



Writing with Alternative Pencils

Guide to Using the Print Alphabet Flip Chart

Who Should Use Print Flip Chart?

The Print Flip Chart (Hanser, 2003) is intended for students with multiple significant physical, vision and hearing impairments, including those with unknown cognitive skills. These students are unable to hold a pencil or physically manipulate a standard, adapted or enlarged keyboard. Students do not need to have intact vision skills in order to use the flip chart. In fact, this pencil has been used by students with a variety of visual impairments, such as cortical vision impairment, legal blindness, impaired visual fields, tracking/scanning difficulties or even unknown and difficult to assess visual skills. Hearing is not required to use the flip chart; it has been used with students who are profoundly deaf. The Print Flip Chart is frequently used as an alternative for students who are not successful with using the Color Coded Eye Gaze Frame.

Students with significant disabilities have writing abilities that greatly vary. Some students may know how to express their ideas in writing and other students may have little, if any, understanding about print. These alternative pencils are ideal to use with ALL students, including those who have very little experience with print. Typically developing children spend hundreds of hours scribbling, drawing, writing and experimenting with crayons, markers and pencils. From these experiences, they gain basic literacy concepts such as, what print is, what it is used for and why, and how it is made. Since our students have been unable to do this because they can't hold a regular pencil...they need to have the same opportunities, except with using some kind of alternative pencil. No prerequisites are needed for beginning students to be able to scribble, explore and experiment with writing. When getting started with writing with students who have limited experiences with print, it is important to remember that:

- Students do not need to know how to use an alternative pencil.
- Students do not need to have cause/effect.
- Students do not need to have reliable motor skills or good switch use.
- Students do not need to know their letters.
- Students do not need to be able to spell or read words.

Similar to typically developing children, our students learn about writing and pencils by using them to write.

Flip Charts and Supplemental Symbols

A range of alphabet flip charts have been included on the CD, these include upper case and lower case charts. For very beginning writers, upper case letters are often used due to their visual simplicity. Flip charts with different colored letters and backgrounds are also included to meet students' different vision needs.

- Black letters on white background



- White letters on black background
- Yellow letters on red background
- Black letters on white and blue background

Additional supplemental flip systems have been included.

Crayon Flip Chart: This is great for use with younger kids. The crayon flip chart allows kids to go into their crayon box and select the crayon color that will be used for writing with the print flip charts.

Writing Tools/Color Flip Chart: This allows students to select the writing tool that will be used for the print flip chart writing, as well as the writing tool color.

Number Flip Chart: This has been included to integrate literacy and math. This is used in the same manner as the print alphabet flip chart. The only difference is that “add a sign” is used instead of “add a space.”

Student communication is a necessary part of any literacy activity. To support communication during writing, a variety of supplemental communication symbols have been included on the CD. The symbols have been made in different colors to support students’ different visual needs.

Talk About It Symbol/Erase Symbol: These supplemental symbols can be used on a single message device or a choice board so that the student can initiate an interaction about their writing or a change in their writing, during writing.

Go to Numbers Symbol/Go to Letters Symbols: These symbols have been added so that during writing, students can go back and forth between writing with the alphabet flip chart and the number flip chart.

Getting Started With the Print Flip Chart

When beginning with the flip chart, it is important to recognize that the flip chart is simply a pencil. It is essential to use this pencil for a wide variety of purposeful and motivating writing activities.

To use the flip chart, students should be positioned with as much support as possible to promote their most optimal head/eye control. For some, this may mean being seated in the wheelchair. For others, this may mean being curled up in a caregiver’s lap. Helpers need to have piece of paper, a paper pad or the student’s journal attached/velcroed to the flip chart. During writing, it is essential that the student’s writing remain in front of them where it can be easily seen.

The partner faces the student and holds the Print Flip Chart where the student can easily see the letters. Because the student cannot directly point to letters themselves, “partner assisted scanning” is used to allow them to select letters. We, the assisting partner, are in charge of scanning/pointing to the various pages/letters for the student. When we are pointing to what they want, the student indicates their choice in a way that is the easiest. Specific directions for doing partner assisted scanning are described in the section: Directions for Using Partner Assisted Scanning to Write with the Print Flip Chart.



