



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to The Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we're talking about the pros and cons of laptop use in a law school classroom. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess. That's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#).

If you enjoy this show, please leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on [lawschooltoolbox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today, we're talking about using laptops and other technology in law school, when to use them and when to leave them at home, because this is actually [not as straightforward as it might seem](#). I mean, it might seem to be a foregone conclusion that, of course, you're going to bring your laptop to school and take notes. I mean, certainly, I did that in every class I went to.

Lee Burgess: Me too.

Alison Monahan: Although, I will say that one time, I took a class in the architecture school, no one had a laptop, and they looked at me like I was really weird when I brought mine out, and I was like, "Oh, everybody doesn't bring a laptop to class and take notes all the time?" New research suggests that this technology might not actually make you a better law student, but a worse one, so let's talk about some pros and cons. Lee, what are the pros of using a laptop?

Lee Burgess: All right, so I think a lot of people find the pros of using a laptop to be that you can type faster than you can write. I think a lot of people feel like they can basically transcribe the class lecture when they're typing and you can't do that when you're writing. A lot of people justify laptop use because things are easier to read because some of our handwriting can be a little sketchy at times. Some people like to be able to move things around, copy and paste, have that flexibility in a note-taking document, which you don't necessarily have if you're working on paper.

Some people like that you could have multiple windows or other information open to help with the class discussion, so if you're ... You can look up an answer or look something up, which you can't do if you don't have a laptop, but it turns out that many of these pros don't actually lead to increased retention or learning.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, I remember. Yeah. I was like, "I loved having multiple windows open." We'd have a chatroom going 20 or 30 people in the class. But then,



people would randomly bust out laughing for no apparent reason, which really confused the professor. Were we focused on the lecture? No.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly.

Alison Monahan: It made it more entertaining. Was I getting more out of the class? Probably not.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Even outside of just how distracted people are with their laptops and the internet is a whole, which we'll get to in a bit. It turns out based on some [research done by some scientists](#) called Pam ... or named Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer that I believe were out of Princeton, they did a bunch of research that actually demonstrates that [students who write out their notes on paper actually learn more](#). Whaa-whaa, for all of us who love our laptops.

Alison Monahan: Whaa-whaa.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. They started by doing three different experiments. The researchers had students take notes in the classroom setting, and then tested students on their memory for factual detail, conceptual understanding of the material, and their ability to synthesize and generalize the information. Half of the students took notes on a laptop, and the other half did by hand. It turns out that the laptop note-takers took more notes, not surprising, right, but those who worked out their notes or those who wrote out their notes by hand had a stronger conceptual understanding and were more successful in applying and integrating the material than those who took notes with their laptops.

I know. Everybody is sad, right? I can feel like a sigh because everybody wants to be able to use their laptops in class, but it does turn out that when you take notes by hands, it requires different types of cognitive processing than typing. It might be slower and more cumbersome, but it's actually a good thing that you can't write down everything that happens in a lecture.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember in one of my first year classes, this girl sat beside of me, and we, unfortunately, were stuck with the seats that we got the first day, and she literally transcribed every word that was said, and it just, A, it drove me completely crazy, but it also just made me think like, "What are you ... Like you're not even paying attention here. You're just writing stuff down."

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: If she got called on, she basically had no clue what was going on most of the time and couldn't answer the questions. I mean, I definitely believe this. I think it's just ... it's a different form of processing information. If you're doing it by hand, you're probably going to listen more. You're probably going to think more about what you need to write down because you can't just type everything, so



when you're doing that, you're probably digesting, summarizing the information. I know for me, it would probably be ... had I taken notes by hand in class, it probably would have been helpful because I could have drawn arrows between things or link up concepts and things like that.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I think that's one of the things that a lot of us don't think about, especially because technology is so prevalent in our worlds. How many absent-minded things we do on technology. I think if everybody took a moment, we could think of an email that we wrote that we don't remember writing because we did it so fast or a text message we don't remember sending. That's not just because you might be like drunk texting or doing something like that. Hopefully, you're not like drunk note-taking in your law school class, but ...

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You may have other issues if that's the case.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true. I'm sure it happens, but technology allows us to do a lot of things in a very absent-minded way, and I think when we're thinking about class time, you really want to evaluate what happens when you take notes by hand. You are forced to listen more. You're forced to digest and summarize information, so you can like succinctly capture what happened in class. Your brain is working harder.

