



LAPTOPS AND LEARNING

There's an old saying that "The pen is mightier than the sword."

Perhaps our 21st century equivalent could be "The pen is mightier than the screen."

Technology has real potential to help with students' learning. Here's just some ways students are using technology to amplify their learning:

- - Some of my Year 11 Modern History students recently asked me to check over their study notes in preparation for their final exam. What they shared was a clear, comprehensive summary of everything we had covered — the result of tireless collaboration in a shared digital space. By working together in real time, editing and refining each other's contributions, they created something far greater than the sum of its parts.
- - As our Year 12s prepare for the HSC, many are utilising digital learning platforms to revise key concepts, revisit past lessons, and test their knowledge — using tools like Atomi, Canvas, Quizlet, and Anki.
- - Some of our Year 8 students have been excitedly telling me about the amazing things they're learning to create with 3D printers, thanks to Mr Stivaktos' STEM lunchtime club.
- - At our recent Illuminate Major Work showcase, it was incredible to see the breadth of student creativity powered by technology — from short films and architectural plans to original music compositions.

I've attended a few training days this year exploring the future of technology in education. One exciting development is the upcoming integration of AI-powered chat tools within Canvas,

allowing students to engage in live conversations with virtual historical figures, authors, or scientists, bringing curriculum content to life in a whole new way. As ICT Leader, I love seeing our students use devices and technology not to replace learning, but to amplify it.

However, even as ICT Leader, I have been actively advocating for students to handwrite and spend some learning time off-screens! I have been stressing to my three Year 12 classes the importance of handwriting responses to practice questions, not only because they will be facing written HSC exams, but more importantly, because handwriting has been shown to activate more complex brain connectivity patterns, which are crucial for memory formation and learning (van der Meer & van der Weel, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2024). For the same reason, I have made all of my students handwrite their class notes; we use laptops for textbooks and interactive tools like quizzes, but the notebook and pen still reign supreme!

And of course, as many parents know, laptops can easily become distractions. Whether it's scrolling, gaming, watching or even shopping, the temptation is real. Some students struggle with thinking for themselves while writing responses, especially when there are easier options on hand such as AI or Google. Earlier this year, a Year 7 parent shared his concerns with me about how much time his daughter was spending on devices. It's a common concern, and one that reminds us that while technology can be a powerful tool in education, it must be used with intention and balance.

For this reason, we have recently reminded staff and students of our clear rules for the use of laptops:

1. Students are not to open their laptops in a lesson unless the teacher has invited them to.
2. If a student is on a website they should not be during class (e.g. game, online shopping, etc), they will receive a formal lunchtime detention.
3. During recess and lunch, laptops should be stored in lockers. Students may only use them during breaks if they are in the IRC.

I'm hoping that here at the College we can embrace the best of both worlds: using technology in powerful and purposeful ways to enhance learning, while also recognising when it's time to switch off the screen and focus with pen in hand. At times, laptops open up incredible opportunities — for collaboration, creativity, and access to knowledge. But at other times, deep thinking and lasting understanding come best through the quiet discipline of handwriting. Sometimes, the pen is still mightier than the screen.

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