During writing time with the flip chart, when the student is making a choice, keep the conversation, questions and/or comments to a minimum. While the social interaction is critical, it is important to pause and give the student ample time to look at the letter. Remember, students need the time to visually process the print. Many students do this best when there is no auditory distraction, especially students with cortical vision impairment.

When the student has selected a letter, stop and write it down. When resuming the scan, start on the same letter. This will give the student a chance to experiment with and write the same letter, similar to typical children who frequently repeat letters. Throughout the activity, give the student opportunities to stop, re-read and talk about writing together. When finished, it is essential to do something with the student's writing in order to show them that writing is for a real purpose...send home that card to mom, post student's writing on the classroom bulletin board, write a thank you note to the office staff, write letters in a classroom alphabet book, sign name on a piece of art work, make a journal entry that is re-visited often etc. MOTIVATION is a must!

When to Use the Symbols “Turn the Page,” “Add a Space,” and “Finished”

The symbols “turn the page,” “add a space,” and “finished,” have been included with the flip chart. It is important to attach these to all of your flip charts right from the start. Over the past couple of years, we have gained some important insights about when to use these symbols during writing. These are just suggestions and take them as such. You know your child/student the best!

For any student, the first couple of times that you use the flip chart, it is helpful to scan through each of the letters one at a time, in a linear fashion. This familiarizes them with what this pencil is and how it might be used. Make sure that you model writing with the flip chart prior to asking the student to write with the chart.

For students who are experienced with print and have a sense of what it is and what it is used for, it may be appropriate to use the symbols during writing. Using the symbols speeds up the process. When the student selects “turn the page” picture, the helper turns the page to the next page of letters. The student does this until they get to a page that they are interested in. Once they are on a desired page, the helper scans through each item one at a time, first through “add a space,” and then through each letter one at a time. (This process simulates “rowcolumn” scanning and can be helpful for students who are learning how to do this for an AAC device or computer activity.) It is important to always scan to “finished,” at the end of each letter row so that the student can end the activity.

For students who have had little experience and understanding of print, using the communication symbols to “turn the page” and “add a space” may not be helpful. When these students use the flip chart, their writing may be random and sporadic. They frequently choose the letters as they are presented and may not be paying attention to the flip chart. These students may be just beginning to learn what the alphabet is, so introducing the concept of turning the page or making a “space,” may not be appropriate. Rather, the student should be



spending lots of time on simply understanding the concept of the alphabet and the purpose of writing, with the adult attributing meaning to all of the student's attempts. For these students, the communication symbols can simply be folded back when not in use.

Directions for Using Partner Assisted Scanning to Write with the Print Flip Chart

When writing with your student, there are two different specific modes of presenting the letters and pages on the flip chart. These modes are described in the following section.

Letter-by-Letter Mode

Does not use the communication symbols

Page-by-Page Mode

Uses the communication symbols

See the discussion earlier in the guide for choosing which mode to use with your student. Below describes how to do partner assisted scanning with your student using the flip chart. A variety of methods are offered; pick the one that suits your student's needs. For more detailed information about partner assisted scanning, go to Linda Burkhart's website:

www.lindaburkhart.com.

1 SIGNAL Partner Assisted Scanning

Using 1 Signal No Tech Partner Assisted Scanning

"No tech" means that the student will indicate their preferences using natural gestures and no equipment. Have the student use their most reliable natural communication as their way of indicating a choice. Common strategies are: smiling, raising eyebrows, vocalizing, or lifting an arm. No tech methods are typically used when students do not have any reliable switch skills/site or when their switch skills breakdown.

