

The Great Debate: Writing by Hand vs. Keyboarding

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Some educators believe that handwriting is an antiquated skill, rendered obsolete by the advent of the keyboard. The Common Core State Standards, which include technology standards but hardly mention handwriting, only amplify this opinion. An all-too-common argument is, “Why ‘waste’ time on teaching handwriting when that time could be spent teaching computer and keyboarding skills?”

The simple answer is that the connection between writing by hand and learning is too significant to be ignored. Using the above logic, one might also say that, with calculators and spell-check, basic math and spelling lessons aren’t necessary, either. Computers can read text out loud now. Some cell phones read text as well, simply by pointing the camera at the desired text; they can even translate foreign words. Does this mean we should discontinue reading instruction (and the study of foreign languages, for that matter)? The benefit of writing by hand, much like the benefit of learning to read and spell and do math problems the “hard” way, is not necessarily found in the act itself. The benefit is in the workout our brains get while we perform these tasks.

Research shows that writing by hand improves students’ creative writing skills, and elementary students actually write more quickly by hand than when typing. Compositions are also longer when written by hand, as demonstrated in a 2009 study: “Consistently, second, fourth, and sixth graders composed longer essays by pen than by keyboard.”⁴ In a paper published in *Advances in Haptics*, Anne Mangen and Jean-Luc Velay report that, “Brain imaging studies...show that the specific hand movements involved in handwriting support the visual recognition of letters.”⁵ Mangen and Velay also refer to a study that reveals how the brain reacts differently to handwriting than it does to typing: “fMRI data showed that processing the orientation of handwritten and typed characters did not rely on the same brain areas. Greater activity related to handwriting learning was observed in several brain regions known to be involved in the execution, imagery, and observation of actions.”⁵

More and more research is emerging that supports handwriting as a necessary and highly beneficial element of education. That’s not to say that keyboarding doesn’t have its place as well; in this age of technology, children certainly must learn how to type. However, we must take care to ensure that technology does not overshadow “the basics,” which are proven to be so important to the development of young minds.

REFERENCES

4 Berninger, V.W., Abbott, R.D., Augsburger, A., and Garcia, N. (2009). Comparison of pen and keyboard transcription modes in children with and without learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 32(3), 11–18.

5 Mangen, A., & Velay, J.-L. “Digitizing literacy: reflections on the haptics of writing.” *Advances in Haptics*. Accessed 21 Dec 2011. <http://www.intechopen.com/articles/show/title/digitizing-literacy-reflections-on-the-haptics-of-writing>.

<http://www.upub.net/The-Great-Debate-Writing-by-Hand-vs-Keyboarding-News.html>