

Test Track

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Overview

Test track is a floor game that allows children to build simple and intricate, straight and curvy tracks for small cars to drive on while simultaneously working with the shapes that are the building blocks of writing the ABCs.

Instructional Objective

Test track serves as a precursor to the highly effective Handwriting Without Tears method for teaching letter and numeral formation to children (Donica, 2015; *Handwriting Without Tears*, n.d.). Children will work with long and short lines and big and small curves. These basic symbols are the simplest components of the English alphabet; these concepts and materials will serve as the backbone to their use of Handwriting Without Tears lessons and materials. Additionally, many factors of the game are designed to support and strengthen fine motor skills to aid young children in learning to form the proper pencil grip (*Fine Motor Development*, n.d.). The District of Columbia's Early Learning Standard LL.3.III.2 for Pre-Kindergarten states that, "Children use emergent writing skills to make letters," (Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2008). Test Track is designed to help them do so.

Learners

The target users of Test Track are children ages 3-5 who have not started to or have just begun writing and forming English alphabet letters. Older children who are struggling with fine motor skills or letter formation could benefit from Test Track, as well. The game is designed so that after learning instructions and playing a few sample rounds with an adult that young children can play with no adult intervention. Test Track is a cooperative game that can be played by a single player or up to three players working together. There are five levels learners can progress through as their skills grow and they feel prepared. Additionally, while this game utilizes the wooden lines and curves from the Handwriting Without Tears materials set, the shapes could be made using cardstock, allowing students and teachers from all socioeconomic backgrounds to participate in this game.

Motivation

Test Track is designed to provide a fun, yet challenging way for students to work with the smallest, broken-down components of forming letters. Learners playing the game will simply notice the specific tracks they are asked to build and then how much fun they have rolling vehicles all over them! Letter writing can be daunting to some young learners and Test Track is here to help break it down into something simple and fun that gets more challenging as they are ready!

Context of Use

Test Track is a supplemental or introductory concept game to letter writing. It can be used in conjunction with the Handwriting Without Tears program or with many other more traditional methods for teaching handwriting to young learners.

Scope

Test Track is a floor game that physically requires roughly one 4x6 foot area to play. Test Track is designed to take roughly 20 minutes for children who are able and ready to complete levels 1-5 in succession. However, due to the fun, play-based nature of the game, the maker of Test Track suspects a small group of children could engage with it for much longer! The scope of the content includes simple familiarization and tactile understanding of big and little lines and curves, the building blocks of letters. The game design includes instructions and suggestions for ways to extend the use of this game for further help in letter-forming and fine motor work.

Object of the Game

Test Track is a cooperative game, so there is no single winner. The game is complete when children have built a track using cards from all five levels in succession and have rolled their vehicles through it.

Design Details

Test Track is designed for children who are just starting to work with letters and letter formation, so I used a font in the materials that more closely mimics actual handwritten letters. For example, we do not typically write, "a." We write it like this: "a." I used color on the game challenge cards to help differentiate between levels but aimed to keep the cards fairly simplistic and not too colorful so as to not overwhelm the learner.

