

Education Today: An Inch Deep and a Mile Wide?

Earlier this week, the [Wall Street Journal](#) released a story on the different outcomes between those who take notes by hand and those who take notes via keyboard. According to the article, there are pros and cons to both sides:

“Generally, people who take class notes on a laptop do take more notes and can more easily keep up with the pace of a lecture than people scribbling with a pen or pencil, researchers have found. College students typically type lecture notes at a rate of about 33 words a minute. People trying to write it down manage about 22 words a minute.

*In the short run, it pays off. Researchers at Washington University in St. Louis in 2012 found that laptop note-takers tested immediately after a class could recall more of a lecture and performed slightly better than their pen-pushing classmates when tested on facts presented in class. They reported their experiments with 80 students in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.*

Any advantage, though, is temporary. After just 24 hours, the computer note takers typically forgot material they’ve transcribed, several studies said. Nor were their copious notes much help in refreshing their memory because they were so superficial.”

As the article went on to report, such findings show that the long term retention those with handwritten notes enjoyed was the direct result of having to think and process information in order to get it down on paper. Those who could write quickly via keyboard simply regurgitated the information instead of chewing on it. Similar conclusions were reached by the authors of the recent book [Make It Stick: The Science of](#)

Successful Learning.

It would be natural to proceed by noting the benefits of cursive handwriting and why more schools should be teaching it. But I'm not going to.

Instead, I want to point out something else.

Like the students who took notes on a keyboard, today's education system too often emphasizes quantity over quality. Instead of reading in-depth the lengthy works from which many of the [ideas of Western Civilization](#) originated, students are treated to quick overviews and brief synopses of various subjects that are an inch deep and a mile wide. They regurgitate this information on tests, and then they quickly forget it.

But while such a method may enable students to come out of high school and college with the appearance of education, [how will they stand up later in life](#)? By emphasizing quantity over quality, is today's education system thwarting the very process of education?