Alison Monahan: It's almost like your brain has to work harder.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, you're asking your brain to do extra processing and to stay focused, which is also going to help in retention. Now, somebody who is typing, and we've all been there, can produce a written record of a lecture without processing any additional meaning, but you're just transcribing ... When you're transcribing something, you're not synthesizing. You're not mentally working those muscles to understand what is being said. You're just like listening and spitting things out on the page, and I think that that's a very important difference when you think about the learning that you're trying to do during class time.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that ... I mean, I remember from when I was a clerk in a district court, and someone literally is there transcribing. You have the court transcriptionist who is doing a short-hand, taking down exactly what's being said, and it was fascinating because my co-clerk and I were there, and we're sitting there. We're not allowed to have laptops, obviously. We're in court, and so we would just be sitting there watching what was going on, maybe making some notes occasionally. I mean, frankly, we didn't even make that many notes most of the time, but we could go back and do an analysis of like, "Oh, what did you think of this argument? What did you think of that? What did you think of this?" If you talked to the court reporter, she was like, "I have no idea what was going on. I was just writing it down."



- Lee Burgess: Right, their job is completely different.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Their job is to just listen and produce a record, not to think thoughtfully about what's happening.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and if you asked her something like, "Oh, what did you think about that argument?" she's like, "I don't know. I don't even remember what you're talking about."
- Lee Burgess: Right, because her brain was tasked for something completely different.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: I think we often forget that in a law school classroom setting ... and most of these studies are not done in law schools. They're done in undergrad campuses, but I still think that it still applies to a type of learning that you want to be as engaged as possible to get the most out of a lecture, and transcribing reduces engagement, and then it's going to make it much harder for you to follow what's being done in class, think about it, and then it turns out, retain that information.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and I would argue it probably even applies more in a law school setting where you're using the Socratic method because frankly, there's a lot of discussion going on that you don't really need to be writing down most of the time.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: You're looking for those key nuggets, which is like reading a case. The case may be eight pages, and then it has one or two points of law, and those points of law are really what you're looking for.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: In a Socratic type method, at least arguably in an undergraduate lecture, somebody might have prepared a lecture where you actually need to retain all of the information that they're giving you, but that's really not the case in a law school classroom. The point of law school classes really are to explore different options, and learn how to make arguments, and learn how to do analysis. If you're just transcribing that ... and I think sometimes people think, "Oh well, I'll just write it all down, and then I'll read it later and figure out what's important," but I think that's got it backwards.



Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's true, and I think you're actually making more work for yourself later.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Lee Burgess: You're better off doing the heavy-lifting in class.

Alison Monahan: Once.

Lee Burgess: That's what you're there for. I mean, it's just ... Yeah. When I was going through this research preparing for this podcast, I also had this inkling of like, "Okay. I get it. Maybe in class, you don't have as much retention, but are these perfect class transcripts better to study off of down the line?" Then, these thoughtful researchers answered that question for me as I can't stop reading and doing research.

Alison Monahan: Fantastic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: What did they say?

Lee Burgess: Well, they did a content analysis of notes, which of course showed that those who use laptops had more verbatim transcription than those who wrote notes by hand. That should not be a surprise, but the high-verbatim note content was associated with lower retention of the material. Over and over again, they just said that if your notes look perfect, that does not mean that you are keeping that information in your brain.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's almost like you've dumped it on the page, and it just bypassed your brain entirely.

Lee Burgess: I was a psych major, so I got a little like geeky as I started reading all of this stuff, but then they also said, "Okay. Well, what if we tell people who are using a laptop that they need to synthesize the material, that they cannot transcribe what the professor is saying?" They wanted them to type notes in their own words. You would think that would solve this problem, but even with those warnings, it turns out the students using laptops still had about the same amount of verbatim content, and they had no ... They were no better at synthesizing material, so it's almost like this laptop tool like poisons your ability to just synthesize material because I think we have ... It's so easy to just create a volume of words.

Alison Monahan: I think this makes sense. If you think about it in terms of ... Okay. Say that you're doing a bunch of research and you're going to write a paper. Typically speaking,



I think people are not so effective if they just sit down and start trying to type up an outline.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: They're typically going to be more effective if they take a piece of paper and start writing out that outline. I mean, not probably in like every single case, but I think on average, you're going to just ... It's going to be easier to do it on paper. There are some things that you just need to do on paper because I think your brain really is processing differently.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The researchers also looked at that maybe down the line, students who have those laptop notes would perform better, but their research didn't support that either because a week after class, those with the laptop notes and those with the handwritten notes were allowed to study for a test, and unfortunately, for you laptop lovers, those who took hand notes still outperformed laptop participants.