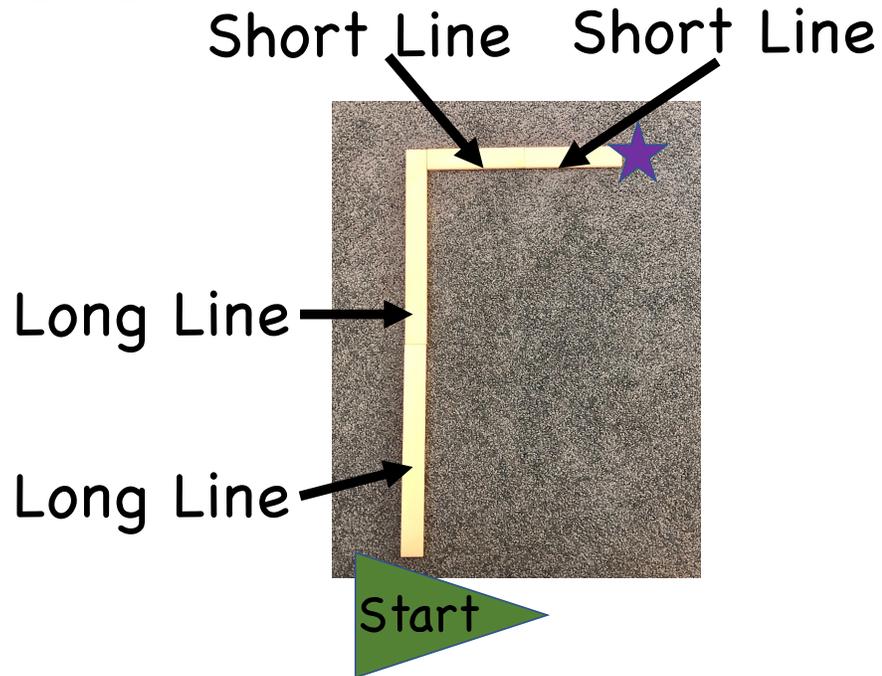
Materials and Game Pieces

On the next few pages you will find the challenge cards. One card for each level is included in full size and the rest are sized down for brevity. After the challenge cards, you will find all other materials needed for the game as well as instructions and extension opportunities.

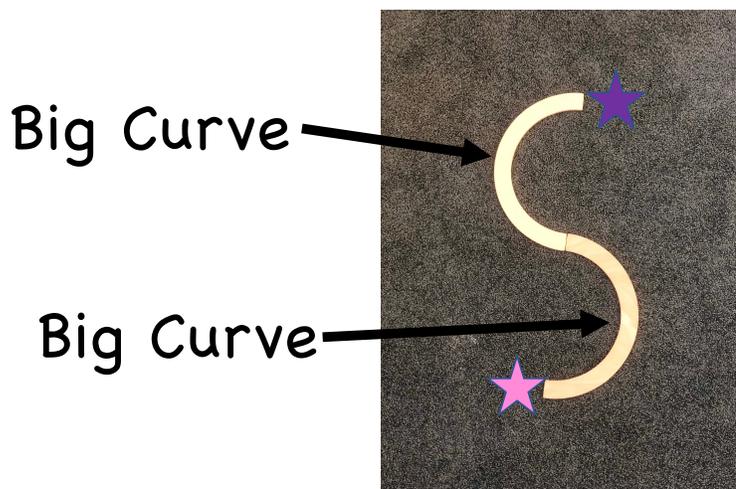
Notes about the challenge cards:

- All "Level 1" cards use two small lines and two long lines. All "Level 2" cards use two big curves. All "Level 3" cards use two small curves. These three levels are designed to be a bit easier than the next two to build skills and confidence.
- All "Level 4" cards use one of each shape: big curve, small curve, long line, and short line. All "Level 5" cards use two of each shape.
- Save "Level 1" and "Level 5," all cards have a pink and a purple star. The instructions will tell the learner to always connect location of the pink star to that of the purple star on the previous card. "Level 1" and "Level 5" have a "Start" and a "Finish" sign in place of one of the stars as they are the beginning and end of the track.
- The cards are designed to be visual but they still incorporate labels for each curve or line. This is to keep the game full of print for the learners to connect to the pictures and also to encourage adults who are playing to use the most helpful language.

