

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Calligraphy

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Understand key tools
and methods

Discover fun alphabet styles
and ways to vamp them up

Create beautiful lettering
and artwork

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Calligraphy For Dummies®

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Calligraphy

2nd Edition

by Jim Bennett, BFA, MFA

for
dummies
A Wiley Brand

Calligraphy For Dummies[®], 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2025944156

ISBN 978-1-394-36899-0 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-36901-0 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-36900-3 (epub)

Introduction

Welcome to the 2nd edition of *Calligraphy For Dummies*. You can use this book as your guide to mastering the art of calligraphy. Whether you're completely new to calligraphy or have some prior experience, this book can help you grasp the basics and explore the endless possibilities that calligraphy offers.

Starting with a beginner's alphabet, EZScript, I guide you through the fundamentals of calligraphy with step-by-step instructions and practical tips. You'll learn different styles, master essential techniques, and gain the skills to create beautiful, professional-quality calligraphy.

Many believe calligraphy requires innate talent, but I've seen determination triumph time and again. One of my students, despite a severe nervous disorder, steadied his pen with both hands and achieved professional-level work. Success in calligraphy isn't about talent — it's about persistence.

If you can write, you can do calligraphy. This book provides the knowledge and inspiration to help you succeed with calligraphy, whether as a relaxing hobby, a serious pursuit, or even a source of income.

About This Book

This book is both a guide and a workbook, combining two courses in one: Calligraphy I and II. Calligraphy I introduces calligraphy — tools, basic methods, and a beginner's alphabet. Then you'll meet seven traditional alphabets to build your lettering skills. Calligraphy II offers creative projects, from designing a unique signature to crafting elegant wedding calligraphy.

But calligraphy isn't learned by reading — you have to practice. This book is filled with illustrations, examples, and exercises to guide you step by step. You set your own pace, progressing as quickly or slowly as you like.

Practice by studying, tracing, and copying the letters provided — almost as if I were right there helping you. Don't write in this book! Photocopy the practice pages so that you can use them again and again.

With time and effort, you'll see your progress unfold before your eyes.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use some conventions throughout this book to make your practice as easy as possible and to make sure that you don't wonder whether you missed something along the way. These conventions make everything consistent and simple to understand:

- » **Getting what you need:** At the beginning of chapters that require you to have certain materials or already know certain skills, I have a “Got What You Need?” section that lists what you need for that chapter.
- » **Practice, practice, practice:** The chapters contain some short practice exercises to get you started, but for more practice, you have full page practice exercises available in the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet (www.dummies.com). Having full-page practice exercises available online means that you can easily print as many copies as you want.
- » **Following guidelines:** There are several types of practice guidelines that enable you to keep your letters uniform in proportion:
 - Black lines separate sections of writing.
 - Rectangles show where to draw the body of the letters.
 - Dashed lines indicate the slant.
- » **Using the three-step method:** The practice exercises in this book use a special three-step method: study, trace, and copy. Study the example letters printed in black that show the direction and sequence of strokes. Trace over the letters printed in gray. And in the blank spaces of these practice areas, copy the letters.

Foolish Assumptions

I try to avoid technical jargon in this book. Whenever I have a choice between a specialized calligraphy term that only calligraphers use and a word that everyone understands, I opt to use the more commonplace word. For example, I use the terms *capital letters* and *lowercase letters* throughout this book, instead of calling the letters *majuscules* and *minuscules*. (If you pursue calligraphy in greater depth, you can pick up all the specialized terminology.)

I wrote this book for anyone curious about calligraphy — whether you're a complete beginner, an admirer eager to learn, a practiced hand looking to refine your skills, or an experienced calligrapher seeking to improve and sell your work.

No matter which category fits you best, I believe that you'll find plenty in this book to explore.

How This Book Is Organized

Like all other *For Dummies* books, this one is divided into parts, so you can easily find where to start or revisit. Each section covers a different aspect of calligraphy, letting you explore at your own pace — whether you're a beginner or refining your skills. The book is organized into five parts, each focusing on key calligraphy topics.

Part 1: Getting Started with Calligraphy

[Part 1](#) introduces calligraphy — its benefits, how to get started, and the special practice method used in this book. It covers essential tools like pens, ink, and paper, along with basic steps for using and caring for your materials — especially the calligraphy fountain pen, an ideal choice for beginners.

Part 2: Taking a Beginner's Path to Calligraphic Artistry

[Part 2](#) introduces EZScript, a beginner-friendly calligraphy style designed to make learning easy and affordable. If you're new to calligraphy, EZScript helps you get comfortable with techniques and tools while avoiding common pitfalls.

Inspired by print, Italic, copperplate, and cursive, EZScript feels familiar no matter your background. After teaching calligraphy for over 50 years, I created it to remove obstacles that often frustrate beginners, making the learning process smoother and more enjoyable.

In this part I also offer guidance on improving and developing your skills as you progress.

Part 3: Exploring the Traditional Alphabets

[Part 3](#) introduces alphabets that expand your repertoire and build a strong foundation for your calligraphy journey. Each style has unique characteristics and conveys distinct emotions, helping you refine your craft and continue growing:

- » **Roman** ([Chapter 8](#)): Classical, solid, and strong
- » **Uncial** ([Chapter 9](#)): Artistic and expressive
- » **Manuscript** ([Chapter 10](#)): Prioritizes readability and clarity
- » **Blackletter** ([Chapter 11](#)): Conveys an ancient and formal aesthetic
- » **Italic** ([Chapter 12](#)): Fluid, versatile, and highly legible
- » **Copperplate** ([Chapter 13](#)): Embodies elegance with graceful flourishes
- » **Versals** ([Chapter 14](#)): Adds decorative flair and visual impact to lettering

Mastering these seven alphabets equips you with the building blocks to explore and adapt virtually any lettering style.

Part 4: Expanding Your Repertoire Beyond the Basics

[Part 4](#) explores exciting calligraphy projects to try once you're confident in your lettering skills. Start with an eye-catching signature or a beautifully lettered quote, then move on to posters, signs, certificates, plaques, and decorative borders.

If you work in other art forms, you'll find ideas on blending calligraphy with different mediums. You'll also learn how to create custom calligraphic computer fonts and use digital tools for composition and layout.

Part 5: The Part of Tens

[Part 5](#) offers valuable tips, starting with ten creative ways to use calligraphy for weddings — whether yours or someone else's. You'll also find ten fun alphabets that mimic styles like Chinese and Greek, helping you expand your skills. The final chapter covers a topic many find exciting: how to turn calligraphy into a source of income.

Icons Used in This Book

I include some icons in this book to flag important information. Keep an eye out for these icons while you read:



TIP

Want to know how to do something better, easier, or faster? Just look for info attached to this icon.



REMEMBER

Although the list of things that you have to remember — stroke sequence, what angle to hold your hand, and so on — may seem endless, this icon points out some really important info that you just can't miss.



WARNING

With this icon, I highlight potential pitfalls — whether it's something that can spoil a calligraphy project or damage a favorite pen.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

When you see this icon, go to the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet for this book (www.dummies.com) to find more practice related to that section.

Where to Go from Here

This book isn't a textbook — it's an adventure. Flip through the pages, scan the Table of Contents, and explore whatever catches your eye. There's no set path, so take your time and follow your curiosity.

If you're new to calligraphy, start at the beginning and work through every chapter and practice exercise in [Parts 1](#) and [2](#). Don't skip anything,

and if you struggle, spend extra time practicing before moving forward. By the end, you'll be ready to explore on your own.

If you already have calligraphy experience, feel free to jump between sections. But don't miss the skill-refinement parts — especially [Chapter 6](#) — as they can sharpen your technique. Also, try the projects in [Part 4](#).

This book includes a free Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet to help you get started. Just visit www.dummies.com and search for “Calligraphy For Dummies Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet.” You'll find practice pages to help you refine your skills, along with a list of traditional alphabets from the book.

No matter your experience level, these resources will help you get the most out of your calligraphy journey.

Part 1

Getting Started with Calligraphy

IN THIS PART ...

Discover why anyone can enjoy doing calligraphy — no special talent or pricey tools required.

Gather the essential materials, including pens, ink, and paper, and find out how to use and care for them.

Start your calligraphy journey with confidence and a clear practice method.

Chapter 1

You Can Do Calligraphy!

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Appreciating what calligraphy is all about
 - » Getting the basics right
 - » Using a step-by-step practice method
 - » Exploring the possibilities of what calligraphy offers
-

Calligraphy literally means *beautiful writing*, but it's so much more than that! Calligraphy enhances invitations, notes, signs, scrapbooks, awards, and cards. It adds elegance to anything you create and helps you develop your creativity.

It's an art form imbued with elegance, grace, and the power to express emotions beyond words. It's also an art form that almost anyone who can write can master — yes, even you. With practice, patience, and a willingness to slow down, you can acquire the skills needed to create stunning calligraphy.

As an artist, I've explored sculpture, painting, and printmaking, from abstract to realism. I've worked as a portrait painter and owned an art gallery and frame shop. Yet, of all my artistic endeavors, calligraphy has been the most rewarding, bringing me deep satisfaction and endless opportunities. Now, you're about to embark on an exciting adventure. The rewards await you, too.

In this chapter I introduce calligraphy, its benefits, and the idea that anyone can create beautiful letterforms. Calligraphy can reveal hidden talents and abilities. Slow down, take a deep breath, and give it a try. You may discover a new passion.

Removing Assumptions about Calligraphy

Maybe you admire other people's calligraphy but feel hesitant to try it yourself. Here are some reasons why you shouldn't let doubts hold you back:

- » **You don't need innate talent.** Creating great calligraphy involves practice, patience, and attention to detail — not as much natural talent as you may suppose. Talent helps but is absolutely not required, especially when the only critic you need to please is yourself.
- » **Age is just a number.** From kids to seniors, anyone can excel at calligraphy with a bit of effort and curiosity. (See the section “[Doing Calligraphy at Any Age](#),” later in this chapter, for discussion of the benefits of calligraphy for all age groups.)
- » **You can buy supplies without breaking the bank.** You just need pens, ink, paper, and a few simple tools. The pens can last a lifetime.
- » **Calligraphy requires minimal space.** You won't need an elaborate setup. You can practice just about anywhere, anytime.
- » **And most importantly — calligraphy is fun!** You see progress quickly, and the more you practice, the more rewarding it becomes.

The best calligraphers are skilled and understand the history of the alphabet. They appreciate how letters evolved and know the tools used in writing. They see themselves as part of a long tradition — preserving the past while shaping the future. This book includes brief notes on each alphabet for historical context.

Having Patience and Focus

You may not have thought about handwriting since childhood. Calligraphy helps you slow down, focus, and turn ordinary writing into

something special. Many find it relaxing.

To become a good calligrapher, you need

- » **Patience:** Calligraphy thrives on a slow, deliberate pace — you create the best calligraphy when you take your time. Masterful lettering is the goal, not speed.
- » **Precision:** Focus on forming letters with care, and enjoy the process of mastering these skills.
- » **Practice:** You can master the first two needs if you consistently practice. Explore exercises in the alphabet chapters in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#) and the downloadable practice sheets online.

Using the Three-Step Practice Method

To help you master each alphabet, I use a reliable, time-tested method: study, trace, and copy

[Figure 1-1](#) shows the three-step approach using the Roman letter *x* as an example. (See [Chapter 8](#) for details on the Roman alphabet.) This illustration helps you understand the method so that you'll know how to apply it when studying calligraphic alphabets.



REMEMBER This method goes to the heart of how I structure this book. For every alphabet, I give you opportunities to study, trace, and copy the letters individually, as well as to practice combining them into words. Additionally, you can find extended practice exercises in the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet where you can further hone your skills.



FIGURE 1-1: How to study, trace, and copy, using the generic Roman letter *x* as an example.

Here are the steps in more detail:

1. Carefully study the example.

The box on the left of [Figure 1-1](#) shows a simplified Roman letter *x* as a model for study before you trace and copy. It displays the letter's shape, along with numbered arrows indicating the stroke direction and sequence.

Imagine that you're watching someone demonstrate each stroke step by step.

2. Trace over the letter printed gray.

The middle box of [Figure 1-1](#) features the Roman *x* drawn in gray. Follow the direction and stroke sequence that you study in Step 1.

Go slowly and aim for smooth, even strokes — you begin working on precision in this step.

3. Copy the letter in the blank space.

In [Figure 1-1](#), the box on the right is intentionally left blank, giving you a chance to practice copying the letter freehand. The idea is to re-create the shape of the letter as accurately as possible.

How did it go? If it felt challenging, that's normal — every attempt brings you closer to mastering the art. With practice, it will feel more natural and effortless.

Follow the sequence: study, trace, then copy. Stick with it, and soon your strokes will be confident. If it felt easy, you may be a natural. Calligraphy could be your niche!



REMEMBER Always complete these three steps in order — study, trace, then copy. I’ve seen students skip the tracing step or do all the tracing before moving on to copying. Although tempting, these shortcuts can disrupt your progress. Calligraphy relies on progressive muscle memory development. Studying builds a mental blueprint, tracing reinforces stroke precision, and copying solidifies independent execution. Skipping or rearranging these steps disrupts retention, weakens consistency, and can cause mistakes in letter formation.



TIP You can best use the study, trace, and copy practice pages in this workbook by photocopying or scanning them so that you can practice over and over again; or you can download the practice pages from www.dummies.com/go/calligraphy and print them out.

Introducing the EZScript Alphabet

I designed the EZScript alphabet, shown in [Figure 1-2](#), with beginners in mind. If you’ve never picked up a calligraphy pen before, this is the perfect place to start. Why? Because EZScript is all about simplicity, accessibility, and getting you off to a confident start.

EZScript is a great beginner's alphabet.

FIGURE 1-2: An example of the EZScript alphabet.

I created this alphabet, which you can explore in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#), with one primary goal: to make practicing calligraphy as easy, approachable, and affordable as possible. EZScript takes the guesswork out of fancy

lettering by blending elements from traditional calligraphy styles with familiar aspects of both print and handwriting — the same handwriting styles some of you learned during your school days and a derivative of the Copperplate style (see [Chapter 13](#)). You may even find yourself thinking, “*Hey, this feels like an upgraded version of my everyday writing!*”

But don’t be fooled by its simplicity. This alphabet offers plenty of creative opportunities for both beginners and seasoned calligraphers alike. The clean, fluid lines and versatile strokes make it perfect for everything from elegant greeting cards to quick personal projects.

Whether you want to practice calligraphy for fun or you dream of becoming a calligraphy pro, EZScript can provide a gateway into this rewarding art form.

Avoiding some common roadblocks

EZScript can help you avoid the following common problems in calligraphy that can discourage you:

- » **Ink blotting or smudging:** You may accidentally smudge wet ink or apply too much. Smudging and blotting often stem from inexperience with dip pens. To prevent this, begin with a bullet-tipped marker, advance to a calligraphy fountain pen, and finally work with the dip pen — each step reducing the risk.
- » **Difficulty understanding letterforms:** Most people need some time to understand the anatomy of letters and how strokes fit together. The EZScript starter alphabet uses simplified letterforms that are very forgiving when it comes to making errors.
- » **Trouble with size, slant, and serifs:** You can letter EZScript by using the size and slant that you feel most comfortable with. Also, this alphabet doesn’t include *serifs* which are small decorative strokes or extensions at the ends of the main strokes of letters in many alphabets.
- » **Frustration with progress:** Calligraphy requires patience, and you may feel discouraged by slow improvement. Practicing EZScript can

give you a sense of accomplishment right from the start. Remember and celebrate small victories to boost your confidence.

Beginning calligraphy without feeling overwhelmed

Starting calligraphy can feel intimidating, but using EZScript, paired with the practice method I outline in “[Using the Three-Step Practice Method](#)” earlier in this chapter, enables you to begin your calligraphy journey with ease.

Doing Calligraphy at Any Age

Doing calligraphy comes with innumerable benefits. A study conducted in Hong Kong and published in the *Hong Kong Medical Journal* in February 2018 found that calligraphy therapy significantly improved cognitive function among older people who have mild cognitive impairment. Another study, published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in September 2024, positively associated calligraphy activities with peace of mind, stress self-management, and perceived health status, especially in older adults.

There are innumerable benefits from doing calligraphy. Here is a list of the major benefits categorized by age group:

- » **Pre-Teens:** Calligraphy enhances fine motor skills, building dexterity and hand-eye coordination. It fosters patience, focus, and creative expression — empowering children to explore artistic styles while building confidence.
- » **Teens:** A mindful outlet for stress, calligraphy nurtures precision and attention to detail, valuable in fields like art and design. Mastering this skill instills a sense of accomplishment and boosts self-esteem.
- » **Young Adults:** Calligraphy can enhance résumés for creative careers, foster networking through shared passion, and offer a meditative escape from the digital world.

- » **Mature Adults:** Practicing calligraphy sharpens mental agility, reduces stress through rhythmic strokes, and rekindles artistic fulfillment.
- » **Seniors:** Therapeutic benefits include improved joint mobility and cognitive engagement. Calligraphy also promotes social connections and provides a lasting sense of accomplishment, allowing seniors to create personal keepsakes and legacy pieces.

Indeed, calligraphy offers a wide range of benefits, whether physical, mental, or social, and the beauty of this craft is that its rewards can adapt to every stage of life. Who knows, you may even discover perks that haven't been listed here as you practice!

Taking Your Skills Further

In this book I give you the foundation to conquer seven basic alphabets (with endless possibilities for variations!) — just flip to [Parts 2](#) and [3](#). But you can also dabble in some advanced alphabets and dive into fun projects that let your creativity soar in [Part 4](#).

Whatever you want to do with calligraphy, this book can help:

- » **Impress with elegant quotations.** [Chapters 7](#) and [16](#) have you covered.
- » **Create a sign or poster that speaks volumes.** Head over to [Chapter 18](#).
- » **Make certificates.** [Chapter 17](#) shows you how to make them look like they belong in the hands of royalty.
- » **Make beautiful calligraphy for a wedding.** If you're planning a wedding, [Chapter 20](#) is like your fairy godmother for calligraphy.
- » **Design your own calligraphy fonts.** If you're tech-savvy, [Chapter 19](#) shows you how to create digital fonts with your calligraphy — you can become the next typographical trendsetter!

- » **Get playful with your calligraphy.** Check out the ten lighthearted alphabets in [Chapter 21](#).
- » **Turn your talent into treasure.** If you're thinking, "Hey, I could make some cash with all these fancy strokes," [Chapter 22](#) can help you.



TIP No matter what you choose to explore, keep experimenting, keep practicing, and above all — have fun. The best calligraphy is the kind that brings a smile to your face (and possibly earns you a few admiring glances).

Chapter 2

Assembling Your Calligrapher's Toolbox

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Finding the right tools
 - » Checking out a variety of pens and ink
 - » Perusing paper options
 - » Getting an idea of other materials you might need
 - » Maintaining your calligraphy tools
-

Your calligraphy success starts with the right materials, but choosing them can feel overwhelming. If you've ever shopped for supplies, you likely faced one of three scenarios: no calligraphy section at all, a tiny nook with a few markers, or an overwhelming selection of pens, inks, and papers. In any case, you probably walked out empty-handed — frustrated and confused.

Don't worry, you're not alone — this chapter clears up the confusion. Whether shopping in person or online, you'll learn how to choose materials that are easy to use, widely available, and built to last (with proper care). No guesswork, just the essentials for your calligraphy journey.

Finding the Right Materials

Calligraphy supplies are available at arts and crafts stores, stationery shops, and online. Knowing what you need makes shopping effortless — use this chapter to create a list, then explore local stores or reliable

online sources for convenience and quality. Many professional calligraphers prefer online shopping for its ease and dependability.



TIP For quality calligraphy supplies, you can visit the top calligraphy retailer in the United States, John Neal Books (www.johnnealbooks.com), which offers an online catalog and a printable PDF. You can order online or by phone, fax, or e-mail.

Other great sources include Dick Blick (www.DickBlick.com) and MisterArt (www.MisterArt.com), which often feature discounts. Amazon (www.amazon.com) is another option, though its lower prices don't always apply to calligraphy supplies.

For an easy, hassle-free shopping option, you can also visit my website, www.newgoldenletters.com, where you'll find curated links to the right materials — no need to sift through overwhelming selections or risk choosing the wrong items.



WARNING Be cautious — Amazon often suggests similar items below your search results. Although these alternatives might catch your eye with their lower prices, they may not always match the quality that you want.

Choosing Your First Pens and Ink

In [Parts 2](#) and [3](#), each alphabet covered includes a recommended pen. You can complete all alphabets and projects with just four pens: a marker, fountain pen, dip pen, and oblique pen. Best of all, they're affordable — and, aside from the marker, they last virtually forever.

Bullet-tipped marker pens

Marker pens with rounded tips create bold, even lines, making them beginner-friendly and widely available. They're ideal for practicing the EZScript alphabet (see [Chapter 4](#)) and useful for Roman and Italic letterforms ([Chapters 8](#) and [12](#)). Their simplicity lets beginners focus on technique without dealing with dip pens or ink.

One standout option is the ZIG Writer (see [Figure 2-1](#)), a durable dual-tip marker with a 0.5 mm fine tip and a 1.2 mm broad tip. Its versatility makes it great for writing, sketching, and calligraphy practice, ensuring consistent ink flow over time.



Kuretake Co., Ltd

FIGURE 2-1: The ZIG Writer.



WARNING Calligraphy markers, designed to mimic broad-edge nibs, can be misleading for beginners. Since ink flows regardless of angle, they may reinforce poor pen habits that are tough to unlearn. However, for experienced calligraphers with solid pen control, they're a handy tool for quick lettering tasks like name tags and informal projects.

Calligraphy fountain pens and ink



TIP

Fountain pens are a great starting point for calligraphy. They're simple, beginner-friendly, and ideal for developing skills before transitioning to dip pens, which require more advanced techniques (see [Chapters 3](#) and [15](#)).

Use fountain pens for practice, personal writing, and small projects. They're portable, come in various nib sizes, and work with ink cartridges or reservoir adapters for bottle refills.

However, fountain pens have some drawbacks — they use less permanent ink, lack standardized nib sizes, and don't produce exactly the same sharp lettering as dip pens. They also tend to be pricier than markers or dip pens.



REMEMBER

Common nib size names, such as fine, medium, and broad, can vary significantly between brands. A medium nib from one brand may be equivalent to a broad nib from another.

Calligraphy fountain pens range in price from under \$10 to over \$50. Many calligraphy teachers, including myself, recommend the Manuscript brand fountain pen. They are widely available in both right-handed and left-handed versions — a surprising but important distinction (see the following section for discussion of right- versus left-handed pens).



TIP

The exercises in this book pair well with the Manuscript fountain pen. You can use other pens if their nib sizes match the recommended specifications — each exercise lists a Manuscript nib alongside its millimeter (mm) equivalent for easy comparison. Simply measure your nib width to ensure compatibility.

For practice, you'll need the medium, broad, and 2B nibs, found in Manuscript pen sets like the Calligrapher's Deluxe Set, which includes all necessary components. You can also buy the pen, nibs, and reservoir adapter separately.

Pelikan 4001 ink is a trusted choice for fountain pens, offering a smooth, reliable flow. Though lighter than carbon pigment inks, it's dark enough for calligraphy and won't clog your pen. Many calligraphers rely on it.

[Figure 2-2](#) shows a Manuscript fountain pen set and Pelikan 4001 ink.



WARNING Avoid waterproof ink in fountain pens — it can cause irreversible damage. Use only inks formulated for fountain pens, as waterproof inks dry and clog the pen beyond repair. Their varnish content can also expand when dry, ruining the pen nib.



Manuscript Ltd.

FIGURE 2-2: The Manuscript fountain pen set and Pelikan 4001 ink.

If you're left-handed

If you're left-handed, you have an important choice of whether to get a right-handed or left-handed pen. Before you buy a pen, decide which kind of pen you can best work with.

How can there be different right-handed and left-handed pens, you might ask? The answer has to do with the shapes of the nibs.

Calligraphy nibs are blunt-cut to create the distinctive thick and thin strokes characteristic of calligraphy. These nibs are officially referred to as chisel or broad-edged nibs.

For right-handers, the correct pen angle is achieved by a combination of pen hold and hand position. To help left-handers achieve the same pen angle, an oblique cut nib is an option.

[Figure 2-3](#) shows the difference between a left-handed oblique and right-handed chisel nib.

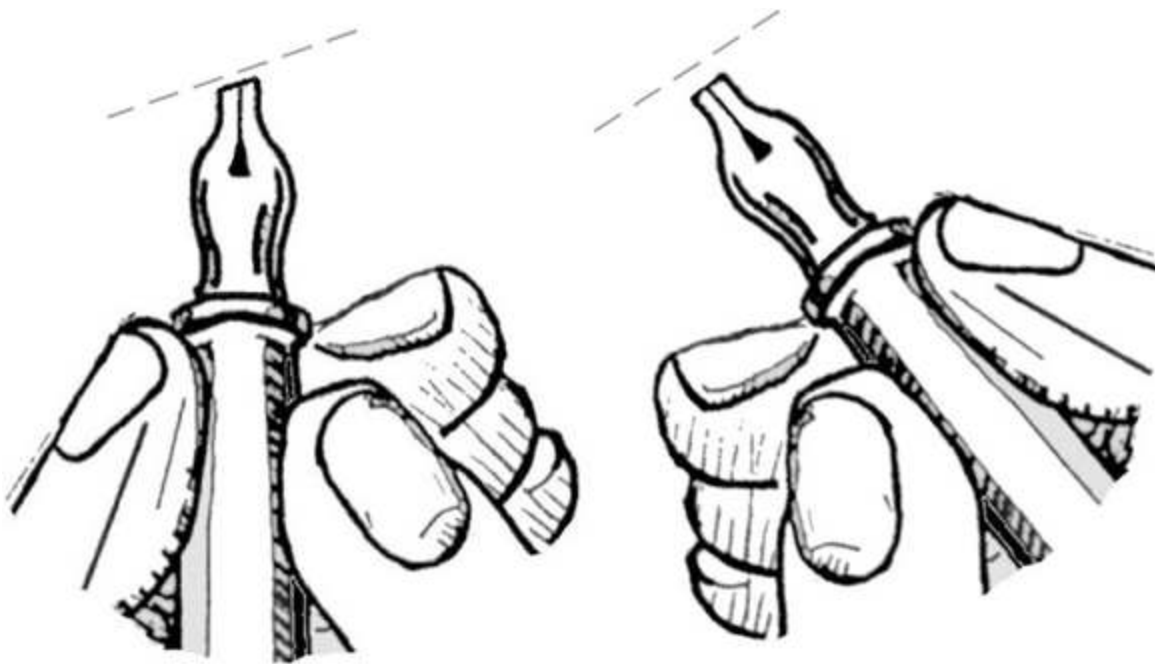


FIGURE 2-3: The left-handed and right-handed nibs.

For right-handed calligraphers, a standard chisel nib naturally creates proper thick and thin strokes, aligning with traditional technique. Left-handed writers, however, often struggle to achieve the same results due to their stroke direction. A left-handed nib, with its oblique cut, can help compensate in some situations for this difference.

However, for many left-handed calligraphers, standard nibs work best. Instead of switching to a left-handed nib, they adjust their grip, writing

angle, or paper position to achieve optimal strokes.

So, if you're a lefty which pen should you use?

See the three hand positions in [Figure 2-4](#) and choose the one that feels most natural and easy to maintain while writing. Once you find the position that works best for you, use it consistently in all your calligraphy.

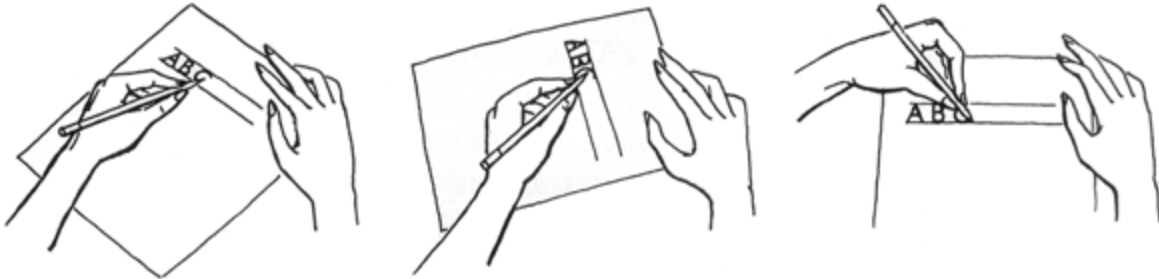


FIGURE 2-4: Three hand-position options for left-handers.

If you choose the position on the far left, a *left-oblique* (left-handed) pen should work best for you. If you pick either of the other two positions, you can most easily use the same kind of pen that right-handers use.



WARNING If you prefer the position on the far right of [Figure 2-4](#), make sure that you don't drag your hand through the ink and smear it.



TIP If you are left-handed, Vance Studley's *Left-Handed Calligraphy* is an excellent companion to this book. Written by an experienced left-handed calligrapher, this insightful guide offers techniques and adaptations to help left-handed writers achieve fluid, beautiful lettering with ease.

Dipping into Dip Pens and Ink

Dip pens have been used for over 3,000 years, evolving from carved reeds to modern steel nibs — yet their fundamental design remains unchanged.

These versatile tools, with separate nibs and handles (see [Figures 2-5](#) and [2-6](#)), allow the use of darker carbon-based inks unsuitable for fountain pens. For sharp, professional-quality calligraphy, the dip pen is unmatched — affordable, durable, and easy to maintain.

To practice all the alphabets and complete every project in this book, you'll need two types of dip pens: a broad-edged nib pen, for five of the alphabets, and an oblique pen, which is used for Copperplate lettering. Each requires its own type of ink.

Broad-edged dip pens and ink

Select your pen according to the nib and choose from three kinds of broad-edged nibs — Mitchell Round Hand nibs, Brause nibs, and Speedball C-Series nibs (see [Figure 2-5](#)). All three of these nibs come in right- and left-handed versions:



THE CHRONICLE

FIGURE 2-5: The Mitchell Round Hand nib with a clip-on reservoir beside it, Brause nib, and Speedball C-Series nib.

- » **Mitchell Round Hand:** Prized for their soft touch, smooth movement, and minimal pressure requirement, these pens are a pleasure to use for calligraphy.

Made of steel, each nib has a dimple for ink filling (see [Chapter 3](#)) and a brass reservoir that attaches underneath (see [Figure 2-5](#)). The reservoir is adjustable for a secure fit, with its front part (the “tongue”) touching the nib near the broad edge.

For best results, use a complete set of nibs, each with its own reservoir, to avoid switching and potential damage. Before use, ensure that the reservoir is correctly positioned and firmly attached.

The Manuscript brand offers a similar nib, the Chronicle, available in sets with wooden handles.

- » **Brause:** These nibs, made of steel, have a top-mounted steel reservoir and a firmer feel than Mitchell Round Hand nibs — ideal if you tend to press down while writing. They fill slightly more easily but cost about twice as much as a Mitchell RH set.

- » **Speedball C-Series:** This steel nib has a brass reservoir permanently attached to the top. If you get this nib, make sure that the reservoir hasn’t been crushed down flat against the nib. If it is, don’t buy it. It should be slightly raised in the middle so that it can hold ink.

Because you can’t take this nib apart to wipe it clean, you have to rinse the nib thoroughly under running water and dry it completely with a soft paper towel after you use it. You can also use a blow dryer. Regardless, it is important not to store it wet; it will rust.

You can use several types of ink work with dip pens, but Winsor & Newton Calligraphy Ink and Pelikan Fount India Ink are excellent choices — widely available, affordable, and trusted by top calligraphers worldwide.

Pelikan Fount India Ink has a convenient spout for filling pens, while Winsor & Newton Calligraphy Ink requires a small paintbrush (see

Figure 2-6).



Speedball Art

FIGURE 2-6: The Brause, Speedball, and Mitchell dip pens with bottles of Pelikan Fount India and Winsor & Newton Calligraphy Inks, and an inexpensive #5 brush for filling the pens.

For projects needing waterproof ink, you can use it safely in a dip pen — just be sure to clean the nib immediately and thoroughly after use.

Oblique pens and ink

If you're interested in Copperplate calligraphy (see [Chapter 13](#)), you'll need an oblique pen holder and pointed nibs (refer to [Figure 2-3](#)), which are typically sold together. Speedball offers a plastic oblique pen, including a left-handed version.

Left-handed calligraphers may need to experiment with paper angles. While the left-handed Speedball Oblique Pen positions the flange on the opposite side, most left-handers prefer using a regular straight pen.

For Copperplate calligraphy, Higgins Eternal black ink is an excellent choice for two reasons. First, its wide-mouth bottle makes dipping an oblique pen easy and hassle-free. Second, it works especially well with added gum Arabic, which improves ink flow and adherence to the nib. I cover the process in detail in [Chapter 13](#).

Selecting the Right Paper

When you're starting out, practice paper is a must. Good-quality photocopy paper works very well for beginners, but HP Premium LaserJet paper is even better.



TIP To find the perfect paper, test it with your pen. Some papers have soft surfaces that cause ink to bleed or feather — choose one that keeps your calligraphy sharp and crisp.

Consider paper thickness as well. If the paper is thin enough, you can see a guide sheet underneath to follow pre-drawn lines. Otherwise, draw guidelines in pencil and erase them after finishing your calligraphy.

For top-notch calligraphic work, consider these excellent paper options:

- » **Strathmore 300 and 400 Series paper:** This reasonably priced paper comes in pads and gives you sizes larger than standard letter dimensions.
- » **Pentalic Paper for Pens:** A high-quality, archival-grade paper that resists becoming brown or brittle over time. Its smooth, hard surface

is perfect for all types of pen work from drawing to calligraphy, including Copperplate.

- » **Borden & Riley Paris paper for pens:** Similar in quality to Pentelic paper, this premium option can be used for advanced work.

Adding Materials to Your Calligraphy Kit

Here are some additional calligraphy tools to consider:

- » **For drawing and positioning:** Use good-quality hard lead pencils for guidelines and layouts. Opt for Magic Rub or Staedtler white erasers — pink erasers can damage paper. Drafting tape is ideal for securing paper without tearing it.
- » **For a professional setup:** A drawing table (18×24 inches or larger) is great for extended projects, but a lap board or tilted board works well, too (see [Figure 2-7](#)). A magnifying glass with light helps with intricate lettering and embellishments.
- » **For measuring and drawing lines:** A 24-inch or larger T-square and a 30–60 right triangle assist in creating accurate guidelines and slant lines. Standard inch and metric rulers are useful for layout and design.
- » **For clean-up and organization:** Keep paper towels handy for quick cleanups. Storage boxes help keep materials organized.



FIGURE 2-7: The correct way to use a lap board.



REMEMBER The preceding list doesn't include other art materials that you may want to incorporate into your calligraphy. For example, if you do watercolor painting, you can certainly use watercolors together with your calligraphy.

Taking Care of Your Materials

Proper care ensures that your calligraphy tools last for years. Follow these tips for maintenance:

- » **Clean and organize your supplies.** Always take a few minutes to tidy up and put things away after use.
- » **Store your nibs.** Use plastic compartmentalized boxes (which I discuss in the preceding section) to store nibs and other small items securely.
- » **Deal with dried ink in fountain pen nibs.** If ink dries in your fountain pen nib, you can soak the nib overnight in water and dry it by blotting it carefully with a soft paper towel. However, you usually don't have to resort to doing this, if you use the recommended fountain pen ink. Simply refilling the pen from the ink bottle dissolves the dried ink residue into the new ink.
- » **Clean dip pen nibs.** New dip pen nibs often have a factory oil coating. Gently scrub them with a toothbrush and a small amount of toothpaste to remove the oil (and later to clean off dried ink, as needed).
- » **Maintain dip pen nibs.** After use, rinse the nibs under running water, wipe them clean with a paper towel, and store them in a dry place.
- » **Properly store your calligraphy paper.** Keep your paper flat and in a dry area, away from moisture and pests, such as mice and insects.

Chapter 3

Putting Pen to Paper: Modern Tools for a Timeless Art

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Using a fountain pen and a dip pen
 - » Getting your board set up
 - » Drawing and using guidelines
 - » Preparing yourself physically
-

If you're new to calligraphy, this chapter can help familiarize you with some fundamental practices before you dive into alphabets (which I cover in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#)): your posture and pen hold, how to properly fill your pen, ensuring that it writes smoothly on paper (a task that's often trickier than it seems), and how to care for your pens to keep them in top condition.

In this chapter, I guide you through the basics of using both a fountain pen and a dip pen. (I talk about these two different pen types in [Chapter 2](#).) Whether you have some trouble using your pen or just want tips to improve your writing experience, this chapter can help. Additionally, I explain how to use guidelines effectively and walk you through creating your own guidelines to elevate your calligraphy.



TIP

If you don't know which pen or ink to choose, don't worry! In [Chapter 2](#), I provide a detailed rundown of materials. One crucial tip to remember: Never use waterproof inks in your fountain pen — they can cause damage and clog the nib.

Using a Fountain Pen



TIP

If you're a beginner in calligraphy, I recommend that you use a fountain pen as your first calligraphy pen. Its broad-edge nib makes practice smooth and hassle-free, allowing you to focus on developing technique without worrying about ink flow. After you master the fountain pen, you can face the challenge of using a dip pen. (For guidance on selecting the right pens, see [Chapter 2](#).)

If your fountain pen came unassembled, take a moment to put it together before diving into the practice exercises in this workbook. Properly fill the pen with ink and check that the ink flows smoothly onto the paper. Although you can assemble most fountain pens easily, you may have problems getting one to write reliably. Fountain pens can be temperamental, so hold yours correctly to achieve consistent results.



REMEMBER

I recommend that you use the Manuscript brand fountain pen (see [Chapter 2](#)).

Examining the parts of a fountain pen

Remove the cap from your fountain pen and take a moment to examine its parts. Each component has a specific name, and although you can certainly call something a thing-a-ma-jig if you want, knowing the proper terms can be helpful when you're talking with another calligrapher or when you want to ask a question of the staff at your favorite arts-and-crafts supply store. But don't worry, the calligraphy police won't swoop in if you mix up the names for the nib and the barrel.

[Figure 3-1](#) shows you the parts of a fountain pen: the barrel, ink cartridge (or reservoir), nib, cap, and adapter. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembling the parts.

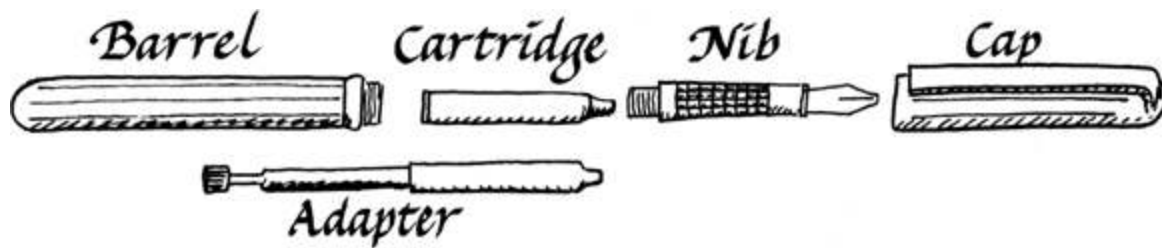


FIGURE 3-1: The parts of a fountain pen.

Filling your pen



REMEMBER How you fill your fountain pen depends on the type of pen that you have. Refer to the instructions that came with your pen to ensure that you understand the specific filling process for your model. In this section, I provide general guidelines for filling both cartridge and reservoir pens: But remember, the manufacturer's instructions are the definitive resource.

How you go about filling your pen depends whether your pen uses a cartridge or reservoir adapter:

- » **If you use a cartridge pen:** First examine the cartridge — it usually has two distinct ends: one flat and the other tapered. Make sure the tapered end faces the correct direction when you insert it into the barrel, as shown in [Figure 3-2](#). If you're using a Manuscript pen, place two cartridges back-to-back so the flat ends touch; the first cartridge acts as a spacer inside the barrel. Then, drop the cartridge(s) into the barrel and carefully screw on the nib section. Make sure that the nib is screwed on tightly. This should puncture the cartridge, allowing ink to flow. However, you won't be able to see if this has occurred because it happens internally. You'll have to test the pen to see if the ink is flowing. If you encounter ink flow problems, see the later section "[Combatting ink-flow problems](#)."



FIGURE 3-2: Filling a cartridge pen.

» **If you use a pen that has a reservoir adapter:** Fill it from an ink bottle. Each adapter features a pump mechanism, and the exact method depends on its design. Consult the instructions that came with your pen to determine whether yours is

- The plunger type
- The kind you squeeze from the sides
- The type that has a knob to turn

For example, the Manuscript pen uses a plunger adapter: first, making sure the adapter is pushed snugly into the nib, simply push the plunger in, dip the nib into the ink, and slowly pull the plunger out to draw ink into the reservoir.



TIP

When you fill the pen, submerge only the nib into the ink, ensuring that the nib is completely covered by the ink (see [Figure 3-3](#)). If you dip it too deeply, you may end up with a mess; if you don't dip it far enough, the reservoir may not fill completely. After you fill the pen, gently wipe away any excess ink from the nib by using a paper towel.

I highly recommend that you start with a pen that uses a reservoir adapter, versus a cartridge pen, because a reservoir adapter allows for better ink flow control and is far easier to refill than inserting cartridges and trying to get the pen to write. Once filled, you can begin lettering instantly without any delay, making the process smoother and more efficient.

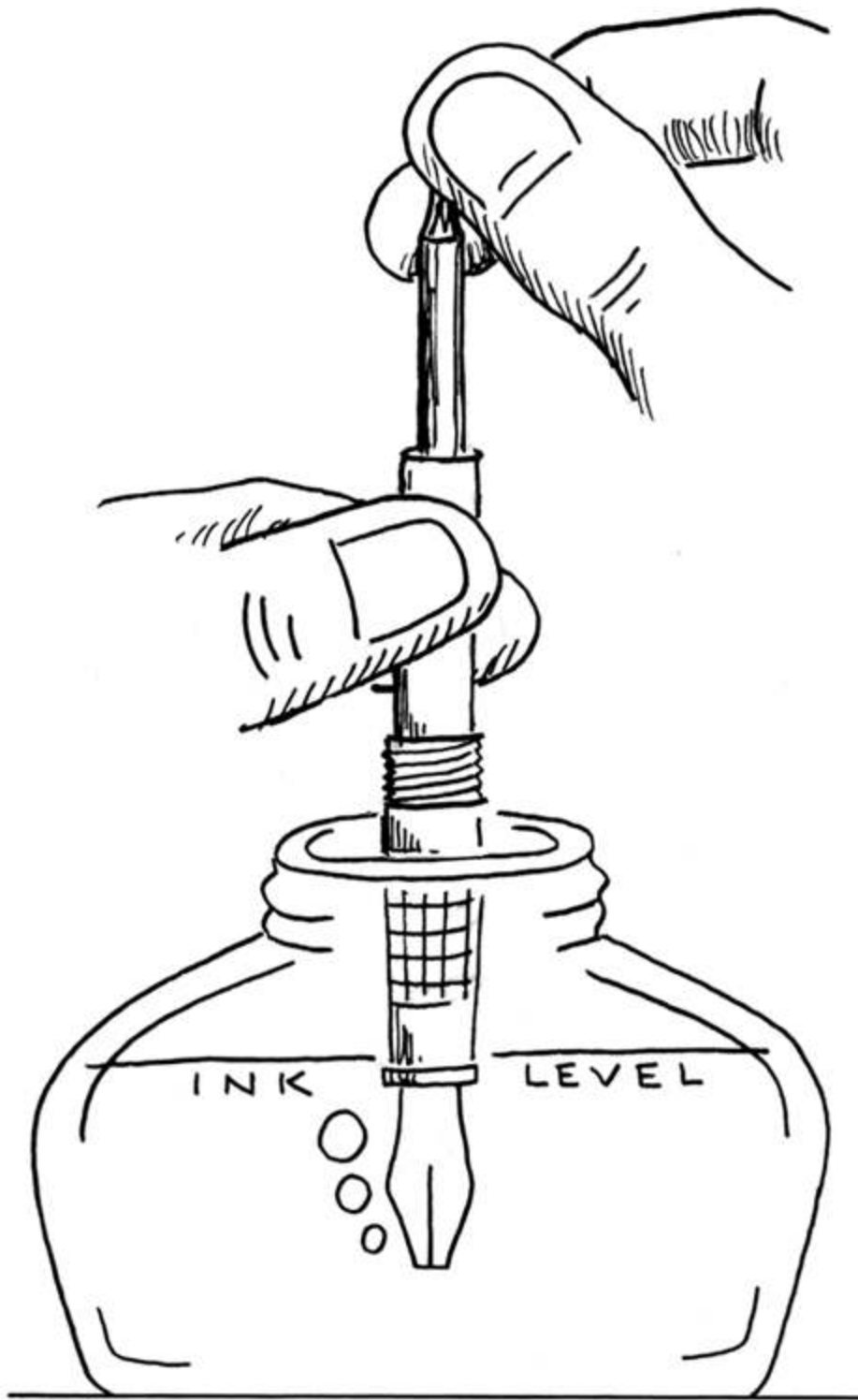


FIGURE 3-3: Filling a pen that has an adapter.

Getting a grip on (actually, off) your pen hold

To master calligraphy, you need proper pen hold, whether you use a fountain pen or a dip pen. Begin by practicing the correct hold with a fountain pen, and then carry that same hold over when you start using a dip pen. If you usually write by pressing down firmly, you may have developed some less-than-ideal habits — gripping the pen too tightly is one of the most common. A tense grip can hinder the control that you need for calligraphy and may lead to fatigue or writer’s cramp over time. You won’t need to press down hard when you use a calligraphy pen.

[Figure 3-4](#) illustrates a tense grip, in which the index finger is angled upward and the middle, ring, and little fingers are curled tightly into the palm. If your current grip resembles the one in [Figure 3-4](#), relax your hold and work on adopting a more natural, effective technique, like the one shown in [Figure 3-5](#).



FIGURE 3-4: A tense pen hold.

[Figure 3-5](#) shows the ideal pen hold — firm but relaxed. The index finger is curved just slightly, and the middle, ring, and little fingers are curved gently underneath. Practice positioning your fingers and angling the pen to mirror the grip shown in [Figure 3-5](#).



FIGURE 3-5: The ideal pen hold.

Combatting ink-flow problems

After assembling your fountain pen (following the manufacturer's instructions), ensure that the pen writes properly before beginning calligraphy. Fountain pens, especially when you first use a new pen or have just inserted a cartridge, can often present ink-flow issues. Because cartridge pens often resist writing immediately, you face the challenge of getting the ink to travel from the cartridge, down into the nib, and onto the paper. Try these techniques to get things flowing:

- » **Tap the nib.** Hold the pen loosely, with the nib pointing downward, about 2 inches above a sheet of scratch paper. Lightly tap the nib on

the paper a few times. Avoid pressing or jabbing — let the gentle tapping coax the ink down into the nib.

- » **Use side-to-side strokes.** Hold the pen so the flat edge of the nib is flush against the surface of the paper (as shown in [Figure 3-6](#)), ensuring that it's not angled. Move the pen side to side in straight lines, keeping the movement aligned with the nib's flat edge. This technique helps draw the ink down into the nib, allows you to gauge the flow, and gives you a sense of the pen's *feel* (meaning sensing in your hand the softness or rigidity of the nib and how smoothly it glides on the paper). Use this technique as a standard way to test how well a pen performs.
- » **Apply gentle pressure.** Carefully press the nib against the paper and pull the pen toward you to encourage ink flow. Be extremely cautious — too much pressure can bend the nib.
- » **Squeeze the cartridge.** If other methods fail, try this nearly foolproof technique. Unscrew the barrel of the pen and gently squeeze the cartridge until a small droplet of ink forms at the nib's underside. Do this squeeze over a surface that a little ink won't damage because squeezing too hard can cause ink to flow out of the pen and splatter.
- » **Slide your finger down the nib.** If you can see ink at the top of the nib but it's not flowing down to the tip, you can slide the tip of your index finger gently along the slit in top of the nib. This action helps force the ink down to the writing edge, ensuring smooth flow onto the paper. Be sure to apply only light pressure to avoid damaging your pen. If you do it correctly, this technique leaves a small ink smear on your finger. (Don't worry, it's part of the process! I call it calligrapher's hand lotion.)
- » **Refill the reservoir adapter.** If you have a fountain pen that you fill from a bottle, simply refilling the pen can saturate the nib and resolve ink-flow problems instantly.

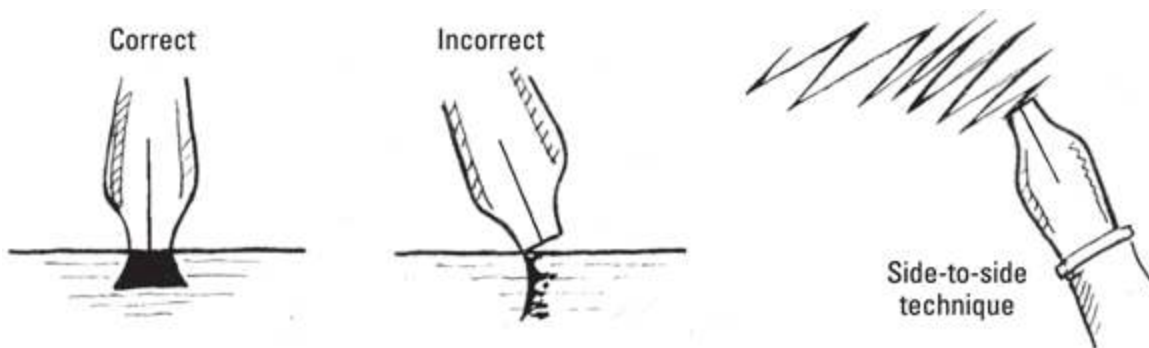


FIGURE 3-6: Holding the flat edge of the nib flush against the surface of the paper and scratching.

After you get the pen working the first time, you can more easily get it going the next time that you use it. You definitely have to endure a break-in process for a new calligraphy fountain pen, which can involve repeating the ink flow techniques. If you have trouble with your pen, treat it like a balky child: Be gentle and persistent, and never lose your cool.



TIP

If you have a nib that's particularly uncooperative and you suspect the problem may be caused by some residual oily film on the nib from the factory, simply wipe the nib gently with a small amount of common household ammonia on a cotton swab. Then allow the ammonia to evaporate. If, indeed, an oily residue is the problem, your pen should now write perfectly.

Getting your own magic wand

The calligraphy pen features a unique flat nib — also called a chisel-edge or broad-edge — that creates the ribbon-like effect of true calligraphy, making parts of the letters thick and others thin. While you practice each alphabet in this book (which you can find in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#)), hold your pen in the specific way that I describe for that alphabet, and your pen takes care of the rest.

If you use the correct grip, your pen's nib design naturally produces the stunning thicks and thins (see [Figure 3-7](#) for an example).



FIGURE 3-7: The distinctive thick-and-thin ribbon-like look of real calligraphy.

If you haven't tried it yet, discover what your pen can do: Have fun and experiment by making some marks and doodles. [Figure 3-8](#) shows the kinds of marks that you can make with your pen, so grab a piece of paper and try to duplicate those doodles. Then see what else you can do — try making some doodles of your own.



FIGURE 3-8: Try to copy these doodles by using your fountain pen.

Copy the thick and thin lines in [Figure 3-9](#) to discover just how you need to hold the pen to make the fattest and thinnest possible lines.



FIGURE 3-9: Figure out how to make these thick and thin lines by using your fountain pen.

Taking care of your fountain pen

Non-waterproof ink makes pen care remarkably easy. You don't need to do elaborate cleaning — even if the ink that's currently in the pen has

dried, simply refill the pen and the dried ink will dissolve into the new ink. If you want to clean the nib before storage, just make a quick wipe with a soft paper towel. For a more thorough cleaning, rinse the nib under running warm water or soak it in a small bowl of warm water, then pat it dry with a soft paper towel. Avoid using soap or cleansers on fountain pen interiors because you can't easily rinse them out.

If you want to switch ink colors. You can either:

- » Flush the old ink out by soaking and drying the nib.
- » Swap in a clean nib.

Changing the ink itself depends on which type of pen you use:

- » **Cartridge pens:** Inserting a new color allows the letters to gradually transition shades while you write.
- » **Pens that use reservoir adapters and bottled ink:** Ensure the nib is clean or replaced to prevent cross-contamination of the colors.

Keep your pen well-filled to ensure crisp, dark lettering. Avoid letting it run dry because pale, thin lines can detract from the quality of your calligraphy.

Working with a Dip Pen

After you master the use of a fountain pen (see the section “[Using a Fountain Pen](#),” earlier in this chapter and also [Chapter 5](#)), you're ready to move up to the next level of quality: the dip pen. Its beauty lies in its simplicity — it performs exceptionally well, is easy to maintain, and can last a lifetime. (For a comparison of dip pens with other calligraphy pens, see [Chapter 2](#). For techniques specific to using a dip pen, see [Chapter 18](#).) Because of their reliability and precision, I use only dip pens for significant calligraphy projects.



REMEMBER I recommend the Mitchell Round Hand dip pen (which I talk about in detail in [Chapter 2](#)). When I refer to a dip pen in the following sections, I mean the Mitchell Round Hand. However, I highlight any relevant differences between the Mitchell Round Hand and Brause, so if you use a different brand, the following sections can still give the information you need.

Checking out the dip pen's parts

Dip pens have three basic parts: the handle, the nib, and a small reservoir attachment on the nib ([Figure 3-10](#) shows the parts of a dip pen). The simple design of the dip pen makes it easy to change nibs. The reservoir can be removed carefully when cleaning the nib.



FIGURE 3-10: Details of a dip pen.

Filling — not dipping — your dip pen

On the Manuscript Round Hand pen, the reservoir, made of brass, slides underneath the nib. Since this brass reservoir can be bent very easily, it is a good idea to use a separate reservoir for each nib to avoid damaging them by having to remove and reattach them every time you change nibs.

Before filling the pen, ensure that the reservoir fits properly, touching the back of the nib near the tip and staying securely in place. (For Brause pens, the reservoir sits on top, but the process is otherwise the same.)



TIP

Filling a dip pen is simple if you avoid dipping the nib directly into the ink. Instead, use a small round artist's paintbrush (#4 or #5) for Winsor & Newton ink or the spout on the Pelikan Fount India ink to place a droplet of ink in the appropriate area, depending on your brand of pen:

- » **For Mitchell Round Hand pens:** Place a drop of ink in the dimple on top of the nib (see [Figure 3-11](#)). If the ink does not automatically flow into the reservoir below, you can hold the pen horizontally and tap the handle near where it joins the nib lightly on the edge of your table. This should cause the drop of ink to flow into the reservoir below.
- » **For Brause and Speedball pens:** Use the paintbrush to insert ink from the left side, between the nib and reservoir. Be careful not to overfill.

Wide nibs consume ink quickly, often requiring refills every two to three letters. Maintain a rhythm to refill frequently so that your letters remain dark and bold.

As you're lettering, avoid letting your pen run dry, which will cause your letters to look pale or thin. Keep plenty of ink in the pen, refilling it often.

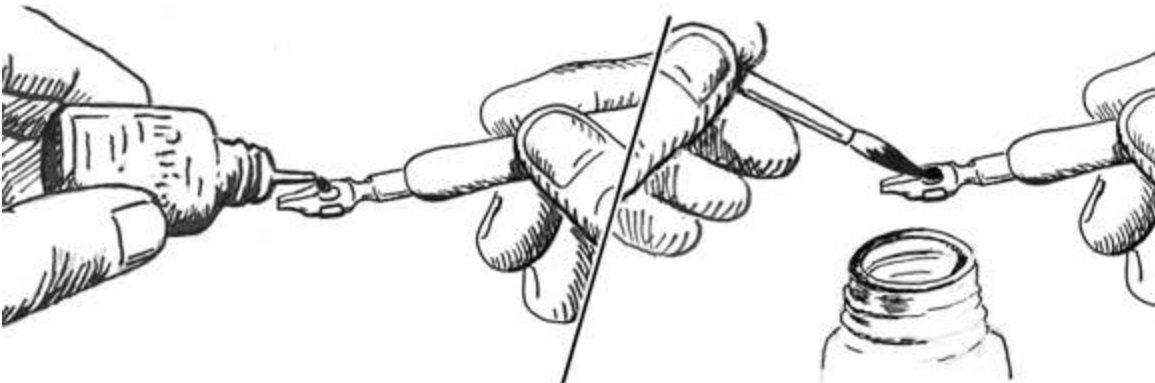


FIGURE 3-11: Filling the dip pen.

Taking care of your dip pen

Always disassemble nibs after use and wipe them clean and dry with a paper towel before you store them. Avoid keeping a nib in the pen handle; instead, store all your dip pen nibs in a sectioned, clear box that has a snap-shut lid to protect them from dust and humidity.

You can clean dip pen nibs more thoroughly than fountain pen nibs (which I talk about in the section “[Taking care of your fountain pen](#),” earlier in this chapter). For dried ink buildup, put a tiny amount of toothpaste on an old toothbrush and gently rub the nib — it’s remarkably effective. Be sure to rinse the nibs under running water and dry them completely to prevent rust, especially if you use steel nibs.



TIP Non-waterproof ink offers a hassle-free cleanup experience. Even if it dries on the nib, you can simply rinse the nib with plain water to remove it effortlessly.



WARNING Waterproof ink poses challenges that go beyond tricky cleaning. While it dries, it expands, acting like a wedge in the nib's slit. This pressure can cause the slit to splay open, rendering the nib unusable. Although waterproof ink has its merits, keep its long-term impact in mind when making your choice.

Setting Up Your Calligraphy Board

Both Ralph Douglass and Sheila Waters endorsed Edward Johnston’s setup for a calligraphy work surface — Johnston, often referred to as the “father of modern Western calligraphy,” established foundational principles still widely used today. To prepare your calligraphy board using Johnston’s design (see [Chapter 2](#) for details on work surfaces and sizes), follow these steps:

1. **Tape one or two large sheets stacked together of smooth, clean paper to the board to act as a pad underlayment.**

Use paper such as poster paper; drawing paper; or *layout bond*, a type of paper that has a smooth, consistent surface. Avoid using folded, creased, or even printed paper because the goal is to put together a perfectly smooth underlayment on which your calligraphy paper can sit.

2. **Tape a sheet of heavyweight paper across the bottom half of the board.**

For example, you can use watercolor paper. This paper serves as a guard, protecting your calligraphy paper from oils and moisture from your hand while you letter.

3. **Secure an elastic band across the top of the board to hold your calligraphy project in place while you're working on it. [Figure 3-12](#) shows everything in place.**

This setup allows you to move the paper up line by line.

4. **Keep a small piece of test paper — one that matches your calligraphy paper — nearby. This way, whenever you need to check your pen's ink flow, you'll have a convenient place to do so.**

[Figure 3-12](#) shows the Johnston calligraphy board setup.

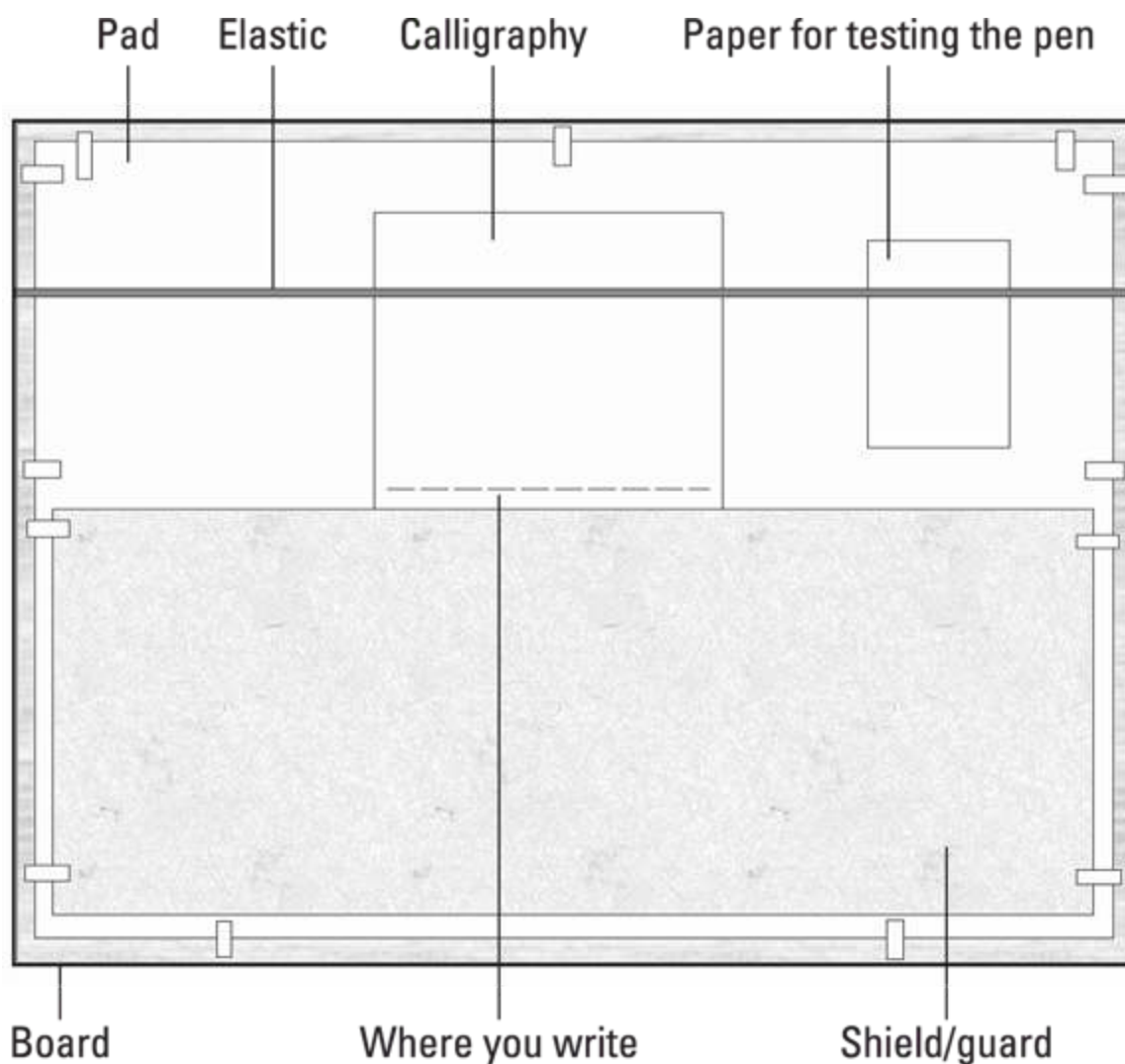


FIGURE 3-12: How to set up your calligraphy board.

Keeping Letters Straight: Drawing Guidelines

You can draw lettering guidelines easily, and they are necessary if you want to make your calligraphy look its best, keeping your letters straight and even. For many of the alphabets that you can find in [Part 3](#) of this book, you need four guidelines to do your best work (see [Figure 3-13](#)):

» **Writing or base line:** The line on which the letters sit

- » **Waist line:** The height of the main body of the letters, such as lowercase *a*
- » **Ascender line:** The height of the *staff* (shown in [Figure 3-13](#)) on letters such as lowercase *d*
- » **Descender line:** The length of the *tail* (shown in [Figure 3-13](#)) on letters such as lowercase *g*

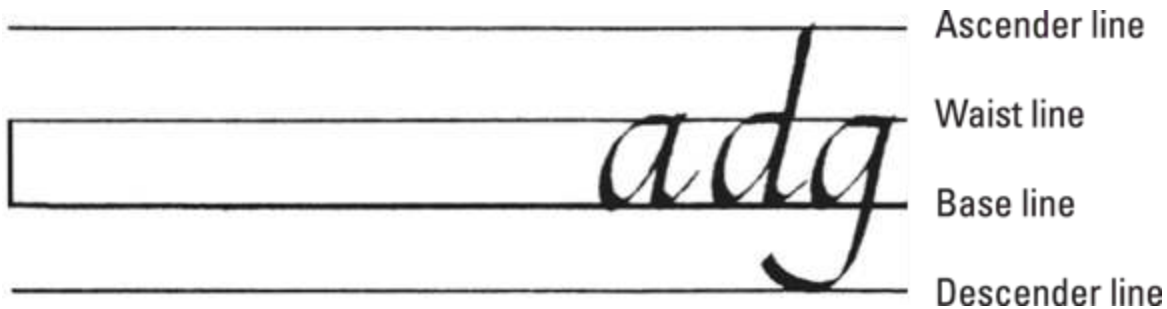


FIGURE 3-13: Calligraphy lettering guidelines.



TIP

To correctly use the guidelines, don't try to write inside them, but draw the letters so that they just touch the lines. You can find additional explanation about how the guidelines work in the chapters in [Part 3](#) that explain the alphabets.

Calculating the distance between lines

The spacing between guidelines, measured in *pen widths* (the width of your nib), varies depending on the alphabet. In each chapter in [Part 3](#) dedicated to an alphabet, I provide the recommended number of pen widths for spacing (see [Figure 3-14](#) for an example).

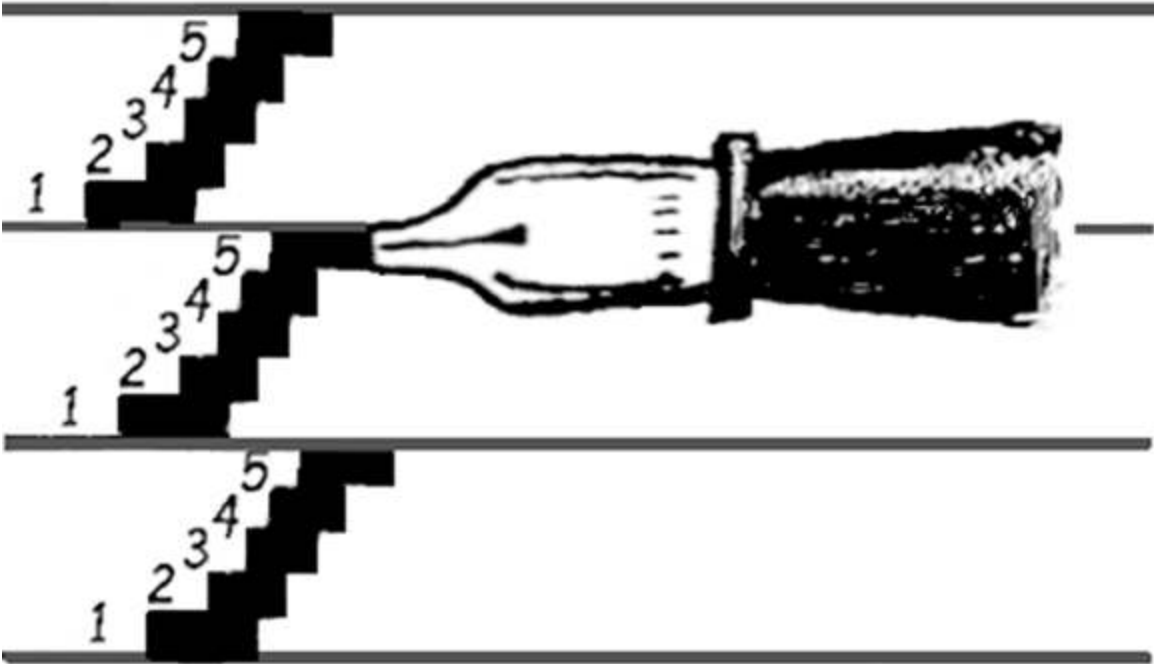


FIGURE 3-14: Using pen widths to determine the distance between the guidelines.

