GRADUPDATE

Hi graduate friends,

I frequently hear students debate the benefits of taking notes by hand or on a laptop. Much of these discussions revolve around one's ability to organize and search notes later on. However, you should also consider the potential effects that your note taking may have on your learning. Let me explain more through an article on this topic.

A study done by Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014) showed that when students took notes using a laptop, they ended up taking a lot of verbatim notes, meaning they wrote down exactly what they heard without necessarily processing it. However, students who took notes by hand (probably due to a slower writing speed) were forced to process the information and rewrite it in their own words. In a second experiment, the researchers even tried asking students not to write verbatim notes on a laptop, and they still did!

After taking notes, students were then asked conceptual questions about the topics and those who had taken notes by hand outperformed those who had taken notes on a laptop. Even when tested a week later on the topics, from students who reviewed their notes, those who had taken notes by hand did better than those who reviewed notes taken on a laptop.

Research like this shows us the importance of processing the information you are trying to take in as opposed to simply writing it down word for word. Having said that, I know it may not be easy or realistic to handwrite all your notes from now on, so consider some of the options you have below:

- Handwrite notes for more important things and type out the less important ones
- Type notes the first time so that you know you have them online, but when you go back to review them, handwrite a summary as a way to practice the content
- Look into software/notebooks which allow you to take a picture of your handwritten notes and turn them into searchable text online
- Remember, handwritten notes can come in different formats. For example, you can also try drawing a mind map of the topic you're trying to study, as opposed to a summarized text piece. The key is to process the information and recreate it.

Now that you know this information, how else can you improve your learning through your note taking process?

Best,

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Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your Learning Development & Success team!

Reference:
Mueller, P. A., & Oppenheimer, D. A. (2018). Corrigendum: The pen is mightier than the keyboard: Advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. *Psychological Science*, *29*(9), 1565–1568.
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