

Penmanship: English Printing and Cursive

Narration/Text

Introduction

We've all seen examples of beautiful, creative and interesting handwriting. Everyone's handwriting is as unique as our fingerprints. Penmanship refers to the technique of writing by hand using a writing instrument. Penmanship includes a variety of handwriting styles, such as, calligraphy, print (also called block letters or manuscript), cursive, or a combination of both the print and cursive. Cursive handwriting is writing where the characters are connected in a flowing manner.

Cursive handwriting has been used since ancient times. While manuscript was used exclusively for more formal writing, such as permanent stone or clay inscriptions on buildings or temples, cursive was used for informal ancient Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek and Latin writing. Cursive is still widely used in a variety of languages including; Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, Korean, Bengali, Russian and others.

This documentary focuses on English print and cursive penmanship styles.

Historical/Cultural Context

The modern English alphabet is actually a Latin (or Roman) alphabet. The Phoenicians developed a 22 letter alphabet between 1100 -1500 BC. By 800 BC, it had spread to Greece and even further under the rule of Alexander the Great. By the 2nd century BC the Roman Empire rose to power and later conquered Greece. During this time the Romans adopted aspects of Greek culture, including the alphabet. This alphabet spread across Europe as far as England, and also into Northern Africa and the Persian Gulf.

At the end of the 8th century AD Charlemagne standardized handwriting, by implementing Carolingian minuscule, a script based on the tradition of Roman handwriting. The script was designed for maximum legibility. Later this style developed into the Romanesque and Gothic styles. The Gothic style was denser so it made better use of the limited and expensive parchment in order to meet the increasing demands for books during the middle ages. Initially Gutenberg's press was based on the cursive style popularized by scribes of the mid-1400's. With technological advancements, upright manuscript styles of lettering were used for printing. During the mid 15th century, Chancery Cursive was created, and used for all Papal documents at the time. It was also used for correspondences, business, and for important formal documents.

Images/Video

Introduction

- Insert samples of English handwriting samples, cursive and print.
- Insert screen capture of penmanship definition
- Show graphics of print, cursive, mixed and calligraphy.
- Show cursive scripts in other languages.
- Image of English print (manuscript) and cursive style

Historical/Cultural Context

- Show map of Latin distribution
- Use timeline key historical points slides created in PowerPoint

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By the late 1500's cursive style typefaces were designed and printed documents were characterized by flourishes and curlicues. Elegant, beautiful handwriting became an indication of social status. This persisted into the late 1700's when penmanship schools had begun educating generations of master scribes. Many of the jobs people had still required clear, legible writing, so by the late 1800's teaching good penmanship became a part of the education system.

The mid 1800's to about the 1920's the commercial demand for speed and legibility impacted how writing was taught in schools. Letters were simplified and teaching involved drills on larger amounts of paper.

Implications for Literacy/Education

The argument that the new technology will replace cursive is not a new one. In fact, when the typewriter was introduced the use of cursive was debated. The same is true now that computer-keyboarding skills are being taught in schools and are more practical for preparing students for the workplace.

Print is still taught in schools as the characters are similar to printed type, and more recognizable on keyboards.

Argument Against:

There are a number of arguments against teaching cursive in schools. In light of modern technologies, many people consider teaching cursive to be wasting time on an obsolete technology. They believe there are more important skills for students to focus on. For example, clearer writing and communication skills, keyboarding skills or even to focus on learning a musical instrument.

A variety of different cursive styles were (or are still) taught in schools, and some students receive little training to write cursive compared with others. There is inconsistent knowledge of cursive, to the point where some children can't even read cursive. And some researchers have indicated that writing in cursive impacts student outcomes due to poor legibility.

Images/Video

→ Show typing footage and add text:
Cursive was initially connected to religion and scribes used it to propagate God's word. Later, as literacy increased, its use became widespread in the workplace. Similar to cursive, keyboarding was embraced by business because it was faster than previous methods and legibility is not an issue.

Implications for Literacy/Education

Is cursive worth teaching in schools?

- Show handwriting clip
- Slides: against cursive
- Show kindergarten writing image
- Slides: against cursive
- Show image of messy handwriting

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Argument For:

Vanderbilt University professor, Steve Graham, conducted research with first-graders who could write only 10 to 12 letters per minute. After 15 minutes of handwriting instruction three times a week over 9 weeks, they had doubled their writing speed and expressed more complex thoughts.

Many of the world's historical documents, such as religious doctrines, legal documents, constitutions, great literature, and even personal letters were written using cursive.

Brain scan research has demonstrated tactile movements involved with cursive handwriting activate regions of children's brains, which are the same as those involved in higher reasoning. In addition, the information is ingrained into the brain with handwriting.

Handwriting, particularly cursive, is an art form. Cursive writing is still used in artwork, logos, invitations, advertising, and even computers include cursive fonts to offer users beautiful fonts to create documents with.

Alternative Approach

There has been no substantial evidence in the research to indicate that teaching children to print, cursive, or type has detrimental effects. In fact, keyboard skills are quite important, and practical to include in the curriculum. The best approach may be to teach children to be "multilingual by hand".

Some educators, who had previously cut out teaching cursive, have brought it back. There are even educational applications now, which use i-pads to teach cursive in the classroom.

- Slides: for cursive
- Show legible cursive image
- Slides on cursive & multiple literacies
- Images of sample uses of cursive

Alternative Approaches

- Slides: Alternative approaches
- I-pad video clip
- Summary Slide

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Credits (Audio, Image and Video)

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