To draw your guidelines, first calculate the distance between them. Multiply the nib's width by the number of pen widths required for the alphabet. For instance, if your pen nib is 2 millimeters (mm) wide and the alphabet specifies five pen widths between lines, the distance between your guidelines would be $2 \text{ mm} \times 5$, resulting in a spacing of 10 mm.



TIP The Manuscript Pen Company has a small ruler called the Manuscript Calligraphy Rule, which you can use to measure the spaces between lines for the most commonly used pen nibs.

Using a T-square and ruler

This method to draw guidelines requires a drawing board, T-square, drafting tape, standard ruler, and a pencil. These tools are described in [Chapter 2](#).

Follow these steps to draw your guidelines:

1. Align the bottom of your paper to your board by using a T-square, as shown in [Figure 3-15](#).
2. Tape your paper down with the drafting tape, as shown in [Figure 3-15](#).
3. Using the ruler and pencil, mark along one side of the paper the distance between the guidelines.
4. Draw horizontal guidelines using the T-square and pencil exactly, as shown in [Figure 3-16](#).

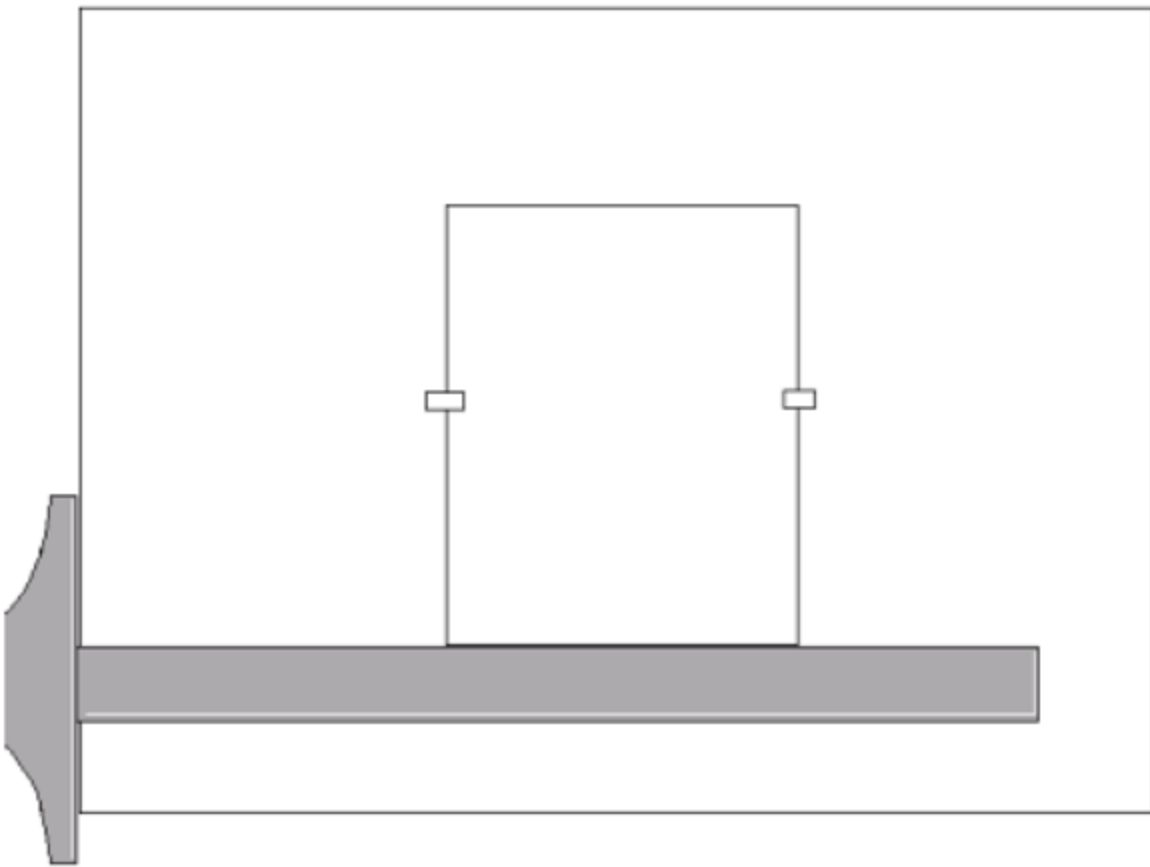


FIGURE 3-15: Use a T-square to align your paper.

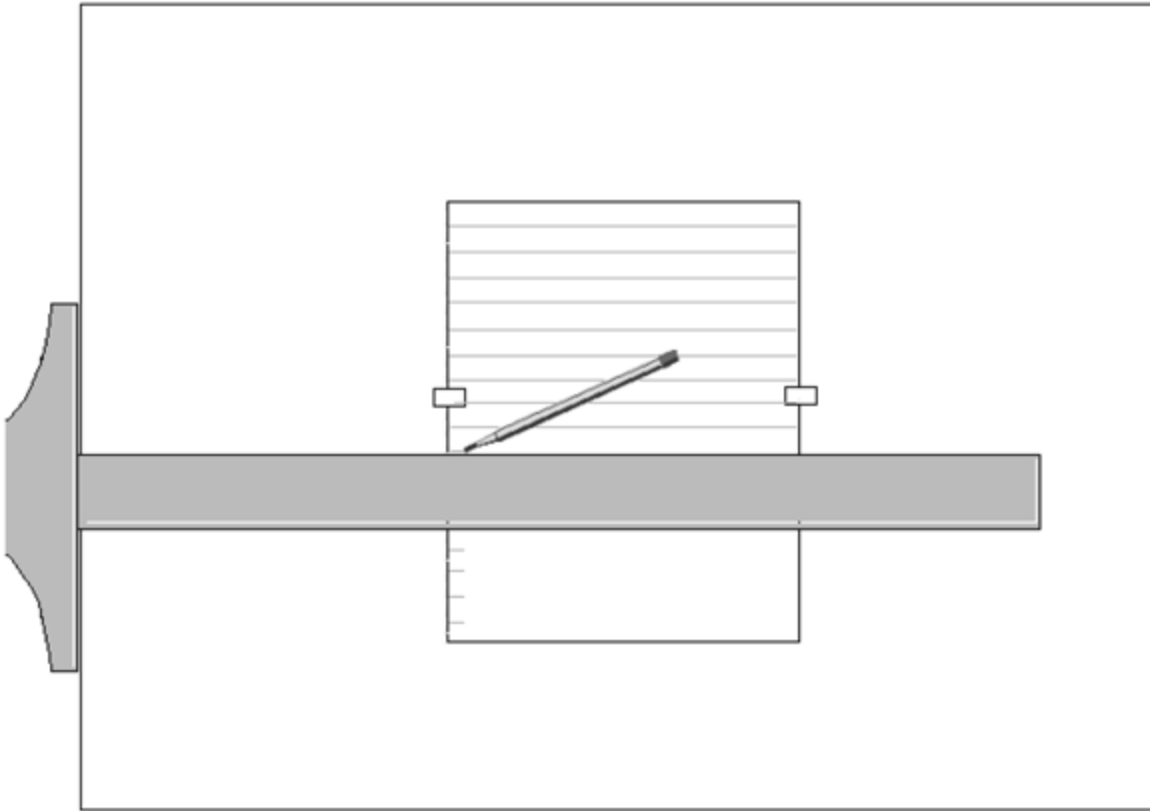


FIGURE 3-16: Draw horizontal guidelines by using a T-square.

Using a standard ruler and a right triangle

This guideline-drawing method requires a drawing board, paper, ruler, drafting tape, and a 30-60 right triangle. These are described in [Chapter 2](#).

Follow these steps to create guidelines using this method:

- 1. Tape the standard ruler in a vertical position to the board.**
Put the increments along the ruler's right edge on the left side of the board, as shown in [Figure 3-17](#).
- 2. Place the paper against the edge of the ruler and tape it down.**
[Figure 3-17](#) shows an example setup.
- 3. Slide the right triangle along the edge of the ruler and draw the horizontal lines at the correct intervals (see [Figure 3-18](#)).**

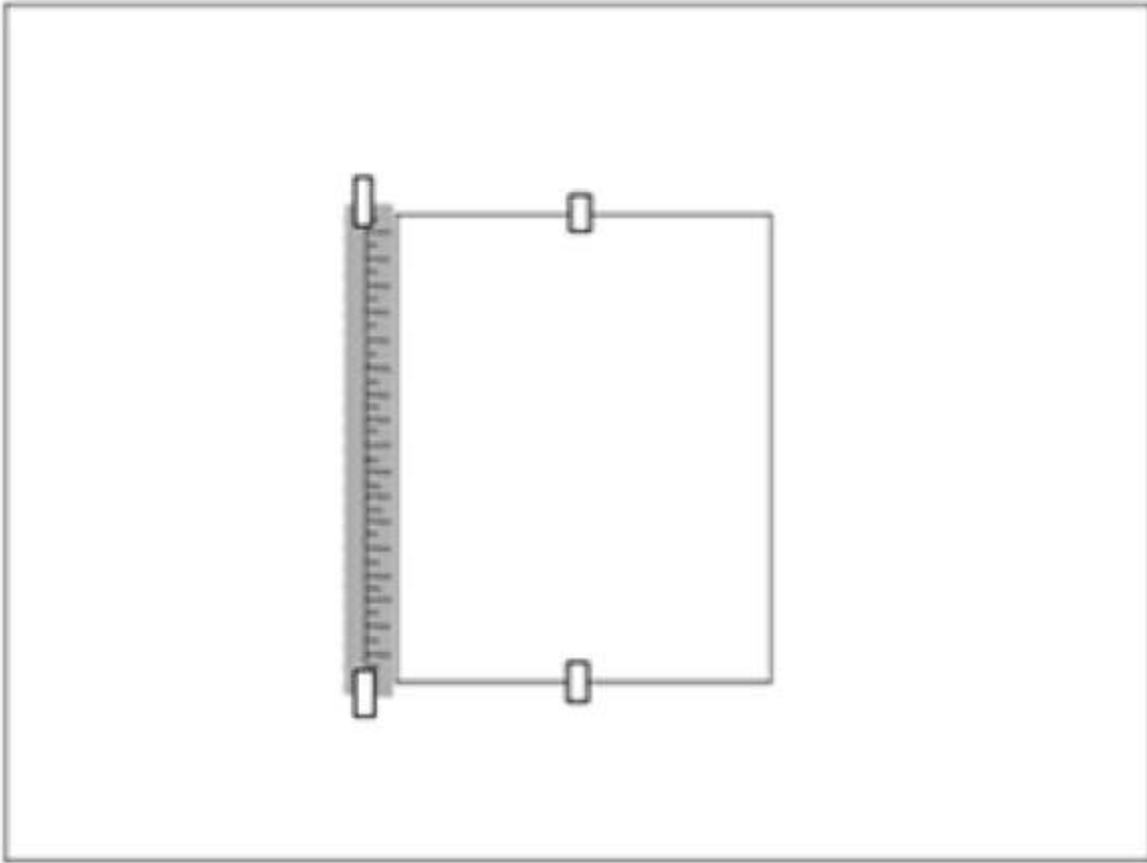


FIGURE 3-17: Getting your ruler and paper taped down.

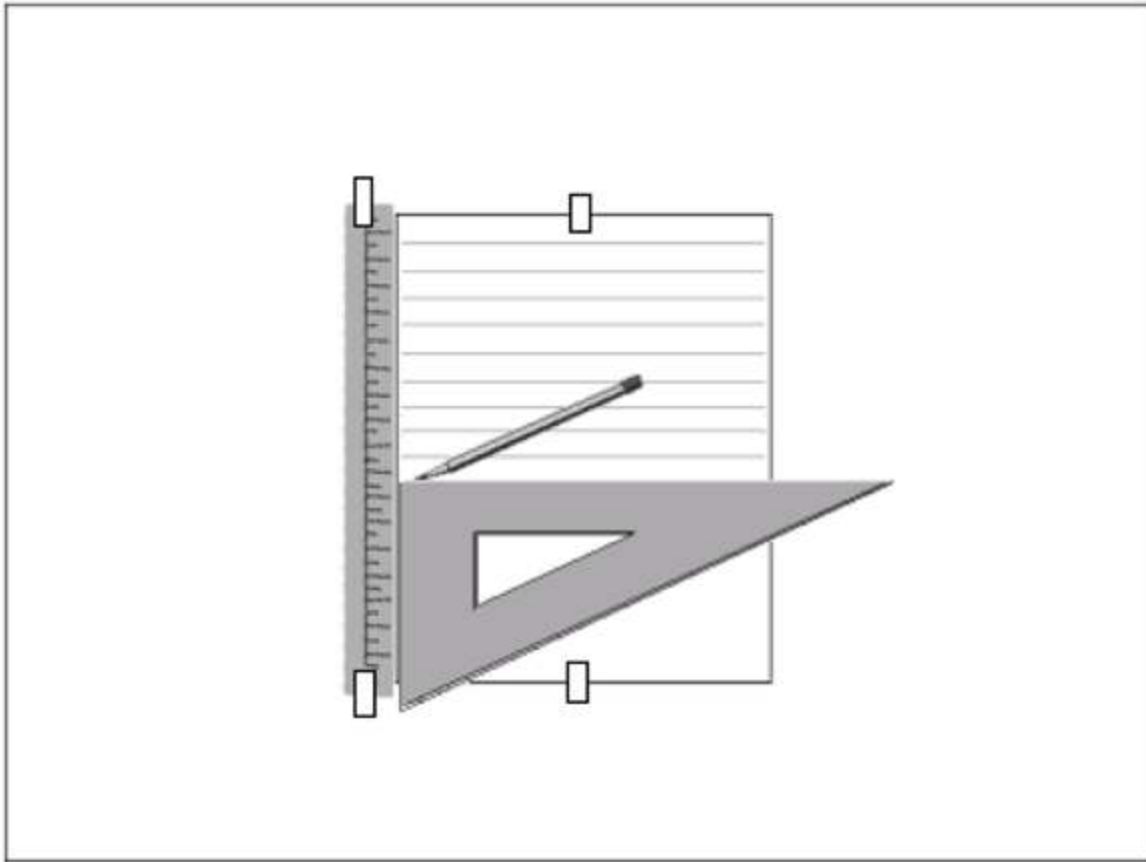


FIGURE 3-18: Using a right triangle to draw horizontal guidelines.



WARNING

CONNECTING THE DOTS — DON'T!

Another method for drawing guidelines exists — one you may even recall from school, if you ever had to rule a sheet of paper. This involves measuring and marking intervals along both sides of the paper, then connecting those marks with a straight edge to create lines. Although familiar, this approach is considerably less efficient than the other two methods described earlier. It requires more time and effort and introduces a greater margin for error.

I mention this method only to caution you against using it — the inefficiencies and inaccuracies introduced by this method make it unsuitable for precise lettering work.

This is for several reasons, including that it is time-consuming, creates a strong risk for misalignment, forces dependency on the paper's edges being perfectly straight, and risks waviness or distortion if the tool itself shifts.

A T-square eliminates these errors by providing a rigid, perpendicular guide anchored against the edge of the paper or drafting surface. With a single stroke, perfectly parallel

lines can be drawn quickly and accurately — without the tedious process of measuring on both sides. Since calligraphy demands consistency, a T-square ensures that base lines, x-heights, and tails remain uniform.

Loosening Up to Get Started

One of the biggest challenges calligraphers face is managing stress. You need a calm, relaxed mindset if you want to succeed in calligraphy because the art requires a slow and deliberate pace. Tension, anger, or frustration can interfere with your ability to perform at your best. If your hand or fingers feel strained, pause and reassess your approach.

Fortunately, you can use some effective ways to create a relaxed environment for your calligraphy practice:

- » **Choose a comfortable, distraction-free space where you feel at ease.** Many calligraphers find that soft, relaxing music enhances their focus. If you're comfortable with it, a small glass of wine may also help you unwind.
- » **Avoid working if you're pressed for time.** Feeling rushed can adversely affect your pen work. Instead, set aside time when you can work at a relaxed pace, allowing your hand to move with control and precision.
- » **Pay attention to your pen grip.** Holding the pen too tightly can lead to writer's cramp. Be mindful of your grip and consciously relax your hand.
- » **Incorporate relaxation techniques into your practice.** Try slow, deliberate breathing: Exhale slowly while you draw each letter. This method encourages a steady, unhurried pace.
- » **Always warm up before you begin.** On a separate sheet of paper, practice duplicating the patterns shown in [Figure 3-19](#). Focus on maintaining a relaxed grip and steady breathing.



FIGURE 3-19: Calligraphy warm-up exercises.

Striking a Pose

By mastering your sitting position and the way you hold your pen, you set yourself up for success, making the practice of calligraphy more enjoyable and effective.

Your sitting position affects your stability, posture, and endurance. Proper alignment ensures that your shoulders, arms, and wrists remain relaxed, allowing for fluid, effortless movements. Poor posture can lead to stiffness, tension, and uneven strokes, making it harder to achieve precision in your writing.

How you hold your pen directly impacts stroke execution, pressure control, and the overall grace of your lettering. The correct grip allows for smooth transitions between thick and thin strokes, and an improper grip can make your writing shaky, inconsistent, or physically uncomfortable.

Getting your posture right

The way you sit while writing directly affects your ability to control your pen or pencil. Poor posture can limit the freedom and precision of your hand movements, making it harder for you to achieve the fluidity and control essential for calligraphy.

So, what's the ideal way to sit? [Figure 3-20](#) offers an example of optimal posture.

To practice calligraphy, you need good posture and the correct pen hold. [Figure 3-21](#) shows the correct position of the paper, your arms, and the pen. In this figure, you can see that the person has the paper straight up and down in front of them. They hold the pen in their right hand in a relaxed manner and use a stick in their left hand to press down on the paper so that it doesn't bounce while they letter on it. They have another long piece of paper under their hands that acts as a shield so that moisture and oils from their hands don't transfer onto their work.



FIGURE 3-20: The correct posture for calligraphy.



FIGURE 3-21: An over-the-shoulder view of the correct posture and pen hold for doing calligraphy.

Perfecting Your Pen Angle

Your pen angle in calligraphy is vitally important because it determines the thickness and contrast of your strokes, shaping the style and clarity of your letterforms. By maintaining a consistent angle, you create uniformity and structure in your lettering — whether it's the bold, dramatic strokes of Blackletter or the graceful flow of Italic. Adjusting your pen angle lets you control stroke variation, adding rhythm and balance to your writing. It's the key to achieving precision, elegance, and character in every letter you make.

The tip of the calligraphy pen has a flat edge (sometimes called a broad edge). If you hold your pen so that the edge aligns with a horizontal on your paper, I call that pen angle zero degrees (see example A in [Figure 3-22](#)).

The pen angle is determined by the relationship between the nib and the horizontal. For right-handed writers who position their paper correctly, a pen angle of zero degrees means the pen barrel is pointing directly back at them.

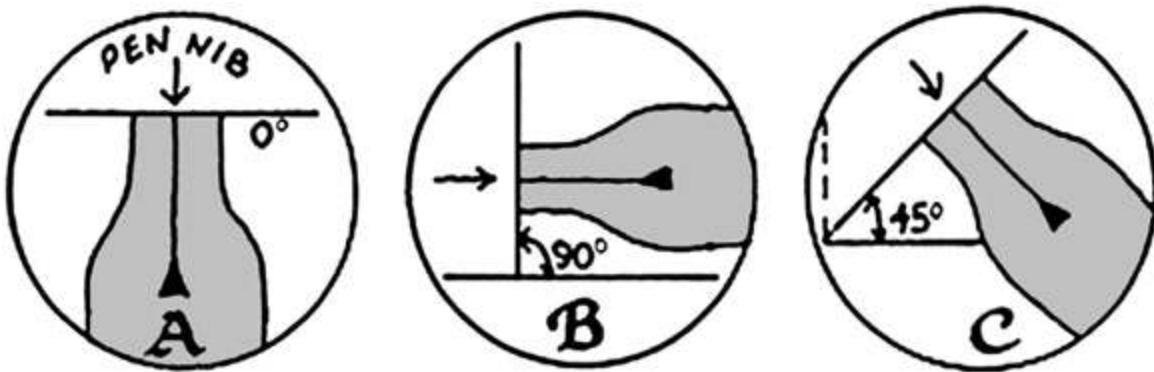


FIGURE 3-22: Three basic pen angles.

If the pen is rotated so that the straight edge of the nib aligns with a vertical stroke on the paper, the pen angle becomes 90 degrees (Example B in [Figure 3-22](#)). In this position, the pen barrel points outward to the right side for a right-handed writer.

The EZScript ([Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)), Italic ([Chapter 12](#)), and Blackletter ([Chapter 11](#)) alphabets require a 45-degree pen angle — exactly midway between 0 and 90 degrees — which is illustrated by Example C in [Figure 3-22](#). At this angle, the pen barrel points slightly past the right shoulder of a right-handed writer.

Maintaining a consistent 45-degree pen angle allows you to produce horizontal and vertical strokes of equal thickness. A flatter angle (closer to zero degrees), as used for Roman, Uncial, and Manuscript alphabets, results in wider vertical strokes compared to the horizontals. Conversely, a steeper angle (closer to 90 degrees) produces the opposite effect.

[Figure 3-23](#) illustrates a range of pen angles.

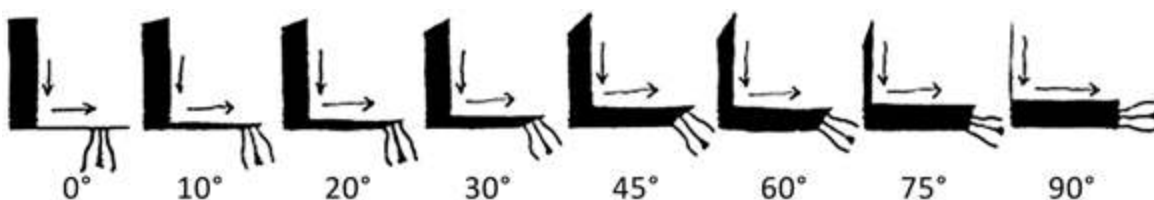


FIGURE 3-23: Eight pen angles from 0 to 90 degrees.

Part 2

Taking a Beginner's Path to Calligraphic Artistry

IN THIS PART ...

Get to know EZScript, a beginner-friendly calligraphy alphabet designed for ease and elegance.

Use a calligraphy pen to write EZScript letters.

Refine your technique to create cleaner, more consistent letterforms.

Apply your calligraphy skills to draw beautiful quotations.

Chapter 4

Getting Acquainted with EZScript

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring EZScript — an intro alphabet for beginners
 - » Putting the letters into groups
 - » Practicing lowercase and capital letters
 - » Making EZScript your own
 - » Doing EZScript with a ZIG Writer
-

Get ready to dive into calligraphy with EZScript — an ultra-approachable alphabet I created just for beginners. With simple strokes and a playful, adaptable style, it strips away the intimidation and makes your first steps feel effortless. It blends a variety of calligraphy styles into something fresh and flexible, so you can start strong and enjoy the process from the very first letter.



TIP If you already have some experience doing calligraphy, you may prefer to skip EZScript — but don't dismiss it entirely. Its relaxed, flow-based style can still offer a refreshing break. Prefer traditional alphabets? Head over to [Part 3](#) for classic forms, but before you go, be sure to check [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#) for tips that will help sharpen your eye and strengthen your practice.

In this chapter, you can use any non-calligraphy pen, but a broad 1.5 mm marker works best for clear letterforms, muscle memory, and consistent strokes with less strain. Beginners might try a bullet-tipped marker like the ZIG Writer that I describe in [Chapter 2](#).

Taking Your First Steps with EZScript

When you dive into practicing the EZScript alphabet, keep these three key things in mind:

- » **Find your sweet spot when it comes to speed.** Find your ideal writing pace — steady, not rushed. Calligraphy is slower than everyday writing, so aim for smooth, controlled strokes. The right speed builds confidence and ease with each letter.
- » **Keep your letters uniform in size and consistent in their slant.** The slant is completely up to you. Tilted to a greater or lesser degree, or no slant at all — it's your call! EZScript is so flexible that you can even tweak the letter shapes to match your style if you want to.
- » **Most importantly, enjoy the process!** Have fun watching your very first calligraphy alphabet gracefully begin to take shape.



TIP

When you're first learning calligraphy, it's perfectly okay to keep your work to yourself. Giving yourself space to practice without pressure can help you grow your confidence and really master one alphabet before sharing it with others.

Take a look at [Figure 4-1](#). Doesn't EZScript look like the alphabet equivalent of a friendly wave hello? With its clean lines and approachable curves, it seems to say, "Come on in, the calligraphy's fine!" Imagine transforming your grocery lists into works of art or impressing friends with handwritten notes that scream, "I've got style *and* a steady hand!"

EZScript is a great beginner's alphabet.

FIGURE 4-1: EZScript offers a great beginner's alphabet.



REMEMBER Instead of lettering directly on the practice pages in this book, you can either photocopy them, scan and print them, or use thin paper for tracing so that you can preserve the original pages and use them over and over again to practice as much as you need. There is additional practice in the Cheat Sheet and Practice Pack which you can download at www.dummies.com/go/calligraphy.

Grouping the EZScript Letters

EZScript uses five basic shapes:

- » **Oval:** Six letters (*a, d, g, o, p,* and *q*)
- » **Ascender loop:** Five letters (*b, f, h, k,* and *l*)
- » **Descender loop:** Four letters (*g, j, p,* and *y*)
- » **The *u*-shape:** Four letters (*b, u, w,* and *y*)
- » **The *n*-shape:** Three letters (*h, n,* and *m*)



REMEMBER I present the letters in the preceding list in groups based on shape to help you make them as uniform as possible — think of it like organizing socks after laundry day.

While you make 15 of the lowercase letters: *b, c, e, h, l, m, n, o, r, s, u, v, w, y,* and *z* in just one stroke, you also have a group of 11 letters that require two strokes: *a, d, f, g, i, j, k, p, q, t,* and *x*.

Letters with the o shape

You form the EZScript letters *a, d, g, o, p,* and *q* by using an oval shape. Draw the oval counterclockwise for all letters except *p*, where it follows a clockwise direction. You can adjust the oval's width — making it as

narrow or as wide as you prefer — but strive for consistency across all six letters.

Study the shapes and strokes of these letters in [Figure 4-2](#).



FIGURE 4-2: Letters with the o shape.

Letters with an ascender loop

The letters *b*, *f*, *h*, *k*, and *l* feature *ascender loops* (meaning the loops go above the waist line; flip to [Chapter 3](#) for discussion of guidelines). Each loop begins just above the waist line, curving gracefully upward before turning into a long downstroke. You can adjust the loop's height — making it as tall or short as you prefer — but consistency across the letters is key to achieving a uniform appearance.

Study the shapes and strokes of these letters in [Figure 4-3](#).



FIGURE 4-3: Letters with an ascender loop.

Letters with a descender loop

Just four letters — *g*, *j*, *p*, and *y* — feature *descender loops* (where the loop goes down below the base line; see [Chapter 3](#)). Each loop begins with a long downstroke, followed by a clockwise curve. You can adjust the loop's length — making it as short or extended as you prefer — but

maintain consistency across all four letters so there is a uniform appearance.

[Figure 4-4](#) illustrates the way to make these letters.



FIGURE 4-4: Letters with a descender loop.

Letters you make using the u and n-shapes

The *u* and *n* parts of the seven letters — *b*, *u*, *w*, *y*, *h*, *n*, and *m* — are really straightforward in their formation, so I don't think we need to isolate them for individual practice. You'll have plenty of opportunity to reinforce them during the full lowercase alphabet exercise.

Letters that you make in two strokes

For those of us who learned cursive handwriting, you were taught to form most letters in a single stroke. Only four — *i*, *j*, *t*, and *x* — required two strokes, with the dots on *i* and *j* and the crossbars on *t* and *x* serving as the second strokes.

However, in the EZScript alphabet, none of the letters are joined together, and you make 11 letters — not just 4 — with two strokes: *a*, *d*, *f*, *g*, *i*, *j*, *k*, *p*, *q*, *t*, and *x*. (See [Figure 4-5](#).)



FIGURE 4-5: Letters that you make with two strokes.

Practicing All the Lowercase Letters

[Figure 4-6](#) shows all the lowercase letters in alphabetical order.

To build confidence lettering the EZScript alphabet, follow these steps, using a marker pen, such as the ZIG Writer (you can find details about this three-step practice method in [Chapter 1](#)):

1. Study a letter.

Carefully observe the letter's structure, paying attention to stroke direction, spacing, and proportion.

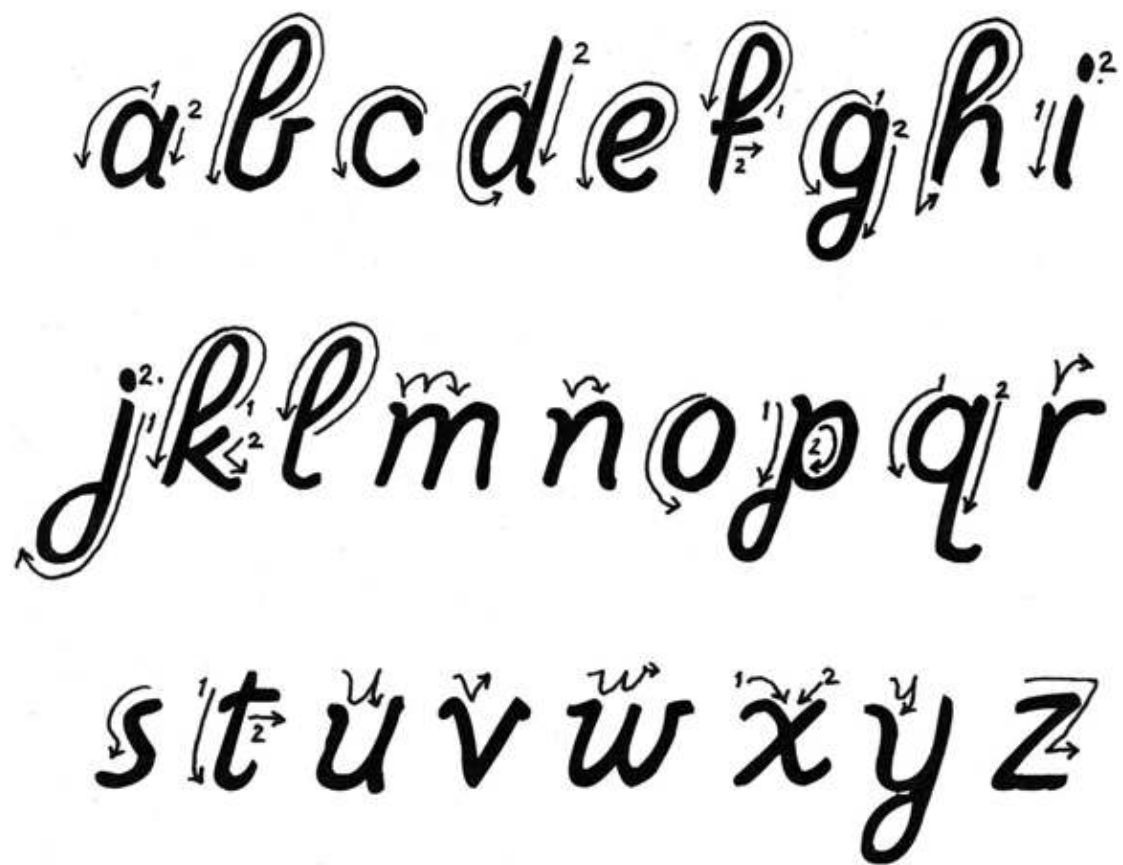


FIGURE 4-6: All the lowercase letters.

2. Trace the letter.

Using the blunt tip of your marker, trace over the sample letter in gray to familiarize yourself with its movement and rhythm.

3. Copy the letter.

Try your hand at making the letter independently, focusing on consistency and fluidity.

4. Repeat Steps 1 through 3 for all the lowercase letters.

Don't be concerned about speed at this point; concentrate on maintaining smooth strokes with precision. Speed will come with time.



Lettering the Capital Letters

After you feel comfortable drawing the lowercase letters (see the preceding section), you can move on to the capitals. EZScript capitals closely resemble Italic capitals, so by familiarizing yourself with EZScript capitals, you also gain familiarity with the most popular calligraphic alphabet.

See [Figure 4-7](#), which illustrates the strokes and shapes needed to form each letter. Study it carefully, then proceed to the practice exercises that follow.



REMEMBER The practice routine begins with carefully studying the example letters, shown in black, with arrows indicating the direction and sequence of strokes. Next, trace over the gray letters, reinforcing the movement and structure. Finally, apply what you can do by copying the letters into the blank space.



FIGURE 4-7: The EZScript capital letters.

Try your hand at lettering this alphabet.



Customizing EZScript

EZScript provides a versatile beginner's alphabet that you can tailor to your own style. [Figure 4-8](#) showcases just three of the many ways to customize EZScript: long ascenders and descenders, wide letters, and a no-slant variation. Experiment with these options and make the alphabet uniquely yours.



The quick brown fox jumps
The quick brown fox jumps
The quick brown fox jumps

FIGURE 4-8: Three possible ways to customize EZScript.

Using the ZIG Writer Marker (or a Brush Pen) with EZScript

The ZIG Writer marker (which you can read about in [Chapter 2](#)) has a fine tip on one end and a broad tip on the other, which allows you to combine them for some impressive and fun calligraphy effects. For example, if you want to create bold, dynamic lettering that has a professional finish, follow these steps:

1. **Use the fine tip of your ZIG marker to letter your words with precision.**
2. **Trace over all the downstrokes with the broad tip.**

This step enhances contrast between thicks and thins.



TIP

If you want to experiment with this technique further and get an even more refined effect, try a pen such as the Tombow Dual Brush Pen. This versatile tool features a flexible brush tip for creating fine, medium, or bold strokes, and a smooth fine tip for consistent lines. Letter your words first by using the fine tip, and then thicken all the downstrokes with the brush. Using the brush, you can create smooth transitions between the thick and thin parts of the letters.



TIP

For additional practice exercises that use the marker pen to letter EZScript, head over to www.dummies.com.

Chapter 5

Lettering EZScript with a Calligraphy Pen

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding how to hold the calligraphy pen
 - » Getting comfortable with your pen
 - » Drawing letters and words
 - » Telling the difference between writing and lettering
-

In this chapter, I guide you through using a calligraphy fountain pen to create the EZScript alphabet. If you're new to calligraphy, be sure to visit [Chapter 4](#) first to practice some fundamental letter shapes before you pick up your calligraphy pen.

For this chapter, you need a fountain pen equipped with a 2B nib (1.5 mm) — check the supply list in [Chapter 2](#) for details.

If you're just starting out, take heart — mastering the calligraphy pen isn't difficult. With the right technique and a bit of consistent practice, you'll develop confident, polished lettering skills. For many, learning calligraphy involves unlearning a few old habits and forming new ones. Luckily, EZScript offers one of the simplest and most approachable pen techniques, making it an ideal place to begin. Once you've become comfortable with this alphabet, you'll be ready to explore more advanced scripts. Check out [Part 3](#) to discover your next options.



REMEMBER Calligraphy is not only an art form, but also a relaxing and enjoyable activity. The key to creating beautiful calligraphy is patience and practice. Don't rush, and enjoy the process of each stroke and letter formation.

Using the Correct Pen Hold

Making letters look just right when using a calligraphy pen requires that you hold the pen at the correct angles:

- » **Viewed from the side:** [Figure 5-1](#) illustrates the correct angle of the pen relative to your writing surface — whether you have that surface horizontal or tilted. This angle, measured between the writing surface to the pen, is approximately 60 degrees.

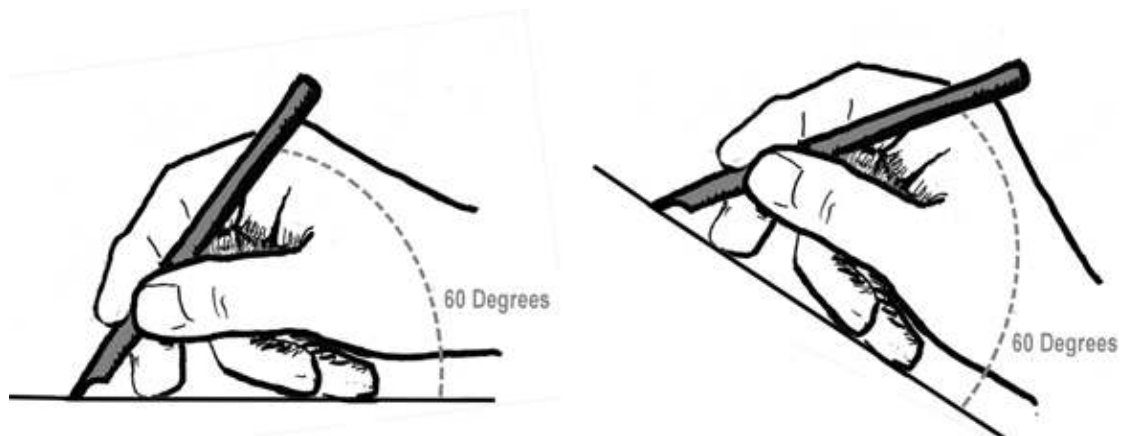


FIGURE 5-1: The angle of the pen when viewed from the side.

- » **Viewed from above:** [Figure 5-2](#) illustrates three different positions:
- *Left:* Incorrect angle, where the pen barrel points outward to the side (90 degrees).
 - *Center:* Incorrect position, angling directly back toward you (0 degrees).

- Right: The correct angle — approximately 45 degrees. Ideally, this position feels natural and comfortable, allowing for smooth, controlled lettering.

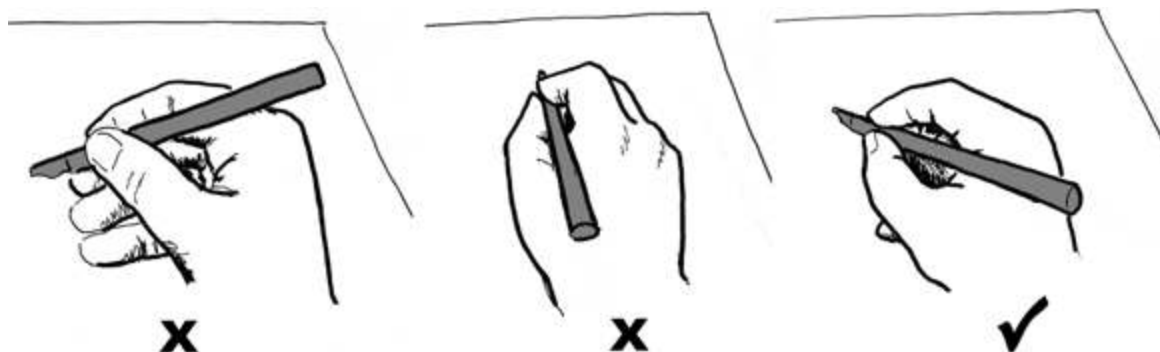


FIGURE 5-2: Two incorrect pen angles and one correct, viewed from above.

For left-handed calligraphers, the technique differs slightly. Although the fundamental principles remain the same, lefties may need to adjust their hand position to avoid smudging and to ensure proper ink flow. Lefties still need to hold the pen at the correct angle, but some left-handed writers find it easier to tilt the paper slightly or rotate their hand to achieve better control.

See [Chapter 2](#) for an explanation of hand positions and pens suited for left-handed writers, including which positions allow for the use of a standard right-handed nib and which require a left-handed oblique nib. Because every writer's technique varies, lefties may need to experiment with different angles and adjustments to find what works best for them.



REMEMBER Hold the pen at these two angles (side and above) constantly while you letter. Don't flex your wrist; you move your whole arm.

While you letter, keep the flat end of the pen flush against the paper — this is the only way a calligraphy pen produces proper strokes. Maintaining this contact ensures consistent ink flow and crisp letterforms. If the pen tilts or lifts, strokes may appear uneven or incomplete.

If you have trouble getting the pen to write, see [Chapter 3](#), where I explain how to hold the pen correctly and troubleshoot ink flow issues.

Warming Up to Your Pen

Using a 2B nib, do some warm-up exercises to get comfortable with your calligraphy pen (see [Figure 5-3](#)). Trace over the basic strokes and shapes in the following exercise. Pay attention to the pressure and angle of your pen while you create thin and thick strokes.



REMEMBER Avoid writing directly in this book. Instead, photocopy or scan the exercises. This book's paper is highly porous, which can cause ink from your pen to bleed through.



FIGURE 5-3: Warm-up strokes.

If you're right-handed and want your letters to match the examples, hold your pen at a comfortable 45-degree angle. This angle helps create elegant zig-zag strokes (see [Figure 5-4](#)), alternating between thick and thin lines. The thick strokes result from a downward pull, but the thin strokes are formed by sliding the pen diagonally upward to the side.

If you're left-handed, getting the thicks and thins to look right may pose a challenge. If so, experiment with different hand positions and paper angles to achieve the same contrast and balance of thick and thin strokes. Some of my left-handed students have also found that eliminating the slant of letters is a solution. Finding the right technique may take some adjustment, but with practice, you can create equally refined lettering.



REMEMBER Don't flex your wrist — maintain the correct pen angles throughout.

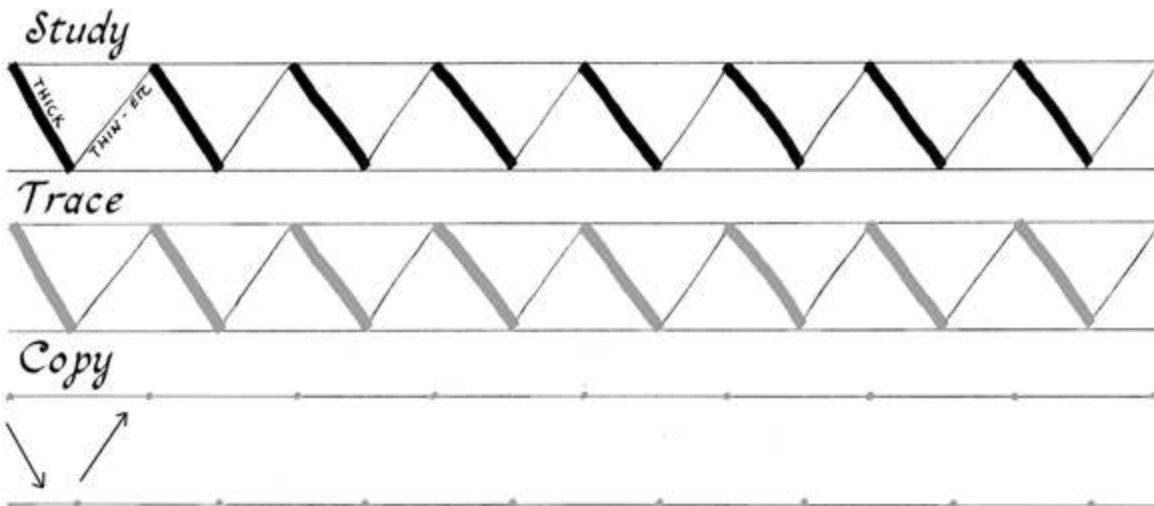


FIGURE 5-4: Zig-zags show thicks and thins.

You don't need to complete the zig-zag in a single continuous stroke. Feel free to lift your pen as often as you need — the preferred break points are at the ends of the thin strokes so that you can make your transitions smooth.

[Figure 5-5](#) illustrates how a right-handed writer maintains a consistent 45-degree pen angle. If you're left-handed, see [Chapter 2](#) for guidance on adjusting your grip and technique.

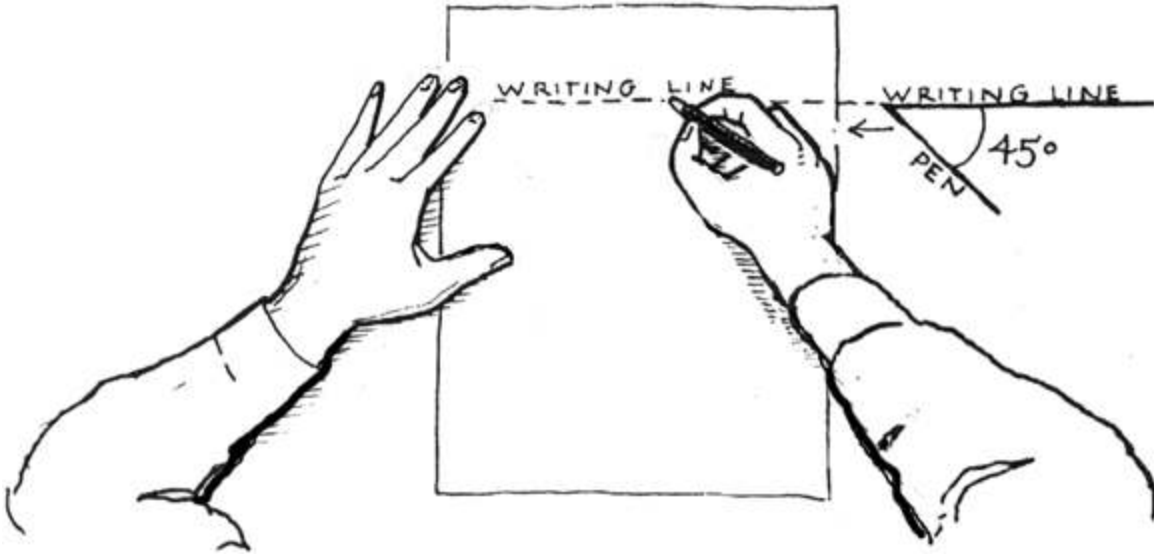


FIGURE 5-5: Overhead view of how to hold the pen.

Getting pen angle right is crucial to your success in calligraphy. The way you position your pen directly affects the shape, clarity, and consistency of your strokes. Even the most beautifully designed letters fall flat if you don't use the correct pen angle.

After you master the proper pen angles, everything else falls into place much more easily, and you can give your lettering the precision and beauty that you're aiming for.

Forming Letters with Your Pen

After you have the pen angles down pat (see the section “[Using the Correct Pen Hold](#),” earlier in this chapter, and the preceding section), try your hand at using your calligraphy pen to form letters.

[Figure 5-6](#) shows the entire EZScript alphabet lettered by using a calligraphy pen.

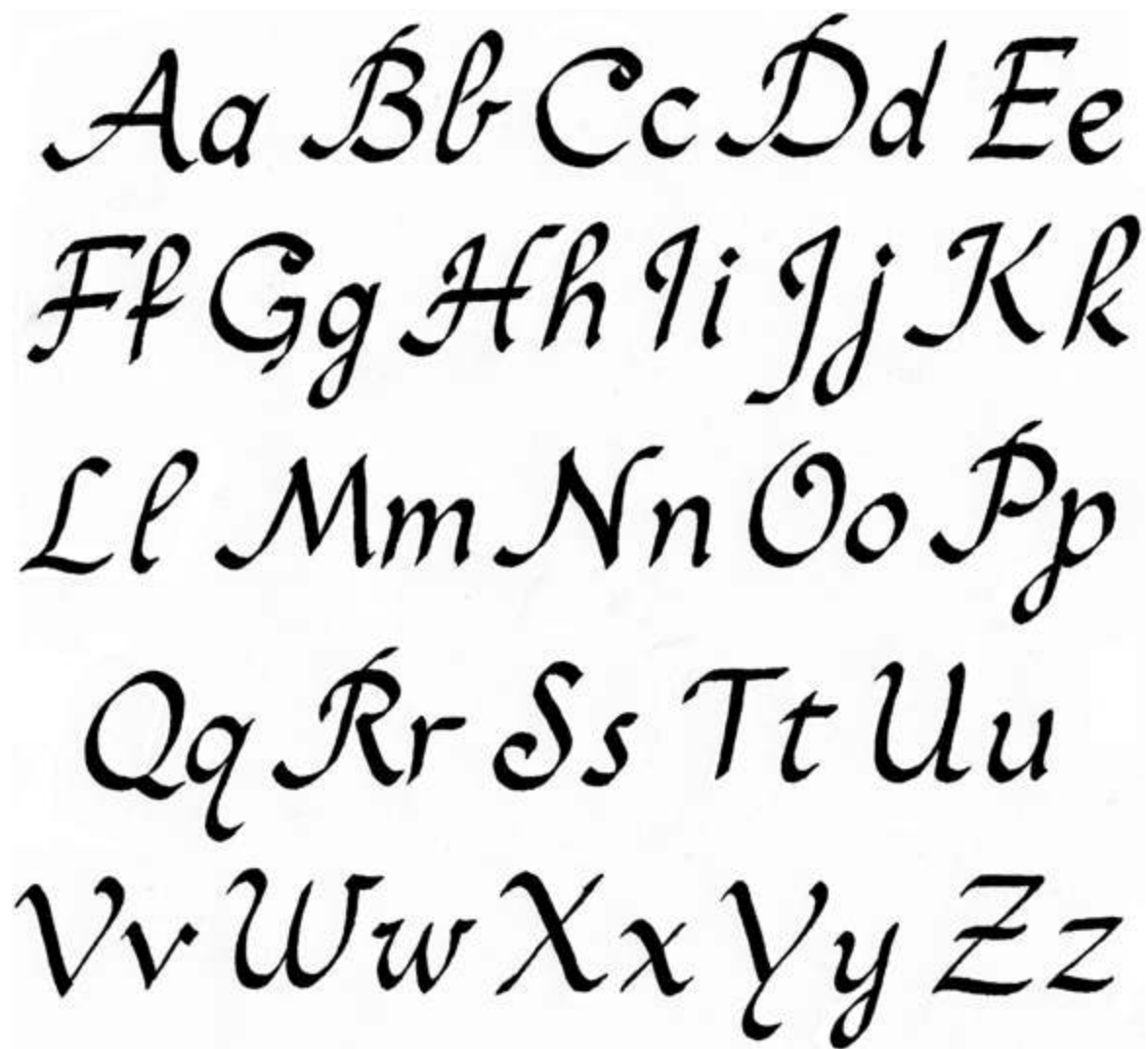


FIGURE 5-6: The EZScript alphabet.

Using your calligraphy pen, carefully trace each letter of the EZScript alphabet. Begin with the capital letters (see [Figure 5-7](#)) before moving on to the lowercase ones (see [Figure 5-8](#)). Pay close attention to maintaining a consistent slant and smooth curvature in each stroke to help develop precision and fluidity in your lettering.



FIGURE 5-7: Tracing EZScript capital letters.



FIGURE 5-8: Tracing EZScript lowercase letters.

Tracing Words

After you feel confident tracing individual letters (see the preceding section), move on to tracing simple words. Begin with short words such as *cat*, *dog*, and *sun*. Focus on maintaining consistent spacing between letters and words.



After tracing the words, challenge yourself by copying them freehand. Begin by drawing your guidelines to maintain consistency (I talk about drawing guidelines in [Chapter 3](#)), then confidently bring each word to life with your pen.

For more opportunities to practice tracing and copying words in EZScript, check out the online Cheat Sheet and Practice Pack at www.dummies.com for additional exercises.

Realizing the Difference between Writing and Lettering

Writing and lettering, although they might seem similar, are quite different:

- » **Writing:** A natural, fluid process focused on conveying thoughts quickly, often without concern for precise letter formation. It's everyday handwriting — personal, efficient, and sometimes inconsistent.
- » **Lettering:** Intentional and artistic, with each letter carefully crafted to achieve a specific style or visual impact. It's more like drawing than writing, requiring attention to spacing, structure, and aesthetics. Whether used for calligraphy, signage, or design, lettering transforms words into visual compositions.

The difference between writing and lettering is like the difference between speaking and performing. Writing is like casual conversation — quick, expressive, and natural, often without much thought to structure or aesthetics. Lettering, on the other hand, is like delivering a carefully rehearsed speech or acting on stage — every word, movement, and gesture is intentional, designed for clarity, beauty, and impact.

Chapter 6

Refining Your Calligraphy

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Reviewing your calligraphy with the 5-S formula
 - » Identifying and avoiding common errors
 - » Practicing effectively
-

You probably know that practice leads to improvement in calligraphy, but you can't improve based only on how much or how often you practice — *how* you practice plays a large part. Effective practice drives noticeable progress and refines your technique.

In this chapter, I share essential tips to help you evaluate and improve your skills, highlighting specific details that you can watch for while you work. You can also find out how to avoid common pitfalls that hinder progress. Apply these strategies, and you can see your calligraphy evolve with greater precision and confidence.



TIP

In the next examples, I use *Italic* letters — primarily because *Italic* is the most widely used calligraphic alphabet. (I cover the *Italic* alphabet in [Chapter 12](#).) However, the principles and techniques demonstrated here apply to all alphabets.



REMEMBER

Before diving into this chapter, get comfortable with at least one alphabet and have experience using a calligraphy pen. I recommend the EZScript alphabet (see [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)) to start; and you can find some getting-to-know-you advice about pens in [Chapter 3](#).

Checking Yourself with the 5-S Formula

One of the most effective ways to assess your progress involves using a formula that I came across years ago in an old handwriting book. It breaks down what to check into five key words, each starting with the letter *s*: strokes, shapes, slant, sizes, and spacing.

By evaluating your work through this lens, you can pinpoint the areas that you need to work on.



REMEMBER The 5-S formula allows you to evaluate your work, not just against the samples that I provide, but also against specific guidelines, giving you a well-rounded assessment of your progress.

Strokes

When evaluating your progress, pay close attention to your *strokes* — the way you move the pen while you form each letter. A smooth, controlled stroke conveys confidence and strength, but a shaky stroke can appear weak and uncertain, suggesting hesitation.

To refine your technique, focus on developing a steady, deliberate movement. Strive for consistency and fluidity in your strokes to see a noticeable improvement in the overall quality of your writing (see [Figure 6-1](#)).

weak stroke better

FIGURE 6-1: Shaky stroke (left); better stroke (right).

Execute a stroke using the correct pen angle; an improper angle can affect the overall appearance of your calligraphy. If the pen is held too *flat*, the downstrokes will appear excessively wide. Conversely, if the

angle is too *steep*, the downstrokes will look too thin, and horizontal strokes may appear disproportionately wide (see [Figure 6-2](#)).

To maintain consistency and balance, follow the recommended pen angles for each alphabet I discuss in this book (see [Figure 6-2](#) for examples of incorrect pen angles).

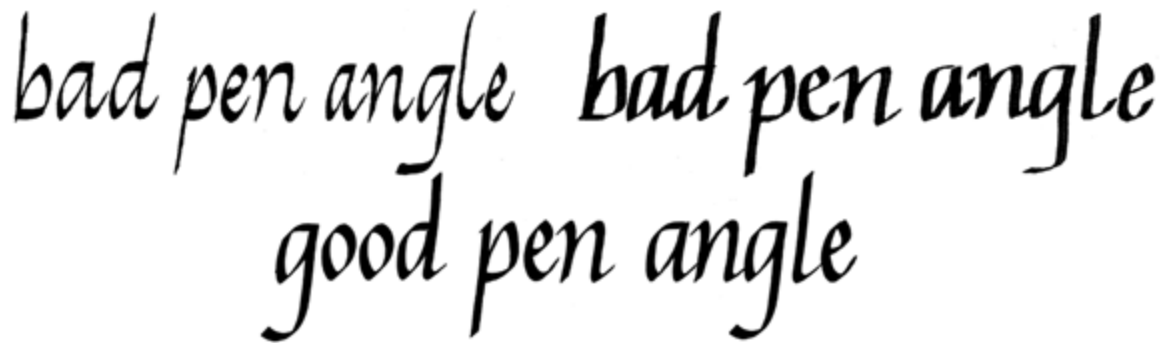


FIGURE 6-2: A steep pen angle (top left); a flat pen angle (top right), and a good pen angle.

Your stroke is one of the most critical elements of calligraphy. Even if you execute everything else perfectly, a poorly formed stroke can undermine the entire composition. Conversely, a strong, smooth stroke — combined with the correct pen angle — can make your work look polished, even if you don't draw perfect letterforms.

While you practice, focus on maintaining steady, confident strokes and keeping your pen at the proper angle. This attention to technique can dramatically enhance the quality of your calligraphy.

Shapes

Form your letters correctly for the specific alphabet that you're working with. Many calligraphers make common mistakes when shaping their letters, which can affect the overall consistency and visual harmony of their work.

While you practice, take a moment to carefully check the proportions and structure of your letters, making sure that they align with the intended form. [Figure 6-3](#) provides examples of both correct and awkward letter shapes to guide you in refining your technique.

The image shows two words in a cursive script. The word 'awkward' on the left is written with letters that have inconsistent slants and shapes, appearing somewhat clumsy. The word 'accurate' on the right is written with letters that have a more uniform slant and more refined, consistent shapes, appearing more polished.

FIGURE 6-3: Incorrect shapes (left); correct shapes (right).

Slant

For consistent, polished lettering, make the slant of your letters (anywhere from zero to close to 40 degrees) uniform. To visualize this slant, picture the minute hand on a clock at the position that's correct for the alphabet that you're lettering. Maintaining this subtle but precise angle can enhance the overall harmony of your writing (see [Figure 6-4](#)).

Fortunately, EZScript and many other alphabets allow for variations in uniform slant, so you don't really have to worry about a difference in slant from the ideal (as long as you remain consistent). The main exceptions are the Roman, Uncial, and Blackletter alphabets, which have no slant.



FIGURE 6-4: A visual for the perfect slant.

Consistency is the key. Slant becomes a problem only when it varies from letter to letter, disrupting the harmony of the writing (see [Figure 6-5](#)).

poor slant *uniform*

FIGURE 6-5: Inconsistent slant (left); uniform slant (right).

Sizes

Keep the sizes of the letters consistent. [Figure 6-6](#) shows what can happen when the sizes of letters varies.

To keep the sizes of the letters consistent, always use guidelines — either penciled in on the paper or by using a guide sheet underneath the paper. Make the guidelines the correct distance apart for the size pen nib that you’re using. (See [Chapter 3](#) for more on guidelines.)

The image shows two words in a cursive script. The word 'inconsistent' on the left has letters of varying heights and widths, with some being significantly larger than others. The word 'consistent' on the right has letters that are more uniform in size and proportion.

FIGURE 6-6: Inconsistent sizes (left); uniform sizes (right).

Spacing

When you look at the distances between letters and words, you want the spaces to look even. You don’t want some letters to look closer together or farther apart than all the other letters. Again, the goal is uniformity. (See [Figure 6-7](#).)

For most alphabets, you usually space the letters of a word just about as closely together as you can reasonably fit them. Serifs can even touch the preceding or following letter. Make the distance between words the width of the letter *o* in that alphabet.

The image shows two phrases in a cursive script. The phrase 'poors pacing' on the left has uneven spacing between the letters and words, with some gaps being much larger than others. The phrase 'better spacing' on the right has more uniform spacing, with the gaps between letters and words appearing more consistent.

FIGURE 6-7: Inconsistent spacing (left); uniform spacing (right).

Reviewing the Most Common Errors

In the following sections, I highlight some of the most common mistakes that people make when they begin to work with EZScript. Each illustration showcases a specific issue — and if any of them look familiar, don’t worry! I guide you through the corrections so that you can refine your technique with confidence.

Failing to follow the basic shapes and strokes of EZScript

Each alphabet has a unique set of basic letter shapes and pen strokes, which I introduce at the beginning of each alphabet chapter. (Flip to [Part 3](#) to find these alphabet chapters.) Not only do you need these elements to get familiar with the alphabet initially — they remain crucial when you continue using that alphabet.



REMEMBER Pay attention to the basic shapes and strokes, and never forget that everyone makes mistakes while mastering a skill. Each mistake provides you with an opportunity to refine your technique — so recognize their importance, observe their effects, and use them to guide your progress toward mastery.

Correcting counterfeit oval shapes

In [Figure 6-8](#), I show five letters in which I use a *c* shape in place of an oval shape. Instead of drawing a *c*, use the oval in the figure, which appears inside the box.



FIGURE 6-8: Using a *c* instead of an oval shape.



TIP

If you can imagine letter shapes as recognizable objects, like the ovals may resemble a decorative oval brooch, this can be a helpful way to internalize proper form and refine your technique.

Preventing poorly shaped ascender loops

In [Figure 6-9](#), five letters have ascenders that resemble a large *p*. To refine their shape, aim for a smooth, flowing loop — just like the one shown in the box on the right in the figure. With a little adjustment, your letters can take on a more polished and graceful look.



FIGURE 6-9: Poorly shaped ascender loops.

Bypassing badly shaped descender loops

[Figure 6-10](#) shows a similar issue as that discussed in the preceding section with the ascender loops, but this time, the descender loops are affected — they resemble the shape of a *d*. The fix is simple: Aim for a smooth, flowing loop, as shown in the box in the figure.



FIGURE 6-10: Problems with descender loops.

Avoiding awkwardly shaped c's and e's

Two small but often overlooked details are the shapes of the letters *c* and *e*. [Figure 6-11](#) shows examples where these letters appear too thin or too thick. To correct this problem, remember that both *c* and *e* share the same proportions as the oval, as shown in the example in the box.



FIGURE 6-11: Awkwardly shaped *c*'s and *e*'s.

Improving imprecisely formed t's

[Figure 6-12](#) shows two examples of a badly shaped *t*. The leftmost *t* has a crossbar that's not horizontal. The second *t* is too tall, and its crossbar is too high and too long. The example in the box is correct. If you're prone to making any of these errors, concentrate on making the letter the correct height and adding the crossbar correctly.

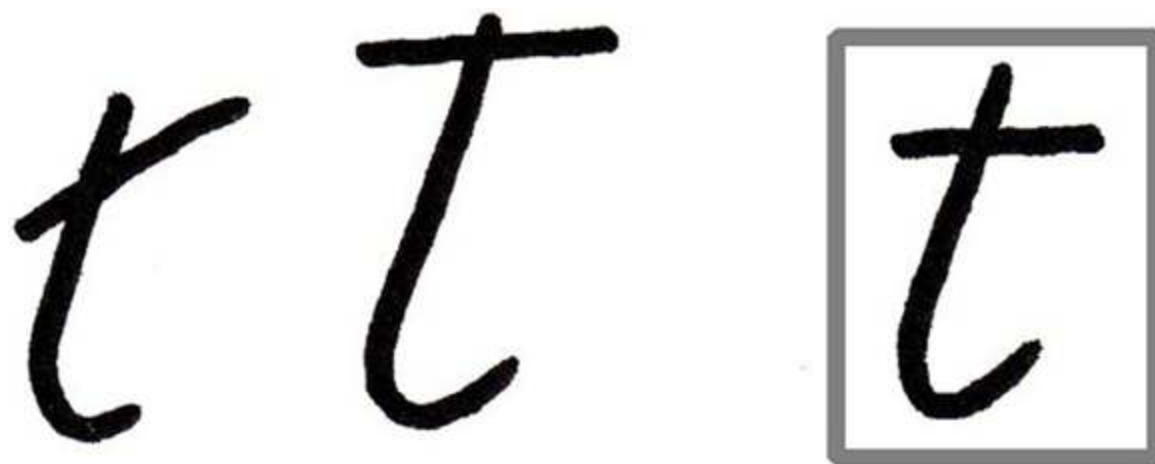


FIGURE 6-12: Improving imprecisely formed *t*'s.

Sidestepping strangely shaped s's

Pay close attention to the shape of the letter *s* — small adjustments can make a big difference. [Figure 6-13](#) highlights two common mistakes, along with the correct form displayed in the box.



FIGURE 6-13: Strangely shaped s's and the correct form.

Loathing low-branching r's

The lowercase *r* can pose a challenge when its right-side branch begins too close to the base — causing it to resemble a *v* (see [Figure 6-14](#)). To prevent this confusing shape, ensure that you position the branch near the top for proper form and legibility.



FIGURE 6-14: A poorly formed *r* and the correction.

Purging pointed arches

Building on the previous issue, the two examples on the left in [Figure 6-15](#) show *m* and *n* with branching that starts at their base, along with arches that are too pointed. This gives them a resemblance to *w* and *v*.

The corrected forms, featuring proper branching and rounded arches, are displayed in the box on the right.



FIGURE 6-15: Correcting incorrect branching and pointed arches.

Making errors in capitals

Errors in the shapes of EZScript capital letters are explored in depth in [Chapter 12](#) — the Italic alphabet. Since EZScript capitals are fundamentally Italic capitals, I discuss common mistakes and their corrections there to avoid unnecessary repetition in this chapter.

Practicing Effectively to See the Most Progress

How you practice is just as important as what you practice. Short, daily sessions improve calligraphy more effectively than occasional long ones. Repetition builds muscle memory and confidence, so aim for 30–40 minutes a day to stay focused without fatigue.

Starting with pen warm-ups

Begin each session with warm-up strokes to loosen your hand and refine control. See [Chapter 3](#) for examples of warm-up exercises and pen doodles.



TIP Breathe easily and stay relaxed while you practice — steady breathing helps control your hand and refine your strokes. A calm, rhythmic approach improves precision and fluidity. Try exhaling on the downstroke for smooth pen strokes.

Stepping up to individual letters

After you warm up, focus on constructing individual letters, paying attention to stroke consistency, size, shape, and slant. Make the letters different sizes — large and small. Experiment using different size nibs.

Continuing with words and sentences

To help you improve your letterforms, practice words and full sentences. *Alphabet sentences* — sentences that contain every letter in the alphabet — are great for practicing. Here are several examples:

- » The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
- » Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs.
- » Sixty zippers were quickly picked from the woven jute bag.
- » My girl wove six dozen plaid jackets before she quit.
- » Brown jars prevented the mixture from freezing too quickly.
- » William said that everything about his jacket was quite fine except for the zipper.

