

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours and 15 minutes

3 Questions

Question 1

Suggested reading and writing time—55 minutes

It is suggested that you spend 15 minutes reading the question, analyzing and evaluating the sources, and 40 minutes writing your response.

Note: You may begin writing your response before the reading period is over.

(This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, handwriting instruction (print and cursive) was virtually universal in schools in the United States. By contrast, little if any time is devoted to such lessons today. While some argue that handwriting instruction should still have a place in schooling, others maintain that digital technologies have rendered such instruction unnecessary.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops your position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today's schools.

- Source A (Gillis)
- Source B (worksheet)
- Source C (Trubek)
- Source D (Kysilko)
- Source E (Pot)
- Source F (graph)

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support your line of reasoning. Indicate clearly the sources used through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. Sources may be cited as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the description in parentheses.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.

Source A

Gillis, Carly. “Schools Debate Cursive Handwriting Instruction Nationwide.” *HuffPost*, 30 Mar. 2011, www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/30/cursive-handwriting-instr_n_842069.html.

The following is excerpted from an article on a news Web site.

Cursive handwriting instruction is disappearing.

Students and teachers alike have swapped pencils for keyboards, baselines for blinking cursors, and have all but written off the traditional route of writing.

Although standardized tests may not pick up the flourish of a cursive capital “T” or grade against floaters and sinkers, proponents of cursive handwriting maintain that there is value in teaching the craft and hope to save it from being erased from educational relevancy.

ABC News reports that 41 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards for English, which omits cursive handwriting from required curriculum. Now that it’s not mandatory, schools around the country are debating whether or not to spend valuable teaching resources on penmanship.

In New York, some schools are considering cutting it altogether. Deb Fitzgerald, a second-grade teacher at Van Schaick Elementary in Cohoes, told CBS 6 Albany that she’d rather “move on” and focus class time on other topics.

Colorado schools are also engaged in a similar debate. Some teachers believe that cursive is archaic and that students should be prepared for contemporary communication. Susana Cordova, chief academic officer Denver Public Schools, told the Denver Post:

“In many respects, it’s only inside our schools where we see such emphasis on paper and pencil,” she says. “The move outside our schools, and in innovative schools, is toward technology. There will always be a role for the written word by hand on paper. But the experiences most of us have, with 30 minutes a day practicing cursive in class, has gone by the wayside.”

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Source B

“Lowercase Cursive Letter Practice Worksheet.” *TLSBooks*,
www.tlsbooks.com/pdf/cursivepractice.pdf.

The following is adapted from a free printable worksheet available on a Web site created as a resource for parents and teachers of students from preschool to sixth grade.

Lowercase Cursive Letter Practice

 Write each letter three times.

Name: _____

a

m

b

o

c

p

d

q

e

r

f

s

g

t

h

u

i

v

j

w

k

x

l

y

n

z

Source C

Trubek, Anne. “Handwriting Just Doesn’t Matter.” *The New York Times*, 20 Aug. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/08/21/opinion/handwriting-just-doesnt-matter.html?mcubz=0&_r=0.

The following is excerpted from an opinion piece published in a national newspaper.

These arguments [in favor of learning cursive handwriting] are largely a side show to the real issues, which are cultural. In April, when the Louisiana State Senate voted to put cursive back into the public school curriculum, senators yelled “America!” in celebration, as though learning cursive were a patriotic act.

A month later, Alabama required the teaching of cursive in public schools by the end of third grade by way of “Lexi’s Law,” named for the granddaughter of the state representative Dickie Drake; Mr. Drake believes “cursive writing identifies you as much as your physical features do.” In other words, our script reveals something unique and ineluctable about our inner being.

For most of American history, cursive was supposed to do the opposite. Mastering it was dull, repetitive work, intended to make every student’s handwriting match a standardized model. In the mid-19th century, that model was Spencerian script. It was replaced by the Palmer Method, which was seen as a more muscular and masculine hand suitable for the industrial age—a “plain and rapid style,” as Austin Palmer described it, to replace the more effeminate Spencerian. Students who learned it were taught to become “writing machines,” holding their arms and shoulders in awkward poses for hours to get into shape for writing drills.

It was also believed that mastering the Palmer Method would make students better Christians, immigrants more assimilated Americans (through its “powerful hygienic effect”), “bad” children better (“the initial step in the reform of many a delinquent”) and workers more industrious (because the script had fewer curlicues and strokes than Spencerian).

Our 19th- and 20th-century counterparts grafted their values onto handwriting, just as we do with our conceptions of individualism, patriotism and the unique self. These are projections we make onto squiggles and loops.

We have seen similar debates over the meaning of handwriting during other moments of historic transition. In the early medieval era, monks were told to stop using a Roman-based script because it looked too pagan and to adopt a more Christian-looking one. In the 16th century, Erasmus wrote a dialogue in which characters writing in the Renaissance-infused Humanist script complain about the “barbarous” look of Gothic script which they deem less civilized. They also complain that women have messy, impatient handwriting. (Today, women are perceived as being naturally better at penmanship than men, largely because handwriting is now taught at a younger age, when the fine motor skills of girls are more developed.)

Cursive has no more to do with patriotism than Gothic script did with barbarism, or the Palmer Method with Christianity. Debates over handwriting reveal what a society prizes and fears; they are not really about the virtues or literacy levels of children.

Finally, current cursive advocates often argue that students who don’t learn cursive won’t be able to read it—“they won’t be able to read the Declaration of Independence”—but that is misleading. Reading that 18th-century document in the original is difficult for most people who know cursive, as the script is now unfamiliar. A vast majority of historical manuscripts are illegible to anyone but experts, or are written in languages other than English.

In fact, the changes imposed by the digital age may be good for writers and writing. Because they achieve automaticity quicker on the keyboard, today's third graders may well become better writers as handwriting takes up less of their education.

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Source D

Kysilko, David. “The Handwriting Debate.” *National Association of State Boards of Education*, 20 Sept. 2012, www.nasbe.org/latest-news/handwriting-debate/.

The following is excerpted from a report published on the Web site of a nonprofit organization that represents state boards of education in the United States.

Handwriting encompasses two distinct forms: manuscript or printed writing using block letters that are not connected when forming words, and cursive writing, where successive letters are joined and angles are rounded. In the United States, printed writing is generally taught beginning in preschool or kindergarten and continuing through 2nd grade, while cursive is taught beginning in the 3rd grade and continuing through 5th grade. . . .

