

the death of Handwriting.

Handwriting. A lost art? What was once the dominant form of communication for hundreds and thousands of years is slowly but surely fading into a mere distant memory. The keyboard is taking the place of pens, pencils and notepads, but to what extent? Are we experiencing the death of handwriting as we know it, or will it still be an essential way of communicating a message in the future?

Think back to when you were learning to write at school, and the joy you felt when you won that ever important license to ditch the lead pencil and upgrade to a shiny new Bic biro. For the next ten years and indeed the rest of your schooling life, every piece of work you did outside of a computing class was delivered via pen and paper. Computers are now extremely prevalent in even the most indigent educational institutes, and as a result, student assessment frequently makes use of this new technology. This shift is also taking place outside the classroom, where tasks such as writing a letter are no longer performed by hand, but on the computer and often sent electronically.

The ease and immediacy of the computer and keyboard make some aspects of schooling much easier. Take for example, a two hour exam in which the student must write an 1800 word essay. A student performing a handwritten essay will ultimately write slower than someone who is proficient on a keyboard. Both of these students may have the exact same competency in regards to applying their knowledge to the essay, but one may fail to do so within the allotted time limit using their less-preferred method of communication. In that regard, computers not only make the task quicker, but also easier to edit mistakes and gauge progress.

But there are a number of reasons why handwriting cannot be omitted from education entirely. For one, it is unfair to

assume all students have access to computers, and just as some students are not competent writers, some will find using a computer to be daunting. Then there's subjects such as mathematics and physics in which handwritten elements cannot be removed from the core foundation of the subject, that is, applying calculations and working through complex equations. Through a process of learning to write, young students can bet-

“An electronic letter takes away the personal touch and formality of a handwritten letter”

ter their spelling and comprehension of the English language on a more personal level, and while handwriting will not be their primary method of communication in the future, it is still an essential skill to possess for the times that it is needed.

There are certainly advantages to now having these two prevalent 'styles' of communication - one for example being bright children who are switched on, but may suffer when it comes to the art of handwriting. These students now have a second option and a way of presenting their work that may not appear so daunting, and their efforts will no longer be underestimated.

In North America, the gradual shift of focus from handwriting to keyboard skills appears to have already begun, with only 10 minutes of an elementary school students' day dedicated to learning to

handwrite. The current Australian curriculum would not deem such a change permissible as the majority of the assessment still relies on students having sufficient handwriting skills.

Typing on the computer no doubt has the advantages of being faster and more legible. But it also makes interpersonal communication a lot easier and more immediate. This results in a world where people are writing more frequently and regularly than they would have in days where handwriting was the leading way of sending a message. With the internet, writing takes place in guises such as instant messaging, web logs, social networking websites such as Facebook and Myspace, and of course, the Email.

Hand written letters once provided the recipient with a touch of personality through stories and thoughts and a sense of heart and soul, in that the sender put their time and effort into writing it just for them. An electronically submitted letter takes away the personal touch and formality that we would come to expect from a handwritten letter. A default typeface that is being used by millions around the world doesn't tell the same story as an

individuals handwriting. That is why a task such as sending your condolences in a card will remain a product of handwriting. It would be seen as unemotional and impersonal to do otherwise.

With all these points in mind, it is evident that while handwriting has decreased in usage and in most part has been succeeded by typing on a keyboard, there are still tasks and scenarios where adequate possession of these skills is desirable. Both forms should be taught and explored in the education system, allowing students and in turn, young adults to choose the way they wish to express themselves.