# **Some states don't want cursive classes to go by the (key)boards**

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Linden Bateman and his pen are fighting to keep cursive writing, or script, in American classrooms. Penmanship. Handwriting. In years gone by, it helped distinguish the literate from the illiterate. But now, in the digital age, people are increasingly communicating by computer and smartphone. Handwriting often isn't called for anymore. When the new [Common Core](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=Common+Core) educational standards were crafted, penmanship classes were dropped.

State leaders who developed the Common Core — a set of preferred K–12 course offerings for public schools — omitted cursive for various reasons. In this digital-heavy age, there is an increasing need for children to master computer keyboarding. And there is evidence that even most adults do not use classic cursive in everyday life. Instead, they use some mixture of cursive and print.

"Stop and think for a second about what are the sorts of skills that people are likely to be using in the future," said education expert Morgan Polikoff. "It's much more likely that keyboarding will help students succeed in careers and in school than it is that cursive will."

States that adopted Common Core are allowed to offer courses that were omitted from the list of preferred offerings. But in many schools these days, classroom time is limited and the pressure to perform well on standardized tests is high. In this environment, optional offerings tend to get sidelined in favor of what's required.

That's why at least seven states — California, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Utah — have moved to keep the cursive requirement. Legislation passed in North Carolina and elsewhere couples cursive with memorization of multiplication tables as twin "back to basics" mandates.

Cursive advocates point to recent brain science: Research indicates that the fluid motion employed when writing script enhances hand-eye coordination and develops fine motor skills. This in turn promotes reading, writing and thinking skills.

They further argue that scholars of the future will lose the ability to interpret valuable cultural resources — historical documents, ancestors' letters and journals, handwritten scholarship — if they can't read cursive. "The Constitution of the United States is written in cursive. Think about that," Bateman said.

All the fuss seems a bit loopy to some members of Generations X, Y and Z. People their age have moved increasingly from handwriting to computers. Some 95 percent of teens use the Internet. The percentage using smartphones to go online has grown from 23 percent in 2011 to 37 percent today, according to the Pew Research Center. A 2012 Pew report found the volume of text messages among teens rose from 50 a day on average in 2009 to 60 a day on average two years later.

Pew research has also shown that educators don't necessarily think that's a bad thing.

A recent survey of American middle and high school teachers found that 78 percent believed the Internet, social media and cell phones were encouraging their students' creativity and personal expression.

Despite those results, says researcher Kristen Purcell, most teachers "encourage their students to do at least some of their writing by hand." Teachers gave two main reasons, she said. The first is that most standardized tests are still in paper-and-pencil format. Teachers also believe that having students write by hand helps slow down their thinking, encouraging deeper and fuller thinking while they're writing.

Pew surveys of teens have found many prefer to write on the computer, which they found faster and neater. But many still use handwriting for notes, letters, journals, short stories or music lyrics — as well as for school.

"I find it hard to think creatively when I am typing," a high school boy from the Pacific Northwest told Pew in 2008. "So I like to handwrite everything, then I put it on the computer. I don't know, that is just how I am."