Those who favor handwriting instruction . . . have “common sense” points: there are and will likely always be times when handwriting notes or lists will be necessary or more convenient—and cursive is faster than printing; handwritten correspondence to individuals has a greater impact on the receiver than emails or digitally printed communications; students, especially in elementary school, still turn in handwritten assignments; there is still a need to be able to read cursive, especially in the case of primary source documents; and cursive is a powerful cultural and historical link to human development, since the drive and ability to draw symbols with our hands is one of the defining characteristics of our species.

But the strongest arguments in favor of teaching cursive are emerging from a growing body of research from the last 10 to 15 years that points to the educational benefits of learning to write by hand—benefits that go well beyond just the ability to write and read cursive. Following are some of the findings.

- * **Cognitive and Motor Skills Development:** Because handwriting is a complex skill that involves both cognitive and fine motor skills, direct instruction is required to learn handwriting (it is not good enough to just give a workbook to students and hope for the best). However, the result of good instruction is that students are benefited both in their cognitive development and in developing motor skills.
- * **Literacy Development:** Handwriting is a foundational skill that can influence students’ reading, writing, language use, and critical thinking. Students without consistent exposure to handwriting are more likely to have problems retrieving letters from memory; spelling accurately; extracting meaning from text or lecture; and interpreting the context of words and phrases.
- * **Brain Development:** The sequential hand movements used in handwriting activate the regions of the brain associated with thinking, short-term memory, and language. In addition, according to Virginia Berninger, Ph.D., professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington, cursive in particular is linked with brain functions around self-regulation and mental organization. “Cursive helps you connect things,” Dr. Berninger said in an interview.
- * **Memory:** The act of handwriting helps students (and adults) retain information more effectively than when keyboarding, mostly likely because handwriting involves more complex motor functions and takes a bit longer. One study comparing students who took notes by hand versus classmates who took notes by computer found that the handwriters exhibited better comprehension of the content and were more attentive and involved during the class discussions.

* **Written Expression:** Elementary-age students who wrote compositions by hand rather than by keyboarding, one researcher found, wrote faster, wrote longer pieces, and expressed more ideas.

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Source E

Pot, Justin. “Cursive Writing Is Obsolete; Schools Should Teach Programming Instead.” *Make Use Of*, 17 Feb. 2015, www.makeuseof.com.

The following is excerpted from an editorial published on a Web site that provides information about technology.

Hardly Anyone Uses Cursive

Almost everyone reading this article was taught cursive in school, but most of you don’t use it. “Much of our communication is done on a keyboard, and the rest is done with print,” says Morgan Polikoff, assistant professor of education at the University of Southern California. “While both research and common sense indicate students should be taught some form of penmanship, there is simply no need to teach students both print and cursive.” There’s only so much time in the day, and which skills we decide to teach has a dramatic impact on the lives of students. Does it really make sense to prioritize an obsolete ability?

It’s Not About The Extra Benefits

Learning cursive does offer some benefits: it helps develop fine motor skills, for example, and stimulates certain regions of the brain. You could make similar arguments about almost anything. Playing the original Super Mario Bros helps develop fine motor skills, for example, but requiring school children to play that game 15 minutes a day would be an (admittedly awesome) waste of time. If cursive is taught, it should be taught not as an essential life skill but as an art—like calligraphy—or as an interesting relic of the past. Modern people don’t use it, and education systems should stop pretending they do.

Bad Reasons To Learn Useless Skills

Cards on the table: penmanship was my least favourite class as a kid (with the possible exception of math). I shudder to think of the time I spent learning cursive: 15 minutes of schooling, every day. It’s a staggering waste—but even worse, in retrospect, were the reasons my teachers said it was important. “You’re going to use this every day,” I was told. I don’t. “In college, if you can’t write cursive, you won’t be able to take notes fast enough.” I didn’t use cursive; I kept up just fine. Of course, teachers gave me lots of bad reasons for learning things—that doesn’t mean learning them isn’t important. I hated learning multiplication tables, but was told it was important because when I grow up I “won’t be carrying a calculator with me everywhere.” That prediction didn’t turn out, but I’m not bitter about learning multiplication tables—I use that skill multiple times every day. So while I hated both penmanship and math class, I’m not upset about multiplication tables. The problem with cursive is I never use it. Surveys show most adults feel the same way. Typing is faster, and print is fast enough when you happen to need to use paper (and it’s increasingly possible to avoid paper entirely).

Education Should Focus On The Future

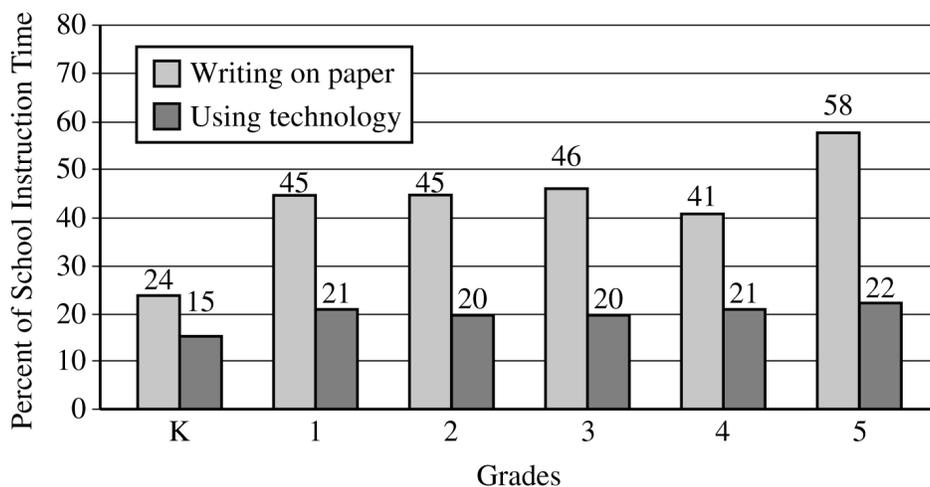
Just because you learned something in school doesn’t mean your kids should: the world is changing, quickly. And while it’s hard to make predictions about where technology is headed, it’s safe to say the future won’t involve a lot of cursive handwriting (unless some kind of disaster sends us back to 14th-century technology, in which case handwriting will be the least of our problems). There’s only so many hours in a day, so it’s important education systems prioritize. Every hour spent learning an obsolete skill like cursive is time they’re not learning the programming skills needed for great jobs, or other essential life-skills like managing your money.