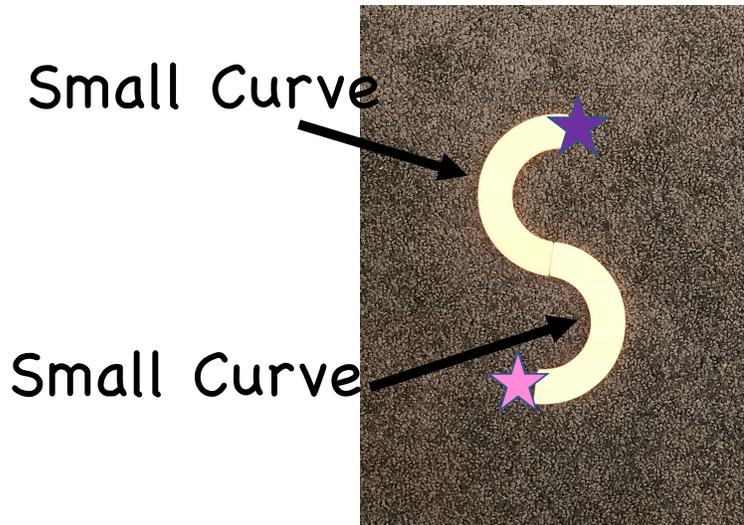
Level 1



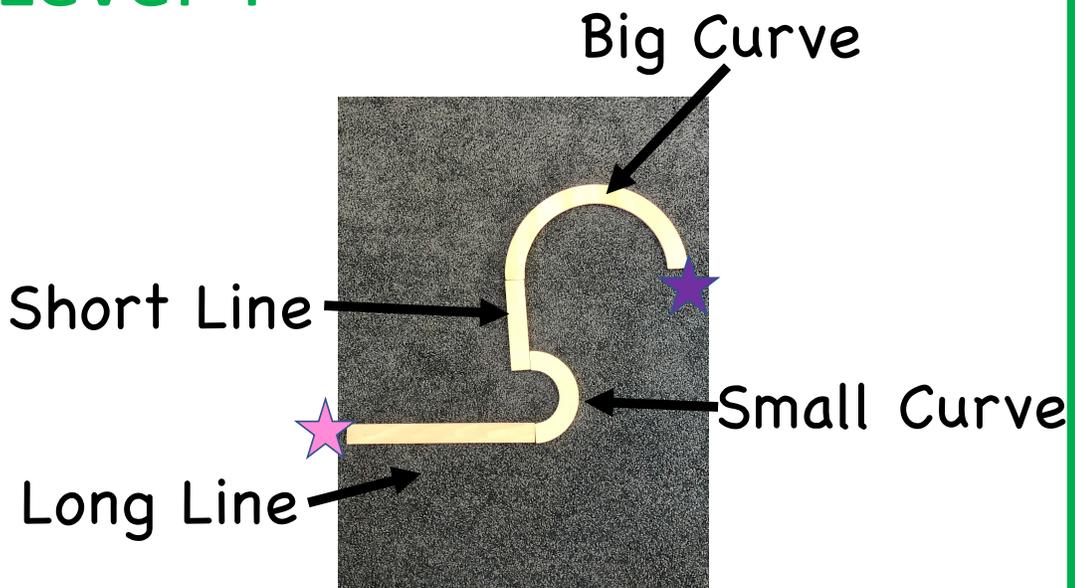
Level 2



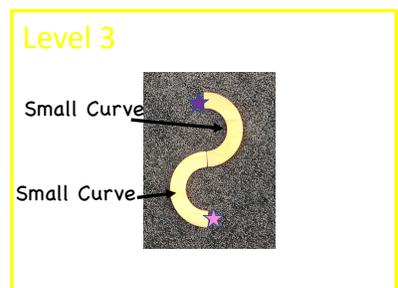
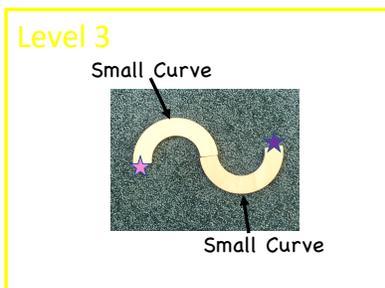
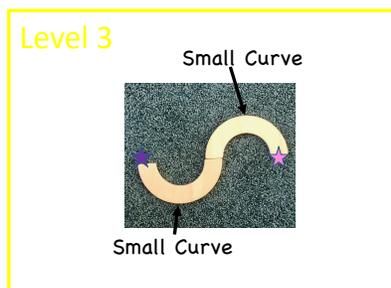
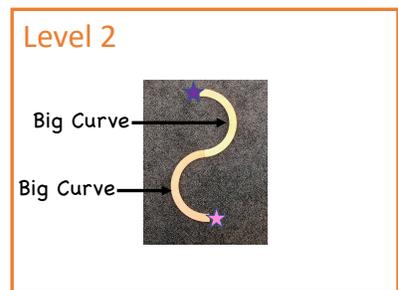
