LAPTOPS IN THE CLASSROOM: EVALUATING THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGY AGAINST DISTRACTIONS

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Many students in college choose to use a laptop or similar tablet technology to take course lecture notes. Laptop use in classrooms has sparked a debate in the teaching community about the advantages and disadvantages (e.g., distractions) of using laptops. To shed light on this debate, in a previous study we explored effects of different note-taking methods with either a pen and paper (handwriting condition) or a laptop (typing condition) on memory for text. We found that students in the handwriting condition did better on an assessment of the material compared to students who typed notes; results were approaching significance. The goal of the current study is to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of laptop use for note taking by asking participants to observe a video lecture. Participants will be assigned to either the typing condition (laptop) or the handwriting condition (pen and paper). They will be instructed to watch a non-psychology introductory video lecture (approx. 20 minutes), and will be asked to take notes on the lecture as if they are going to be tested on the material. After a short distracter task, participants’ memory for the lecture will be tested using a combination of multiple-choice and fill-in-the blank questions. A week later, participants will be given the same assessment test to determine if encoding method (laptop vs. handwritten) influences long-term retention. Note-taking is known to increase retention during the encoding process by converting information from sensory registers to short and long-term memory (DiVesta and Gray, 1972). Based on the encoding process, we hypothesize that participants in the handwriting condition will have a higher retention rate than those who are in the typing condition for both short and long-term retention. We hope that results will inform both students and teachers about best-practices in note taking.