

Tuesday English News Report

*Why reading books and writing **longhand** is better for learning*

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My son is 18 months old and I've been reading books with him since he was born. Over the past six months he has started to recognise a few letters and numbers. He calls a capital Y a "yak" after a picture on the door of his room, and so on.

Reading is a young activity for humans. We have been speaking in some form for hundreds of thousands of years and we are born with the ability to learn how to speak.

However, the earliest writing began only 6,000 years ago, and every act of reading remains a version of what my son is learning: identifying objects known as letters and words, using our brains in the same way as we use it to identify trees, cars, animals and telephone boxes.

It's not only words and letters that we process as objects. Texts themselves, so far as our brains are concerned, are physical landscapes. So it shouldn't be surprising that we respond differently to words printed on a page compared to words appearing on a screen; or that the key to understanding these differences lies in the geography of words in the world.

Research has shown that when given a choice between media ranging from printouts to smartphones, laptops, e-readers and desktops, 92 per cent of respondents replied that it was **hard copy** that best allowed them to concentrate.

What exactly is going on here? Age and habit play their part. But there is also a growing scientific recognition that many of a screen's **unrivalled assets**, like hyperlinks, are either unhelpful or downright **destructive** when it comes to reading and writing.

In three experiments in 2013, Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer compared the effectiveness of students taking longhand notes with typing onto laptops. Their conclusion: the relative slowness of writing by hand demands heavier "**mental lifting**", forcing students to summarise rather than to quote **verbatim**; in turn, tending to increase understanding and **retention**.

Tests suggest the experience of reading differs between letters learned through handwriting and letters learned through typing.

It seems that the motor-skill-activating physicality of objects lights up our brains brighter than the placeless, weightless scrolling of words on screens.

It's not all bad. Screens are at their worst when they **ape** paper. But at their best, they're something which can engage and activate our wondering minds.



1. What do you think?

2. Vocabulary

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below using words from the box.

longhand	unrivalled	assets	destructive
verbatim	retention	ape	mental
hard copy			

1. Something printed on paper is known as (a) _____.
2. To _____ something means to copy it, often in an unthinking way.
3. In exactly the same words as were used originally. They had to remember and recite the passage _____ (exactly as it was written).
4. The typhoon was very _____. It damaged many building and uprooted hundreds of trees.
5. Useful or valuable things or even people are known as _____.
6. _____ refers to anything connected to the mind.
7. He hates sending email and prefers writing letters the traditional way – in _____.
8. Here it means remembering something. His _____ of events that happened 50 years ago is amazing.
9. Better than everyone or everything of the same type. Shakespeare's work is _____ in the English speaking world.

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