

Printing, cursive writing, keyboarding and word processing

As parents, we remember the Palmer method of writing and the shift from printing to cursive writing, usually in 2nd or 3rd grade. Writing has, however, changed dramatically. Schools no longer stress, and often don't teach, cursive writing. Block and italic printing are more the norm.

There are a number of reasons why this is so. Virtually all print materials (books, magazines, newspapers, websites, product labels) are printed, so to be a literate person one must learn to read print, not cursive writing. Additionally, forms (tax forms, credit card applications, job applications) cannot be completed in cursive writing. A popular myth is that cursive writing is faster, but research shows the speed of one's thoughts, not cursive or printing, is the critical factor in the speed of one's writing. Another myth is that cursive writing is more legible when, in fact, personal styles of writing often make it less legible than printing.

Students today use computers (estimates are that 90% of kids age 5 to 17 use computers). Writing with computers becomes the norm for many and handwriting becomes a fallback skill, one used when a computer is unavailable. For many situations then, keyboarding and word processing skills are what are critical to writing well. Keyboarding can be taught to very young children, but 4th grade seems to be the point when students develop facility with keyboarding most quickly. Learning to type 30 to 40 words a minute has replaced perfectly executed cursive letters. Research shows that using a word processing program teaches a number of skills simultaneously—vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and editing.

Clear legible handwriting has its place, but gone are the days when cursive writing was a sign of good character and maturity.

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