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Source F

“Time Spent in Classroom Handwriting versus Technology.” *Learning Without Tears*, 5 Nov. 2013, www.lwtears.com/files/Research%20Bulletin_Nov%202013_For%20WEB_Nov5.pdf.

The following is a graph of the results of a 2013 national survey of 450 elementary school teachers in the United States that asked how much of their time students spent writing on paper and how much of their time they spent using technology.



Question #/Prompt	Sample Identifier	Score Point
1	1A	1-4-1
1	1B	1-4-0
1	1C	1-3-0
1	1D	1-2-0
1	1E	1-1-0
2	2A	1-4-1
2	2B	1-4-0
2	2C	1-3-0
2	2D	1-2-0
2	2E	0-1-0
3	3A	1-4-1
3	3B	1-4-0
3	3C	1-3-0
3	3D	1-2-0
3	3E	1-1-0

Question 1

The synthesis prompt for this year asked students to use material from six provided sources and develop a position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today’s schools. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support their line of reasoning—indicating clearly the sources used through direct quotations, paraphrase, or summary; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument. The skills required included 2.A, 4.A, 4.B, 4.C, 6.A, 6.B, 6.C, 8.A, 8.B, and 8.C.

We expected these students to develop an argument that consistently demonstrated their understanding of the distinctions being made about cursive vs. manuscript instruction and its importance or lack thereof. This prompt was highly accessible, and nearly all students were able to frame a recognizable response. Their theses were clearly articulated in almost all cases. It appeared that the combination of the new scoring guide and the new stable wording has helped students in that way. The Question Leader makes the important observation that “many lower-half papers were written by students who combed through sources looking for ‘support’ for their own arguments, instead of engaging with the sources,” which was the ultimate aim. By the same token, there were some very accessible places for students to question/engage critically with the sources, and many did so very well. The higher-performing students were also expected to use the sources in conversation with one another in ways that would reveal their sophisticated writing and thinking and their ability to synthesize information in service of their own argument.

Synthesis Essay**6 points**

In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries, handwriting instruction (print and cursive) was virtually universal in schools in the United States. By contrast, little if any time is devoted to such lessons today. While some argue that handwriting instruction should still have a place in schooling, others maintain that digital technologies have rendered such instruction unnecessary.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Write an essay that synthesizes material from at least three of the sources and develops your position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today's schools.

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Source B (worksheet)

Source C (Trubek)

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In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
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- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row A Thesis (0-1 points)</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no defensible thesis. • The intended thesis only restates the prompt. • The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. • There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	<p>1 point</p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Do not take a position, or the position is vague or must be inferred. • Equivocate or summarize others’ arguments but not the student’s (e.g., some people say it’s good, some people say it’s bad). • State an obvious fact rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to the prompt by developing a position on handwriting instruction in today’s schools, rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt. Clearly take a position rather than just stating there are pros/cons.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Some people think that handwriting should still be taught in schools today, but others think that it’s not necessary anymore because everything is digital.”</i> <p>Address the topic of the prompt, but do not take a position</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Kids no longer learn handwriting in school, and there are several reasons why that’s the case.”</i> <p>Address the topic of the prompt but state an obvious fact as a claim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“As opposed to previous centuries, nowadays handwriting is not really taught in schools anymore.”</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Present a defensible position that responds to the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Even though it may seem old-fashioned, handwriting should still be taught in schools today.”</i> • <i>“While it makes sense for students to learn keyboarding and other skills that will prepare them for a digital world, handwriting instruction still holds a place in a modern child’s education.”</i> • <i>“Given the fact that most kids learn on computers and tablets nowadays, it makes no sense for them to spend time learning an obsolete skill such as cursive handwriting, although they still will need to learn how to print.”</i>
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. • The thesis may be anywhere within the response. • For a thesis to be defensible, the sources must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. • The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point. • A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<p>Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0-4 points)</p>	<p>0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or references fewer than two of the provided sources.</p>	<p>1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence from or references at least two of the provided sources. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.</p>	<p>2 points EVIDENCE: Provides evidence from or references at least three of the provided sources. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p>3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>	<p>4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes					
<p>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. • May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus on summary or description of sources rather than specific details. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. • May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. • May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. • Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the sources to build an argument. • Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. • Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the sources to build an argument. • Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. 	
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. 					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria			
Row C Sophistication (0-1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.		
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say...</i>”). • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. </td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;"> Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions across the sources. 2. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or arguments conveyed in the sources) by situating it within a broader context. 3. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument throughout the response. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. </td> </tr> </table>			Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say...</i>”). • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions across the sources. 2. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or arguments conveyed in the sources) by situating it within a broader context. 3. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument throughout the response. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
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Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 				

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Handwriting can often say a lot about a person, however this form of expression is not the only thing that defines a person's character. In the classroom, more and more children are being taught how to rewrite the alphabet, but in a fancier way. While this skill may seem valuable for those who study English or literature, expecting this skill from young children is simply too much. Handwriting instruction in today's schools should be a thing of the past as educators themselves are growing more discontent with this curriculum, this curriculum stems from historical malpractices, and children do not experience any growth.

As students progress throughout their education, their teachers are always there to guide them, however, when teachers are forced to teach curriculum they do not agree with (or when governments do not listen to the teacher's concerns), how effective can they be for the student? This same discontent is growing within teachers with regards to handwriting instruction in the classroom. Teachers from New York to Colorado are beginning to understand what their students need - and handwriting lessons are the first to go (Source A). When it comes down to it, teachers see their students for much longer than state representatives, or maybe even their parents, do. With such a large role in the children's lives, teachers often know what children need, and these needs should be listened to. Susana Cordova, an academic officer from Colorado, shares this idea as she explains the importance of ditching ~~handwriting~~ handwriting lessons and preparing students to utilize tools that they might actually use; these tools include computers, tablets, and other

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

technological advancements (source A). If teachers speak up for their students, governments should listen. Handwriting instruction needs to go.

Along the same lines of the importance of handwriting, the source of handwriting instructions pushes on an agenda that is not fit for an entire generation of students. Going back to the Industrial Age, students found themselves taking part in handwriting instruction to be better Christians, more American, or more fit for the work force (source C). The issue is, this practice is outdated; not all students are Christian, being a "good American" is a much more loose term, and, put simply, the work force today now revolves around technology. As time progressed, these instructions remained, and so have these underlying expectations, but none of these expectations actually correlate to handwriting (source C). Handwriting does not define a student's religious affiliation, behavior, patriotism, or work ethic, and by continuing to use the handwriting practices that were associated with these things, students are being put into a box.

