

## ARE YOU STILL PAPER TRAINING YOUR KIDS?

WINGATE SWAIN

**Noted educational futurist and author [Will Richardson](#)** has written impassionedly about the folly of preparing students for a future that no longer exists. In a [blog post](#) several years ago, he examined some of the shifts in thinking that educators need to embrace to better equip their students for success. One in particular caught my attention. “Right now, we are still paper training our kids,” he wrote. Although I’m sure he was talking about the larger imperatives of digital media, I immediately thought of the most fundamental of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills—keyboarding.

**With more than 95% of all written information** being composed in digital form, why is it that we rely on paper-and-pencil to assess writing skills? And, a little closer to home, how might online programs like PEG WRITING be used to help students—particularly younger ones—develop greater proficiency at the keyboard?

**The key, I think,** is to make the keyboarding the byproduct rather than the focus of instruction. For your next PEG WRITING assignment,

1. **Encourage students** who are uncomfortable with keyboarding to compose their first drafts on paper. In this more familiar and comfortable environment, students will tend to create more developed and responsive works.
2. **Once the first draft is completed,** have them transcribe the hand-written first draft into PEG WRITING for scoring. To reduce their anxiety,
  - Disable the timer that tracks and displays how much time student have to complete the task.
  - Remind them that their work will be saved automatically every 60 seconds and if they get tired, they can quit and return to finish the transcription later.
  - Recommend specific tutorials that may help familiarize students with the keyboard. Some of the animated tutorials require students to type answers as they go along, which means that the student is learning about writing and becoming familiar with the keyboard in a setting that feels like fun!
3. **Finally,** collect the student’s handwritten essay and compare it to the online submission. What changes occurred during the transcription process? Are there key differences? It is reasonable to expect some changes (after all, transcription is an opportunity for revision), but key omissions or mistakes (in transcription) may provide clues to inform instruction.
4. **In future assignments,** compare the autosave times to see if the student has improved their transcription speed and accuracy.

Interestingly, our research has shown that even those students who demonstrate limited keyboarding skills still prefer to submit their responses online (rather than on paper). Over time, you can expect your students to achieve greater proficiency in these essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as they gain greater confidence in their writing and in their ability to compose online.

Please contact us at 855-830-1390 or email us at [info@pegwriting.com](mailto:info@pegwriting.com) to share your thoughts on this subject. We welcome your questions and comments.

## ABOUT WINGATE SWAIN

Mr. Swain directs the marketing and sales of MI's packaged assessment solutions, including the award-winning Folio Writing Assessment and the Project Essay Grade (PEG) automated essay scoring system. Mr. Swain came to MI in 2002 after a 25-year career in the computer software industry. A graduate of Duke University, he has served in a variety of sales, marketing, communications, business development, and management positions for AT&T, SAS Institute, and Informatica Corporation. In the community, he is an active advocate for downtown and neighborhood revitalization efforts.