

The power of writing things down...

There's an often circulated quote I see it a lot online attributed to different people, but the essence runs across literally generations and any number of well-noted authors and playwrights. It says, "I often write to find out what I think about something."

Writing the process of demanding of ourselves to put words on a writing surface. It provides us clarity. It helps us zone in on key messages. It helps us share those messages with ourselves and with others.

Writing is a beautiful thing that, hilariously, was once considered kind of like controversial technology. Back in 300 BC, good old Socrates—of course, we know and love him as a very influential person in human history—but he decried the written word, saying that the use of written words would stop us from using our memories and our minds. Thankfully, his student Plato was okay with writing things down, so we know that Socrates said that. Otherwise, it might've been lost in the ether.

So, here we are today, with so many tools and different options for writing, for capturing our thoughts and clarifying our messages. And it's wonderful to remember in this moment that, while there are many plates on which the food can be served, there's great benefit in hand-to-writing surface—writing by hand.

This is an actual, literal, visceral connection to the writing process that enhances memory and recollection. You're more likely to recall things that you've handwritten, especially if you've done so repeatedly, if it's important for you to recall it.

It's also a beautiful way to do cognitive offloading. The reality is our brains are hardwired to run efficiently, and that means even our working memory has limitations. We can manage no more than about three to four items in working memory at any given time. By writing and often writing by hand so it's captured quickly and succinctly, we are actually freeing our brains to keep taking in and processing other information along the way. So—cognitive offloading: very helpful in many circumstances and situations.

It's often said that our mind is made for having ideas, not holding them, and that aligns with that cognitive offloading, where we need to get what's in our brains down into another format so that we can reference it again.

In collaborative settings, writing things down—especially in a way that can be viewed, contributed to and shared in the moment—is what we call distributed cognition. We share in the message creation and clarification of what is being crafted to purvey to other people. So, distributed cognition: also incredibly helpful, especially in these days

in which there's constant input and we're in environments that demand so much of us. It is helpful and healthy to share.

And writing is great reference material. We humans have brains that are made to run efficiently and keep us safe. That means they will default to automations and patterns. Sometimes, those automations and patterns are actually loops that are limiting us. By referencing what we've written previously, we can identify those patterns and loops and step in with our brain's prefrontal executive functioning to make changes of our own volition, step in and move ourselves, propel ourselves, forward.

Whether it be a project, speech, some other kind of written content where we're just capturing ideas in whatever form you can, hand write and latch onto those words, the better. It's going to serve you, your colleagues, your friends, your community better when you sit down and write.