

QUESTIONS ABOUT CURSIVE

Inga Dubay & Barbara Getty

Q: What is this debate about teaching cursive handwriting in schools?

A: The fact that cursive handwriting will no longer be taught in the elementary schools of several states has recently made headlines. Other states are debating whether or not cursive handwriting will be included in their core standards.

Perhaps this isn't so surprising when you consider the fact that by middle school or high school, most students print exclusively or make up their own semi-cursive style different from what they learned earlier. No wonder students lose interest in cursive writing: they don't see cursive letters on their computer screens, smartphones, tablets or in books, newspapers, and other media. For many in this technological age, traditional cursive handwriting is outdated.

Q: What do you mean when you use the word "cursive"?

A: When most people hear the word "cursive," they think only of the traditional cursive or "looped cursive." This brings to mind tedious exercises in grade school and perhaps low grades in penmanship – and maybe illegible writing.

"Cursive" comes from the Latin word, "currere," which means "to run." Cursive writing is literally "a running hand." So cursive handwriting doesn't mean that every letter in a word has to be joined to the next letter or that the writing must be sloped or that loops should be added to letters. Cursive just means that handwriting has a flow, making it comfortable and efficient.

There are two kinds of cursive handwriting in the USA: looped cursive and cursive italic

Q: What is the difference?

A: Look closely at the differences with regard to the learning process and outcomes. As you compare, consider the fact that in all areas of education, the most successful programs build on previously learned concepts.

looped cursive cursive italic

Looped cursive has been taught in US schools since the early 1900s including brand names such as Palmer, Bowmar-Noble, Zaner-Bloser, D'Nealian, and others. In looped cursive, loops are added to lowercase and capital letters. Looped cursive requires that all letters in a word be connected. When third grade students make the transition from printing to cursive writing, they must learn 26 new lowercase and 26 new capital letter shapes, and, in some programs, a change of letter slope. These changes constitute a time-consuming process, and for many students it is often a traumatic transition.

Cursive italic comes to us from the height of the Italian Renaissance. Cursive italic does not require students to learn new letter shapes as it builds on previously learned concepts. Cursive italic is joined printing. Also the letter slope is the same for both basic italic (printing) and cursive italic. Since the writer is not adding loops to letters for cursive, handwriting remains legible. The writer may choose to join letters, lift between letters or use a combination of both techniques. Printed handwriting is always an

acceptable choice. (Attorneys attest that a clear, printed signature is just as legal as an illegible, joined scrawl.)

Q: If a teacher wants to teach cursive handwriting, which is the best choice?

A: Again, consider the learning process: Is the time spent teaching handwriting efficient, and does the process build on previously learned concepts?

In our experience of over 40 years, we have found that italic handwriting (printing & cursive) works well for all levels from kindergarten to adulthood. Basic italic instruction begins in kindergarten and cursive italic is introduced in the second or third grade. Teachers need less instruction time as cursive italic is a natural continuation of what students have already been taught. Some children prefer to continue to print, while others easily segue into using diagonal and horizontal lines to connect some or many letters.

Q: When an adult wants legible handwriting, which is the best choice?

A: Consider the outcomes: As an educator and as a person who writes by hand, which of the two cursives, looped cursive or cursive italic, would you choose for effective personal communication?

Adults in our numerous seminars for medical professionals and others in our public workshops who have chosen to make their handwriting legible, find it helpful to drop the loops -- performing a “loopectomy” as one surgeon phrased it. That’s why we see “Please Print” on every form: eliminating loops promotes legibility. Adults who use basic and cursive italic find that they have a legible, useful, and aesthetically pleasing handwriting.

Q: Where does Getty-Dubay stand?

A: Legible handwriting is still important in this technological age. Therefore, we applaud the decision of some states to question the teaching of looped cursive. This questioning opens up the debate about which handwriting program uses the most efficient learning process and produces the best outcomes. If a cursive handwriting is to be taught, the most educationally sound transition from printing to cursive is found in Getty-Dubay italic handwriting. In addition, Getty-Dubay provides legible handwriting for all ages.

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Getty-Dubay Italic Handwriting Series and Write Now: The Getty-Dubay Program for Handwriting Success; www.handwritingsuccess.com

OVERVIEW:

Getty-Dubay Basic Italic (printing):

Sans-serif lowercase and sans-serif capitals

Slightly sloped letters at 5° slope, both basic and cursive

Ascender/capital height similar to most fonts; descender length similar to most fonts

Getty-Dubay Cursive Italic:

All lowercase letter shapes remain the same from printing to cursive

Easy transition from printing to cursive with many options

Only one capital letter shape (Y) changes from printing to cursive

Option to use basic capitals with cursive lowercase