For kids, pen mightier than keyboard

"Children consistently did better writing with a pen when they write essays. They write more and they write faster," says Virginia Berninger.

The study was designed to compare methods of transcription, a basic cognitive process involved in writing that enables a writer to translate thoughts or ideas into written language. Both handwriting and spelling are transcription processes.

Pen and keyboard

"A keyboard doesn't allow a child to have the same opportunity to engage the hand while forming letters—on a keyboard a letter is formed at a fast pace, on paper the child has time to form letters," she says. "Children consistently did better writing with a pen when they wrote essays. They write more and they write faster," says Berninger.

Although most children in the study developed transcription skills in an age-appropriate way, a small number showed signs of a transcription disability. They were tested on transcription tasks for 10 minutes both by pen and by keyboard.

In the second task they were asked to write one sentence that began with the word "writing" while using a pen and to write one sentence that began with "reading" while using the keyboard. Finally, the children were asked to write essays on provided topics for 10 minutes both by pen and by keyboard.

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