Why I'm Asking You Not to Use Laptops by Anne Curzan, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

First, if you have your laptop open, it is almost impossible not to check email or briefly surf the Internet, even if you don't mean to or have told yourself that you won't. I have the same impulse if I have my laptop open in a meeting. The problem is that studies indicate that this kind of multitasking impairs learning; once we are on email/the web, we are no longer paying very good attention to what is happening in class. (And there is no evidence I know of that "practice" at doing this kind of multitasking is going to make you better at it!)

Now I know that one could argue that it is your choice about whether you want to use this hour and 20 minutes to engage actively with the material at hand, or whether you would like to multitask. You're not bothering anyone (one could argue) as you quietly do your email or check Facebook. Here's the problem with that theory: From what we can tell, you are actually damaging the learning environment for others, even if you're being quiet about it. A study published in 2013 found that not only did the multitasking student in a classroom do worse on a post-class test on the material, so did the peers who could see the computer. In other words, the off-task laptop use distracted not just the laptop user but also the group of students behind the laptop user. (And I get it, believe me. I was once in a lecture where the woman in front of me was shoe shopping, and I found myself thinking at one point, "No, not the pink ones!" I don't remember all that much else about the lecture.)

In addition, I can find your multitasking on a laptop a bit distracting as the instructor because sometimes you are not typing at the right times; I am not saying anything noteworthy and yet you are engrossed in typing, which suggests that you are doing something other than being fully engaged in our class. And that distracts my attention.

There's also the issue of the classroom environment. I like to foster a sense of conversation here, even in a class of 100 students. If you are on a laptop, I and your peers are often looking at the back of your computer screen and the top of your head, rather than all of us making eye contact with each other. Learning happens best in a classroom when everyone is actively engaged with one another in the exchange of information. This can mean looking up from your notes to listen and to talk with others, which means you may need to make strategic decisions about what to write down. Note-taking is designed to support the learning and retention of material we talk about in class; note-taking itself is not learning. And speaking of what you choose to write down …

A study that came out in June—and which got a lot of buzz in the mainstream press—suggests that taking notes by hand rather than typing them on a laptop improves comprehension of the material. While students taking notes on a laptop (and only taking notes—they were not allowed to multitask) wrote down more of the material covered in class, they were often typing what the instructor said verbatim, which seems to have led to less processing of the material. The students taking notes by hand had to do more synthesizing and condensing as they wrote because they could not get everything down. As a result, they learned the material better. I think there is also something to the ease with which one can create visual connections on a handwritten page

through arrows, flow charts, etc.

I figure it is also good for all of us to break addictive patterns with email, texting, Facebook, etc. When you step back, it seems a bit silly that we can't go for 80 minutes without checking our phones or other devices. Really, for most of us, what are the odds of an emergency that can't wait an hour? We have developed the habit of checking, and you can see this class as a chance to create or reinforce a habit of not checking too.

Of course, if you need or strongly prefer a laptop for taking notes or accessing readings in class for any reason, please come talk with me, and I am happy to make that work. I'll just ask you to commit to using the laptop only for class-related work.