Critics may argue that handwriting instruction is beneficial for students. Multiple studies show that students have more refined cognitive and motor skills, they are much more literate, and their brain's development occurs faster. However, one key detail is that direct instruction is required for all of this to be remotely feasible (source D). The issue is, though, direct instruction does not actually take place; instead, students are given worksheets where they are tested on repetition and memorization (without their teacher's help). While these benefits sound promising, nothing is actually being done in the classroom to harbor them (source B).

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

With this in mind, handwriting instruction does not help teachers, does not allow students to break free from their restraints, and does not harbor any benefits for students that allow them to grow. Handwriting wastes time, is not properly taught, and does not prepare children for the future. Children are the future of our society, not their handwriting skills.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In today's society, doing something simply out of habit & because that is what past ways have done is what handwriting is all about. We all remember our grandparents praising to us the importance of cursive writing & how much it will aid us greatly later in our lives. It seemed to be so engrained in their generation & when it came to importance, we never questioned it. However, while we may continue to value ^{handwriting instruction} ~~some~~ ^{some} ~~some~~ out of strong sense of nostalgia, it should ~~be removed~~ ^{decreased} from school ^{instructed} ~~instructed~~ ^{in a digital age} due to the newer importance of technological skills ~~and~~ ^{on a digital age} & because its benefits can be achieved in less time ^{ways} ~~decreased~~.

The first reason handwriting instruction should be ~~removed~~ ⁱⁿ school instruction is due to the rising importance of technological & more modern skills for children. Since I teach how teachers in Colorado schools not only believe students should be prepared for contemporary communication styles, but also that the entire entire world (& in innovative schools) is moving in the direction of technology. Each day in our lives as people, technology has become a more & more essential piece of our lives. With COVID, people all the time are ~~being~~ ^{being} typing & completely work digitally because they can't see their teachers in person, allowing for more flexibility. Not only, the world is moving away from route, inflexible pen & paper or cursive work, & towards the inclusiveness & ease of typing on Word Docs & Google Sheets to accommodate for anyone's ~~ability~~ ^{ability} & ~~and~~ ^{and} allow them to work. Because of this, writing

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

instructors should be decreased to leave more time for technological / digital computer instruction. This theme is carried over into Doc. C, which describes how it ^{hand} writing takes up less of students' educational time, they could actually become better writers as a whole by being able to operate more quickly on a keyboard during this surgically digital age. Once again, writing instruction must change as the world shifts ~~to~~ to an age more focused on technology & the ever expanding digital surge. As students use more digital writing platforms such as Microsoft Word to complete work, they need less class time on handwriting & more to be spent on typing & understanding how to use a computer. ~~Handwriting instruction should be decreased to allow more time for technology instruction.~~ This could significantly further their writing abilities & simply help them adapt to a world dealing with complex issues such as COVID & long distance education / ~~use~~ employment that can be done at home.

The next reason handwriting instruction should be decreased in school instruction is because its benefits can be achieved in less time ^{& more effectively} ~~ways~~ ways. ~~The~~ Doc. D describes a few of the benefits of writing by hand, such as motor skill development, memory, & even thinking. While these skills are certainly beneficial to all students and should be valued, there are other ways to get them outside of school & in school that don't waste time on something barely used like handwriting. Doc. D details how motor skills can be developed by

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

by playing the Official Super Mario Bros, something that doesn't waste class time (time outside of school), doesn't teach something used by barely anyone, & is very fun for kids as well. Once again motor skills are important for children to develop, but they can be gained in far easier ~~ways~~ & more efficient ways. This same logic can be stretched out to things like ~~math~~ ^{critical} thinking, ~~which~~ another claimed benefit of handwriting. While it certainly does do this, math & history class also practice critical thinking, but are actually useful skills for potential jobs or at least future academic life (college, high school), while ~~handwriting~~ ^{writing} is not. Essentially, this skill can be achieved without wasting class time on something that ~~is~~ has quite little importance in the real world while undervalued subjects such as math & history can steer you academically ~~to~~ into a major. Because of this, handwriting skills should be developed in school, instructors leave their benefits can be achieved in far less time consuming & more effective ways.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

With the advancement of technology, cursive has shown to be an unnecessary skill that should not be taught in schools. Instead of wasting ^{class} time with cursive, students should be taught to use tools of the future and technology.

At one time, many years ago, cursive ~~was~~ ^{might} have been considered an essential skill. However, the reasons cursive once was needed are now outdated and replaced ~~with other~~ ^{with tools such as} ~~general~~ ~~word~~ keyboards. One example of this is the illegible writing from the ~~18th~~ 18th-century, more specifically, the Declaration of Independence (Source C). The original writing is hard for anyone to read, knowing cursive or not, and with the use of modern technology, there is no need to attempt to read the original document anyways, proving the knowledge of cursive in this instance, useless. Another example of this can be seen in the idea that ~~everyone~~ cursive is an essential skill because it is used every day ~~and~~ for things such as taking notes in college (Source E). With means of communication shifting away from paper and pen and towards keyboards, the idea that everyone uses it all the time is just not true. Most people who learned cursive never use it, and ~~stick~~ stick to just typing or printing for school notes.

Not only is cursive ^{itself} non-essential, but teaching it actually wastes class time, with many teachers preferring to skip it (Source A). Instead of taking 15 minutes to learn cursive every day, students could be taught more about how to use modern tech such as spreadsheets and essential typing

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Skills. Otherwise, that class time could be spent on deepening students understanding of school topics, which would be ^{much} more beneficial ^{to them} ~~in the~~ long ~~run~~ term, than any of the "benefits" that ^{may} come with learning cursive.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Handwriting is a simple and useful skill that will help people throughout their lives. However, it is becoming less and less frequent to use handwriting in schools with the uprising of technology. Handwriting instruction in today's schools should not be taught as it is a waste of time and has no proper meaning. "Students and teachers have swapped pencils for key boards, baselines for blinking cursors, and [off] the traditional writing route." (Source A)

As time moves on, technology advances and old technology falls deeper into history. Computers and cell phones have overtaken the needs to carry around pieces of paper at the grocery store. Even typewriters, although long gone, were once used to write essays, instead of using pencil and paper. Handwriting education is simply outdated by technology, and it is no longer necessary to be taught in schools today. Besides, there are more important topics to be discussed in school. ~~Handwriting is a waste of time and money at the school teachers.~~

Cursive has been taught in American schools for many years prior to present-day America. It was a mandatory class, where students learned how to write in cursive and also standard print handwriting. But "mastering [this] was dull repetitive work... and [done while students held] their arms and shoulders in awkward positions for hours to get in shape for writing drills." (Source C) As stated from the source, handwriting education was very repetitive and boring; it only

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

made the students "writing machines," with no significant outcome.

