

Editor's notes:

Email, texting, and tweeting all make communication quicker and easier. But some worry that electronic communication tools are eroding our ability to write the old-fashioned way: by hand.

A study conducted by Doc-mail, an online stationer, found that the average adult (out of 2,000 participants) goes about 40 days without writing anything by hand, and one in three hasn't written a note on paper for more than six months. In addition, 50 percent feel that their handwriting has significantly declined, with one in seven being "ashamed" of their writing. Spelling may be another casualty, with four in 10 of the participants reporting that they depend on autocorrect for the right words. Many writers may find themselves helpless without a keyboard in the near future.

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We note several dates of interest this month:

Thanksgiving, October 8 -- Some historians credit Canadians with being the first to celebrate Thanksgiving in the New World. In 1578, English navigator Martin Frobisher held a formal ceremony in Newfoundland to give thanks for surviving the long journey across the Atlantic. Over the years, Canadians celebrated other Thanksgivings, usually to mark military victories or the birth of royal children. Halifax is said to be one of the first Canadian communities to give thanks for a bountiful harvest when it held an autumn feast in 1762.

Swallows depart from Capistrano, October 23 -- After a summer of roosting in the arches of the historic two-story mission in California, the famous swallows leave their mud nest on the Day of San Juan, for whom the mission is named. They circle once and then start their 7,500-mile journey to Argentina for the winter.

Frankenstein Day, October 26 -- Many literary experts consider Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the first science fiction book and still one of the greatest. The inspiration for the book came from a dream that Shelley had while visiting the poet Lord Byron at his villa on Lake Geneva in Switzerland. Stormy weather forced her and the other guests indoors, where they passed the time reading ghost stories. Shelley may have been influenced by experiments at the time in which doctors and scientists sought techniques to bring people back from the dead through smelling salts, artificial respiration, and electric shock.

Halloween, October 31 -- Halloween traditions extend back several millennia. In late October, when the days grew shorter, the Celts celebrated the Feast of Samhain, Lord of the Dead.

Bonfires were lit to frighten away ghosts, and celebrants sought to protect themselves from harm by disguising themselves in grotesque costumes and masks.

Modern Halloween also reflects the edicts of medieval churchmen who declared November 1 All Saints Day (All Hallows). The day before became All Hallows Eve, shortened to the familiar Halloween. Despite the church's efforts, pagan beliefs about the dead returning to roam the world on October 31 persisted.

Think 'Blue' to be More Creative

Some of us feel more creative wearing our favorite green T-shirt or checkered cap, and research suggests that the colours around us actually do influence how well we do certain tasks.

In an experiment written up in the June 2009 issues of the journal *Science*, subjects who faced a red computer screen performed better on detail-oriented tasks like proofreading.

On the other hand, participants who looked at a blue screen did better on creative tasks, presumably because blue is a more relaxing color that allows our minds to wander more freely, while red provokes anxiety because it's associated with danger.

So when you need to unleash your imagination, get out the blue paint—or at least your cerulean T-shirt.

The perfect solution

An employer once offered the following scenario to some candidates for an important job:

"You are driving along in your car on a wild, stormy night. You pass by a bus stop, and you see three people waiting for the bus: One is an old woman who's obviously very ill; another is a close friend who once saved your life; the third is the perfect mate you've been looking for your whole life. What do you do?"

The options are obvious: You could pick up the old woman and possibly save her life; you could offer a ride to your friend to repay him (or her) for once having saved you; or you could invite your perfect mate because you may never find him or her again.

The best candidate gave this answer: "I would give the car keys to my friend and ask him to take the old woman to the hospital. Then I'd stay behind and wait for the bus with the woman of my dreams."

Management focus: These traits will help

Every organization is different, and so is every employee. That means every manager has to find his or her own best style of leadership. Don't neglect these important traits of every successful leader:

- **Flexibility.** Learn what works in different situations, and don't stick to any strategy just because it's been useful once or twice in the past.

- **Emotional intelligence.** Understand what your people want from their jobs and their lives. It's more than a paycheck. Manage according to their needs, not just yours.

- **Honesty.** Tell the truth. If information is confidential, say so, but don't lie about it or evade

the question, unless you want your employees to grow suspicious of your motives.

- **Accountability.** Let employees know what you expect, and hold them accountable for results. And hold yourself to the same standards.

- **Service.** Your employees work for your organization, not just you. Your role is to help them do their best work, not just to bark orders at them.

- **Focus on strengths.** Find out what your employees are best at, and what you're best at. Don't neglect gaps and weaknesses, but maximize strengths so everyone can work at the top of his or her game.

Stingy Jack and the Origin of the Jack o'lantern

The jack o'lantern is one of the most popular and enduring symbols of Halloween, the night when children of all ages dress up and go door to door in search of treats. But where did "jack" come from?

Its origins can be found in Irish myth. According to the stories, a crafty soul nicknamed Stingy Jack played a trick on the devil. In one version, Jack lured Satan up into an apple tree, then planted a circle of crosses around the tree to trap him there. In exchange for being set free, the devil promised not to take Jack's soul when he died.

In another tale, Jack persuaded the devil to transform himself into a coin; Jack then slipped the coin into a purse that contained a cross. Again, Jack made a deal with the devil before setting him free.

In both stories, after Jack died, both heaven and hell refused to let him in, and he was condemned to wander the world in darkness. Satan offered him an ember of the fires of hell to light his way, and Jack placed it inside a hollowed-out turnip to carry as a lantern.

This "Jack O'Lantern," using a turnip or a beet, was common in the British Isles to ward away evil spirits on All Hallows' Eve. Immigrants to North America substituted pumpkins, which were larger, more plentiful, and easier to carve.

Originally associated with harvest season, the jack o'lantern has become part of a traditional Halloween in the United States and Canada. So start carving!

Amaze your friends with these outlandish words

English is an amazing language, filled with unusual and obscure words. Here are a few to drop into the conversation when you want to show off:

Agastopia (n.) Admiration of a particular part of someone's body. "Andrew considered his habit of gazing at Lila's elbow to be a little harmless agastopia -- until his girlfriend elbowed him in the ribs."

Erinaceous (adj.) Of, pertaining to, or resembling a hedgehog. "He told me I looked stunningly erinaceous, but I'm not sure it was a compliment."

Kakirrhaphiophobia (n.) Abnormal fear of failure. "Bernard loved pie but his kakorrhaphiophobia prevented him from entering the pie-eating contest."

Macrosmatic (adj.) Having a good sense of smell. "Vernon's macrosomatic powers enabled him to trail the suspect by following the scent of anchovies on her breath from a pizza she'd eaten yesterday."

Xertz (v.) To gulp a beverage enthusiastically, heartily and quickly. "Thirsty, Max proceeded to xertz his beer and then belched the first eight bars of "Old McDonald Had a Farm."

Zoanthropy (n.) A mental disorder in which one believes oneself to be an animal. "Bruce had to sleep upside down because in his extreme zoanthropy he believed he was a bat, an affliction which eventually led to his becoming a caped vigilante."