

Why is Handwriting Important? The Role of Handwriting in the Age of Technology

Students in Abilene's elementary schools still spend time practicing printing, and learning the skills needed to develop their cursive writing abilities. Despite the fact that today's children type, text and e-mail on a regular basis, USD 435's curriculum continues to include lessons on what has long been considered one of the fundamental three R's of the educational system.

Research points to a link between handwriting and brain development. For example, Virginia Berminger, an educational psychology professor at the University of Washington claims, "Because handwriting necessitates physical sequential strokes to form just one letter (as opposed to a single strike in hitting a single key), massive regions in the brain are activated, including areas of thinking, language, and temporary information storage and management."

According to Anderson in Handwriting Research, the inability to write letters can lead to reading difficulties. Creating letters through writing is essential to reading letters. Letters are only random lines until we interact with them through the written language.

When I checked with Sondra Flynn, Occupational Therapist, and Tim Johnson, Occupational Therapy Assistant, both with the Central Kansas Cooperative in Education, they also cited many other research studies that show writing by hand helps build important neural pathways in the brain. It is a skill that helps us better remember what we are recording, thus aiding in memory retention. Handwriting taps into kinesthetic memory, (using the brain to coordinate body movements) which has been cited as one of the most reliable memory channels.

In an interesting twist, there are several "apps" that allow users to take handwritten notes on the screen of their iPad using their finger or a stylus; these notes can then be converted to text for emails or documents. Many of our students take advantage of these apps as they collect their notes. When visiting with Taylor Alderson, an Abilene High School Graduate, she said, "I use handwriting everyday, but the iPad allows me to organize and retrieve information quicker and easier".

As our schools utilize more and more technology, computers to iPads, it is apparent that handwriting still matters. Both have their place in today's educational system.

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