Letter-by-Letter Mode (simulates "linear" scanning)

- The partner begins by pointing to "a." The partner slowly moves through the letters, pausing an equal amount of time between each letter. The partner can say and/or sign the letter name, or silently scan through the letters. Remember to keep talk to a minimum so student can focus on the letters.
- When the partner is pointing to what the student wants, the student uses their no tech signal to select the letter to be written.
- The partner immediately writes down the student's selection. When scanning is resumed, the partner starts on the SAME letter that the student just selected.
- The partner scans through the alphabet in order from a-z.

Page-by-Page Mode (simulates "row-column" scanning)

- The partner begins by pointing to "turn the page." If the student uses their no tech signal to select "turn the page," the partner turns the page. The partner begins the scan on



“turn the page” again so that the student has the opportunity to go through the flip chart page by page. (This simulates row scanning.)

- When the student does not use their no tech signal to turn the page, the partner continues scanning on that page, through “add a space,” each of the letters and then through “finished.” (This simulates column scanning.)
- The partner slowly moves through the items, pausing an equal amount of time between each item. The partner can say and/or sign the letter name, or silently scan through the letters. Remember to keep talk to a minimum so student can focus on the letters/items.
- The partner stops on an item when the student uses their no tech signal to indicate the letter to be written.
- The partner immediately writes down the student’s selection. When scanning is resumed, the partner starts on the SAME letter that the student just selected.
- The partner scans through the alphabet in order from a-z.

In some cases, students’ natural communications are not clear and reliable. It may be helpful to provide more feedback and clarification through using a single message device as described below.

Using 1 Switch Partner Assisted Scanning

This can be accomplished using 1 single message device, such as the BigMack (Ablenet) or the Chipper (Adaptivation). Record on it: “that’s it”, “I want that” or “that’s the one.” Position the single message device in a place that is the easiest for them to touch. You can also plug a switch into it. The partner slowly flips through the flip chart according to the processes described above.

Considering the Use of 2-Signal Partner Assisted Scanning

Using the above 1-signal method, the partner controls the speed and movement through the pages and letters. This can be tough for some students, as it requires them to react within a specific time. If that is a problem for your student, using 2-signal partner assisted scanning may be helpful in decreasing reaction time demands. Many students struggle to simply use 1 switch, so using more switches may appear difficult. However, for many students we have seen that removing the reaction demands may improve their motor skills and the ability to learn to use other switches.

The most important consideration in choosing a partner assisted scan method is that when students are using a 1-signal method, they are in a passive role, simply waiting. A state that often contributes to learned helplessness and decreased attention. Using a 2-signal method, students are more actively engaged and involved, with increased control of the activity, increased attention and more opportunities to learn.

2 SIGNAL Partner Assisted Scanning

Using 2 Signal No Tech Partner Assisted Scanning

As described earlier, “no tech” means that the student will indicate their preferences using natural gestures. The student should use their most reliable natural communication as their way of indicating a choice. Common strategies are: smiling, raising eyebrows, vocalizing, or lifting an



arm. No tech methods are typically used when students do not have any reliable switch skills/site or when their switch skills breakdown. An example of 2-signal no tech scanning would be the use of a frown and a smile. The student can frown to indicate, “no not that one—go onto the next one.” This serves as a way to move the partner to the next choice. The student can then smile to say “yes-that’s what I want.” See the 2switch process below, and simply use a frown for the MOVER switch and a smile for the PICKER switch.

Using 2 Switch Partner Assisted Scanning

This can be accomplished using 2 single message devices, such as the BigMack (Ablenet) or the Chipper (Adaptivation). These are helpful when the student’s natural gestures are unclear. The student uses one device as the “MOVER” to tell the partner to turn to the next page or to point to the next letter. The student uses the other device as the “PICKER” to select a particular page or letter.

- Record the “MOVER” device with a message such as: “next,” “move” or “go.” It may even be helpful to color code it green for “go.”
- Record the “PICKER” device with a message such as: “that’s it” or “I want that.” It may even be helpful to color code it red for “stop here.”
- Position the 2 single message devices in places where the student can easily press them. It’s helpful if the “MOVER” switch is in place where they can repeatedly hit the switch. (Switches can also be plugged into the single message devices).