You can find additional practice pages that contain words and sentences in the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet for this book. Just go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and press Enter. A link to the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet will appear at the top of the search results.



TIP

Save all your practice exercise sheets so that you can look back and gauge your progress.

Chapter 7

Creating Expressive Quotations: Elevating Your Skills

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Knowing what you need to succeed
 - » Getting a glimpse of good arrangement
 - » Examining different ways to design a quotation
 - » Making your designs your own
-

One of the first things that many aspiring calligraphers try is lettering a favorite saying or quotation. If you have such a project in mind, you just landed upon one of the most beloved practices in calligraphy — bringing words to life through artistic lettering.

You’ve likely seen calligraphic quotations everywhere: greeting cards, plaques, posters, and inspirational artwork. Lettering a quotation in a compelling style is a hallmark of calligraphy, transforming simple words into visual statements.



REMEMBER Throughout this chapter, when I use the term *design*, I’m not referring to decorative embellishments. Instead, design — often called *layout* — concerns the way that you arrange calligraphy on the page.

Thoughtful layout is just as vital as the lettering itself, influencing the overall composition and ensuring that a piece looks balanced and

visually engaging. By carefully considering layout, you can elevate calligraphy from ordinary to exceptional.

In this chapter, I provide you with some key principles of arrangement, including a special spiral design.

Gathering What You Need

Doing the things that I describe in this chapter won't require that you have a lot of materials or extensive knowledge. Here's all you need:

- » **Familiarity with at least one alphabet:** EZScript ([Chapters 4 and 5](#)) will work fine, but knowing two or more alphabets provides you with more design options.
- » **A fountain pen or a dip pen:** See [Chapter 2](#), where I discuss pens.
- » **Appropriate paper:** You can start with standard 20 lb. printer paper, which works great for calligraphy. It has the right kind of surface for pen work and is thin enough so you can see guidelines placed underneath. I describe other kinds of paper in [Chapter 2](#).
- » **Know how to draw guidelines on the paper:** Or, if the paper is thin enough to see through (such as standard printer paper) know how to use a sheet that has guidelines underneath the paper. See [Chapter 3](#) for information about drawing guidelines.

Arranging the Lines of the Quotation

If you have a short quotation or saying you'd like to letter, this is a great opportunity to try your hand at a simple, satisfying project. Start by deciding how to arrange the words across lines to reflect the meaning and rhythm of the text. (For longer quotations and more calligraphic projects, see [Part 4](#).)

The two examples of the same quote in [Figure 7-1](#) illustrate poor arrangement. Notice the following:

- » **Top quote:** Too fragmented; the breaks in the lines distort the meaning.
- » **Bottom quote:** Needs more line breaks — you can't easily read it.

Now take a look at the same quote from [Figure 7-1](#) arranged appropriately in [Figure 7-2](#).

Love suffereth
long and is kind;
Love envieth
not; love vaunteth
not itself.

Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not;
love vaunteth not itself.

FIGURE 7-1: Examples of poor arrangement.

Love suffereth long
and is kind;
love envieth not;
love vaunteth not itself.

FIGURE 7-2: An example of a nice arrangement.

Creating an Impressive Spiral Design

Calligraphy isn't just about making beautiful letters — it's also about how you place them on the page. Your choices in arranging words shape how the piece looks and feels. With thoughtful design, even a simple quote can become something eye-catching. One engaging layout you can explore is the spiral design shown in [Figure 7-3](#) — it adds movement and life to your text.

A spiral creates a mesmerizing flow, drawing the viewer's eye inward while radiating outward with movement. Drawing this kind of design provides you with both an impressive and enjoyable challenge. **Note:** If you want to learn how to draw the spiral guidelines, there are YouTube videos that teach how.



repeated without end - Emerson's nature
the second; throughout
circle; the horizon which forms it
The eye is the first figure

FIGURE 7-3: An example of a spiral design.

[Figure 7-4](#) provides a template for spiral writing. To use it, place your paper over the template — if you can see the lines through your paper, they can serve as a guide for maintaining proper placement while you letter in a spiral.

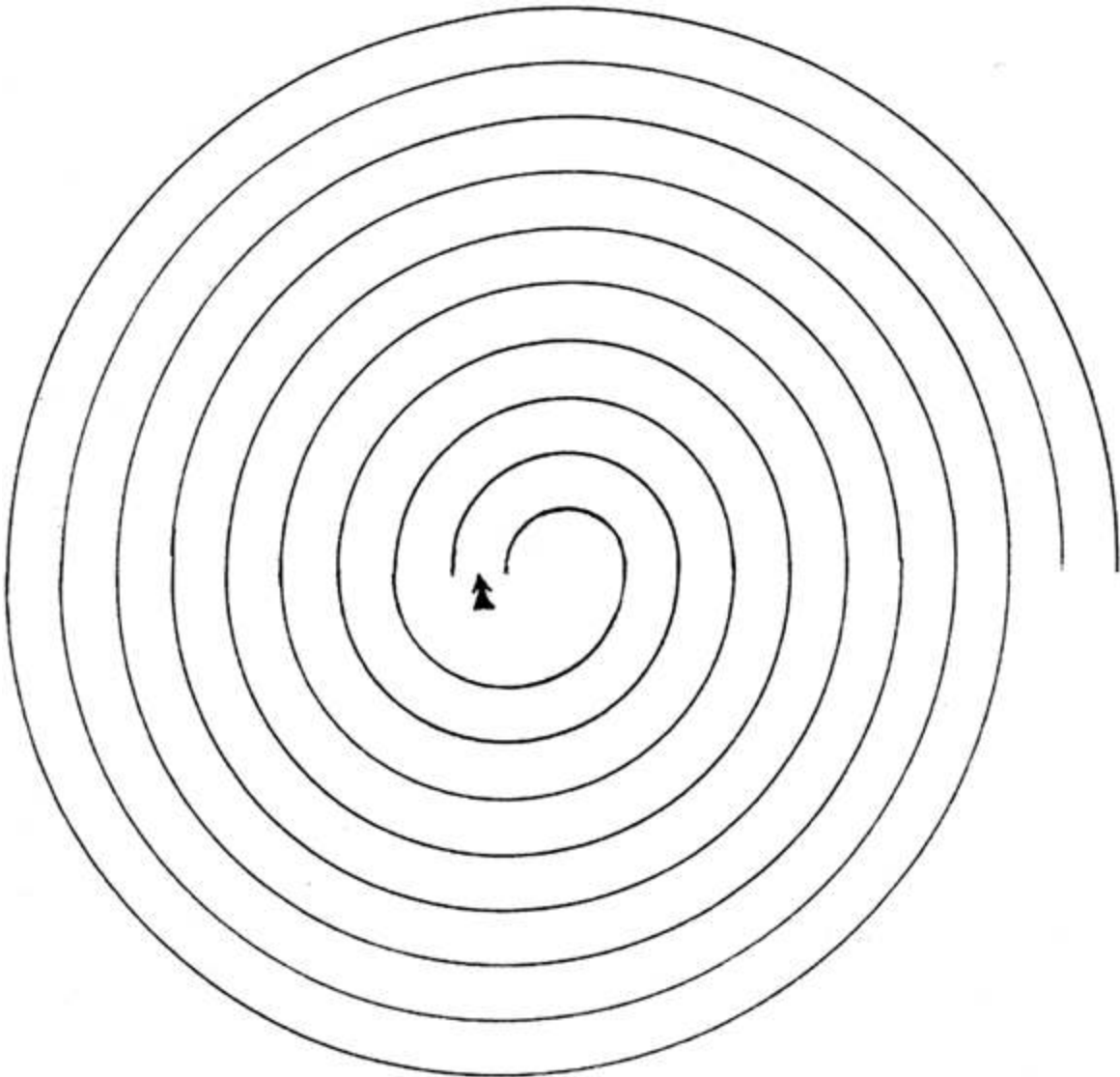


FIGURE 7-4: A spiral design template.

Using Quotations to Express Yourself Creatively

Quotations are like little bursts of inspiration — mini masterpieces of wisdom that can spark creativity and amplify self-expression. Whether you want to weave them into your calligraphy, use them to fuel fresh ideas, or reinvent their meaning in your own unique way, the right words can transform your art and thinking.



TIP

Become a collector of quotations. Keep a file of inspiring words that can use as a resource for your calligraphy. The Internet offers a vast and unlimited selection of quotations, making it an excellent place to explore meaningful passages.

If you're spiritually minded, you may want to create an inspiring personal collection of religious quotes that hold significance for you. Whether drawing from sacred texts, inspirational figures, or prayers, assembling a selection of meaningful passages can provide a rich well of material for calligraphic projects. These words, written with intention and artistry, can become deeply personal expressions of faith and reflection.

Here are some suggestions to help you explore your creativity while working with famous quotations in calligraphy:

- » **Play with emphasis.** Highlight key words in a quote by using different sizes, styles, or weights to bring out meaning. A single bolded word can shift the entire tone of a quotation.
- » **Experiment with layouts.** Rather than writing in straight lines, try the spiral design that I discuss in the preceding section, curved compositions, diagonal placements, or asymmetrical designs to make the arrangement of the words visually dynamic.
- » **Incorporate simple flourishes.** Even if you know only the lettering of one alphabet, adding small flourishes — extended strokes, loops, or subtle swashes — can make a piece feel more expressive.
- » **Use contrast for impact.** Write part of the quote larger or in a slightly different style to create a focal point. Mixing capital letters

with lowercase or slanted with upright text can add variety.

- » **Break the rules occasionally.** Creativity involves much more than just precision. Let your instincts take over — perhaps extending a letter beyond its usual boundary or incorporating small doodles.
- » **Start small and expand.** Start by lettering a simple word or short phrase before you tackle longer quotations. That way you can refine your style before you commit to large projects.
- » **Use personal interpretation.** If a quote deeply resonates with you, you might modify the wording slightly to make it feel even more personal while maintaining its essence.
- » **Incorporate images.** Add a picture or collage to your composition (see [Figure 7-5](#)).

*Verily, verily,
I say unto you,
Except a corn of wheat
fall into
the ground
and die,
it abideth
alone:
but if it die,
it bringeth forth
much fruit.*



John 12:24 KJV

FIGURE 7-5: An example of incorporating an image with a quote.



TIP

When you use quotations, make sure that you don't break any copyright laws. Confirm that the quotation you want to use doesn't have a copyright or has an expired copyright. Please respect the copyright laws — they're the only protection that artists have against theft and plagiarism.

Evaluating Your Success

Calligraphy is a journey. Whether you're a beginner or refining your skills, treat self-evaluation as a continual practice. Growth comes from recognizing areas to improve and viewing them as chances to learn. Doubt is natural — just remember, the goal is progress, not perfection. Every calligrapher, no matter their level, can always improve. So stay positive, embrace the process, and focus on your own path rather than comparing yourself to others.

Assessing strengths and weaknesses

To most effectively evaluate your calligraphy, use the 5-S formula (which I discuss in detail in [Chapter 6](#)), which helps you identify areas of both strength and weakness.

[Figure 7-6](#) provides a visual to help you remember this formula. It's also an example of using two alphabets – a large, flourished versal capital s (see [Chapter 14](#)) in combination with EZScript.



FIGURE 7-6: A calligraphic visual aid for remembering the 5-S formula.

By analyzing these elements in your calligraphy, you can pinpoint specific areas that you can refine while celebrating where you're excelling.

Acting as your own judge

Ultimately, the only person you need to satisfy with your calligraphy is yourself. Art is personal — it should bring you enjoyment and fulfillment. Rather than chasing perfection, focus on steady improvement, and always allow room for creativity.

Staying encouraged

Ask yourself:

- » Do I feel joy when I create calligraphy?
- » Am I making progress, even in small ways?
- » Which areas do I feel strong in, and which do I need to give more attention?
- » Am I challenging myself while still having fun?

Every stroke is a step forward. Keep practicing, keep experimenting, and most importantly — keep enjoying the process.

Part 3

Exploring the Traditional Alphabets

IN THIS PART ...

Explore Classical Roman letters, the foundation of Western calligraphy and modern type.

Try your hand at Uncial, a rounded script that has distinctive Celtic charm.

Discover Formal Manuscript, the precise and elegant hand of medieval scribes.

Master Blackletter, known for its bold presence and historical gravitas.

Practice Italic script, the graceful writing style of the Renaissance.

Dive into Copperplate, a flowing, flourished script ideal for invitations and formal pieces.

Add flair with Versals — ornamental, decorated letters that bring any layout to life.

Chapter 8

Classical Roman Letters: The Pillars of Written Language

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Working with the Roman alphabet
 - » Practicing letters individually and together
 - » Drawing the Roman alphabet with a pen
 - » Avoiding some of the most common errors
 - » Making your letters sizzle with serifs
-

In this chapter, I cover the step-by-step basics of how to master the Roman alphabet, sometimes called the Latin alphabet. Named after its creators, the ancient Romans, this alphabet dates from between the 1st and 4th centuries BCE, making it the oldest alphabet that I cover in this book.

The Roman letters form the foundation of Western writing systems. Today, you can see variations of the Roman alphabet everywhere in printed and written materials. Nearly all Western alphabets, typefaces, and fonts originate from these letters.

Mastering the Roman alphabet involves studying both letter formation and pen angle. Because both aspects are equally important and challenging, I break them down separately in this chapter.

The Simplicity and Challenge of Roman Letters

The Roman alphabet, shown in [Figure 8-1](#), may seem simple, but its simplicity is deceptive. Few letterforms challenge a calligrapher's precision more. With no flourishes or embellishments to hide mistakes, even the smallest flaw stands out.

Even if mastering these letters feels daunting, I encourage you to study their proportions and design — after all, they form the foundation of all our alphabets.

For calligraphers, the Roman alphabet is invaluable because

- » People can read it easily because it's simple and familiar.
- » It epitomizes classical elegance in its purest form.

It also pairs beautifully with other styles, making it ideal for titles. Most importantly, learning to write it in calligraphy deepens your understanding of capital letter proportions across all scripts.

You may wonder why this chapter focuses only on capital letters. The reason is that the Roman alphabet, as presented here, stays true to its historical origins — it originally contained no lowercase letters. These developed centuries later in Latin through an informal script called New Roman Cursive (or Cursive Minuscle).

Similarly, this chapter omits numbers because Latin texts relied on Roman numerals, which use letters to represent values, rather than the Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, and so forth) commonly used today. For guidance on writing numerals in calligraphy, see [Chapter 10](#).



FIGURE 8-1: The Roman alphabet, lettered with a dip pen.

From a calligrapher's perspective, Roman letters work wonderfully for titles and headings because they are all capitals. You can also combine Roman capital letters with other style lowercase letters, creating a harmonious blend of the Roman alphabet's strength and dignity with the elegant gracefulness of other alphabets, especially Italic (which I present in [Chapter 12](#)).



REMEMBER Perfecting your skill lettering the Roman alphabet involves two key steps: mastering letter shapes and refining pen angle.

First, practice the basic shapes using a marker pen like the ZIG Writer I describe in [Chapter 2](#). Later, in the section “[Drawing Roman Letters Using a Pen](#),” you’ll transition to a calligraphy pen — either a wide-nib fountain pen (2B) or a dip pen with a 1½ mm nib.

Once you’re comfortable with the pen, the final step is adding serifs to the letters.

Getting to Know the Five Groups of Roman Letters

I divide the letter shapes of the Roman alphabet into five groups, based on the proportion of width to height. The following sections introduce letters that are

- » As wide as they are tall
- » Three-fourths as wide as they are tall
- » One-half as wide as they are tall
- » Very narrow
- » Extra wide

Letters as wide as they are tall

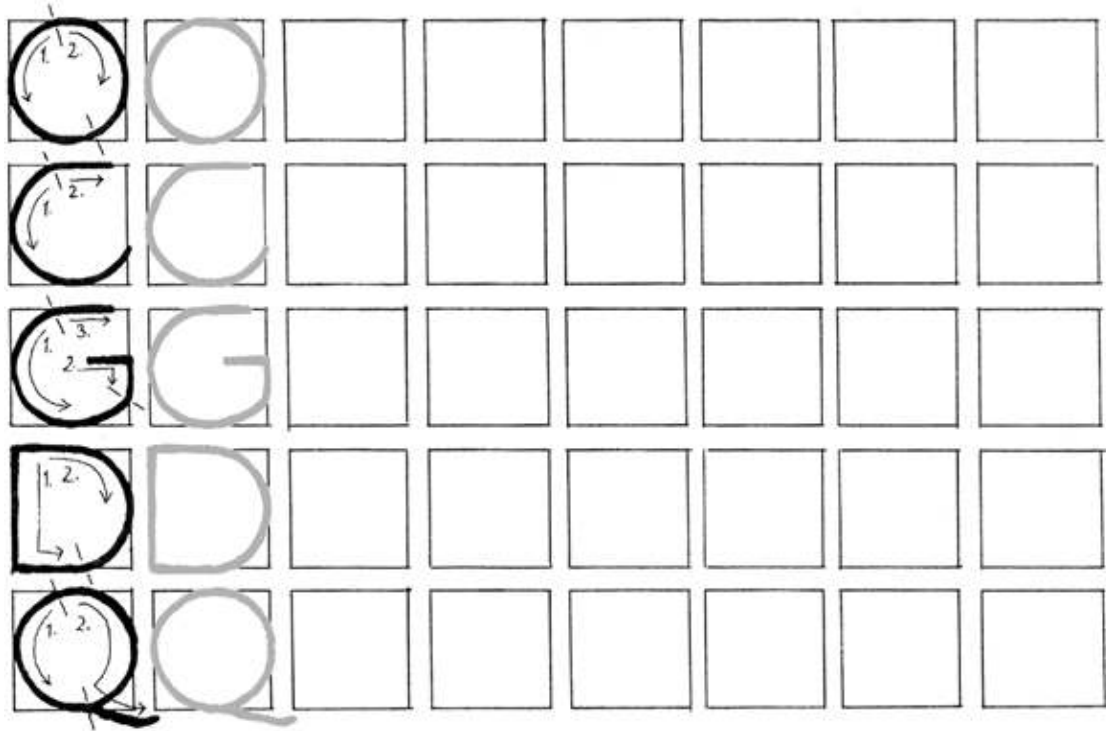
Five letters are as wide as they are tall. They will fit inside squares so that their edges touch all four sides of the squares (see [Figure 8-2](#)). All five of these letters are circular: *o*, *c*, *g*, *d*, and *q*.



FIGURE 8-2: Letters *o*, *c*, *g*, *d*, and *q*.

You can practice these letters in the exercise that follows — just trace the gray letters and then make them freehand in the boxes provided. Here's how to make these letters:

1. **Begin all the letters at roughly the 11 o'clock position and end the strokes at 5 o'clock.** The hash marks on the letters guide you from the start to stop position.
2. **Follow the rest of the stroke sequence as indicated.**



Keep these tips in mind while making these letters:



- » **TIP** Avoid flexing your fingers to move the pen as you make the circular letters. It is best to move your whole hand at the wrist and your arm.
- » Practice making the strokes with a smooth, uniform speed — not too fast and not too slow. You should be able to count to four or five at a normal rate as you make each one of the circular strokes.

Letters $\frac{3}{4}$ as wide as they are tall

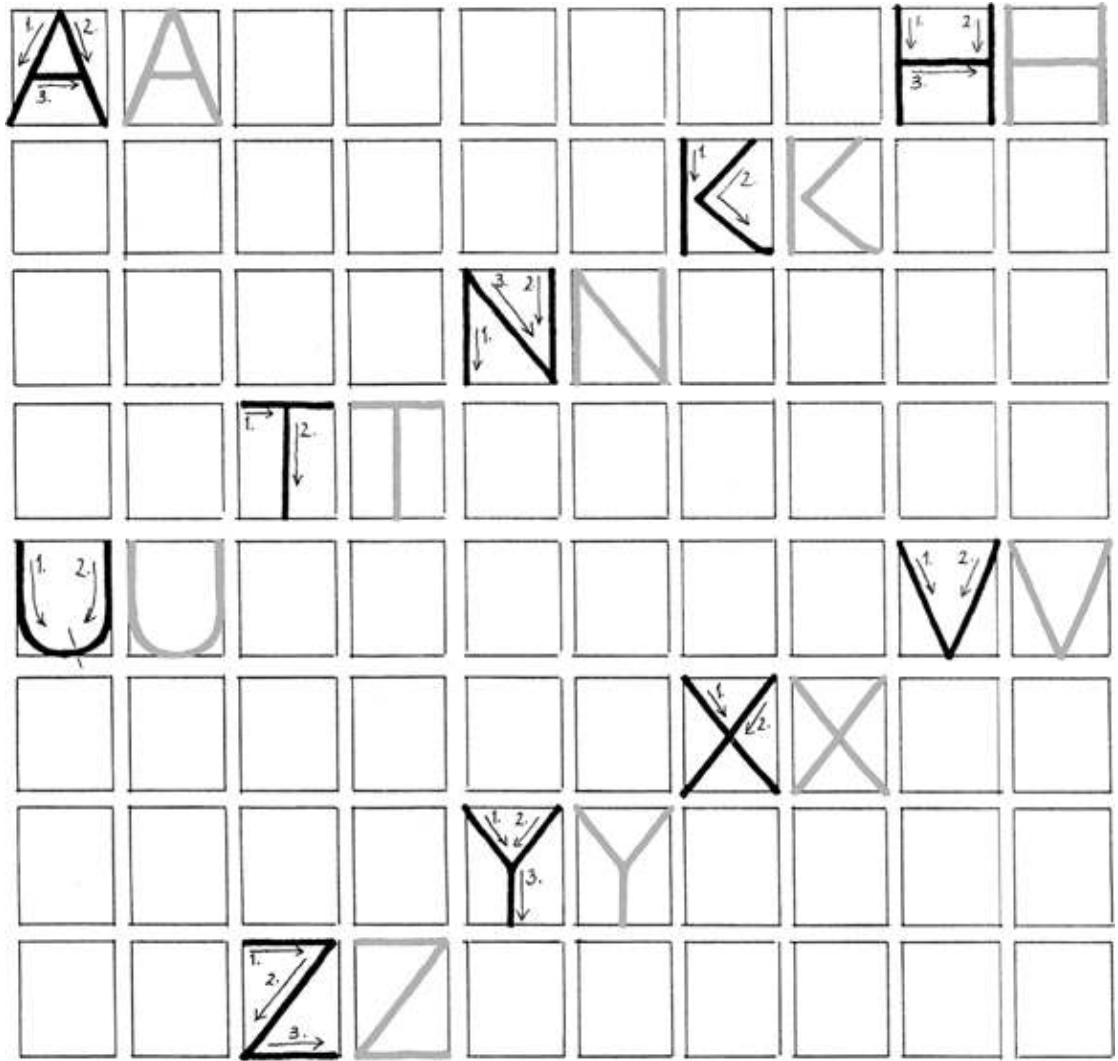
The largest group has letters that are three-fourths as wide as they are tall (see [Figure 8-3](#)); so, the ratio of the width to the height of these ten letters is three to four. Ten letters fall into this category: *a, h, k, n, t, u, v, x, y, and z.*



FIGURE 8-3: Letters *a*, *h*, *k*, *n*, *t*, *u*, *v*, *x*, *y*, and *z*.

Here are some tips for making these letters:

- » All but one of these letters has strokes that are straight. The only exception is *u* which is curved at the bottom.
- » The rule for making the strokes is to go left to right and top to bottom.
- » Visualize the rectangle as you make these letters.
- » On letters like *a*, *h*, and *n* draw the two sides before you draw the line through the middle.



Letters ½ as wide as they are tall

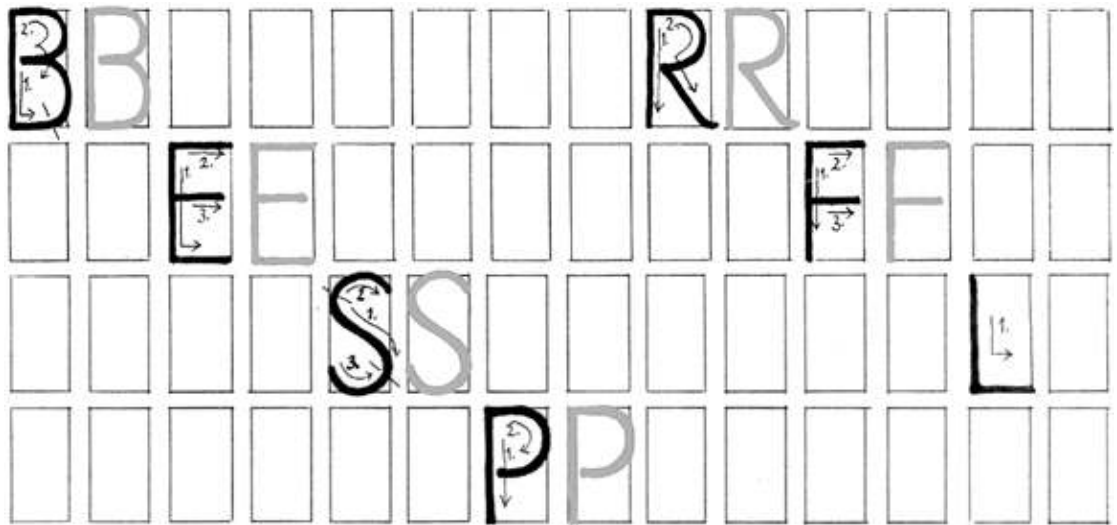
The letters that are ½ as wide as they are tall can be found in [Figure 8-4](#).

B R E F S L P

FIGURE 8-4: The letters *b*, *r*, *e*, *f*, *s*, *l*, and *p*.

Here are some tips for making these letters:

- » Only the *l* is made in one stroke. All the other letters in this group are made with two or three strokes.
- » Visualize a half-wide rectangle as you make these letters.
- » The horizontal stroke in the middle of the *f* is lower than the same stroke on the *e*.
- » The round shape on the top part of the *p* extends farther down than the corresponding shape on the *r*, and the round shape on the *r* is longer than the same shape at the top of the *b*.
- » You can remember them by using the memory aid “brief sleep.”



Two narrow letters

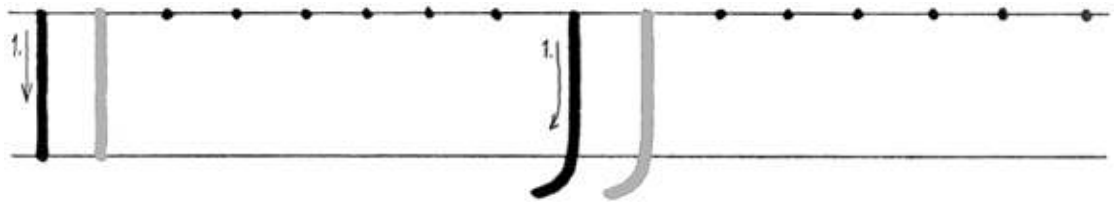
The *i* and the *j* are very narrow letters (see [Figure 8-5](#)). They’re only as wide as the pen that is drawing them. Notice that the *j* is simply an *i* with a “tail” added.



FIGURE 8-5: The *i* and the *j* are the narrowest letters.

Follow these tips for making these letters:

- » Begin the strokes at the top.
- » Pull down slowly and evenly.
- » Keep the letters vertical — no slant.



Two wide letters

The *m* and the *w* are each wider than they are tall. Notice that the outside “legs” of the *m* are not angled as much as the outside “arms” of the *w* (see [Figure 8-6](#)).



FIGURE 8-6: The letters *m* and *w*.

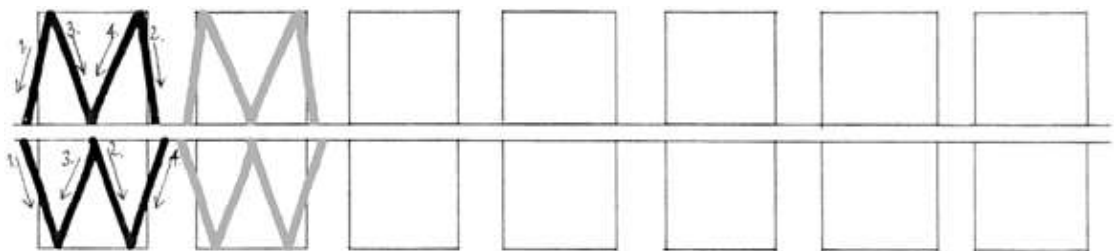
As you practice the wide letters, remember that the *w* is *not* an upside-down *m*. Notice the differences between the two letters. Pay close attention to the sequence of strokes:

» **For the *m*:**

- The two outside “legs” are made first. They are only slightly slanted. These strokes begin just inside the square and end outside the square.
- The center “V” of the *m* touches the base line.

» **For the *w*** (this letter has two sets of parallel strokes which the *m* does not have):

- The first and second strokes are parallel, and the third and fourth strokes are parallel.
- Notice how the second and third strokes overlap at the top and how the two points at the bottom lie well inside the square.



Putting the Letters Together

Practice drawing the Roman alphabet by using a bullet point marker pen, putting the letters together, as shown in [Figure 8-7](#). While you form words with these letters, pay attention to the spacing between letters and words. Aim for even, consistent spacing to create a balanced look. (I delve into the specifics of spacing in the section “[Stringing the alphabet together](#),” later in this chapter.)

ART BIOLOGY

FIGURE 8-7: Putting letters together.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

Give it a try! Trace the words from [Figure 8-7](#) in gray, and then make them freehand in the space provided. You can find many more words to practice, spanning the entire alphabet, in the Practice Pack online at www.dummies.com/go/calligraphyfd2e.

While stringing letters together, keep these tips in mind:

- » Take your time; don't rush.
- » If it helps you, you can lightly pencil in the shapes of the letters first.

ART BIOLOGY

Drawing Roman Letters Using a Pen

If you have the letter shapes down for the Roman alphabet, try drawing the letters by using your calligraphy pen. (If you don't feel confident in your letter shapes, refer to the section "[Getting to Know the Five Groups of Roman Letters](#)," earlier in this chapter.)

In the following sections, I guide you through using your calligraphy pen to draw the Roman alphabet.

Getting the letter height right

Because the letters in the Roman alphabet are all capital letters, they should all be the same height. If you notice variations, it's an opportunity to refine your technique and bring even more continuity to your lettering.

Remember these things about the Roman letters and pen widths:

- » Make them eight pen widths high (see [Figure 8-8](#)).
- » Make the space between rows of letters (called "leading" in typesetting lingo) equal to three to four pen widths — your choice.

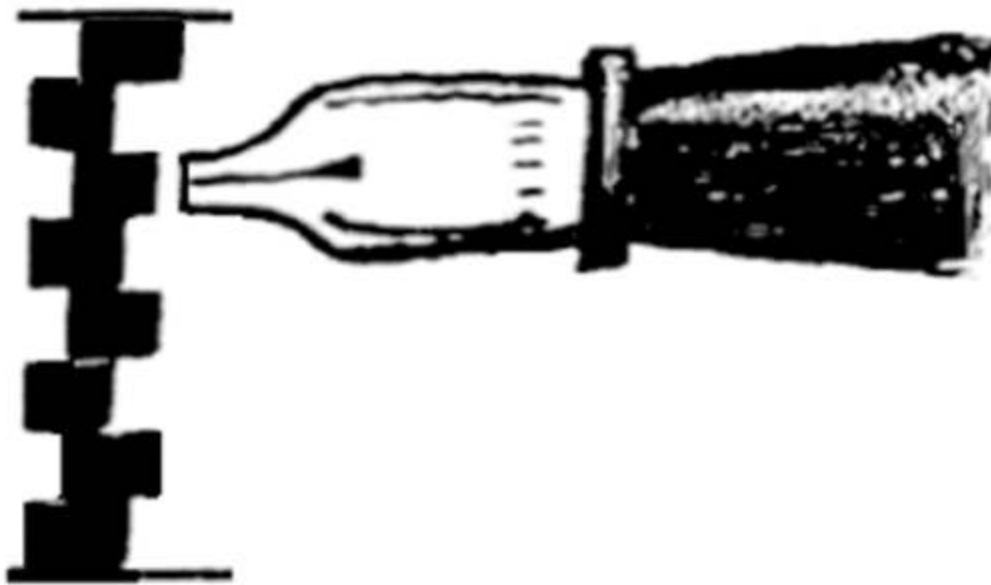


FIGURE 8-8: Eight pen widths for letter height.

Smoothing out your stroke

Maintain smooth, even strokes when using your calligraphy pen — precision is key. The Roman alphabet is unforgiving, which makes any mistakes highly visible, especially if your strokes are shaky.

A little planning ensures that each letter retains its strength and structure, bringing a polished, historical beauty to your work. Since a steady hand is essential, warm up with exercises from [Chapter 3](#) before diving into serious practice.



TIP

Consider sketching these letters very lightly with a pencil as a guide, then go over the penciled letters with your pen. This way, you can focus on getting the correct letter shapes and spacing with the pencil, and then concentrate on making smooth strokes with the pen.

Zeroing in on the correct pen angles

The Roman alphabet has two pen angles (for an explanation of pen angle, see [Chapter 3](#)):

- » **The primary pen angle:** 20 degrees; used for most of the letters (see [Figure 8-9](#)).

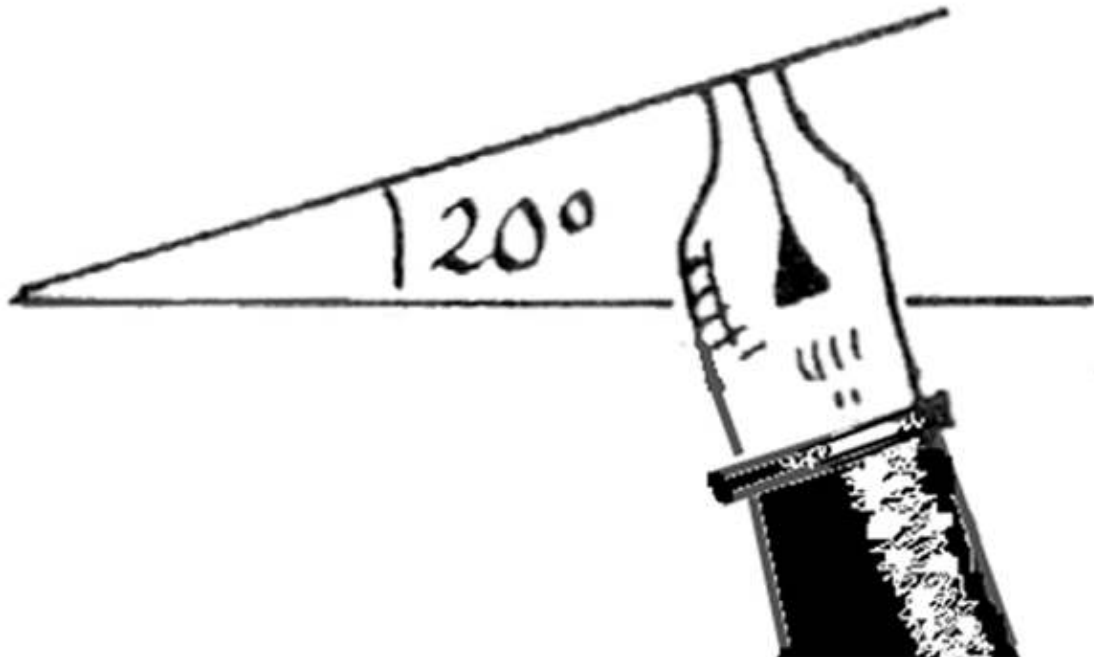


FIGURE 8-9: The 20-degree pen angle.

» **The secondary pen angle:** 45 degrees (see [Figure 8-10](#)); used for parts of some letters and all of a few letters.

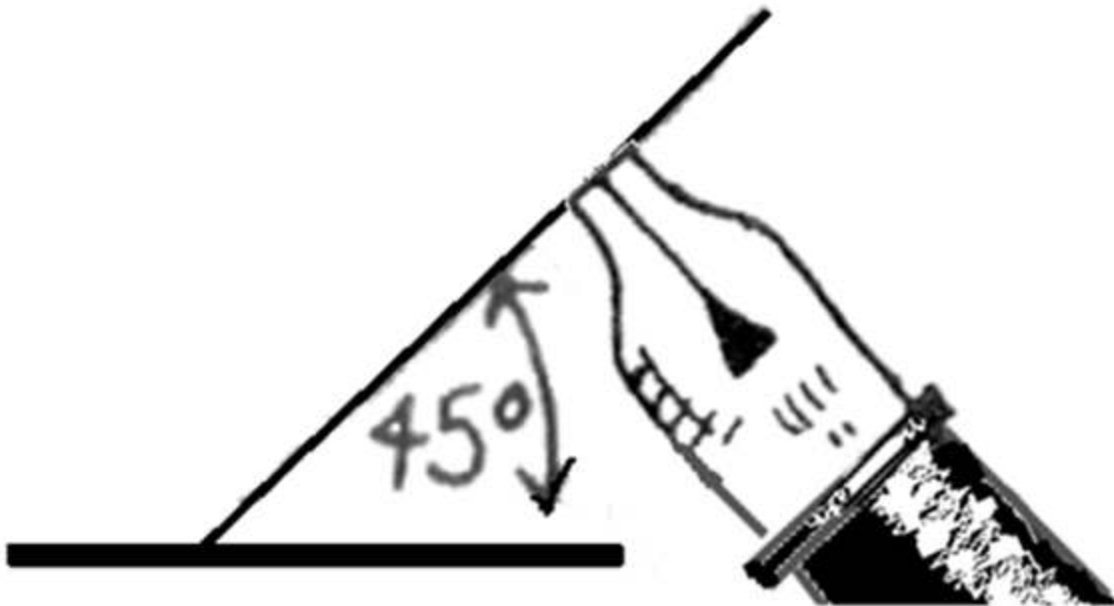


FIGURE 8-10: The 45-degree pen angle.

Practicing pen angle (PA)

When it comes to the 20-degree PA, if you make a plus sign (see [Figure 8-11](#)), you can notice

- » That your pen makes the verticals noticeably thicker than the horizontals
- » How the edges of the beginnings and endings of the strokes are angled



FIGURE 8-11: The 20-degree angle plus sign.

While you practice, try to get a mental picture of how you hold the pen to achieve the correct PA.

- » **Right-handed:** For most right-handers the barrel of the pen points back to a point inside their shoulder.
- » **Left-handed:** Experiment to see how to hold the pen to make the 20-degree plus sign. See [Chapter 2](#) for information on the different ways a left-handed writer can hold the pen.



Most people find the 45-degree pen angle the easier of the two (see [Figure 8-12](#)). For a thorough explanation of the 45-degree pen angle, see [Chapter 3](#).

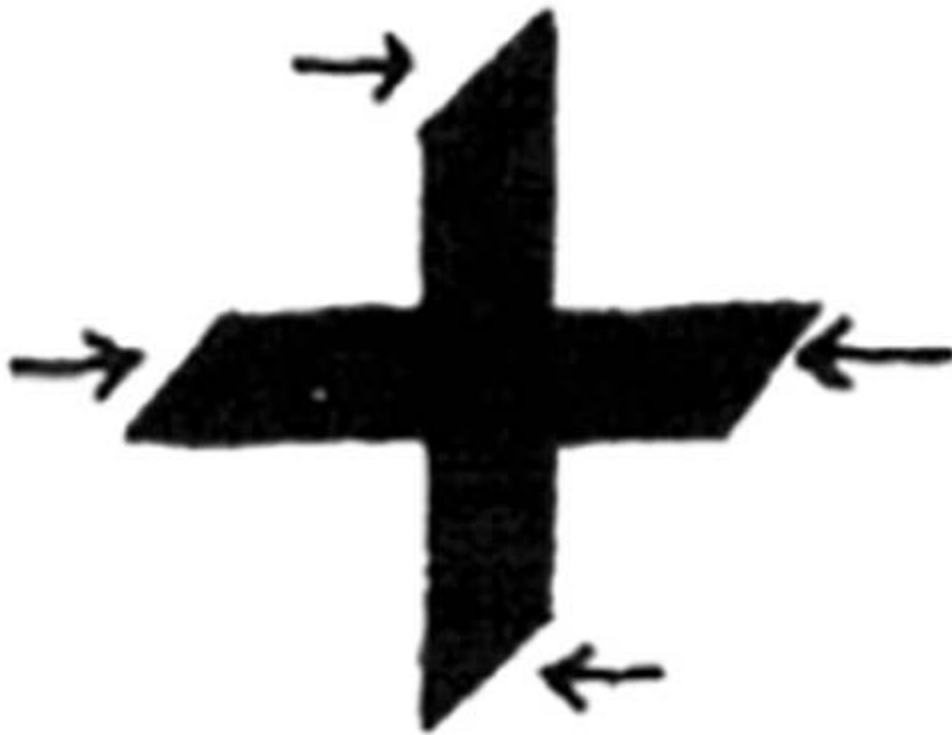


FIGURE 8-12: The 45-degree angle plus sign.

Follow these tips on making and/or practicing these plus signs:

- » Don't twist or turn the pen.
- » Hold the pen in the same position in your hand when you make both the vertical and horizontal strokes.
- » Try to make the beginnings and endings of the vertical and horizontal strokes perfectly angled at 20 or 45 degrees.



Creating letters by using a 20-degree pen angle (PA)

[Figure 8-13](#) shows you the 15 letters that require a 20-degree PA: *B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, L, O, P, Q, T, and U*. These letters basically don't have any diagonals in them.



FIGURE 8-13: The letters using a 20-degree pen angle.

Tips for making letters that use a 20-degree PA:

- » The vertical strokes are noticeably wider than the horizontal strokes.
- » Keep the letters the correct width according to which group they belong.
- » Don't become discouraged if you don't like your first efforts. The challenge presented by the Roman alphabet is worth the effort. Practice is the key to improvement.

Use the following exercise to practice.



Making letters using the 45-degree (PA)

For the six letters *A, K, M, R, Y, and Z*, you make some parts using a 45-degree PA and other parts a 20-degree PA. [Figure 8-14](#) shows you these letters. The parts of the letters that are made using a 20-degree PA are noted. The parts not noted are made with a 45-degree PA. You can always refer to this model until you remember which parts require which angle.



FIGURE 8-14: Letters made with a 20- and 45-degree pen angles.

- » [Figure 8-15](#) shows you the strokes that you need to make using a 20-degree PA.
- » All the other parts of these letters require you to use a 45-degree PA.
- » Z seems to contradict the pattern — the horizontals require a 45-degree PA, and the diagonal uses a 20-degree PA. You draw the letter this way to give the strokes the correct thickness.

The five letters *N*, *S*, *V*, *W*, and *X* are made entirely using a 45-degree PA. [Figure 3-15](#) shows you what they look like. Study how the thick and thin strokes appear in these letters.



FIGURE 8-15: Letters that are made entirely using a 45-degree pen angle.

Use the following exercise to practice the 11 letters that use a 45-degree pen angle either partially or entirely. Refer to the models above if necessary.



Stringing the alphabet together

Pay close attention to the spacing between the letters and between words (see [Figure 8-16](#)) when you draw the Roman alphabet. You have to do the spacing of the Roman letters completely by eye, and you want it to

look nice and even. However, measuring and putting an equal distance between letters doesn't do the trick. As strange as it may sound, using equal distances between the letters makes them look unevenly spaced. The letters just have to *appear* to be evenly spaced, which you achieve by spacing them unevenly.

SPACING SPACING

FIGURE 8-16: Examples of equal (left) and unequal (right) spacing.

Space the letters so that all the white spaces in between them appears to be equal in area (see [Figure 8-17](#)). Bear in mind these guidelines on spacing:

- » Because some letters have rounded sides and other letters have vertical sides, you must make adjustments to compensate for the amount of white space that appears between them.
- » Generally, straight sides need more space between them and the neighboring letters, and rounded sides need less space.
- » Turn your work upside-down or view it using a mirror to assess how balanced the white spaces appear when seen from a fresh perspective.

ACE BARK CYAN

FIGURE 8-17: Equal spacing looks wrong (left); Uneven spacing looks correct (right).



HONING
YOUR SKILLS

You can practice the whole alphabet by stringing together the letters to create words. Get a feel for drawing this alphabet in the exercise in this section, and check out the fuller practice exercise in the Appendix.

Avoiding Common Roman Alphabet Errors

I can't list all the errors that people can make with this alphabet, but this list gives you several of the errors that the most people seem to make (see [Figure 8-18](#)), as well as how to avoid them. Many people draw

- » **The horizontal on the *A* in the wrong place:** Position it just below center.
- » **Certain letters too wide:** *B*, *E*, and *F* are all half-wide letters; and *H* is a $\frac{3}{4}$ -wide letter.
- » **The top of *C* hooks over:** Make the top of this letter straight, not curved.
- » **The *K* strokes overlap in the center of the letter:** Don't make the diagonal strokes on the right side of a letter extend so far as to overlap the vertical stroke on the left.
- » **The *D* too narrow:** Make this letter as wide as it is tall. Many commonly used typefaces have a narrow *D*, so you may be used to seeing it that way. If that's the case, do a little research and look at examples from antiquity of the Roman letters to develop an appreciation for the proportions of these letters.
- » **The legs of the *M* angled out too much:** Draw the outside legs close to vertical. (Don't think of the *M* as upside-down *W*.)
- » **The center part of the *M* not down to the baseline.** Many modern typefaces have the middle of the *M* stop before the bottom of the letter, so people know that style. Just remember that the center *V* touches the writing line.
- » **The top of the *P* the wrong size:** Make it a whole lot larger than it appears in [Figure 8-18](#).
- » **The leg of the *R* in the wrong position:** Begin the leg close to the vertical, and don't curve it at the top like the one in [Figure 8-18](#).

- » **The *S* too curved:** The incorrectly drawn *S* in [Figure 8-18](#) looks more like an Uncial *S* ([Chapter 9](#)).
- » **The sides of the *W* not angled enough:** Give the *W* two sets of parallel strokes — the first and third strokes, and the second and fourth strokes. The *W* is not an upside-down *M*.
- » **The center of the *W* too short:** Extend the center part to make it even with the top of the letter.



FIGURE 8-18: Fifteen very common errors in drawing the Roman alphabet.

Adding on Some Serifs

Classical Roman letters have serifs — small finishing strokes at the ends of letters that add elegance and structure.

Keep them proportionate and correctly positioned. It's easy to make them too long or slightly off-center, which can throw off the balance of your lettering.

[Figure 8-19](#) illustrates that the *C*, *G*, *O*, *Q*, *S*, and *Z* have no serifs. The serifs appear where straight strokes meet the top and bottom guidelines.



FIGURE 8-19: The Roman alphabet with serifs added.

Getting to know the three kinds of serifs

All the serifs on Roman letters are made using a 20-degree pen angle. You can add serifs in three ways:

- » **Slab serif:** Add a small, straight line to completed letters at a 20-degree pen angle; this is the easiest technique. Illustrated on the left in [Figure 8-20](#).
- » **Joined slab serif:** Draw the serifs while you create the letters. Maintain a 20-degree pen angle and adjust for lines that require a 45-degree angle. This is a very popular way to add serifs to the Roman letters. Illustrated in the center in [Figure 8-20](#).
- » **Pedestal serif:** The most difficult option but extremely impressive if done correctly. After making the letters with joined slab serifs, add a tiny curved stroke to each serif, as shown on the right in [Figure 8-20](#) and in the study, trace, and copy exercise below.



FIGURE 8-20: Three kinds of serifs.



TIP

Keep your serifs small, and if you're adding a serif to a letter made using a 45-degree pen angle, turn the pen slightly to make it angled at 20.

Practice the three types of serifs: study, trace, and copy below.



Chapter 9

Uncial: The Irish Charm of Celtic Glyphs

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting a grasp on the Uncial alphabet basics
 - » Sealing the deal with serifs
 - » Breaking the letters into groups
 - » Putting it all together
 - » Trying some less formal — but fun — versions
-

The Uncial alphabet dates back almost as far as the Roman alphabet (see [Chapter 8](#)) and was widely used by Irish, Latin, and Greek scribes from the 3rd to the 8th century CE.

Recognized for its rounded, uniform characters, Uncial highlights the versatility of calligraphy strokes (which I cover in [Chapter 3](#)). It remains one of the easiest and most popular calligraphy alphabets today — over the years, many of my students have chosen it as their favorite.

Historians believe Uncial (pronounced *un-shell*) comes from the Latin *uncia*, meaning “inch,” as early forms of this alphabet measured roughly an inch in height.

This style has many variations. In this chapter, we begin with a formal Uncial script similar to the lettering used by early Christians in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Later, I’ll guide you through an informal variation, Celtic (pronounced *kell-tick*), used by Irish scribes.



REMEMBER The letters in this alphabet are extremely forgiving when it comes to covering up your goofs: You can make mistakes in letter shapes and sizes and still have the results look great; no other alphabet gives you that much leeway. Just keep your strokes smooth and steady (shaky strokes are the bane of this alphabet).

To work with the alphabet exercises in this chapter, use either a calligraphy fountain pen that has a 2B nib or a dip pen that has a 1.5mm nib. If you need information about pens or pen angle, check out [Chapter 3](#).

Starting with the Uncial Alphabet

[Figure 9-1](#) shows you the Uncial alphabet, an alphabet that you can use for almost any purpose. This all-capital alphabet has no lowercase letters. The letters are fat — all the letters (except *I* and *J*) are as wide as, or wider than, they are tall.



FIGURE 9-1: The Uncial alphabet.

These letters have a body height of five pen widths, with very short ascenders and descenders. They barely extend beyond the waist line (the

top of the main body) and the guideline (where the letters sit), as shown in [Figure 9-2](#).

Because of their minimal extensions, ascender and descender guidelines aren't necessary. You'll only need two guidelines, as illustrated in [Figures 9-1](#) and [9-2](#). If you're unfamiliar with guidelines, see [Chapter 3](#).



FIGURE 9-2: Five pen widths and two guidelines.

When you draw this alphabet, you use only one pen angle throughout. The pen angle is 20 degrees (see [Figure 9-3](#)), the same pen angle that I describe in [Chapter 8](#) for most of the Roman alphabet. How you hold the pen for a 20-degree angle depends on your handedness:

- » **Right-handers:** For most right-handers the barrel of the pen points back to a point inside their shoulder.
- » **Left-handers:** You have several options that I cover in [Chapter 2](#). Figure out which pen hold works best for you.

Trace the following zigzag design to determine the correct way to hold the pen.

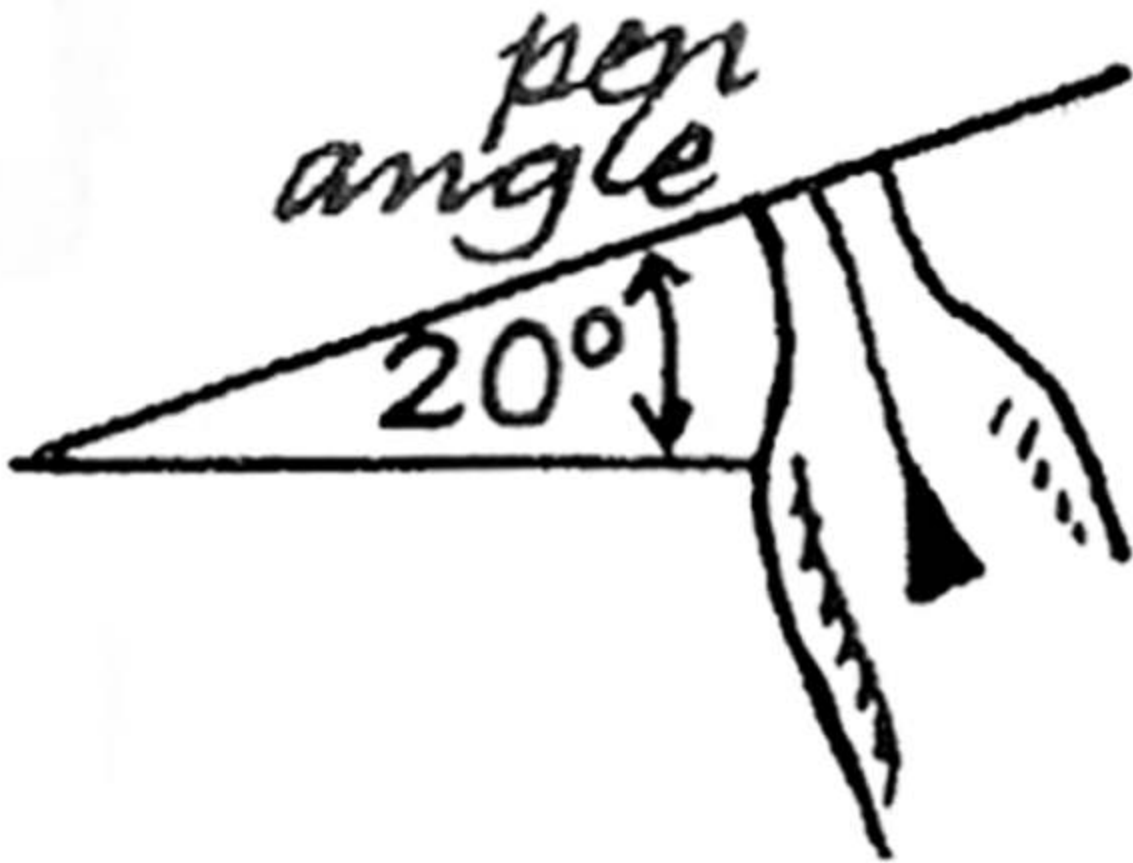


FIGURE 9-3: The 20-degree pen angle.

Practicing the pen angle helps you get a handle on the Uncial alphabet. Trace over the gray zigzag design below. If you're holding the pen at the correct 20-degree angle, you'll be able to duplicate the alternating thick and thin lines exactly as shown. If the thick and thin lines don't match, adjust your pen angle slightly and try again.



Adding Elegance with Uncial Serifs

Uncial has two very interesting *serifs* (the decorative additions to the letters) that resemble the flared end of a horn (see [Figure 9-4](#)). You use them at the ends of two kinds of strokes:

- » **Vertical:** For example, on the vertical stroke of the letter *I*.
- » **Curved:** See the curved stroke at the top of *C*.



FIGURE 9-4: The two serifs used in several Uncial letters.

You can draw these serifs different ways. Choose the method that works best for you and gives you the best results.

When you place the serif on the vertical, you have the following options (see [Figure 9-5](#)):

- » Draw the serif first, and then add the vertical as a separate stroke.
- » Draw the vertical first, and then lift your pen and add the serif.

If you use this method, draw a thin diagonal at the beginning of the vertical stroke to show you exactly where to place the serif.

- » Draw everything in one continuous stroke.



FIGURE 9-5: Drawing a serif on a vertical stroke.

When you place the serif on the curved stroke, you have the following options (see [Figure 9-6](#)):

- » Add the serif after you finish the stroke.

If you use this method, end the curved stroke with a thin diagonal to help you see where the serif needs to go.

- » Draw the serif without lifting your pen at the end of the curved stroke.

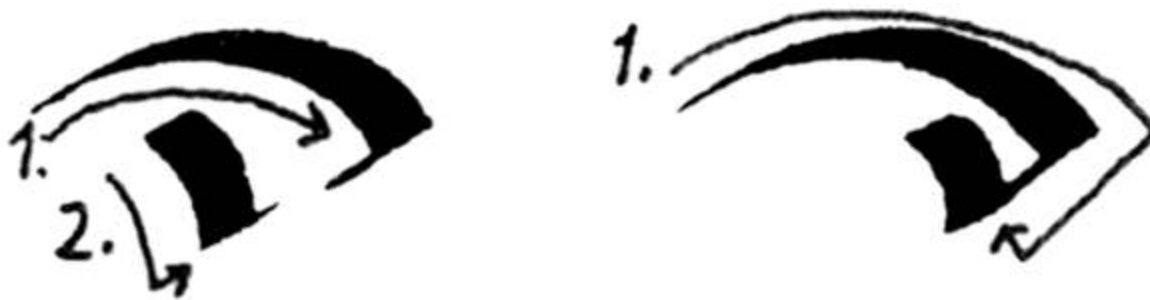


FIGURE 9-6: Drawing a serif on a curved stroke.

Practice tracing and copying the serif strokes in the following exercise by following these steps:

1. Trace over the strokes that appear in gray.
2. Try to duplicate the shape in the space that appears to the right of the one you trace in Step 1.
3. If your shapes don't look exactly right, all you need is a little more practice. Study the examples and repeat.

Discover which method of drawing the serifs works best for you.



Four Groups of Uncial Letters

You can divide the letters of the Uncial alphabet into four groups according to their shapes and the similarity of the strokes that you use to draw them:

- » Circular letters
- » Letters that have a strong vertical
- » Letters that include diagonals
- » Letters that don't fit any other category



REMEMBER Strive to keep the letters wide, the strokes smooth, and the slant consistent.

Circular letters

Five letters have a circular shape: *c*, *d*, *e*, *g*, and *o* (see [Figure 9-7](#)). Although I call this shape circular, the letters don't really form circles. They're shaped more like curved diamonds than actual circles. The shapes of the *d* and the *o* in [Figure 9-7](#) illustrate the point.



FIGURE 9-7: The circular Uncial letters.

Most people find these letters a whole lot of fun to make. While you practice the circular letters, follow these tips:

- » Focus on keeping all your strokes smooth, deliberate, and steady.
- » Keep these letters really wide.
- » Don't get fussy with the serif strokes on top of the *c*, *e*, and *g*. Leave them alone after you make them; don't go back over them and try to

fix any errors.

» Have fun making these letters.



Letters that have strong vertical strokes

Twelve Uncial letters have vertical strokes that stand out as dominant features: *b, f, h, l, j, k, l, n, p, q, r, and u* (see [Figure 9-8](#)).

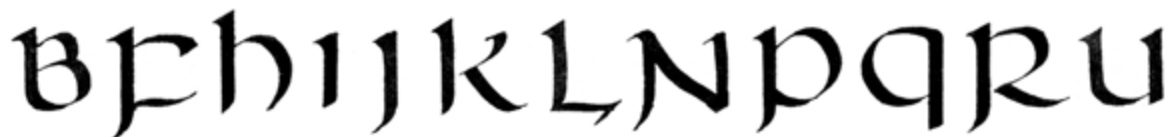


FIGURE 9-8: Uncial letters *b, f, h, l, j, k, l, n, p, q, r, and u*.

I provide self-explanatory examples of how to draw these letters in the following figure, but keep these points in mind:

- » All the letters in this group (except *q*) begin with a vertical stroke.
- » All the letters except *n* and *q* have a horn-shaped serif at the top of each vertical stroke.
- » Make sure that the vertical strokes don't slant.
- » Make the serifs small, flat on top, and curved on the side. Avoid serifs that look like triangular pennants!
- » Draw really short *ascenders* and *descenders* (the sections of the letters that go above and below the main body of the letter). For example, the ascender on the *h* doesn't extend very far past the top guideline.



Letters that have diagonals

Six letters include diagonals: *a*, *v*, *w*, *x*, *y*, and *z* (see [Figure 9-9](#)).

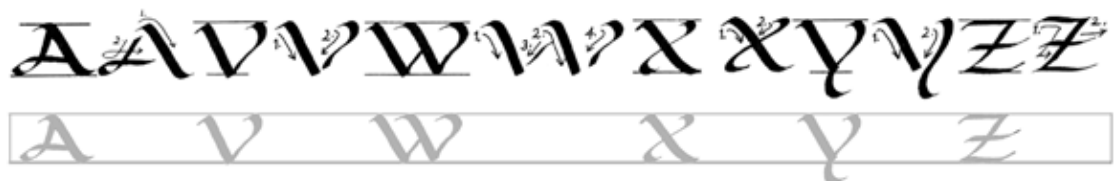
Although many of the Uncial letters appear decidedly different than letters in other alphabets, these letters that contain diagonals resemble more closely the letters in other alphabets.



FIGURE 9-9: Uncial letters that have diagonals.

While you practice these six letters, keep these suggestions in mind:

- » Make the diagonal that forms the right side of the *a* first.
- » The *w* has two long, parallel diagonals.
- » You draw the right side of the *v* exactly the same as the right side of the *w* and the top of the *y*.



Three special letters

Three of the letters in the Uncial alphabet don't fit into any of the other groups discussed in the preceding sections: *m*, *s*, and *t* (see [Figure 9-10](#)). These letters aren't more difficult than the others; they're just a little different from the others.



FIGURE 9-10: Uncial letters *m*, *s*, and *t*.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind while you practice these three letters:

- » Keep the two halves of the *m* equal in size.
- » Keep the bottom and top of the *s* balanced; you don't want one part to look significantly smaller than the other.
- » Keep the *c*-shape of the *t* centered under the horizontal line on top.



Putting the Uncial Letters Together

With the Uncial alphabet, you don't need any special skill when you space the letters in words and sentences (unlike most other alphabets). The only rule that you need to follow is to simply space the letters so that they look right to you. It's that simple ([Figure 9-11](#) shows a phrase written in Uncial letters).

pack my box

FIGURE 9-11: Words written in Uncial.



**HONING
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You can find a lot more opportunities to practice the letters and spacing online. Visit www.dummies.com and search for “Calligraphy For Dummies Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet.” But the following exercise allows you to practice the letters from this chapter.

Varying the Uncial Alphabet

You can create some very interesting variations of the Uncial alphabet by simply stretching and compressing the letters. Indeed, you really can’t make them too wide or too narrow. In addition to variations in width, you can add flourishes and curlicues to these letters. The Celtic scribes are especially famous for their designs.

How much experimentation you can do and what you should avoid depends on your imagination and creativity. However, you need to have a limit. Don’t go so far as to make the letters look sloppy and hastily or haphazardly drawn.

Narrowing your Uncial letters

With the Uncial alphabet, you can experiment with different letter widths. [Figure 9-12](#) shows an example to give you an idea of what you can do. You don’t need to try to duplicate the letters that I use in [Figure 9-12](#); create your own!

THIS IS A NARROW VERSION OF UNCIAL

FIGURE 9-12: A narrow Uncial variation.

I don't have any rules to give you about how you should or shouldn't draw a narrow variation, but here are a few helpful hints to keep in mind:

- » Because the letters are more compact than standard, you may have to simplify the letters and eliminate some of the loops and serifs.
- » Keep the *ascenders* and *descenders* (the parts of the letters that go above and below the letter's main body) short.

Going wide

Perhaps you want to know whether you can make the Uncial letters wide. Not only can you make wide variations in the Uncial alphabet, these variations provide more room for adaptation (see [Figure 9-13](#)) than the narrow variations.



FIGURE 9-13: A wide variation of the Uncial alphabet.

Experiment with the letters and create your own variations. While you experiment with wide variations, keep these ideas in mind:

- » Wider letters tend to look less bold. Be careful that you don't lose the contrast between the thick and thin strokes in your letters.
- » In contrast to the way that a narrow variation makes it more difficult to maintain serifs and loops (see the preceding section), a wide variation opens the door so that you can add more loops and fancy stuff.

Making intricate “curlicues”

The Celtic people are famous in the world of calligraphy for their use of the Uncial alphabet. They developed an entire system of design based on this alphabet, including intricate designs called *Celtic knots*. Today, you can see some of their handiwork in *The Book of Kells*, a manuscript of the four Gospels of the New Testament created around 800 CE by Irish

or Scottish Christian monks. [Figure 9-14](#) shows some examples of Celtic type design.



FIGURE 9-14: A curlicues variation.

Note: A curlicues is an informal term meaning a spiral, twist, or wavy shape that's added as a flourish.

If you want to try your hand at doing these kinds of designs, follow these suggestions:

- » Lightly sketch your letters and designs with a pencil before you use the pen.
- » Keep your strokes fluid and smooth. Sloppy strokes definitely stand out when you do curlicues.
- » Look at books that illustrate Celtic designs and try your hand at copying those designs on your own paper.

Going crazy with variation

[Figure 9-15](#) shows you some examples that can inspire you to try out some truly crazy variations. I made these examples as crazy as I possibly could while still maintaining the character of the letters. (I borrowed these designs from Celtic manuscripts.)

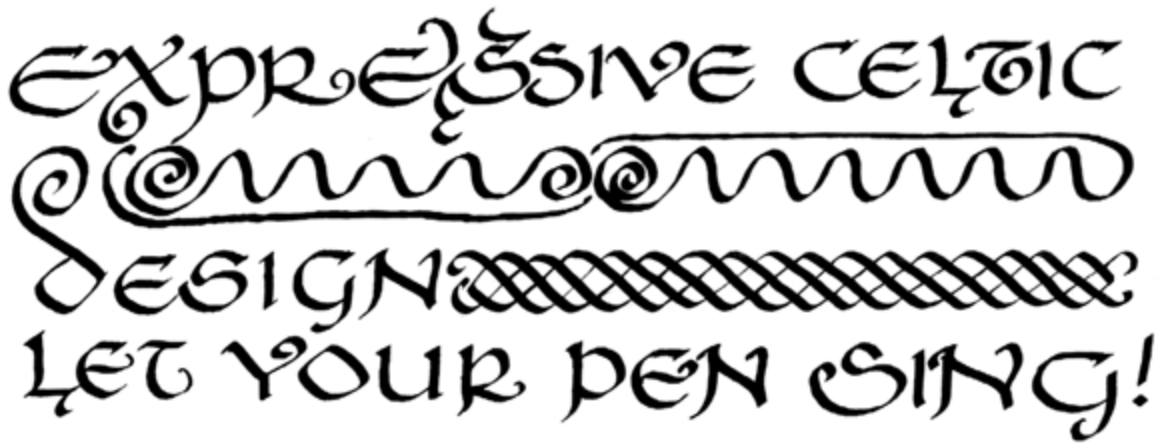


FIGURE 9-15: Celtic designs illustrate how expressive you can make your designs.

Letter fitting — a neat trick

One of the handiest things that you can do with the Uncial alphabet is fit letters together in unconventional ways (see [Figure 9-16](#)). Letters can

- » Touch and overlap
- » Peek out from underneath other letters
- » Be different sizes (not conforming to the usual guidelines)



FIGURE 9-16: Fitting Uncial letters together in interesting and very unconventional ways.

Experiment and try different ways of fitting letters together. While you experiment, keep these ideas in mind:

- » Try different ways to overlap and fit letters together. Some ways that you try look good, and other ways don't look good at all. Through trial and error, see what works for you.

- » To fit the letters together, make the letters different sizes.
- » Always pay attention to legibility. If the letter-fitting makes the words too difficult to read, you'll need to simplify your design.

