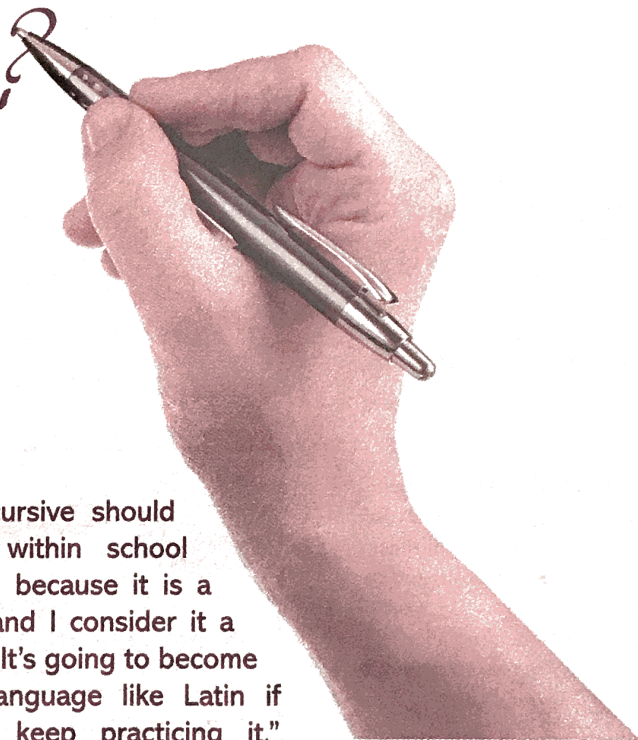


Can You Read This?

Is cursive still relevant in an age of keyboarding?



My memories of learning to write cursive include receiving my first bad grade in school. No matter how hard I tried, my teacher repeatedly placed a “D” on my papers. Forgetting some extra frill, or my letters not being on a consistent slant, I would suffer the humiliation again and again.

In high school I learned keyboarding in typing class, complete with noisy typewriter machines, Wite-Out and a teacher who called out each lesson letter by letter. In my senior year, our school bought computers and those who had not taken typing class were definitely at a disadvantage.

To this day I am a fast typist and a poor scribe, although my printing is kindergarten teacher-approved.

Making the Case for Cursive

Adopting new national curriculum guidelines for 2014, most states are now moving away from penmanship and instead requiring proficiency in keyboarding. California is one of just

“I think cursive should be kept within school curriculum because it is a tradition and I consider it a language. It’s going to become a dead language like Latin if we don’t keep practicing it.”
—*Jai Willkomm, senior at High Tech High International.*

a few states keeping cursive in third grade curriculum.

Typical reasons given for teaching cursive are development of motor skills, ability to read historical documents, speed for timed writing and the imprinting of words for spelling and vocabulary retention.

Samantha Peterson is a sophomore at Children’s Creative and Performing Arts Academy, a private school in San Diego. She remembers learning cursive in first grade at Hawthorne Elementary School in Clairemont.

“I still use cursive,” says Peterson. “I sometimes take notes in cursive because it’s faster.”

Peterson also agrees that cursive is a good thing to learn for reading important artifacts or even cards from grandparents. She also shows off her nice cursive writing to decorate cakes.

Shayna Rians, a librarian at the San Diego County Imperial Beach branch, started a cursive club at the library hoping to instill a love of penmanship in younger generations.

“I read an article about a girl finding her grandmother’s diary and she couldn’t read it,” Rians explains. “I am fascinated by cursive, especially old cursive.”

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Parents were appreciative of Rians' efforts, but attendance was low. Cursive will now be blended into a future homework club at the library. Rians hopes that teachers will give extra credit for cursive work done outside of the classroom.

The Case for Keyboarding

Cursive can't be used to fill out official forms, is difficult for lefties and is eventually discarded by most students. Its value in learning has been debated since the 1960s. Proponents of removing longhand feel that proper keyboarding is the more vital skill and with time constraints in the classroom, schools must choose.

"I think it is unnecessary to learn cursive," says Allison Diamond, a mother of two from San Diego. "Are we going to soon teach our kids to write in Helvetica, Garamond and Comic Sans, too?"

Diamond brings up a great point. The debate is likened to when the Italians invented Italic script and thus the art of calligraphy was threatened. Handwriting always has, and always will, change according to its function in society.

Popular program Handwriting Without Tears (www.hwttears.com) embraces the philosophy that today's cursive should be about speed and legibility, not about style or being fancy.

The Bigger Problem

For me, the bottom line is that handwriting will always be important (think SAT essays, job applications, signatures and jobs where people's lives depend on legible writing), and that computers are not leaving our lives. The problem is that many children are not learning handwriting properly nor are they learning keyboarding properly. Solutions and administrative decisions must include this reality.

Learning keyboarding techniques correctly should be part of school curriculum, separate of the cursive debate. It takes a trained teacher to do this well, along with consistent dedicated class time. Instructors need

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to know the best methods for teaching to type accurately and fast. Knowing proper keyboarding technique should always come before using computers to acquire information.

My son was being asked to type his work in fourth grade. He had yet to master neat printing, let alone cursive or keyboarding. Being asked to type papers while in the process of learning was counterproductive. Now that he is in high school, I am questioning the efficiency of his self-taught keyboarding method. Cursive? Well, those third grade standards never took hold as his classroom computer time increased.

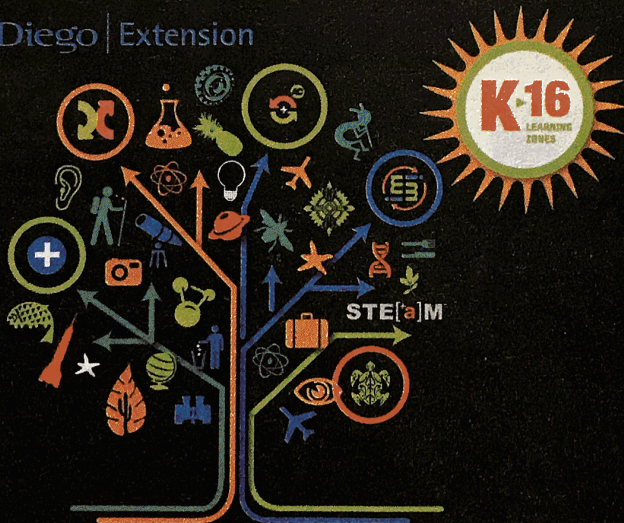
Solutions for Parents

It is not enough to know whether your child's school teaches cursive writing. It matters which grade your child will be taught cursive and which style the school utilizes. Ask teachers in the grade your child will move into if they continue to value cursive handwriting and require students to use it. Getting an accurate picture of learning cursive in your child's classroom will help you to decide whether to increase practice at home or ask for alternatives from your child's teacher if cursive writing is not working for them.

Just as important is asking if your child will spend time on computers prior to keyboarding lessons. There is plenty of fun software for kids to learn keyboarding. My 11-year-old daughter prefers a simple free online program that emphasizes proper technique instead of distracting games (www.typingweb.com.) Regardless of whether or not you supplement your child's education with cursive writing, keyboarding or both, you shouldn't dismiss that beautiful handwriting will always have appeal. Perhaps practicing penmanship together is just the thing to slow down the entire family in the midst of today's hectic schedules. Turn off your screen and give it a try. ❖

Laura Pardo writes from central San Diego and notes that the final draft of the Declaration of Independence was written by a professional scribe.

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