One may argue that handwriting education develops skills beyond educational benefits including: cognitive and motor skills, literacy development, brain development, and memory. However, one can use the same argument about practically any other skill used in life. "Playing the Super Mario Bros helps develop fine motor skills..." but to schools that would be a waste of time. If handwriting is taught, however, it should be taught as an art form in an art class, not in an English class for life skills. (Source E)

Sample 1E (1 of 2)

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Cursive writing should be practiced more by the schools and students because helps people to identify themselves, helps you to develop more skills, and cursive help

people to connect things. In source C Mr Drake talks about the importance of using and learning cursive and he says that "Cursive writing identifies you as much as your physical features do" (Source C). Cursive writing helps you to express your self to give an opinion about something and that is why schools should continue teaching cursive writing because like the quote says cursive writing identifies your self and that is why we should continue learning cursive writing instead of using technology.

Cursive writing identify your self but also help you to develop more skills. In source D the author talks about the benefits that handwriting brings to the people and he says "Because handwriting is a complex skill that involves both cognitive and fine motor skills" (Source D). The quote shows how handwriting can help people to develop more skills and become more productive in writing. Handwriting that involves cursive writing is important in our life because not just identify our self it also help us to understand new things and to develop more skills so we can become better. Cursive practice is an important part of us and that is why schools should continue practicing this writing

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In school because it identifies you, develop more skills, but also help people to connect things.

Cursive writing help people in the brain development which is the most important part to understand and learn new things. In source D the author says that handwriting activate the regions of the brain and that also "Cursive helps you connect things" (source D). The quote show why cursive writing is so important in our life because helps us to connect thing so we can understand things better. This is why schools should continue teaching cursive writing instead of using technology because writing help us to be what we are and help us to improve our skills.

Question 1

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Sample: 1A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis appears at the end of paragraph 1: “Handwriting instruction in today’s schools should be a thing of the past as educators themselves are growing more discontent with this curriculum, this curriculum stems from historical malpractices, and children do not experience any growth.” It is a defensible thesis statement that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response establishes a clear line of reasoning that makes effective use of structured paragraphs. It takes opposing arguments into consideration and includes specific evidence from the sources. The third and fourth paragraphs provide specific evidence about how “handwriting instructions pushes an agenda” and “direct instruction does not actually take place.” These paragraphs explain how the individual points they make connect to the thesis, arguing against claims of cultural benefits of learning cursive and claims of cognitive benefits. The second paragraph makes an argument from authority (specifically the authorities cited in Source A), claiming that teachers possess more knowledge than legislators about what students need to know for the future. This paragraph is less specific in its commentary than the paragraphs that follow, but each claim is supported with evidence from the sources.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

Paragraphs 1 and 2 are persuasive and thoughtful but not particularly sophisticated. The response merited a sophistication point with nuanced refutative arguments in paragraphs 3 and 4 and an eloquent conclusion. The third paragraph makes incisive arguments against three past claims in Source C about the cultural and moral effects of learning cursive, using one-sentence explanations about how changes in the culture make these claims irrelevant followed by evidence from a source that denies these effects—a sophisticated one-two punch refutation. The fourth paragraph acknowledges the cognitive benefits of learning cursive in source D but refutes arguments based on these benefits by focusing on a source’s claim that these benefits require students receiving direct instruction and then using the worksheet (Source B) plus a statement from another source to show that schools don’t offer this direct instruction—another one-two punch refutation.

Sample: 1B

Score: 1-4-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis is the next-to-last sentence of the first paragraph: “However, while we may continue to value handwriting instruction out of some strong sense of nostalgia, it should decreased from school instruction due to the newer importance of technological skills in a digital age & because its benefits can be achieved in less time consuming ways.” This is a defensible statement that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

There is a sustained line of reasoning both within and between the paragraphs. The response moves back and forth between detailed discussions of the benefits of decreasing handwriting instruction, using the hybrid teaching method common during the Covid-19 pandemic to demonstrate the benefits of technological skills: “the inclusiveness & ease of typing on Word Docs & Google Sheets to accommodate for anyone’s situation & still allow them to work.” For example, the response cites Sources A and C about the “flexibility” and time efficiency of technologically based education in a digital world. The response addresses the cognitive benefits

Question 1 (continued)

of handwriting foregrounded in Source D, using Source E to demonstrate that the same cognitive development benefits can be obtained “by playing the Original Super Mario Bro’s.” This fluid control of evidence and explanation is consistent throughout the response. The response consistently embeds and responds to specific words and phrases from the sources and integrates them into its explanations.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. While its prose is generally functional and workmanlike, it does not serve to emphasize the most complex parts of the argument. The response begins with a sweeping generalization: “In today’s society,” and transitions with “The first reason handwriting instruction should be decreased in school” and “The next reason handwriting instruction should be decreased.” While the response does contain a line of reasoning, it does not explore the complexities or tensions across the sources beyond what is evident or make a sustained effort to situate the argument in a broader context. Finally, the response does not display effective rhetorical choices and lacks the detailed consideration that characterizes essays that have earned the sophistication point.

Sample: 1C**Score: 1-3-0****Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The response has a thesis that presents a defensible position on handwriting instruction: “With the advancement of technology, cursive has shown to be an unnecessary skill that should not be taught in schools. Instead of wasting class time with cursive, students should be taught to use the tools of the future and technology.” A multiple-sentence thesis like this one can receive the thesis point.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response makes multiple connected claims in a line of reasoning. For example, the response claims that cursive is outdated and supports that claim with a discussion of evidence including the Declaration of Independence (Source C) and modern note-taking practices in college (Source E). The third paragraph constructs a line of reasoning about the opportunity cost of teaching cursive and supports it with an appeal to authority (Source A) and a discussion about better alternative uses of class time, including the original idea that the time could be spent on “spreadsheets” or “deepening student’s understanding of school topics.” The response focuses on specific words and details in the sources, such as the insight in paragraph 2 that modern cursive won’t help you read the Declaration of Independence and the specific value of “15 minutes” that teachers don’t want to waste in paragraph 3. While there is evidence for all claims, not all evidence is clearly explained. For example, the rebuttal at the end of paragraph 2 is a simple denial that people use cursive without a developed discussion of why. The commentary does not integrate all evidence into the response’s line of reasoning.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. The writing is workmanlike and functional, but there are meaningful lapses: “cursive has shown to be” or “hard for anyone to read, knowing cursive or not.” While the meaning is clear, the style does not rise to the level of “vivid and persuasive.” The response does contain a line of reasoning, but it does not explore complexities or tensions across the sources, nor does it situate the argument in a broader context. The role of cursive is not extended past the binary options of using it or not using it; the response does not discuss nuanced limitations or implications.

Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1D

Score: 1-2-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis is the second-to-last sentence of the first paragraph: “Handwriting instruction in today’s schools should not be taught as it is a waste of time and has no proper meaning.” Although the second reason is vague, the statement takes a defensible position about handwriting instruction and therefore earned the thesis point.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response provides evidence from four sources and discusses evidence that supports the claim in the second paragraph. The second paragraph follows up a quotation from Source A at the end of paragraph 1 with two specific examples about grocery lists and typewriters to illustrate why pencil and paper are becoming obsolete. However, the third paragraph is made up largely of quotations from Source C without a clear statement of the claim the quotations support or any explanation of their relationship to a line of reasoning. The final paragraph summarizes Source D (uncited) and Source E to state and refute a claim about the cognitive benefits of learning cursive, but it does so without explaining the statements in the sources. Commentary relating evidence to the claims is lacking in these two paragraphs.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The second paragraph provides two examples that display thinking about the implications of source claims about changes in the technologies for writing, but this was not enough to merit a point on sophistication. The response struggles to be clear about one of its central claims and often fails to provide commentary connecting evidence from the sources to its claims. The rhetorical choice of a three-claim structure is not effective in the way that characterizes responses that did earn this point.

Sample: 1E

Score: 1-1-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response has a thesis: “Cursive writing should be practiced more by the schools and students because helps people to identify themselves, helps you to develop more skills, and cursive help people to connect things.” This thesis presents a defensible position on handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response only uses two Sources, C and D. Responses that do not use three sources cannot earn more than 1 point on the evidence row. The response generally substitutes summary and paraphrase for explanation. For example, in the last paragraph, the student quotes Source D, “Cursive helps you connect things” and then summarizes the same statement, “The quote show why cursive writing is so important in our life because helps us to connect thing so we can understand things better.” The extension from “connect things” to “understand things” is not an explanation. This pattern is repeated throughout the response.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. The writing is disorganized, and the sentence and paragraph structures obscure rather than clarify meaning. With no line of reasoning and explanations that rely on summary, the response cannot explore complexities or tensions across the sources. The response also does not situate the argument in a broader context. It is firmly anchored in the material presented in the two sources and never expands into social or cultural factors implicated by or in that material.

The Student Samples which follow are the released set of papers posted on AP Central.

1A = 1-4-1

1B = 1-3-0

1C = 1-1-0

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Penmanship is a practice that has held true throughout centuries of world history. Through its beginnings as pictographic scripts and its historic practical applications, penmanship has managed to connect people for as long as time can tell. Through letters between lovers via carrier pigeon or through signatures on legal documents, penmanship finds its place in society day in and day out. While to some, cursive handwriting in particular may seem a futile use of motor skills, for many, ~~it creating~~ the track of a pen ~~across~~ forming loops across a paper allows them not only several ~~to~~ cognitive benefits, but a sense of individuality and normalcy in a rapidly digitalizing world. Cursive handwriting, though it may seem outdated in the ~~to~~ digital age, is vital in society not only because it promotes cognitive development, but because it can be used to define a person and his/her work; due to the importance of cursive writing, ~~it was~~ its teaching must not be omitted from schooling.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In practice, the benefits of cursive writing cannot be outshone, especially in terms of cognitive development. Studies show that ~~the~~ the act of handwriting not only develops the regions of the brain associated with thinking, short term memory, and language, but that it also helps with information retention (Kysilko). While the cognitive benefits of handwriting are obviously not ~~limited~~ limited to cursive handwriting, manuscript, while ~~slow~~ it yields the same benefits, is slower. Many proponents of eliminating the teaching of cursive in schools argue that it would allow time for other more important skills to be developed, cursive helps save time in the long run for many due to its fluidity in practice. Others claim that cursive should not be taught as a necessity but as an art, but this perspective, too, fails to acknowledge that it contradicts the primary doctrine of the anti-cursive: that the teaching of the skill is a waste of time (Pot). The historical significance of cursive is also important to note when discussing the viability of

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

teaching cursive in school in the modern days. In American history, cursive was taught as a method of cultivating an American identity, as Dickie Drake, Alabama state representative stated, "cursive writing identifies you as much as your physical features do." (Trubek). In order to maintain the sense of individuality Americans hold so dearly, handwriting must continue to be taught. Perhaps handwriting serves a superficial means of maintaining individuality, but in a rapidly digitalizing world, sometimes the only way to distinguish the writing of two people is by handwriting. Unless you are a seasoned stylographer, 12pt Times New Roman font essays written by anonymous authors will be impossible to distinguish. ^{two} No matter how you look at it, cursive handwriting is a vital component of human development and must continue to be taught in schools.

Perhaps the most common rebuttal to the importance of teaching cursive handwriting in school is that traditional writing methods are becoming obsolete,

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

but studies show that it clearly not the case. As schools opt to print fewer copies of worksheets in favor of digital annotation and many textbooks are releasing digital forms, a widespread falsehood is gaining popularity: the idea that schools are "[writing] off the traditional route of writing" (Gillis). In casual observation of more affluent areas, this may seem obvious, but studies show that a greater ~~more~~ amount of time in class many elementary classrooms is spent hand-writing than is spent using technology (graph).

This simple disproof eliminates the top argument against ~~the~~ the continuation of teaching cursive handwriting, thus denying anti-cursive sentiment is unarguable.

The teaching of cursive in schools offers copious amounts of benefits for students, that cannot effectively be replaced by any other methods. Cursive is ingrained in the minds of people everywhere, perhaps due to its lasting effect on human cognitive development. So I implore you, student or not, to continue to study cursive. Allow yourself a return to ~~the~~ tradition after a



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

long day at the computer. You just
might leave a mark on your mind forever.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In the present, handwriting instruction in schools has dwindled from its former prominence. The digital age offers alternatives to developing and mastering penmanship, so the art is less prioritized compared to alternative common core subjects. Although handwriting instruction develops motor skills, it has little place in schools because it is inefficient compared to technology, and other subjects are more useful in the real world.

