



J17 A Comparative Study of Generation Y and Generation Z Signatures

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the handwriting characteristics observed in Generation Y and Generation Z signatures.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by discussing handwriting characteristics observed in the younger generations' signatures, those that are shared within Generations Y and Z, and if differences exist between the generations.

Before 1980, writing was taught in North American schools using copybooks from published writing systems. After 1980, there was a shift in the North American public schools for students to copy their teacher's writing on the chalkboard.¹ The North American educational curriculum over the years has had less focus on penmanship and writing instruction. As of 2006, some Provinces in Canada have eliminated cursive writing as a learning expectation in the curriculum.² As of 2013, approximately 45 states in the United States have removed cursive writing instruction from the curriculum.²

Generation Y or the Millennial Generation was born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. Generation Y was one of the first generations to grow up with computers, the internet, and cell phones. They were exposed to technology and many became technologically savvy. Several individuals from Generation Y were exposed to cursive writing instruction but have reverted to hand printing.

Generation Z or the Post-Millennial Generation was born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. At a very young age, Generation Z was exposed to technologies, such as computers and tablets. They have become highly proficient in the use of technology. Some individuals within the younger generation have had no formal cursive writing instruction and are unable to write or even read cursive writing.

The younger generations often prefer to type on an electronic device versus writing with pen and paper. Speech-to-text is also a popular option. Video chat, text, or direct messaging is favored over handwritten correspondence.

This project sets out to compare the signatures of Generation Y and Generation Z. Participants from this study ranged in age from 18 to 39 years (born 1980 to 2001) and learned to write in North America. The Generation Y participants ranged in age from 24 to 39 years (born 1980 to 1995). The Generation Z participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years (born 1996 to 2001). Ten specimen signatures were collected from each participant. Handwriting features that were assessed include: type of writing, style of writing, skill, case of writing, letter construction, connections, punctuation, initial and terminal strokes, size, flourishes, line quality, alignment, positioning, and range of variation.

It is hypothesized that Generation Z writers will have less connections, introduce more hand printed forms, have poorer line quality, and have a lower skill than Generation Y.

Signatures are important in authenticating documents. Do Generation Y and Z still value pen-and-paper signatures? The educational and societal changes that distinguish Generations Y and Z from past generations include: the lack of formal penmanship training in cursive writing and the shift toward electronic communication. Are there unique features in Generations Y and Z signatures that set them apart?

Reference(s):

1. Jan Seaman Kelly and Brian S. Lindblom, *Scientific Examination of Questioned Documents, Second Edition* (Boca Raton: CRC Press Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 59-60.
2. Lisa Van De Geyn. The End of Cursive Writing in Schools? *Today's Parent*, November 26, 2013, <https://www.todayparent.com/family/cursive-writing-in-schools/>.

Signatures, Generation Y, Generation Z