Letter-by-Letter Mode (simulates “linear” scanning)

- The partner begins by pointing to “a.” Each time the student presses the “MOVER” device, the partner goes to the next letter and WAITS.
- The partner does not go to the next item until the student says so; this decreases anticipation and gives the student the opportunity to checkout the letters without fear of having the page changed.
- Each time the student hits the “MOVER” switch the partner moves and points to the next letter. The partner can say and/or sign the letter name, or silently scan through the letters. Remember to keep talk to a minimum so student can focus on the letters.
- When the partner is pointing to what the student wants, the student presses the “PICKER” switch to indicate the letter to be written.
- The partner immediately writes down the student’s selection. When scanning is resumed, the partner starts on the SAME letter that the student just selected.
- The partner scans through the alphabet in order from a-z.

Page-by-Page Mode (simulates “row-column” scanning)

- The partner begins by pointing to “turn the page.” If the student uses the “PICKER” switch to select “turn the page,” the partner turns the page and WAITS. To turn the page again, the student continues to use their “PICKER” switch to communicate this message. This allows the student to go through the flip chart by page, making scanning faster. This simulates scanning through “rows” on a communication device or computer program.



- When the student gets to the page (or row) they want, they stop using the “PICKER” switch and instead, use the “MOVER” switch to move the partner through each item on the page. This simulates “column” scanning. The partner then scans through “add a space,” each of the letters and then through “finished.”
- Each time the student hits the “MOVER” switch the partner moves and points to the next letter. The partner can say and/or sign the letter name or item, or silently scan through the letters and items. Remember to keep talk to a minimum so student can focus on the choices.
- The partner stops on an item when the student uses their “PICKER” switch.
- When the partner is pointing to what the student wants, the student presses the “PICKER” switch to indicate the letter to be written.
- The partner immediately writes down the student’s selection. When scanning is resumed, the partner starts on the SAME letter that the student just selected.
- The partner scans through the alphabet in order from a-z.

Using 2 Switch Partner Assisted Scanning with Visual Feedback

For students with a hearing loss, switch adapted, colored closet lights can be substituted for the single message devices. Students can press a switch to signal the green light, to tell the partner to keep moving through pages/letters. A red light can be used to pick or stop on a page or letter.

Important Note: For any partner assisted scanning where the student uses a switch or no tech method to signal “MOVE,” the partner does not “MOVE” to the next item until the student says so. This decreases anticipation and gives the student the opportunity to check out the letters without fear of having the partner move on to the next item before the student has had a chance to make a selection. Most students with significant disabilities have great difficulty with reaction time due to their motor impairments. Increasing their anticipation may make responding even more difficult.

A Couple of Extra Tips:

Model the use of the symbols so that the students begin to learn what they mean.

Be prepared for students to not make a selection. The idea of writing may be very foreign for our students. They may be busy simply studying and processing the letters. In comparison to typically developing children, most students with significant disabilities have had extremely limited opportunities to look at print, so it is important to give them this time. They may be thinking about the activity and what they want to write. Like any of us, students need to see what the choices are before they pick something. Just start over and scan through the choices again.

Minimize the YES/NO questions and flip and point through the Print Alphabet Flip Chart with minimal talk and/or sign to simply say the letter. We want students to be focusing on the letters and thinking about their writing. If we ask them too many questions, we may overload them with too much language.



General Teaching Strategies

MODEL, MODEL, MODEL

Watching peers and adults engaged in an activity or completing a skill is a primary means by which children learn. Language and communication in particular require modeling. Children who are learning to use an alternative pencil need to see the people in their family/classroom model its use.

Attribute Meaning

When typical children begin scribbling and writing, their attempts are random and their intentions and writing are unclear to adults. However, based on the context, the adult attributes meaning to the child's attempts. A random mark made by a young child might be interpreted (and celebrated!) as helping mom write the grocery list or paying a bill. This happens repeatedly over time, and this helps the child begin to understand what they are doing and what their writing means. This strategy is equally important to use with students with significant disabilities.