Chapter 10

Manuscript: The Elegant Hand of the Scribes

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking at the height, pen angle, basic shapes, and proportions
 - » Getting to know the lowercase and capital letters
 - » Using two sets of numbers
 - » Putting letters together
 - » Varying the style
-

Calligraphers know this alphabet by various names — Manuscript, Foundational Hand, and Bookhand. It's a simplified version of the Roman alphabet (which I cover in [Chapter 8](#)) with many practical uses. Less formal than Roman, it's easier to draw and adaptable for nearly any purpose.

Scribes began using this alphabet in the 9th century for manuscripts and books, which is why it's also called Manuscript or Bookhand. Over time, its letterforms influenced many of today's typefaces.

The name Foundational Hand comes from its popularity among calligraphy teachers as a beginner-friendly alphabet. But don't let that fool you — it remains a versatile and elegant style beyond its introductory use.

This chapter covers Manuscript letters (both lowercase and capitals) and numbers. Since this alphabet is built on shapes rather than strokes, there's no step-by-step breakdown of how to draw them. The best way to master it is by studying and practicing letters grouped by shape similarities.

Getting to Know the Manuscript Alphabet Basics

Many people feel that the Manuscript alphabet is one of the easier styles to figure out. The letters are very uniform in structure (see [Figure 10-1](#)), and the strokes are all very natural.

In the following sections, I equip you with the info that you need to begin putting pen to paper to draw the letters of the Manuscript alphabet.



FIGURE 10-1: All the letters and characters in the Manuscript alphabet.



REMEMBER For this chapter, you need either a Manuscript (brand name of the pen, not the alphabet) fountain pen that has a 2B nib, or a dip pen that has a 1.5 mm nib. You also need to be familiar with what

the terms *pen angle* and *guidelines* mean. If you're not sure about these terms, look in [Chapter 3](#).

Pen widths

You can find out more about pen widths in [Chapter 3](#); but for this alphabet, [Figure 10-2](#) shows you the pen widths to use for the heights of the lowercase and capital letters in this alphabet.



FIGURE 10-2: Pen widths for lowercase and capital letters.

Pen angle

Calligraphy students can master this alphabet fairly easily because it requires only the 30-degree pen angle (see [Figure 10-3](#)) for almost all the strokes and letters.

The alphabet has only one exception to the 30-degree pen angle, the lowercase z. You make the top and bottom horizontals of the z by using a pen angle of 45-degrees (the same angle that you use for Blackletter and Italic, discussed in [Chapters 11](#) and [12](#), respectively). Otherwise, it's all 30 degrees.



FIGURE 10-3: The 30-degree pen angle.

Trace over the following zigzag design. If you hold the pen at the correct 30-degree angle, you can duplicate the alternating thick and thin lines in this design. Before you get started, review these points so that you can make and maintain the correct angle:

- » If you're a right-hander, the barrel of the pen points back to the edge of your right shoulder.
- » If you're a left-hander, try out pen holds until you find one that makes the zigzag design exactly as shown. That's the pen position that you need to maintain.
- » Because of the pen angle, the vertical lines appear just a little wider than the horizontal lines in the letters.
- » The thinnest parts of the letter *o* don't go to the exact top and bottom of the letters, but close to the 11 o'clock and 5 o'clock positions.



Basic shapes and proportions

The main body of Manuscript letters is 5 pen-widths tall, with ascenders and descenders extending 3 pen-widths above and below. These circular, upright forms lack slant and are drawn using ten basic strokes in various combinations (see [Figure 10-4](#)).



FIGURE 10-4: Basic strokes.

You can practice the basic strokes for this alphabet in the following practice space. Trace over the strokes drawn in gray, copy the strokes in the blank spaces that follow the strokes that you trace, and remember the following:

- » **Pull the pen toward you; don't push it away.** All the strokes are *pull strokes*, which means that you basically pull the pen toward you. Because it uses only pull strokes, you can draw this alphabet with either a fountain pen or a dip pen.
- » **Concentrate on keeping the sizes of the letters uniform, the strokes smooth.** Consistency enhances readability.
- » **Keep the letters completely vertical.** If you work on a slanted alphabet before tackling this one, you may have a tendency to slant the letters. Resist!
- » **Avoid ovals; keep everything circular.** This is a true *ball-and-stick* alphabet. If you already know EZScript or the Italic alphabet, for example, you may have a tendency to make the letters not wide enough.
- » **Maintain a constant pen angle.** Don't twist or turn the pen while you make the letters.



Going Low with Manuscript Lowercase Letters

Rather than going through the letters in alphabetical order, I introduce the letters according to their similarities in the following sections.



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You can practice all the letters in this chapter, but for extra lowercase practice, check out the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com. Search for “Calligraphy For Dummies”

and click the link in the results to access the Manuscript lowercase alphabet and other alphabets from this book.

The round letters

The letters *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *o*, *p*, and *q* have a circle as a major part of their shape (see [Figure 10-5](#)). Circles may not be the easiest shapes to draw, but I start with these because the round shape is the shape that all the letters are based upon. If you get this right, you can do all the letters with ease.

b c d e o p q

FIGURE 10-5: The round letters.

When you practice the round letters:

- » If you're right-handed, always do the left side of the circle first.
- » If you're left-handed, you may find doing the right side of a circle first easier. If it's easier, do it that way.



Letters that have the n or u shape

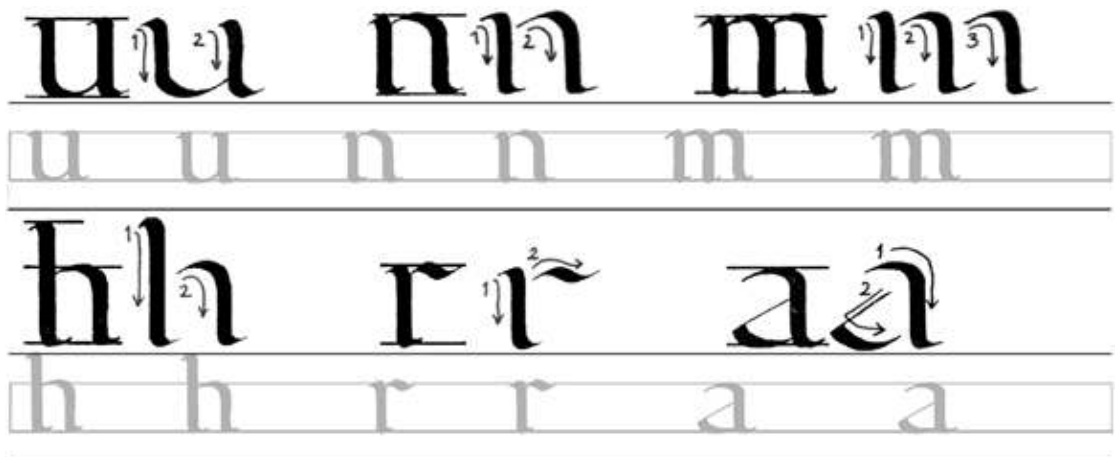
The letters *u*, *n*, *m*, *h*, *r*, and *a* are similar to each other because they all have the *u* or *n* shape in them (see [Figure 10-6](#)). These letters combine partial circles with straight strokes.



FIGURE 10-6: Letters that contain the *n* or *u* shape.

While you practice these letters, keep the following tips in mind:

- » Make the white spaces inside these letters symmetrical horizontally.
- » Be careful with the *serifs* (the rounded beginnings and endings of these letters). Make small curves. Don't make these serifs sloppy or too big.
- » Make sure that the letters have no slant to them.
- » The top and right side of the *a* is exactly like the top and right side of the *n*.



The straight-line letters

The letters *i*, *j*, *k*, *l*, and *t* are built around a straight stroke. Their curved serifs appear at the beginning, end, or both. Some are small (like *i*), while others are larger (like the ends of *l* and *t*). Follow the exercise for precise sizing — oversized serifs can distort the letter’s shape. See [Figure 10-7](#).

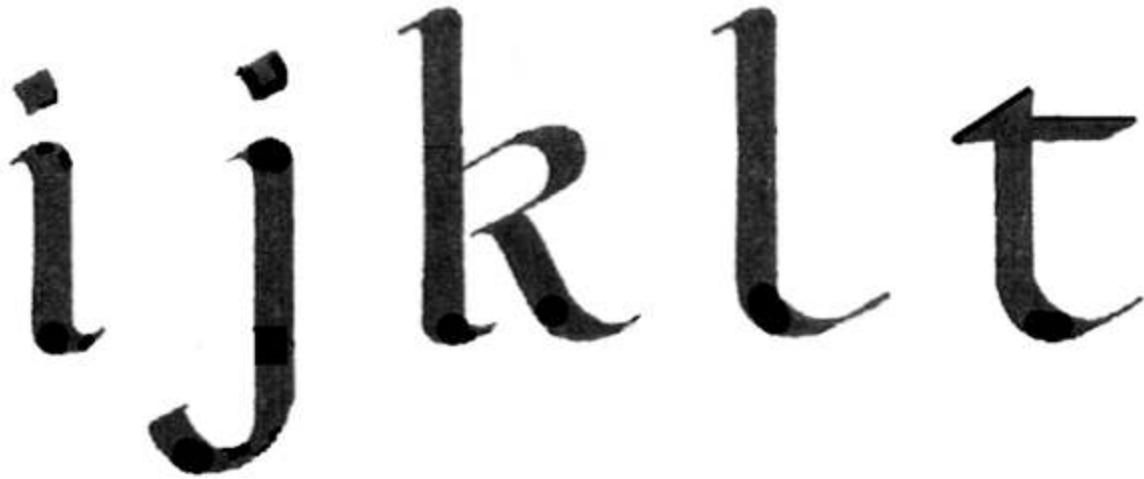


FIGURE 10-7: The straight-line letters.

Here are some tips for making these letters:

- » Keep the long vertical strokes straight and smooth. In these letters, a stroke that’s not straight stands out.
- » Keep the curved serifs at the beginnings and endings of the letters neat and small. Don’t be sloppy or haphazard with these serifs.
- » Make the base of the *l* and the *t* circular.



The letters that have a v shape

The three letters *v*, *w*, and *y* are very similar in the Manuscript alphabet (see [Figure 10-8](#)). The points where the letters sit on the base line have overlapping strokes. This overlap is important to the style of the letter.



FIGURE 10-8: The letters with a *v* shape.

Keep these tips in mind while you practice these letters:

- » Make the diagonal strokes (except for the serifs) straight, not curved.
- » Keep the two halves of the *w* equal in width.
- » Keep the long stroke on the *y* straight, except at the top and bottom.



All the other letters

I lump the five letters not covered in the preceding sections together into one group of misfits. Each of these letters has similarities to other letters, but they really don't fit with any of the other groups. These letters are *f*, *g*, *s*, *x*, and *z* (see [Figure 10-9](#)).



FIGURE 10-9: Letters *f*, *g*, *s*, *x*, and *z*.



REMEMBER When drawing the letter *Z*, adjust your pen angle to 45 degrees for the top and bottom horizontal strokes. Using the usual 30-degree angle will make them appear too thin.

Here are some tips for drawing these letters:

- » The *g* may take a bit of practice. Make sure that the second stroke (which resembles a 3) wraps around below the first stroke. Also, make the fourth stroke (what I call *the ear*) horizontal, not angled upward.
- » Don't forget that you use a 45-degree pen angle for the horizontal lines of the *z*.



Making Manuscript Capital Letters

Manuscript capitals are a relaxed, less formal version of Roman capitals (which I cover in [Chapter 8](#)). Their strokes are more casual and pair well with the lowercase Italic alphabet. The serifs, called half-slab serifs, are shorter and less formal than regular slab serifs, resembling those on the lowercase letters.



HONING
YOUR SKILLS

Be sure to check out the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet on www.dummies.com for even more practice on creating Manuscript capital letters, in addition to what you find for practice in the sections that follow. From the main website, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box and click the Search button. Click the link to the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet that appears in the results.

Letters as wide as they are tall

The capital letters *C*, *D*, *G*, *O*, and *Q* are circular in shape and as wide as they are tall (see [Figure 10-10](#)). They are 8 pen widths tall, which is exactly the same height as the *ascenders* (the parts of the lowercase letters that extend upward from the main body of the letters, such as *b*) in this alphabet.

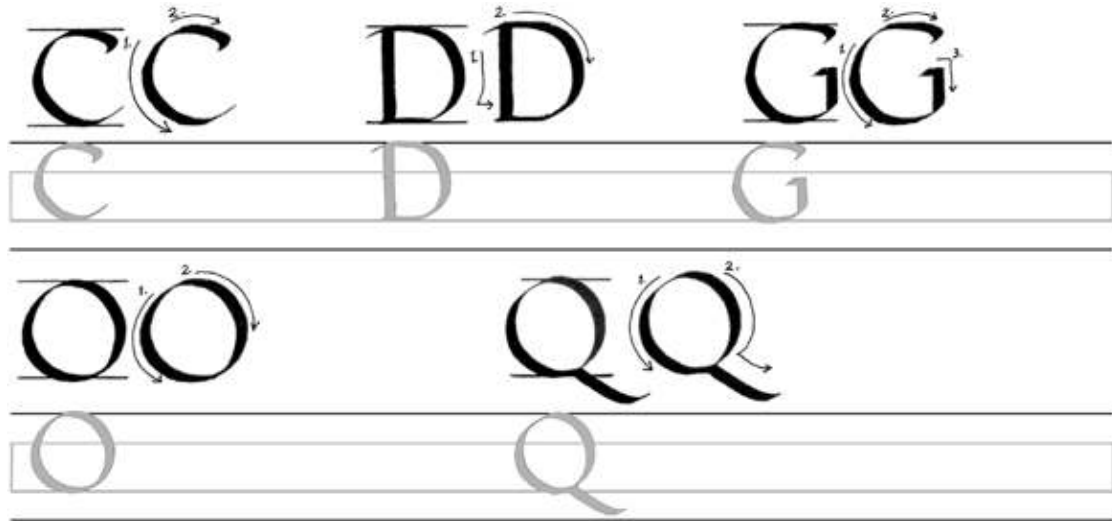


FIGURE 10-10: Letters of equal height and width.

Follow these tips while you practice these letters:

- » Strive to make the circles as perfect as you can. No ovals permitted here.

- » If you have difficulty drawing these letters, you can lightly pencil them in so that you can draw over the pencil with a pen.



Letters whose width is $\frac{3}{4}$ the height

Ten letters are in the group whose width is $\frac{3}{4}$ the height (see [Figure 10-11](#)). They are *A, H, K, N, T, U, V, X, Y,* and *Z*. These letters have an average width (which means their width is between the fattest and skinniest). Most people find it pretty easy to draw these letters correctly.

A H K N T U V X Y Z

FIGURE 10-11: Letters three-quarters as tall as they are wide.

While you practice these letters, please remember to

- » Keep the width $\frac{3}{4}$ of the height. Don't make these letters too narrow or too wide.
- » Study the small serifs at the beginnings and ends of the strokes and make them correctly.
- » Hold the pen at a constant 30-degree angle.



Letters half as wide as they are tall

The capital letters that are only half as wide as they are tall are *B*, *R*, *E*, *F*, *S*, *L*, and *P* (see [Figure 10-12](#)). In some cases, this proportion may not look exactly right to you, but that's probably because the letters that you see every day don't follow all the rules.

B R E F S L P

FIGURE 10-12: The half-wide letters.

Follow these tips:

- » Use the memory aid *brief sleep* (BREF SLP) to help you recall the half-wide letters.
- » Study the small serifs on the *E* and *F*, and make these carefully.
- » Make the small *foot serifs* at the bottoms of the *R*, *F*, and *P* short and horizontal.



The narrow capitals

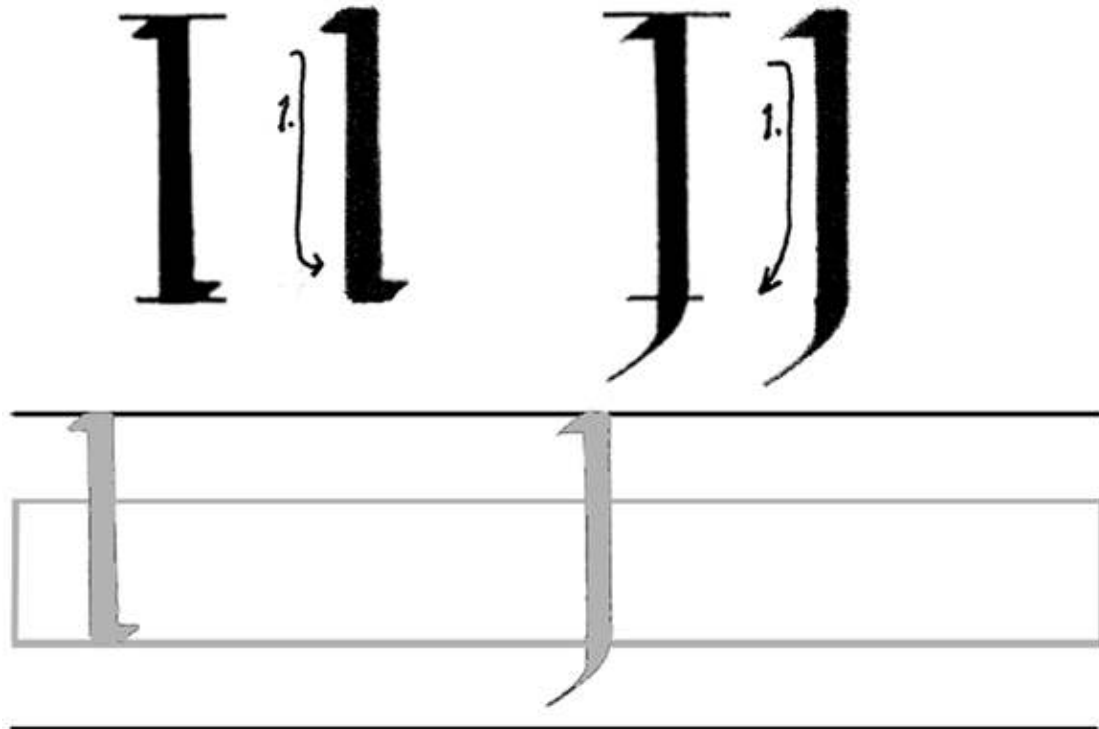
The capitals I and J are narrow (see [Figure 10-13](#)), nearly the width of a single pen stroke. J is simply an I with a short tail. It was introduced in the 16th century to distinguish the consonant and vowel uses of I, helping clarify words like Iulius (Julius) and Iesus (Jesus).



FIGURE 10-13: Two very narrow letters.

Here are some tips for making the *I* and the *J*:

- » Make the vertical strokes straight and vertical.
- » Draw the serifs small.
- » The tail on the *J* is short and not curved.



The wide capitals

Two of the capital letters are extra wide — the *M* and the *W* (see [Figure 10-14](#)). The *M* is one of our oldest letters (derived from the ancient Phoenician alphabet), while the *W* evolved much later as a doubled *V*.



FIGURE 10-14: The wide letters.

Follow these tips when drawing the *M* and the *W*:

» They're not upside-down versions of each other:

- The sides of the *m* are slanted inward only slightly.
 - The *w* has two sets of parallel strokes, and the outside strokes are slanted quite a lot.
- » Keep the letters balanced so that one side doesn't appear noticeably larger than the other.
- » Be careful to make the serifs small. Don't make the serifs so large that the sides of these letters curve.
- » Include the overlapping strokes, as shown in the examples.



Counting Your Number Options

This section presents two sets of numbers for the Manuscript alphabet ([Figure 10-15](#)). Use the top row with both capitals and lowercase, and the bottom row for capitals only. Lowercase numbers vary in size, with some extending above or below the base line, but both sets follow the same stroke sequence.



FIGURE 10-15: Two sets of numbers.

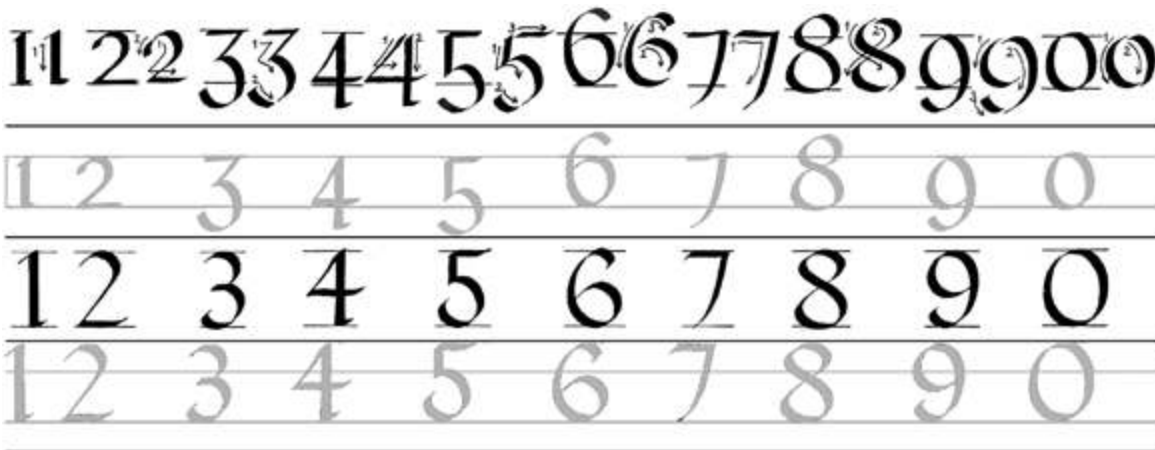
» **The top row of numbers:** When you use both capital and lowercase letters. The lowercase numbers have different sizes and positions.

You draw

- The 1, 2, and 0 between the guidelines and waist lines
- The 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 to extend down below the base line, but not touching the descender line
- The 6 and 8 to extend up above the waist line, but not touching the ascender line

» **The bottom row of numbers:** When you pair the numbers with only capital letters, these numbers are the same height as the capitals.

The strokes and their sequence are essentially the same for both sets of numbers.



Putting It All Together

When putting all the letters together to create words, space the letters so that they appear to have an equal distance between them (see [Figure 10-16](#)).

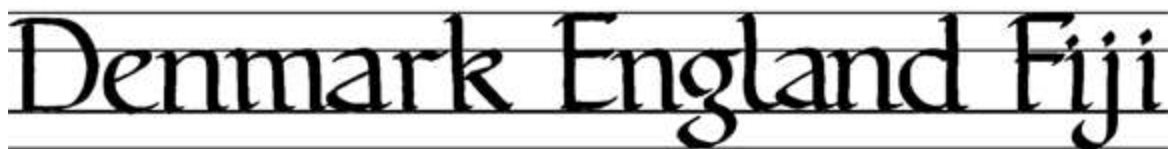


FIGURE 10-16: Examples of spacing.

Equal spacing doesn't create balanced letter spacing — adjustments must be based on letter shapes. To achieve uniform spacing within words, place letters at unequal distances as needed. Take these tips to heart on spacing:

- » Place two rounded letters (such as *o* and *c*) closer together than letters with vertical sides or a mix of rounded and vertical shapes.
- » Space two vertical letters (such as *a* and *m*) farther apart than a vertical and rounded letter or two rounded forms.
- » Ensure enough space between words — about the width of an *o*.
- » To check spacing, squint until the text blurs into a gray line or turn the paper upside-down. Even spacing will look uniform, while white gaps mean letters are too far apart and darker spots indicate they're too close.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

The following exercises provide a sampling of trace-and-copy practice for words in the Manuscript alphabet. You can find more practice for this alphabet on the For Dummies website (www.dummies.com); just enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box and press Enter. A link to the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet should appear in the results.

America Belgium Canada

Making Variations of the Manuscript Alphabet

You can use the Manuscript alphabet in a number of wonderful variations.

Narrowing your Manuscript

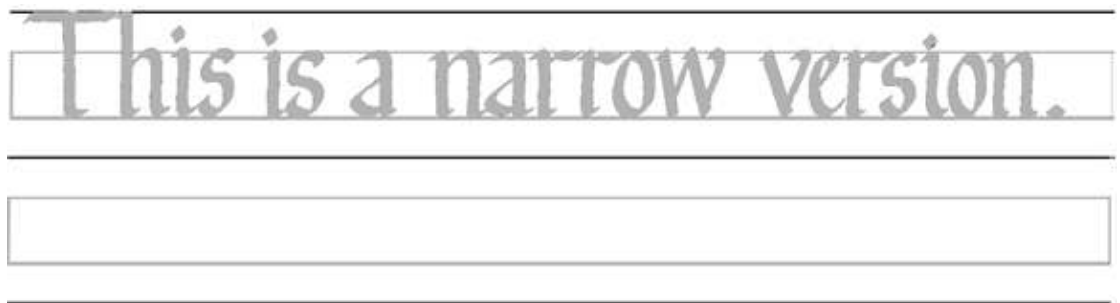
A very attractive variation on the Manuscript alphabet (and one of my favorites) involves simply drawing the letters narrower than usual (see [Figure 10-17](#)). The only rule about how narrow to make the letters relates to how easily you can read them and how the letters look simply by sight. This variation has many practical applications and allows you to squeeze more letters into a space than the standard form of the alphabet.

This is a narrow version.

FIGURE 10-17: A narrow version of Manuscript.

While you practice a narrow version of the Manuscript alphabet, follow these tips:

- » Although you determine the width by sight, make the width consistent throughout.
- » Keep the serifs small and neat.
- » You can use regular width capital letters, if you like.



Making a bold statement with Manuscript

You can decrease the height of the body of the letter (the distance between the waist line and base line) from 5 pen widths in the normal

letter to 4 pen widths. This change produces a heavier, thicker letter (see [Figure 10-18](#)).

This is a bold version.

FIGURE 10-18: A heavy, bolder version.

Keep these points in mind when you do the bold variation:

- » Because you have less height in which to draw the letters, draw the shapes clearly; don't make them so close together that they look squashed.
- » Don't make the serifs too large.
- » The *ascenders* are still 3 pen widths above the waist line.



Chapter 11

Blackletter: The Majesty of Medieval Script

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Checking out the alphabet
 - » Getting the basic strokes down
 - » Looking at the lowercase letters
 - » Creating capital letters
 - » Putting letters together to make words
-

The name *Blackletter* originates from this alphabet's densely black appearance, particularly noticeable when an entire page is covered with these letters. Blackletter is also referred to as *Gothic*, a nod to its origins in the Gothic or Medieval era (around the 12th century), when monks and scribes used this style to meticulously copy church documents.

In modern times, Blackletter primarily appears in headings on certificates and diplomas. Many newspapers, including *The New York Times*, incorporate variations of this style in their titles. Blackletter exudes an air of formality and gravitas. You might recognize this style by another name: Old English.

In this chapter, I guide you through the step-by-step basics of writing the Blackletter calligraphy style, including both capital and lowercase letters. You can find in this chapter not only the fundamental strokes, but also how to string letters together to form words. I include plenty of opportunities for practice — both in this chapter and in the online Cheat Sheet (which you can access through www.dummies.com) — so that you can perfect writing letters and building words. Before long, you can craft

your own official-looking Ivy-League-like diploma to impress your friends (with your calligraphy prowess, of course!).

Getting to Know the Blackletter Alphabet

For most students, the surprising thing about Blackletter's intricate appearance is how easily they can grasp it. You form the lowercase letters by using just seven basic strokes, with three of them forming the majority of the alphabet through various combinations. For that reason, I call Blackletter a Lego alphabet — its building-block-like structure makes crafting words both intuitive and endlessly creative.



TIP Blackletter is visually striking, exuding a wealthy and official aesthetic. However, it takes longer to draw and is less legible than most of the other alphabets in this book, making it generally impractical for applications that require quick readability, such as signage, advertisements, or instructional displays. [Figure 11-1](#) shows the lowercase Blackletter alphabet.



FIGURE 11-1: The lowercase Blackletter alphabet.

To start with Blackletter, like with any calligraphy alphabet, make sure you're using the correct pen, pen angle, and letter height:

- » **Calligraphy pen:** Use a Manuscript fountain calligraphy pen (recommended in [Chapter 2](#)) that has a 2B nib, or any fountain or dip pen that has a 1½ mm nib.
- » **Pen angle:** Maintain a constant 45-degree angle (see [Figure 11-2](#) and [Chapter 3](#) for detailed information on pen angle).
- » **Height:** The letters' body height is 4 pen widths, while *ascenders* and *descenders* (the parts of letters that extend upward above or below the main letter body, such as *b* and *g*) measure 2 pen widths each (see [Figure 11-3](#)).

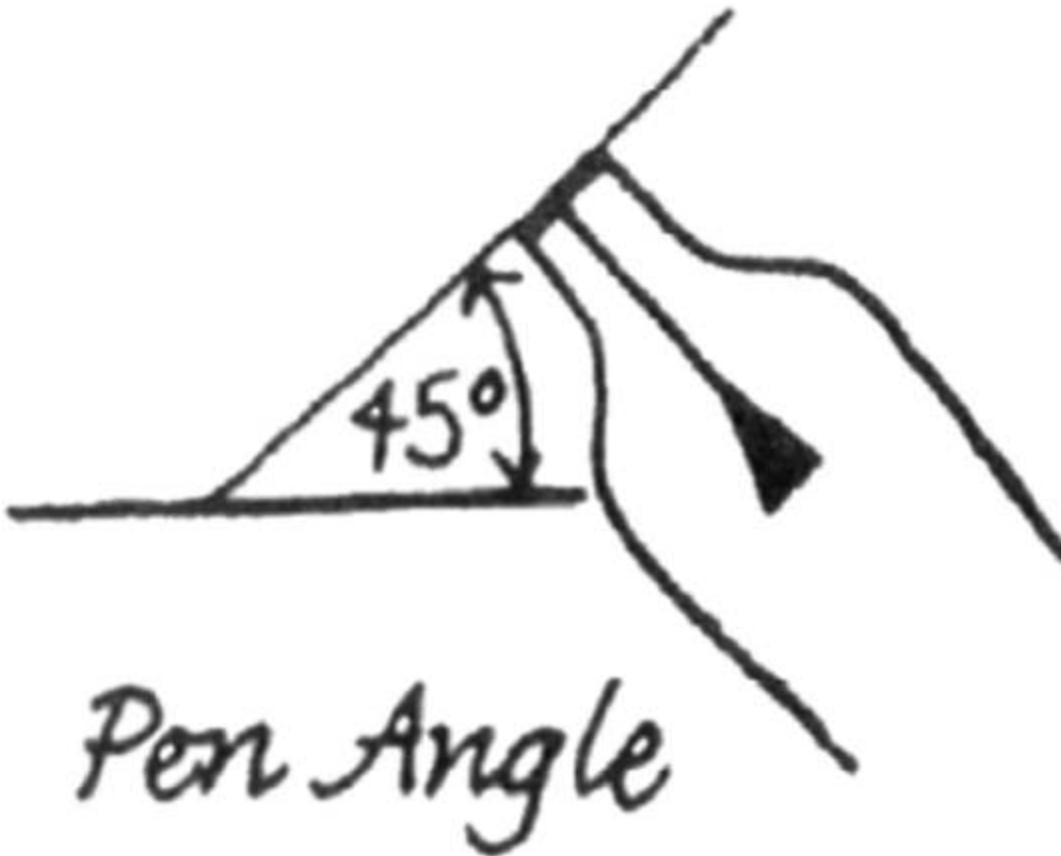


FIGURE 11-2: The angle for writing Blackletter.

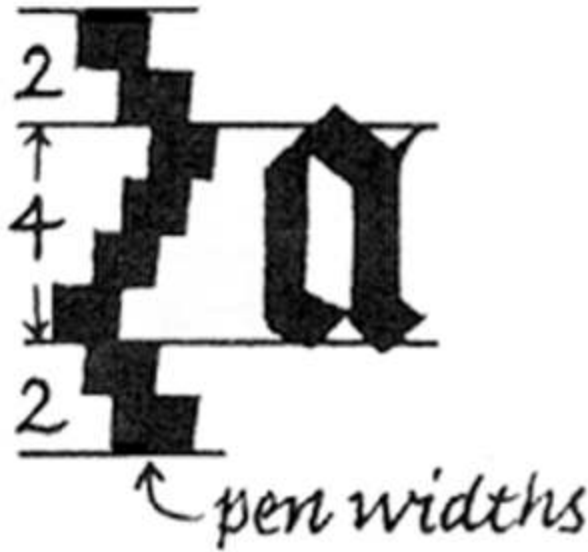


FIGURE 11-3: The height for Blackletter.



TIP

If you use one of the pens that I recommend in the preceding list for this alphabet, your nib is the right size for doing the practice exercises in this chapter.

Boning Up on the Basic Strokes of Blackletter

You make the lowercase letters of the Blackletter alphabet by using just seven basic strokes; and actually, only three of those strokes are *primary basic strokes*, the main ones used in almost all the letters. You use the remaining four strokes, known as *secondary basic strokes*, in only a few instances.

Drawing the three primary basic strokes

[Figure 11-4](#) illustrates the three primary strokes essential to craft lowercase Blackletter letters. These strokes form the basis of every letter in the alphabet, and you have to master them without errors. Because

you create each letter by combining these strokes in various ways, perfecting them ensures accurate lettering across the alphabet.

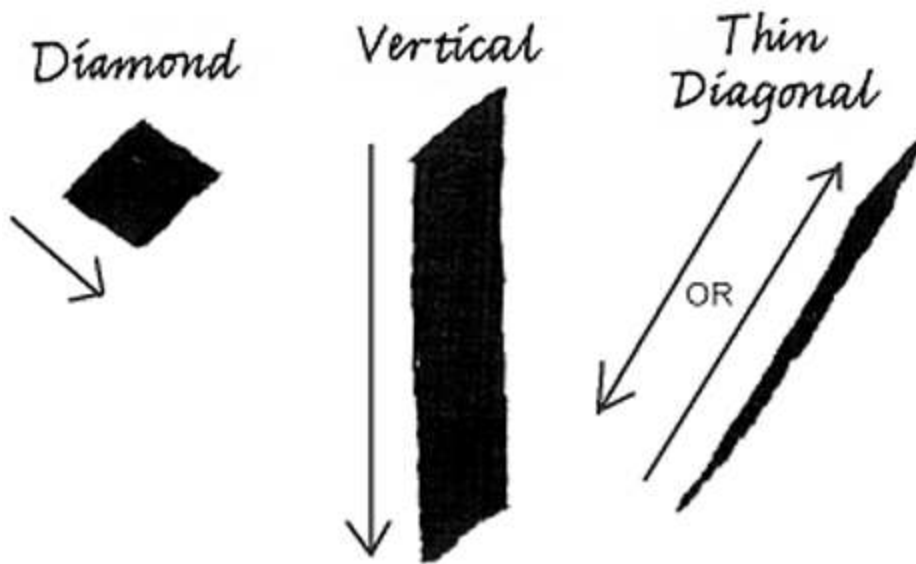


FIGURE 11-4: The three primary strokes.

Practice the three key strokes that form most of the lowercase Blackletter alphabet:

- » **The diamond:** Begin at the upper left corner of where you want to draw the shape and guide the pen diagonally downward and to the right at a 45-degree angle, stopping where you want the lower right edge to be.
- » **The vertical:** Position the pen at the stroke's top and pull straight down.
- » **The thin diagonal:** Create this stroke by sliding the pen one of two ways, either upward to the right or downward to the left, both at a 45-degree angle:





REMEMBER When you want to keep a stroke straight and even, it helps to take a breath and then exhale slowly while you make the stroke.

Perfecting the four secondary basic strokes

[Figure 11-5](#) highlights the four secondary basic strokes, which you use less frequently than the primary basic strokes (which I discuss in the preceding section). You need these secondary strokes to form a few specific letters, and you have to execute them accurately. Because these strokes are just as important to the structure of letters as the primary strokes, you must make them precise. It goes without saying, mastering the basic strokes ensures that you can create all the letters correctly.

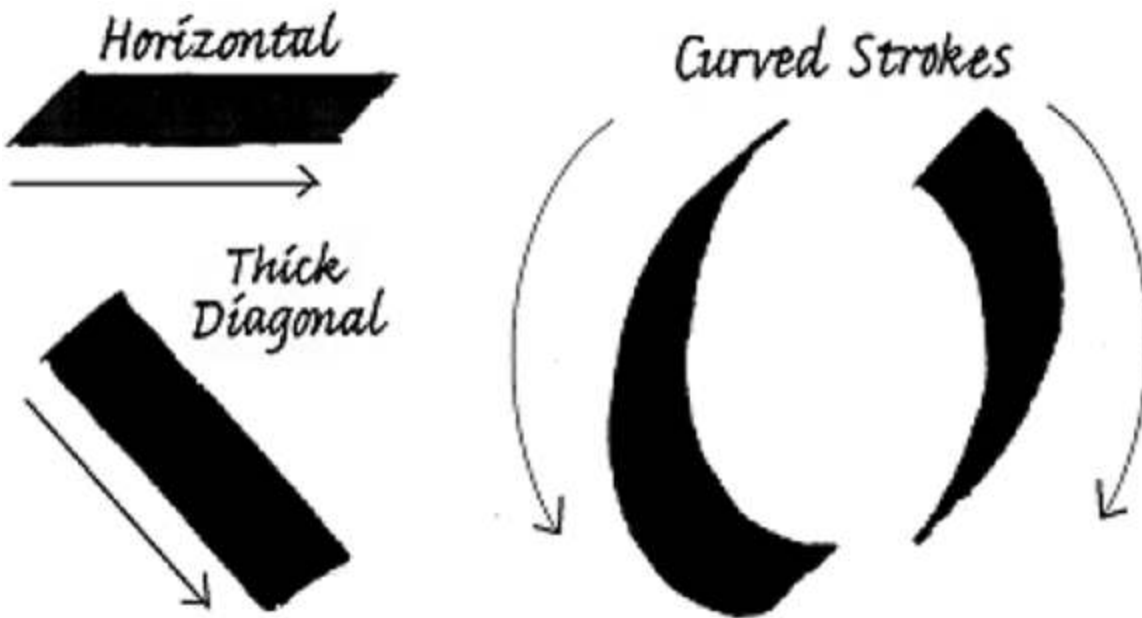


FIGURE 11-5: The four secondary strokes.

Practice the four secondary strokes with the following exercise:

- » **The horizontal:** Start at the left and move the pen straight across to the right.
- » **The thick diagonal:** Begin like you would for a diamond (see the preceding section), starting at the upper left of where the shape

begins and moving diagonally down to the right at a 45-degree angle. Instead of stopping after you draw a small diamond, extend it into a thick diagonal line.

- » **The two curved strokes:** Start at the top of where you want the stroke to begin and create half circles, one to the left and one to the right.



Combining the Basic Strokes for the Lowercase Alphabet

Mastering Blackletter requires combining the seven basic strokes discussed in “[Boning up on the Basic Strokes of Blackletter](#)” earlier in this chapter. As you draw each letter, your pen control and ability to maintain the correct angle will be tested. Developing proficiency in this alphabet not only sharpens your accuracy but also strengthens your overall calligraphy technique. (See [Chapter 3](#) for pen basics.) The more you refine your Blackletter skills, the more confident and precise all of your calligraphy will become.

In the following sections, I reference the guidelines that you use to make a calligraphy alphabet. See [Chapter 3](#) for a rundown on these guidelines.

As with the other alphabets presented in this book, I use the study, trace, and copy method to help you learn to do Blackletter. First, you study the examples that are printed black. Pay close attention to the sequence and direction of the strokes that are indicated by numbered arrows. Then, you can trace over the letters printed in gray; and finally, practice copying them freehand in the blank space provided.



HONING
YOUR SKILLS

Although you get a chance to practice each lowercase letter in the sections that follow, you can find an entire page of practice for these lowercase letters in the online Cheat Sheet, so you can practice to your heart's content. Just go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and press Enter; a link to the Cheat Sheet will pop up in the results.



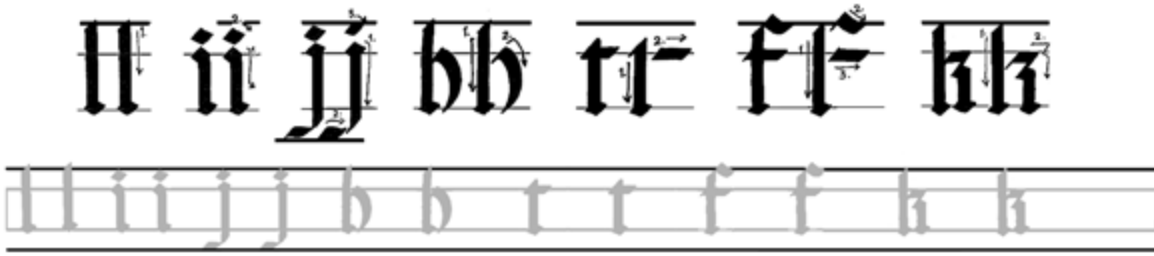
TIP

Instead of going through the lowercase letters in alphabetical order, I show them to you in groups according to their similar shapes and strokes. You can then practice and perfect similar strokes and end up writing an entire group of letters, rather than just one at a time.

Letters that have a main vertical stroke

This group of letters has a main vertical stroke. The letters (from simplest to the most complex) are *l*, *h*, *i*, *j*, *t*, *f*, and *k*.

Most Blackletter letters — 23 out of 26 — feature vertical strokes, but these seven stand out, having vertical strokes as the dominant feature. Start by mastering the *l* as a foundation (see the following section), but remember that each letter has unique traits that you must carefully observe. Refer to the examples at the top of the following trace-and-copy exercise for guidance. If you're a visual learner, you may intuitively follow the example; but if you're a verbal learner, consult the how-to descriptions in the following sections for precise instructions for each letter.



Going vertical with l

To draw the *l*, follow these steps:

1. **Begin at the ascender line and draw a vertical stroke downward almost to the base line.**
2. **Without lifting the pen, add a diamond directly below the line that you draw in Step 1.**

This diamond (which I explain in the section “[Drawing the three primary basic strokes](#),” earlier in this chapter) should rest right on the *base line*.

Curving into h

To make an *h* in two strokes, follow these steps:

1. **Make an *l*.**
2. **Lift the pen, and then add a curved stroke to the right side of the line that you draw in Step 1.**

Dotting your i

Draw an *i* in two strokes by following these steps:

1. **Make a diamond that sits on the waist line.**
2. **Without lifting the pen, add a short vertical directly below that diamond.**
3. **When you reach the base line, add another diamond.**
4. **Lift the pen and put a diamond on top as shown to make the dot on your *i*.**

Using three strokes for j

Make the *j* in three strokes by following these steps:

1. **Make a diamond that sits on the waist line, and follow it with a long vertical.**
2. **Draw a horizontal at the bottom of the line, which sits on the descender line.**
3. **Place a diamond at the top as shown for the dot.**

Crossing your t

Make the *t* in two strokes; follow these steps:

1. **Make a vertical that begins above the waist line and ends with a diamond on the base line.**
2. **Draw a horizontal that touches the waist line of the letter.**
Make the beginning of the stroke in line with the slant at the top of the vertical.

Simplifying your f

Follow these steps to draw the *f* in three strokes:

1. **Make an *l*.**
This letter consists of a vertical with a diamond at the bottom. (I explain how to draw it in the section “[Going vertical with l](#),” above.)
2. **Draw a short, thick diagonal at the top of the vertical.**
Make certain that the slant at the beginning of this stroke lines up with the slant at the top of the vertical.
3. **Draw a horizontal that touches and sits under the waist line.**
Start this line slightly to the left of the vertical and end it as shown.

Eyeing proportions in k

Make a *k* with two strokes by following these steps:

1. **Make a letter *l*.**

You draw this letter with a vertical and a diamond, as described in the section “[Going vertical with 1](#),” earlier in this chapter.

2. **Lift the pen and make a short horizontal that fits under the waist line.**
3. **At the end of the horizontal, slide the pen down diagonally to the left to make a thin diagonal.**
4. **Add a short vertical and a diamond at the bottom.**

This stroke ends directly on top of the base line.



TIP

To draw the *k* correctly, fit all the parts together in the right proportions. Many people make the second stroke (which has four parts) too big for the rest of the letter. Practice making all the parts of the second stroke the correct size.

Letters that have an o shape

The letters in this group are: *o*, *a*, *b*, *d*, *g*, *q*, and *p*.

All of these letters have an *o* included somewhere within them. After you know how to make the *o* (see the following section), you can start to make these other letters; but you need more than an *o*, you need to know the individual characteristics of each letter. Look at the examples in the following study-trace-and-copy exercise to see how to make each of these letters. You can also refer to the following sections, which have how-to step lists for each letter.



Getting around with o

Follow these steps to make the *o*.

1. **Make a vertical that begins right under the waist line and ends before you get to the base line.**

2. **Add a diamond.**

Make this diamond almost long enough to be a thick diagonal.

3. **Lift the pen and make a diamond attached to the top of the vertical.**

Make the left corner of this diamond touch the upper-right corner of the vertical that you draw in Step 1.

4. **End the stroke that you start in Step 3 by drawing a vertical.**

Try to place the stroke so that the white space remaining inside the letter is exactly the same width as the verticals that you make with the pen. The vertical should end so that the lower-left corner touches the right corner of the diamond that you made in Step 2.



TIP Most people run into problems when they try to make the *o* shape: drawing leaning verticals instead of straight ones, giving the white space an incorrect width, or not properly forming the top and the bottom where the strokes join.

Starting with a

Make the *a* in three strokes by following these steps:

1. **Draw a short vertical that begins and ends slightly inside the guidelines as shown.**

2. **Without lifting your pen, add a diamond to the bottom of it.**

3. **Lift the pen and add a diamond near the top of the vertical as shown.**

4. **Lift your pen again, and then add a short, thin diagonal to the right side of the top diamond.**

5. **Without lifting the pen, add a vertical below the top diamond.**

6. **Finish your stroke by putting a diamond at the bottom of the second vertical.**

Adding diamonds for b

Follow these steps to draw a *b* with two strokes:

1. **Make an *l*.**

This letter has a long vertical ending with a diamond. (See the section “[Going vertical with l](#),” earlier in this chapter, for instructions.)

2. **Lift your pen and make a diamond that touches the right side of the vertical at a point just below and touching the waist line.**
3. **Add a short vertical that touches corner-to-corner with the diamond at the bottom of the vertical you made in Step 1.**

Going short for d

Make the lowercase *d* in two strokes by following these steps:

1. **Draw a vertical that begins under the waist line and ends before you get to the base line.**
2. **Add a diamond.**

You begin just like when you draw the *o* and *a*. (See the section “[Getting around with o](#),” earlier in this chapter.)

3. **Lift your pen and, beginning at the ascender line, make a long thick diagonal that ends just past the waist line.**
4. **Not lifting your pen, follow the diagonal in Step 3 with a vertical that touches the diamond at the bottom, corner-to-corner.**

Using four strokes to draw g

Draw the lowercase *g* in four strokes. Just follow these steps:

1. **Make a vertical that begins below the waist line with a diamond at the bottom that sits on the base line.**

2. **Lift the pen and make a diamond that connects to the top of the vertical from Step 1.**

3. **After drawing the diamond in Step 2, make a thin diagonal followed by a vertical.**

Steps 1 through 3 are the same steps for drawing the *a*. (I talk about drawing an *a* in the section “[Starting with a](#),” earlier in this chapter.)

4. **Continue the vertical all the way down to the descender line.**

5. **Lift the pen, and then make a horizontal along the descender line that meets the vertical at the bottom.**

Ending with a surprise: q

Follow these steps to make the *q* in three strokes (it’s almost exactly like the *g*, discussed in the preceding section, with a slightly different ending):

1. **Make a vertical line and a diamond.**

In this step, you draw an *l* (see the section “[Getting vertical with l](#),” earlier in this chapter).

2. **Lift your pen and make a diamond at the top of the vertical line that you draw in Step 1.**

3. **Lift your pen, and then make a thin diagonal line adjoining the diamond you made in step 2.**

Continue all the way down to the descender line.

4. **End the stroke by drawing a short horizontal to the left of the vertical.**

Connecting verticals in p

You use three strokes to make the *p*. Just follow these steps:

1. **Make a diamond and a long vertical.**

You use the same procedure that you do to begin the *j* (see the preceding section for instruction on drawing a *j*).

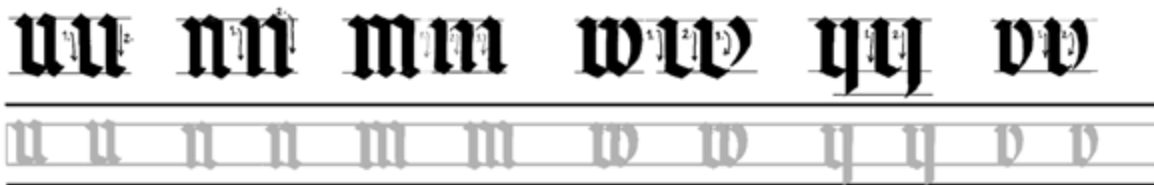
2. **Lift the pen, and then make a second diamond immediately to the right of and touching corner-to-corner with the diamond at the top.**
3. **Continue the stroke with a vertical that ends above the waist line.**
4. **Lift your pen, and then make a horizontal from the left side of the long vertical to the short vertical.**

Starting just to the left of the long vertical of the first stroke and resting on the *base line*, make a horizontal that ends at the corner of the short vertical of the second stroke.

Letters that have a u or n shape

You draw the letters *u*, *n*, *m*, *w*, *y*, and *v* in two or more strokes. Check out the *u* and *n* shape in the following section to get the feel for this group.

All the other letters in this group have either a *u* or an *n* included somewhere within them. Look at the examples in the following trace-and-copy exercise to see the strokes that you use to make each of these letters. I provide how-to instructions for each letter in the following sections if the examples don't make things clear enough.



Gathering your diamonds with u and n

Make the *u* by following these steps:

1. **Make a diamond that touches the waist line.**
2. **Continue into a vertical down to just above the base line.**
3. **Make another diamond.**

Make this diamond a tiny bit longer than the diamond you draw in Step 1 so that it's almost a short, thick diagonal.

- 4. Lift your pen, and then, starting at the top again, make another diamond.**

Position this diamond a very short distance away from the diamond that you draw in Step 1.

- 5. Add a vertical.**

- 6. Finish with a diamond that touches the diamond that you draw in Step 3.**

Have these diamonds touch corner-to-corner at the bottom.

Make the n by following these steps:

- 1. Make a diamond that touches the waist line.**
- 2. Continue into a vertical down to just above the base line.**
- 3. End the stroke with a diamond that sits on the base line.**
- 4. Lift your pen, and then make a diamond that touches corner-to-corner the diamond at the top of the vertical that you draw in Step 1.**

Make this diamond a tiny bit longer than the diamond from Step 1, making it like a short, thick diagonal.

- 5. Continue the stroke by adding a vertical.**
- 6. Finish by placing a diamond level with the diamond that you draw in Step 3.**

Make sure this diamond doesn't touch the diamond from Step 3.

Doubling up with m

You can make the m in three strokes by following these steps:

- 1. Draw an n .**

See the preceding section for instructions.

2. **Immediately to the right of the second stroke of the *n*, add another stroke exactly like the second stroke.**

Going for a w

Follow these steps to make the *w* in three strokes:

1. **Make a *u*.**

I describe drawing a *u* in the section “[Gathering your diamonds with u and n](#),” earlier in this chapter.

2. **Make a curved stroke that begins at the waist line and ends at the corner of the bottom-right diamond.**

Piecing together strokes to make the y

Make the *y* in two strokes by following these steps:

1. **Make a diamond that touches the waist line.**
2. **Continue into a vertical to the base line.**
3. **Add a diamond at the end of the vertical.**

Make the diamond in this step a tiny bit longer than the one you make in Step 1, almost a short, thick diagonal.

The first stroke that you make in Steps 1 through 3 is the same as the first stroke of a *u* (see the section “[Gathering your diamonds with u and n](#),” earlier in this chapter).

4. **Make a diamond immediately to the right of the diamond that you draw in Step 1.**
5. **Continue with a long vertical down to the descender line.**

Make certain that the vertical touches the corner of the diamond that you draw in Step 3 while it passes by.

Steps 4 and 5 mirror the first stroke of a *j* (which you can read about in the section “[Using three strokes for j](#),” earlier in this chapter).

Drawing a v in two strokes

Follow these steps to make the *v* in two strokes. The first stroke is like the first stroke of a *u*, and the second stroke is like the last stroke in a *w*:

1. **Begin by making a diamond that touches the waist line.**
2. **Continue into a vertical.**
3. **Add a diamond at the end of the vertical.**

The vertical should end at the base line.

Steps 1 through 3 are the same as you use to make the first stroke of a *u* (see the section “[Gathering your diamonds with u and n](#),” earlier in this chapter).

4. **Lift your pen, and then make a curved stroke that begins at the waist line and ends at the corner of the diamond that you drew in Step 3.**

This step is like the last stroke in a *w*, which I talk about in the section “[Going for a w](#),” earlier in this chapter.

Open-sided letters & the unique letters

Three letters in this section — *c*, *e*, and *r* — all have open sides.

The other three letters *s*, *x*, and *z* are unique and don’t really fit into any of the categories in the preceding sections. I’ve included them here mainly to save space (and possibly so they won’t feel weird or neglected).



Opening with a c

You make the *c* in two strokes. Just follow these steps:

1. **Make a vertical from below the waist line to above the base line.**

2. **Without lifting your pen, add a diamond to the bottom of the vertical you draw in Step 1.**
3. **Still without lifting your pen, add a thin diagonal to the right of the diamond you just drew in step 2.**
4. **Lift the pen, and then add a diamond near the top of the vertical that you make in Step 1.**

Make this diamond just a tiny bit longer than a regular diamond.

Going diagonal with e

Use two strokes to make the *e* by following these steps:

1. **Make a vertical from below the waist line to above the base line.**
2. **Without lifting your pen, add a diamond to the bottom of the vertical.**
3. **Include a thin diagonal to the right of the diamond that you draw in Step 2.**
4. **Lift the pen and add a diamond near the top of the vertical that you make in Step 1.**

Steps 1 through 4 are exactly the steps you use to draw a *c* (see the preceding section).

5. **End the stroke with a thin diagonal moving leftward from the bottom right of the diamond to the center of the vertical.**

Drawing an r

You make the *r* in two strokes. Follow these steps:

1. **Make a diamond at the waist line.**
2. **Continue into a vertical.**
3. **At the base line, add a diamond at the end of the vertical.**
4. **Lift the pen, and then join a short horizontal onto the top diamond corner to corner.**

Snaking an s

You draw the *s* in four strokes; just follow these steps:

1. **Make a curved stroke that begins at the waist line and ends halfway to the base line.**
2. **Without lifting your pen, add a thin diagonal to the end of the stroke that you begin in Step 1.**
3. **Without lifting your pen, make a clockwise that ends at the base line.**
4. **Lift your pen, and then add a diamond to the left of the previous stroke and sitting on the base line.**
5. **After lifting your pen, add a short horizontal to the top of the letter.**

Marking the spot with x

You make the *x* in three strokes by following these steps:

1. **Make a clockwise curved stroke that starts at the waist line and ends at the base line.**
The curve should be vertically aligned so the end point is directly under the beginning point.
2. **Lift your pen, and then make a second curved stroke counterclockwise so it goes in the opposite direction of the first.**
Make this stroke overlap in the middle the stroke that you made in Step 1.
3. **After lifting your pen, add a diamond to the top of the second stroke.**

Ending with z

By following these steps, you can make the *z* in two strokes:

1. **Begin with a thin diagonal from roughly a pen width beneath the waist line up to the waist line.**

2. Continue with a horizontal that follows the waist line slightly more than the width of a diamond.
3. Without lifting your pen make a thin diagonal down to the base line.
4. Lift your pen and make another horizontal that follows the base line to a point that is directly under the right end of the horizontal you drew in Step 2.
5. End with a short thin diagonal upward less than a pen width.
6. Lift your pen, and then draw a horizontal through the middle that is approximately the width of the letter.

Drawing the whole lowercase alphabet



TIP

Sometimes you can more easily place the strokes correctly if you begin and end with a small, thin diagonal that gives you a starting and stopping place. For example, if you end a diamond at the bottom of the first stroke by adding a small, thin diagonal, you have a stopping place for your second stroke.



Moving On to Capital Letters

Blackletter didn't come with capital letters originally. Medieval scribes weren't slacking — they had a clever solution: big, fancy letters called *versals*. These beauties adorned the start of verses, and the scribes

sketched, inked, and dressed them up with paint and gold leaf. Want to know how to make your own? Hop over to [Chapter 14](#) for a crash course.

Nowadays, you can't just skip capital letters — what if someone needs a certificate and you're stuck without them? Luckily, [Figure 11-6](#) has your back, showcasing a modern take on Blackletter capitals. These stylish capitals are 5 to 6 pen widths tall, and I group them in the following sections based on letter shapes to make things easy for you.



FIGURE 11-6: Capital letters for the Blackletter alphabet.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

I give you a chance to practice each capital letter in the sections that follow, where you can trace the gray letters and copy them in the blanks provided. But you can find more practice exercises for these capitals in the online Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com. Just enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box and click the Search button. A link to the Cheat Sheet will appear in the results.



REMEMBER

If you look at Blackletter alphabets in other books, you can probably find some capital letters different from the ones that I

show in the following sections. The explanation is simple — a standard set of capitals for Blackletter just doesn't exist.

Flag-flying capitals

Most of the capitals in the Blackletter alphabet begin with a vertical stroke — the *pole* — above which you make a horizontal stroke — the *flag*. You also add a *barb* (a small curved stroke that begins with an upward thin diagonal that transitions into a very short horizontal) on the side of the pole (see [Figure 11-7](#)). Most of the capital letters (see 17 of them in the practice exercise below) have this feature.

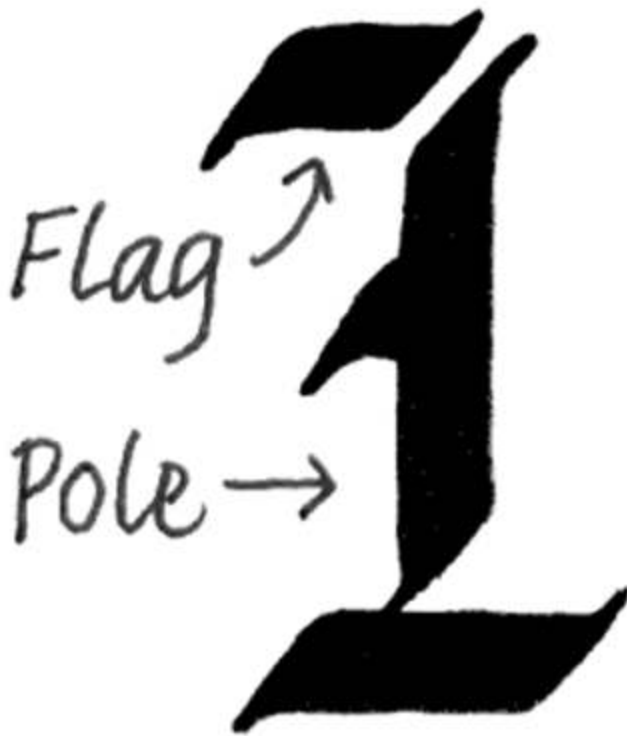


FIGURE 11-7: The capital *I*, complete with a flag flying on a pole.

You make the basic element of these 17 capital letters — the flag flying from the pole — by following these steps:

1. **Draw a long vertical stroke downward from a point halfway between the ascender line and the waist line to the base line.**

This step creates the pole.

2. **Add a horizontal stroke at the bottom.**

This line creates a *foot*.

3. **Lift your pen, and then add a horizontal stroke near the top of the vertical from a point directly above the left side of the foot to within a millimeter of the top of the vertical (pole).**

Don't let this stroke touch the vertical that you draw in Step 1.

This step creates the flag.

4. **Lift your pen, and then add a short, curved stroke to the left side of the vertical at the vertical's center point to create the barb.**



TIP

Make certain that you don't slant these letters. If you have difficulty keeping the letters from slanting, lightly pencil in the vertical strokes before you use a pen to make the final letters.

Practice below the 17 letters in this group.



The circular capital letters

This group includes five letters — *C*, *G*, *O*, *Q*, and *T*. All these capitals have curved strokes. Just check out the first stroke on the capital *C* in

[Figure 11-8](#) to see what I mean — all of the circular capital letters share this curved stroke.

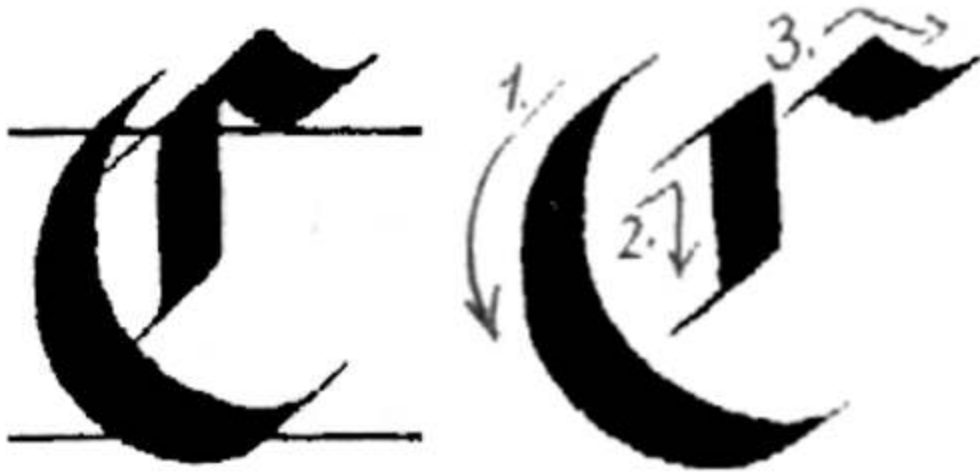


FIGURE 11-8: The curved stroke of a capital C.

The curved-stroke capitals are pretty straightforward, as you can see in the following practice exercise. However, here are some tips for creating these capital letters:

- » Try to visualize where you want the curved stroke to go before you make it.
- » Make the stroke all in one motion and at an even speed. Smooth and steady is the way to do it.
- » Don't be discouraged if at first the curved stroke seems too difficult. With practice, you can eventually get it right.

The following practice gives you a chance to try the circular capital letters. Trace the gray letters and copy them in the space provided.



The group of group-less capitals

These four capitals — *A*, *S*, *X*, and *Z* — don't really fit in the groups in the preceding sections. Each of these letters is unique, as you can see in [Figure 11-9](#).



FIGURE 11-9: The capitals *A*, *S*, *X*, and *Z*.

Look at the following models for these capitals. Then alternately trace and copy in the practice area provided.



Nudging Forward to Numerals

Because this alphabet originally had no Arabic numerals (when scribes developed Blackletter, people still used *Roman numerals*, which are letter representations of numbers), the set of numbers in [Figure 11-10](#) is my own creation. Not to toot my own horn, but I believe these numbers go with this alphabet extremely well.



FIGURE 11-10: Blackletter numerals.

Here are some tips for making these numbers:

- » Make the numbers the same height as the capital letters.
- » Keep the strokes angular. Avoid too many round shapes.

- » Follow the sequence and direction of the strokes shown in the examples.

Practice tracing and copying in the space below.



Stringing Together Blackletter Letters

If you feel comfortable making all the letters of the Blackletter alphabet (if not, see the sections earlier in this chapter), you can begin to practice putting these letters together in words. See [Figure 11-11](#) for an example.

Academy Bureau Club Dept.

FIGURE 11-11: Words done in Blackletter.

When stringing the letters together to make words, keep the following in mind:

- » Keep the letters close enough together so that the white spaces between them aren't much wider than the black strokes that make the letters.
- » Make the space between words equal to the width of the letter *o*.
- » Keep both the letters and the words dense and compact.



HONING
YOUR SKILLS

In the exercise below, trace over the gray letters. Then see whether you can copy them within the lines directly below those letters. This exercise is just the beginning, though. The online Cheat Sheet has an extended exercise that gives you a chance to practice stringing together all the lowercase and capital letters of the Blackletter alphabet. Go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and press Enter. A link to the Cheat Sheet will appear in the results.

Academy Bureau Certificate Department

Chapter 12

Italic: The Renaissance of Elegance

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding the Italic alphabet
 - » Practicing the shapes of the lowercase letters
 - » Using a calligraphy pen to draw the Italic alphabet
 - » Making Italic capital letters
 - » Improving your calligraphy and checking for errors
-

The Italic alphabet, often called *Chancery* or *Chancery Cursive*, is a practical yet elegant style of writing. Emerging during the Italian Renaissance, it became widely used across European society — from official documents to personal letters. Even Leonardo da Vinci wrote a version of the Italic alphabet.

In this chapter, I guide you through the Italic lowercase letters and share techniques for using a calligraphy pen to create their graceful shapes. You also get to add the Italic capital letters to your repertoire. Most people find mastering this very popular style easiest if they separate letter formation from pen techniques, so that's what I do in this chapter.

Taking Baby Steps to Mastering the Italic Alphabet

Here's the process that I recommend you follow when you begin working with the Italic alphabet:

- » **Start by practicing letter shapes without a calligraphy pen.** Use a broad-tip marker (a 1–2 mm tip works well), such as a ZIG Writer so that you can concentrate exclusively on the shapes of the letters.
- » **Move on to using a calligraphy pen.** By practicing the shapes separately first, you avoid the frustration of simultaneously perfecting letters and controlling the pen.

By breaking the process into these two discrete parts, lettering the Italic alphabet becomes smoother and more enjoyable. With patience and practice, the Italic alphabet can provide you a rewarding and versatile foundation for exploring many other alphabets.

Introducing the Italic Alphabet

Any aspiring calligrapher should know the Italic alphabet because it is

- » **Popular and versatile:** Italic is the most popular alphabet among modern calligraphers. It's not only elegant but also suits almost any occasion, from formal certificates to personal notes. Its variations are so iconic that many people equate the Italic alphabet with calligraphy itself.
- » **Practical and rapid:** Because it's relatively quick to write, compared to other alphabets, the Italic alphabet is a practical option for calligraphy that you don't have time to slave over.
- » **Beginner-friendly:** Most people find the Italic alphabet easier to write than the other calligraphy alphabets because it closely resembles everyday handwriting. It also offers both a printed (*calligraphic*) and cursive (*handwritten*) form, making it incredibly adaptable.

The name *Italic* has an intriguing history. Although today the term often refers to slanted text in word processing, its roots trace back to the Italian Renaissance. During this period, Italic calligraphy emerged in Italy — hence the name.