Many advocates for handwriting instruction cite motor skill development as a reason to keep the practice. For instance, the National Association of State Boards of Education claims practicing handwriting both requires and augments fine motor skills (Source D). However, attributing motor skills primarily to this course is not entirely accurate. Edutardist Justin Pat rebutted the claim by explaining other uses of hands such as playing video games are equally as effective (Source E). While handwriting instruction may indeed promote superior motor skills, alternative options render taking periods of class for this one section irrelevant. Therefore, the development of fine motor skills is not exclusive to handwriting instruction, so schools should instead consider less time-intensive alternatives.

One flaw of handwriting instruction is its decreasing efficiency with the advent of digital typing. Author Anne Trobich of the New York Times admits even third graders spend less time ~~writing~~ typing than writing (Source C). Because note-taking skills are maximized with the author's speed, if one method is noticeably slower than others, the most efficient option should be in fact be practiced. In fact, a survey of elementary school students

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

~~the~~ quantified the difference in speed as handwriting takes over twice as much time as computer use (Source P). Due to this extreme discrepancy, practicing handwriting instruction in schools should not be encouraged when technology is generally far superior for the students whose skills must be cultivated. As such, handwriting instruction has little place in the modern era.

Finally, other subjects should ~~be~~ take the place of the spent instructing handwriting in schools. Specifically in regards to specialized handwriting like cursive, limited school time is better spent on subjects the students will use daily, and even second-grade teacher Deb Fitzgerald agrees schools should "move on and save class time on other topics" (Source P). Skills such as math should be prioritized for younger children since methods like multiplication are integral to both adult and child life (Source E). Overall, rather than ~~take up limited time~~ devote time to a subject with little use, schools should instead reallocate time to other core topics the student can use in the real world.

In conclusion, while handwriting instruction has some amount of merit with its promotion of motor skills, it poses little worth in schools because of its inefficiency and ~~the~~ lack of physical use.

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Cursive hand writing should not be focused, or taught in school, because it is a waste of time, it is not useful, and technology is more prevalent now.

Teaching cursive writing is a waste of time. If ~~the~~ cursive writing is not mandatory then that can lead students to focus on building a larger vocabulary, which will ultimately make them a stronger writer. In source C the text states in the last paragraph "the changes imposed by the digital age may be good for writers and writing, because they achieve automatically quicker on the keyboard, today's third graders may well become better writers as handwriting takes up less of their education." This piece of text displays how the younger children have a better chance at being better writers because handwriting is not taking much of their time. With this extra time children could be building vocabulary to be a successful writer. Learning cursive writing in school is a waste of time because as the future is approaching the use of cursive is becoming non-existent. Source A states "the experiments most of us have, with 30 minutes a day practicing cursive in class, have gone by the wayside." This is supporting the fact that the time used learning cursive has not been useful to everyday life.

Going along with a waste of time cursive isn't used enough to be beneficial, so why learn it. Many schools have cut it out of the curriculum. Source A states "41 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards for English, which omits cursive handwriting from required curriculum." Source A clearly displays the ideal that cursive handwriting in the school system ~~isn't~~ is a

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

mandatory, because it is stated that 41 states have taken it out of their curriculum.

As time goes on and technology progresses technology will be used more and the use of pencil and paper are going to be more discrete. In addition to that with technology advancing there are going to need to be skills taught about technology. ~~Source A~~ Source A states "The move outside our schools, and in innovative schools, is towards technology". This from source A is simply supporting that technology is taking over, because the world after school is filled with technology. From source C it states "the world is changing, quickly. And while it is hard to make predictions about where technology is headed, it's safe to say the future won't involve a lot of cursive handwriting" with that in mind it is obvious to see with technology advancing the need for cursive handwriting is decreasing.

To conclude, cursive handwriting should not be a skill enforced in school. ~~paper~~

Question 1

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

The synthesis prompt for this year asked students to use material from six provided sources and develop a position on the place, if any, of handwriting instruction in today’s schools. Students were expected to respond to the prompt with a thesis that presented a defensible position; select and use evidence from at least three of the provided sources to support their line of reasoning—indicating clearly the sources used through direct quotations, paraphrase, or summary; explain how the evidence supported their line of reasoning; and use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating their argument. The skills required included 2.A, 4.A, 4.B, 4.C, 6.A, 6.B, 6.C, 8.A, 8.B, and 8.C.

We expected these students to develop an argument that consistently demonstrated their understanding of the distinctions being made about cursive vs. manuscript instruction and its importance or lack thereof. This prompt was highly accessible, and nearly all students were able to frame a recognizable response. Their theses were clearly articulated in almost all cases. It appeared that the combination of the new scoring guide and the new stable wording has helped students in that way. The Question Leader makes the important observation that “many lower-half papers were written by students who combed through sources looking for ‘support’ for their own arguments, instead of engaging with the sources,” which was the ultimate aim. By the same token, there were some very accessible places for students to question/engage critically with the sources, and many did so very well. The higher-performing students were also expected to use the sources in conversation with one another in ways that would reveal their sophisticated writing and thinking and their ability to synthesize information in service of their own argument.

Sample: 1A

Score: 1-4-1

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis is stated at the end of paragraph 1: “Cursive handwriting, though it may seem outdated in the digital age, is vital in society not only because it promotes cognitive development, but because it can be used to define a person and his/her work; due to the importance of cursive writing, its teaching must not be omitted from schooling.” This is a defensible statement that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Sophistication (0–4 points): 4

The response develops a sustained line of reasoning both within and between the paragraphs. It moves smoothly back and forth between discussions of the benefits of cursive and rebuttals of typical objections to cursive handwriting instruction. For example, the response cites Source D about the cognitive benefits of cursive, anticipates the counterargument that manuscript would carry the same benefits, and addresses this counterargument with the claim that “manuscript, while it yields the same benefits, is slower.” All of this is done in one sentence. The response consistently exhibits fluid control of the evidence and appropriate explanations of its significance. Whereas less controlled responses tend to quote large pieces of text when less would be appropriate, this response consistently embeds and responds to very specific words and phrases from the sources and integrates them into its explanations.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response consistently displays a vividness and persuasiveness of style that goes beyond the occasional rhetorical flourish. From the crafted introduction that contains relevant details about the history of script to the direct address in the conclusion, the response is vivid. The response also consistently explores complexities and tensions across the sources. Most sources are presented in conjunction with one another in a way that

Question 1 (continued)

demonstrates a deep understanding of the tensions present and offers a cogent explanation for why the response’s position is ultimately more relevant. Finally, the response consistently explores the broader context of the place of cursive in American society.

