, the eyes will be too close to the material to be comfortable. If the table height is too low, the student will hunch over the work, which affects circulation and back comfort.

Hirsch, M. "A review of Darrell Boyd Harmon's experimental results." American Journal of Optometry Mar 37 (1960): 121-37.

#### CONTACT ME AT:

Brenda@BrendaMontecalvo.com  
www.BrendaMontecalvo.com



## Montecalvo

VISUAL SECRETS

### LIGHTING

BEST LIGHT SOURCE:  
SUNLIGHT OR CANDLELIGHT

The next best is full-spectrum incandescent.

Fluorescent light, common in schools, is the most difficult under which to study and can be very disruptive to a reader's eyes and visual process. It can affect physiological systems and eye-brain processing.

#### STUDY AREA

Modifying the Study Area

If the study area does not have natural light, use full-spectrum lights. Reduce shiny surfaces and glare.

### DYNAMIC LIGHTING

POSITIVE EFFECTS ON LEARNING

Improves visual comfort

A study done in a first-grade classroom showed that dynamic light had a positive effect on oral reading fluency. Dynamic light is defined as the change in the quality of illumination and color temperature of the light based on the activity being performed.

Dynamic light changes depending on the student's needs throughout the day. For example, one type of lighting should be used for quiet time, and a different type used for times when the student needs to be more alert.

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#### CONTACT ME AT:

Brenda@BrendaMontecalvo.com  
www.BrendaMontecalvo.com

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## Montecalvo

VISUAL SECRETS

### TEMPERATURE

STUDY BY CORNELL UNIVERSITY:

Productivity and Happiness

Reducing the room temperature to 68 degrees Fahrenheit or colder resulted in employees making 44 percent more errors. The optimal room temperature was 77 degrees Fahrenheit. The study stated that when a person is cold, energy is diverted to keep warm and takes away from the ability to concentrate. The study also noted that being warmer also made people happier.



### HYDRATION

Our bodies are comprised of 60 percent water. Water is a conductor of all of the electrical impulses that occur within our bodies. There are millions of impulses occurring each second in our eye-brain process. When a student becomes dehydrated, the eye-brain process will not be optimal. It has been shown that hydrated children have better memories. Headaches, fatigue, and lightheadedness are early signs of dehydration.

#### STUDY AREA

Modifying the Study Area

If the study area is difficult to heat without making the entire house too warm, you can use a blanket or small room heater during study times. Have a thermometer nearby to keep track of the temperature.

### BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING TEMPERATURE

#### OPPORTUNITY TO RELATE TO MATH

Associate reading temperature with a numberline.

- Keeping the room at the correct temperature teaches the student how to read a thermometer
- Teaches the difference between Fahrenheit and Celsius

#### REFERENCES

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#### CONTACT ME AT:

Brenda@BrendaMontecalvo.com  
www.BrendaMontecalvo.com

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# Visual Secrets Activity Cards

The Art of Beautiful Handwriting

## Handwriting Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Handwriting

**1. Proper Position Includes**  
Feet flat  
Proper desk and chair height  
Slanted work surface

**2. Pencil Grip Includes**  
Pointer and thumb pinching pencil  
Soft grasp

**3. Up and Over**  
Make letters round  
Move pencil up and over

**4. Breathing**  
In through the nose  
Out through the mouth  
No holding the breath while writing

**5. Feather Touch**  
Don't push hard  
Write as lightly as possible  
No broken pencil tips

**6. Eyes Guide Hand**  
Look ahead of pencil tip  
Grasp pencil so you can see tip

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[www.BrendaMontecalvo.com](http://www.BrendaMontecalvo.com)

Understand the Language of Math

## Math Made Easy

6 Steps to Mastering Math

**1. Count Steps**  
Space between numbers is equal.  
Foundation for understanding math.  
Engineers like to count steps.

**2. Number line**  
Visual representation of how far apart each number is.

**3. Count By Sets**  
Do 2s, then 5s, then 10s  
Next do 3s, 4s, 6s,  
7s, 8s, 9s

**4. Fractions**  
Which is larger, 1/3 or 1/2?  
How big are the pieces if you are sharing with 7 friends?  
How about with 3 friends?

**5. Measuring**  
How high is the door? = Height  
How wide is it? = Width  
How big if it was cut in half?  
Calculate the area (Height x Width)

**6. Timed Tests**  
Avoid flash cards. Learn sets first.  
Do verbal call out.  
Ex. Multiples of 6.  
Say 1, answer is 6  
Say 3, answer is 18

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The Art of Writing

## Composition Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Composition

**1. Stop Correcting...**  
Grammar  
Spelling  
Penmanship

**2. Telling Stories**  
At bedtime  
Have child add to story  
Be creative

**3. Define...**  
Verbs  
Nouns  
Adjectives  
Adverbs

**4. Fun Writing Materials**  
Attractive Journal  
Wide Ruled Paper  
Comfortable Chair & Desk  
Smooth Writing Pen

**5. Describe...**  
What an apple looks like.  
How do you set the table?

**6. Writing Space**  
Where is your favorite spot to sit?  
Make the space creative and relaxing.

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Learn to Spell Well

## Spelling Made Easy

6 Steps to Better Spelling

**1. Vowels**  
a e i o u sometimes y  
At least one per syllable

**2. Syllables**  
Each one has a vowel.  
How many in word?  
How many letters in each?

**3. Letters in Word**  
How many total letters?

**4. Assign Number to Letters**  
What is first letter?  
Last letter?  
What is #4?  
What is #2? etc.

**5. Spell Word**  
Forward  
Backward  
With no hesitation

**6. Practice Test**  
Give test like it's done in class  
Relearn ones not in right sequence

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Reading Can Take You Anywhere

## Reading Made Easy

6 Steps to Enjoying Reading

**1. Comfortable reading posture**  
Center reading material at a slight slant  
Keep reading material about 16" from eyes

**2. Interesting Material**  
Student's favorite area of interest...  
Sports? Horses? Hunting? Friends?

**3. Build Vocabulary**  
Define words prior to seeing them.  
Use new word in a sentence.  
Then show the written word.

**4. Silent Reading**  
Avoid lip reading.  
Ask questions after first paragraph.  
Watch eyes move along print.

**5. Upside Down**  
Minimizes the habit  
of sounding  
out each word.

**6. Describe...**  
Characters in detail.  
What might happen next.

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# Thanks for being here!

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