

Pro Tips from the Art Room: Favorite Adaptive Tools

Leslie Grace, Elementary Art Teacher in Philadelphia PA

Frog Tape. I love and use this the most often. A big issue I have is students hitting their art really hard with whatever we are using, so just simply taping it down with removable tape eases their frustration (I am sure this is not big news to you though!)... I also love my loop scissors.

Hanna Lee, Elementary Art teacher and Art Therapist in Fairfax VA

Slip resistant shelf liners are relatively cheap and come in rolls and have a multitude of uses. It could be wrapped around a tool like pencils or paintbrushes to provide a more ergonomic handle for those with problems in fine motor skills or gripping. When I first experimented with wrapping a strip of it around a paintbrush, I didn't know what to use to make it stick to itself, so I used a bobby pin which worked really well for keeping it together and had the added bonus of making sure it didn't roll away from the student. It also could be an alternate material for sewing on for students who have fine motor difficulties or allergies to burlap. They can be used in the tray of a student in a wheelchair to avoid having items roll around outside of their grasp. Lastly, they can be attached to seats to prevent slipping around/fidgeting and falling out of chairs.

Squeeze bottles- An OT once told me that regular Elmer's glue bottles are very poorly designed, which I definitely agreed with. They are hard to squeeze and not as ergonomic as a round shape. I bought some with PTA money this past school year and they were great for all my students. I even heard students say, "wow, these glue bottles are awesome!" They really are easier to use for students (and me!), and I would suggest getting ones with attached caps, but I found that the squeeze bottles clogged a lot less than Elmer's glue bottles. They could even be used to paint with. I have not tried this, but I suspect my students would have loved that.

Glue sponge- though I love the squeeze bottles, I often had my K-1st and special education students use glue sponges. A lot of these students often had difficulty controlling how much glue they used (messy!), so for certain projects (like collages), I used these. They really worked well for these populations in helping them use the right amount of glue and creating less of a mess. I made sure the sponge was hot glued on the bottom of the container though, because many of them cannot control the urge to pick the sponge up and squeeze it (or eat it...). Some of my special ed students don't actually have enough strength in their hands to squeeze a glue bottle, so this worked out on many levels.

Wikki Stix- These are great for visually impaired and blind students. The student can “draw” with them and trace around it with a pencil, then color or paint within them with that extra sensory boundary telling them where to stop. They could be used to make art on paper or sculptures as well for a tactile art activity. My students in the Autism Support program LOVED them to make art with. Most of them had very limited fine motor skills and were unable to draw, paint, etc recognizable objects, so we used them to add to pictures using them as hair, insect legs, whiskers for animals, etc. One of the IAs for the class said she thought they loved them because they make them feel successful in their artwork since they can't draw the lines.

Time Timer- I got a large one for my classroom and mounted it on the wall. I originally got it because of my students with high functioning autism in my gen ed class. They tend to really fixate on things and it was difficult to move them along. I got this particular timer for many reasons; first, because it is large and can be seen by the whole class. I had tried small numerical timers at certain students' seats, but they often went ignored. Secondly, it can be "read" even by little ones or those students who can't tell time. I introduced it at the beginning of each class at the beginning of the year, and every student knew that the smaller the red space got, the less time they had. Those who could tell time would remind peers, "oh, there's only X minutes left!" and they would always remind me to set it if I had forgotten to. This really worked out for all of my populations. I think it really reduced the anxiety of "how much more time do I have?!" for kids and let them plan accordingly. I think for my special ed population, it worked well because they could anticipate a transition coming up, and allowed them to be more prepared. It was also nice because I set it at the beginning of every class with enough time for clean up, so I never accidentally began clean up too late, and students knew that the timer ringing began the start of clean up, so that was a consistent system in my room that they could always depend on.

Crystal Samuelson, Lead Digital Arts Educator in Middletown DE

Kahoot is my favorite. The students use their own devices in the classroom to respond to questions on the screen. They just added a new homework feature as well where the students can go at their own pace.

Christina Kimmel, Elementary Art Teacher in Philadelphia PA

Rubber bands for grips on brushes at the top of where the brush or pencil point is for people with blindness and another rubber band where they should hold it. Also good for people who need a guide such as people with autism.

Different feeling dots for people with blindness to distinguish colors when painting.

Cutout frame or box to contain the working area in a picture.

Imagery cards to keep students on track for what is next or what they should be doing.

Different tiered assessments based off of an individual's level or abilities.

Jenna Gabriel, Special Education Manager At the JFK Center for Performing Arts

Tennis ball onto a paintbrush to assist with grip.”

Different textures and found objects can make a big difference in sculpture for students with visual impairments.

Tracey Gardner, Philadelphia School District Special Education Teachers Assistant

Loop Scissors seem to be the best for my students with fine motor skills.

Aaron Weber, Art Teacher at The Green Tree School

Dollar Store Oven Mitts with Velcro and an assortment of interchangeable brushes for kids with fine motor issues. I used the idea after seeing a therapy dog paint with the same concept. I just have things like textured fabric and AstroTurf and I forget what else, but a piece of Velcro on them so you can switch what is attached to the oven mitt. And students that have some gross motor but little to no fine motor, the mitt can be slid over the hands and braces and they can paint.

Bev Johns Professional, Fellow at MacMurray College and Retired Supervisor and Administrator at Four Rivers Special Education District

Various types of pencil grips and don't forget left handed scissors for is lefties. Here is another one-- I take file folders and cut the front into a picture frame and then put a sheet of paper in the inside of the folder. This helps students stay within the paper space.

Pedals under students desks are great for children who need to move their feet.

Debbie Robinson Levine, Adaptive Art Specialist at the Prader-Willi Homes of Oconomowoc in WI

Containers that bulk gum comes in and hot glue crayons to the bottom. Instant holder for crayon rubbings. Triangle crayons work great as well as the big crayons. Gives a big grip for those having trouble with fine motor skills.

Pool Noodles and wrap them around breyer handles that are made of the wire loops.

Jacqui Vivanco Hertlein, Fine Arts Teacher at Grace School Houston TX

Silk App. I have a boy with Autism in my class and he absolutely loves to create on it when he finishes early with a project. We also used Silk to draw out his clay monster project because he did not want anything to do with clay that day

Karen Rosenberg, Art Teacher Newtown PA

Bingo Markers. When the ink runs out I fill them with tempera paint. Great for my HS kids with fine motor issues.

Peta Dual Control Training Scissors - “Designed with the assistance of occupational therapists, Peta Dual Control Training Scissors have double loops on each handle that allow a teacher and student to simultaneously complete the cutting action. They're ideal for young children, children with reduced grip strength, and those with visual/perceptual difficulties or tremor.”

Glad Press'n Seal Wrap with clay and paint with kids who are sensory defensive.

Susan Dubrunfaut, Teaching Artist at The Barnes Foundation

Faber-Castel beeswax crayons. They are triangular shaped (easier to hold and does not roll) thick sticks that have luscious color without a mess or having to press too hard.