Sample: 1B

Score: 1-3-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This response clearly articulates its thesis at the end of paragraph 1: “Although handwriting instruction develops motor skills, it has little place in schools because it is inefficient compared to technology, and other subjects are more useful in the real world.” This multipart claim is defensible and takes a clear position on the subject of handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response uses a conventional five-paragraph structure, but it distinguishes itself by incorporating evidence from multiple sources clearly and explaining their connection to the thesis. The response organizes multiple claims into a line of reasoning, providing clear explanations of specific evidence. For example, in paragraph 2 the response uses Source D to provide evidence of an opposing point of view, then uses evidence from Source E to refute the claim. The response goes on to explain how the point raised in Source E about video games developing motor skills is applicable to the classroom, saying that “alternative options render taking periods of class for this one section irrelevant” and that “schools should instead consider less time-obtrusive alternatives.” Not all of the evidence in the response is clearly integrated, however. The third paragraph’s claim that Source C “admits even third graders spend less time typing than writing” is a mischaracterization of the significance of the relevant phrase, and the connection to the “decreasing efficiency” of handwriting is not clear. In the same paragraph, the claim that the chart in Source F demonstrates that “handwriting takes over twice as much time as computer use” is also a mischaracterization with little connection to the topic of the paragraph. These lapses prevent the response from having earned the fourth point in Row B.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. While its prose is generally functional and workmanlike, it does not serve to highlight the most persuasive parts of the argument. The response does contain a line of reasoning, but it does not explore the complexities or tensions across the sources, nor does it situate the argument in a broader context. Its mischaracterization of several of the sources does not suggest a very sophisticated grasp of the material. The response also does not display especially effective rhetorical choices. Once an adequate explanation has been provided for one point, the response moves on to its next point.

Sample: 1C

Score: 1-1-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis is stated in the first sentence of the passage: “Cursive hand writing should not be focused, or taught in school, because it is a waste of time, it is not useful, and technology is more prevalent now.” Although its phrasing is somewhat confusing, it is a defensible thesis that takes a position on handwriting instruction.

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response is characterized by long quotes that are followed by close paraphrases. For example, paragraph 2 includes an extended quotation from Source C that is followed by the paraphrase, “This piece of text displays how the younger children have a better chance of being better writers because handwriting is not taking much of their time.” The commentary that follows, “With this extra time children could be building vocabulary,”

Question 1 (continued)

attempts to explain the statement, but it is not attached to the argument. Later paragraphs lack even attempts at commentary and consist entirely of close summary of the sources.

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not display a vividness or persuasiveness of style. It often struggles to find the appropriate word or syntactical structure to convey the underlying idea, as when it asserts in the first sentence that “Cursive handwriting should not be focused, or taught in school.” The response does not develop a line of reasoning, so it could not earn the sophistication point by exploring complexities or tensions across the sources or situating its argument in a broader context. Finally, the response does not display effective rhetorical choices. Its consistent use of a quotation followed by a paraphrase is not a sophisticated structure.

2021 Handwriting Prompt, Synthesis Essay 1-4-1

Penmanship is a practice that has held true throughout centuries of world history. Through its beginning in pictographic scripts and its historic practical applications, penmanship has managed to connect people for as long as time can tell. Through letters between lovers via carrier pigeon or through signatures on legal documents, penmanship finds its place in society day in and day out. While to some, cursive handwriting in particular may seem a futile use of motor skills, for many the track of a pen soaring loops across a paper allows them not only general cognitive benefits, but a sense of individuality and normality in a rapidly digitalizing world. Cursive handwriting, though it may seem outdated in the digital age, is vital in society not only because it promotes cognitive development, but because it can be used to define a person and his/her work; due to the importance of cursive handwriting, its teaching must not be omitted from schooling.

In practice, the benefits of cursive writing cannot be outshone, especially in terms of cognitive development. Findings show that the act of handwriting not only develops the regions of the brain associated with thinking, short term memory, and language, but that it also helps with information retention (Kyjilko?). While the cognitive benefits of handwriting are obviously not limited to cursive handwriting, manuscript, while it yields the same benefits, is slower. Many proponents of eliminating the teaching of cursive in schools argue that it would allow time for other more important skills to be developed, cursive helps save time in the long run for many due to its fluidity in practice. Others claim that cursive should not be taught as a necessity but as an art, but this perspective, too, fails to acknowledge that it contradicts the primary doctrine of the anti-cursive: that the teaching of the skill is a waste of time (Pot). The historical significance of cursive is also important to note when discussing the viability of teaching cursive in school in the modern day. In American history, cursive was taught as a method of cultivating an American identity, as Dickie Drake, Alabama state representative stated, "cursive writing identifies you as much as your physical features do." (Trubek). In order to maintain the sense of individuality Americans hold so dearly, handwriting must continue to be taught. Perhaps handwriting forms a superficial ? of maintaining individuality, but in a rapidly digitalizing world, sometimes the only way to distinguish the writing of two people is by handwriting. Unless you are a seasoned stylographer, two 12pt Times New Roman font essays written by anonymous authors will be impossible to distinguish. No matter how you look at it, cursing handwriting is a vital component of human development and must continue to be taught in schools.

Perhaps the most common rebuttal to the importance of teaching cursive handwriting in school is that traditional writing methods are becoming obsolete, but studies show that is clearly not the case. As schools opt to print fewer copies of worksheets in favor of digital annotation and many textbooks are releasing digital forms, a widespread falsehood is gaining popularity: the idea that schools are "[Writing] off the traditional route of writing" (Gillis). In casual observation of more affluent areas, this may seem obvious, but studies show that a greater amount of time in many elementary classrooms is spent hand-writing than is spent using technology (graph). This simple disproval eliminates the top argument about the continuation of teaching cursive handwriting, thus deeming anti-cursing sentiment unarguable.

The teaching of cursive in schools offers copious amounts of benefit for students that cannot effectively be replaced by any other methods. Cursive is ingrained in the minds of people everywhere, perhaps due to its lasting effect on human cognitive development. So I implore you, student or not, to continue to study cursive. Allow yourself a return to tradition after a long day at the computer. You just might leave a mark on your mind forever.