



MASTERING CURSIVE writing has been an important milestone for kids for generations, like learning to ride a bike or tie your shoes. But over the past two decades, the increasing use of computers and smartphones for communication has made handwriting less essential, threatening to wipe out cursive altogether. According to the Associated Press, only 14 states—including

California, Florida, and Texas—currently require that cursive writing be taught in public schools. Supporters of cursive instruction point to research that shows that learning to write this way improves hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and creativity. They also say that writing in cursive is faster and easier than writing in print, because connecting the letters means that you don't have to lift your hand off the page as often.

But opponents insist that learning cursive is unnecessary in the 21st century: If kids already know how to read and write in print, they shouldn't have to master cursive as well. Instead, they say, schools should focus on teaching skills that are more useful in today's society, such as computer programming, typing, and critical thinking. Should students learn cursive in the digital age? Two handwriting experts weigh in.

YES

Some people say it's unnecessary to learn cursive in the digital age, but

research shows it can have major benefits for kids. For one thing, learning to write in cursive improves hand-eye coordination and motor skills. It also stimulates areas of the brain responsible for thinking and communication, which leads to better expression, logic, creativity, and problem solving. In fact, studies show that kids who write in cursive score better on reading and spelling tests than those who write in print.

Writing in cursive is quicker and easier than writing in print.

Similarly, the College Board found that high school students who wrote the essay portion of the SAT in cursive scored slightly higher than their peers who wrote it in print. Experts say that may be because writing in cursive is faster than writing in print, so students had more time to focus on developing their ideas.

Indeed, experts at Princeton University in New Jersey say that writing in cursive is quicker and easier than writing in print because you don't have to lift your pen off the page as often. Imagine if a gymnast had to stop and perform each movement individually rather than in one smooth motion. In the same way, writing in cursive is more efficient than the stop-and-start movements of printing.

Opponents of cursive say it's time-consuming to learn. However, it generally takes only 15 minutes a day for a few weeks for students to master what is an important lifelong skill. Many kids feel great pride when they learn to sign their own names. Plus, without knowing cursive, people wouldn't be able to read historic documents, such as the U.S. Constitution, that were written in cursive.

Learning to type is certainly important in a digital world, but handwriting is no less so.

—SHEILA LOWE

President, American Handwriting Analysis Foundation

NO

Being able to write in cursive generally isn't a useful skill in the 21st century. States and

local school districts shouldn't require that kids learn it. Teachers already have a limited amount of time to teach core subjects, including math, science, social studies, and reading. Instructors shouldn't waste valuable class time teaching cursive when few students will use it after they graduate.

Most adults—including handwriting teachers—no longer write in cursive. According to a 2012 survey, only 37 percent of handwriting teachers said they used cursive. More than half admitted to using a hybrid of print and cursive, where some letters are joined together and others are not.

It's certainly important for children to learn to write by hand. But it isn't necessary that they learn both print *and* cursive. According to researchers at Washington State University and Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, writing in cursive is no faster or more legible than writing in print.

Plus, all handwriting—not just cursive—has been shown to have certain

benefits, including aiding in the development of motor skills and memory. For example, research shows that students who take notes by hand are more likely to recall and understand information

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than students who type their notes on a computer. But it doesn't matter whether those notes are written in cursive or print.

In addition, it can take some students several months to learn to write in cursive. But *reading* cursive can be taught in just 30 to 60 minutes—about one to two minutes per letter. If kids must learn cursive, why not just teach them to read it? That way, young people will still be able to understand documents and letters written in cursive.

—KATE GLADSTONE

Director, World Handwriting Contest

CORE QUESTION What evidence does each writer use to support her claims? How does each writer address the other side's arguments? Who do you think makes her case more effectively?