

Is handwriting on its way out?

✘ I have always thought I was quite a nice person but I have just discovered I'm reliable, supportive and cynical. This news was brought to me courtesy of a press release from STABILO and discovered a little about the dark art of graphology.

The company surveyed 2000 UK adults to celebrate National Stationery Week back in April. The findings show:

- Almost a quarter have a small-sized writing style – 7mm or less – which can suggest someone is conscientious.
- Just three per cent have large handwriting – 13mm in height or more – and this is typically the sign of someone who is generous and lacking inhibition.
- Handwriting which leans to the right can suggest someone is friendly and this represents 30 per cent of Brits.
- While left-leaning writing, which is used by around one in 10 people, can suggest a cynical nature


Apparently the colour ink you choose is also revealing:

- Two thirds of respondents use black ink when writing which sometimes shows someone wants to be clearly understood.
- Blue ink is often an indicator of friendliness and this is colour of ink is used by 30 per cent of people

I suspect most people choose whatever pen comes first to hand but I did once have a boyfriend who wrote in green felt tip on pink paper. The relationship was doomed after just one note.

Handwriting still has its place according to the survey: for writing shopping lists, to-do lists and filling in forms. Nearly 50% of those surveyed admit they judge people on their handwriting – and six in 10 said their individual handwriting style is important to them.

Neither mad nor bad, just dyslexic

This time of year when Christmas cards come though the  letter box seems to me to be the one occasion when handwriting matters. While e-cards are in vogue and a great money saver, there is something special about digging out the best pen, or even a half decent biro, and doing Real Writing.

According to an article in the [Guardian](#), research commissioned by online stationer Docmail earlier this year revealed that the average time since an adult last scribbled was 41 days. But it also found that one in three of us has not had cause to write anything “properly” for more than six months.

Many claims are made for the power of handwriting on our psyche and development. Edouard Gentaz, professor of developmental psychology at the University of Geneva who said: ‘Children take several years to master this precise motor exercise: you need to hold the scripting tool firmly while moving it in such a way as to leave a different mark for each letter.’ He believes it helps with reading and learning the alphabet.

Now I have spent a lot of my working life with people with dyslexia who often have dreadful handwriting which they struggle to read and have seen the way that touch typing can transform composition and spelling as people move from thinking in terms of individual letter shapes to writing whole words so I am not excited by such assertions and I do not accept that handwriting helps develop muscle memory whereas computer don't.

I am also quite shocked by notion put forward in the article by historian Philippe Artières that doctors and detectives in the late 19th and early 20th century found signs of deviance among lunatics and delinquents, simply by examining the way they formed their letters. Quite possibly these people were neither mad, nor bad but simply dyslexic.

However, I will admit that handwriting is very individual and personal compared to word processing. I am amazed how many people's handwriting I can still recognise at a glance after a gap of many years. I am also saddened when I open a card from an old friend and see how their handwriting has started to break down with age .

Handwriting is our personal mark, it reveals something of our identity and as such is very powerful. We need to be careful how we use it.