



## Questioned Documents Section – 2011

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### J25 Trends in Handwriting Instruction

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be made aware of recent trends and theories in handwriting instruction and the spread of newer and revised handwriting systems in the United States. Class characteristics of notable new and revised systems will be highlighted. Information from a survey of school systems will be presented.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing awareness of newer handwriting systems and their class characteristics, which will aid in the evaluation of handwriting in the practice of forensic document examination.

Knowledge of the forms in prescribed writing systems is important in forensic document examination in evaluating the uniqueness and significance of handwriting characteristics. Forensic document examiners must be aware of characteristics which may have been influenced by a system and thus are common to a large class of writers, and those which are individual and serve to uniquely characterize writing.

Previous surveys of handwriting systems have shown that the Palmer and Zaner-Bloser systems were dominant through much of the 20th century, with Zaner-Bloser eventually becoming the more widely-used system in public schools.

Toward the end of the century and into the present, emphasis in schools has gradually shifted away from handwriting instruction to more time spent on keyboarding and computer skills. Students also write less in school and in their home lives, choosing computers, text messaging, and electronic media over handwriting as the preferred method of communication. Educators have noted that by the time students reach junior high and high school age, their handwriting is often difficult to read and partly illegible. The result of this is that educators have sought handwriting systems that are easier and quicker to learn and that emphasize legibility and speed.

The D'Nealian system of handwriting was created in part as a response to this need. By the 1990s, studies of portions of the United States showed that the D'Nealian system had surpassed Zaner-Bloser as the most popular system in public schools in the majority of the states surveyed.

Other simplified systems have also been developed based on different theories as to which forms and methods of letter construction are easier to learn, retain, and more likely to remain legible after initial instruction. The Handwriting Without Tears (HWT) system has become popular and is used by a growing number of school systems. Zaner-Bloser has moved beyond their traditional system to offer a simplified system; recent information indicates that Zaner-Bloser again shares the industry lead alongside D'Nealian. There has also been discussion in some schools of teaching only printing, and dropping cursive writing instruction altogether. Another movement supports the idea of teaching only one italic-based system rather than the current two system approach of teaching cursive and printing.

Information for this presentation is based on a literature survey and interviews with personnel at handwriting system companies, and on an ongoing survey of schools; data presented will include results from the Chicago metropolitan area and other regions as available.

### Questioned Documents, Handwriting Systems, Writing Instruction