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# Writing Becoming an Abnormal Act?

**“WRITING** is an abnormal act in today's electronic world,” read the magazine headline. Would that make reading also an “abnormal act”?

Author of the copyrighted article in U.S. News & World Report is Hugh Kenner, head of the English department at Johns Hopkins University.

Kenner said that very little writing goes on in many people's lives and that youngsters trained on TV and video games may ask, “Why should I learn to write?” Some adults might echo, “Yes, why?”

Telecommunications technology, a phrase encompassing the gamut of devices that are changing our world, is here to stay. It is transforming business and industrial operations and is moving into our homes more rapidly than we may realize.

Where and how people work, what we do, how we are educated, how we live and how we spend our leisure time are increasingly influenced by electronic-age technology.

Fears that we could lose our ability to read do not seem to be well-

grounded.

A national readership study showed 68 percent of adults read at least one newspaper a day. Magazines devoted to almost every conceivable subject have substantial circulation. Popular books are bought by the millions. Electronic word processors and computers have eased but not eliminated paperwork in government and business.

Educators still are trying to stamp out charges that “Johnny can't read” — or, spell or count, doesn't know history and doesn't understand science. Probably some pupils never will but it appears the decline in basic educational achievements has been slowed and reversals may have been accomplished in some areas.

Businessmen have complained that young employees can't or won't learn how to do their jobs. Terrel Bell, secretary of education, reports that 26 million Americans are “functionally illiterate” and 46 million others are nearly so.

What seems to be happening is a

bifurcation of literacy, in which one group may be reading and writing less, falling behind, and another group is combining traditional reading and writing skills with modern technology to move ahead at a more rapid pace.

Almost all of us have been told by acquaintances that they derive as much news and information as they need from TV, radio or computer files and that they communicate by phone or electronics.

These people may be among the first to install videotex systems to pay bills, do their banking and eventually do their shopping.

They may be well-educated but might be losing something valuable if they rely too heavily on contraptions and neglect reading and writing.

None of us is capable of learning and assimilating all of the information available. We need all skills and devices obtainable to review and select what is important and utilize it to accomplish more and live better.