

Crunch-it

Switzerland Makes Case To Kill Cursive Writing For Good

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A side-effect of the digital revolution may be the death of cursive writing. Though some may argue that pure utilitarianism is a trap, students must be prepared for a different future.



Cursive writing could use a hand

(Catherine)

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DIE WELT/Worldcrunch

Since 1947 the kind of handwriting taught in Swiss schools has been known in Swiss-German dialect as *Schnüerlischrift*, which means “string writing” because — unlike block letters — all the letters in a word are attached to each other as if they were on a string.

But now *Schnüerlischrift*, or cursive writing, may be going the way of the dinosaur: In a spate of modernizing activism, the majority of Swiss cantons and the country's teachers' association all favor eliminating cursive handwriting completely from school courses.

The reasons are the same ones cited in 2011 by the German state of Hamburg to take cursive off its school curriculum: The writing experience () has become something entirely different than it was 50 years ago. Back then, people wrote letters by hand and bookkeepers made handwritten entries in their ledgers.

But these days, when 6-year-olds are already adept with computers () and mobile phones, block letters have started to be viewed as the measure of all things, and cursive is seen as cultural baggage. And top education officials apparently like nothing better than to unload unnecessary burden to save money, free up class and teacher time, and spare students needless effort.

But if the Swiss handwriting revolution really takes place and *Schnüerlischrift* is replaced by a simpler form of block writing, it is not the end of the Western world. Cursive handwriting was once introduced because it enabled faster writing; it can of course be done away with if it no longer serves its purpose. It would just be a shame — just as it would be a shame if poetry, operas () and stucco ceilings were no longer.

Historically obsolete

European forms of handwriting have their origins in Latin business writing, documented since the first century. The Romans produced massive amounts of daily correspondence, far more than any civilization before them, and needed a form of writing that would be easy to inscribe on wax tablets or papyrus (unlike what Asterix (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asterix>) might lead you to believe, not every contract, letter or official document was chiseled into stone in large block letters). Smoothing out the writing process led to ligature — the linking together of letters in a word — and hence to cursive writing styles.

Those who support keeping cursive handwriting on school curricula mostly advance their case with aesthetic arguments that naturally strike opponents as absurd. In 2011, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* quoted German professor of pedagogics Hans Brügelmann as saying that art class should be the place for people to learn handwriting if that's what they wanted to do — a disdainful attitude reminiscent of other ideological revolutionaries who wrote off beautiful things () as useless and worthy of elimination.

The fact is that we can type words faster than it takes to write them out by hand, and there are now only very few cases (such as addressing envelopes, graffiti (), and of course the legally binding signature) that can't be handled with a computer. But technology is finding ways to deal with such things as well, and then it may be that the death knell will have truly sounded for cursive handwriting.

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Article 22 of undefined
