
Advantages and Disadvantages of Technology in the Music Industry

Reading Music: Print versus Screens

I'm sure everyone has seen the comic strip theme about the younger generation forgetting how physical books work. Technology users laugh it off and think it's the old people turning the tables because they don't know how technology works and they think it works both ways. With the rise of e-books, that future may not be so far off. People communicate digitally, read digitally, write digitally. Even a whole music genre is based around using only technology. How long before all our art is technology based? Will musicians convert to strictly technology reading and writing music? Let's delve deeper.

Everyone has a preference when they read. Some like to read in bed; others like busy and loud environments, while even some require silence and comfort to read. Some people like large print. Some people like mystery. Some people refuse to touch an e-book. It's all about preference.

People who prefer physical books argue that there's less distractions. No notifications pop up on your book telling you so-and-so liked your photo. You don't get notified that your boss texted you. All a book does is be a book. When reading for comprehension and learning, a physical book is easy to notetake and annotate. Or when notetaking digitally, you don't have to go back and forth between tabs or windows on your device. There's also the nostalgia around physical books. Have you ever smelled a book? Heard the sound of pages turning? Some people love those experiences (Jabir).

On the other hand, some people prefer screen-reading. With the rise of devices strictly for reading (ex. Kindle), people like having a whole library in an object smaller than some books. You can read anything, anytime, anywhere. Depending on your e-reader, you can multi-task, which is a great benefit. Some e-readers also have a dictionary button, so you can highlight a word you don't understand and it will define it.

When we write, some people have completely converted to technology. Others still believe in the tried and true handwritten method. Each have their pros and cons.

Writing on a screen has ease of mobility for those with disabilities. And it's remarkably easier to backspace: rather than messily cross out pen or erase pencil, you just tap a button. Speaking of

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neatness, there is no illegibility. No one can have chicken-scratch typing. Typing also allows for spell and grammar check, which assists with individualized support in educational writings.

Handwriting has its benefits, too. Handwriting is personalized. A handwritten letter always creates feelings of gratefulness, more so than an email or a typed letter. Our handwritten signature can act as a binding agreement because everyone's handwriting is different. Handwriting has also been linked with better memory regarding what was written.

I have converted my writing to technology, but I feel I have a unique method for my writing. When writing for research, I like to become well-versed in my topic. Then, I turn on talk-to-type and explain the topic of that paragraph. I use my own words. Sometimes, I even swear. I feel it gets my thoughts on paper, typed, and organized into the paragraph style of the final paper. I revise and replace informal words with more appropriate ones and add citations from where I learned my information. I find this method keeps my paper in my own words and doesn't have the latency between thought and key (or pen). It moves at the same pace as my brain, rather than having to wait for my hands to finish this word. This is also especially helpful because I have joint issues in my hands and wrists, and typing and speaking is easier on my hands.

Evidence to support the music and language parts of the brain are the same has been uncovered by the Georgetown University Medical Center. The temporal lobes memorize words, but also music. Hearing an out-of-key note registers in the brain the same as an illogical word. The example given by ScienceDaily was "[I]'ll have my coffee with milk and concrete" (ScienceDaily).

So now we know, our brain treats it like a language. When we read music and play it, the reading and speaking parts of our brain light up like a christmas tree when viewed through an fMRI. Improvising in a group, which is a common form of jazz music, literally translates in our brains as a conversation. Our brains process what the other person played, and responds with something that complements it (Mannes). Why shouldn't reading and writing music be discussed in this conversation?

When I brought this topic up in class, my colleagues mentioned that they never even thought of using an E-reader for music. Because I have no personal experience with this, I interviewed the IUP Music Technology and Tuba/Euphonium professor, who reads often from an iPad. Regarding distractions, he said his reading software, ForScore, prevents him from multitasking in other apps. But even he gets distracted sometimes because they are right there. And he said screen reading isn't for everyone: "[w]e have been conditioned to scan the screen rather than read in a consistent manner from left to right. We look for pictures, links, ads, etc... We are also used to bouncing around between different tasks on our devices, so I think that reading music on a screen is not for everyone." (Wehnau, Collins). He also claimed note-taking is easier,

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because “You can write directly on the PDF and you can control the size, color, and opacity. ForScore also has pre-made “stickers” such as clefs, accidentals, and other common markings. These can also be resized and pasted with any color.” (Wehnau, Collins). Dr. Collins doesn’t read on a screen all the time, though. He added that he only uses an e-reader when traveling with a lot of music or when playing outside.

Reading music on paper is something I am very experienced with. On paper, you don’t have Facebook, Twitter, etc. available at your fingertips. In rehearsals, however, note-taking can appear sloppy and difficult to read: a problem avoided when using an e-reader. An issue brought up by Dr. Collins was, when playing outside, your paper can blow away. One single paper can fall out of a folder, and be much easier to miss than a whole missing e-reader. Another downside to paper is that in historical or popular sheet music, originals can be destroyed. If no one converts it to PDF, it becomes lost forever. Even music that has been converted to PDF and sold, can become worn after being well-loved and often played.

When it comes to composing music, I went to a composition major who studies very closely under Dr. David Martynuik at IUP. He claimed writing on a notation software allowed for experimentation. With a playback function, you can write chords that don’t follow the rules of music theory and see how they sound. Writing on paper is “...more textbook and usually involves one or two close voices” (Wehnau, Snively). In a case study involving giving a child a notation software, it resulted in a “...musically untrained [child] demonstrat[ing] on many occasions the ability to imagine and externalise musical sounds accurately in pitch and rhythm.” (Jennings). This means a software gave someone without musical training the ability to compose and understand music in a different way, meaning digital composing makes music more accessible.

In the end, this is a conflict of preference, and it cannot be solved in one essay. Both e-books and physical books, sheet music and notation software, have a place and a purpose. The development of digital sheet music and notation software and powerful tools in the music world, but you need to know how to use them right. This isn’t the definitive end to the debate, but it gives insight so others may choose what is best for them.

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