

Left-Handed Literacies

Janine Blue

Being left-handed in a right-handed world comes with specific challenges and stigmas. We're the friend people don't want to sit next to at the movie theater (pre-Covid). The one out of every ten people. The evil character in old literature. The athlete that the coach never had to coach before. The one in orchestra class whose instructor struggled to demonstrate how to move small, novice left fingers across the strings. So much of how we interact with the world can be guided by our hands.

For example, literate activities, as a whole, cater to right-dominant hands and positions of the body. Tools, methods, and instruction favor those who put things in their right hand when they want to interact with the world. "And for those who are left-handed" is never an add-on in instruction or product labels. It's a lot to accept, and it sometimes seems like a bummer.

However, being left-handed also means being part of an exclusive (sometimes spatially awkward) community that outspokenly understands each other due to the exclusion and oversight of those in power who are right-dominant. And this community has created or expanded known genres to cater to our functionality and needs.

Thanks to innovation, social media awareness, and places like Etsy, the genres within right-handed focused literate activities that once seemed so challenging (using a mouse on the right side, using those medieval left-handed scissors, just completely reconfiguring your controller for a video game) are now accessible and tailored to the left-dominant hand.

In this short graphic, I will explain various left-handed-centric tools I use for my literate activities and how these tools have changed the way I perform and feel in my body as I write and research.

As a student and someone who wants to write narratively as a career note-taking and drafting are not only critical researching genres, but they are also literate activities that require specific tools. Tools that have long plagued lefties... like the dreaded notebook spiral ring. I use notebooks with spiral rings on the right side. The perforation (where you tear the page) is also on the right side. Additionally, I use notebooks with rings and perforation at the top of the notebook (like a detective's notepad), so I can disregard the ring altogether.

Figure 1: My Preferred Styles of Lefty Notebooks



These deviations from rings and perforation on the left side allow me to write more smoothly and freely, enhancing my desire to take notes and draft by hand.

Figure 2: Left Hand on Right-Handed Notebook with Pen.



Writing can be difficult. It can be a particular kind of difficult for a left-handed person to adhere to right-handed-styled notebooks. These are sold in most general stores that carry school and office supplies. It takes browsing specialty stores, novelty isles, and online avenues to buy a pack of two left-handed notebooks—and on average, it's more expensive for less paper than with standard right-handed-styled notebooks.

Assimilation is often the solution to this lack of access. Unfortunately, this means bumping into spiral rings and writing near the margins that results in messy print and crooked letters, which then turns into having to rotate your notebook about ninety degrees to compensate. And it sometimes creates an overall disgruntled attitude and dispels the energy to write. Writing by hand is an embodied experience. How your hands feel and move influences how and what you may write.



Figure 3: Ink Palm



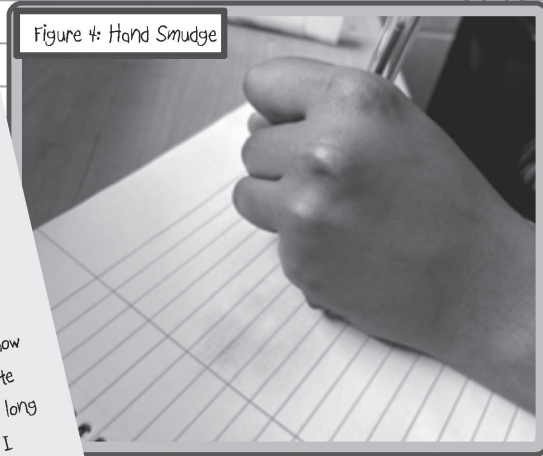
Every lefty knows about Ink Palm. The pen is wet, the spirall ring is cold, and the hand pays the price. Writing isn't only thought in your mind or written by your fingers. Your process can be stained on your skin.

When I was a kid and didn't know many of the tricks to left-handed literacies, I often found myself washing my hands on for some reason, just feeling "messier" than my classmates after a long in-class writing session. It could have been nerves about my writing, but the evidence was usually on my palm.

And with Ink palm comes The Smudge. As a lefty glides their writing hand across the page, so does the ink trail. This is another layer of my younger self and, even now, the feeling of being messy as a student taking notes in class lingers. On it lingers when writing on scratch paper or sticky notes that aren't my tailored writing tools, or when it comes to using dry-erase markers or chalk.

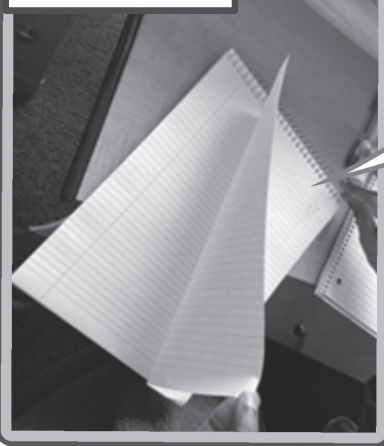
So much of my "pre-Google Doc" writing history can be traced through smudges: how much I wrote, how neat or sloppily I wrote (how much I cared about the print), how long the words I chose were, and how hard I squeezed my pen and pressed onto the paper—all of it was told on the page.