There were other research. There was [research done at West Point](#) where they had different sections of a class. It was all taught the same way, and they had like a laptop class, like a hybrid class, and a hand note-taking class. Each section performed differently based on the way that the students could interact. I mean, it's amazing how this little thing like note-taking while listening to a lecture seems to have a huge impact on your ability to perform.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, it is super interesting. I think if you ask most people going to law school like, "Do you think it really matters if you take notes by hand or take notes on a laptop?" I mean, I think even a lot of professors would have been like, "It probably doesn't really matter. Like as long as people are getting the information, it seems like they could process it just fine," but it turns out that does not really seem to be necessarily supported by the research.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and this, I think, is one of those areas where it can take a lot of self-discipline for you to try a different way. If you've been a laptop note-taker and you get to law school, and even if you walk into a room where there are a bunch of laptops, it can take a little bit of a leap of faith and a little bit of self-discipline to say, "I am going to lay down the laptop. I am not going to bring it to school with me or to class with me, and I am just going to go old-school and take handwritten notes even if other people think I'm crazy."

Well, you're clearly not crazy because the research supports that that you're going to have a higher retention and may actually do better academically than somebody else who has a laptop, but it can be hard to discipline yourself to stay that focused because we live in a very distracted world, and I think the desire to



multitask is very powerful, and it can be hard to like leave the laptop somewhere else or in the bag, or leave your phone somewhere else.

I think what's interesting about these studies is they didn't take into account like having a cellphone on the desk or something like that and interruptions, which I think is another type of distraction that can happen with technology, but just the idea that it's okay, that the world is not going to end if you were not connected to the internet or the phone for even a three-hour class is something that takes a lot of discipline to do. It's really hard to turn off your phone sometimes, I mean.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I decided about a week or so ago that I just was not going to ever go on Facebook or Twitter again. I mean, maybe not forever, but I literally woke up one morning. I was just like, "Why am I spending time on these sites? Like I'm not deriving any pleasure from this. It's not useful to me. It's just making me stressed out." It's been a little over a week, and I mean, it's pretty challenging not to just ... I mean, there are even a couple times where I literally like thoughtlessly without even thinking about it on my phone, I suddenly was looking at Facebook, and I'm like, "How did that happen?" Like, "Oh, I just mindlessly pushed that button because that's my habit. That's what I do. That's my distraction," and so breaking that habit is really tough.

I mean, we've talked before about [Deep Work by Cal Newport](#), a great book, and his argument is that as we get more, and more, and more distracted, having that ability to focus and really do very serious thoughtful work is something that's incredibly valuable. If you are in the classroom and you're thinking, "Oh my gosh, I'm so weird," you might be the person who's going to be the one who ultimately is able to focus on that winning appellate brief or something that someone else is just literally not going to have trained themselves to do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The history of law is pretty monastic.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: It's basically people sitting in a room with a bunch of books for a very long time, and it's not ... I constantly find myself surprised at how much I want to switch between things and multi-task when I know I needed to do like one thing at a time.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah.



Lee Burgess: For instance, I had a student call this morning, and for somebody, say, for the bar, and I always write meeting notes after a student call. But then like, "Ping," my email went off, so it was like, "Oh." I answered an email, and then my text message went off, and then I answered a text, and then I ... While looking at my email from the last thing, I realized there was a discount code for something that I wanted to buy, so then I go like online to buy something. Then, like 20 minutes later, you realize I've never taken the meeting notes and like finalize them for this student, and then it took me a lot longer because I had done like five different things between ending the meeting and doing the meeting notes.

Where if I had just sat down for five minutes, I could have probably cranked up the meeting notes because they were fresh in my mind, and it would have been done with, but it's very hard because we do live in this distracting world with all these alerts and these notifications, and it's ... We're not working at our best.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think that's a good point because I'm guessing that during your meeting with the student, you were probably taking notes by hand. Is that accurate?

Lee Burgess: Not today, but usually, I do.

