

Taking Notes, the Write Way

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Surely if asked, anyone from the “boomer” generation would argue that their college education was difficult, and that younger generations have it easier with all the revolutionary technologies they’ve been afforded. However, something important to note is the hindrance placed on education with those revolutions, even with something as simple as notetaking. Younger generations of students have transferred their notes from the old-fashioned pen and paper to the screens that are so coveted. The idea is that students are easily able to write down what they hear, giving them the ability to focus on the course more intently to get every word they need. However, taking notes on a laptop doesn’t only put people without access to a laptop at a disadvantage, but it leads to an entire class of students falling behind. If a student types their notes, they suddenly are determined to record everything said in that class instead of capturing main ideas to be revisited, leading to disorganization. Moreover, their attention can be taken away from the subjects entirely and brought to items of less-importance, like gossip or social media trends, taking away from the tasks assigned to them and preparation for adulthood. Most importantly, written notes hold more weight in their authors’ brains than words typed out on a page. Although some have the luxury of having a laptop or other technology, students should be required to take notes on paper for learning retention, acceptance of adult responsibility, and equality of opportunity.

Students often take notes on a computer because they find it more efficient, when in fact they are retaining less information. Sherry Turkle notes in her article “Education: An Attentional Disarray” that students who are on any electronic devices in class are finding it difficult to focus. Furthermore, she makes the connection that “it is hard to concentrate in class when you are holding a device that you associate with games and messaging—a device built to encourage doing one thing and then another and another,” which shows that students without exposure to such technologies are less likely to be sidetracked, emphasizing the importance of taking notes by hand (Turkle 182). The devices in pockets and on desks during class time can distract from learning, which leads to poor retention of course information. When notes are taken on a device, Turkle notes that students can feel the need to check things not relevant to class discussions, such as social media or text messages. Obviously, these uses of class time are unproductive at best, and at worst detrimental to the learning process. If a student takes notes on a piece of paper, the association is less on “games and messaging” and solely devoted to the class time. That student will pay attention more in class and learn the topics covered with more ease, while a student who gives less of their attention will most likely have to re-teach themselves the information covered in class on their own time. Overall, students have the ability to take control of their education by taking written notes instead of using their computers to do so, which will lead to a stronger grasp of course materials and a generally better understanding of the classes they take part in.

While some argue technology is a gift, young adults are struggling with maturing to grasp adult responsibilities as well as schooling. In Jean M. Twenge’s article “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” Twenge finds that there are many discrepancies between the generations used to technology and those who lacked it. More specifically, Twenge notes the absence of all-around maturity and the ability to channel their attention towards school. In the article, she explains how teens now tend to stay home instead of taking on adult responsibility, while their parents

believe they're studying; Twenge furthermore explains that "Teens ... seem to be content with this homebody arrangement—not because they're so studious, but because their social life is lived on the phone If today's teens were a generation of grinds, we'd see that in the data. But eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-graders in the 2010s actually spend less time on homework than Gen X teens did in the early 1990s" (Twenge 262). The students represented by this data are getting less involved with their education and more involved in the devices that educators put so much emphasis on to further their learning. Their homework is on their devices, as well as their social lives, and they use the time spent at home to fiddle with networking on the devices entrusted to them to study. Parents expect their children to work, but when they read their notes on a screen it connects in their minds to games and friends; getting back to Turkle's argument about how screens are associated with other things for these students, their precious study time is being used up by trivial swiping. If students were required to read their notes on paper, then they would be less tempted to reach for the phone—the phone would be a separate thought—which could lead to more efficient study time instead of time wasted.

Separate from quality studying, typed notes create a system of learning skewed towards the economic elite. Wealth impacts people's lives from political opportunities to college decisions, but it should not have an effect on academic success. Gregory Mantsios's article entitled "Class in America" dives deeper into this idea, discovering that wealth is also closely related to overall power. While commenting on American politics, Mantsios notes that "Wealth and power are closely linked. The economic elite have a grossly disproportionate amount of political power—more than enough power to ensure that the system that provides them such extraordinary privileges perpetuates itself," and although this comment is geared towards political aptitude, there are college implications (Mantsios 364). Some students have the comfort of technology to help in class; they can easily access a dictionary, their work, and pictures for references. Other students are not given the ability to work on a computer for financial reasons, and are therefore left behind. Education is something so coveted in America, and yet it seems as though the college system works against those of lower income; as Mantsios puts it, the system perpetuates itself. If students struggle to afford something that helps others in a class, they might feel overwhelmed and drop out, giving the edge to those who finished their degree. If the goal is to educate everyone who attends, then the school and educators should be responsible for leveling the playing field for all students and giving equal opportunities to stay ahead. Economic standing alone should not prohibit someone from earning a college degree with the same ease as others, and therefore everyone in a classroom should be required to take notes by hand.

Although the information provided is convincing in favor of written notes, it doesn't change the fact that typed notes are efficient; students are able to type faster than they can write. This means faster notes and a more efficient way to study by looking over notes by finding keywords with ease. Words are easily translated from mouth to page, and specific words and phrases are caught before the thought passes. However, studies have shown that students given access to laptops and computers are more likely to take lower quality notes than students who are forced to write them out by hand. In Turkle's article, there was a Harvard professor talking about typed notes prohibiting participation from her students, saying that "...If your notes are meant to capture the themes of the class, you remember your own participation and you make it part of the story. If you are trying to write a transcript of a class, class participation takes you away from your job," (Turkle 187). If the whole point of typing notes is for them to be taken easier and more efficient, then the argument is null once the students prove their typed notes are simply a transcript and taken with no purpose. They are taken to transcribe the words they hear like a court

stenographer, and not to learn the information being given. With regards to the ease of studying, the argument is clear; a student cannot study notes that they do not fully understand without re-teaching themselves the whole of the material covered in class, which in turn is less efficient in the end. Thus, taking notes on a device is overall less efficient than it seems and typically results in poor note-taking skills and wasted time.

As argued, notes taken on a piece of paper leads to more positive outcomes than allowing students to take their notes on screens that only distract and take away from the learning process. Students less fortunate may feel left behind, and the student taking their notes on a laptop takes away their own ability to learn and mature. Students who are less wealthy can worry less about getting their hands on a wireless internet connection, education can be more geared towards learning instead of socialization, and students can learn to take their lives more seriously as they grow into adulthood. The most important aspect of written notes is that students are actually remembering what was said in class; retention is one of the most important things to influence young minds. Students are expected to learn the required curriculum in order to better themselves, and truly the reason is to elevate the future of America. If students are supposed to learn to be well-rounded, then absorbing the subjects required for such a feat would start with taking quality notes. A more educated public leads to more educated actions for politics, economic ideals, and things generations of the past have yet to figure out. Constant issues that those “boomers” worry about are things that students now could fix with more education under their belt than age groups prior. Ultimately, the future of America lies in the retention of the information available to them. Starting strong with well-written notes and leaving students with a foundation to last them—not only until the end of their educational careers but until the end of their time serving the country—is crucial to the advancement of the new world.

Works Cited

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