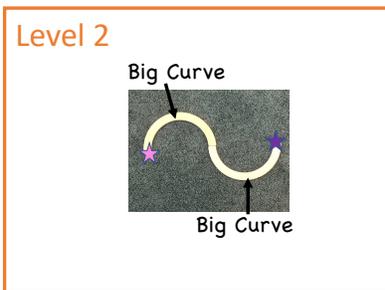
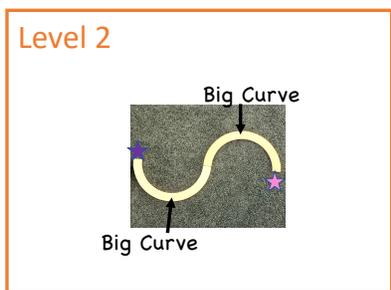
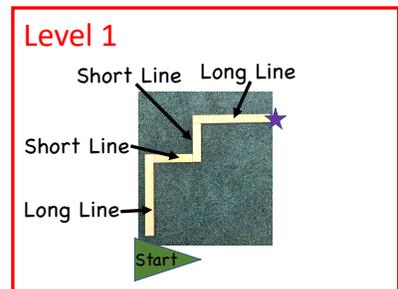
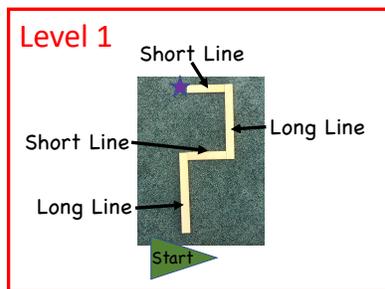
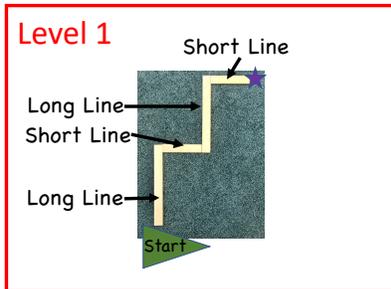
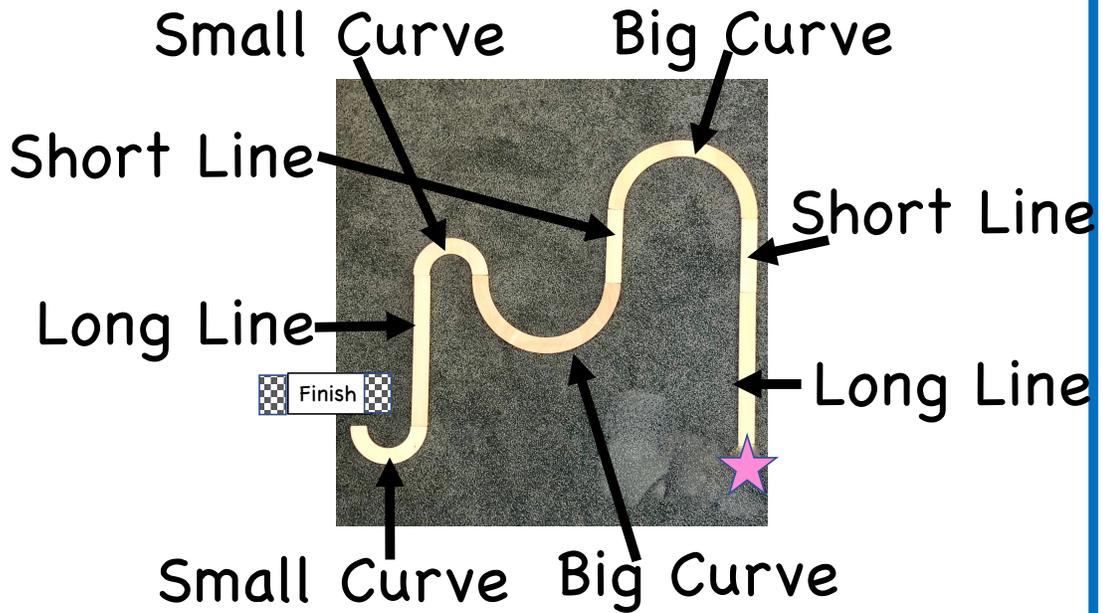
Level 3

