

HANDWRITING

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I attended the Handwriting Summit in Washington last year. Here's part of my Psychology Today blog report:

What I Learned at the Summit

- Brain development related to handwriting can start in infancy; formal handwriting instruction should start in kindergarten.
- Being a boy predicts handwriting illegibility.
- Making letters produces more brain activation in reading areas for 4- and 5-year-olds than simply looking at letters or keyboarding.
- Brain development for hand writers continues into late elementary. (Fifth-graders develop motor skill for making slimmer L's than third graders.)
- Good teachers make handwriting fun. (Candy-cane "F's" and gentle feedback are in—knuckle rapping is out.)
- Slant variability in adults is OK. (Your personal slant and that of others should always be respected.)
- Adult note taking with lousy handwriting fluency is like cell phones and driving—"watch out!"
- The balance between keyboarding and handwriting needs more attention and research.
- Common Core Standards give handwriting short shrift at grades K and 1; no cursive handwriting standards are addressed.
- Graphology (scientific handwriting analysis) revealing something of one's [personality](#) was not addressed at the summit. (No one reported that a space at the top of open-top O's connotes people who speak **O**ften and **O**penly.)

Short Answers to Big Questions

1. *Does eliminating handwriting instruction harm children?* Yes.
2. *Is it important to teach both cursive and manuscript? When?* These questions have not been answered by research. A survey of participants at the conference found most participants believe it's important to teach both manuscript and cursive. It was reported that formal handwriting in manuscript should begin in

kindergarten with gentleness. Also reported, some schools in Europe start teaching cursive in kindergarten.

3. ***How will technology impact handwriting and learning in the 21st century?*** The feeling most often expressed was that technology and handwriting are compatible, complementary, and both are important for mankind's future. Currently, graduate students have been observed to choose taking notes by hand versus notes on computers about half and half.
4. ***Is there research support for handwriting instruction?*** Yes. (See the link below.)
5. ***Does handwriting instruction help children learn to read?*** "Through a series of studies using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to probe how the brain processes stimuli in real time, we have demonstrated that, a) there is a distinct system in the human brain that is recruited during reading that is also recruited during writing, b) that the reading network develops as a function of handwriting experience, and c) that handwriting, and not keyboarding, leads to adult-like neural processing in the visual system of the preschool child. These findings suggest that self-generated action, in the form of handwriting, is a crucial component in setting up brain systems for reading acquisition. There is support for the notion that handwriting instruction is positively connected to learning to read." Dr. Karin Harman-James; Indiana University, Department of Psychology and Brain Sciences; From "The Neural Correlates of Handwriting and its Effect on Reading Acquisition."
6. ***Does changing handwriting change personality?*** Scientific analysis of handwriting as it relates to personality was not addressed at the summit. It was clear, however, that handwriting changes brain functioning as it relates to composition, writing fluency, note taking, and beginning reading.
7. ***Is teaching cursive a waste of time?*** Emphatically "no"—according to most of the researchers. It was pointed out by some researchers that a continuous stroke increased speed and fluency. In keeping with the democratization of handwriting, many researchers suggested manuscript, cursive, or keyboarding should all be options. Handwriting enthusiasts who occupied Washington agreed: It's one's right to choose!

Best Quotes

"We are in a hurry to do away with basic skills because they can be replaced by technology. What happens when technology doesn't work? Cursive writing is still part of a good [education](#)." Dr. Daniel A. Domenech, Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators.

"To say that kids don't need to write because they don't do it anymore (due to texting and keyboarding) is a common myth." Dr. Tanya Santangelo, handwriting researcher, Arcadia University.

"Twenty-five percent of children really need some help." "If handwriting is a problem, children have trouble composing." Dr. Jane Case-Smith, The Ohio State University.

"In an era emphasizing evidence-based instructional practices, it is puzzling why neither handwriting nor spelling is included in the Common Core State Standards for Writing K to 5."

Dr. Virginia W. Berninger, University of Washington

My full reports on my Psychology Today bog are listed below:

This was announcing the Handwriting Summit in Washington.

<https://my.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising-readers-writers-and-spellers/201201/epiphany-and-handwriting-summit-in-washington-dc>

This report on the summit has more information to help you including a link to research:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising>

I would be happy for you to share these links with your group.