

## Differences in Assessing Hand-Written and Typed Student Exams: A Corpus-Linguistic Study

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**Abstract :** The digital age has long arrived at Austrian schools, so both society and educationalists demand that digital means should be integrated accordingly to day-to-day school routines. Therefore, the Austrian school-leaving exam (A-levels) can now be written either by hand or by using a computer. However, the choice of writing medium (pen and paper or computer) for written examination papers, which are considered 'high-stakes' exams, raises a number of questions that have not yet been adequately investigated and answered until recently, such as: What effects do the different conditions of text production in the written German A-levels have on the component of normative linguistic accuracy? How do the spelling skills of German A-level papers written with a pen differ from those that the students wrote on the computer? And how is the teacher's assessment related to this? Which practical desiderata for German didactics can be derived from this? In a trilateral pilot project of the Austrian Center for Digital Humanities (ACDH) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the University of Vienna in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Education and the Council for German Orthography, these questions were investigated. A representative Austrian learner corpus, consisting of around 530 German A-level papers from all over Austria (pen and computer written), was set up in order to subject it to a quantitative (corpus-linguistic and statistical) and qualitative investigation with regard to the spelling and punctuation performance of the high school graduates and the differences between pen- and computer-written papers and their assessments. Relevant studies are currently available mainly from the Anglophone world. These have shown that writing on the computer increases the motivation to write, has positive effects on the length of the text, and, in some cases, also on the quality of the text. Depending on the writing situation and other technical aids, better results in terms of spelling and punctuation could also be found in the computer-written texts as compared to the handwritten ones. Studies also point towards a tendency among teachers to rate handwritten texts better than computer-written texts. In this paper, the first comparable results from the German-speaking area are to be presented. Research results have shown that, on the one hand, there are significant differences between handwritten and computer-written work with regard to performance in orthography and punctuation. On the other hand, the corpus linguistic investigation and the subsequent statistical analysis made it clear that not only the teachers' assessments of the students' spelling performance vary enormously but also the overall assessments of the exam papers - the factor of the production medium (pen and paper or computer) also seems to play a decisive role.

**Keywords :** exam paper assessment, pen and paper or computer, learner corpora, linguistics

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