Around the same time, early printers needed a typeface to emphasize words within text. They adopted the immensely popular Italic alphabet for this purpose. Back then, Italic calligraphy and italicized printed text were identical. Over time, the printed version evolved into slanted forms of vertical fonts, but the original connection to the Italic alphabet remained.

To get a better idea of what I'm talking about, check out a sampling of the Italic alphabet yourself — just take a look at [Figure 12-1](#).

*We are happy to announce the arrival of
Mikhail Earnest Adams, born 11-18-05.*

FIGURE 12-1: A sentence that uses the Italic alphabet.

It's All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families

So that you can easily get acquainted with the Italic alphabet, I group the 26 lowercase letters into six families based on their similar shapes and strokes. Practicing letters in these groups rather than in alphabetical order be more effective.

You create most of these letters in a single stroke without lifting the pen, although a few need two strokes.



REMEMBER Proportion is key when drawing Italic lowercase letters. The most common mistake is making them too tall or too wide.

These letters should fit within a slightly right-leaning parallelogram, with a width roughly two-thirds of its height. As you draw, keep this shape in mind — see [Figure 12-2](#) for guidance.

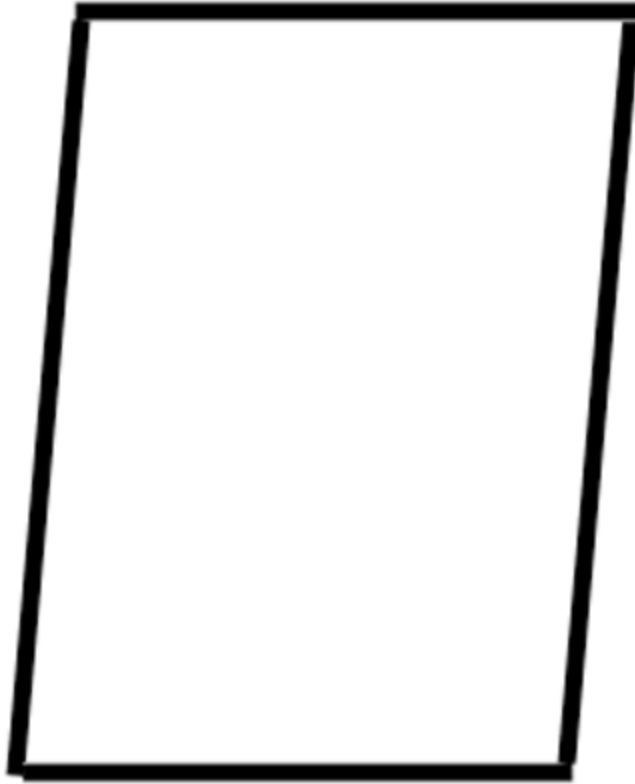


FIGURE 12-2: Visualize this parallelogram when drawing lowercase Italic letters.

In the practice exercises offered in the followings sections, first study the examples drawn in black. Then trace over each letter drawn in gray. Copy the letter freehand in the space provided to the right of each letter.

Pull-down letters (the *l* shape)

The pull-down letter family is the easiest to master. You build each of the five letters — *i*, *l*, *j*, *f*, and *t* — around a single pull-down stroke.

Before you practice these letters, focus on the pull-down stroke (see [Figure 12-3](#)). Pay attention to the slant and observe how the stroke begins at the top line and ends at the bottom line.



FIGURE 12-3: The pull-down shape.



TIP

Don't worry if making these letters feels awkward at first — you feel that way simply because it's new. Relax, go slowly; with practice, it gets easier.

Start by examining the letters based on the pull-down stroke in the following practice. Study the black examples, trace over the gray ones, and then practice drawing them freehand in the spaces between.

Keep in mind the following:

- » Look closely at how the letters sometimes begin and end with small tails, called *serifs*.
- » The *i* and *j* have dots that resemble small dashes.
- » The *f* and *t* include a horizontal crossbar.
- » The *t* is short, with its crossbar starting where the serif begins at the top of the first stroke.



TIP

Go slowly and keep your pull-down strokes straight and evenly slanted. Avoid curving them and maintain a uniform slant.



Pull-down, bounce-over letters (the n shape)

The pull-down, bounce-over letter family includes seven letters: *n*, *m*, *r*, *h*, *b*, *k*, and *p*. Each letter begins with a pull-down stroke, followed by a *bounce-over* — an upward swing to the right. See [Figure 12-4](#) for an example of the stroke.



FIGURE 12-4: The pull-down, bounce-over shape.

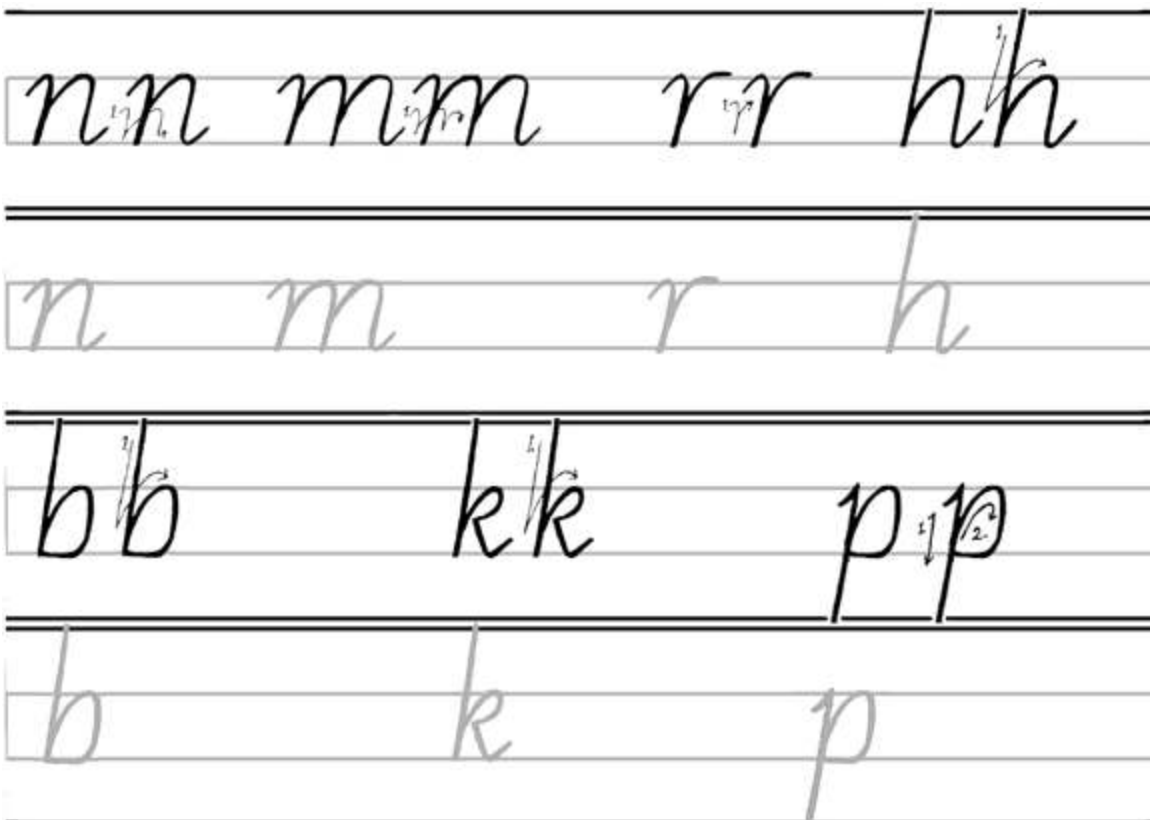
The bounce-over part of the stroke branches off from the pull-down part about halfway up. Try to make all the branching off in your letters happen at the halfway point.



REMEMBER When making the letter *p*, use two strokes instead of one. If you draw it in a single stroke, the long staff of the letter appears thicker

and darker than the rest, which doesn't look good. Creating the *p* in two strokes ensures better consistency.

Study, trace, and copy in the following space.



Pull-down, swing-under, pull-down letters (the u shape)

This family is very similar to the pull-down, bounce-over family I discuss in the preceding section. These letters begin with a vertical stroke, but instead of bouncing up and over, the stroke continues in a curve upward and to the right (see [Figure 12-5](#)). The letters that have this kind of stroke are the *u*, *y*, *a*, *g*, *q*, and *d*.



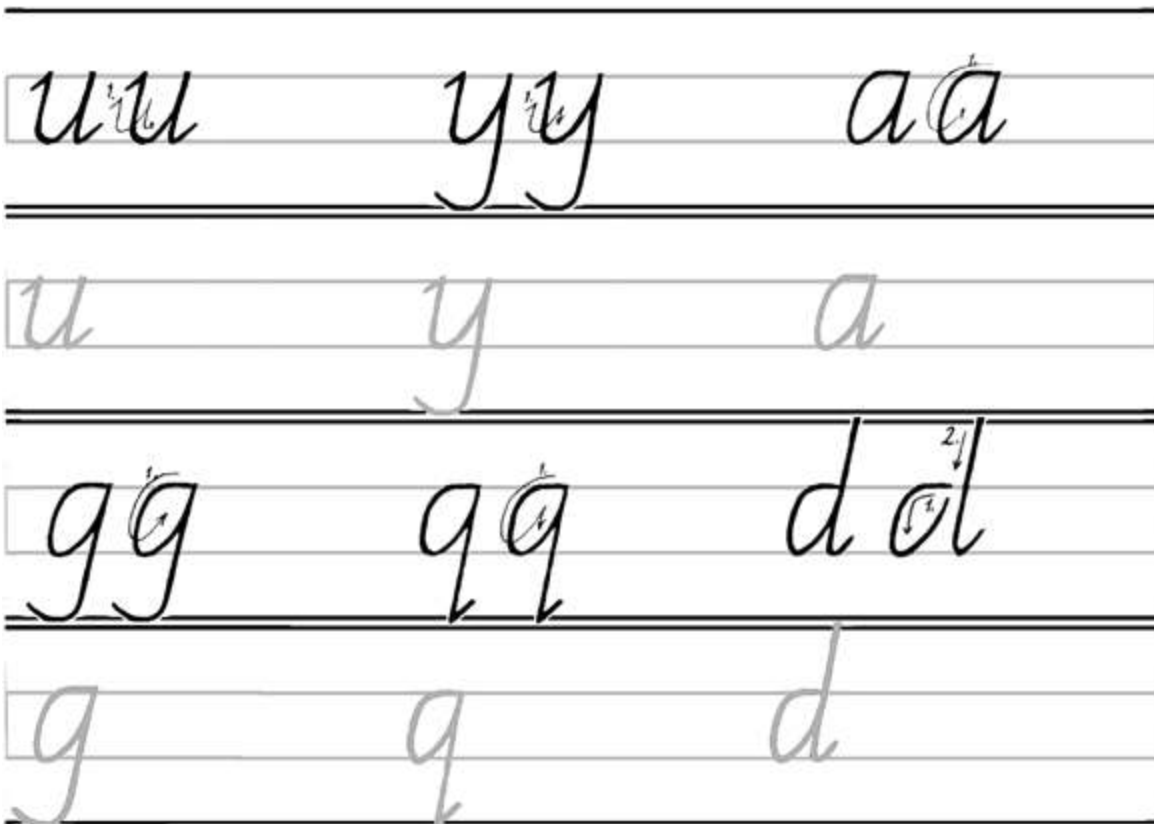
FIGURE 12-5: The pull-down, swing-under, pull-down shape.

Before you practice these letters in the following exercise, examine how you make each letter. In particular, note that you make the *d* in two strokes.



REMEMBER At first, you may not think that you need to make the letter *d* in two strokes, but here's why it matters: When using a calligraphy pen, making the staff as a separate stroke prevents it from looking too thick and dark — just like with the letter *p* (see the preceding section).

Now, practice each letter in the following exercise.



Oval letters (the o shape)

Only three letters belong in the oval letter family — *o*, *c*, and *e*. As you can see in [Figure 12-6](#), the stroke that you use to make oval letters is, well, oval.



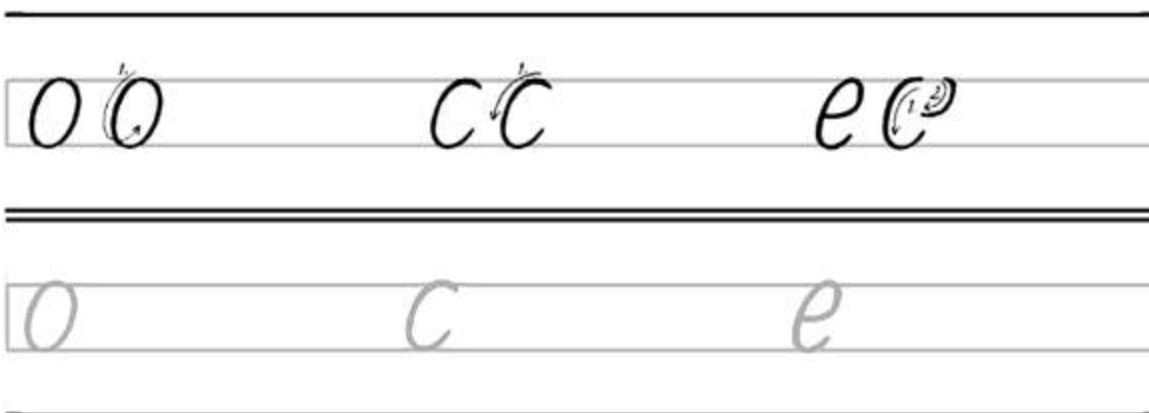
FIGURE 12-6: The oval shape.

You may feel the urge to use a circle while you practice drawing the oval shape, but keep the emphasis on oval.



TIP

You make the *e* in two strokes. You don't strictly need to draw it this way, but it does make it easier to draw the correct shape. For that reason, most calligraphers prefer to make the *e* in two strokes.



X letters (the x shape)

Only three letters belong in the X letter family: *x*, *s*, and *z*. You make these letters by using diagonals (see [Figure 12-7](#)).



FIGURE 12-7: Drawing the X shape.

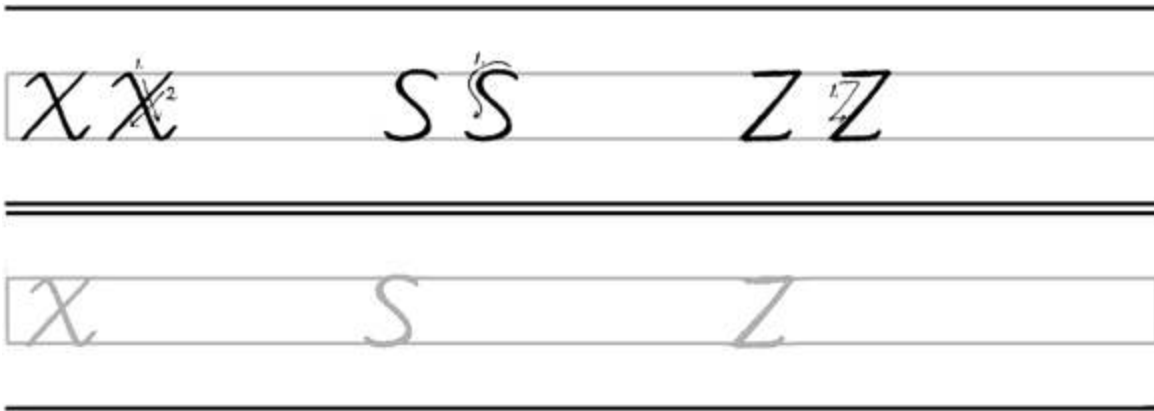


TIP

To get the proportions right, fit the *x* inside a slanting parallelogram. If you draw the slanting parallelogram (refer to

[Figure 12-2](#)) and then connect the corners diagonally, you have the *x* shown in [Figure 12-7](#).

These letters have straight diagonals — even the *s*. Most people don't normally write an *s* with a straight diagonal across the middle, but that's how you make the Italic *s*. Practicing can help you get the feel for it.



V letters (the v shape)

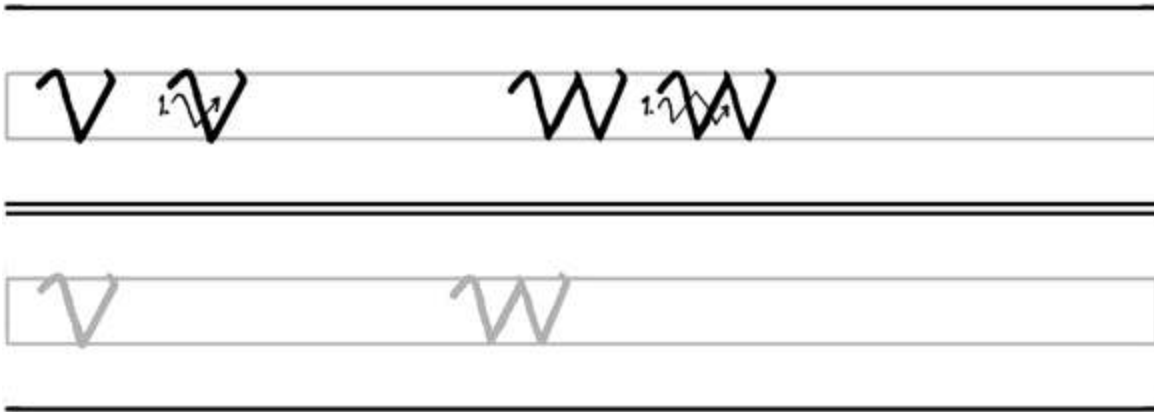
Only two letters fall in the V-letter family: *v* and *w* (see [Figure 12-8](#)).



FIGURE 12-8: The *v* shape.

To get these letters right, make sure that you draw the sides of the *v* straight, not curved.

Practice these two letters in the following exercise.



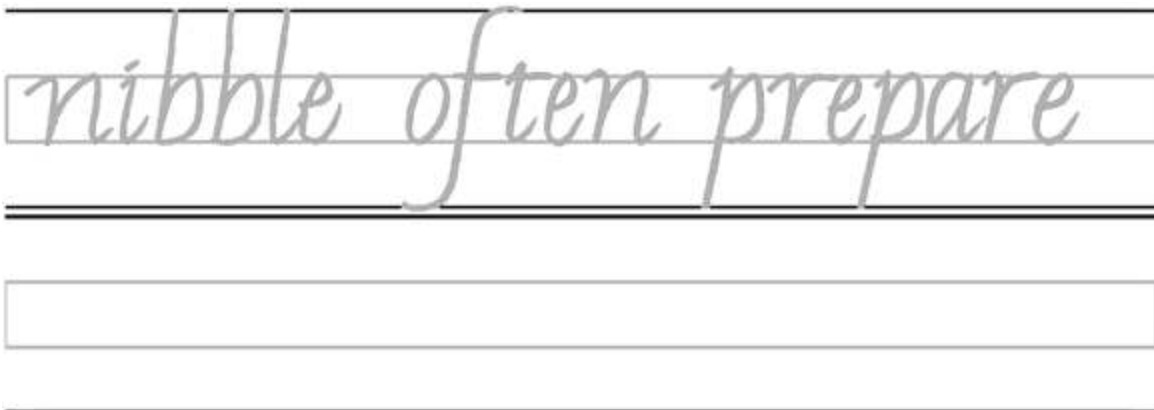
Putting Together What You Know to Make Letters and Words



HONING
YOUR SKILLS

In the Practice Pages available online at

www.dummies.com/go/calligraphyfd2e, I give you more opportunities to practice these lowercase letters. To access the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and then press Enter. A link to the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet will appear in the results. But you can also give it a whirl right now by tracing the following gray letters and copying each letter in the space below.





**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

In the online Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet, I give you more opportunities to practice these lowercase letters. To access the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and then press Enter. A link to the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet will appear in the results.

Doing Italic with a Calligraphy Pen

For this section, you need a fountain pen that has a 2B nib (which measures 1.5 mm). (See [Chapter 2](#) for information about the types of pens and nibs and [Chapter 3](#) to get started using one.)



REMEMBER Before using a fountain pen, get confident with the Italic letter shapes and strokes. Calligraphy builds on foundational skills, much like math, so take your time and don’t rush the process. If you want to get more comfortable with the shapes and strokes, see the section [“It’s All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families,”](#) earlier in this chapter.

Getting the pen angle for the Italic alphabet right

Two important elements for doing any calligraphy alphabet accurately are

- » Holding your pen at the correct angle
- » Getting the right shape for your letters

I explain how to do both in the following sections — don’t worry, I’m sure you’ll do great.

Getting your angle right

To create elegant thicks and thins in your Italic letters, you need to hold your pen at the correct angle. The correct pen angle ensures that you can properly control your strokes, giving your calligraphy balance and beauty.

To review the details of pen angle, see [Chapter 3](#).

Achieving the ideal pen angle for the Italic alphabet is surprisingly simple because you maintain one constant position for all the letters. The pen angle is always 45 degrees — a position that feels quite natural to most people.



REMEMBER To do Italic, you don't twist and turn the pen this way and that. You hold it in one constant position while the hand and arm move it on the paper.

[Figure 12-9](#) illustrates the correct angle for right-handers. The pen doesn't point directly back toward you, nor does it jut out to the side. Imagine the back of the pen pointing just past your right shoulder.

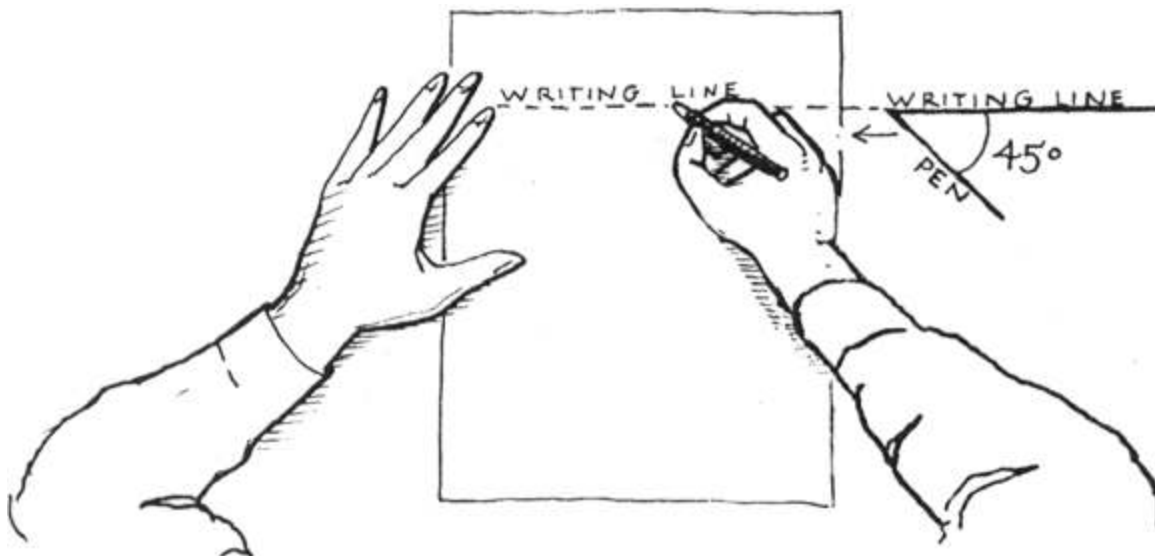


FIGURE 12-9: The correct pen and hand position for a right-handed person.

If you're left-handed, please see the information specifically for lefties in [Chapter 2](#).

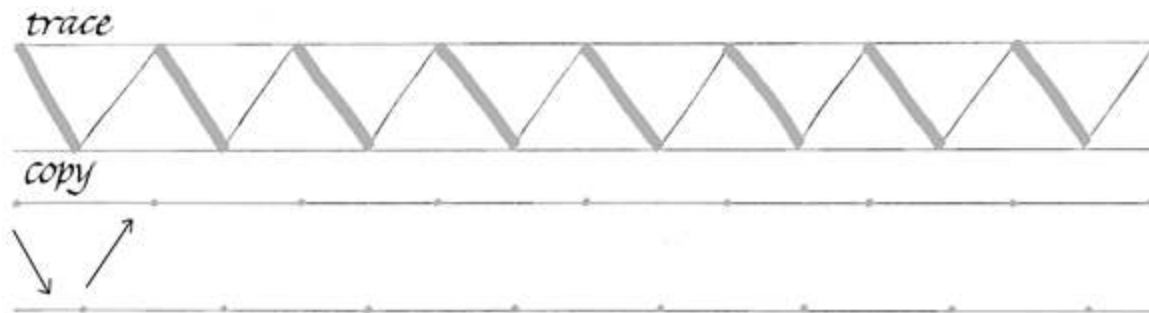
Practicing the pen angle

The correct pen angle to draw the Italic alphabet enables you to make a zigzag design where the thicks and thins alternate (see [Figure 12-10](#)).



FIGURE 12-10: Zigzag design.

Trace the following zigzag and copy it by connecting the dots in the space provided.



Perfecting the pen angle

Hold your pen in the same position that enabled you to make the zigzag (see the preceding section), and make plus signs, with the horizontal and the vertical strokes equal in thickness. And if you hold the pen correctly, the beginnings and endings of these strokes should be slanted at exactly 45 degrees. (See [Figure 12-11](#).)

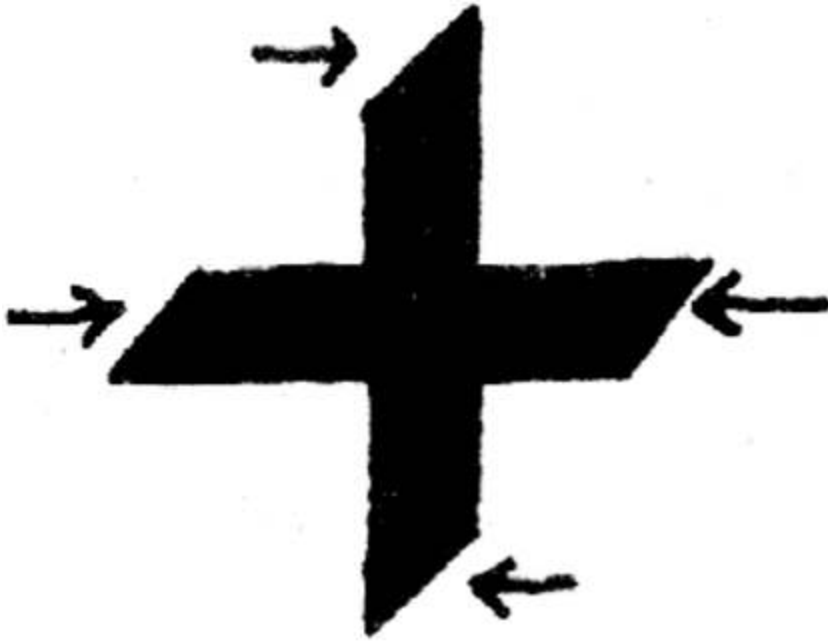


FIGURE 12-11: The plus sign.

Trace over the plus signs that appear in gray in the following exercise, and after each one, draw a plus sign freehand in the blank space to the right of each gray plus sign. Make sure you hold the pen at the correct angle to get those 45-degree slants. Practice until you get the slants just right.



Trying the six basic shapes

After you feel confident that you have the correct pen angle (see the preceding sections), try your hand at the basic shapes for the Italic letters by using your fountain pen. (You can read more about the basic shapes in the section “[It’s All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families](#),” earlier in this chapter.) First, look at the examples that are drawn in black. Then trace over the gray shapes and copy them in the blank spaces.



TIP

You absolutely must master the correct pen angle if you want to write the Italic alphabet. Without the proper angle, your efforts won't give you the results you want.

If you don't use the correct pen angle, return to this section and practice until it becomes second nature. Take your time — don't move on until you're confident that you mastered this skill. It's the foundation of everything Italic-alphabet related.

Reading between the lines — pen widths

The spaces between the guidelines for the Italic alphabet are equal to 5 pen widths (check out [Chapter 3](#) for a more complete discussion of guidelines). To measure the precise distance between the lines, turn the pen sideways and make five little marks, one on top of the other, like a stack of little bricks (see [Figure 12-12](#)).

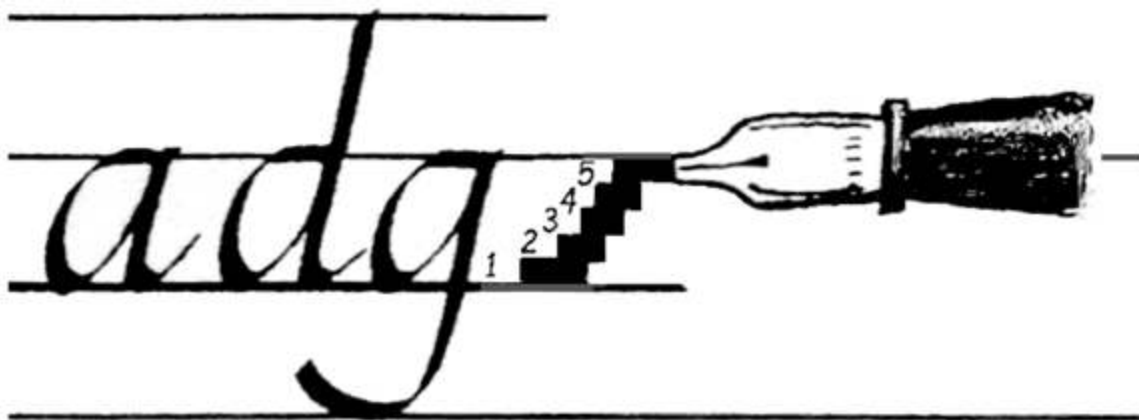


FIGURE 12-12: The distance between the lines for this style is 5 pen widths.



REMEMBER When working with guidelines, don't write your letters inside the lines. Instead, place your strokes just slightly on top of them. If you examine the tops of the letters *a* and *g* in [Figure 12-12](#), you can see that they rest gently on the lines, rather than being confined within them.

The golden rule here is to write on the guidelines, allowing your strokes to gracefully cover them — without straying too far beyond. Precision matters, but don't be too hard on yourself if your strokes occasionally wander. (I'll admit — my own letters tend to stretch past the lines now and then!)

Drawing Lowercase Italic Letters with a Calligraphy Pen

The tails that you make at the beginnings and endings of some of the lowercase Italic alphabet letters are called *serifs*. Letters in the Italic alphabet have three kinds of serifs (or no serifs at all). Make sure that you use the correct serifs with each letter:

» **Pointed:** Six of the letters have serifs that are pointed (see [Figure 12-13](#)): *i*, *j*, *p*, *t*, *u*, and *y*.



FIGURE 12-13: Letters that begin with a sharply pointed serif.

- » **Elbow:** Another six letters begin with elbowlike serifs: *m*, *n*, *r*, *v*, *w*, and *x*. These serifs look like elbows because they begin with a straight line, then they curve, and then they go straight again (see [Figure 12-14](#)).



FIGURE 12-14: Letters that begin with elbowlike serifs.

- » **Elbow curve:** The serifs that appear at the ends of many of the letters are elbow curves (see [Figure 12-15](#)). These letters are *a*, *d*, *h*, *i*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *t*, *u*, and *x*.
- » **None:** Nine letters have no serifs at all — *b*, *c*, *e*, *f*, *g*, *o*, *q*, *s*, and *z*.



FIGURE 12-15: The serifs at the ends of letters are elbow curves.

Some the letters have just one serif, some have two, and some have none.



WARNING Round serifs really don't work on the Italic alphabet (see [Figure 12-16](#)); they mess up the beautiful rhythm and flow of the Italic letters. Stay away from round serifs!

wrong

FIGURE 12-16: Round serifs are all wrong for Italic!

The serifs at the ends of letters are always curved like an elbow. The serifs at the beginnings of letters can be either elbows or sharp angles. The pull-down letters (see the section “[Pull-down letters \(the l shape\)](#),” earlier in this chapter) and the pull-down, swing-under, pull-down letters (discussed in the section “[Pull-down, swing-under, pull-down letters \(the u shape\)](#),” earlier in this chapter) have pointed-angle serifs.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

Practice by studying, tracing, and copying the letters in the following exercise.

Hold your pen at a steady 45-degree angle as you trace the gray letters, then copy them in the space below. You can also trace and copy words to refine your technique.

For additional lowercase letter practice, visit www.dummies.com and search for “Calligraphy For Dummies.” Look for the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet in the search results.

animals buffalo canary dog

Making Italic Capital Letters

Many of the capital letters in the Italic alphabet begin with a shape that I call the *ear*. Also, many of them have a shape that I think looks like a *foot*. [Figure 12-17](#) shows what they look like.

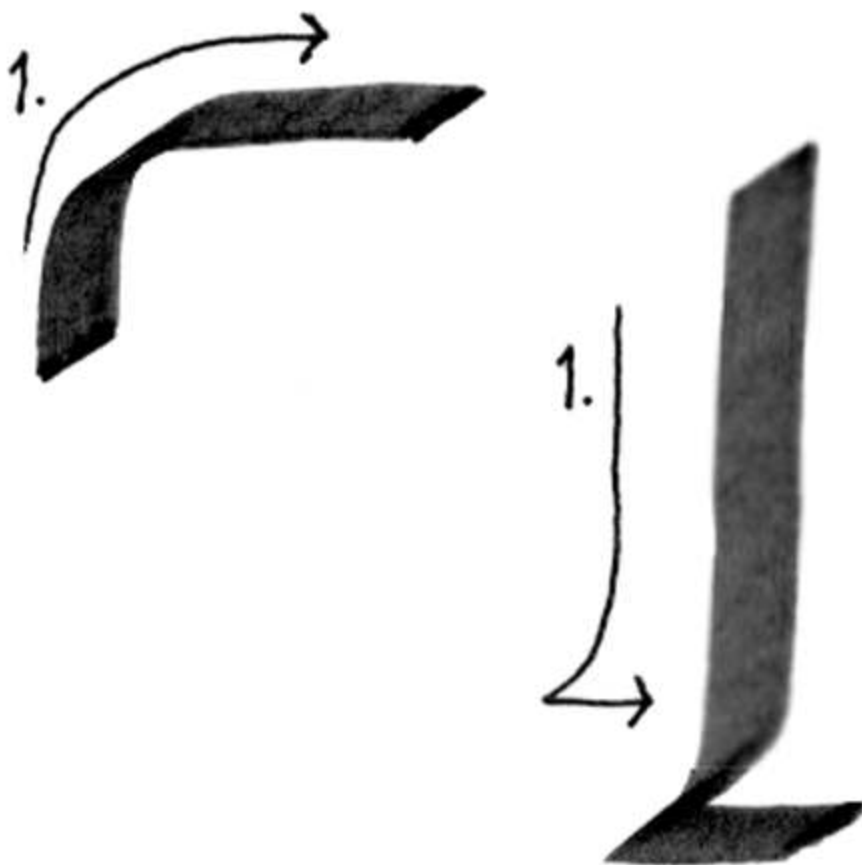


FIGURE 12-17: The ear (left) and foot (right) shapes.

Practice these two shapes by first studying the example in [Figure 12-17](#) and then tracing the shapes below drawn in gray. Finally copy them in the blank spaces provided. When you practice, compare the shapes that you make to the examples in [Figure 12-17](#). Be especially careful when you practice these shapes to keep the straight parts straight and the thin parts thin.



One fascinating aspect of the Italic alphabet is the unique height of the capitals. Unlike ascenders, which reach higher, the tops of capital letters sit midway between the waist line and the ascender line. (See [Chapter 3](#) for more on guidelines.)

Begin by carefully studying the large example in black of each capital letter, noting the little numbers and arrows that indicate the sequence and direction of each stroke. Tracing over the example with your finger can help you understand the letter's structure and flow.

After you feel comfortable with the formation, trace the gray letters and then copy each letter in the provided space. This repetition can build muscle memory and refine your technique.



REMEMBER Keep an eye on your pen angle throughout this process, and always make sure that the tops of the capitals align halfway between the ascender line and the waist line.



FF GG HH II JJ

F G H I J

KK LL MM NN OO

K L M N O

PP QQ RR SS TT

P Q R S T

UU VV WW XX

U V W X



Combining Italic Lowercase and Capital Letters

You can practice lowercase letters in Italic with your calligraphy pen in the section “[Drawing Lowercase Italic Letters with a Calligraphy Pen](#),” earlier in this chapter, and capital letters in the preceding section. Put them together by tracing the words below and copying them in the space provided.





HONING
YOUR SKILLS

For more information about how to draw the capital letters presented in this chapter, see [Chapter 8](#), which is all about the Roman letters. For additional practice in Italic, use the exercises I provide in the online Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com, enter “Calligraphy For Dummies” in the Search text box, and press Enter. The link to the Practice Pack with Cheat Sheet will appear on the page of results.

Writing Italic Numbers and Punctuation

To build confidence with the vital elements of numbers and punctuation (and while I’m on the subject, remember to maintain your consistent 45-degree pen angle), carefully study the following examples. Pay close attention to the numbered strokes and directional arrows — they guide you in creating each shape.

Trace over the examples in gray, and then copy them repeatedly below the gray items.



Checking Yourself with the 5-S Formula

The 5-S Formula (see [Chapter 6](#)) is a powerful tool for assessing your mastery of calligraphy. It focuses on stroke, shapes, slant, size, and spacing — fundamental principles you can apply to any alphabet in this book. Use this formula to identify areas for improvement.



REMEMBER Although this chapter emphasizes Italic, the 5-S Formula can guide your review across all alphabets in this book. It lets you compare your work not only to the provided samples but also to clear, practical guidelines.

Reviewing the Most Common Errors in Italic

In the following sections, I show you the most common errors that calligraphers face when they work with the Italic alphabet. Each illustration shows you an error — and if you see something familiar, don't worry, I let you know how to correct it.

Droopy a shapes

[Figure 12-18](#) shows incorrect *a* shapes — the tops of their bowls are too angled, and the bottoms too rounded. To fix this, make the tops flatter and the bottoms sharper (see the section “[It's All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families](#),” earlier in this chapter, for correct shapes). To illustrate, the sketches of the sad and happy girls in [Figure 12-29](#) show the error and the correction. The happy girl, poised with a book on her head, represents the correct shape.



FIGURE 12-18: Droopy *a* shapes.

Spiky letters

In [Figure 12-19](#), the calligrapher has made narrow curves too pointed, so the letters appear sharp and spiky. Although less problematic than the droopy *a* problem (see the preceding section), it can still cause issues — for instance, the *n* and *u* may look too similar. To fix this issue, avoid sharp angles and use smoother, narrower curves.



FIGURE 12-19: Spiky letters.

Fat and rounded letters

The letters in [Figure 12-20](#) appear too fat and rounded, making them excessively wide for the Italic alphabet. You can easily fix this common mistake: Just make sure that the body of each letter fits within a tilted parallelogram, as I explain in the section “[It’s All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families](#),” earlier in this chapter.



FIGURE 12-20: Fat and rounded letters.

Rounded arches

The letters in [Figure 12-21](#) are overly wide, with the arches of the *m* and *n* too rounded. These shapes, created by using the pull-down, bounce-over technique (see the section “[Pull-down, bounce-over letters \(the n shape\)](#),” earlier in this chapter, should be narrower, with the bounce-over parts branching off from the pull-down parts about halfway up. In this example, the branching occurs too close to the top.



FIGURE 12-21: Rounded arches.

Crooked pull-down strokes

In [Figure 12-22](#), the pull-down strokes in the three letters have inconsistent slants. To fix this issue, ensure that you slant all pull-downs equally to make them parallel. (I talk about pull-down strokes in the section “[Pull-down letters \(the l shape\)](#),” earlier in this chapter.)



FIGURE 12-22: Crooked pull-down strokes.

Branching too high or too low

The bounce-over parts of the shapes in [Figure 12-23](#) branch off incorrectly — either too high or too low. (I discuss the way to do a bounce-over in the section “[Pull-down, bounce-over letters \(the n shape\)](#),” earlier in this chapter.) Start the branch halfway up the downstroke. In each pair of examples, the left letter demonstrates too-high branching, and the right letter shows too-low branching.



FIGURE 12-23: Branching too high (left) or too low (right).

Gaps in letters

In [Figure 12-24](#), three letters have open spaces where their shapes should be closed. This error can occur in any letter that has a closed shape, with gaps appearing at the top or bottom. To correct this issue, consciously complete every letter, leaving no gaps where strokes should connect.



FIGURE 12-24: Gaps in letters.

Badly shaped e's

You can see three common errors in making the letter *e* in [Figure 12-25](#). The second stroke should move horizontally when joining the first stroke at the center. From left to right, the second stroke is slanted, joins too low, and connects too high.



FIGURE 12-25: Badly shaped e's.

Badly shaped s's

[Figure 12-26](#) illustrates three common mistakes in forming the letter “s.”

The first example shows that the middle is curved instead of a straight diagonal (see the earlier section “[It’s All in the Family — Six Simple and Easy Letter Families](#)” for the correct method). The second and third examples show top and bottom of the different sizes.

To create a proper *s*, make the middle a clean diagonal and make the tops and bottoms equally balanced.



FIGURE 12-26: Badly shaped *s*'s.

Badly shaped t's

Three common errors in forming the letter *t* include (as illustrated in [Figure 12-27](#), from left to right):

- » The letter is too tall, and the crossbar doesn't start at the serif's top point.
- » The crossbar is too low and overly long.
- » The crossbar starts correctly but is too long.

To avoid these mistakes, focus on achieving the right height and positioning the crossbar properly.

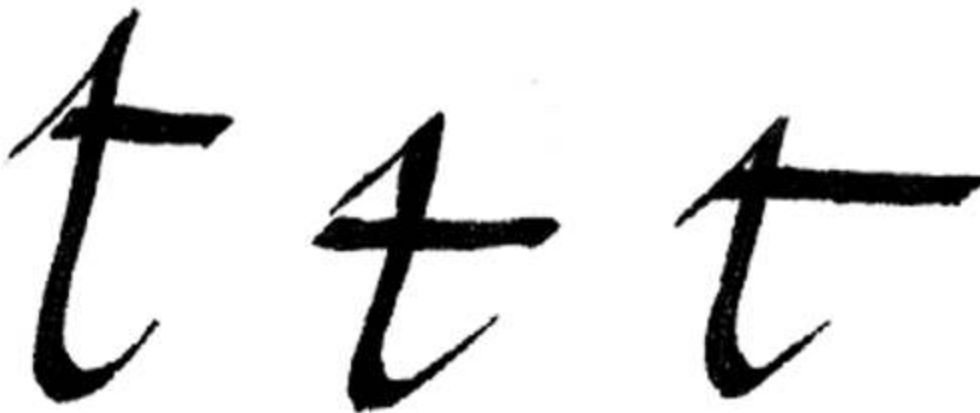


FIGURE 12-27: Badly shaped *t*'s.

Errors in capitals in the first half of the alphabet

Here are the common errors in letter proportions and shapes for capital letters *A* through *K*, as shown in [Figure 12-28](#) (the left and right examples for each letter):

- » *A*: Too wide (left); too narrow, with unevenly angled sides (right)
- » *B*: Too wide (left); has an oversized bottom and a too-small top (right)
- » *C* and *D*: Too narrow
- » *E* and *F*: Too wide
- » *G*: Too narrow
- » *H*: Too wide (left); has nonparallel sides (right)
- » *K*: Too wide (left); has curved legs that should be straight (right)



FIGURE 12-28: Errors in capital letters in the first half of the alphabet.

More errors in capitals

The following are common errors in letter proportions and shapes for letters *L* through *T* (see [Figure 12-29](#)):

- » *L*: Too wide; it should be half as wide as it is tall
- » *M*: Has a middle *v* shape that's too short and doesn't touch the base line (left); poorly proportioned, the two halves should be equal (right)
- » *N*: Too wide (left); too narrow (right)
- » *O*: Too narrow; make *O* a wide letter
- » *P*: Too wide (left); too narrow (right)
- » *R*: Too wide, with a curved *leg* that should be straight
- » *T*: Too wide (left); too narrow (right)

L M M N N O P P R S T T

FIGURE 12-29: More errors in capitals.

Errors in capitals: U through Z

For the capital letters U through Z, [Figure 12-30](#) demonstrates common proportion errors:

» *U*: Too wide

» *V, X, Y, and Z* (in pairs): Too wide (left); too narrow (right)

U V V X X Y Y Z Z

FIGURE 12-30: Errors in capital letters U through Z.



TIP

For guidance on the ideal proportions of the Italic capitals, look at the Roman alphabet in [Chapter 8](#). Roman and Italic capitals share the same proportions, although their style and execution differ.

Roman capitals are upright and structured, with strong vertical strokes and well-defined serifs. Italic capitals, although maintaining the same proportions, lean forward with a more fluid, dynamic quality, giving them an elegant, calligraphic rhythm.

Understanding this relationship ensures consistency in letterforms and also allows each style's unique expression.

Chapter 13

Copperplate: The Art of Flourished Perfection

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting your Copperplate toolkit ready
 - » Getting a handle on how to create the lowercase letters
 - » Creating the capital letters
 - » Putting the punch on punctuation and numerals
 - » Spacing letters from each other appropriately
-

Copperplate? What on earth do plates made of copper have to do with calligraphy? Well, the name makes sense after you know the history: Copperplate — also called engraver's script, engrosser's script, or English Roundhand — dates back to the 16th century and remained the dominant style of lettering until the 19th century. This elegant script mimics the handwriting that was painstakingly engraved into copper plates for printing.

You'll recognize it from

- » Historic documents like the U.S. Declaration of Independence
- » Diplomas and formal certificates

This is what sets it apart:

- » Ornate, flowing letterforms
- » Requires a special oblique pen
- » Emphasizes dramatic thick and thin letter strokes

There are good reasons why you should learn it:

- » It is visually stunning and deeply satisfying to practice.
- » It is less commonly mastered today — a mark of distinction.
- » Mastery can elevate your skills and recognition.

In this chapter, I show you how to use the special oblique pen needed for Copperplate. I guide you through the technique for creating thick and thin strokes, first mastering ten foundational strokes for lowercase letters, and then advancing to capitals, numbers, and punctuation. Finish with practice exercises to help you write Copperplate like a pro.

Cozying Up to Copperplate

Copperplate is distinct from the other alphabets in this is distinct from the other traditional alphabets, so no prior experience is needed to begin. If you have practiced other styles, your familiarity with tracing, copying, and attention to detail will give you a head start. For a preview, see [Figure 13-1](#).



FIGURE 13-1: The Copperplate alphabet.

Unlike other styles that rely on pen angle, Copperplate achieves its signature contrast through varying pen pressure. It also calls for a unique writing tool — the oblique pen (see [Figure 13-2](#) and [Chapter 3](#) for details). In the following sections, I guide you through the nuances of

this elegant style: the strokes, the flourishes, and the finer points that define Copperplate.

Using the special oblique pen

The oblique pen has the point mounted at an angle on the side (see [Figure 13-2](#)). This odd-looking arrangement makes it easy for you to control the slant and to make the long strokes that are characteristic of this style.

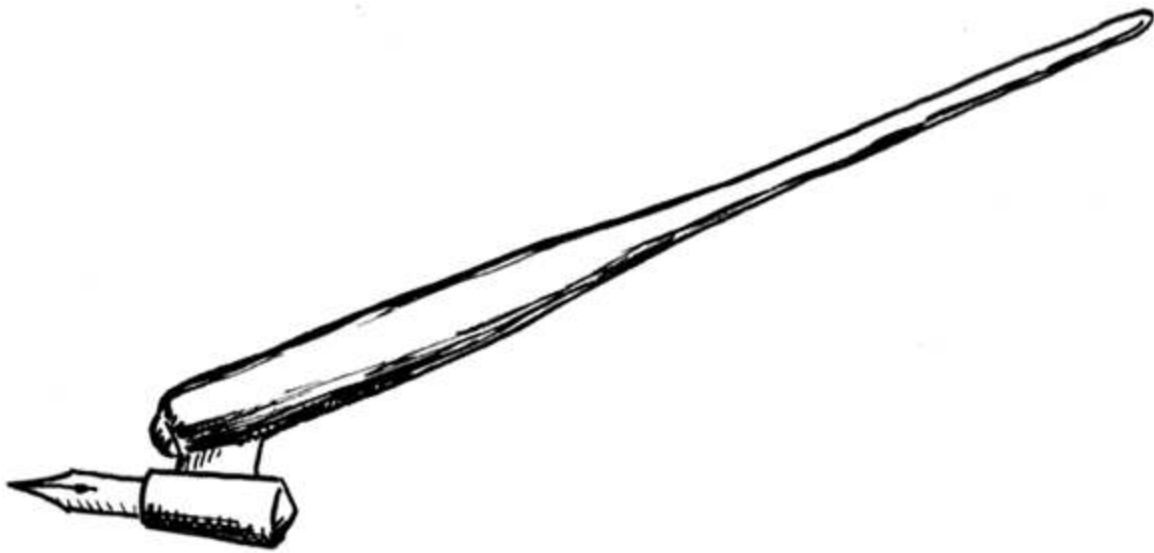


FIGURE 13-2: The oblique pen.



REMEMBER To write Copperplate, you need a specially prepared ink. I use Higgins Eternal (a carbon-based ink) mixed with about a dozen drops of gum Arabic, or $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon if using powdered form. The gum Arabic thickens the ink and adds surface tension, helping it to cling to the pen point and produce clean, bold downstrokes. Without it, thin ink can break into droplets when you apply pressure to the pen and the nib spreads open.

Angles and slants

Copperplate letters have a slant of between 30 and 40 degrees from the vertical. Most calligraphers use a 36-degree slant, and that's the angle

that I use in this chapter (see [Figure 13-3](#)).

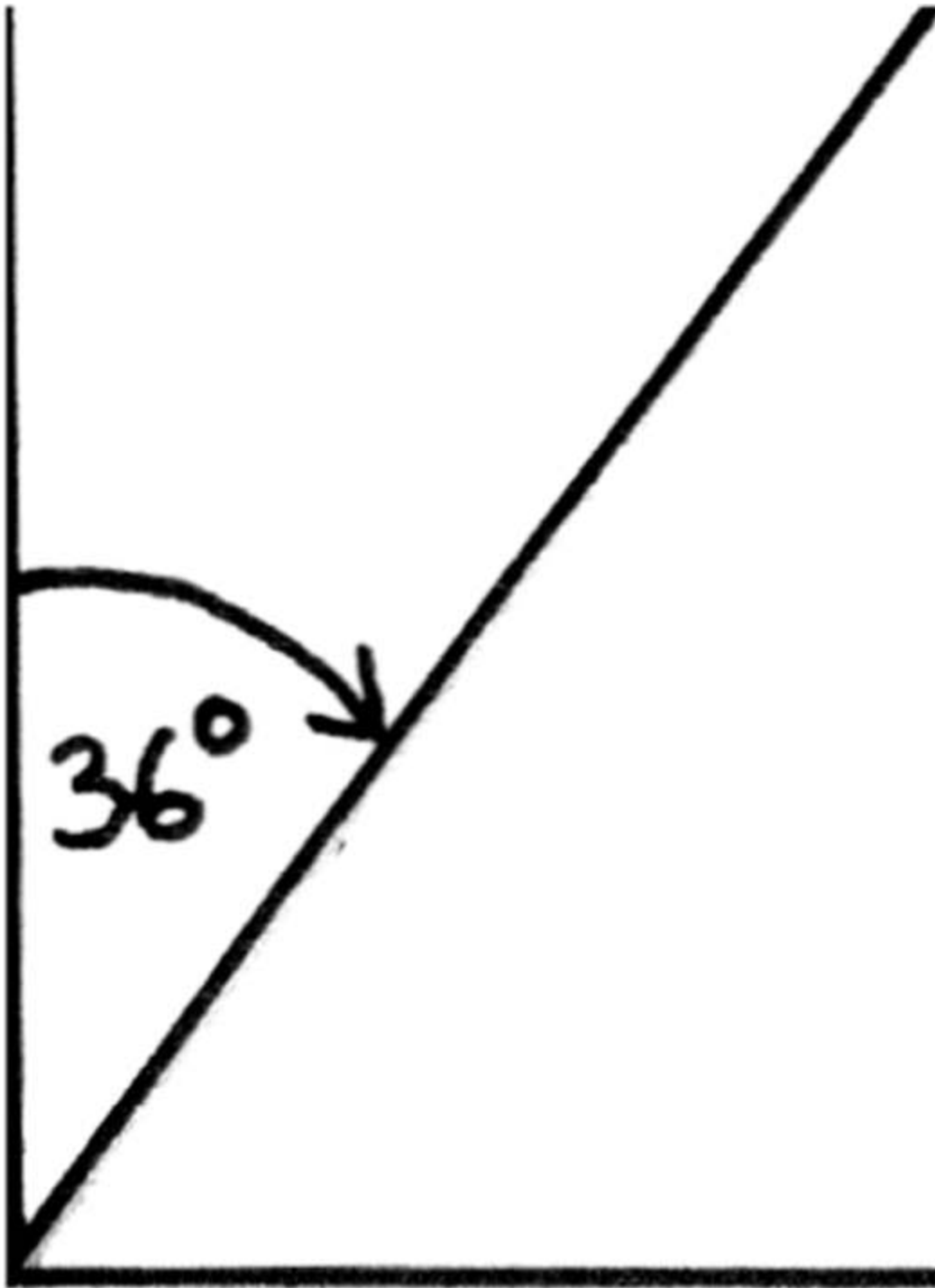


FIGURE 13-3: The 36-degree slant.

If you want to use the 36-degree slant, have slant lines that you can follow, in addition to the regular guidelines. (I cover guidelines in

[Chapter 3](#).) You can draw the slant lines at the correct angle by simply drawing a diagonal on a rectangle that's 3 units wide and 4 units tall (see [Figure 13-4](#)).

Holding your pen

Hold your pen in a comfortable writing position and turn the page under your hand so that your pen lines up perfectly with the pen in [Figure 13-5](#).

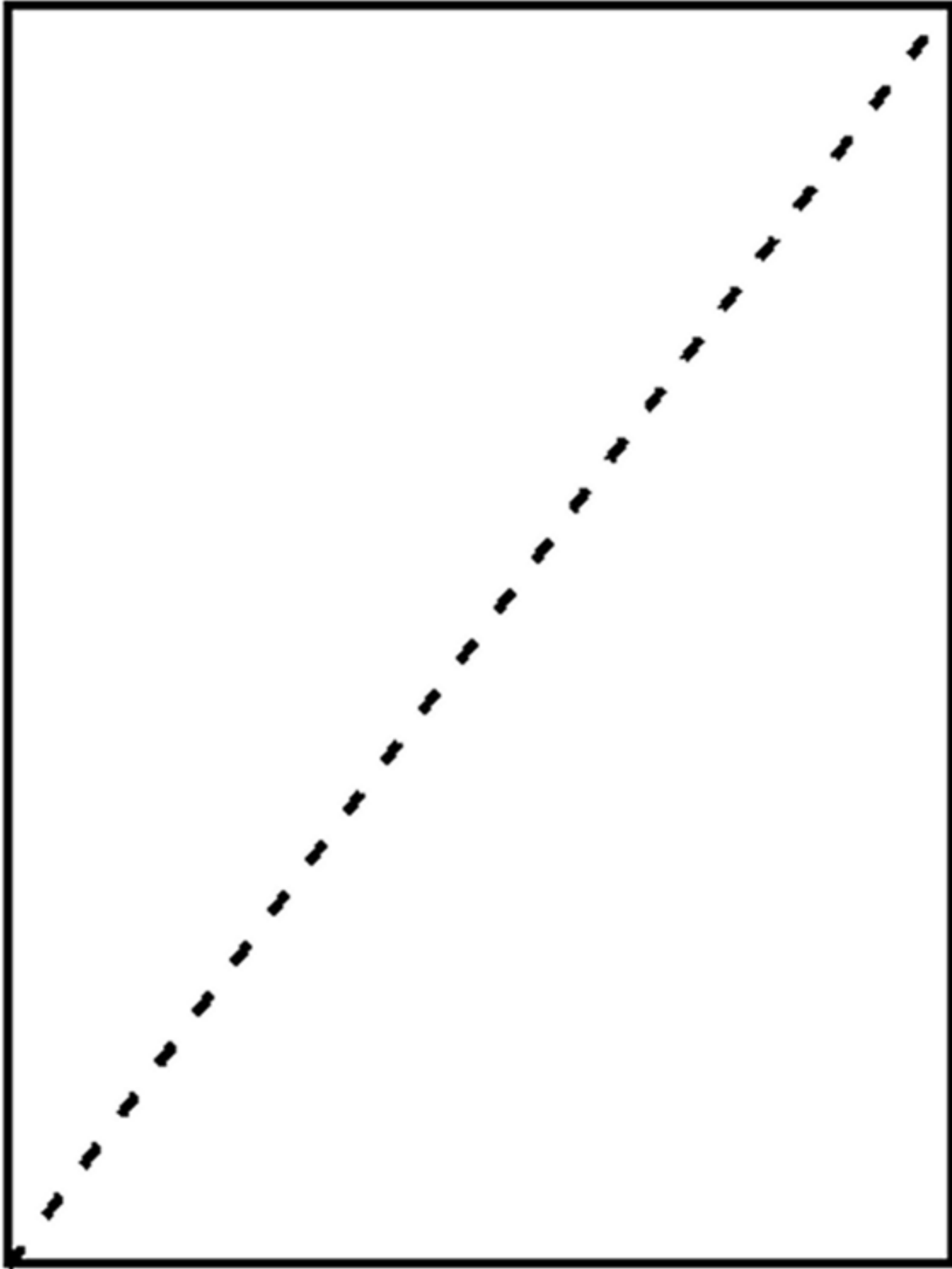


FIGURE 13-4: Determine this slant by drawing the diagonal of a 3-by-4 rectangle.



TIP

The most comfortable position for me has the slant lines nearly vertical. Find the position that's most comfortable for your hand. And maintain this position while you letter. Don't turn the pen this way and that while you write.

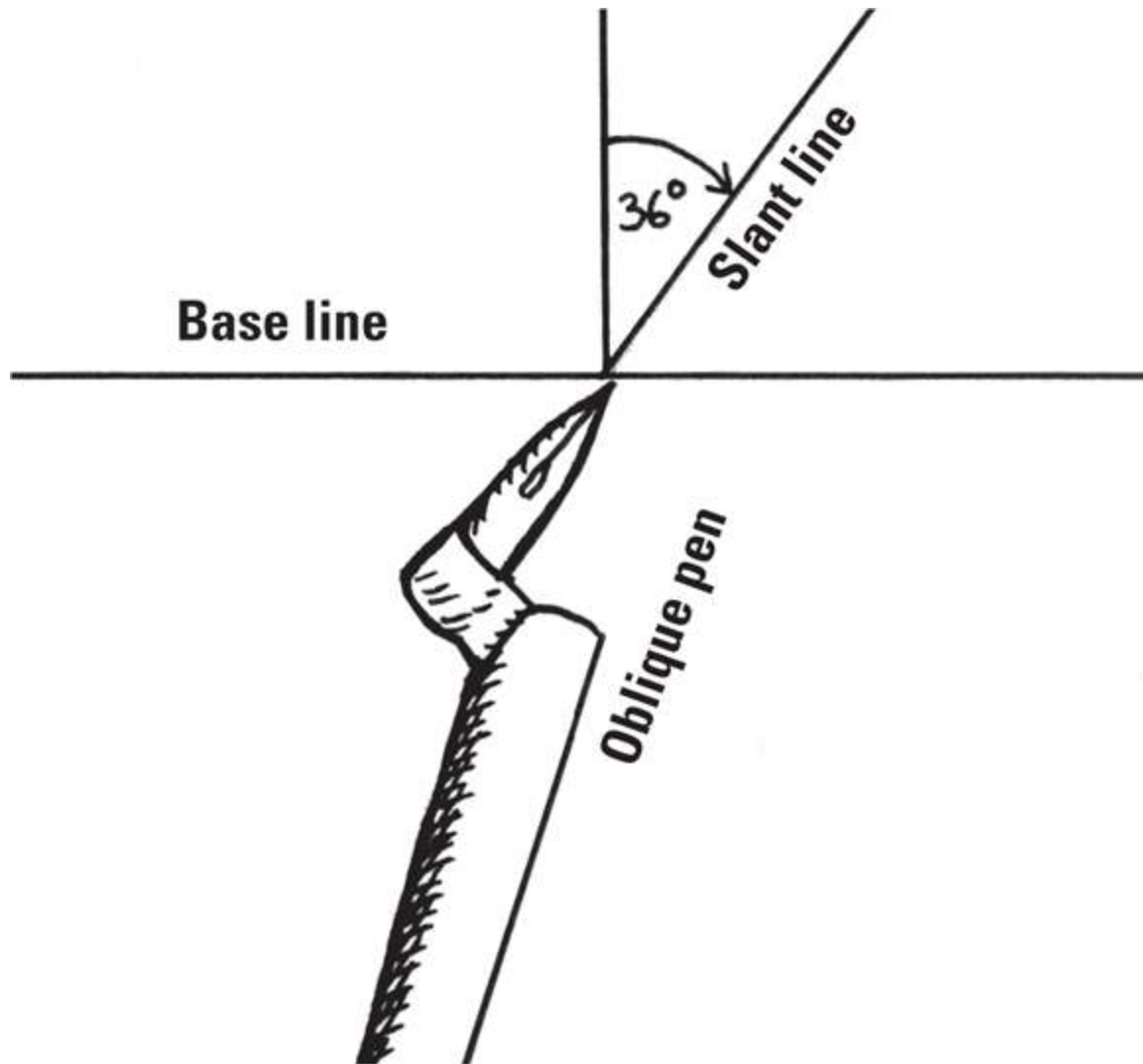


FIGURE 13-5: The position of the pen.

Copperplate Guidelines

Copperplate guidelines differ significantly from those of other styles (see [Figure 13-6](#)). Unlike other alphabets, you don't calculate the spacing

between lines using pen widths. You can choose any spacing that you prefer, as long as it's consistent. For Copperplate, you need six evenly spaced lines:

- » **A top capital line:** The capital letters go all the way up to this top line.
- » **A short ascender line:** *d*, *p*, and *t* have ascenders that go up to this line.
- » **The waist line:** The top of the letter body (same as with other alphabets).
- » **Base line:** Where the letters sit (also same as other alphabets).
- » **The short descender line:** The *f* and *p* stop at the line below the base line.
- » **The capital descender line:** Where the capitals with looped descenders stop.

The tops of the looped ascenders on *b*, *f*, *h*, *k*, and *l* begin below the top capital line, and the bottoms of the looped descenders of *g*, *j*, *q*, *y*, and *z* stop just above the capital descender line. I have not drawn special lines for these letters, but you may if you wish. (See [Figure 13-6](#).)



FIGURE 13-6: The guidelines and the heights of the different kinds of letters.

Also, draw the slant guidelines as dotted lines. When you use Copperplate, make the ascenders and descenders of the letters parallel to the slant lines.

Controlling the pressure to produce thicks and thins

The pen used for Copperplate has a sharp point, with the thicks and thins of the letters created entirely by varying the amount of pressure on the pen. Applying very light pressure produces a fine hairline; heavier pressure spreads the point open to create a wider line. You always apply pressure when making the downstrokes. Upstrokes are always fine hairlines, made with the lightest pressure (see [Figure 13-7](#)).



FIGURE 13-7: Create the thick and thin parts of the letters by varying the pressure on the pen point.

Practice the technique of light upstroke and heavy downstroke until you can duplicate the following strokes. Begin by tracing over the example without ink. Observe what the pen point does. And try to make

- » The downstrokes even in width
- » The upstrokes fine and smooth



Using the Ten Basic Strokes

You draw the lowercase Copperplate letters by using ten basic strokes, as shown in [Figure 13-8](#). You can put these strokes together in different combinations to make all 26 lowercase letters.

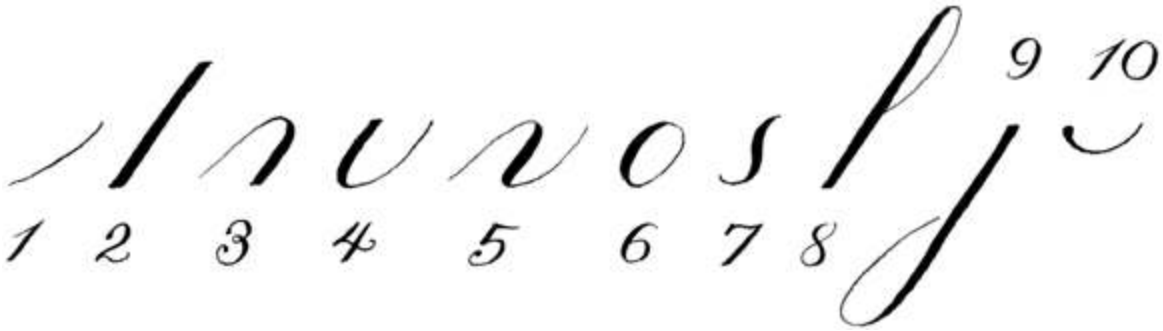


FIGURE 13-8: The ten basic strokes.



REMEMBER You draw all the letters in this alphabet from top to bottom and left to right.

Here's how you do each stroke (use the practice exercise that follows to trace and then copy each stroke):

- » **Stroke 1, the thin hairline:** Use a very light touch while moving the pen upward.
- » **Stroke 2, the thick vertical downstroke:** Use even pressure while you move the pen downward. Try to keep the width of the line as uniform as you can.
- » **Stroke 3, the arch:** Begin at the base line with a thin hairline stroke upward and end with a thick stroke downward.
- » **Stroke 4, the cup:** This looks like an upside-down arch. Begin with a thick stroke downward that curves upward, turning into a thin hairline.
- » **Stroke 5, over-under:** Begin with stroke 3, and after the downstroke, continue like stroke 4. Make sure the down stroke in the middle slants.
- » **Stroke 6, an oval:** Begin at the top and apply pressure while you draw the left side of the oval. When you reach the bottom, curve the stroke upward as you lighten pressure on the pen to change it into a thin hairline.

- » **Stroke 7, an s shape:** Make this shape by using a downward stroke. The thickness of the stroke changes from thin to thick and then back to thin again at the curves of the *s*.
- » **Stroke 8, an upward loop:** Begin slightly above the waist line with a thin hairline, then loop it to the left, below the top guide line, and turn it into a thick downstroke.
- » **Stroke 9, a downward loop:** Beginning at the waist line, draw a long, thick vertical down almost to the bottom line. At that point, curve the line to the left and continue moving the pen upward to the base line while lightening pressure on the pen to make a thin hairline.
- » **Stroke 10, a dot and whisker:** Begin with a dot, which you can make by simply pressing down on the pen without making a stroke. After you make the dot, release the pressure on the pen and make a thin hairline that curves slightly toward the right.



