

Why C.S. Lewis Would Have Sided with Today's Cursive Writing Supporters

In the last several years, one of the more contentious education debates has revolved around cursive writing.

Supporters of cursive often argue that learning long-hand is essential to reading our founding documents and other important bits of nostalgia, such as grandma's recipe for rhubarb pie.

The opposing side suggests that modern times call for modern methods, arguing that cursive has little place in a world where tech devices permeate nearly every aspect of life.

This latter camp appears to have a pending addition to its ranks. But more surprising than the fact that another institution is considering dropping cursive, perhaps, is the fact that this institution is the bastion of traditionalism: Cambridge University. *The Guardian* [explains](#):

The increasing illegibility of students' handwriting has prompted Cambridge University to consider ending 800 years of tradition by allowing laptops to replace pen and paper for exams.

Academics say that students are losing the ability to write by hand en masse because of their reliance on laptops in lectures and elsewhere.

Sarah Pearsall, a senior lecturer at Cambridge's history faculty, said: "Fifteen or 20 years ago, students routinely wrote by hand several hours a day, but now they write virtually nothing by hand except exams.

"As a faculty we have been concerned for years about the

declining handwriting problem. There has definitely been a downward trend. It is difficult for both the students and the examiners as it is harder and harder to read these scripts," she told the Daily Telegraph.

The Guardian goes on to explain that Cambridge may follow in the steps of Edinburgh, which tested the use of typed exams several years ago:

*At the time, Dai Hounsell, a professor of higher education at the university, told the Scotsman that students faced a dual strain in providing handwritten exam answers. Physiologically, they were not used to extended bouts of writing by hand, and **structuring essays on paper presented a different mental challenge to writing on a computer**, he said.*

That last point should make everyone stop and think, regardless of whether one is in favor of fostering cursive. Is it possible that we're discouraging thinking and sound writing methods by nixing cursive for typing?

Research suggest such is the case, for writing by hand [has been found](#) to increase neural activity, activate the thinking portions of the brain, and foster creativity.

But while research can be persuasive, it's often more revealing to see how writing by hand has affected revered writers. One of these individuals was C.S. Lewis.

Although living in an age in which modern technology offered a way to speed up his writing process, Lewis [avoided the typewriter](#) like the plague. The main reason for this appears to be the fact that using pen and ink allowed him to analyze his written thoughts far better. As Walter Hooper explains in a preface to a collection of Lewis' letters:

Lewis almost always wrote with an old-fashioned nib pen that is dipped into an inkwell as one writes. ... It is not a method

to condemn. When Lewis dictated letters to me, he always had me read them aloud afterwards. He told me that in writing letters, as well as books, he always 'whispered the words aloud'. Pausing to dip the pen in an inkwell provided exactly the rhythm needed. 'It's as important to please the ear,' he said, 'as it is the eye.'

Is it possible that we would have far more reasonable, informed thinkers like Lewis in the up-and-coming generation if we taught them to slow down and weigh their words and thoughts more carefully through the medium of pen and ink rather than keyboard and screen?

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