

How friends, family spark handwriting change

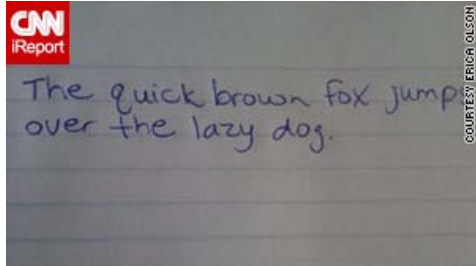
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By Cortnee Howard, Special to CNN
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Editor's note: As part of CNN's *Defining America* project, CNN iReport is conducting a cultural census. We're asking people to share a self-portrait, show off their handwriting, tell us what they typically eat for dinner, and more. This piece is part of our series focusing on the handwriting project.

Handwriting is much more than a way to communicate. It's also a visual representation of our personality.

(CNN) -- When Erica Olson was in the eighth grade, she and her best friend shared everything: clothes, shoes, gossip -- even their handwriting style.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Handwriting style can be a direct reflection of personality, experts say
- Changes to handwriting over time are quite common
- Experiences with friends and family can have an enormous influence on the way we write
- Technology affects frequency with which we write but not the personality of our handwriting

The pair were inseparable and spent months practicing identical signatures and smiley faces in the margins of their homework after school. But when they grew apart during high school, Olson **decided that it was time for a change.**

"I didn't want my handwriting to look like hers," Olson explained. "I wanted it to be more round and bubbly, like the handwriting of the most popular girls in school. To that end, I set upon a project of changing my handwriting completely. I have a distinct memory of sitting in earth science class, painstakingly filling out a worksheet assignment as I trained my hand to the new 'bubble' style."

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Only after months of practice was Olson finally content with her results.

"It took me quite a long time to write in this handwriting to begin with, but as I grew accustomed to it, I could write nearly as rapidly as I could in my old style. I haven't really changed my handwriting since then, but as I finished high school and moved into college, I became less concerned with how others would view my handwriting, so I let the letters become sloppier and less bubbly," she said.

Stories like Olson's are not uncommon. Whether we write in print, cursive or a combination of both, our handwriting is much more than a vehicle for communication. It is a visual representation of our personality: of who we are, what we've learned and who we want to be. And it is this deep psychological connection, experts note, that makes handwriting so personal and susceptible to outside influence.

"Handwriting changes over time, and even handwriting changes from day to day are very common," said clinical psychologist Christina Rummell. "How we write can often be a subtle indicator of our personality, and so the compulsion to alter one's handwriting is very normal."

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Left-handed children are particularly susceptible to changes in their handwriting as their parents worry about how they will adapt to a world designed for right-handed people. Sunny Jamil was just a toddler when his grandparents noticed that he began picking up objects with his left hand. But instead of encouraging him to use his right hand like his other family members, they [embraced the trait](#).

"I picked up the pencil with my left hand when I was a child," Jamil said. "My maternal grandmother discouraged those who desired that I be taught to do it with my right hand. She may be the most significant influence to my current writing methods."

But being left-handed also came with many challenges. It took Jamil's parents several months to teach him how to write without smudging the paper with his hand. Years later, Jamil says that despite his improvement, he is still searching for the perfect handwriting technique.

"Ever since I began to hold a pencil, I've been told by my elders and friends that my handwriting is pleasing to look at," Jamil said. "On the other hand, I have a self-critical view where I feel that it is OK and can always improve. My secret internal, and nearly impossible, goal is to be able to perfect it to such an extent where I am able to duplicate how every letter/word looks the same way every time."

Family and friends are not the only factors that can spark an abrupt handwriting switch. As technology continues to erode the need for written communication, experts also say that handwriting can change simply from a lack of practice.

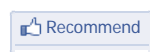
"Because we don't write things out by hand as much, it's not unusual for handwriting to change over the years," Rummell said. "It can be hard to maintain form without practice."

Lisa Jones, a bookkeeper from Perry, Michigan, agrees that her computer use has changed her writing.


"My father started teaching us to write before we entered school and was very insistent on having good cursive and printing," she said. "My [handwriting has declined](#) as I've used the computer throughout the years."

But despite these observed relationships between handwriting and culture, there are still those who say that their handwriting remains above the influence. Carmen Espina, a college professor in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, says that she is [happy with her handwriting](#) and has never tried to change it.