TIP Make a copy of the ten strokes because having a visual reference in front of you can really help you remember them when you're figuring out the letters. Without it, you may find my instructions tricky because I rattle off stroke sequences — but if you have your trusty reference, it's all smooth sailing!



The top and bottom of stroke 2, the thick downstroke, are *square* (which in calligraphy speak means that they form a flat, horizontal edge). If you have trouble making the downstroke square, follow these steps:

1. **Create a short hairline stroke going up.**

The image on the left of [Figure 13-9](#) shows this stroke.

2. **Apply pressure to the pen.**

You want the point to open up toward the left.

3. **Pull down on the stroke with even pressure.**

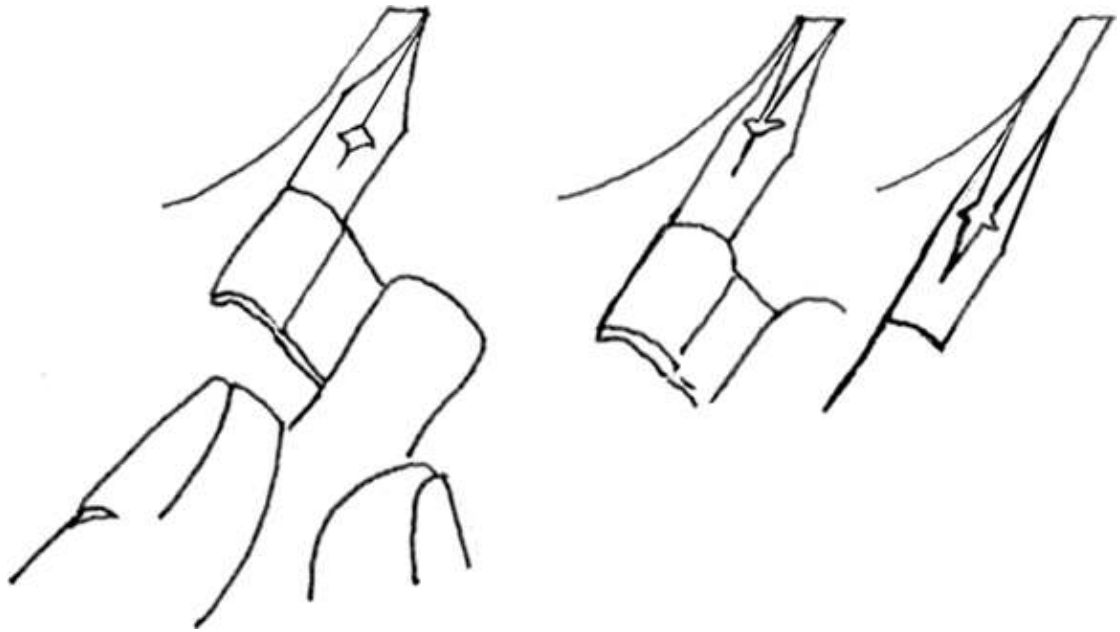


FIGURE 13-9: Using a hairline to lead into the stroke.

4. **To square the bottom, roll the pen slightly to the left and lift.**
See [Figure 13-10](#).

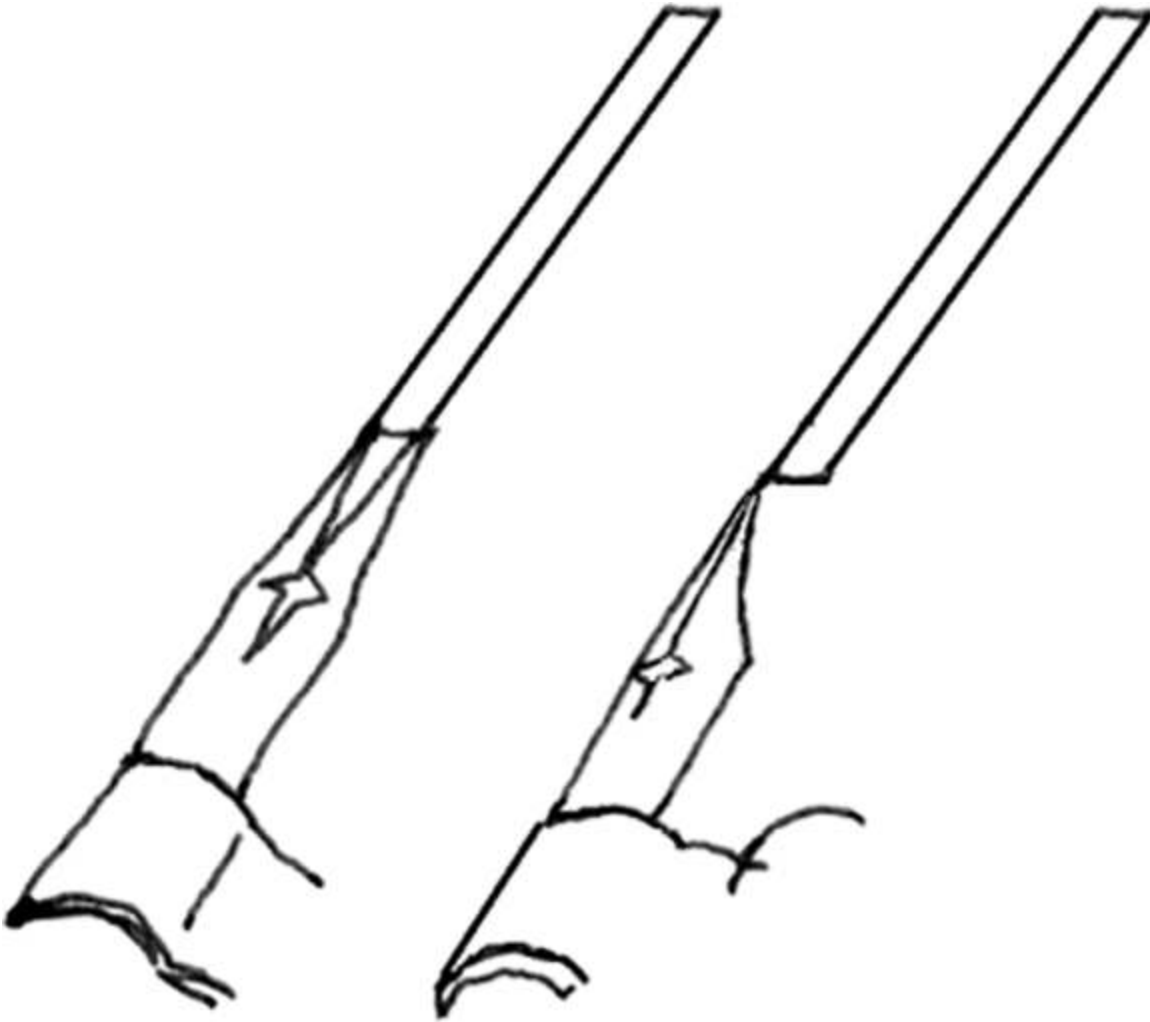


FIGURE 13-10: Squaring the bottom.

This technique requires a little practice to perfect. Try squaring the stroke in the exercise that follows.



Drawing Lowercase Copperplate Letters

You make the Copperplate lowercase letters by combining the basic strokes I discuss in the preceding section. In the following sections, I divide the letters into groups according to their similarities, which can help you get familiar with how to draw the letters and also maintain uniformity in how you draw them.

In most cases, you can see how to make the letters by looking at the illustrations. The text names and describes the sequence of strokes.



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To practice these letters, photocopy or scan and print the following practice exercises. However, if you want to practice the lowercase letters even more, check out the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet.

*Letters that contain the *n* shape*

The letters that have the *n* shape include *n*, *m*, *h*, *p*, *y*, and *v* (see [Figure 13-11](#)).



FIGURE 13-11: Letters that contain an *n* shape.



TIP

In the following lists, in between each step, lift the pen. So, if I give you two strokes within one step, do each stroke, one after the other, without lifting your pen. The step numbers correspond to the numbers in the illustrations.

Follow these steps to make the *n*:

1. **Draw the arch shape.**
2. **Draw an over-under to the right of the previous stroke.**



Draw the *m* by following these steps:

1. **Draw the arch shape.**
2. **Draw the arch again.**
3. **Draw an over-under stroke.**



Make the *h* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline, and then continue the line into an upward loop.**
2. **Draw an over-under stroke.**



Follow these steps to make the *p*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline, followed by a thick vertical stroke.**
2. **Draw an over-under stroke.**



Draw the *y* by following these steps:

1. **Draw the over-under stroke.**
2. **Draw a downward loop.**
3. **Draw a thin hairline.**



Follow these steps to make the *v*:

1. **Draw the over-under stroke.**
2. **Draw a dot and whisker.**



Letters that use the o shape

The letters that have an *o* shape include *o*, *a*, *g*, *d*, and *q* (see [Figure 13-12](#)).



FIGURE 13-12: Letters that contain an *o* shape.

Follow the steps in this section to draw each letter in this group.

Draw the *o* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an oval shape.**
3. **Draw a dot and whisker.**



Follow these steps to draw the *a*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an oval shape.**
3. **Draw the cup shape.**



Make the *g* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an oval shape.**
3. **Draw a downward loop.**
4. **Finish with a thin hairline.**



Follow these steps to make the *d*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an oval shape.**
3. **Draw a thick vertical stroke as shown.**
4. **End with the cup shape.**



Draw the *q* by following these steps:

1. **Begin with a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an oval shape.**
3. **Draw a thick vertical stroke that turns into the cup shape at the bottom.**
4. **Draw a dot and whisker as shown.**



Letters that have the c shape

You draw only two letters with a *c* shape, and I give you one guess what one of those letters happens to be ... that's right — the letter *c*. The other letter is *e* (see [Figure 13-13](#)).



FIGURE 13-13: Letters that use the *c* shape (including *c*!).

Follow the steps for drawing each letter when you trace and copy the letter in the exercises below.

Make the *c* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**

2. Draw the left half of an oval shape leaving the right side open.
3. Place a dot at the top of the half-oval shape.



Follow these steps to draw the *e*:

1. Draw a thin hairline.
2. Draw a miniature version of the first part of an upward loop. As you complete the loop, draw the left half of an oval shape.



Letters that use the l shape

Only a couple of letters belong in the group of *l*-shaped letters: *l* and *b* (see [Figure 13-14](#)).



FIGURE 13-14: L-shaped letters.

Combine the basic strokes (see the section “[Using the Ten Basic Strokes](#),” earlier in this chapter) to make these letters; use the following steps. Then trace and copy each letter in the following exercises.

Follow these steps to make the *l*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an upward loop, and then connect it to the cup shape.**



Make the *b* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an upward loop, and then connect it to the cup shape.**
3. **Draw a dot and whisker.**



Letters that contain the *i* shape

In this section, you can create all the letters that have the *i* shape: *i*, *j*, *u*, *w*, and *t* (see [Figure 13-15](#)).

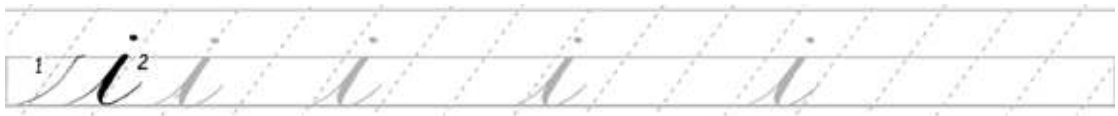


FIGURE 13-15: Letters that use an *i* shape.

Follow the step lists below for each letter while you trace and copy the letters in the following exercises.

Follow these steps to draw the *i*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline, and then continue with the cup shape.**
2. **Put a dot over it as shown.**



Make the *j* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw a downward loop.**
3. **Draw another thin hairline as shown.**
4. **Put a dot over it like with the *i*.**



Follow these steps to make the *u*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw the cup shape.**
3. **Draw the cup shape again.**



Make the *w* by following these steps:

1. **Begin with a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw the cup shape.**
3. **Draw another cup shape.**
4. **End with a dot and whisker.**



Follow these steps to draw the *t*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw a thick vertical stroke.**
3. **Draw the cup shape.**
4. **Draw a horizontal crossbar (not a basic stroke).**



The remaining letters

The letters *f*, *k*, *r*, *s*, *x*, and *z* don't belong to any one group, except the leftovers group (see [Figure 13-16](#)). So in this section, you can find out how to create each of these oddball letters.



FIGURE 13-16: Drawing the leftovers.

Use the following steps while you study the example and trace and copy each letter in the practice exercises.

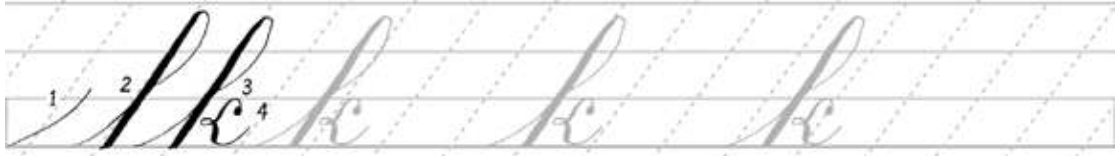
Make the *f* by following these steps:

1. **Start with a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an upward loop.**
3. **Draw a dot and whisker placed as shown in this practice exercise.**



Follow these steps to draw the *k* (this one's a little tricky):

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw an upward loop.**
3. **Draw the s shape, then a small clockwise loop (not a basic stroke), followed by the cup shape as shown.**
4. **Put a dot at the top of the s shape.**



You can make the *r* two ways. To create the older version, follow these steps:

1. **Draw the arch shape.**
2. **Draw a thin hairline.**
3. **Attach a dot and whisker.**

Follow these steps for the newer version of the *r*:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw a dot and short whisker.**
3. **Draw the cup shape.**



Make the *s* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin hairline.**
2. **Draw the *s* shape.**
3. **Draw a dot and whisker.**



Follow these steps to make the *x* (this is a tricky one):

1. **Draw an over-under stroke, but change the angle as shown in this practice exercise.**

2. **Draw a long, slanted version of the s shape with a dot on both ends.**



Follow these steps to draw the z (another tricky one):

1. **Draw an arch shape that you end with a curve to the left. Continue with a small clockwise loop at the bottom of the curve.**
2. **Draw a slightly curved downward loop.**
3. **Draw a thin hairline up through the baseline.**



Stepping Up to Capital Letters

The capital letters in the Copperplate alphabet are super tall, reaching all the way up to the topmost guideline. For the letters with lower loops, which are *G*, *J*, *Y*, and *Z*, their loops dip down to the bottom descender line. Unlike the lowercase letters, the capitals, with a very few exceptions, don't rely on the ten basic strokes. As you practice, focus on keeping your strokes smooth and even—you'll have gorgeous, polished letters in no time.

Letters that have the I shape

The five letters in this group (*I*, *F*, *G*, *J*, and *T*) all have a long, thick stroke through the middle (see [Figure 13-17](#)).



FIGURE 13-17: Capital letters that have an / shape.

Check out the following descriptions and illustrations to see how to create each of these capital letters. The practice exercises that follow each letter's description give you a chance to study the example and then trace and copy each letter so that you can perfect the sequence of strokes.

Make the *I* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin, curving hairline as shown.**
2. **Draw a heavy stroke downward that ends with a curve to the left and a dot.**



Follow these steps to make the *F*:

1. **Draw a heavy downstroke that ends with a curve and a dot.**
2. **Draw a wavy line on top.**
3. **Draw a small looping stroke through the middle as shown.**



Follow these steps to draw the *G*:

1. **Draw a spiraling stroke counterclockwise.**
2. **Draw a heavy downward stroke all the way to the bottom descender line that ends with a curve to the left and a dot.**



Draw the *J* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a thin, curving hairline.**
2. **Draw a heavy stroke downward to the bottom descender line and finish it with a hairline loop as shown.**
3. **Draw a thin hairline back up to the base line.**



Make the *T* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a heavy downstroke that ends with a curve and a dot.**
2. **Draw a wavy line on top as shown.**



Letters that have the P shape

The letters in this group (*P*, *B*, *R*, and *D*, as shown in [Figure 13-18](#)) are related to the group in the preceding section. All the letters begin with the same *I* shape used to make the *I*-shaped capitals I describe in that section.



FIGURE 13-18: Letters that use the *P* shape.

You can practice each letter by studying the example and tracing and copying the exercises that follow the description of how to do each letter.

Make the *P* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a heavy downward stroke that ends with a curve to the left and a dot as shown in the example.**
2. **Draw a double curve stroke over the top as shown.**



Follow these steps to make the *B*:

1. **Draw a heavy downward stroke that ends with a curve to the left and a dot.**
2. **Draw a triple loop shape that begins on the left side and ends on the right side as shown in the example.**



Follow these steps to draw the *R*:

1. Draw a heavy downward stroke that ends with a curve to the left and a dot.
2. Draw a double loop shape that ends with the cup stroke.



Make the *D* by following these steps:

1. Draw a heavy downward stroke that ends with a small curve to the left.
2. Draw a hairline stroke that goes to the right and up the right side of the letter and ends with a loop over the top.



Letters that use the A shape

The letters in this group include *A*, *M*, and *N*, which all use the A shape (all three letters have upward-pointing, sharp angles). See [Figure 13-19](#).



FIGURE 13-19: A-shape letters.

Practice each letter by using the exercises that follow each step list.

To make the *A*, follow these steps:

1. **In one stroke, draw a dot, a narrow curve, and a straight line that goes up sharply to the topmost guide line.**
2. **Draw a heavy, straight line to form the other leg of the letter.**
3. **Draw a loop through the middle exactly as shown.**



Make the *M* by following these steps:

1. **In a single stroke, draw a dot, a narrow curve, and a straight line that goes up sharply to a point at topmost guide line.**
2. **In another single stroke, draw a heavy, downward straight line, a hairline upward, and a second heavy downward line that ends with the cup basic stroke.**



Follow these steps to draw the *N*:

1. Draw a dot, a narrow curve, and a straight line that goes up sharply to a point at the topmost guide line.
2. Draw a heavy, straight line downward and a hairline upward that ends with small clockwise curve at the top just as shown.



Letters that use the V shape

The capital *V* and *W* have downward-pointing sharp angles, as shown in [Figure 13-20](#).



FIGURE 13-20: The V-shaped letters.

Try your hand at lettering the *V* and *W* by using the following steps that correspond to the numbers in the illustration.

Make the *V* by following these steps:

1. Draw an over-under basic stroke at the topmost guide line.
2. Draw a slightly curving, heavy stroke down to the base line.
3. Draw a hairline up to the topmost guide line that curves and ends with a dot.



Follow these steps to make the *W*:

1. Draw an over-under basic stroke at the topmost guide line.
2. Draw a slightly curving, heavy stroke down to the base line.
3. Draw a hairline upward, followed by a second curving, heavy stroke down to the base line.
4. Draw a hairline up to the top that ends with a curve and a dot.



Letters that have the U shape

The two letters in this group, *U* and *Y*, look exactly alike above the base line. The only difference is the *Y* has a descender. [Figure 13-21](#) shows the Copperplate capital letters *U* and *Y*.



FIGURE 13-21: Letters that use a *U* shape.

You, too, can create these letters — it just takes some practice. By using the following steps (strokes), you can practice each letter in the following exercises.

Make the *U* by following these steps:

1. **Draw a clockwise loop that turns into a heavy downstroke toward the base line where it curves to the right and then continues upward.**
2. **Draw another heavy downward stroke toward the base line where it changes into a cup basic shape.**



To draw the *Y*, start out by using the same process that you use for the *U*, but the final downstroke becomes a long loop. Just follow these steps:

1. **Draw a clockwise loop that turns into a heavy downstroke toward the base line where it curves to the right and then continues upward.**
2. **Draw another heavy downward stroke toward the base line where it changes into a downward loop.**
3. **Draw a thin hairline.**



Letters that use the O shape

Three letters — *O*, *Q*, and *C* — have counterclockwise ovals. (See [Figure 13-22](#).)



FIGURE 13-22: Letters that include an *O* shape.

These letters have relatively simple instructions:

- » ***O*:** Draw a counter-clockwise spiral as shown in the illustration filling the space from the topmost guideline to base line.



- » **Q:** **Step1:** Draw a counterclockwise spiral just like the *O*. **Step2:** Add a little S-shaped line at the bottom of the spiral.



- » **C:** Make the *C* by drawing a counterclockwise loop beginning at the topmost guide line and down to the guide line beneath and then transitioning into a larger downward curve to the baseline where it swings up to the waist line where it ends in a small curve.



Brother & sister letters: H & K

The two letters in this group — *H* and *K* — look a whole lot like each other, like a brother and sister. Perhaps *H* is the reserved sibling, upright and formal, and *K* adds a flourish of individuality with its elegant leg. See [Figure 13-23](#).



FIGURE 13-23: Letters *H* and *K*.

Get a handle on creating these letters by tracing and copying the letters in the exercises that follow the numbered lists.

Make the *H* by following these steps:

1. Draw the over-under shape under the topmost guide line.
2. Draw a slightly curving, heavy stroke downward toward the base line where it ends with a curve to the right and a dot.
3. Draw a hairline that goes upward from left to right and forms an upward loop (Basic Stroke 8), and then transitions into a heavy downstroke to the base line where it ends with the cup shape.



Follow these steps to draw the *K*:

1. Draw the over-under shape under the topmost guide line.
2. Draw a slightly curving, heavy stroke downward toward the base line where it ends with a curve to the right and a dot.
3. Draw a shape that begins with a dot (as shown in the illustration) and resembles the left half of a pair of curly brackets.



The elegant outliers

E, L, S, X, and Z stand apart — unlike other capitals, they share no common traits but their individuality. See [Figure 13-24](#).



FIGURE 13-24: Letters *E, L, S, X, and Z*.

Use the following steps to practice each letter; just trace and copy the letters in the exercises that follow each step list.

Make the *E* by drawing three counterclockwise spiraling curves:



Make the *L*: Begin like you are going to make a *c*, but make the loop smaller and follow it with a broad downstroke that loops to the left in a clockwise fashion and then sweeps to the right with light pressure.



To draw the *S*: Draw a counterclockwise spiral at the top, a heavy down stroke, and a clockwise spiral at the bottom.



Make the *X* by using this sequence of strokes:

1. In the space under the topmost guide line, draw a clockwise spiral that transitions into a heavy, slightly-curved down stroke and ends in another clockwise spiral.
2. In the top space, draw a counterclockwise curve that turns into a heavy, slightly-curved to the left, down stroke that adjoins the first downstroke, and then ends with a counterclockwise curve at the bottom as shown in the illustration.



Following these steps, make the *Z*:

1. Draw a small, horizontal s-shape.
2. Draw a second s-shape.
3. Draw a long loop down to the bottom descender line.
4. Finish with a thin hairline.



Numbers and Punctuation

Because our numbers developed separately from the letters — emerging from Arabic numerals in the 10th century, as compared to Roman and Latin letterforms that date much earlier — they don't follow the same structural rules. So, you can make these numbers any size that you like. Punctuation, introduced gradually through scribal practice, evolved with a different rhythm and placement logic than letters. You can see both in [Figure 13-25](#).

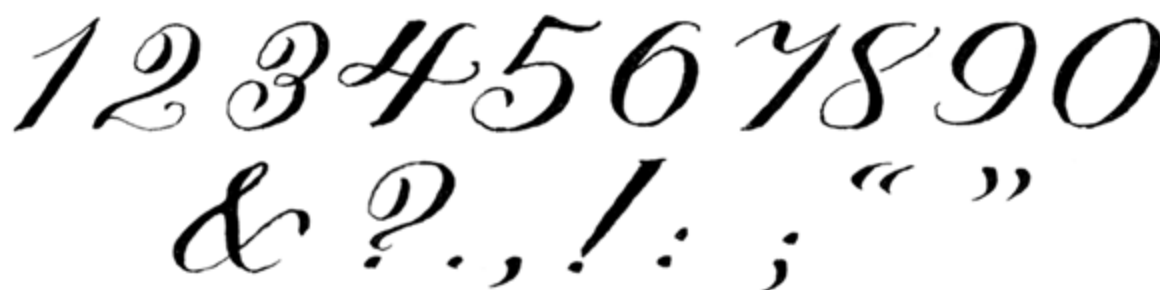


FIGURE 13-25: The Copperplate numerals and punctuation.

I explain how to create each numeral in the following step lists. (Most of the punctuation I leave up to you to figure out.)

To make the *1*, follow these steps:

1. **Draw a light upstroke hairline.**
2. **When you reach the top of the number, make a downward stroke, gradually increasing the pressure until you reach the base line.**



Follow this sequence of strokes to draw the 2 in one stroke: Draw a curlicue, a clockwise curve over the top, and end with a little squiggle at the bottom.



Make the 3 this way in one step: Draw a curlicue and two clockwise half-circles that are linked by a small loop. End with a hairline that curves around.



Follow these steps to make the 4:

1. **Start with a slight curve at the top and draw a long downstroke.**
2. **Draw a smaller downstroke to the left of the first downstroke. Without lifting the pen, make a loop and a wavy line to the right.**



To draw the 5, follow these steps:

1. **Draw a downstroke that is followed by a clockwise half circle that ends in a curly cue.**
2. **Draw a slightly curved line across the top, as shown in the example.**



Draw the 6 by looking at the illustration and following these steps:

1. **Draw a large, curved downstroke for the left side of the number.**
2. **Draw a smaller downstroke, curved in the opposite direction of the curve in Step 1.**



Follow these steps to make the 7:

1. **Draw a wavy line along the top, like the over-under basic stroke.**
2. **Draw a downward stroke, gradually increasing the pressure like the number 1.**



Make the 8 by following these steps:

1. **Make an s-shape, and at the bottom, curve the stroke back up to the middle.**
2. **Draw a thin hairline.**



Draw the 9 by following these steps:

1. **Draw a small, curved, downstroke for the left side of the number.**
2. **Draw a larger downstroke curved the opposite direction for the right side.**



Follow these steps to make the 0 (zero):

1. **Draw a downstroke curving to the left to create the left side.**

2. For the right side of the number, draw a downstroke curved the opposite direction as the curve in Step 1.



Draw the & (ampersand) by following these steps:

1. Draw a slightly curved downstroke.
2. Draw a backwards s-shape that crosses over the first stroke and ends with a small curve as in the example.



Make the ? (question mark) by following these steps:

1. Draw a clockwise spiral that ends with a small counterclockwise hook at the bottom.
2. Draw a dot at the bottom.



All the other punctuation marks are pretty self-explanatory — you can handle them!



Putting Copperplate Together

When you begin working on writing words, pay attention to spacing.

While you practice lettering words in Copperplate, keep the downstrokes

as evenly spaced as possible. If you pencil in the letters lightly before you draw them with the pen, you can remain more consistent in your spacing.

Pay close attention to the contrast between your thick and thin strokes; make this contrast strong. Just look at [Figure 13-26](#) for an example.

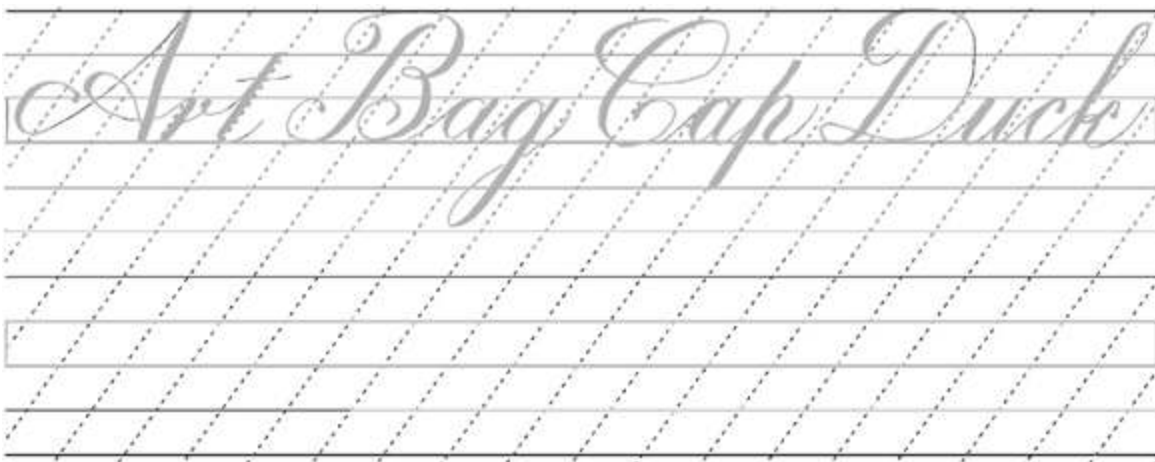


FIGURE 13-26: Examples of words drawn in Copperplate.



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Give spacing a try in the exercise below. You can find more opportunities in the online Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com/go/calligraphyfd2e to practice drawing words by using the Copperplate alphabet.





TIP

Computer fonts that resemble the Copperplate style of lettering include Kunstler Script and Edwardian Script.

Chapter 14

Versals: Elegantly Outlined and Decorated Letters

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Checking what materials you need
 - » Drawing a versal letter
 - » Using different alphabets
 - » Applying gold leaf to your letter
-

Early scribes used Versal letters — those bold and beautiful capitals from medieval manuscripts — to mark important sections of their manuscripts with ornate designs, vivid colors, and gold. While they followed strict conventions, modern calligraphers embrace creativity, reimagining the artistic potential of these letters.

One way to truly elevate your own calligraphy and give it that Wow Factor is by incorporating a decorated initial — a large, eye-catching letter that headlines your piece with style and flair.



REMEMBER Artistic skill can really help you when you create these letters because you draw, rather than write, them — but don't worry if sketching isn't your strong suit! This chapter is packed with shortcuts and techniques to help you design decorated initials, even if you're a complete beginner.

And here's where the magic happens — color! A decorated letter becomes truly spectacular after you paint or *gild* (add gold leaf to) its interior. Pairing bold hues with intricate background designs can turn

your calligraphy into something truly breathtaking. In the section “[Drawing the Illuminated Capitals](#),” later in this chapter, I walk you through simple methods to achieve this lettering, step by step.



REMEMBER Unlike the study, trace, and copy exercises I include in earlier chapters, in this chapter I focus on outlining or tracing letters in templates. For tracing, use tracing paper or translucent layout bond. When applying gold leaf and paint, opt for heavier paper — such as the *Pentalic* paper I recommend in [Chapter 2](#) — or smooth, heavyweight watercolor paper. Heavier paper provides the durability needed for gold leaf and paint, preventing warping and ensuring a smooth finish.

Although there are distinctions between versal letters and illuminated capitals, in this chapter, to keep things simple, I use the terms interchangeably.

Equipping Yourself with the Right Tools

You need entirely different materials for this chapter than you do for other chapters in this book. For the basics, you need

- » A pencil
- » A dip pen that has a narrow nib (1 mm or smaller)
- » Ink for the dip pen

If you want to add color, you need

- » Your choice of colored ink, acrylic paint, watercolor, or colored pencils
- » A small round brush, #5 or smaller.

If you want to add gold leaf, you need:

» **Imitation gold leaf squares:** You can find these at most crafts stores, on Amazon, and on my website www.newgoldenletters.com; they typically come in packs of 100 sheets.

Note: Early on, it's smart to avoid real gold leaf — it's fragile and difficult to handle. Metal leaf offers a similar look and is much easier to work with. Once you master the technique, you can transition to real gold leaf.

» **Gold leaf adhesive:** Also available at most crafts store, on Amazon, and on my website www.newgoldenletters.com.

» **Acrylic gesso:** Michaels has an 8 oz. tube that is perfect for this job.

» **A watercolor natural bristle mop brush:** I use a #1 mop brush. A goat hair gilding hake brush can also be used.

Drawing the Illuminated Capitals

Illuminated capitals are a classic calligraphy art form. Follow these steps to use a simple and rewarding technique:



REMEMBER For the following sections, I focus on using just one letter (the letter y), but you can use any letter of the alphabet.

Step 1: Sketching the letter

First, draw the design in pencil (see [Figure 14-1](#)). You have a couple of options available to you when it comes to doing this sketch:

» **Freehand:** If you have the artistic ability, then by all means use your imagination and draw the letter freehand. You can interpret a design that you've seen and liked, or you can create your own design from scratch.

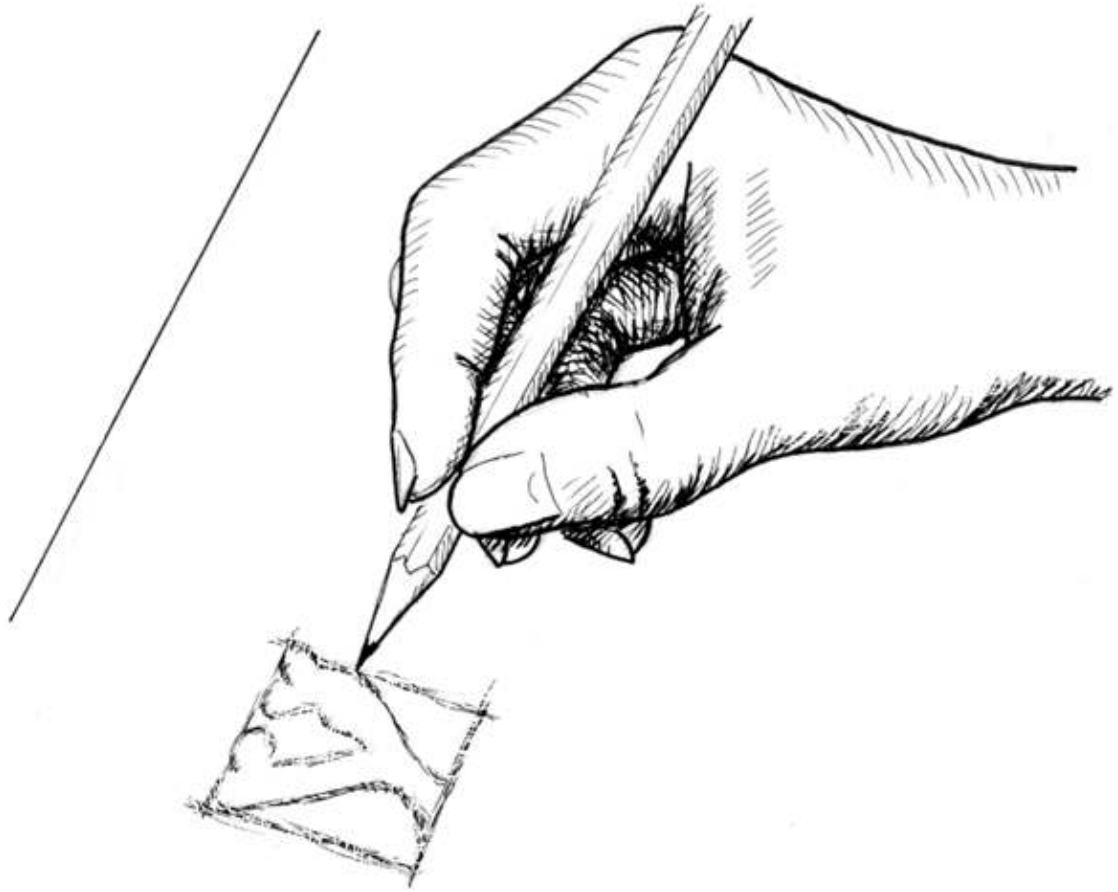


FIGURE 14-1: A pencil sketch of the letter y.

» **Template:** To work from a template, just trace or transfer a design that you like. Check out the templates available on my website at www.newgoldenletters/alphabets. If you have paper that is thin enough to see through, you can simply lay your paper on top of the template and trace.

If your paper is too heavy for tracing, then you have to transfer the design. Follow these steps:

1. **Trace the entire design onto a small piece of paper that's thin enough for tracing.**
2. **Turn the paper over and shade the reverse side using the side of your pencil lead.** Apply dark, even coverage, ensuring that the entire area behind the design is fully shaded.

3. Finally, flip the paper right-side-up again, position it where you want the letter, and trace over the design with firm pressure.

You wind up with a pale, ghost-like version of the design transferred onto the paper.

4. (Optional) Retrace this faint design with pencil to firm up the lines.

Step 2: Decorating the letters and background

After you sketch the letter in pencil (see the preceding section for details on that process) and like the way it looks, begin adding color to the design:

- » **The letter:** Use acrylic paint or watercolor to fill in the letter with the color that you want. Choose a light and bright color, such as yellow, if you have a dark background. However, if you have a light background, dark colors can make the letter pop.
- » **The background:** Normally, a solid-colored background isn't as attractive as a background that has a repeating design. You can add a design fairly easily. [Figure 14-2](#) shows five simple designs: horizontal lines, crisscrossed diagonal lines, floral designs, vines, and spirals.



FIGURE 14-2: Different background designs.

Step 3: Inking the lines

After you paint your letter and its background (see the preceding section), go over the pencil lines with ink. When you complete that final step, your letter should look spectacular (see [Figure 14-3](#)) — a true emblem of your calligraphic expertise!

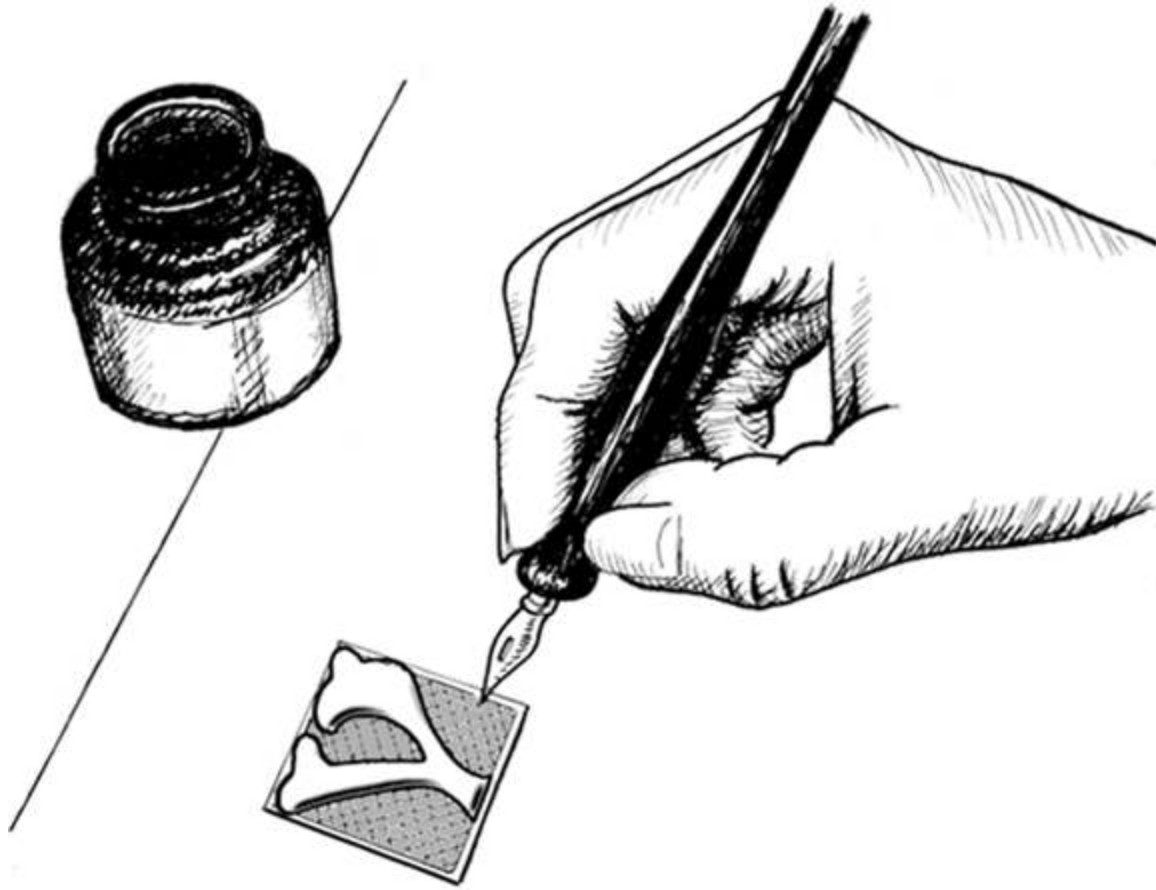


FIGURE 14-3: The final, decorated letter.

Experimenting with Creative Alphabets

Traditionally, illuminated letters feature Uncial alphabets, still widely used today (see [Chapter 9](#) for more on Uncial). Roman capitals and Italic capitals (which I discuss in [Chapters 8](#) and [12](#)) also make stunning illuminated designs. For example, [Figure 14-4](#) showcases a Roman capital *A* template ready for a calligrapher to fill in.

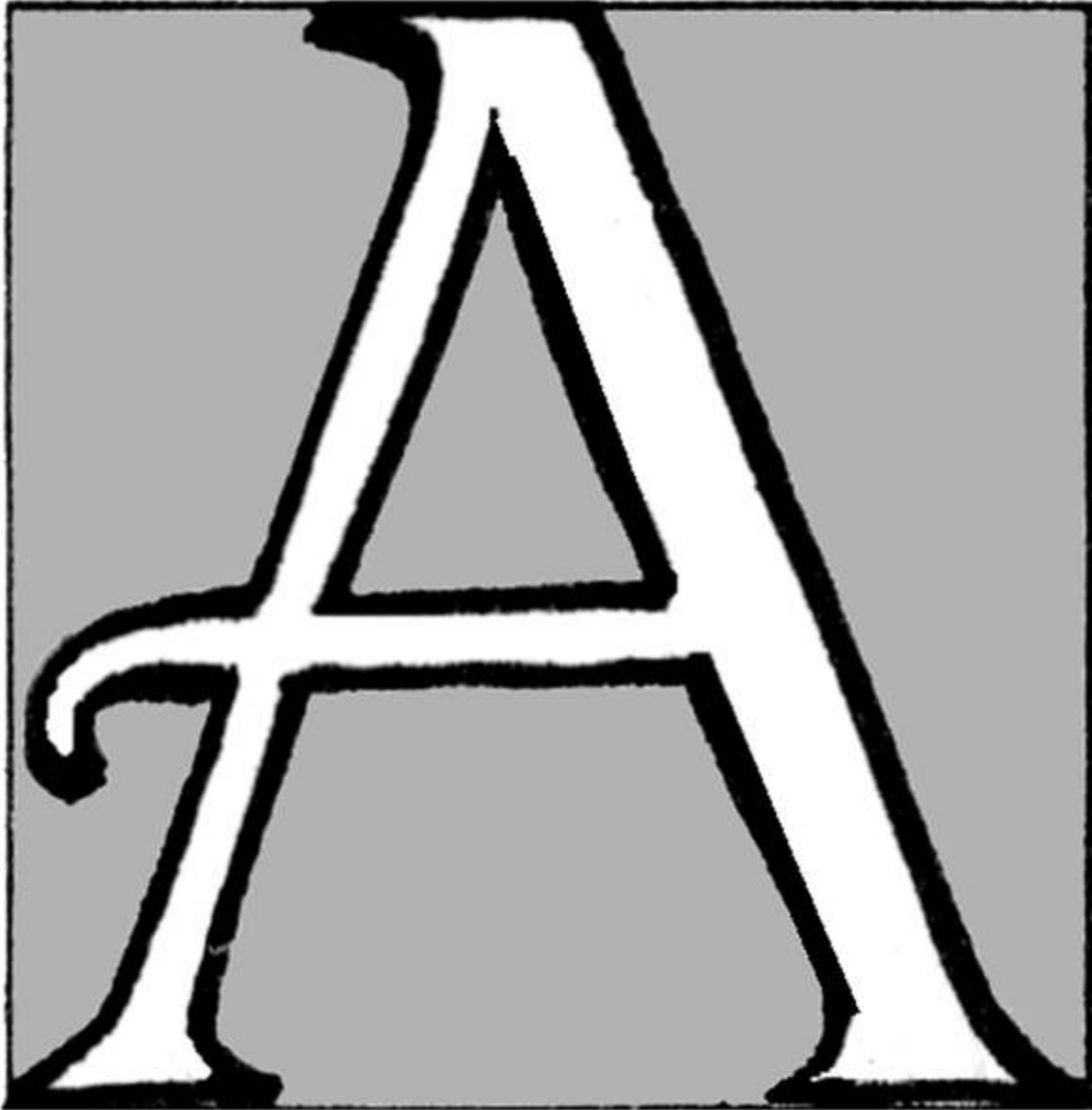


FIGURE 14-4: A Roman capital A fill-in letter.

But why stop at tradition? Illuminate your designs with your imagination — animals, tools, acrobats, even insects can form letters. [Figure 14-5](#) shows a whimsical alphabet inspired by designs from the 1700s, perfect for children's projects.

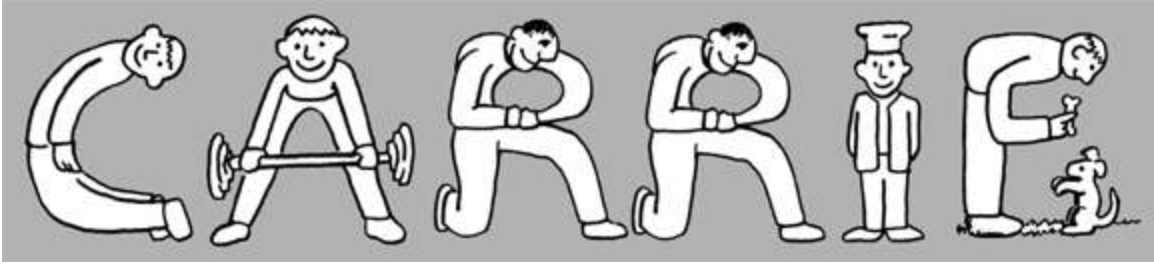


FIGURE 14-5: A whimsical design.



**HONING
YOUR SKILLS**

You can find templates for the whimsical design, the Roman capitals, and the Uncial alphabet in the Practice Pack and Cheat Sheet (www.dummies.com/go/calligraphyfd2e).

Applying Gold Leaf in the Traditional Method

The gilding technique that I describe in the following sections follows the traditional method. However, real gold leaf, though stunning, is both expensive and challenging to handle because of its delicate, ultra-thin nature. Static electricity can adversely affect it, making it tricky to manage. You can't touch it with your fingers — you need a brush to pick it up and position it.

Thankfully, imitation gold leaf — metal leaf — offers a practical alternative. You can apply it far more easily, it costs less, and you can't visually distinguish it from genuine gold. When you use metal leaf that imitates gold on a letter, it creates an effect that resembles real gold, with authentic luster and color — not at all like paint.

For example, [Figure 14-6](#) showcases a piece of calligraphy where the scribe gilded the first letter — an illuminated A — by using gold leaf. Over the gold, an ink vine design flows across its surface, and the inside of the letter features a matching vine pattern tinted with watercolor.

And God said,
after our liken
over the fish
the air, and over the cattl
over every creeping thing
So God created man in h
God created he him, male

FIGURE 14-6: An actual-size example showing what a gilded letter looks like.



TIP

If you want to work with real gold leaf, start first with imitation leaf. Practice applying it until you feel confident, and then try your

hand at using real gold. For additional guidance, you can find helpful tutorials and resources online.

Handling the materials

Applying gold leaf may seem intimidating, but it's really pretty easy. Just follow these steps:

- 1. Prepare a clean work space that's free of drafts and static electricity.**

Unfortunately, you can't work with gold leaf while you sit next to a window or a fan — the air blows the thin leaf all over the place! Also, anything that can get electrically charged (such as a wool sweater) can attract or repel the gold leaf.

- 2. Draw the outline of the letter with a pencil on the paper, placing it exactly where you want it to be.**

- 3. Layer acrylic gesso within the outlined area you intend to gild, gradually building up the surface to achieve the desired relief.**

Apply 3 to 4 coats of acrylic gesso, brushing smoothly and evenly. Allow each coat to dry fully before adding the next, building up the layers to create a raised letter. [Figure 14-7](#) shows this step on the left.

- 4. Give the surface of the gesso a final smoothing.**

Traditionally, calligraphers used agate burnishers, but the back of a spoon can do an acceptable job if you don't have a burnisher.

- 5. Using a small brush, apply gold leaf adhesive on top of the gesso where you want the leaf to adhere.**

Keep in mind that the leaf adheres where the adhesive is and doesn't adhere where there is no adhesive. Be careful not to paint beyond the lines and also be careful not to leave any small unpainted areas where you want the leaf to adhere.

- 6. Let the adhesive dry.**

That's right — you *do not* apply the leaf to the wet adhesive. That creates a mess. (I know from personal experience!) After the

adhesive dries completely, it remains tacky for at least a few hours; that's when you apply the leaf.

- 7. When the adhesive is dry, breathe onto it just exactly the way you would to clean the lenses on a pair of glasses.**

This step moistens the adhesive and increases the tackiness.

- 8. Gently pick up a sheet of metal leaf at two of the corners and slowly lay it over the prepared area.**

One sheet should cover a letter.

Alternatively, you can pick up the leaf by laying a piece of wax paper slightly larger than the square of leaf over the square and rub it with your hand. When you lift the wax paper, the gold leaf should adhere to it.

- 9. When you have the leaf in place, gently blow directly down on top of the leaf so that it adheres where you want it to.**

If you use the alternate wax-paper method (see Step 8), you can then lay the wax paper on top of the letter and rub to get the leaf to adhere to the adhesive. You have just one shot if you use this method, so be careful and methodical.

The center picture in [Figure 14-7](#) shows the gold leaf in place.

- 10. Gently rub over the leaf by using a soft watercolor brush.**

This is where you use the paint brush (see the earlier section "[Equipping Yourself with the Right Tools](#)").

Continue rubbing with the brush until you remove all the excess leaf so that all that remains is the leaf attached where you want it.

- 11. If the gold leaf didn't attach to a spot, apply adhesive to that spot, let it dry, and put a small piece of the leaf on that spot.**

The small pieces of leaf that you don't use for the original letter transfer usually work perfectly for filling in any gaps. The picture on the right in [Figure 14-7](#) shows the finished letter.

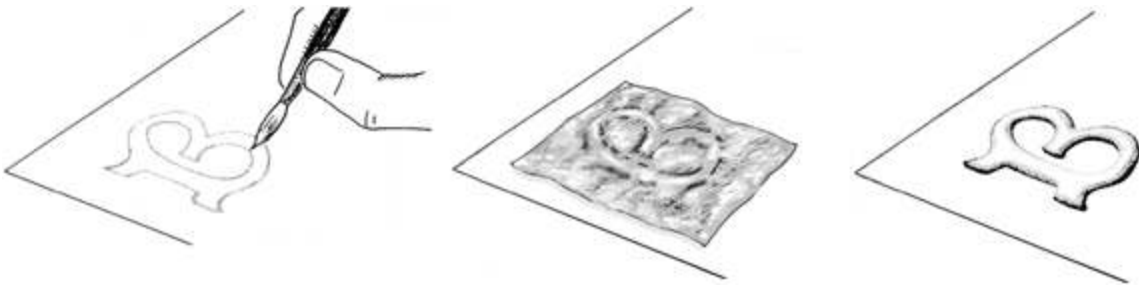


FIGURE 14-7: Three steps in the gilding process.

My explanation of the gilding process is enough to get you started. If you want to explore this further, I recommend the book, *Contemporary Illumination for the Calligrapher and Artist: Traditional Techniques Reinterpreted* by Toni Watts.

Using shortcuts to add gold to letters

Using gold spray paints, such as Krylon Premium Metallic Gold Foil and Rust-Oleum Pure Gold, can approximate the effect of gold, but paint can never duplicate the dazzling effect of real gold leaf. However, if you prefer to use paint, follow these steps:

- 1. Obtain high-quality paper suited for spray paint.**
Thick cardstock or watercolor paper works best to prevent wrinkling.
- 2. Set up a well-ventilated workspace and cover the surrounding area with newspaper or a drop cloth to protect from overspray.**
- 3. Lightly tape down your paper to keep it flat and secure while you spray it.**
- 4. Cut out stencil shapes or masks to cover the areas that you want to protect.**
You don't want to spray the non-gilded portions of your lettering.
- 5. Shake the spray paint can thoroughly to ensure an even distribution of the metallic pigments.**
- 6. Hold the can about 8 to 12 inches away from the paper and apply in light, even passes.**

Avoid spraying too heavily to prevent dripping.

7. **After the paint dries, write your calligraphy with ink directly over the sprayed area.**

You need a steady hand and a high-quality nib for this step. Black ink contrasts beautifully with gold backgrounds.

8. **(Optional) If you want to add illuminated capitals or accents, layer intricate designs on top of the sprayed area by using a fine brush or pen.**

9. **Seal your work by spraying a clear fixative.**

This step preserves the paint's shine and ensures durability.

10. **Allow everything to dry completely before handling.**

If you handle it too soon, you risk smudging or damaging the metallic finish.

Exploring More Gilding Ideas

Although versals, illuminated letters, and hand-drawn outlined letters each have their own characteristics, for our purposes, they offer similar creative possibilities and can be used interchangeably.

Take risks: Try gilding something unexpected, such as your grocery list or the first letter of your to-do list (because, let's face it, "Take out trash" looks a lot more glamorous in gold). Experiment, play, and most importantly, have fun with it.

Every masterpiece starts with a single stroke — okay, and maybe a little trial and error.

Part 4

Expanding Your Repertoire Beyond the Basics

IN THIS PART ...

Add style with borders, embellishments, and creative letter variations.

Use calligraphy for artistic projects such as signatures, quotations, and personal pieces.

Design polished certificates that look professional and impressive.

Create posters and signs that use bold, readable lettering.

Explore how to turn your handwriting into custom calligraphic computer fonts.

Chapter 15

Adding Variations, Borders, Flourishes, and Other Embellishments

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Checking out different kinds of variations
 - » Finishing letters with flourishes
 - » Incorporating borders
 - » Adding some flavor with designs, doodles, and other embellishments
-

Years ago, when I was a student in art school, one of my teachers often spoke about the Wow Factor in good art — how a truly remarkable piece instantly sparks a sense of awe. He explained that the best works continue to evoke “Wow!” moments when viewers explore them further.

The same applies to calligraphy. Great calligraphy has the power to amaze, captivate, and inspire — it has its own kind of wow!

In this chapter, I show you ways to amplify the Wow Factor in your own calligraphy. Although I focus on enhancing the Italic alphabet (an alphabet that you can read about in [Chapter 12](#)), you can apply many of these techniques to the other alphabets that I discuss in [Part 3](#) of this book.



REMEMBER Before you try the exercises in this chapter, get comfortable with at least one alphabet. If you’re just beginning, I recommend that

you start with EZScript (head to [Chapter 4](#)) or Italic (see [Chapter 12](#)). For practice, you can use any type of calligraphy pen that you prefer.

Using Variations to Change the Look of Letters

You can explore two types of variations:

- » **Entire alphabet changes.** Adjusting all the letterforms to be thick and bold or light and thin
- » **Selective changes.** Altering individual letters by shifting rounded shapes to angular ones, angular shapes to rounded forms, or exploring alternative designs

Creating heavy and bold letters

One of the simplest ways to alter the look of an entire alphabet is by adjusting the spacing of guidelines. Narrower spacing — such as lines set just 3 pen widths apart rather than the standard 5 pen widths — creates a darker, heavier, and bolder variation of Italic, intensifying the contrast between thick and thin strokes (see [Figure 15-1](#)).

*Heavy and Bold can be dramatic.
A quick brown fox jumps over a
lazy dog. Pack my box with five
dozen liquor jugs.*

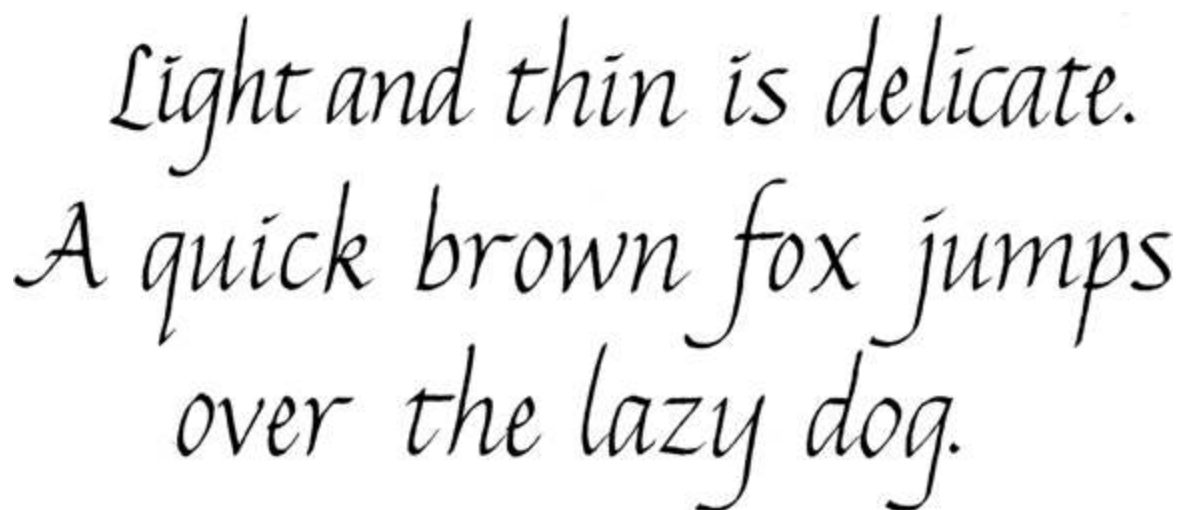
FIGURE 15-1: Heavy and bold letters that use guidelines only 3 pen widths apart.

Making your letters light and thin

In contrast to making the letters look heavy and bold (as I discuss in the preceding section), if you use guidelines that are 7 to 8 pen widths apart, you can produce a very light and thin version of Italic, making the difference between the thick and thin strokes almost imperceptible (see [Figure 15-2](#)).

Adding angles to round shapes

You can alter the look of an alphabet by adjusting its basic shapes. For example, you can transform rounded letterforms into more angular ones (see [Figure 15-3](#)). You may hear this style called *Batarde* (literally “bastard” in French), a name that came about because of the style’s unconventional development.



Light and thin is delicate.
A quick brown fox jumps
over the lazy dog.

The image shows a sample of handwriting in a light, thin, italicized script. The text is written in three lines: "Light and thin is delicate.", "A quick brown fox jumps", and "over the lazy dog." The letters are very light and thin, with a consistent slant and shape throughout.

FIGURE 15-2: Create light and thin letters by using guidelines that are 7 to 8 pen widths apart.

You don’t need to make these letters to an exact specification — they come with no rigid rules, so let your imagination guide you. Just remember to maintain consistency in size, shape, and slant. (This variation remains one of my personal favorites because of its distinctive look.)

Angular Italic
Try this variation for a
different look.

FIGURE 15-3: An angular version of the Italic letters.

Rounding angular shapes

This approach reverses the angular technique that I discuss above — here, instead of sharpening rounded letterforms, you soften angular ones. Examine [Figure 15-4](#) for reference, then experiment with crafting your own variation. Since you're modifying letterforms rather than following a traditional alphabet, there's no need to conform to rigid rules — embrace creative freedom. This method often produces a contemporary, informal reinterpretation of traditionally structured scripts like Italic.

A rounded variation.
Pack my box with five
dozen liquor jugs.

FIGURE 15-4: A rounded variation of the Italic letters.

Avoiding errors

When you depart from the standard forms and use variations, you can easily fall into the trap of making errors in stroke smoothness, shape, size, slant, and spacing. (See [Chapter 6](#) for a full explanation of the 5-S formula.) Make sure you use this formula as a guide, no matter what alphabet you work with.

Mastering Flourishes

Adding flourishes can bring flair to your calligraphy. These stylistic embellishments serve as accents, ornaments, or even elements that unify letters and words in a cohesive composition. However, make them complement — not replace — strong lettering skills. Use them wisely to enhance, not overshadow, your letterforms.



WARNING A word of caution: Use flourishes sparingly—too many can overpower your lettering. Like a dash of spice, a few well-placed embellishments enhance the composition; overdo it, and the result can be overwhelming. If you don't know whether a flourish adds to the design, just leave it out.

In this section, I introduce fundamental techniques for adding flourishes to your calligraphy, enhancing its elegance and artistry. As shown in [Figure 15-5](#), flourishes amplify the movement of letterforms, creating a more dynamic and expressive composition. Experiment with different styles and placements, ensuring that each embellishment feels natural and complements the overall design.

One particularly popular flourish is the *S-curve*, a stroke or series of strokes that resemble the letter S, most often drawn horizontally from the ascender and descender parts of letters (see [Figure 15-6](#)).



FIGURE 15-5: An example of flourishes suitable for titles.

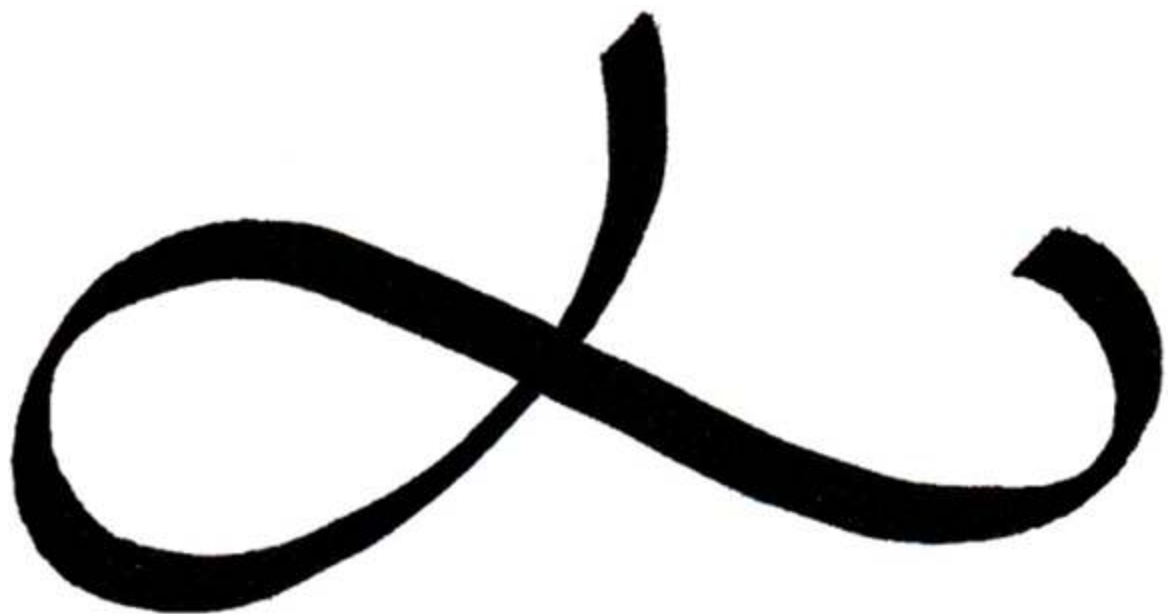


FIGURE 15-6: An example of an S-curve that can be added to a descender.



TIP

When you add flourishes, make each stroke as smooth and fluid as possible — nothing diminishes their elegance more than a shaky

or uneven line.

Study the examples in [Figure 15-7](#) and follow these suggestions to successfully incorporate flourishes into your lettering:

- » Extend the final stroke of the letter, horizontally ending in an upward curve, for letters such as *a*, *c*, *d*, *h*, *i*, and so on, which typically end in *serifs* (the decorative additions to printed letters) or have serif-like endings. Use this flourish on one of these letters only when that letter is the last one in a word at the end of a sentence.
- » Add looped S-curves to *ascenders* (extensions above the main body of the letter) on the letters *b*, *d*, *h*, *k*, and *l*. Make these loops as large as you like. In fact, the larger the flourish here, the better, because the larger loops can act as embellishments to entire words rather than just a single letter.
- » Add looped S-curves to *descenders* (extensions below the main body of the letter) on the letters *f*, *g*, *j*, *p*, and *y*.
- » Extend the final stroke on the letters *e*, *q*, and *r*.
- » Add an S-curve to the tops of the letters *c* and *s*. You can use this flourish to connect to the letter *t*, as shown in [Figure 15-6](#).
- » Extend the final part of the letters *v* and *w* upward.
- » Connect double *l*'s, as shown in [Figure 15-6](#).



FIGURE 15-7: Flourishes for all the Italic lowercase letters.

The pointers in the preceding list for making flourishes apply to the capital letters as well as lowercase letters. Just take a look at [Figure 15-8](#) for some examples.

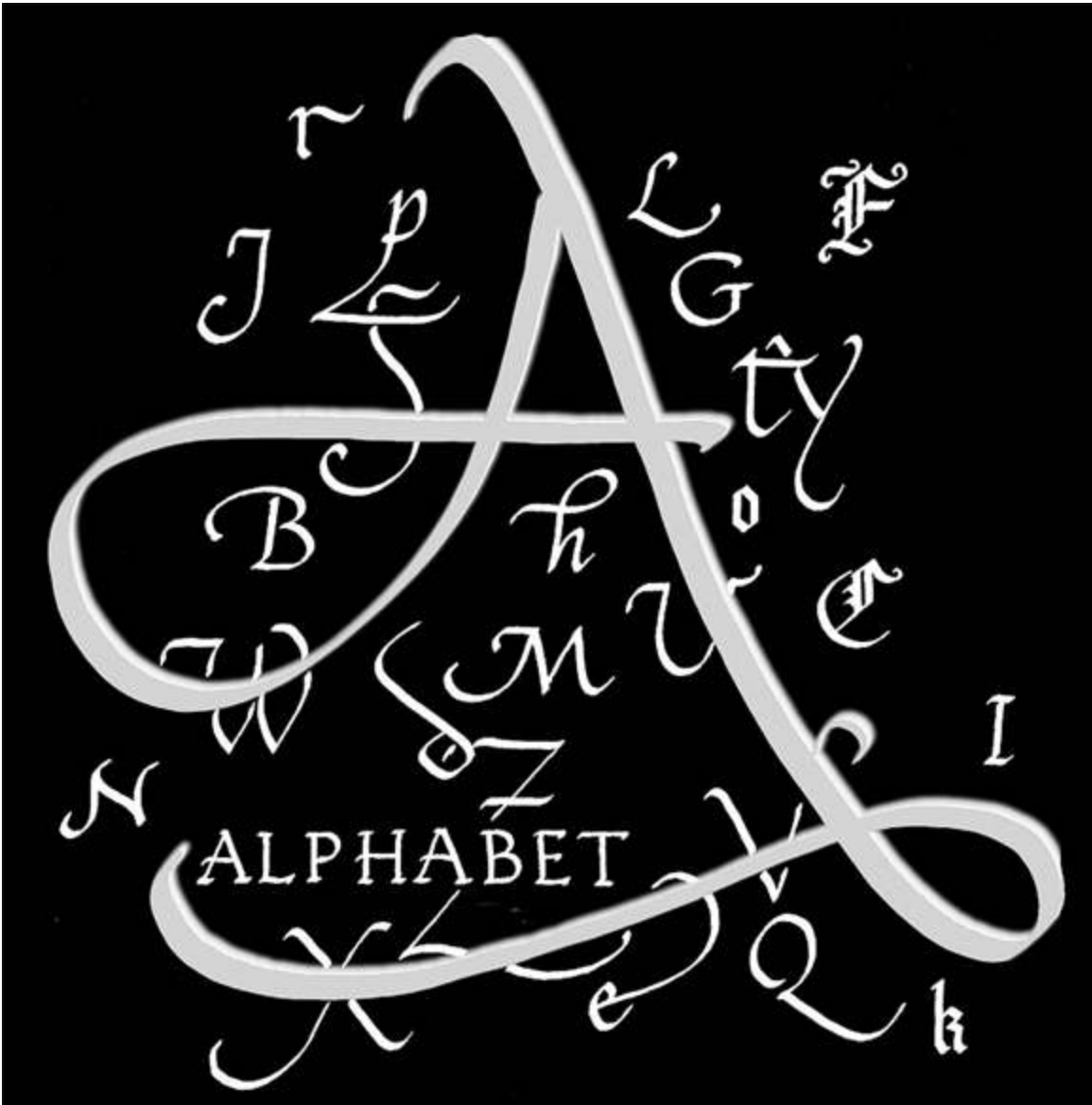


FIGURE 15-8: Flourishes for all the Italic capital letters.

