

Cursive Writing

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When retirees think back to their elementary school days, they will easily recall being taught cursive writing. Sit upright. Hold your pen or pencil lightly. Keep your wrist up. Glide on your finger nails. Write with freedom. They will recall using a practice book. The MacLean Method of Writing, a personal copy being provided for each student in the first six grades. It all began in grade one when they were taught to print but by grade two, they were taught to join the letters with simple or double curves. Each student's report card had a space for each subject's mark, including one for writing, and we always hoped to see an A.

As the years went on, folks used their signatures written in cursive for everything from signing job applications to unemployment cheques to pension applications. Many a friendly letter was written in cursive to friends and relatives and reading each reply was no problem. We had no difficulty understanding cursive while reading wills or while poring over historical documents. We understood the signature on the inside of each greeting card. We just couldn't consider ourselves literate without being able to read and write cursive.

However, time does not stand still, and change always seems to be around the corner. Suddenly within the past 20 years, a debate arose as to whether students should be taught cursive writing. The question arose, is cursive writing a vanishing skill? Many have asked what use is it? Cursive is becoming something of a dying art with texting and typing taking over in our technical world. Some educators agreed while others still argued that deleting cursive writing from the curriculum would break an important link between the past, the present and the future. It seemed in many school districts across Canada no conclusion could be made as to the survival of cursive instruction so the final decision was that it would be made optional.

Given the fact that electronic communications are taking over the world of reading and writing, there are fears that children might not be able to write their own signature. Many years spent at a computer or tapping out letters on an iPhone are among the reasons why penmanship is suffering. Yet each time a document requires us to sign at the bottom, we are expected to use the flowing form of writing known as cursive. Many people would be thrilled if cursive writing would once again be a mandatory part of the curriculum in our schools.