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# Student Success

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**Student Success**

## The Handwriting is on the Wall

*By Janet Zadina, Ph.D., Spring 2011 Brain Research and Instruction Newsletter  
Bridging Between Neuropsychological Research and Education*

A few years ago I started wondering how the change from handwriting to keyboarding would change the brain. Handwriting is unilateral and keyboarding is bilateral. In handwriting, in a typical right-handed person, the information goes from the left brain to the right hand. In left-handers, it could go from either the left hemisphere or the right hemisphere (although rarer) so the path is not as direct. The implications of this are not well understood. In using a keyboard, one is using both the left and right hands simultaneously in order to compose. This is bound to use the brain differently, but what would be the effects?

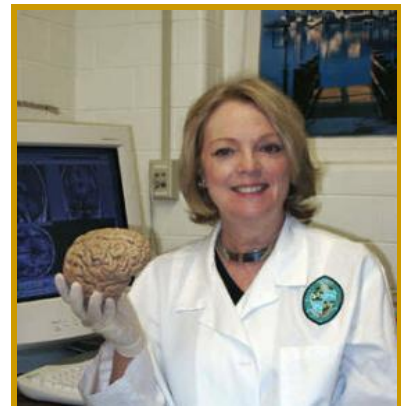
Virginia Berninger at the University of Washington says that handwriting differs from typing because handwriting involves sequential strokes for each letter, as opposed to keyboarding with one stroke per letter. Brain scans show that sequential finger movements activate a larger area in the brain in regions involved in thinking, language, and working memory. She also found that students wrote better essays by hand than using keyboards.

Some new research indicates that handwriting is an important skill for the brain in several ways. First, learning to write and practicing it can not only help children learn their letters and help with fine motor skills, but may also help them express themselves. Sadly, many schools are devoting less time to this skill, so parents may need to encourage handwriting at home. There is an app for that! A game for preschoolers is available

as an app on the iPhone called abcPocket Phonics. Writing thank you notes and letters to relatives is also an excellent way.

Other research indicates that writing may help learning by engaging the brain. For example, writing out Chinese letters may help with learning the language, researchers speculate. I am thinking that would help with chemistry symbols and math as well. I personally am a huge note-taker even though I realize I will probably never look at the notes again. I feel that it focuses my attention and helps me process and recall the information. I have always supported the idea of students taking notes in class as an important practice. I am pleased to see that my behavior is supported by research. Researcher Karin Harman Jones at Indiana University (my B.S. Alma mater!) concludes that there is something about writing and drawing that is helpful for learning. You know from my talks that I also encourage drawing as a way of processing information.

If you want more information, go to (<http://bit.ly/9sYY3T>) and <http://bit.ly/dggYOm>





Spotlight



# THE POWER OF CONNECTING: HOW FACULTY AND PEER CONNECTIONS ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

Dr. Ginger Holden, English Professor  
San Joaquin Delta College

In the blockbuster film *Avatar*, the Omaticaya people possess a unique idiomatic expression for recognizing the singularity of an individual: “I see you.” To *see* someone means to see beyond his/her exterior; it means to see inside the person and understand him/her.

As faculty, we sometimes either forget to “see” or fail to “see” our students. Our eyes might travel across a classroom but only register a sea of nondescript, indistinct bodies. Other times, we might look at our students and unconsciously make assumptions about their identity, which is simply another form of not “seeing.”

*Seeing* is acknowledging the student as a person—with interests, conflicts, goals—and seeing is a pathway to creating connections. When we find ways to connect with our students and provide a means for them to connect with each other, we enhance the way they perceive themselves. And when students begin to “see” themselves as capable college students, learning occurs.

There is no single, correct way to connect with students. However, Johnnie Terry, Professor of Philosophy at Sierra College, suggests doing more than placing an email address or phone number on our course syllabi. In his presentation at last month’s Student Success Institute in San Jose, Terry emphasized earnest connections that reach out to students. Simply learning students’ names can be a

powerful way to say “you are important to me.”

We can also create connections by enabling students to “see” us. Sharing our career or educational path, our passion for our discipline, or our fascination for a hobby not only *humanizes* us but also allows us to find common ground with a segment of our students.

Finally, faculty need to encourage and, if possible, facilitate connections between students within our classrooms. Terry recommends forming groups to use throughout the semester as well as creating different groups with varied members. This gives students the opportunity to work with a different set of peers. Even though lecture courses offer little to no opportunity for student connections (i.e. group work) during class time, faculty can encourage these connections via study groups, out-of-class projects, or labs.

Faculty and peer connections cannot be over-emphasized. When students feel connected with their instructors and classmates, they develop a “positive academic identity.” For some students, this new identity is needed to replace a “negative academic identity,” which inhibits learning. For other students, connections help strengthen their existing academic identity, which may be “neutral or insecure.”

Faculty can help shape this positive academic identity in various ways. For example, providing precise feedback on assignments (such as *reasons* why the exercise/

exam/essay was not successful) can empower students. As a result, explains Terry, a student’s mindset may alter from “Nothing I can do” to “I just need to do x, y, and z.”

Faculty can also provide specific steps for learning course material and how to achieve those steps. For example, we can explain that all assigned reading should be completed before going to lecture, and we can provide instruction on *how to read* the material in order to best comprehend the textbook or work of literature. As part of the course introduction, consider including a “Ways to Succeed in This Course” handout or PowerPoint slide and reinforce those concepts throughout the semester. Learning tools, such as these, may also positively impact a student’s mindset.

[Click Here](#) for complete article

## San Joaquin Delta College

### STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM

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