When trying to do flourishes, keep these tips in mind:

- » **Capital A in two ways:** Either on the left or the right side, as shown in [Figure 15-7](#).

- » **The letters *B*, *D*, *E*, and *F* in two ways:** With a stroke that either curves over the top or wraps around below the letter.
- » **Many of the capital letters by using S-curves:** You start the S-curve at the extension of a flourish which is the beginning or ending of a stroke in forming the letter.
- » **Several of the letters by lengthening the ending stroke:** Examples include *Q*, *R*, *U*, *V*, *W*, *X*, and *Z*.
- » **Some letters, such as *C*, *O*, *S*, and *T*, in unique ways:** Refer to the examples in [Figure 15-7](#) to see the possibilities.



TIP

For especially large flourishes, lightly sketch the lines by using a pencil before you commit the flourish to ink. To maintain control, lift the pen at intervals, rather than attempting to complete the entire flourish in a single, uninterrupted stroke — a challenging feat for intricate designs.



REMEMBER

Lift the pen only at the thinnest parts of a stroke. You can set it back down and continue from that point, but never attempt to lift the pen in the middle of a thick stroke — doing so makes it nearly impossible to resume smoothly without disrupting the stroke's flow or leaving an uneven mark.

Enhancing Your Calligraphy by Using Borders

A well-placed border can turn an ordinary calligraphy piece into something striking. Whether framing an elegant invitation or adding flair to a certificate, borders bring structure, charm, and emphasis to your work.

But when should you use one? The short answer: whenever it enhances your design. No hard-and-fast rule exists — not even for maps or name tags. Although maps traditionally have borders, name tags often look cleaner without them. But if a border suits your vision, go for it!

Borders range from formal and refined to playful and unconventional. You may opt for a frame that surrounds all four sides, a decorative flourish running down just one edge, or an understated accent at the top and bottom.

Calligraphers tend to gravitate toward classic, visually pleasing, and easy-to-create designs. I introduce you to these tried-and-true styles in this section.

The tool that you use to create borders in calligraphy shapes their final look. Choose the pen that best complements your project and enhances your vision. You can use one of the following pens:

- » **Broad-edge calligraphy pen:** Creates darker, more substantial borders.
- » **Fine-pointed pen:** Offers delicate, refined lines while providing the flexibility to incorporate color. By first outlining your design in waterproof ink (see [Chapter 2](#) for why it's generally best to avoid it), you can then apply watercolor to bring rich, vibrant depth to your work.
- » **Ruling pen:** For crisp, straight-line borders, precise and structured.

I talk about these and other types of pens in [Chapter 3](#). See [Figure 15-9](#) for a comparison of broad-edge, ruling pen and sharp-pointed drawing pen borders. [Figure 15-9](#) also shows a border created by using a sharp-pointed pen.



FIGURE 15-9: Borders drawn by using a calligraphy pen, sharp-pointed pen, and ruling pen.

You don't get a formula to use to determine how wide or narrow to make a border. It's an entirely visual decision. Trust your eye and use what looks best to you. (The same principle applies to choosing letter sizes and guidelines, which I talk about in [Chapter 3](#).)

Preliminary sketches give you the freedom to experiment — test different proportions, adjust placements, and see what feels right and enhances your specific piece. Let your intuition guide the way. See [Figure 15-10](#).



FIGURE 15-10: A border drawn by using a sharp-pointed pen.

You want uniform repetition of design when you create borders. To ensure a uniform look, always sketch your borders before you commit them to ink. Measure the spacing so that you can repeat the design at regular intervals, keeping everything balanced and precise.

Creating a mock-up provides a clear framework for the structure and spacing of your design. To prepare the mock-up to be used underneath the sheet of paper where you'll create your final work, darken the lines (shown in [Figure 15-10](#)) to ensure that they remain visible through the final sheet, making it easier to follow and maintain precision. Any of the calligraphy papers that I recommend in [Chapter 2](#) are transparent enough for you to see the design underneath. It is also helpful to make light pencil lines for your border on your top sheet before you begin using ink.

Adding Other Embellishments

When you use a broad-edge calligraphy pen (which you can read more about in [Chapter 2](#)), you can effortlessly produce thick and thin strokes, making it perfect for creating striking designs and decorative doodles. If you use them thoughtfully, these accents can add a touch of elegance to your calligraphy.

These embellishments serve multiple purposes:

- » Introduce bullet points
- » Mark the start or end of a paragraph
- » Provide emphasis in titles and text

Many embellishments can even blend seamlessly into flourishes, such as a flourish that finishes in a delicate floral motif (see [Figure 15-11](#)).

Graphic designers often refer to these elements as *dingbats* — small decorative marks that enhance a layout. But, like with any ornamentation, use them in moderation to ensure that they complement your work rather than overpower it.

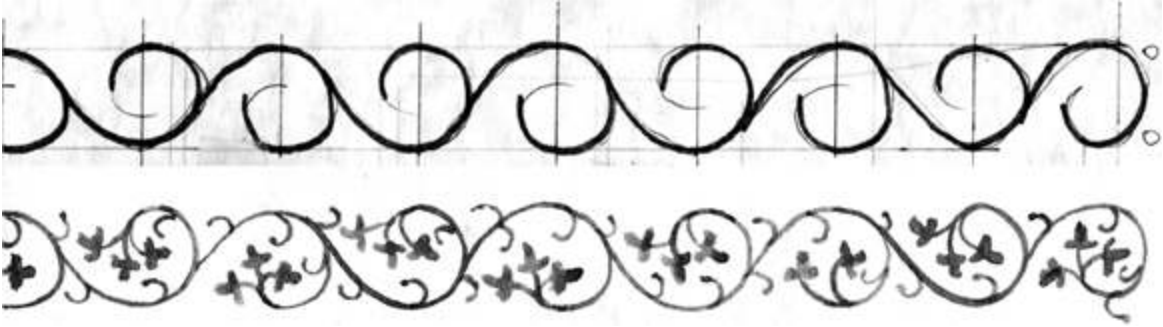


FIGURE 15-11: Examples of doodles that you can create by using the broad-edge pen.

Chapter 16

Broadening Your Artistic Horizons: Signatures, Quotations, and More

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Creating elaborate signatures
 - » Designing a quotation
 - » Addressing envelopes
 - » Making maps and plaques
 - » Putting your calligraphy in a mat and frame
 - » Using calligraphy in fine art
-

Calligraphy opens the door to a vast array of creative possibilities — so many, in fact, that I'd have to write an encyclopedia to cover them all! In this chapter, I focus on a few of the most impactful ways to use the artistry of calligraphy.

For instance, you can see how to craft sophisticated calligraphic signatures that exude personality and professionalism. Building on the foundational techniques I introduce in [Chapter 7](#), I now expand on how to elevate quotations into striking, expressive designs that command attention. I also show you how to apply your skills to other creative endeavors, such as adding art to your calligraphy, making maps and plaques, addressing envelopes, and even handling your own matting and framing.

Gathering What You Need

To get the most out of these projects, you'll need

- » **Alphabet Familiarity:** Ideally, know two alphabets, but even one is enough to explore the techniques.
- » **A Writing Instrument:** Use a fountain or dip pen (see [Chapter 2](#) for guidance).
- » **Quality Paper:** See [Chapter 2](#) for paper selection.
- » **Guidelines:** Know how to draw guidelines or use a guide sheet beneath your paper. (See [Chapter 3](#) for details.)

Additional materials, where needed, are listed in individual projects.

Designing a Flourished Signature

Signatures are the perfect project for using flourishes. Thoughtfully applied, flourishes enhance letterforms and unify the design into a cohesive whole (see [Chapter 15](#) for details). But adding them randomly won't create harmony — they require intention.

I've crafted countless signatures ([Figure 16-1](#) shows some examples), and at arts and crafts fairs, they act like magnets — drawing in fairgoers, sparking conversations, and even attracting buyers, all for just a dollar!



FIGURE 16-1: Examples of the many flourished signatures I've done.

A well-crafted signature leaves a lasting impression. Whether on correspondence, a gift, or a work of art, it catches the eye and showcases individuality. Even the smallest details can reflect artistry and care, making your mark truly stand out.

Planning with preliminary sketches



TIP

The only surefire way to master the use of flourishes is through extensive preliminary sketches. By experimenting and refining your designs, you can achieve a balanced and harmonious look.

To guide you in creating a polished and professional-looking signature, follow these steps:

1. **Choose a calligraphic style that suits your signature's tone** — modern for elegance, Gothic for boldness.
2. **Write your name simply and legibly** — this forms the foundation for flourishes.
3. **Identify natural spots for embellishment**, like starting strokes, loops, and spaces.
4. **Sketch flourishes lightly**, ensuring that they enhance rather than overwhelm.
5. **Refine for balance and harmony** — every element should feel intentional.

Finalizing the design

After you settle on a design that you like, follow these steps:

1. **Select high-quality paper suited for calligraphy.**
2. **Use a pen to trace over your finalized sketch.**
3. **Practice the signature several times to ensure that you use consistent and smooth strokes.**

4. **With your best pen and ink combination, execute the final version of your signature on the high-quality paper you choose in Step 1.**

Produce a polished version that has clean, deliberate strokes, especially if you plan to use the final design in a presentation to a client or for a special project.

Composing Beautiful Quotations: The Calligrapher's Specialty

Lettering quotations is one of the most versatile and impactful tasks a calligrapher can undertake — it's often considered the cornerstone of calligraphy. [Figure 16-2](#) shows two examples of how calligraphy and details such as gold leaf can transform the presentation of quotations.



REMEMBER Mastering this skill not only allows you to transform meaningful words into stunning visual art, but also equips you with techniques that you can apply to a wide range of other projects, from greeting cards to personalized artwork.

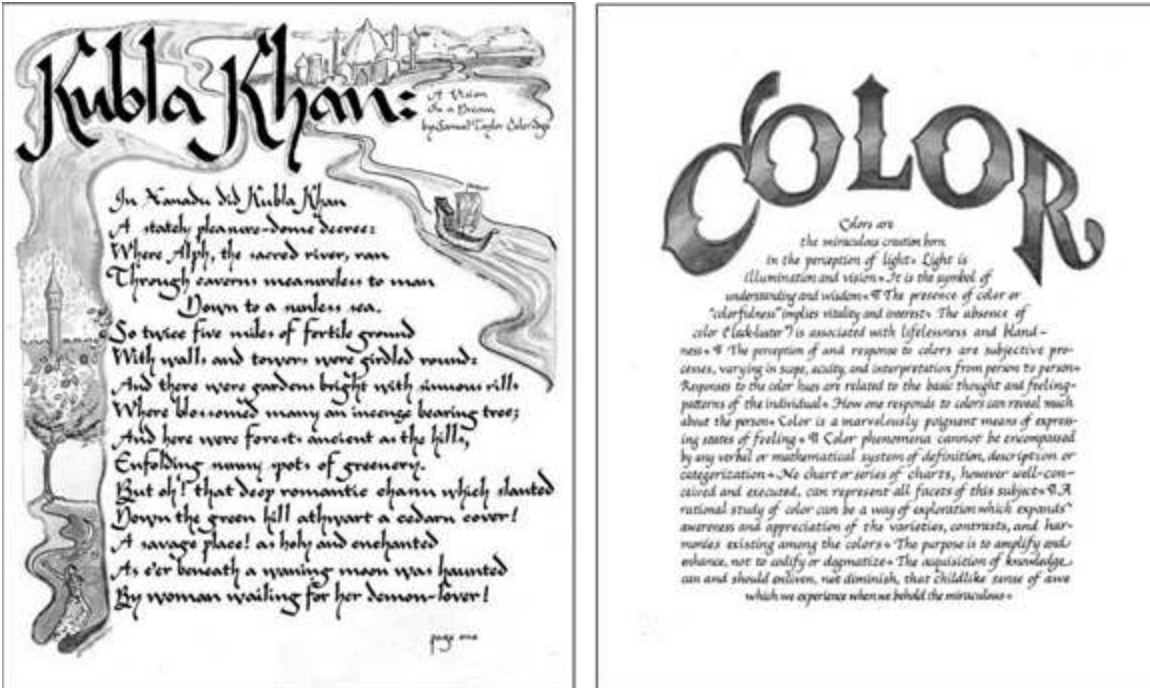


FIGURE 16-2: Two quotations that feature gold leaf and acrylic paint used like watercolor.

In [Chapter 7](#), I give you the basics of lettering simple quotations, focusing on clean, straightforward designs. In this chapter, I take things a step further, exploring the nuances of crafting more challenging quotation layouts, justifying margins, incorporating decorative elements, creating balanced compositions, and adding flourishes that elevate your work to a professional level.

Mastering margin justification

Start by arranging the words in a way that reflects their meaning. Sketch multiple thumbnail layouts — experiment freely, because sketches allow for exploration without commitment.



TIP

Create 4 to 12 sketches, refining them until you land on a favorite. Then, make one final polished version.

Once you settle on a layout, choose how to execute the design. The following sections cover three types of flush designs and one symmetrical approach (see [Figure 16-3](#)).

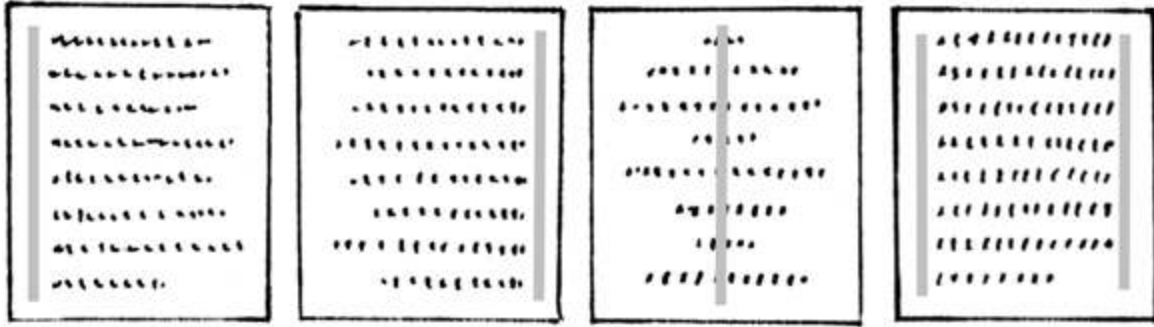


FIGURE 16-3: Flush left, flush right, symmetrical, and flush left and right designs.

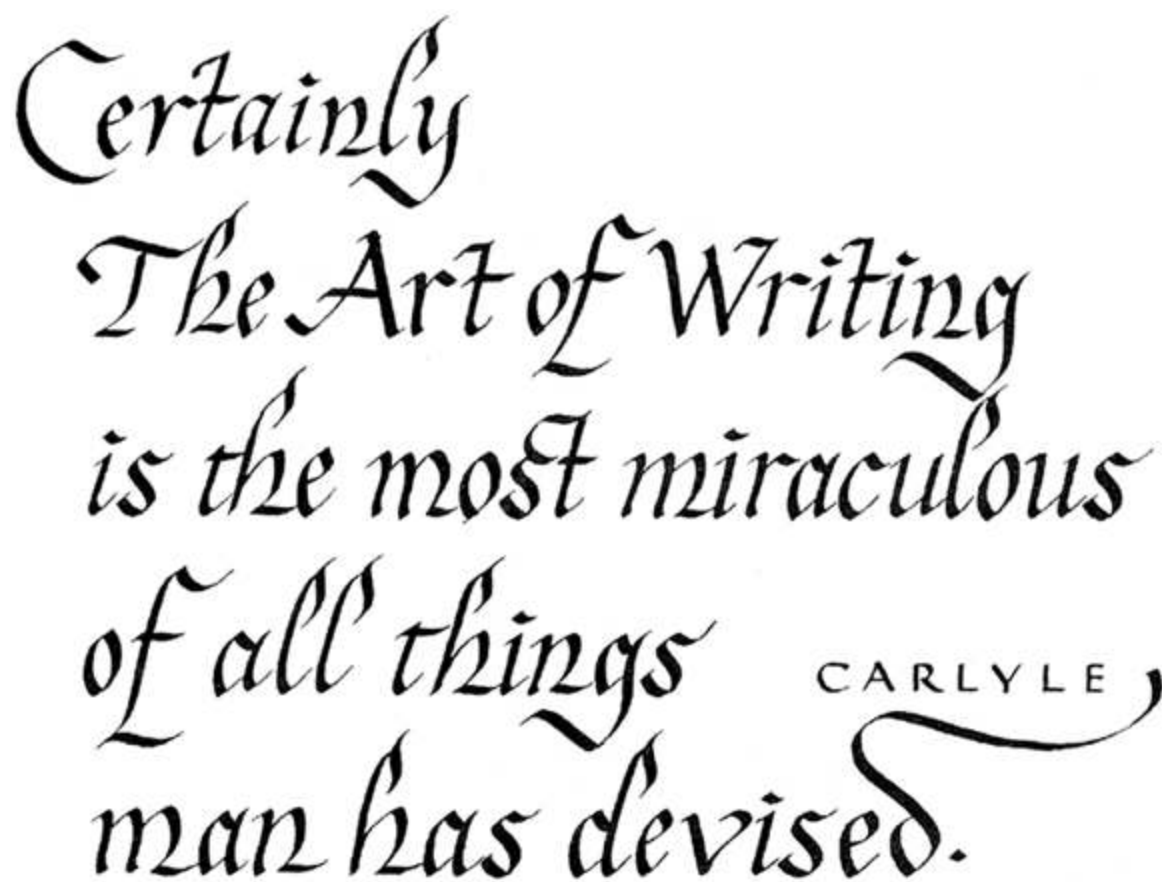
Flush left

Flush left, also called left-justified, aligns text evenly along the left margin while leaving the right edge ragged. It's the simplest and most straightforward layout.

A flush-left design requires no special techniques; simply write like you normally do. However, keep these tips in mind to enhance your work:

- » **Mark your left margin.** Consider drawing a vertical guideline to maintain a consistent and clean left edge.
- » **Add visual interest.** Flush-left designs can appear quite ordinary, so consider incorporating decorative elements to elevate the look. Flourishes, variations in letter styles or sizes, and creative arrangements can add depth and charm to your design.

[Figure 16-4](#) demonstrates how to dress up a flush-left design. In this example, I pair a variation of Italic with Roman lettering, slightly offset the first word to the left, and embellish it with flourishes.



Certainly
The Art of Writing
is the most miraculous
of all things
man has devised.

CARLYLE

FIGURE 16-4: A flush-left design that has been dressed up.

Flush right

Flush right means that all the lines of text line up on the right side. This design takes some planning, but it's not as difficult as it may appear.

Follow these steps to produce a clean, well-spaced flush-right design:

1. Prepare a preliminary version of your quote.

Do a preliminary layout using the flush-left layout (see the preceding section) to establish spacing guides:

- *Traditional method:* Letter the text flush left on sketch paper. For efficiency, use a marker that has the same nib size as your final pen.
- *New method:* Create the preliminary version digitally, using a font that has proportions matching your intended alphabet. (See [Chapter 19](#) for details on creating your own fonts.)

2. On your final paper, lightly pencil in guidelines and draw a vertical line to mark the right margin.
3. If using the traditional method, cut out individual lines from your sketched layout. If using the new method, print your digital version.
4. Tape the first line to the left of the right margin line.

If you are the new method and the printed copy is visible as an underlayment, you can letter directly over it and skip Steps 5 through 7. If it is not visible, trim the lines from your printed version and follow the next steps.

5. Use the taped version as a guide, carefully drawing the final text below it.

Use the taped strip as a guide to achieve proper spacing and alignment for the right-flush line of text. You can see an example of this tape-and-copy method in [Figure 16-5](#).

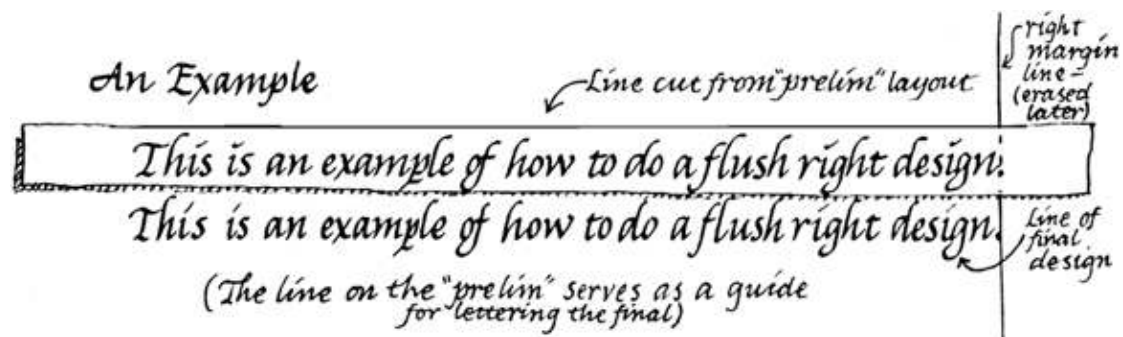


FIGURE 16-5: Using strips from a preliminary version as guides for the final version.

6. After you complete inking the line, un-tape your guideline from the paper.
7. Repeat Steps 4 through 6 for each line of your quotation.

Continue positioning and lettering each line until your design is complete.

Symmetrical

Symmetrical means that each line of text is centered horizontally on the page. Like the flush-right design (see the preceding section), this design also requires planning, but it's also easy.

You can create a symmetrical design by

- » Using one of the two methods for creating the preliminary text and cutting strips that I discuss in the preceding section, except instead of positioning the preliminary copy on the right margin, line it up with a center line that you draw on the final version (see [Figure 16-6](#)).
- » Find the center of a strip easily and accurately by simply folding the strip in half.

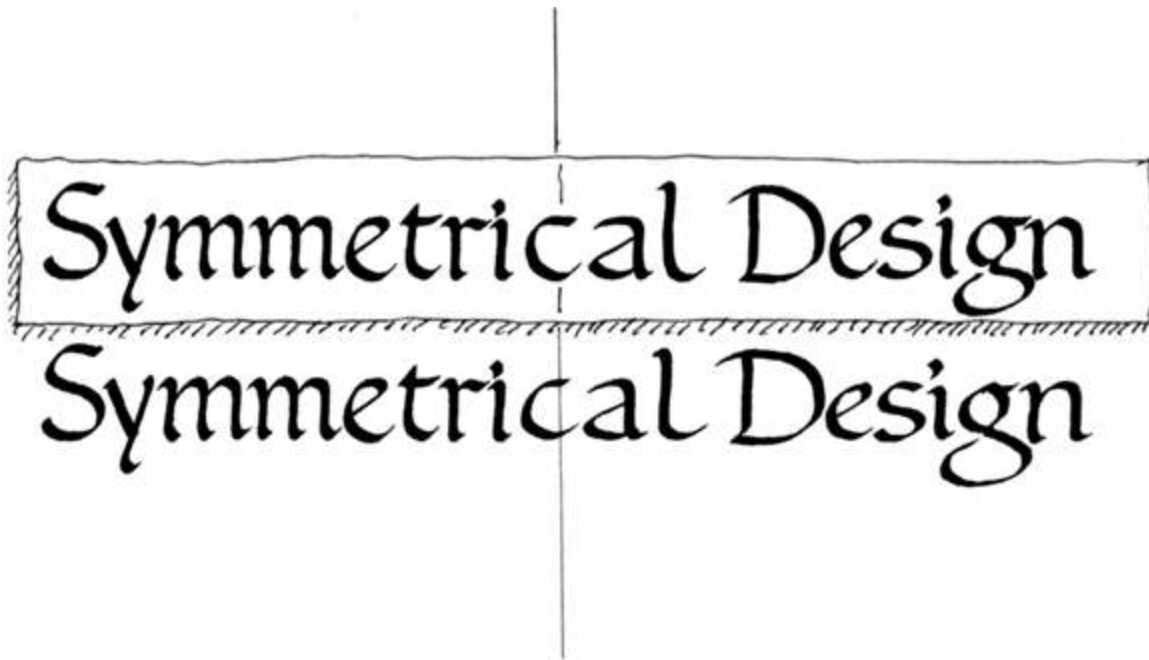


FIGURE 16-6: Using a preliminary version to line up the final version.

Flush left and right

Flush left and right (see [Figure 16-2](#), far right) requires that all the lines begin at the same distance from the left edge of the paper and end at the same distance from the right edge. This is the most challenging of the four designs. (The digital method, which I discuss in this section, simplifies the process greatly.)

A flush left and right layout requires a two-step preliminary process before you complete the final version in ink. Follow these steps if you use the traditional method:

1. Letter the text flush left in pencil on sketch paper.

Keep the lettering light because you refine it in ink in Step 3. Ensure that you make the text line up with the left margin as evenly as possible.

2. Draw a vertical line (lightly) down the right edge of your layout, aligned with the end of the longest line of text.

3. Estimate how much additional space you need to add between words on a line that doesn't quite reach the line you draw in Step 2.

4. Reletter the whole line in ink so that the line ends at the line drawn in Step 2.

5. Repeat Steps 3 and 4 for each line that doesn't quite reach the line in Step 2.

Alternatively, you can use a computer to create the layout digitally, setting the margins in your word processor to match your design requirements and eliminating the need for manual spacing adjustments. (See [Chapter 19](#) for guidance on designing custom fonts.)

6. Cut the lines of text into strips.

7. Position a line above the area on your final paper where you want that line to appear.

Or, if the final paper is thin enough, use the layout as a guide underneath, rather than cutting the text and going line by line.

8. Use the strip (or the page underneath your final paper) as a spacing guide and draw the text on your final work.

Using this guide ensures alignment and neatness.

9. Repeat Steps 7 and 8 for each line of the quotation.



WARNING Making the margins too narrow is the most common mistake that students make. Narrow margins make the calligraphy look cramped. Keep your margins nice and wide.

Exploiting harmony and contrast

An outstanding quotation design makes use of both harmony and contrast. You can use these principles in your designs:

- » **Harmony:** Also called *unity*, it is achieved through a consistent style and size of the letters that you use. The layout ties it all together.
- » **Contrast:** Contrasts can be created by having different letter sizes and weights (boldness), adding embellishments and flourishes, and using different colors. You need contrasts to create interest, but use them judiciously.

Here are some tips for adding interest to your design:

- » Make one letter or word stand out by making it larger and/or bolder than the others.
- » You can use two alphabets in a design but be careful if you use more than two. When you use two alphabets, the rule is that the older one should come before the later one. For example, use Roman before Italic (see [Figure 16-7](#)).
- » Add designs or drawn images (see [Figure 16-8](#)).
- » Add color with different color inks, designs, or images.

BLESSED are
the poor in spirit: for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven ::
Blessed are they that mourn
for they shall be comforted ::
Blessed are the meek: for
they shall inherit the earth ::
Blessed are they which do
hunger and thirst after right-
eousness: for they shall be
filled :: Blessed are the mer-
ciful: for they shall obtain
mercy :: Blessed are the pure
in heart: for they shall see
❖❖❖❖❖❖ G O D ❖❖❖❖❖❖

FIGURE 16-7: A flush left and right design that uses two alphabets.

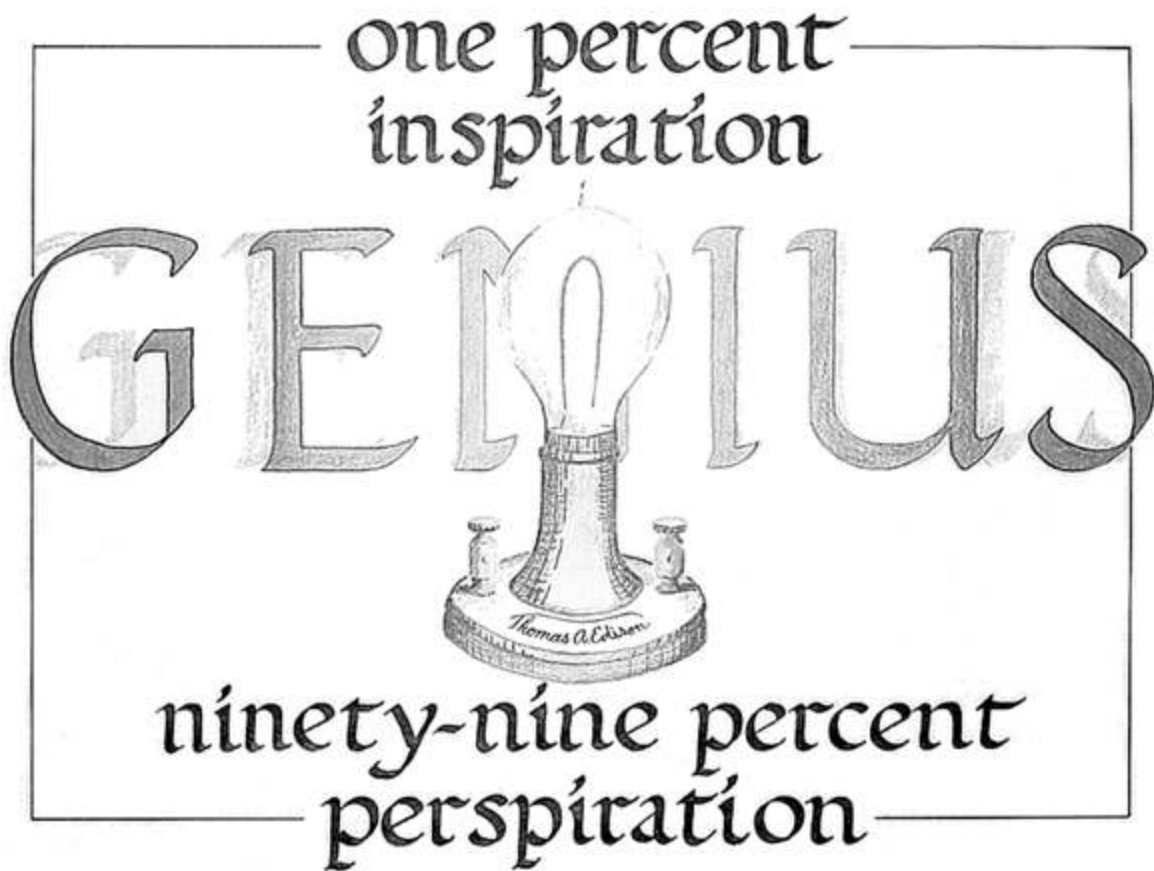


FIGURE 16-8: A symmetrical design that uses three alphabets and a drawn image.

Positioning a large word

You can design a quote by making one word larger than the others.

You can place the word that is larger than the others in several different ways. The obvious placement is centered at the top — just like a title — but you can also place the word in other places. It can be at the bottom, in the middle, or along the side. Also, it does not have to be in a straight, horizontal line; it can be slanted or even curved (see [Figure 16-9](#)).

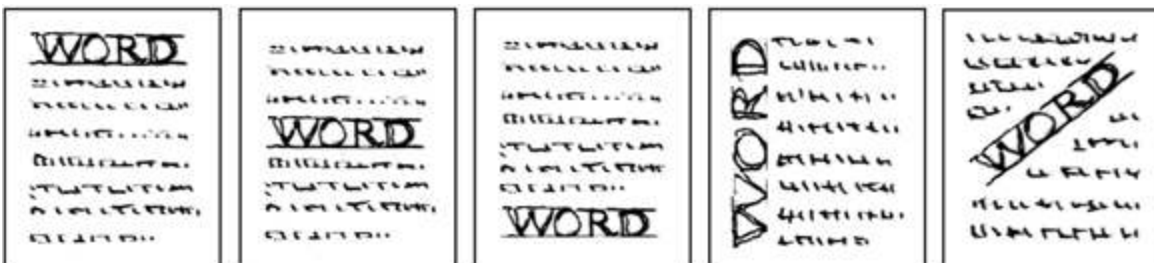


FIGURE 16-9: Some of the many possibilities for positioning a large word in your design.

Incorporating Designs and Drawn Images into Your Calligraphy

If you have drawing or painting skills, consider blending them with calligraphy. Painting can enhance calligraphy as a subtle complement, or, at a more advanced level, the two can interact as equals, each adding meaning and depth. Asian art has long embraced this fusion, though it remains less explored in Western traditions.

Making Maps

You can use calligraphy to create maps that serve both practical and artistic purposes. Whether you're designing a meticulously detailed map of a real-world location for reference use or indulging your imagination with a whimsical fantasy map, calligraphy can add an elegant and timeless touch.

I love creating maps. [Figure 16-10](#) shows an example of my efforts.

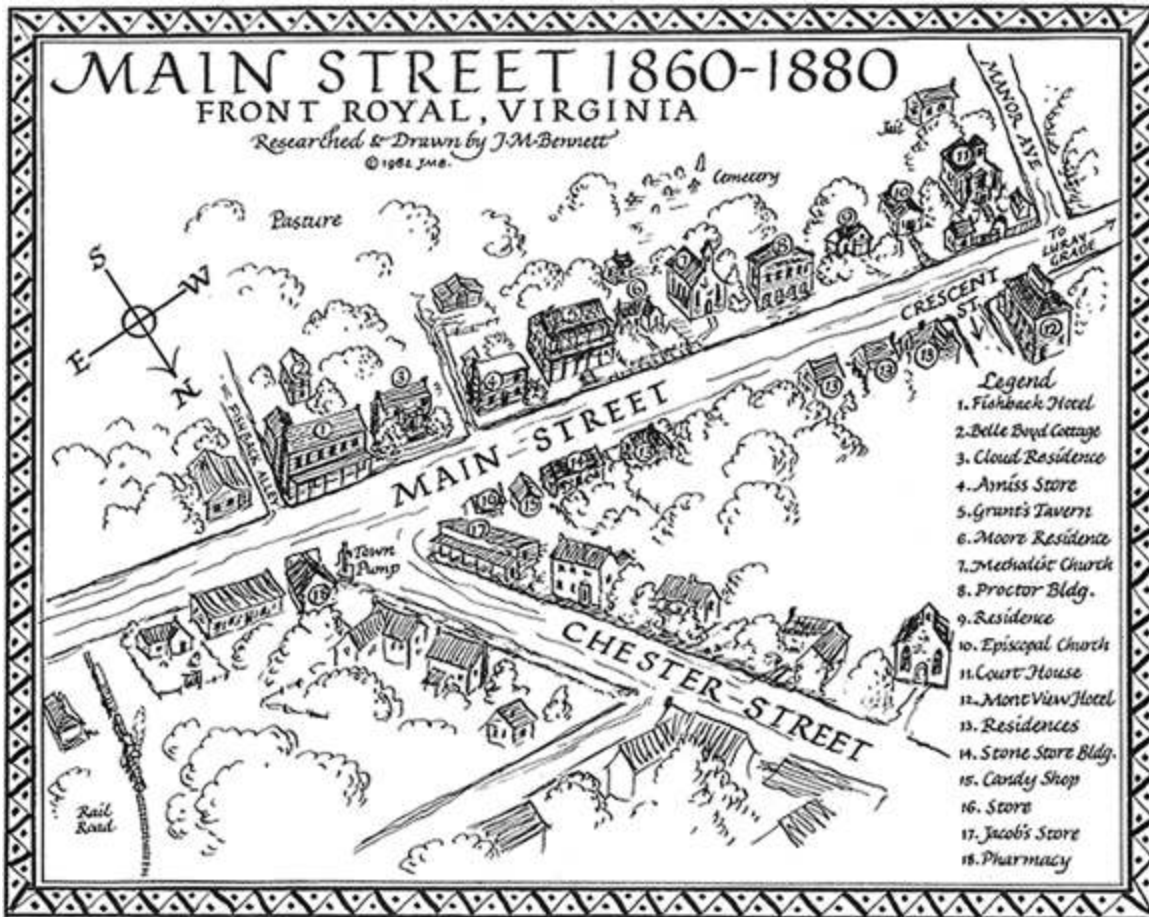


FIGURE 16-10: A map of my hometown in the late 1800s.

I used the fun map, shown in [Figure 16-11](#), as an art project to reinforce the math concepts and operations that my class covered when I taught middle school math. I made the map look antiqued by pouring tea on it.



TIP

Maps can serve both practical and artistic purposes. They can provide directions to an event on an invitation, mark meaningful locations such as where a couple first met, or highlight store locations in business materials. In creative projects, maps can add a decorative touch to travel-themed designs, blending function with visual appeal.

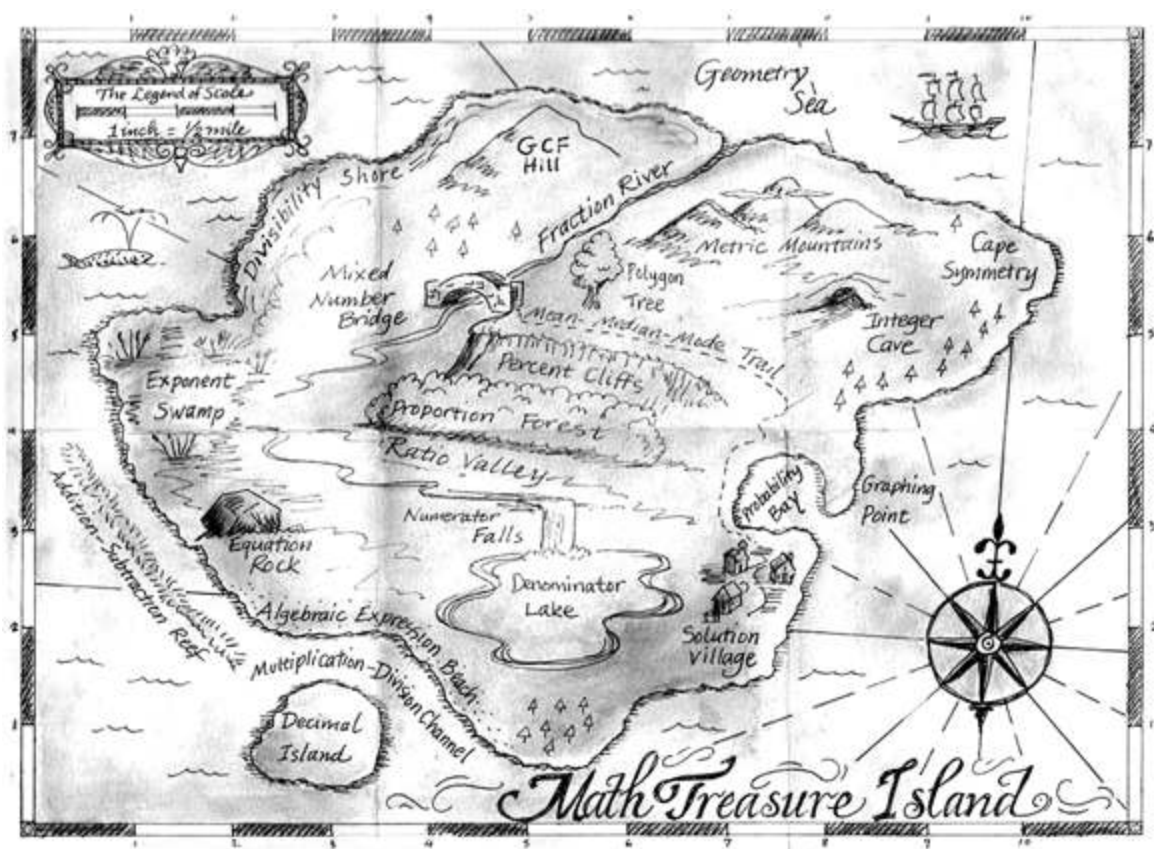


FIGURE 16-11: A map of Math Treasure Island.

Addressing Envelopes

An elegantly addressed envelope sparks curiosity and makes a lasting impression. It's a simple yet powerful way to showcase your skills, allowing for flourishes and embellishments that go beyond the letter itself. A beautifully calligraphed envelope reflects care and craftsmanship.

For the simplest approach, use a guide sheet with lines drawn in bold marker — such as the ZIG Writer — and slip it inside the envelope so that the lines are visible on the side where the address goes. Most envelope paper is thin enough for the guidelines to remain visible, especially when drawn extra dark. Follow these lines carefully as you write the address.



REMEMBER Think of the name and address as a cohesive unit, using embellishments to enhance harmony rather than create visual distraction.

Producing Plaques

Creating calligraphy plaques can showcase your lettering, whether you make a plaque of a favorite saying, a recipe, or an award.

A *plaque* is typically a beveled wooden base that has a mounted paper design, sealed under a clear polymer coating for durability. You can find unfinished plaques and sealing products at crafts stores such as Michaels or Hobby Lobby.

Follow these steps to successfully create a plaque:

- 1. Gather your materials.**

You need a dip pen, waterproof India ink, and smooth, heavyweight paper. (Be sure to wash out your pen nibs immediately after use to prevent the waterproof ink from ruining your nibs. (I discuss pen problems in [Chapter 2](#).)

- 2. Choose an alphabet to use.**

[Part 3](#) of this book offers alphabet options.

- 3. Size the paper by pressing it onto the plaque to create an impression of the edges.**

This works great for oval and heart-shaped plaques.

- 4. Using the impression as a guide, complete the calligraphy.**

Allow the ink to dry fully before you do anything more with the paper.

- 5. Sand the wood plaque thoroughly, then paint or stain the front and sides. Let it dry 24 hours.**

Covering the entire surface prevents uneven transparency.

6. Cut out the paper shape following the impression.

Make sure it fits correctly, and trim it if needed.

7. Apply white glue evenly with a stiff brush to the back of the paper and press it in position on the plaque. Place a weight on top to keep the paper from curling.

Work quickly because the glue can dry fast. I use an iron skillet for the weight.

8. After the glue dries, spray the entire front side lightly with a sealer such as Krylon Crystal Clear. When that has dried, brush on a final coating such as Mod Podge.

Follow all product safety precautions for both the sealer and polymer finish.

9. Allow the plaque to set for at least two days to give the coating time to cure.

10. Glue felt to the back and attach a decorative hanger.

Your plaque is complete!



TIP

When doing plaques, be especially careful and take your time. Don't rush the process. Set up a work space and work step by step; and make small plaques at first until you master the technique.

Doing Your Own Matting and Framing

Matting and framing enhance the beauty of your calligraphy while ensuring longevity. A well-chosen mat and frame complement your lettering style and create a striking visual impact.



REMEMBER Quality framing can be pricey, especially with archival materials, custom mats, or specialty glass. Get quotes before committing, or explore DIY options with premade frames to stay within budget. A custom frame enhances and preserves your calligraphy, so plan ahead to avoid surprises.

Choosing the right mat

A mat is a border placed around artwork within a frame. It serves both aesthetic and practical purposes, providing visual separation while helping to protect the piece.:

- » Mats provide space between the artwork and the frame, adding depth and elegance.
- » Acid-free mats prevent discoloration and deterioration over time.
- » A neutral-colored mat keeps the focus on the lettering; a colored mat can enhance or contrast the ink. Soft tones often work best to avoid overpowering the composition.

Selecting a frame

Keep the following in mind when you select a frame for your calligraphy:

- » **Complement your calligraphy's style.** Simple frames suit modern lettering, and ornate frames enhance traditional scripts.
- » **Material matters.** Wood frames add warmth, and metal frames offer a sleek, contemporary look.
- » **Protect your calligraphy from UV rays.** Consider glass that has UV protection to shield against fading, especially if you plan to display your piece in direct light.

Mounting and assembly

When you put the mat and frame (see the preceding sections) together with your calligraphy, remember these considerations:

- » Use archival adhesives or corner mounts to secure the paper without damaging it.
- » Measure to ensure that you center the calligraphy within the mat for balance and visual appeal.
- » Assemble the frame carefully, making sure that all components fit snugly without warping the paper.

Displaying your framed calligraphy

A well-placed framed piece can elevate the impact of your calligraphy while ensuring its longevity. Keep these considerations in mind:

- » If you plan to hang your framed calligraphy, choose a location that avoids direct sunlight so that you can prevent fading.
- » For added flair, consider pairing framed calligraphy with complementary artwork or decorative elements.

Creating Calligraphic Fine Art

Calligraphy can transcend traditional lettering to become an integral part of fine art. You can choose from two primary approaches to incorporate calligraphy into artistic compositions:

- » **Calligraphy as a narrative element:** Weave lettering into the artwork to complement or enhance the visual storytelling. For example, scripture quotes integrated into a church mural can reinforce the spiritual themes while harmonizing with painted scenes. This method allows text to serve as both a design element and a meaningful message within the composition.

[Figure 16-12](#) shows a detail of a mural which was painted on a wall in a school's media enter. It was a really ambitious project. The entire mural was over seven feet tall and over twenty feet long. It took me the better

part of a year to complete this project. This is an example which shows that calligraphy doesn't have to be small; it can be used on a large scale.



FIGURE 16-12: A detail of a mural I painted that used calligraphy extensively.

» **Calligraphy as abstract expression:** Artists such as Mark Tobey (1890–1976) and Bradley Walker Tomlin (1899–1953) explored calligraphy-inspired abstraction, in which letterforms and gestural strokes create dynamic, rhythmic compositions:

- Tobey's *white writing* technique, influenced by East Asian calligraphy, features intricate, layered white brushstrokes that evoke movement and energy.

- Tomlin’s work, on the other hand, incorporates calligraphic marks within abstract fields, balancing spontaneity with structure. This approach treats calligraphy as a visual texture, rather than readable text, emphasizing form and emotion over literal meaning.

[Figure 16-13](#) shows one of my own abstract creations.

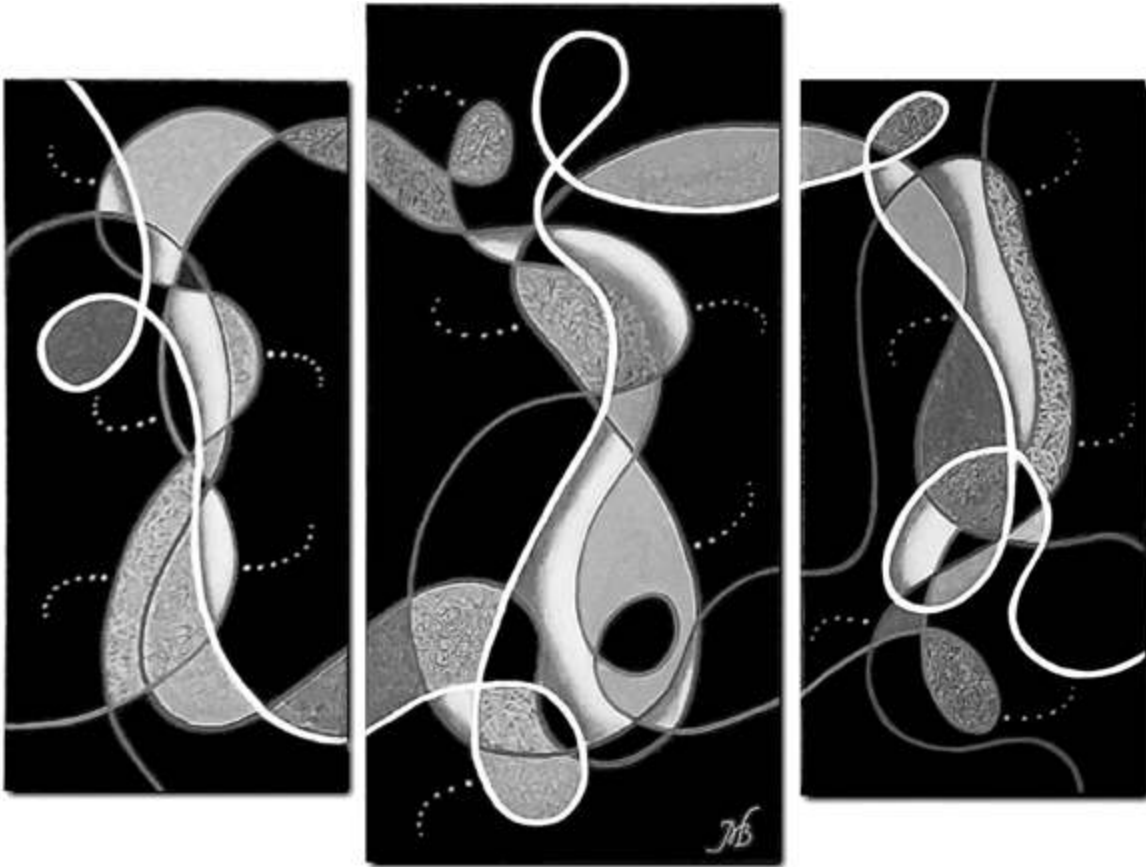


FIGURE 16-13: One of my calligraphy-inspired abstractions, “Concerto with Dancers.”



REMEMBER Calligraphy is more than writing — it’s art. Every stroke, curve, and flourish is an expression of creativity, transforming words into visual poetry. Whether structured or free-flowing, traditional or experimental, calligraphy is a reflection of artistic vision.

Chapter 17

Crafting Elegant Certificates

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Looking at what you need (and need to know)
 - » Filling in names on preprinted certificates
 - » Creating different kinds of certificates
 - » Fixing (little) mistakes
 - » Presenting your finished work
-

When people find out that you can do calligraphy, it's only a matter of time before someone asks you to create certificates. The most common request involves filling in names on preprinted certificates — a relatively straightforward task. Occasionally, however, someone may ask you to design and hand-letter a completely custom certificate, a project that requires creativity and attention to detail if you want to produce a one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

Although people typically use certificates to recognize achievements, honor service, or commemorate the completion of a program or course of study (such as a graduation diploma), certificates don't always have to be serious — they can also be lighthearted and humorous, serving as a playful way to acknowledge someone.

In this chapter, I guide you through a variety of certificate projects, ranging from simple to complex and from formal to fun. Along the way, I provide plenty of tips and techniques to help you tackle creating any certificate with confidence.

Getting Your Materials and Skills in Order

To create certificates, you need the following skills:

- » For a polished result, mastery of at least one alphabet — preferably two or more to diversify text and titles. Use Italic, Manuscript, or Copperplate for body text; Roman, Blackletter, or Uncial for titles. (See [Part 3](#) for the details on these and other alphabets.)
- » Understanding of how to draw guidelines (see [Chapter 3](#)).
- » Creating flush and symmetrical designs ([Chapter 16](#) offers valuable information you can apply to creating certificates).

And make sure that you have the following materials:

- » **Pen:** For casual jobs, a marker or fountain pen suffices. For your best work, always use a dip pen.
- » **Paper:** Use archival-quality, acid-free paper for formal documents to ensure longevity. For lighthearted tasks, try Strathmore or Pentelic paper (see [Chapter 2](#) for discussion of paper types).



TIP

It is easy to find archival-quality paper called “calligraphy parchment.” It resembles real parchment and, in lighter weights, is translucent. Both qualities make it a great choice for creating elegant certificates.

Looking at Examples of Certificates

In this section I offer a glimpse into certificate design. [Figure 17-1](#) highlights examples to inspire projects you can create on your own.

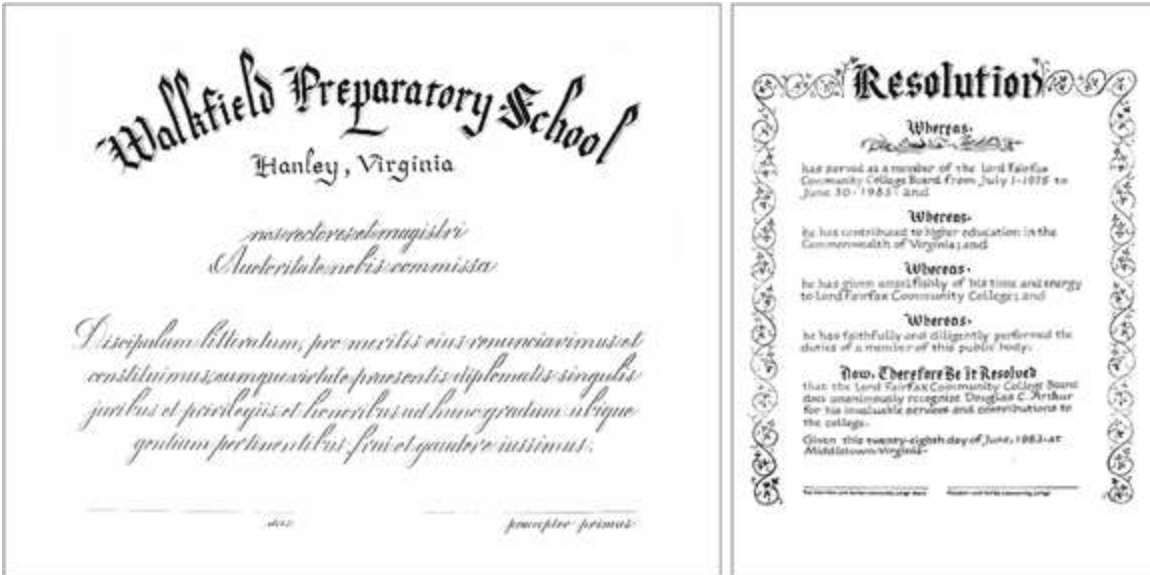


FIGURE 17-1: Examples of finished certificates.



REMEMBER Certificates don't have to be stiff or formal — you can have fun with them, too. [Figure 17-2](#) shows a lighthearted example: a Master's degree from the College of Hard Knocks, complete with a Latin motto that offers a smile and a truth — *Non est prandium gratuitum* (There's no free lunch).

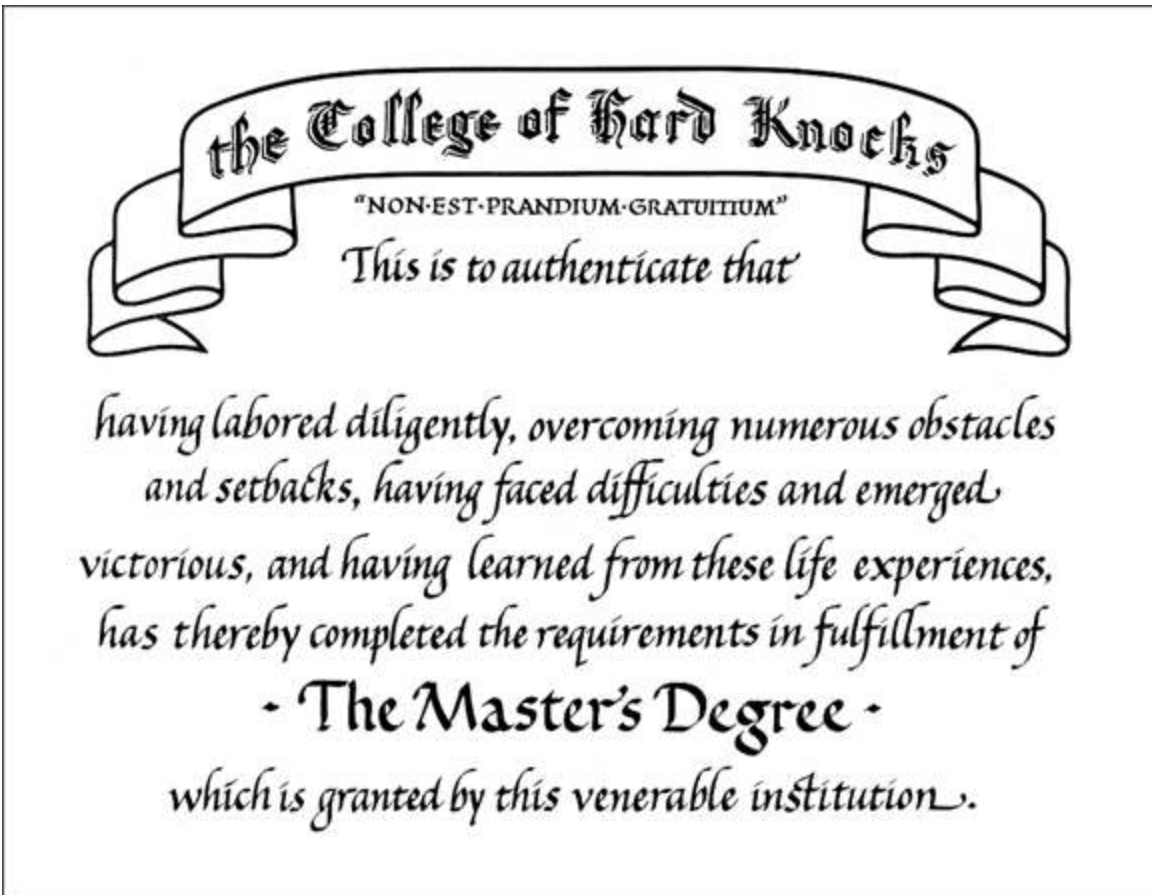


FIGURE 17-2: A Master's degree from the College of Hard Knocks.

Filling In Names on Prepared Certificates

You can write names on preprinted certificates easily, but preparation makes all the difference. Here are proven ways to help guarantee your success:

- » **Always ask for an extra certificate.** Test your pens to see which works best — some papers cause ink to bleed, skip, or smear. On tricky surfaces, a marker may work better than a dip or fountain pen.
- » **Get accurate name details.** Request a written list to ensure correct spelling and capitalization because names can vary widely.

» **Center names with precision.** Make sure that you center the name in the space provided.



TIP If you struggle to eyeball centering, try this method (see [Chapter 16](#)) to eliminate the guesswork:

1. **On ruled paper, write the names in the certificate's style.**
2. **Cut the names into strips and trim the ends so that no extra paper remains on either side of the name.**
3. **Fold the strip evenly in half to find its center.**
4. **Align the center fold that you make in Step 3 with the certificate's center line.**
5. **Carefully hold or tape the strip in position above where you want to draw the name on the certificate.**
6. **Letter the name on the certificate, using the strip as a guide for the position of your lettering.**
7. **Remove the strip that you tape to the certificate in Step 5.**

Now you have a neat and professional-looking certificate!

Working from Scratch

Creating a certificate from scratch may feel daunting, but if you're comfortable with a couple of alphabets (see [Part 3](#)) and practice lettering quotations (see [Chapter 16](#)), you're ready to begin.

If no one's commissioned a certificate yet, take the lead — design one for someone who deserves recognition. A “World's Most Extraordinary” award for a boss, friend, or neighbor is a great place to start.

In the next sections I guide you step by step, and if you slip up, just jump to the section “[Fixing Mistakes](#)” later in this chapter.

Follow these steps to plan out your certificate:

1. Check the wording that you plan to use on your certificate.

Make sure the text is completely accurate — check grammar, spelling, punctuation, and dates. For added confidence, ask someone skilled in proofreading to review it.

2. Create a preliminary sketch to match the formality of the certificate.

You'll want a more formal design for a high school diploma than for a kindergarten certificate. [Figure 17-3](#) shows basic layouts — symmetrical, curved titles, or bordered. Start with one of these simple designs before trying anything more intricate.

3. Draft a rough version of the certificate that shows the text placement and how you want to emphasize key elements.

Consider different sizes, weights, and styles of letters, using a hierarchy:

- *Title*: Largest and boldest
- *Body*: Medium size and weight
- *Date/signatures*: Smallest and lightest



REMEMBER When combining different alphabets in a design, the accepted tradition is to follow their historical order. Roman, Uncial, and Blackletter precede Italic, Manuscript, and Copperplate. (Check out [Part 3](#) for details on these alphabets.)



FIGURE 17-3: Three basic, traditional certificate designs to start.

Creating a mock-up

Using a mock-up — a sample layout that shows exactly where each element goes — simplifies making multiple copies of the same kind of certificate. You can create mock-ups by hand or use a computer with fonts that match the styles and sizes you plan to use in your lettering (see [Chapter 19](#) for details on designing your own fonts). Computer created mock-ups are a great timesaver.

Follow these steps to make a traditional mock-up:

1. **Letter all the lines (title and text) on a separate ruled sheet using the styles and sizes that you plan to use on the final certificate.**

Focus on good lettering and spacing; you can adjust placement later. If you want to curve the title, letter it straight first. See the following section for instructions on curving the title when you're ready.

2. **Cut the lines that you lettered in Step 1 into strips.**

Make each line its own strip.

3. **Draw guidelines on a blank sheet of paper that's the same size as the planned final certificate.**

I talk about guidelines in [Chapter 3](#).

4. **Position the text strips that you create in Step 2 onto the guideline sheet that you create in Step 3.**

5. **Use repositionable drafting tape to hold the strips in place.**

See the section “[Lettering the actual certificate](#)” later in this chapter to learn how to use the mock-up.



TIP

Although the final certificate should be lettered with a dip pen (it gives you the best results), you can use a marker or fountain pen for the mock-up — whichever feels more comfortable. Just match the nib size to the one you'll use on the final version. See [Figure 17-4](#).

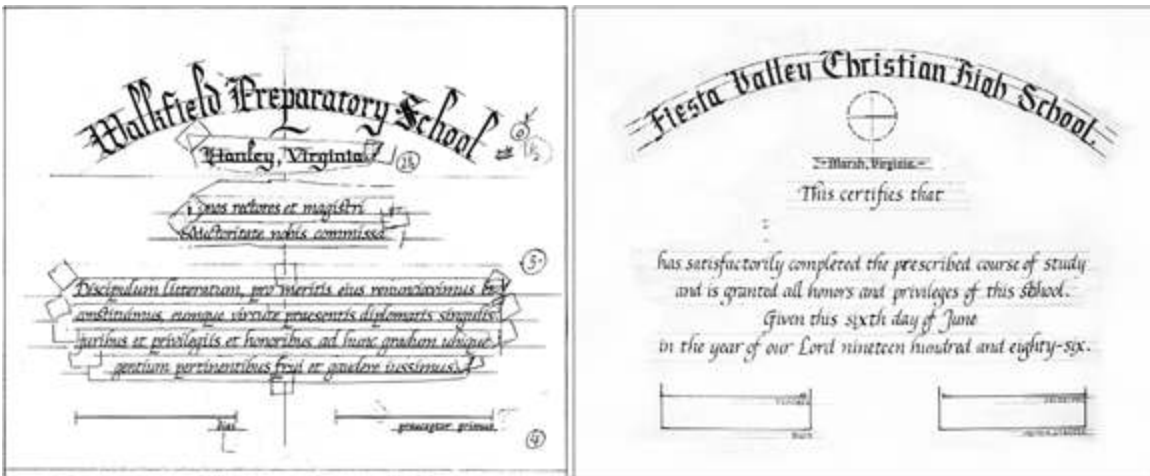


FIGURE 17-4: Two mock-up examples.

Curving the title

If you want to curve one or more of the strips that you create for your mock-up (see the preceding section), follow these simple, almost foolproof steps ([Figure 17-5](#) shows the curved title on a mock-up):

1. **On your mock-up sheet, use a compass (the circle drawing kind) to draw the curved base line positioned exactly as you want it.**
2. **Draw a vertical, center line through the arc.**
3. **With a pencil, mark the center of the strip that you want to curve.**
4. **Trim away everything below the base line, including the descenders.**
5. **Cut slits between each of the letters, as shown in [Figure 17-5](#).**
6. **Position the strip on the mock-up, matching the center lines.**
7. **Carefully bend the strip to match the curve that you draw in Step 1.**
8. **Tape the correctly positioned strip to the paper.**
9. **Darken all the guidelines of the letters on your mock-up by tracing over them with a marker.**

Now you can use your mock-up underneath the paper where you'll letter your certificate. See the next section "[Lettering the actual](#)

[certificate.](#)”

Alternatively, you can create the curved title by using a computer. Simply use a font that matches the style and size that you plan to use (see [Chapter 19](#) for tips on designing computer fonts based on your calligraphy). This digital approach offers precision and flexibility, complementing the traditional method.



FIGURE 17-5: A curved title on a mock-up. Note the cropped g.

Lettering the actual certificate

After you prepare your mock-up (see the section “[Creating a mock-up](#),” earlier in this chapter), follow these steps to letter the actual certificate:

1. **Place the blank certificate paper on top of the mock-up so that the text shows through.**
See [Chapter 2](#) for the paper I recommend.
2. **Use drafting tape to secure the guideline sheet to your writing board — tape the corners or edges lightly. Then place the sheet for the certificate on top and tape it down as well, aligning carefully with the sheet beneath.**
3. **Use the mock-up as a guide to carefully letter the certificate.**



REMEMBER Let your mock-up underneath your certificate paper guide you, but don't let them boss you around! Use them for placement, but elevate them with your own artistry. Purely tracing stiffens your strokes; if you aim for improvement, you bring smoothness, rhythm, and confidence to your work.

Fixing Mistakes

If you make a mistake in certificate lettering, you usually have to start over, but you can sometimes make minor corrections. Always attempt a correction first — but it must be flawless and invisible. If you can't fix the error seamlessly, begin again.

You can try to make a correction by using one of the following techniques:

» **Remove the error with a scrape.** You can sometimes do a very small amount of erasing by using a razor blade.

Scrape an error off your certificate by following these steps:

1. **Make sure the ink is completely dry.**

If you try this technique while the ink is still wet, it just smears.

2. **Use a new, clean, single-edge razor blade.**

Gently scrape away the mistake — shaving off a thin layer of paper. Hold the blade nearly flat, at a low angle, and apply light, even pressure. This method works best on good-quality paper that is thick enough to tolerate careful scraping.