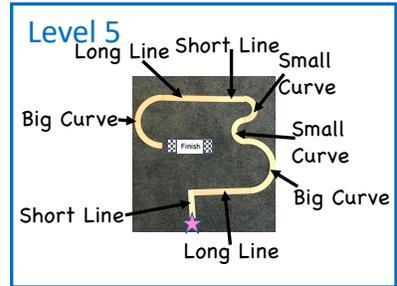
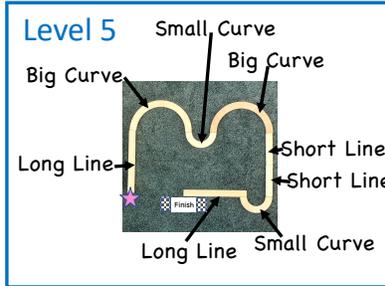
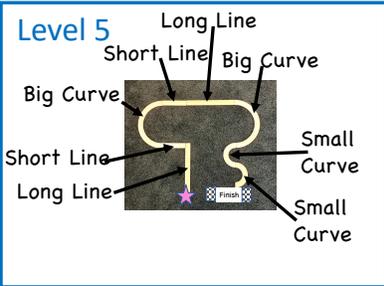
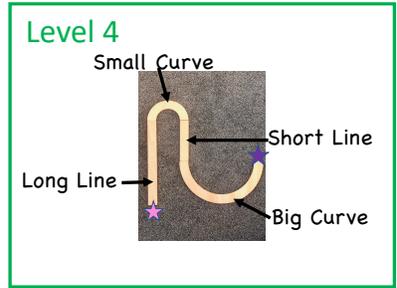
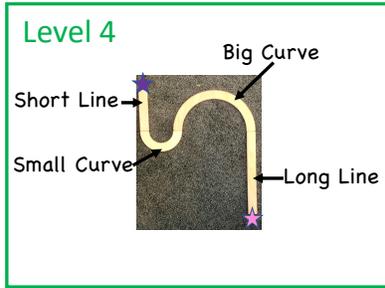
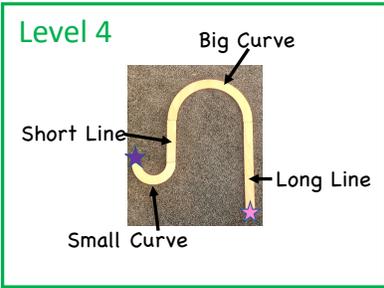


Level 4

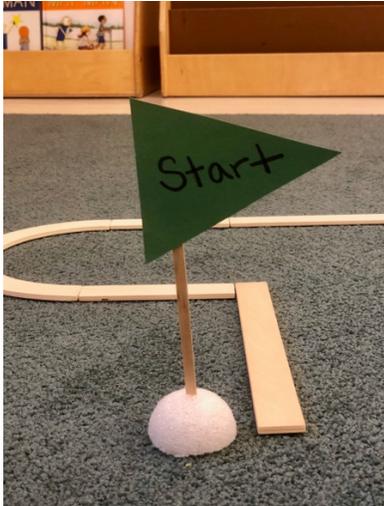


Level 5

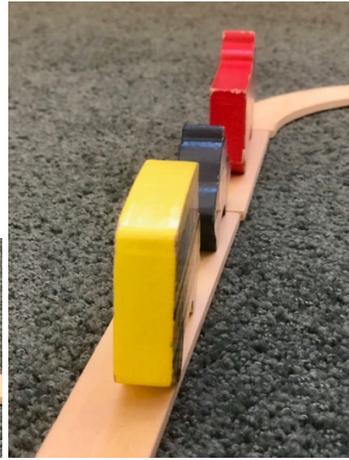




Game Pieces



The "Start" and "Finish" signs indicate the beginning and ending of the track and correlate with the symbols on the challenge cards.



The vehicles that learners get to drive all over their tracks are intentionally very thin. This is to encourage children to hold their fingers more closely together, almost pinching the vehicle and thus working their fine motor skills. Strong fine motor skills lead to a stronger pencil grip (*Fine Motor Development*, n.d.).



The pink and purple stars are used on the challenge cards to indicate where you will connect your level two track to your level one track, your level three to your level two, and so on and so forth. Test Track comes with many physical pink and purple stars to put on your wooden track. This is designed to help children visualize what they are seeing in the cards and connect tracks in a way in which they can be connected.

The Track



The track is made up of a set of wooden curves and lines. There are five of each size and shape. These are the same lines that are used for the Handwriting Without Tears system of learning handwriting.