Alison Monahan: Okay. Right. Well, oftentimes, I mean, if I have a call with someone, for example, what I'll often do is take some notes by hand, and then I'll put them in some sort of electronic format, but it's definitely ... It's very, very tempting not to do that as soon as you finish whatever the meeting is, but it definitely makes it a lot harder, and I think this has relevance to the note-taking in class because I think one of the things people are concerned about in class is, "Well, okay. Say, I take this notes by hand, but then what? Am I going to retype them all?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I've talked to people who take their notes by hand, and then they go re-type them verbatim, which I would argue is really not that different from just typing them verbatim to begin with.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: The whole point is you need to be processing all the steps along the way.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I think there's definitely value in backing this up in some sort of analog fashion whether it's taking pictures of them, or scanning them, or whatever. Obviously, you don't want to lose them.



- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Thinking through the next step for people, how they get this information out of their notes and into a usable format I think is also valuable.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, and that's true. Interestingly enough, the only reason I did not take notes by hand today was because we were interacting using an online tool and working on the computer together. But even then, my notes during our call are very cryptic. All I need is something to refresh my recollection so I can write out thoughtful comments.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I'm not going to sit there and take transcript notes of a call because if I'm truly engaged, I should retain enough information that I can write up notes after a 30-minute call when I'm out.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: Just in the same way that if you're truly engaged in class, you should be able to recall what some of your class notes were covering, what discussion is covering, and I think students feel so scared they might miss the secret that was told in class that they didn't put down in their notes or their notes might get confusing, but that's what things like office hours are for. That's what things like comparing your notes to your friend in class can be for. Like there are ways to make sure that you're filling in any gaps.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, for sure. This is your starting point.
- Lee Burgess: Right. These are just class notes. These are just notes based on a lecture, so if you ... When you're doing your deep work, go back to review some lecture notes and ... or scratching your head because it doesn't make sense, then you go to office hours and you can tell your professor, "I was reviewing my class notes, and it seems that you laid out that it was a three-prong test. But then, I was going back through the cases, and that doesn't seem to be what was in the case. Did I take my notes incorrectly, or is there a more modern rule?" Your professor is not going to be like, "You should have taken better notes." It's like your professor is probably going to walk it through and be happy that you didn't come in with a transcript of his class. I think that he'll be okay with that.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I'm also sure that I typed up all kinds of incorrect information.
- Lee Burgess: Oh, yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. I mean, I think there's ... It's a lot about freeing yourself from this assumption that we have to be tied to technology to do the best work we can possible, and I think that's ...



- Alison Monahan: Right. Oftentimes, it's the opposite of reality.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly, it is.
- Alison Monahan: The good news is there actually are systematic ways to take notes by hand that can be super effective, so I think we have a post on the website about the [Cornell note-taking method](#) and our favorite notebooks, the [Circa notebooks](#) that you can actually get.
- Lee Burgess: That's true. Cornell method? Yup. Yes.
- Alison Monahan: They're designed for that, and you said there, I mean, in a very brief nutshell is I think you have a column on the left, and then you have like your main note-taking section, and then you have a section at the bottom, and so each one of those has a purpose. I think one of them, you take like highlights, and one of them, you're just taking notes. Then, one of them, you may ask like follow-up questions and things you're confused about. Whatever it is. Read the post, but the point being you're not just dumping everything on a legal pad at that point like it's an actual system that can be very effective for people.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah. The other thing about the Circa notebooks that we like is if you've never used them or whatever version of them ... I know like Staples type of version. There are other versions floating out there, but you can easily move pages around, which I think is also very powerful because if you've got a notebook and you have class notes, you can insert ... You can move your brief to the beginning of a class notes or you can just reorganize things because I think that's one thing that people struggle with with taking notes by hand because if you're taking them in, let's say, a spiral notebook, you can't move things around or people don't want to carry binders because they're too heavy. Where something like the Circa notebook or that style gives you a lot of flexibility without having to abandon the paper handwriting.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and when it comes time to put your outline, or study aid together, or whatever it is you're studying, you can actually take everything out and spread it out, and get an overview just in the way that if you print it out, your class notes, which I would often do, and like went through and highlighted them so I could look at them all at once, you can do the same thing on paper. It doesn't just have to be like, "Oh, I'm going to go with a legal pad and write stuff down." Like there are actually pretty sophisticated ways to use analog options that give you a lot of flexibility.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right, so we've already started talking about it a little bit, but major issues with laptops I think beyond the lack of retention is the distraction. We've been talking about this, the interest.



Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah.

Lee Burgess: I mean, like it's huge. [One study](#) that was done actually with law school students show that 90% of laptop users engage in online activities unrelated to coursework for at least five minutes, and roughly 60% were distracted for half of the class.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that's not surprising if I think back to my law school days.

