

VIEWPOINTS

SECTION | H

BUFFALONEWS.COM

THE BUFFALO NEWS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2014

Studies suggest paper is better than a screen for reading comprehension and retaining information.

There's still something special about paper

Interesting that the tech website CNET has started publishing an old-fashioned magazine – you know, on paper, like Time and Life. To complete the retro circle, CNET's periodical is carrying print ads for Ford, Gillette and other brands already at home in the "Mad Men" era.

But wasn't the digital technology that CNET touts supposed to do away with paper? Parent company CBS Interactive explains the seeming contradiction: The magazine simply gives people yet another way to get at CNET's wares.

Seems there's still something special about paper. After all, Wired magazine, aimed at the techno-literate, has always put out a paper edition – and a handsome one at that.

The Web is just electrical signals in the air. Paper is real estate. A paper magazine is an object that won't vanish with a keyboard click or if the battery dies. At the airport newsstand, it announces its existence to all who pass by.

As a platform, paper is "portable, accessible and affordable," a story about CNET's magazine cutely notes.

Studies suggest paper is better than a screen for reading comprehension and retaining information. We also read faster on paper.

Why? Our brains regard text as a "tangible part of the physical world," Ferris Jabr writes in Scientific American. Books have a topography that screens don't.

"Turning the pages of a paper book is like leaving one footprint after another on the trail – there's a rhythm to it and a visible record of how far one has traveled," according to Jabr.

And he quotes Anne Mangen, a researcher at the University of Stavanger in Norway, as follows: "The ease with which you can find out the beginning, end and everything in between and the constant connection to your path ... might be some way of making it less taxing cognitively, so you have more free capacity for comprehension."



Froma Harrop

COMMENTARY

An article in the New York Times focuses on the debate over reading stories to children off a tablet screen versus out of a paper book. Don't screens offer a superior experience? After all, Elmo and Grover talk and jump around on screens. They stay put on paper.

The conclusion among child development experts is that paper is better. A study at Temple University finds that young children comprehend more than when read to from a screen. It may have something to do with the gadget's getting more of the attention than the literature.

And forget about putting the kid in charge of the iPad. The back-and-forth conversation with the elders is what helps children develop, experts say.

Another concern is that children's e-books may come embedded with games and other dis-

tractions – just like adult e-books.

On the subject of paper's special powers, there's a wildly popular show at New York's Museum of Modern Art – of paper cutouts no more complicated, technically, than paper dolls. It helps, of course, that the guy with the scissors is an artistic genius named Henri Matisse.

Matisse cut simple shapes of swimming women, dolphins, sea plants and other forms from pieces of paper painted in bright solid colors. He then pinned or pasted them onto paper or a canvas in arrangements neither you nor I would ever have thought of. (You can see the pinholes and places where the paper tore.)

The exhibition includes this looping movie of old Matisse in his studio wielding a big pair of scissors and showing his svelte female assistants – oddly, in evening dresses and high heels – where to place them.

Most famous for his oil paintings, Matisse spent his last years cutting paper shapes. There something special about paper.

– *Creators Syndicate*