

Teacher Checklist: When to Request a School-Based OT Assessment for Fine Motor Skills

Step 1: Determine Educational Impact

- Fine motor challenges are affecting classroom performance or participation.
- Difficulties make it hard to complete written work, manipulate tools, or work independently.
- Fine motor issues are causing frustration, avoidance, or decreased confidence.

Step 2: Observe Common Fine Motor Challenges

A. Handwriting

- Handwriting is consistently illegible or very slow compared to peers.
- Student struggles with letter formation, spacing, or staying on the line.
- Difficulty copying from the board or worksheets accurately.
- Poor pencil control
- Frequent hand fatigue, shaking, or dropping the pencil.

B. Tool and Material Use

- Difficulty cutting with scissors or using glue appropriately.
- Trouble manipulating small objects (beads, Legos, coins, manipulatives).
- Difficulty using classroom tools (ruler, stapler, math manipulatives, etc.).
- Avoids or becomes upset during fine motor tasks (art, STEM, crafts).

C. Self-Care in the School Environment

- Difficulty with clothing fasteners (zippers, buttons) during dressing or toileting.
- Trouble opening snack or lunch containers independently.

D. Classroom Function and Participation

- Needs extra time to complete assignments involving writing or cutting.
- Avoids or rushes through fine motor tasks.
- Displays frustration, off-task behavior, or decreased endurance during fine motor work.

Step 3: Classroom Strategies Attempted

- Tried adapted writing tools (pencil grips, thicker pencils, slant board).
- Offered alternative formats (typing, dictation).
- Provided visual or lined paper supports for spacing and alignment.
- Incorporated fine motor warm-ups, breaks, or strengthening activities.
- Documented response to these strategies (improved / unchanged).

Step 4: Next Steps

- Fine motor challenges persist despite classroom strategies.
- Difficulties are significantly impacting access to the curriculum.
- Teacher has collected specific examples of classroom impact.
- Information shared with IEP or Student Support Team (SST) to discuss possible OT referral.

Important Note:

Occupational therapy is considered a related service under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** and rarely stands alone on an IEP. Not all students who demonstrate fine motor difficulties meet the eligibility criteria for special education services.

Therefore, these students may not qualify for school-based occupational therapy. In such cases, the occupational therapist can often provide general classroom strategies, environmental adaptations, or activity recommendations that can benefit any student without the need for a formal assessment or ongoing OT services.