Lee Burgess: It's not surprising. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, people would be doing all kinds of stuff: shopping online, chat rooms. Sometimes, dating sites.

Lee Burgess: Reading the news.

Alison Monahan: Reading the news. Yeah. I definitely caught up on my New York Times in class. Definitely.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: All sorts of different things. Checking email. Now, you can be slacking with your study group or whatever. I mean, it's very hard not to be doing these things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Back in the day, my first year of law school, my school didn't have WiFi yet. That makes me feel really old.

Alison Monahan: Whoa.

Lee Burgess: I know. They got WiFi ...

Alison Monahan: How did you survive?

Lee Burgess: Well, WiFi in the classrooms came I think my 2L year, but it was a big deal because it was almost a blessing in disguise because we had to like take out the internet cord and plug in the computer.

Alison Monahan: Oh, you still had internet.

Lee Burgess: I mean, it still had its own internet plug, but you had to like out yourself that you were going to be distracted in class because there was no other reason to plug your computer into the internet.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I don't know. I mean, I think the distraction is bad for the person doing it, and it's also bad for everyone around you.



Lee Burgess: Yes, and they actually, in my nerdy research I did today, they've actually done research that [laptop use by one student can actually harm other students around them](#) and that the multi-tasking of the laptop is a significant distraction to both the users and people even those who may be handwriting around that student, and I thought that was interesting because a lot of ... I don't know, a lot, but a chunk of law school professors are banning laptops and technology in their classrooms.

At first, you, I think, err on the side of, "Hey, aren't we all adults, and shouldn't we be able to make these choices for ourselves?" But when research is supporting that the laptop use is distracting to other students even those making their own choice to not use technology, maybe the professors have a point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of this too can depend on where you end up sitting, so if you are someone who knows you're distracted by this type of things ... I think everyone is distracted, but some people are more sensitive. It makes sense to think about, do you want to sit in the front row? Do you want to sit where you're not going to be as distracted?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I mean, certainly ... I don't know, but I definitely remember reading over people's shoulders and getting really in to whatever they were doing and just being like, "Oh, wow. Okay. I just totally missed the last five minutes." I mean, I think the downside of a professor deciding to do this is really that there are certain students who need to use a laptop. If you have some sort of learning disability or a physical issue that makes you ... At one point, I had actually ... Well, actually this would have meant I couldn't use my laptop, but I cut my finger, so I guess I would have had to handwrite, but assume that for some reason, I did something differently and had to use the laptop.

I think there's an issue there around it outing people who maybe have accommodations or something like that, so I think that ... I think it's a tricky question to just put a total ban on them. Although, I can understand the impetus. I mean, I wouldn't necessarily want to have to make that choice as a professor.

Lee Burgess: Right. I think it is tough. If you are a student who has a disability and the laptop is going to be something that you want to consider using, you can also talk to disability services and see if there are any other options. At my law school, there were designated note-takers who would share their notes with students with disabilities anonymously, and that allowed the students with the disabilities to not have to worry as much about tracking the notes in class perfectly because they knew they were going to get reputable notes from another student.



You never know what might be the options to remove some of this worry or stress around the laptop use or lack of laptop use, and it may actually be better for you if you don't have to try to physically take all of these notes while trying to comprehend what's going on in class. I guess there are often more options than you might think to explore, but you got to go ask early when you get back to school to see if there are some accommodations that could make even this note-taking issue easier for you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it depends a lot on the individual. I mean, if you are someone who for whatever reason definitely feels like you absolutely need to have a laptop and your professor wants to ban them ... I mean, I think the fair question is like, "Okay. Can I switch to a different professor where this is not going to be an issue?"

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I think it's awkward if you're one or the only person or one of a couple of people who were taking notes and everyone else wants to be using their laptop, and they can't, and they're ... It's just not a great scenario, so if your professor is going to do that, I think that's a valid question.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and just because it might be "easier" for you to take those notes on a laptop, depending on your disability, depending on how you process information, don't just assume that the laptop is actually going to make it better because ... For instance, if you're a student with ADHD, which is a common learning disability that gets accommodations in law school that we see a lot of, it might seem like, "Well, I bet if I can take all these notes, then even if I'm distracted in class, I can go back and reference these really comprehensive notes."