Pause

When presenting choices, seeking a communication, or asking a question, wait at least 10 seconds (or more!) and keep the talk to a minimum. While the social interaction is critical, it is important to pause and give the student ample time to look at the letter/touch the Braille. Students need time to process the activity, process the print/Braille, think about their choices, and the time to make their body respond. Many students do this best when there is little or no auditory distraction, especially students with cortical vision impairment.

Do “Think Outlouds”

As experienced readers/writers, there are a lot of basic things we have learned about literacy that are unspoken and assumed. Things such as: what writing is for; the functions of writings (lists, letters); and the relationship between letters, sounds, and words; are not obvious to children who are just getting started accessing the alphabet. Given vision, hearing, and motor issues, many students with significant disabilities have even more difficulty understanding this hidden information. Therefore, talking/signing about what you're doing and why will provide an important learning support.

Provide DAILY Opportunities

Skills can't be learned without regular, successful practice. Children without disabilities write every day from the time they enter school, and many write every day beginning when they are very young and begin using crayons, markers, and chalk at home. Students with significant disabilities rarely have this level of opportunity - a fact that greatly influences their literacy learning progress. Daily opportunities to use the alphabet display in the way a very beginning writer might scribble or otherwise explore writing tools is important.

AVOID Testing and Known-Answer Questions

Examples of testing or known-answer questions are: “Find the letter ___”, “Show me the letter ___.” These should be avoided as students are just beginning to learn how to manipulate the



alphabet. Instead, ask them to write; work with them to interpret their selections; and write down the letters they select on a piece of paper, white board, computer, or something the child can see.

Connect The Print to Things the Student Knows About

Writing is about constructing meaning with print. When connecting the print to things the student already knows, it helps them make sense of the print. For example, Jake writes: “mmhymp.” His mom comments/signs: “Wow, you’ve written a lot of Ms—that’s the first letter of your brother’s name—Max!”

Keep Copies of Students’ Written Work and Celebrate!

Start accumulating a pile of student writings to share and revisit. Date them and put them up in places for all to see - especially the student. Don’t forget the refrigerator door! Change occurs over time so keep everything!

Sample Goals for Emergent Writers

These are examples of goals that are appropriate for very beginning students who may be “scribbling” and just starting to learn about the alphabet and the purpose of print and writing.

- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics using the appropriate assistive technologies, student will choose a topic from his home/school log, photo journal, or other source, with <insert level of support>, 4 out of 5 days.
- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics using the appropriate assistive technologies, the student will demonstrate increased complexity in writing as indicated by changes in letter combinations and spaces, 2 out of 5 days.
- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics using the appropriate assistive technologies, the student will demonstrate increased complexity in writing as indicated by X or more word-like groupings, 2 out of 5 days.
- During writing with the full alphabet, student will independently activate a single message device programmed with “that’s it,” X or more times, on 3 out of 5 days.
- During writing with the full alphabet, student will independently activate two single message devices with “that’s it,” and “not that one,” with <insert level of support>, on X or more times, on 3 out of 5 days.
- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics, the student will demonstrate increased engagement with the Braille as demonstrated by participating with hand under hand facilitator support for 50% of the letter entries <insert level of support>, 2 out of 5 days.
- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics, the student will demonstrate increased engagement with the visual print as demonstrated by visual attention to 50% of the letter entries with <insert level of support>, 2 out of 5 days.
- Given daily opportunities to write about self-selected, personally meaningful topics, the student will demonstrate increased engagement with the Braille by reaching out with an



open hand to reread their Braille writing for 50% of the letter entries <insert level of support>, 2 out of 5 days.

Fun Activities

Alphabet Activities

Alphabet Scavenger Hunt: Student picks a letter and then you have to find something in that room that begins with that letter. Write down things as you find them and talk about them.

Write Letter Books: Students picks letter for pages of letter book. The helper writes the letter on the book page. Together the student(s) work with the helper to find an appropriate picture for that particular letter page.

