

Reading and writing equipment

The ability to read and write is important for both children and adults as it allows the opportunity to learn and create.

There are a number of aids available that may assist people to read and write more easily.



Writing

Grips

Pens and pencils that have a built-up handle are generally easier to grasp for people with weak or painful hands. The larger grip can help ease strain on hands and wrists and may improve writing control.

One of the cheapest and simplest options for building up the handle width is to use foam tubing. It is soft to grip and available in a variety of sizes and densities.

There are a variety of commercially available pen and pencil grips which are used to assist with correct grip and help reduce finger fatigue. These include conical shaped foam grips, rubber grips that are triangular, contoured or moulded and foam or plastic spherical grips. Pens with inbuilt moulded finger grips are also available to assist with grasp.

Pens for children

Some pen grips are specifically designed for use by children. Correct positioning is encouraged through the use of a star image with a smiley face located on the handle shaft. This is designed to point up towards the user when the pen is held in the accurate position. Larger crayon/pencils or crayon grips are also available to assist with grasp.

Weighted pens

Wrist weights or weighted pens may assist unsteady hands, although the additional weight can increase fatigue in some users.

Specialised pens

Another option is a pen which features an offset nib that is designed to make the writer exert pressure directly above the pen tip, reducing writing strain and increasing visibility.

If finger-thumb opposition is limited there are a range of specific writing aids that do not require thumb use. One example of this is a ring pen that is held in place by a plastic ring that slips over the middle finger with the adjacent fingers providing support. This can also be used on a toe for writing with the foot if required.

A solid plastic moulded pen holder is available which fits into the palm of the hand. The pen is secured in front of the fingers. Upper arm strength, rather than finger control, moves the pen.

Other products use a moulded orthosis to wrap around the hand and fingers to minimise the need to maintain a pincer grasp while writing.

If purchasing a commercially available pen it may be worth considering that pens with felt tips, rolling balls or gel ink require less pressure to put ink on paper and tend to write more smoothly.

Low vision

A writing template may assist people whose writing skills are limited by their vision. Writing templates feature a plastic sheet with a cut out section that acts as a guide for writing. Writing paper with well-defined black lines may also help act as a guide for writing in straight lines.

Correct positioning and posture

Correct desk and chair height supports the best positioning for writing and may assist in reducing fatigue. Feet should be flat on the floor or resting on a footrest, thighs parallel to the floor, back comfortably supported by the backrest and elbows level with the desk height. Remove any clutter from the desktop.

- A **footrest** may be of help to enable correct positioning of feet if the desk height is not adjustable or too high.
- An **adjustable height chair** with or without an adjustable backrest (for example an office type chair) will facilitate good posture.
- An **angled writing surface** may help prevent neck, shoulder and back pain by improving the working position.
- **Lighting** is also important—ensure it is strong enough, free of excessive glare and does not create shadows over the written work.

Alternatives

Typewriters and computers may provide an easier alternative for producing written communication for some people.

Reading

Book holders

For people who have difficulty holding books, a book holder may be of assistance. Many book holders are adjustable and allow the book to be positioned at a good angle and height for the individual. Book holders come in a range of sizes that span from models that hold large broadsheet newspapers to smaller more portable models. Some book holders are also designed to enable the user to read while lying in bed, others are for use while seated or in conjunction with a table.

Overbed tables

Overbed (Overway) tables may be useful for reading or writing in a bed or chair. They are generally height adjustable and may feature a tilting tabletop for better positioning. Some models have a split tabletop that allows items to be placed on the fixed flat surface while the reading/writing surface is tilted during use.

Page turners

People who have difficulties turning pages in a book may benefit from a page-turner. These range from simple rubber thimbles that clip on to the hand to automatic electronic switch and sensor operated devices.

Low vision

There are a range of magnifying sheets, magnifying lamps and magnifying torches that can assist people with visual difficulties in reading tasks. Scanners can move across a page of text and magnify the words onto a large screen. It is important to note that many of these items can only be purchased with a valid referral from an appropriate eye care professional in order to get the most accurate magnification range.

Other reading aids

Prism glasses allow a user to read lying down by utilising prisms to alter the direction of view. Large print reading materials may also be helpful.

Contacting the Independent Living Centre

For further information or to make an appointment to visit the display please contact the Independent Living Centre. The Independent Living Centre offers free advice on equipment and techniques to help you with everyday tasks.

Independent Living Centre
11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086

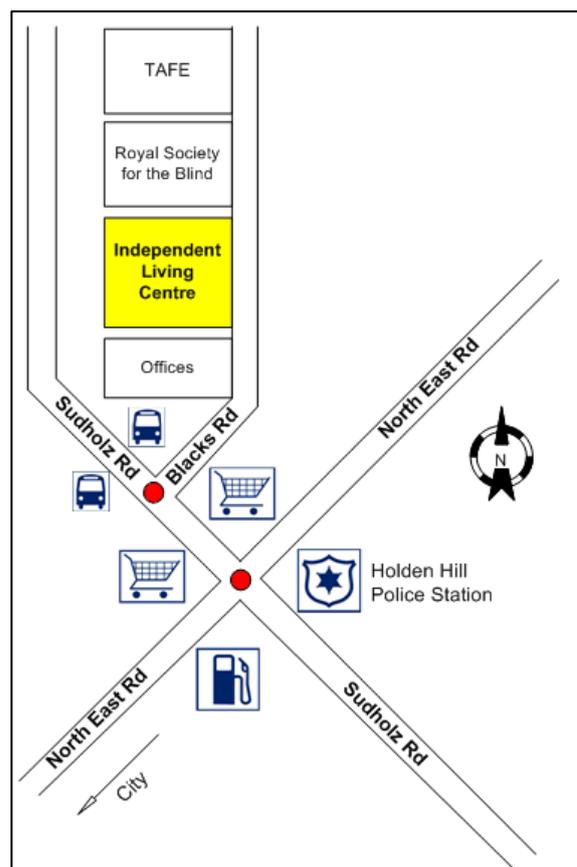
Phone: 1300 885 886 (SA & NT callers only) or 8266 5260

Email: ilcsa@dcsi.sa.gov.au

Website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc

Accessible off street parking is available.

Bus services run nearby. Call 8210 1000 for timetable information.



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