Figure 4: Hand Smudge



It might be a smudge, a mess, but it's also proof I was there and that my hand was related to the content on the page. It's my mark. My DNA is present.

Figure 5: Notebook Rip

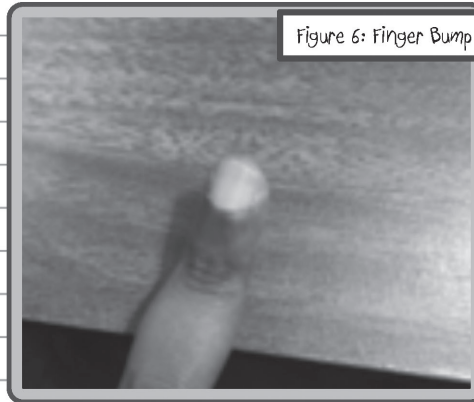


A clean and crisp edge is sometimes a personal challenge for the lefty vs. notebook. Sometimes the top works better than the side.

We're conditioned to view top perforation notebooks as not "standard"—something more akin to the sticky note or notecard genres. And I think part of this is because these notebooks don't present as a "book" but more like a pad. It's not typical in the notebook genre. I'll admit, I did have this weird moment of "but I need a real notebook," and then I realized I was requesting this tool assimilate, just like I have to. But no, I'm not right-handed. I live a different literate life, and no two artifacts within any genre are precisely the same. So, I guess we embraced each other.

With the Ink Palm comes The Smudge. And sometimes, too, The Bump—the mound on the left middle finger and that painful knuckle pop that often accompanies it from years of using pencils and pens that, while just circular tubes, are designed for the right-handed individual.

Figure 6: Finger Bump



Writing can be challenging, and it can also be uncomfortable, even painful.

I use pens designed explicitly for a left-handed individual. These pens are fast drying (no smudges), come with extra finger padding (no bumps), and curve ergonomically to the fingers (less squeezing and knocks against the spiral rings).

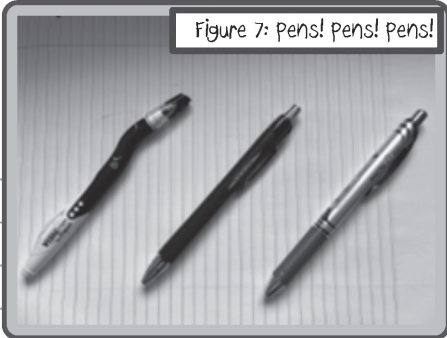


Figure 7: Pens! pens! pens!

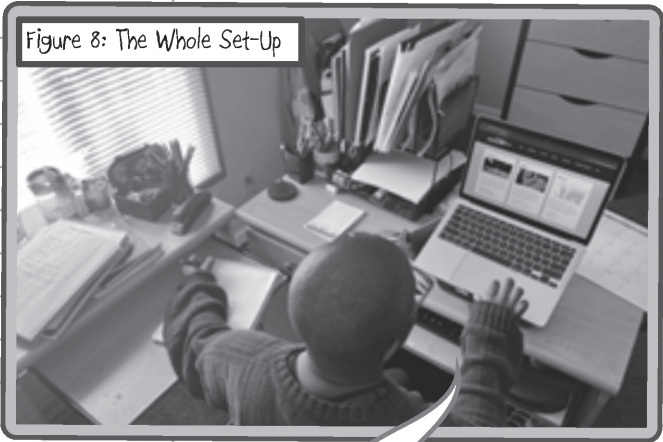


Figure 8: The Whole Set-Up

My office desk(s) are set up for my left hand—the one I craft my life with. I'm still assimilated to the right-handed mouse and placement, but I do whatever I can to honor my dominant hand and ensure it's comfortable. It's always the star of the show.

My literate activities come with a few bumps and smudges as a lefty. Even with my tailored tools, I still encounter challenges with writing in a right-handed world. However this has made me appreciate notetaking and drafting so much more. It's personal every time, and it makes me more aware of my body while I write and how it feels while I write.

My left hand and its literacies are the stories of my writing life.



Janine Blue is a PhD student studying creative writing, particularly experimental prose. Her research interests include Black feminism, critical race studies, and women's and gender studies. When she's not writing, teaching, or student-ing, Janine prefers to stream, play tabletop games, and spend too much time with PS4 simulation games. She can be found hiding in her snuggle cave at home most of the time when not on campus, complete with weighted blankets and warm tea.