Words About Things I Know: Student picks a letter and then together you make a list of words that begin with that letter - that are related to things the student knows. Write them down and talk about them. It can be especially motivating to select actions, pictures and foods that the student is familiar with. Can later create a short letter/object book with the things you talk about.

Tongue Twisters: Student picks a letter and then you make up a short tongue twister using that letter. Write it down and talk about it. These can also be typed into a talking word processor for the student to reread later (using a switch as needed).

Wheel of Fortune/Hangman: You think of a short word or phrase that the student is familiar with and draw the lines for the letters. Give student the category that it is in (person, place, animal). As the student picks letters, you either write them on the correct line or in a separate space where un-needed letters are collected. As the letters are selected, you could cover them on the alternative pencil with small sticky-notes - this will help the child know which letter it is not. Make it fun by recording a game show buzzer on a single message device, and ask the student to indicate when they are ready to pick another letter (Free sound effects available on web). Some teachers have done this activity with students' names, favorite people's names, new word wall words, favorite books and the daily lunch menu.

Writing Activities

Write Picture Captions: Offer the student things such as favorite photos from a family photo album or pictures from a magazine or wordless book. Ask the student to pick one and then write about it. Don't expect students who are just getting started to write words or correct sentences. As students get started, they are likely to select random letters that are quite difficult to relate to the photo or picture selected.

Start a Journal: Most typical early writers experience writing in a journal. They often draw a picture and write about it - beginning well before they can actually spell any words or even write letters correctly. The same activity can be modified for students with significant disabilities. Ask the student to write by selecting letters from the alternative pencil, record the exact selections in a journal, and keep adding to it over time.



Create a Remnant/Scrap Book: Collect remnants (food labels, movie tickets, receipts, napkin from McDonald's), pictures, or objects that reflect the activities, experiences, and events that occur in the student's every day life. Have the student choose a remnant to write about. Glue their choice into a journal, or slip them into plastic page protectors, and have the student use the Print Alphabet Flip Chart to write about it. Record exactly what the student chooses. Talk about it and add the date. For more information, see the CD handout: Creating Remnant Books.

Sign Name for a Real Purpose: It can be motivating to have students sign their name for a purpose, such as on artwork, reminder notes to family members, and holiday/special occasion cards. Record exactly what they choose on the Print Alphabet Flip Chart. DO NOT provide a model for the student to copy while name writing, but make sure there are lots of models of name writing and use throughout the day. The helper can model name writing with the student's pencil after the student has made an attempt. Other sample purposes for signing name: morning sign in, sign up for lunch choice, signing a library card to checkout a book, signing in for a therapy session, signing up for a classroom station.

Student Writing Samples

Student: Jake

13 year old with cerebral palsy and deaf-blindness

Environment: Home

Task: Free Writing (first explorations with the Print Alphabet Flip Chart)

Tools: Print Alphabet Flip Chart with 2-switch partner assisted scanning (used 2 switches plugged into 2 colored closet lights) Used remnant book filled with personally meaningful remnants/pictures to select topic

It is important to see that change occurs over time-no different than typically developing children who are just learning to write.

6/29/04 Free Writing
ejk

6/29/04 Free Writing
kquj

7/1/04 Free Writing
zomjhaacvn

7/14/04 Free Writing
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagnv



7/14/04 Topic: Chose to Write About Going to
Movies (Movie Stub in Remnant Book)
aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaabbbbbbbcddeeeeeefffffffffff
fffffgggggiiijjkkmooqtxxxxxy

8/04 Topic: Note to Gretchen
ejgabdecaaaaaaaaaaaaa

8/05 Topic: Going to
Greensboro
iszfijkm

9/05 Topic: Going to the
doctor's
jmwwwmosuz

10/05 Topic: Mom being away on vacation for 2
weeks
iijkkklmwwwyzzjjjjkmmmmuuuuuvz

12/05 Topic: My New Remote Control Dinosaur
ac dad jk kk m m r r rs u u uwz begh jj j m vv w