"I think fast and I write fast," she said. "When writing, I want to describe everything as detailed as possible. I can't say that anyone has influenced my handwriting. I write for myself and I do not intend others to understand it."



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Hilikus00

Maybe you should give them your phone number, so they can ask your opinion before they post an article.

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dawnarie

I remember copying some friends handwriting. I completely changed the way I wrote my capital J after seeing a friend write her name Julie, making circles to dot my "i" from my aunt, Using a lower case G as a capital, from my mother. I have went thru my loopy phase and backhand phase. Sadly after I b... [more](#)

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DrunkPunk

handwriting? who the hell writes with their HANDS these days?! barbaric, i say.

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osasmama

this article has changed my life!

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NJNCPS

Good article. A couple good points. Yes handwriting does change, with growth, mental status (those feeling 'small' in mood write smaller) and by choice. Now, I'm like Charlie Brown. I can't use a pen for 30 seconds without making a mistake. Charlie had a pencil pal, not a pen pal. OMG something... [more](#)

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vulpes08003

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Thibby

Left handed people are just better people.

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zapper45701

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Lately, I've been writing letters (in long-hand cursive!), and mailing them snail mail! Talk about old fashioned. However, I find a connection to my thoughts and ideas that has been hiding somewhere under the keyboard. It's very cathartic to let it all out through the pen. I actually spend a few ... [more](#)

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MsAledella

This article reminded me that I want to practice calligraphy. I picked it up as a child because I happened to have what everyone called very nice handwriting, and I enjoyed it from an artistic aspect. I am shocked to see comments saying cursive isn't or shouldn't be taught. If I hadn't had the oppor... [more](#)

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Tigz

facepalm replay button doesn't work

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Tigz

facepalm when the power grid goes down you revert to writing out prescriptions....which will be filled using current inventory...

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fallenmeteor

Hand writing does not express personality, unless you specifically intend it to. It shows that you care enough about expressing your personality that you feel the need to include it in your handwriting

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amused123

dust10b- nonsense. NO one has been convicted of being a rapist because of their handwriting revealed they had rapist tendencies. It's a bunch of hooley.

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dust10b

You have not clue what you're talking about. Handwriting analysis is often used by the prosecution in criminal cases. One of the main reasons is because it you can see a persons personality through it. Look it up. Showing your personality is exactly what handwriting does, whether you want it to ... [more](#)

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michaelcturn

I, for one am glad that handwriting is becoming de-emphasized. I have minor essential tremors which make fine-motor movements less precise. I spent countless hours doing handwriting drills to no avail. It wasn't until I was allowed to use a computer in class that I really began to excell.

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seantr4

amen same issue. i used to get f's in school because the teacher couldnt read my writing, they made me use the fat kindergarten pencils in school (embarrassing) and even with that and 30 min on just one line still couldnt write better.

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Bobbb1056

Here in Ohio the state seems to be following the Indiana lead of discontinuing teaching cursive writing in schools, elementary school. But I wonder then, how will people learn to write their signiture? It is such a personal thing. Practiced until you get it just the way you want it. And to practi... [more](#)

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viewyscrew

Not true in all cases amused123- There are instances where someone may have to give a "legible signature". I for one have a hideous "everyday signature" but there are times I've had to write it out so it is clearly my name on that piece of paper.

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amused123

Your legal signature is a "symbol" unique to you, it is not a spelling of your name.

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iGuessed

Why don't you analyze Obama's handwriting?

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swimohio

Hand writing is one indicator of dyslexia. It may take longer to identify the problem if one of the indicators are removed.

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WTerrace

i use a word processor even though i can no longer put dot my l's with hearts.

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KiM3695

I use either bubble print or a combination of cursive and print. Or, sometimes I just use cursive. I have many different ways of writing different things, different documents, etc. Writing should always be taught, and cursive too. Why not? Kids should learn it. Neat and organized hand writing makes ... [more](#)

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barondarby

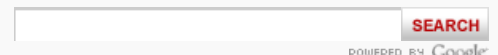
my handwriting has suffered greatly due to the fact that I do almost everything digitally these days. thanks to computers and smart phones the most I ever write these days fits on a post-it note. i am left handed, and I don't smear my ink, but people did try to make me write with my right hand in sc... [more](#)

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