

HERE'S WHY WRITING THINGS OUT BY HAND MAKES YOU SMARTER

Typing is fast.

Handwriting is slow. In this face paced world this is precisely why handwriting is better suited to learning.

Take it from research psychologists Pam A. Mueller of Princeton University and Daniel M. Oppenheimer of the University of California, Los Angeles, who did a fascinating investigating just how terrible laptops are for note-taking when learning.

Earlier studies have argued that laptops make for poor note-taking because of the litany of distractions available on the internet, but their experiments yielded a counterintuitive conclusion: Handwriting is better because it slows the learner down.

By slowing down the process of taking notes, you accelerate learning.

It works like this. If a skilled typist is sitting in a workshop, he or she will be able write down almost every word that the lecturer utters. The thing is, that transcription process doesn't require any critical thinking. So while you're putting the words down on the page, your brain doesn't have to engage with the material you are typing.

As learning science has discovered, if you're not signaling that the material is important to your brain, it will discard the information from memory for the sake of efficiency. But if you are taking notes by hand, you won't be able to write down every word the speaker says. Instead, you'll have to look for representative quotes, summarize concepts, and ask questions about what you don't understand.

This requires more effort than just typing every word out and the effort is what helps cement the material in your memory. The more effort you put into understanding something, the stronger signal you're giving your brain that it's worth remembering.

Mueller and Oppenheimer conclude, transcribing lectures verbatim rather than processing information and reframing it in their own words is detrimental to learning. The benefits of handwriting, have been documented by lots of educational psychologists, who have found that handwriting engages parts of the brain that typing neglects, especially areas associated with memory formation. For these reasons the arguments go that you will come up with more ideas when handwriting rather than typing.

So, as French psychologist Stanislas Dehaene told The New York Times, you may want to step away from the keyboard. "When we write, a unique neural circuit is automatically activated," he said. "There is a core recognition of the gesture in the written word, a sort of recognition by mental simulation in your brain, it seems that this circuit is contributing in unique ways we didn't realize." The result? "Learning is made easier," he concluded.

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