Test Track

Note: The instructions to this game are intended to be read aloud by an adult. They are written in child-friendly language, so please feel free to read them verbatim. Also, please note that children who are just starting out with this game might not be ready to build levels 1-5 in succession yet—and that's okay! We recommend starting out with the simplest levels, 1-3 first. When your child is comfortable with levels 1-3, they are ready for the challenge of 4 and 5!

Welcome to Test Track, a game that challenges you to build different tracks for your vehicles! Here's how to play:

1. Choose your vehicle. You can be the red firetruck, the yellow school bus, or the blue and white police car.
2. Before you're ready to build, look at all of the wooden pieces. Notice the **long lines**, the **short lines**, the **big curves**, and **small curves**. Hold them and trace them with your fingers while saying each of their names!
3. Find the green triangle sign. That's the start sign!
4. Pick one red level 1 card. Use the wood pieces to build the same track you see on the card! Don't forget to put the green start sign and the purple star on your track.
5. Drive your vehicle on the track. Can you go all the way from the start sign to the star? Say the name of the piece while you roll over it. In level one, you'll say "long line" or "short line" when you go over the piece.
6. Let's make the track bigger. Pick an orange level 2 card. Use the wood pieces and the pink and purple stars to build the same track you see on the card. Here's where it gets tricky: make sure the pink star always connects to the purple star from the last track you just built!
7. Now that your track is longer, test it again by driving your vehicle all the way from the start to the last purple star! Say the name of the piece as you go over it. The new level 2 track has two "big curves!"
8. Pick one yellow level 3 card. Build the track making sure to always connect the pink star to the purple star from the last track. Test your track! Say the name of the pieces while you roll over them. Hint: The new level 3 track is made of two "small curves!"
9. Pick one green level 4 card. Build the track and test it with your vehicle. Don't forget to say the name of each piece as you roll over it!
10. Pick one blue level 5 card. Build the track. Place the black and white Finish sign where it belongs. Test your very long track by driving all the way from start to finish! Can you name all of the pieces as you roll over them? How fast can you go?

Opportunities and Ideas for Expansion

For children who are older or have simply mastered all of the levels, here are some suggestions for challenging them using our game materials and a few other handy household items.

- Race against a timer! Make sure to say the name of each piece of the wooden track and to roll over every corner and curve. Extra material needed: a kitchen or phone timer.
- Can you race the entire track backwards?
- Can you build a new track backwards? Start with the finish line on a level 5 card and work your way back down to level 1.
- Create your own track. Be sure to say the name of each piece as you roll over it!
- Can you draw the entire track? Try to draw each level as you build it. When you have created the whole track, try to draw the whole thing again! Extra materials needed: paper and pencils, crayons, or markers.
- Play "Designer & Builder" with a friend! The designer tells the builder which wooden piece to use next and the builder has to make it fit into place. You can both test the track with vehicles and draw it!

Design Process

Working with pre-kindergarten children, my work mostly focuses on social emotional learning and pre-writing skills. I have used and I have observed many District of Columbia Public Schools that I have visited using the Handwriting Without Tears program. I like this program as it focuses on breaking down letters into simple parts: long and short lines and big and small curves. It encourages play and familiarization with these parts and concepts before using them for letter formation. The makers of Handwriting Without Tears have a few ways of playing and interacting with their wooden letter parts pieces, but I wish they had more! That is what inspired me to make Test Track. I did a similarly inspired project with my pre-K class last year. We had been studying machines and all of my children used the Handwriting Without Tears wooden line and curve pieces to create and design a machine of their own. After creating their machines, my students drew their creations and also tried to recreate the machines their friends had made from photos. Encouraging play and early work with these pieces and concepts made using four long lines to make a “W” or two long lines and one short one to make an “A” much simpler concept. When making Test Track it was also important to me to find thin or small vehicles to encourage a pinching motion to help strengthen their fine motor skills as they played with their tracks. Whether working with two-year old or five-year old children, strengthening fine motor skills is always a goal I have had for many students in the past. I settled on some chunky vehicular puzzle pieces because they require a child to pinch and hold them as they push it along the track. I certainly plan to use Test Track with my class!

References

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