You have to balance that with the amount of distraction that comes and the fact that you're not forcing your mind to try and process the information in class. For some students in that situation, I might recommend, "Go ahead and try taking notes by hand and seeing if you can get a friend to also share their notes with you, so you could compare and see if you missed anything or find somebody in your study group that you can review your class notes with afterwards," or something along those lines because giving up all the benefits for handwriting is often not worth it just for this idea that you could track more information.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's right. I mean, I think you have to sometimes push against what seems like the easiest approach and think about, "Okay. Is this really getting me to where I need to be?" and then really try it out. The one thing I sometimes hear is, "Well, I couldn't take notes by hand because my handwriting is just so bad."



- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: What do you do with that?
- Lee Burgess: Well, unless you cannot read your own handwriting at all, I think you go ahead and try it.
- Alison Monahan: Which they seem might want to work on your penmanship.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know, but it's like I ... Even people with not great handwriting can usually read their own handwriting. It's just that someone else might not be able to read it and ...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Someone told me he couldn't read his handwriting. I was like, "Well, maybe you should just write more slowly and write better."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, and maybe that is a candidate for somebody maybe retyping something later if they are worried they're not going to be able to remember what they wrote, but I think for the majority of people, your penmanship is probably just fine to go ahead, and try, and take notes by hand.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and again, like if you're trying to write really, really quickly and you're basically trying to transcribe, well, just write less.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Think more, write less.
- Alison Monahan: I think that should be our motto, "Think more, write less."
- Lee Burgess: Exactly, and it turns out all the scientific studies seem to support that, so it comes with some valuable resources, and I've linked to some of the articles and information about these studies, so if you too like me were a psych major in college and get excited about this kind of stuff, you can go read these studies on one of your breaks as well, but don't read it during class because that would be a bad distraction.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Well, and I think you can also do things like you go to class, you take notes by hand, and then you take 10 or 15 minutes afterwards to find your laptop, and then type up the key points you want to remember. I think that could actually be a very effective way of combining these two things.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, and that may be for someone who says they can't remember what ... or read what's in their handwriting. It's like a middle ground if you needed to ...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you'll probably remember from an hour ago.



- Lee Burgess: Right, if you were paying attention.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: If you were reading the New York Times or posting on Facebook about all of the political ambivalence going on in the world, you may not remember what happened in class, and that could be problematic.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right, so what are our recommendations? Well, try taking notes by hand. It might sound scary. It might sound like something that you don't want to do, but just try it. Just try it for like a week. See what happens.
- Alison Monahan: You can even try it like one class.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, just one class, but just try what happens. Learn about different note-taking systems. We talked about ... We mentioned the Cornell method, which we'll link to in the show notes. We've talked about Circa notebooks, but try out some different processes using ... You can even use different colored pens. I know, Alison, you're such a big fan of like drawing. I think one of the benefits of doing this by hand is you can link to things, and do circles and mind maps.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. You could even make like a little flowchart right on the fly.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, amazing.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, so you have this ability to create notes outside the box, which I think is also very helpful, but do explore some of the note-taking systems. If you haven't started law school yet, maybe you can read up on some of these so you can, in a week, try a few different ones and see which one really works for you because not everybody is going to think and process the same way, and just be willing and open to try it. Even if you love your laptop, can't get enough of it, love your iPad, love your whatever, just give it a try. You're not going to lose anything like nothing bad is going to happen.
- Alison Monahan: Nothing. If you go to class for a week and you take notes by hand, and then you decide you absolutely can't do it, well, you'll probably be okay.
- Lee Burgess: It's like turning off your phone for an hour. It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. You'll survive.



Lee Burgess:

You'll survive. All right. Well, with that, I think we're about out of time. You can find all our episodes, including archives [by episode number](#) and [by topic](#) at lawschooltoolbox.com/podcast if you're interested in catching up on other episodes. If you enjoyed this episode of The Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it, and be sure to [subscribe](#) so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [Is Handwriting Notes a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?](#)
- [The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard: The Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Notetaking by Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer](#)
- [Scientific American: A Learning Secret: Don't Take Notes with a Laptop](#)
- [The New York Times: Laptops are Great. But Not During a Lecture or Meeting.](#)
- [Deep Work by Cal Newport](#)
- [Tips for Using the Cornell Note-taking Method](#)
- [All the Supplies You Need to Start Law School Right](#)
- [Laptop Multitasking Hinders Classroom Learning for Both Users and Nearby Peers by Faria Sana, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Cepeda](#)