3. **Use a burnisher to smooth the paper where you scraped.**

A *burnisher* is a smooth, hard tool often made of bone, Teflon, or agate. Gently rub the scraped area. This flattens the paper fibers and reduces roughness. If done carefully,

burnishing should allow you to letter over the correction cleanly.

- » **Alter the letter to make it look like another.** If you draw the wrong letter, you can sometimes alter it slightly by using a combination of erasing and relettering. For example, you can easily change the lowercase letter *r* into an *n*.
- » **Put a design on top of the mistake.** For example, when I finished lettering a quotation years ago, much to my consternation, I discovered a drop of ink that had splattered near the bottom. I simply drew a small star on top of it and placed another star at the bottom so that the two looked perfectly balanced and completely intentional. No one ever suspected that one of the stars covered a mistake!

Adding spaces for signatures, dates, and seals

Certificates usually require dates and signatures. If you need to draw lines for these elements, use a ruling pen (shown in [Figure 17-6](#)), which you can probably find at any store that sells drafting supplies. John Neal Books (www.johnnealbooks.com) also offers them. (See [Chapter 2](#) for more information about materials and supplies.)

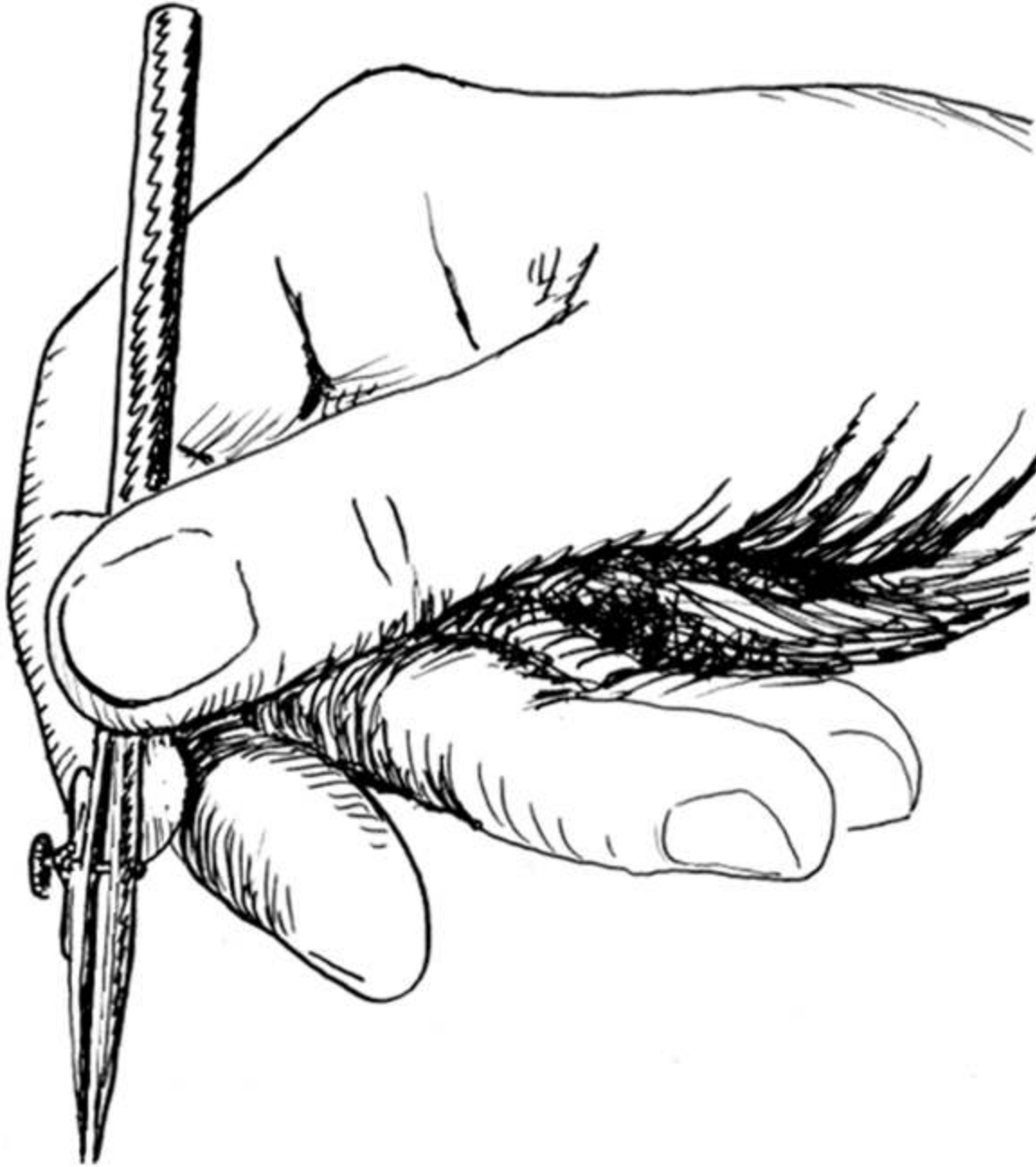


FIGURE 17-6: Using a ruling pen.

You'll quickly get the hang of using a ruling pen — it produces a fine, consistent line ideal for signature and date lines on a certificate. Adjust the line width using the side knob, and fill the pen by placing ink between the metal jaws with a dropper or brush. Always use a straight edge, such as a ruler or T-square, to guide the pen for crisp, even lines.

If you've never used a ruling pen before, get one and try it: I think you'll be amazed at how it helps you draw perfect lines.

Running for the border

A border can enhance your certificate's design, but you never want the border to overpower the certificate's contents. A border that's too wide or heavy can ruin the overall balance of a certificate. For more about borders, see [Chapter 15](#).

Creating Resolutions

This section isn't about New Year's resolutions; instead, it covers a special kind of certificate used to honor someone's service to an organization or community. Official resolutions are rarely preprinted (at least, I've never seen one); they're almost always created by hand.

The form of the official resolution is simple:

- » **“Resolution”**: This word appears at the top of the certificate.
- » **“Whereas”**: Preceding a statement and followed by a comma
- » **Statement**: Explaining an aspect of the resolution and its purpose
- » **Statement ending**: A semicolon and the word *and* appear at the end of each Whereas statement. (The last Whereas statement ends with just a semicolon, not an *and*.)
- » **“Now, Therefore Be It Resolved”**: After a series of “Whereas” statements, a closing statement begins with this phrase.

Here's an example of how you may word a resolution:

Resolution

Whereas, John Smith has served the Stoneville School Board from 1995 to 2006; and

Whereas, he has contributed to public education in the Stoneville community; and

Whereas, he has given unselfishly of his time and energy to the School Board; and

Whereas, he has faithfully and diligently performed the duties of a member of this public body;

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved that the Stoneville School Board does unanimously recognize John Smith for his invaluable services and contributions to the board.

Given this ____ day of (month), (year), at Stoneville, Ohio.

Presenting Your Work with a Presentation Folder

Delivering your finished certificate gives you an opportunity to make a lasting impression, so make your presentation thoughtful. A hinged folder that has silk ribbons securing the certificate can elevate your certificate (see [Figure 17-7](#)). Add ribbon ties, your business card, or a decorative label that features the recipient's name and your by-line in calligraphy. For an added Wow Factor, display the folder on a lightweight easel during the unveiling.

A little dramatic flair goes a long way in highlighting the value of your artistry and making the certificate recipient feel special. Plus, you can create one easily:

- » Use colored mat board for the flap.
- » Use 3/16-inch black Gator board for the backing.
- » Secure corner ribbons by using cloth decorator tape.
- » Create a hinge for the flap by also using cloth decorator tape.
- » Thread ribbon ties through holes that you punch in the boards.

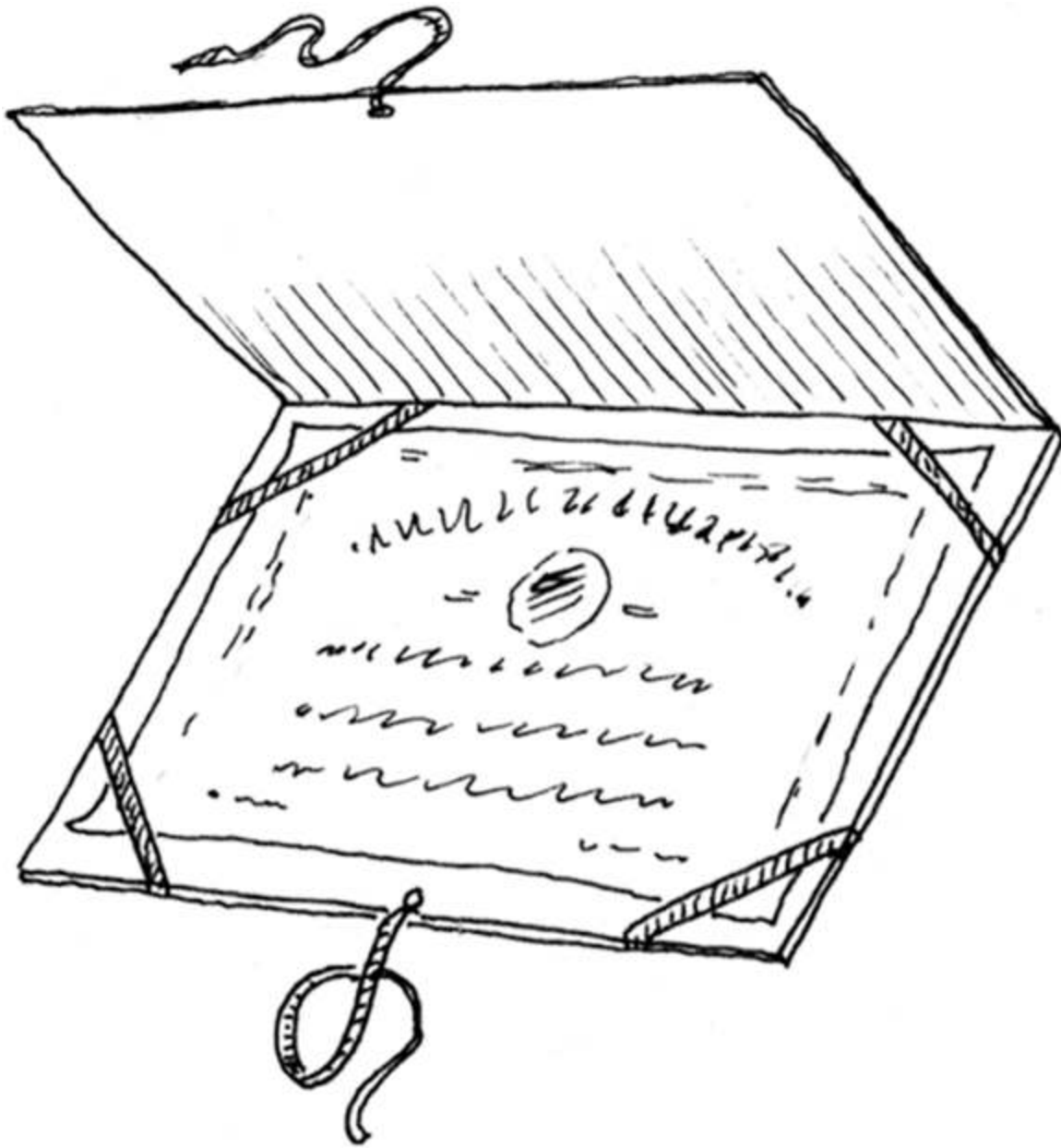


FIGURE 17-7: The completed work in an elegant-looking presentation folder.

Chapter 18

Designing Eye-Catching Posters or Signs

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Assessing your skills and materials
 - » Looking at pull-stroke letters
 - » Avoiding errors and creating effective poster designs
 - » Doing large-scale letters
 - » Getting started with brush letters
-

One of the most practical applications of calligraphy is creating posters or signs. A club, organization, civic group, or school may enlist your calligraphic skills to announce an upcoming event. If you take on the task, you need to design a visually compelling piece that effectively communicates the message to the public.

Getting the Tools and Skills to Polish a Poster

To create a poster or sign in the way that I describe in this chapter, here's what you need:

- » **Poster-size paper:** See [Chapter 2](#) for recommendations on types of paper to use. I don't recommend that you use poster board because of its slick surface which makes it difficult for precise pen lettering.
- » **A dip pen:** If you can, get a special poster pen that has nibs ranging from 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches wide — such as an Automatic or Coit pen.

Automatic and Coit pens have fixed handles and work with non-waterproof inks or water-based tempera paints. Avoid waterproof inks or acrylics because they can clog the nib. You fill these pens like a dip pen — using a small paintbrush or dropper stopper (see [Chapter 3](#)).

To effectively use these tools, you need to know how to

- » **Draw at least two alphabets.** In [Part 3](#), I show you how to do several alphabets that you can use for a poster or sign project.
- » **Measure and use guidelines.** You can find information about guidelines in [Chapter 3](#).
- » **Create bold, large letters.** Ideally, use a dip pen. If you don't need to be precise in your calligraphy, you can substitute wide markers for a pen, or you can outline letters and fill them in (see the section “[Making Large-Scale Letters](#),” later in this chapter).



TIP

Larger dip pens sometimes splatter ink if you try to push the nib away from you as you form the letter. If you run into this problem with a pen that you're trying to use, avoid push strokes and make all your strokes pull strokes (which I talk about in the following section) — especially for the Italic lowercase letters (you can read about the Italic alphabet in [Chapter 12](#)).

Using Pull-Stroke Italic

In [Chapter 12](#), I explain that Italic lowercase letters are typically formed in one continuous stroke — an approach that works well if you use a fountain pen or a smaller dip pen nib. However, larger dip pen nibs, especially poster pens, can catch on the paper and spatter ink if you push them. To avoid this mess, always use pull strokes, pulling the pen toward you, rather than pushing it away. Most alphabets rely on pull strokes, but Italic presents unique challenges.

[Figure 18-1](#) shows lowercase Italic letters made entirely with pull strokes, with arrows marking the direction of the pen. The letter *o*, rather than being written in a single loop, can be shaped using two separate pull strokes. If you practice other alphabets from [Part 3](#), this method may feel familiar — it's the same approach used to form the *o* in several of those styles.



FIGURE 18-1: The pull-stroke Italic lowercase letters.

Avoiding Common Errors in Design

You probably know the Bad Poster Artist — the notorious figure responsible for cluttering bulletin boards with poorly designed posters. These posters pop up everywhere: the coffee shop, the grocery store, the

gym, even schools. Their work, always on a full sheet of poster board, resembles [Figure 18-2](#).

Take a stand against the Bad Poster Artist by championing well-crafted posters and raising the standard for visual communication in our communities!



FIGURE 18-2: The work of the notorious Bad Poster Artist.

[Figure 18-2](#) highlights three common mistakes in bad poster design:

- » **Lack of visual appeal:** The overall design — if you can even call it that — is dull and unengaging. It fails to grab attention, making it clear that little thought or creativity went into its creation. A few magazine cut-outs of cakes and pies can't salvage it.
- » **Poor typography:** This poster fails in many ways when it comes to how its words are lettered:

- The text is small and lacks boldness, so people can't easily read it from a distance.
 - Underlining doesn't improve legibility.
 - A jumbled mix of cursive, lowercase printing, and capital letters results in an ineffective and inconsistent look.
 - No one would call the lettering clear, attractive, or purposeful.
- » **Misuse of white space:** Excessive empty space makes the poster feel incomplete, leaving the words looking lost in a vast sea of white space.

Making a Good Poster

The preceding section highlights the problems with a bad poster as unattractive design, poor lettering, and poor use of white space. So a good poster must include

- » An attractive design that catches the eye
- » Good lettering that people can easily read
- » Effective use of white space

I explain each of these aspects of a good poster in the following sections.

Going fishing — hook 'em and reel 'em in!

A good fisherman selects the right bait to lure a catch. Likewise, a skilled poster artist or sign painter uses design to grab attention. First, you need to draw people in (hook 'em), then guide them to read the details (reel 'em in).



REMEMBER The analogy isn't meant to cast people as fish or hint at sly persuasion. It simply reflects a truth: If a poster doesn't catch the eye, its words will never touch the mind — and its message, like an unopened letter, drifts unread.

[Figure 18-3](#) exemplifies effective design. With minimal text, it relies on large, bold lettering to draw the eye and smaller, varied styles to organize the details. The Manuscript and Italic alphabets (see [Chapters 10](#) and [12](#)) work seamlessly together, complementing the layout. The illustration integrates smoothly with the lettering, and although the poster is predominantly black and white, a striking accent in the original poster — a brilliant red drop of paint from the paintbrush — makes it pop.



FIGURE 18-3: Eye-catching design.

To create an effective poster, you need to bait the hook. Follow these tips to reel in attention:

- » **Maximize visibility from a distance.** Make key words large and bold enough so that people can read them from about 50 feet away. Bright colors and striking images also help draw the eye.

- » **Plan and sketch before you begin.** Use preliminary sketches to refine your design so that you have a clear vision before you start the final lettering.
- » **Incorporate variety.** Organize information in an easy-to-read format by using letters in different sizes and styles. Mixing two or three complementary styles improves readability (see the following section for discussion of lettering).
- » **Balance white space.** Avoid designs that feel overcrowded or empty. Thoughtful spacing creates a polished and professional look (see the section “[Making the most of white space](#),” later in this chapter).

Using effective lettering

Effective lettering is essential to a successful poster. It’s not just about crafting a strong message — it’s about shaping the letterforms to create visual impact. [Figure 18-4](#), my poster for summer art classes, illustrates this principle with bold, oversized text that draws the eye, and a mix of styles and sizes that guide the viewer through the information.

If you have a lot of text, you need to organize your content. Too much information can easily make a poster feel cluttered and hard to read. I carefully planned every element in the design in [Figure 18-4](#) — including decorative letter embellishments, headings, and subheadings — before I started lettering.

SUMMER

OIL PORTRAITURE WORKSHOP

ART

DRAWING WORKSHOP

CLASSES

CALLIGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Portrait Painting –

A how-to course that includes charcoal, pastels, and oil. Some of the lessons are: mixing flesh colors, getting a realistic likeness, painting from photographs, etc. The instructor gives numerous demonstrations. This is a class for people who already know the basics of drawing and painting.

Drawing –

The course that can actually teach you to draw! Based upon the widely discussed 'right side of the brain' concept, this course promises to teach anyone how to draw skillfully and realistically. Talent and experience are not needed!

Calligraphy –

The very popular art of beautiful writing is the subject covered in this class. Students will learn all 3 of the styles represented here plus 2 more! For beginners.

FIGURE 18-4: Effective lettering on a poster.

To ensure the effectiveness of your letters

- » Select a style of lettering that seems appropriate for the subject.
- » Choose a style and size that people can easily read at a reasonable distance.
- » Organize the information in order of importance so that the main idea stands out and the supporting information is a smaller size.

Making the most of white space



TIP

If you've taken art classes, you may know the concept of *negative space* (the blank areas, as opposed to the positive space occupied by images and text). In the context of poster design, the term *white space* refers to negative space. If you understand how to work with negative space, apply that knowledge to your poster creation.

[Figure 18-5](#) demonstrates how to manage white space effectively, especially when you have minimal text. This poster relies on visual elements — such as the cartoon artist and stars — to create an eye-catching design.



FIGURE 18-5: Managing white space like a pro.

Make the most of white space by using these tips:

- » **Break away from rigid symmetry.** People can easily overlook perfectly balanced spaces — opt for a dynamic arrangement that grabs attention.
- » **Vary space sizes.** Avoid uniform gaps; incorporating different-sized spaces creates visual interest and keeps the design engaging.
- » **Take a cue from professional design.** Study advertisements in media to see how the pros use white space effectively, and then apply those insights to your own work.

Making Large-Scale Letters

The following sections offer two possible ways to make large-scale letters: using two pencils or using a compass.

The two-pencil method

No poster pens? No problem. You can outline letters using two pencils taped together, then fill the outlines with ink. To form Italic lettering, hold the pencils so that the line between the points maintains a 45-degree angle, as shown in [Figure 18-6](#).

[Figure 18-6](#) doesn't show the guidelines. To calculate their spacing, multiply the distance between the pencil points by the number of pen widths typically used for letter height. For Italic letters, make the guidelines five times the distance between the pencil points.



FIGURE 18-6: How to hold your pencils when using the two-pencil letter-drawing method.

If you use standard-sized pencils, draw the guidelines approximately $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches apart, making capital letters one and a half times that measurement — about $4\frac{1}{8}$ inches tall. Now, that's a sizable letter!

The compass method

This technique requires a draftsman's compass with interchangeable tips. Its adjustable arms act like paired pencils, letting you set stroke width with precision. Unlike standard school compasses, this tool accommodates pencil leads on both sides. Try varying the spacing to explore different lettering effects.

Brushing on Letters for Signs

Sign lettering is a broad field, beyond the scope of this book, which focuses on ink and pen work. Brush lettering is essential for sign painting — a separate skill used for everything from restrooms to

billboards. Brushes offer more flexibility than pens, letting you vary letter size and style. Outdoor signs require waterproof paints. Although I don't cover sign painting in depth, I include a few tips to get you started.

To successfully brush letters onto signs, you need the right tools:

- » **Paint:** *Sign painter's enamel* is recognized as the best paint for signs, but you may want to practice with *showcard poster paints*, which you can wash out of your brush with water.
- » **Thinner:** Use mineral spirits or turpentine for oil-based enamel sign paint. Lacquer thinner works best for lacquer-based enamel. If you're working with water-based enamel, simple water does the trick.
- » **Brush:** You can't buy good sign-painting brushes for cheap. In selecting brushes, don't skimp on quality. Low-quality brushes simply will not do the job. Even if you're just beginning, a good-quality brush is a must.

Begin by getting yourself a single brush: a 1/4-inch #10 sable brush. This brush has a round *ferrule* (the metal collar that holds the bristles on the handle), but the ends of the bristles do not taper to a point. Instead, they are cut flat.

- » **Surface:** If you're painting an outdoor sign, use weather-resistant material, such as metal, some plastics, or treated plywood. You can make an indoor sign on practically anything — even paper.



REMEMBER Tempera paints clean easily by using soap and water, but enamel paints require paint thinner first, followed by soap and water. After washing, gently squeeze out excess water from the bristles, reshaping them as you go. Store your brushes upright in a cup or holder, with the bristles pointing up.

Before you begin painting signs, take time to get acquainted with your materials. Test the brush to understand its flexibility and flow, examine how the paint behaves on your chosen surface, and explore how the

thinner affects both texture and drying time. This brief warm-up helps you gain control and confidence before committing strokes to your final design.

For more information on sign painting brush techniques, I highly recommend checking out some of the expert videos on YouTube.



TIP

It takes practice to become proficient using a sign painter's brush. Because the end of the brush is cut flat and not tapered, you can skillfully manipulate it to duplicate the thicks and thins of all the pen-lettered alphabets. Just use the flat end of the brush like the flat edge of a pen nib. With practice, you can perfect this technique.

Chapter 19

Creating Calligraphic Computer Fonts

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Exploring custom calligraphic fonts
 - » Creating your own fonts
 - » Expanding your skill set with fonts
-

Designing calligraphic fonts offers an inspiring fusion of creativity and technology. For calligraphers, the opportunity to craft and produce custom fonts has several significant benefits. This technological leap represents the first major advancement in a calligrapher's toolbox in centuries, opening up new, exciting possibilities. Today, you can find resources available to support font creation at every skill level, making this innovation accessible to all. Whether you're polishing a calligraphic masterpiece, customizing characters to make your writing pop, or even dreaming up a brand-new alphabet (because why not?), technology can help you approach perfection.

To create calligraphic fonts, you need

- » **Font creation software:** Software that turns scanned calligraphy into usable fonts; for example, the company High-Logic offers a program named Scanahand (www.high-logic.com). To fine-tune your fonts, use a graphics editor such as Photoshop along with FontCreator, also from High-Logic.
- » **Printer:** So that you can print font templates.
- » **Scanner:** To scan in images of the calligraphy templates that you create by hand.

» **Calligraphy supplies:** Pens, paper, and ink for crafting authentic lettering samples.

Using Custom Calligraphic Fonts

You might wonder why a calligrapher, deeply passionate about hand-drawn lettering, would venture into creating digital fonts. The answer lies in their versatility and the creative possibilities that they unlock.

Printing calligraphy

One of the most immediate benefits of custom-designed fonts is their efficiency in producing polished, cost-effective designs. You can use them for projects that have tight deadlines or limited budgets. For instance, for several years, I designed weekly bulletin covers for my church. Because I designed these covers gratis and didn't need to produce physical originals, I created them entirely on my computer by using my own fonts, together with scanned images of my art — saving both time and resources while maintaining artistic integrity.

Producing digital products

Creating and designing fonts opens up new doors for calligraphers, expanding your craft beyond ink and paper. It transforms you into a typeface designer, allowing you to integrate custom fonts into logos, letterhead designs, and other digital compositions. Imagine the freedom of designing computer fonts that complement your artistic vision, seamlessly blending tradition with innovation.

Making mock-up layouts

Perhaps the most significant advantage to having your own calligraphic fonts is the time and effort that they save when it comes to designing impressive calligraphic work. If you have a personalized font library and a word processor such as Microsoft Word, you can quickly generate impressive layouts and mock-ups that serve as blueprints for intricate, hand-crafted pieces — such as long quotations that have justified margins on both sides or certificates that need perfectly centered text.

For practical guidance on mock-up techniques, see [Chapters 15](#) and [17](#).

THE WORK OF DONALD JACKSON AND HIS SCRIBES

You can use computer fonts to enhance both creativity and efficiency, as demonstrated by the renowned calligrapher Donald Jackson and his team of professional scribes, who lettered and illustrated the entire Saint John's Bible by hand (an extraordinary calligraphic feat). Before putting their quill pens to parchment, they first developed computer-generated mock-ups of every page, using a custom font designed by Jackson himself, ensuring precision in layout and composition. Check out their work at www.saintjohnsbible.org. Like Jackson, I've found that starting with a digital layout lets me identify spacing hiccups long before the ink touches the page.

Creating Your Own Calligraphic Fonts

After considerable trial and error with different font creation tools, I've found that Scanahand paired with FontCreator (both available at www.high-logic.com with free trials for each) suits my needs best — especially given my technical limitations. If you're a calligrapher aiming to digitize your lettering without getting bogged down in complex software, you might find this combination helpful, too.

Here's an overview of how the process works:

Start with Scanahand (Windows only)

- » Print out a template provided by the program.
- » Fill in your letterforms by hand.
- » Scan and upload the template — no advanced setup required.
- » Produce a usable rough draft of your font quickly and easily.

Refine with FontCreator (Windows and Mac)

- » Open the Scanahand-generated font in FontCreator.
- » Tweak character shapes, spacing, and alignment.
- » Adjust visual details without needing deep graphic design knowledge.

In the following sections, I walk you through exactly how you can use these two apps to craft your own calligraphic fonts.

First, you'll need to install these apps on your computer. Don't worry—it's easier than it sounds!

Here's what to do:

1. Go to the website www.high-logic.com
2. Choose Scanahand (Windows only). This program helps you turn your scanned calligraphy into a real font.
3. Click either Free Trial or Buy Now; then follow the instructions to download and install it.
4. Next, get FontCreator (Windows and Mac) from the same site. It helps you clean up and perfect your letters.
5. To polish your font even more, try using a graphics editor like Photoshop to tweak the shapes and spacing.

Adding an alphabet to Scanahand

To start using Scanahand, follow these steps:

1. **With Scanahand installed on your computer (www.high-logic.com), open the app from your Start menu or desktop shortcut. Choose “Use Evaluation Version” if you're trying the free trial.**
2. **In the Scanahand window that opens, select File and click the print the instruction page option and print.**

These instructions explain the correct way to draw your letters on the template.

3. **Click on the Empty Template icon on the left side of the screen to open a template.**

The preset basic template is a single-page layout that contains a grid for all 106 characters in a font set, which means the boxes where you draw your letters are so small it makes it difficult to produce well-formed calligraphic fonts. However, I suggest that you use this template for your first font. Once you get the hang of how it works, using the premium version (which is what you get with the trial version), you can customize your template settings, including enlarging the boxes for better clarity.

4. **Print your template on proper paper.**

Click on the Print button at the top of the window, and print a template on good quality printer paper where your hand-drawn letters will be crisp and clear with no bleeding or feathering.

5. **Carefully fill in the template's blanks by hand, shaping each letter to match your desired style. (See [Figure 19-1](#).)**

I use a dip pen for this process because it enables me to draw the sharpest letters.

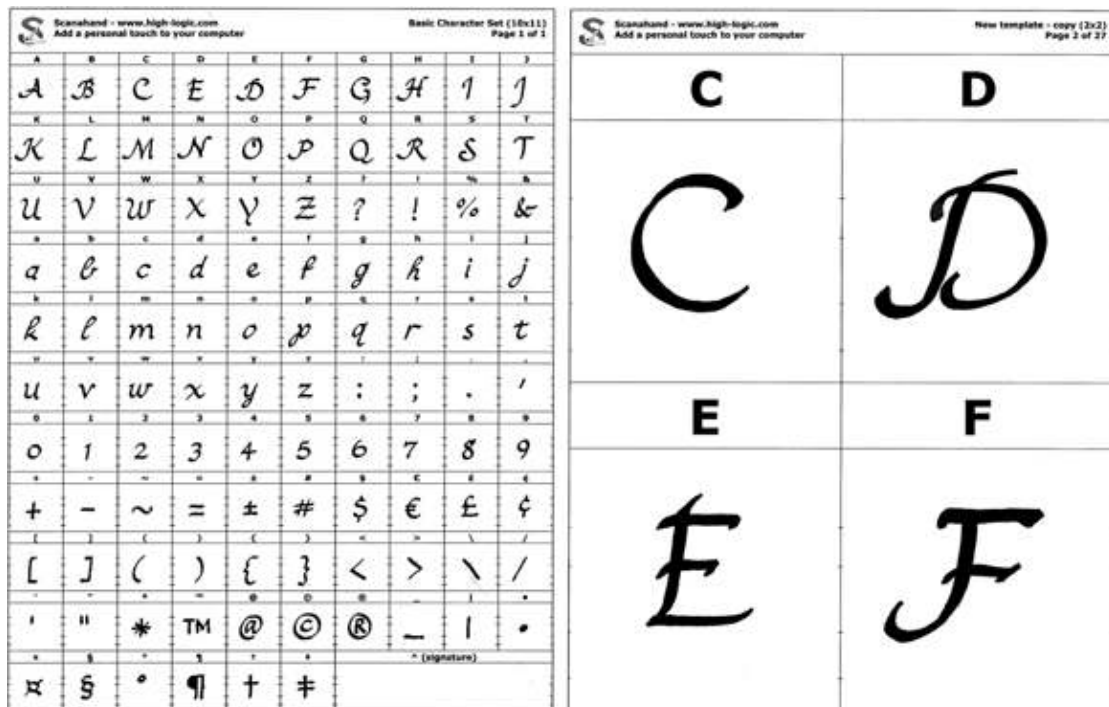


FIGURE 19-1: The preset template filled in (left), compared to an enlarged template (right).



TIP

If you happen to have a magnifying light, that will enable you to have finer control when lettering on a small scale.

Pay close attention to the dash marks along the left and right edges of the template boxes. These marks indicate key reference lines: the ascender, waist line (sometimes called the “x-height”), base line, and descender lines. Position your letters centrally within the boxes, aligning them precisely with these indicators. (See [Figure 19-2](#).)

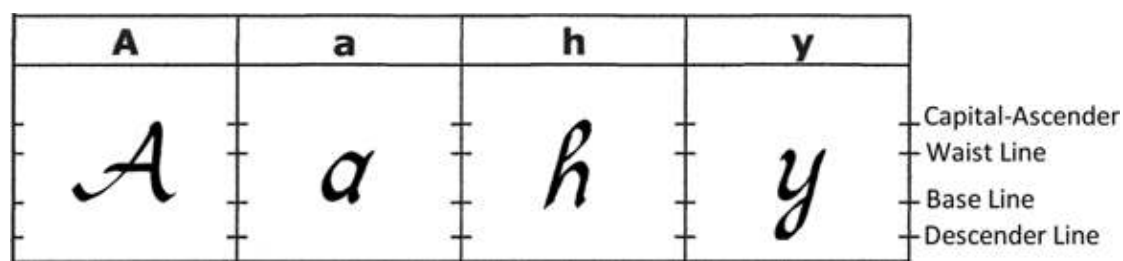


FIGURE 19-2: The correct placement of letters in the template boxes.

6. **After you draw all the letters, place the template on your scanner, positioning it as straight as possible.**
7. **Select the Scan button in Scanahand.**

If your scanner has an auto-feeder, avoid using it because it can twist the paper slightly.
8. **After the document successfully scans, select the Generate button in Scanahand.**
9. **In the pop-up window that appears, name your font, and then select Create Font.**

Scanahand creates your own custom font, ready for you to use!



TIP

If you have a graphics editor, you can refine your template images, prior to scanning, to ensure crisp, clean letterforms. Then save it. Scanahand offers both Scan and Load options so you can import your saved template back into the app.

Working with your images in FontCreator

Before continuing, ensure that FontCreator is installed. If not, download it from www.high-logic.com.

While Scanahand analyzes each letter, it automatically adjusts smoothing, spacing, and alignment to prepare your hand-drawn letters for font generation. However, you might decide that your fonts need more fine tuning. (That's always true for my fonts.) Once you have created a font by using Scanahand (see the preceding section), follow these steps to transfer the font into FontCreator and tweak your alphabet:

1. **After Scanahand has generated your font, you should see a button to click that will transfer your font from Scanahand to FontCreator.**

FontCreator is a full-feature font editor that gives you complete control over the quality of your fonts.

2. **How to use FontCreator to edit an installed font.**

First, download and install FontCreator (www.high-logic.com).

Launch the app and select the Open Installed Font option under File. Select your font and the alphabet will appear in a large window. See [Figure 19-3](#).



FIGURE 19-3: Two primary views in FontCreator: the alphabet (left) and editor (right).

3. **Double-click a specific letter to open Editor view for that letter.**

In Editor view, you can interact with the building blocks of each letter. Here's what you'll see ...

Click the letter to see its bounding box. This box controls the size of the letter. Click again to see the letter composed of its elements — represented by small squares and circles:

- *Squares:* Define the points which control the outline the letter
- *Circles:* Control the curvature of the outline

4. **Right click on a point or circle to move, delete, or add new points.**

You get precise control over every aspect of the letter's shape.

Fine-tuning your alphabet

You can adjust the size of a letter in FontCreator (while keeping your font balanced and consistent) in a couple of ways:

- » Select and drag a corner of the bounding box to adjust its size. This method is the one I prefer — it's simple and foolproof.
- » Select all the points by clicking again and use the Transform tools to scale the size of the letter (the Standard Version is required for this option).

Visually make sure to keep your letter proportions intact.

On a much more advanced level, you can also tweak font properties by following these steps:

1. Under **Font**, click **Properties**.
2. In the **Metrics** tab, adjust the **Ascender**, **Descender**, and **x-Height** (letter body height) numerical values by entering new measurements that reflect your desired vertical proportions.
3. Use the **Calculate** button to auto-fill values based on your glyph outlines, or manually enter values to control line spacing and character alignment.

Getting into kerning

Kerning is the fine-tuning of space between letters to make text look balanced and natural. Some letter pairs — such as *AV* or *To* — can feel too far apart or too close together, creating awkward gaps or collisions. Adjusting kerning ensures that words appear to flow smoothly and people can easily read them.

FontCreator makes this process easy; just follow these steps:

1. **If you have the Standard Version of FontCreator, you can use the Automatic Kerning Wizard under Tools in the main menu**
This tool analyzes character shapes and suggests ideal spacing for Latin-based fonts.
2. **The method I use is more hands-on. In the letter editing mode, click on and adjust the red, dashed, vertical lines on either side of the letter to either expand or shrink the space on either side of the letter.**

Trying out your new font

FontCreator includes a feature that enables you to see your font in actual use. Follow these steps:

1. **Press F5 or select Test Desktop Font from the Font menu.**
2. **This allows you to type custom text and see your font in action.**
3. **Change the number in the upper-left corner to resize the font's display.**

Getting help with Scanahand and FontCreator



TIP

Scanahand and FontCreator have detailed, easy-to-read user manuals. However, you may find, as I have, that these apps are so intuitive you don't need to consult the manuals to get started.

High-Logic has a forum (see [Figure 19-4](#)) and a huge library of tutorials on their website (www.high-logic.com), which you can access by selecting Support in the website's top menu. The page that opens links to excellent resources that can help you get familiar with the font software, solve problems, and get answers to your questions. It's a valuable and friendly resource.

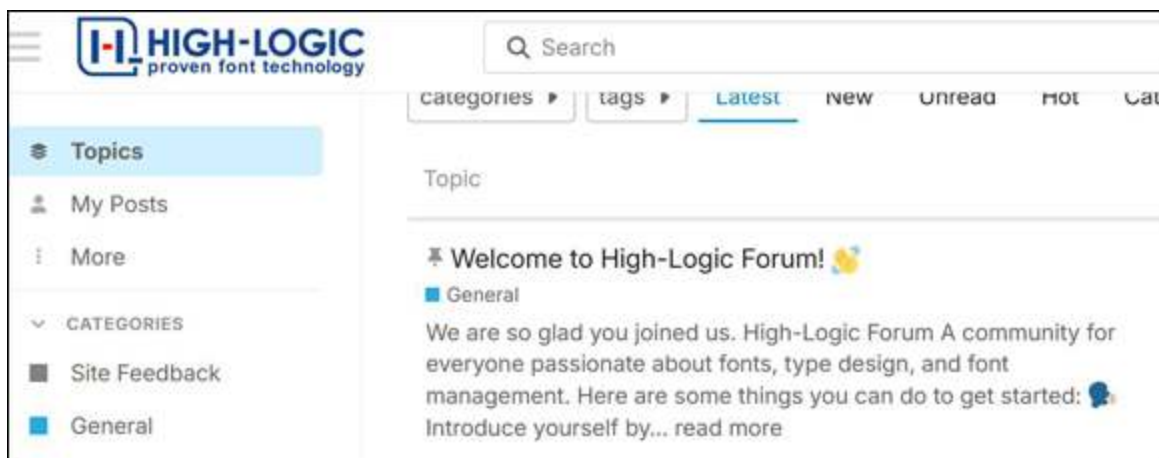


FIGURE 19-4: Welcome to the High-Logic Forum, a valuable and friendly resource.

Now that you have all the tools you need, creating fonts can be a lot of fun. Why not invent a ceremonial script or a fantasy alphabet to reflect a fictional culture? Font creation can be a playground for storytelling, too.

Part 5

The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART ...

Discover ten creative ways to add a personal touch to weddings by using calligraphy.

Experiment with ten fun and unique alphabets to stretch your style.

Get ten practical tips for earning income with your calligraphy skills.

Chapter 20

Ten Ways to Use Your Calligraphy for Weddings

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Designing wedding invitations, announcements, and programs
 - » Lettering items for the reception
 - » Creating marriage certificates, guest books, and thank-you notes
-

Calligraphy lends elegance and a personal touch to weddings, enhancing invitations, envelopes, programs, menus, and more. Many students have enrolled in my classes specifically to master wedding calligraphy. Whether you're preparing for your own wedding or offering calligraphy services to others, this chapter provides the essential guidance to get started. For an introduction to popular wedding lettering styles — Blackletter, Italic (often flourished), and Copperplate — see [Chapters 11, 12, and 13](#).



TIP Doing all the calligraphy for a wedding can be a monumental job. Consider starting small by doing only one thing for the wedding, such as place cards.

You can turn doing calligraphy for weddings into quite a money-maker. People want to make their weddings special, and you can help with your calligraphy skills. If you want to check out more ways to make money with calligraphy, see [Chapter 22](#).

Preparing the Invitations

The invitation is often the first thing people associate with wedding calligraphy, but it's not the most challenging part. Typically, only one “master” invitation is created, which a commercial printer reproduces — eliminating the need to handwrite each one.

Follow these tips to make your invitation master up to snuff:

- » **Perfect the design and wording.** Ensure that the layout is flawless, with proper format, spelling, and punctuation.
- » **Make it unique.** Hand-lettered invitations don't have to mimic commercial designs — embrace originality.
- » **Focus on the theme.** Unlike mass-produced invitations, calligraphy allows for personalized elements, such as symbols representing the couple's cultures or faiths.
- » **Prioritize aesthetics.** Design the layout first, then refine the wording to complement the visual balance.

Reflect the wedding style. Whether formal or informal, incorporate colors, motifs, and decorative elements to align with the overall aesthetic.

Use creative borders. Borders don't have to frame all four sides — try a single bar or top-and-bottom accents.
- » **Add color strategically.** Watercolor pencils offer precise control, transforming pencil strokes into soft, painted effects with a wet brush.

When creating a master for reproduction, consider working at a larger scale than the final copy. A larger master allows for easier corrections and the use of correction fluid, as any adjustments will not affect the printed result.

Consider getting a proportional scale, which makes measurement conversions easy and error-free. Look for them at stores that sell commercial artist's materials — they typically cost less than \$10.

Once your master is ready for printing, you have several options. Photo-offset printing produces flat invitations, while thermography uses heat and resin for raised lettering. Though your master is created in black ink on white paper, you can choose different ink and paper colors for the final print.

Photocopy printing is an option, but it lacks the elegance of professional methods. If using photocopies, consider high-quality cardstock and hand-applied details to enhance the design. Both photo-offset printing and thermography offer a more affordable alternative to engraving while maintaining a refined look.

Designing Envelopes and Cards

If the couple is planning a traditional wedding where the invitation is accompanied by a reception card and hand-addressed envelopes, careful planning ensures an elegant presentation. Follow these steps:

1. **Create a master** for the reception card, printed in the same style as the invitation.
2. **Hand-address the envelopes**, a demanding task for large guest lists.
3. **Test paper and envelopes** before recommending them — ensure smooth ink flow by requesting samples from the printer.
4. **Plan your lettering style** carefully. Decide on flourishes, embellishments, pen size, and whether the address should align vertically or slant.
5. **Match the envelope lettering** to the invitation style for consistency (for example, avoid pairing a Copperplate invitation with an Italic-addressed envelope).
6. **Balance embellishments** thoughtfully. Flourishes work well for a few invitations but can become overwhelming for a large batch.



TIP

Do the address in a style simple enough that you can do the entire list all in the same style without having the task become too big to handle.

Use a fountain pen rather than a dip pen for addressing envelopes — most professional calligraphers prefer it for handling large batches efficiently. Since fountain pen ink isn't waterproof, protect the address from smudging by applying a clear fixative spray such as Lascaux UV Protect or Golden Archival Spray Varnish. A couple of light coats will ensure durability without affecting the ink's appearance.

Sometimes, you can slip a template that has dark guidelines inside the envelope, but only if you can see the guidelines well enough through the paper to write the address on the outside.

If the paper of the envelope is too thick or too dark, or it has a liner so that you can't see a template inserted inside, you have to make a stencil, which you lay on top of the envelope. Follow these steps:

1. Use heavy card-stock to create the stencil.
2. Cut out guidelines for the address.
3. Place the stencil on the envelope and lightly draw pencil lines.
4. Letter the address carefully.
5. Let the ink dry completely.
6. Erase pencil lines with a white eraser to avoid scuffing the paper or calligraphy.

Making Announcements

Wedding announcements inform loved ones of the event without extending an invitation. They're ideal for small ceremonies or destination weddings where guests may be limited or unable to attend.

Like invitations, announcements start with a black-ink master on white paper, which a printer can reproduce in any color. However, announcements differ in design by emphasizing the wedding location. A simple sketch of the church, venue, or regional elements — such as Hawaiian flora for a tropical wedding — can enhance the message and create a personal touch.

Designing Custom Monograms

Monograms are a popular and stylish addition to wedding paper goods, from envelopes to napkins. They add a personal touch and can range from a single initial to multiple letters. A standard monogram places the surname in the center, flanked by the bride's and groom's initials.

For a more intricate design, letters can be woven together using flourishes, though this requires careful planning. Monograms can be printed or embossed — although commercial embossing can be costly, hand embossing is a simpler, DIY-friendly option. Many resources, including YouTube videos, are available to guide you through the process if you'd like to experiment.

Getting with the Program

Many people like to have a program for their wedding, which the ushers can give to the guests who attend the ceremony. You can make the program a single sheet that has a title on one side and the actual program listed on the other side. [Figure 20-1](#) shows an example of a wedding program.

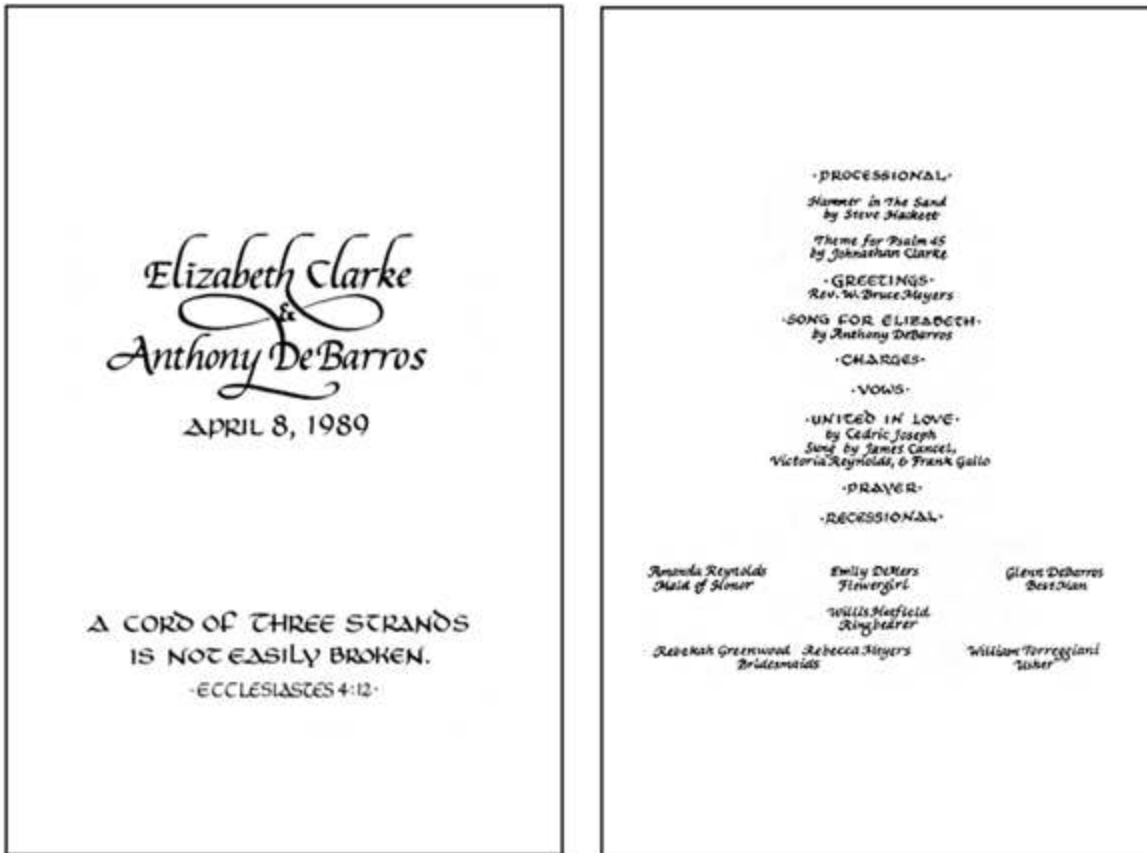


FIGURE 20-1: A wedding program.

Setting the Table with Place Cards and Favor Tags

A wedding reception includes many elements that you can do in calligraphy, including place cards, table numbers, and tags for the *wedding favors* (small gifts that the newlyweds give to each of the reception guests).

You can have the favor tags commercially reproduced from a master that you design, but you need to do the place cards and table numbers individually by hand.

When a wedding reception has place cards done in calligraphy, they add such a personal touch of elegance that many guests want to take their cards home with them after the reception.

Cooking Up Menus

If the wedding party serves a meal at the reception, you can do the menu in calligraphy so that it reflects the style or theme of the wedding.



REMEMBER Always keep the menu simple and easy to read — a monogram is fine, but avoid excessive embellishments that might hinder readability. This is not the place to showcase elaborate flourishes; instead, aim for a balance of elegance and clarity.

Consider guests with vision impairments when selecting letter size and style. Ensure that the text is large enough and distinct, while still aligning with the wedding's aesthetic. If your calligraphy is highly decorative elsewhere, consider subtle modifications to improve legibility.

For a bar menu, calligraphy can add a sophisticated touch, but the same rules of readability apply.

Making It Official with a Marriage Certificate

Although commercial wedding certificates often feel impersonal, a hand-crafted version can become a cherished keepsake.

In Jewish tradition, couples receive a ketubah, a beautifully designed marriage contract, and Quakers have a similar custom. These folk-art pieces often become treasured family heirlooms, passed down through generations. Many calligraphers today specialize in creating ketubah designs.

Before designing a marriage certificate, research historical and contemporary examples — books and online resources offer plenty of

inspiration. Aim for a traditional format infused with modern aesthetics, balancing timeless elegance with a fresh, personalized touch.



TIP If you want to see examples of marriage certificates, explore online resources that offer customizable templates and inspiration. Websites like Word Templates Online and Word Layouts provide a variety of editable designs, ranging from traditional to modern styles.

Here's the basic format of a marriage certificate:

- » The couple's wedding vows, favorite poem, or a verse
- » The couple's names, the date, and the location of the event
- » Customarily, spaces for the newlyweds, officiant, and witnesses to sign at the church or reception

You can make the custom-designed wedding certificate more than just a certificate lettered in fancy calligraphy. You can incorporate art, painting, and design that reflects the style or theme of the wedding.

Signing the Wedding Guest Book

Wedding guest books have become a little passé. Many people today prefer to have the guests sign a photograph of the couple. Nevertheless, if the couple wants a wedding guest book, you can inscribe it in calligraphy.

Many people who enjoy calligraphy also like bookbinding. If you have this knowledge and skill, you can even create a handmade guest book. That way, you can design everything, from the cover to the pages.

Creating Thank-You Notes

While couples traditionally handwrite their thank-you notes, the stationery itself can be custom-designed. Incorporate a monogram (see “[Designing Custom Monograms](#),” earlier in this chapter) or repeat border designs from the invitation (see “[Preparing the Invitations](#),” also earlier in this chapter) for a cohesive look.

As with the invitations, create a black-ink master on white paper, then take it to a printer for reproduction in quantity.

Chapter 21

Ten Fun Alphabets

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Creating variations of the seven basic alphabets
 - » Making alphabets that look like non-English alphabets
 - » Trying some weird variations
-

I bet that you can find over 10,000 different styles of English alphabets. If you doubt the truth of that statement, just look at how many fonts you can find online to download onto your computer. Despite the incredible number of alphabet styles, you can categorize nearly all of them as variations of the six basic alphabets that I cover in [Part 3](#) of this book. When you know those six, you can turn them into thousands!

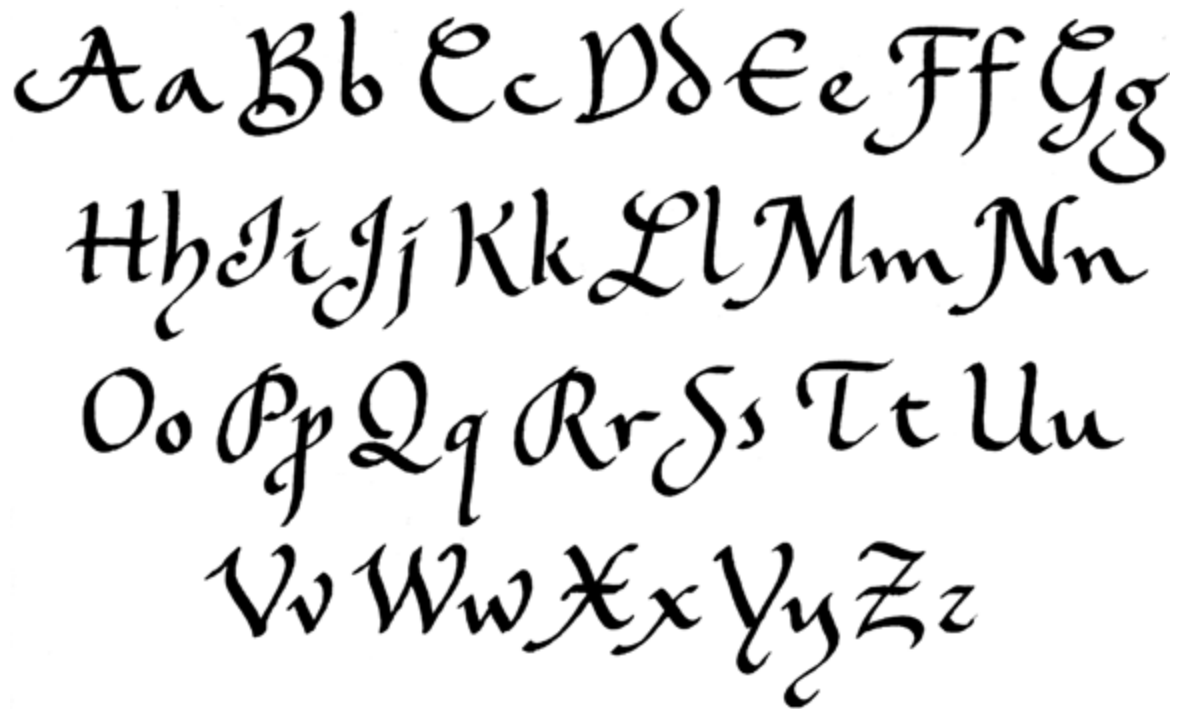
After you see how to create these variations, you might feel inspired to create your own alphabets. Who knows, you might just create a new variation that other calligraphers want to use.

I do not provide guidelines, stroke sequences, or directional cues for the alphabet figures in this chapter. However, if you are familiar with the alphabets I describe in [Part 3](#), you can determine the strokes by drawing on your understanding of the underlying letterforms and closely examining their structure.

Nearly Persian

This alphabet is based on a famous typeface (font) called Legend. It is a variation of Italic. Like Italic the pen angle is 45 degrees and the letters have just a small amount of slant to them. There are lots of flourishes and swashes.

Draw the capitals and ascenders tall. The descenders are long, but the body of the letters is short (only about 3 pen widths). This is a fun alphabet that always looks fantastic wherever it is used.



Pseudo-Chinese

A calligrapher can find the very simple-looking Pseudo-Chinese alphabet (a variation on the Roman alphabet, which I talk about in [Chapter 8](#)) a real challenge. The pen angle constantly changes from one stroke to the next. The height is 3 pen widths.

If you're ambidextrous, you may have a leg up when it comes to doing this alphabet well. It took me three attempts to produce what you see here.



Hebrew-esque

The Hebrew-esque alphabet style lets you try to duplicate the look of the Hebrew alphabet.

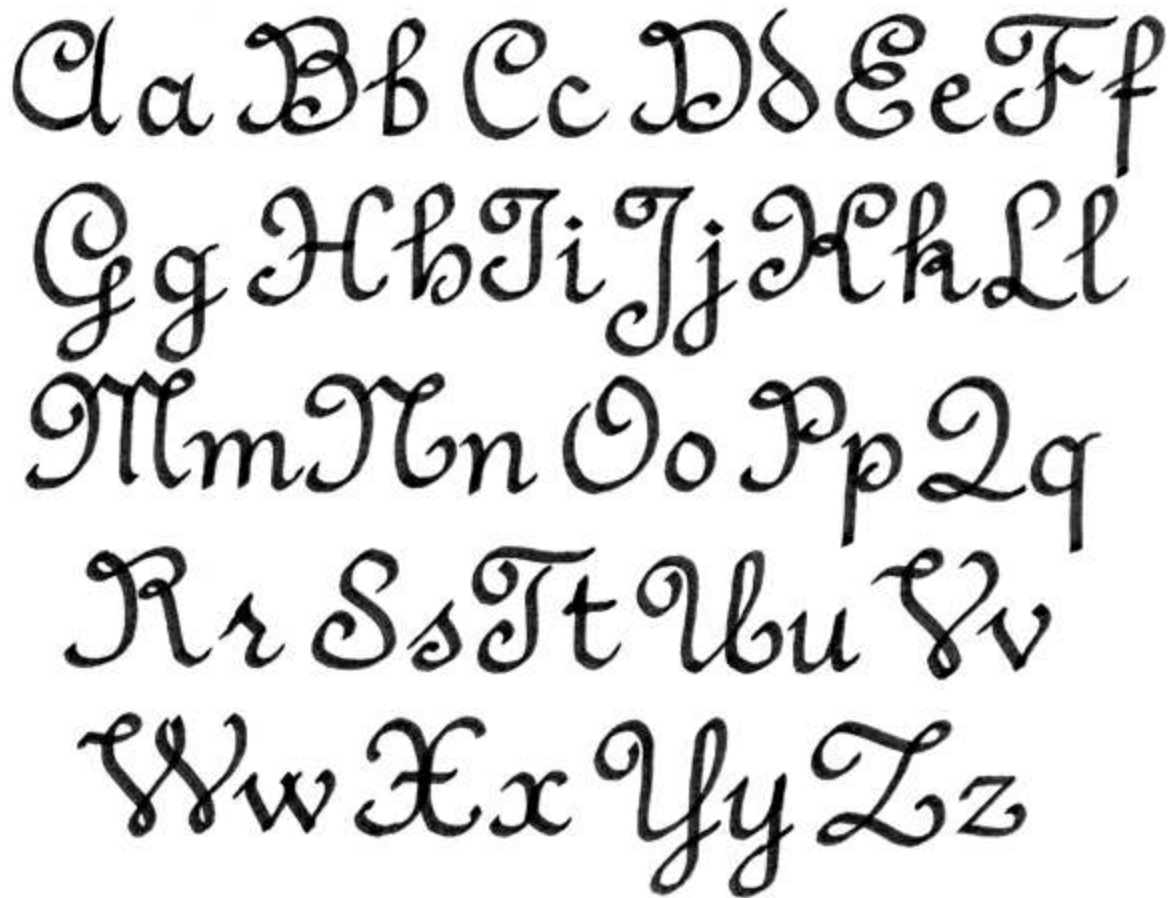
This variation of the Roman alphabet (see [Chapter 8](#)) uses a pen angle as close to zero as you can manage, with the pen pointing straight out to the side. The height of these letters can be 5, 6, or 7 pen widths, your choice.



French Ronde

The French Ronde alphabet, a variation of Manuscript (see [Chapter 10](#)), is very popular and not difficult to do. You can find many versions of this alphabet; I give you one of them here. This elegant and pretty style is especially appropriate if you're doing calligraphy for a wedding.

To draw this alphabet, you use a 30-degree pen angle and make the letter body 5 or 6 pen widths high.

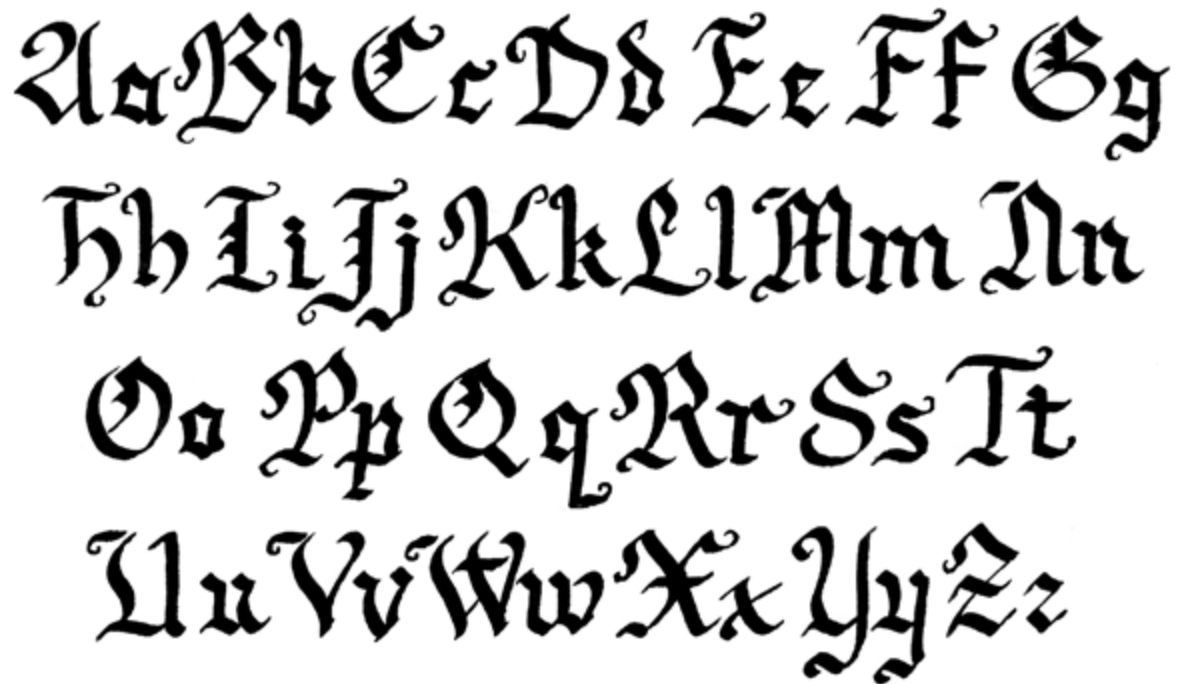


Old German (Also Known As Fraktur)

The Old German alphabet (also called Fraktur) is a variation of the Blackletter alphabet (flip to [Chapter 11](#) for this alphabet). You create this variation by curving the strokes and adding little curlicues to the ends of those strokes.

The curlicues are fun to make. While the ink is still wet, turn the nib up on a corner and draw the curved shape.

For this alphabet, you use a 55-degree pen angle. The height of the letter body is 4 pen widths.



It's Greek to Me

This Greek-like alphabet is a Roman variation. (I talk about the Roman alphabet in [Chapter 8](#).) You draw a letter height of 8 pen widths and angle your pen very flatly (the pen points directly back towards you).

A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z

Digital

This version of digital letters is a variation of the Roman alphabet. Since these letters are made almost entirely using horizontal and vertical strokes, it is a real challenge to draw these letters with a calligraphy pen. The letter height is 8 pen widths. The pen angle is 45 degrees.

A B C D E F G H I J
K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z

Upside-Down Letters

This unique alphabet is a creative mix of letters, numbers, and symbols that maintain their familiar shapes when flipped upside down — yet the

message becomes completely unreadable. While it may not serve a practical purpose, it's undeniably fun, especially for kids who enjoy secret codes and puzzles.

Write a message using these characters, turn it upside down, and you'll see what looks like ordinary symbols — but the text itself remains unrecognizable. And for an extra twist, there's a message written below the alphabet — just flip it over to reveal it!

a b (d e f g h i j k l m n o p q
r s t u v w x y z
8 o p h z e 7 a y + j a _ o
s d w n f x o j u m o j q > !) ! n b e

Fancy Fancy

This very fancy alphabet is a variation of Copperplate (see [Chapter 13](#)). The main difference between this alphabet and Copperplate is that these letters have especially long ascender and descender strokes.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv
Ww Xx Yy Zz

Funky Letters

One day, I wondered whether I could create an alphabet based on mistakes that students frequently make. The Funky alphabet is what I came up with. It's a variation of Italic (see [Chapter 12](#)) with a letter height of 5 pen widths and a pen angle of 55 degrees.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii
Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq
Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Chapter 22

Ten Tips for Turning Your Calligraphy into Income

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Setting yourself up to attract clients
 - » Deciding on prices and generating sales
 - » Taking orders and making deliveries
 - » Keeping financial records
-

Do people ever express an interest in purchasing some of your calligraphy? Do they ever ask you how much something costs? Do they ever ask you to do some calligraphy for them?

Answering yes to any of these questions gives you a good indication that you can sell your work. If people don't ask any of these things, that doesn't mean you can't sell your calligraphy: It probably means that you just need to show your work more.

Turning your calligraphy hobby into a source of income comes with great perks. You set your own hours, take vacations when you choose, and have full control over your offerings without worrying about back orders. Plus, working from home lets you stay close to family while enjoying tax advantages in the United States.

I give you plenty of tips in this chapter to get you started in the right direction if you want to make some money with your calligraphy.

You may wonder about the potential to build a thriving calligraphy business entirely online; some people even claim that digital platforms provide the ultimate solution for success. Although the Internet provides valuable tools for artists, in my experience, true success in art comes from fostering personal connections — engaging with enthusiasts,

collaborating with creatives, and attending art fairs. These interactions create lasting impressions that digital platforms can't fully replicate.

Making a List

Identifying your market is essential for success in marketing your calligraphy. Start by making a list of potential clients who might be interested in calligraphy. Common buyers include schools, libraries, youth organizations, police and fire departments, chambers of commerce, houses of worship, restaurants, wedding coordinators, and businesses specializing in events and weddings.

Other potential markets include corporate clients, luxury brands, historical societies, museums, book publishers, art galleries, personal commissions, tattoo studios, hotels, resorts, event planners, and artisan vendors. Each group has unique calligraphy needs, from signage and certificates to invitations and decorative pieces.

By identifying your ideal audience, you can tailor your services and marketing approach more effectively.

Creating a Sizzling Business Card

Create a striking business card that showcases your calligraphy. Avoid generic, ready-made designs — your card should be an impressive representation of your skills. Often, it's the first example of your work that potential clients see, so make it sizzle.

Here are some tips for creating an effective business card:



- » **TIP** **Do some research.** Find designs that appeal to you and use them for inspiration.
- » **Pop a QR code on it.** Link directly to your website or contact info. Online tools like Canva's QR Code Generator or Me-QRQR will

generate the QR image free.

- » **Make your master big.** Design your card three times bigger than the final version size for better resolution when printed or uploaded.
- » **Give your card to everyone.** Distribute it generously — order at least 2,000 and make sure they reach as many hands as possible. Slip one into every piece of outgoing mail.
- » **Create a digital version.** Add it to your e-mail signature for sharing online.



TIP

If you're on a budget, design and print your first cards using a computer with a scanner and business card software. This allows for experimentation before committing to a final design. While this is a good starting point, plan to get professionally printed cards soon — experienced professionals can spot the difference.

Impressing with Your Portfolio

Build an impressive portfolio that showcases the range of calligraphy pieces you create. Focus not just on displaying your skills but on inspiring potential clients to commission you to create a piece of calligraphy for them.

A great portfolio might take you a while to develop. At first, you can simply create a couple sample pieces to show. Later, when you make sales, you can add photos of actual commissioned work into the portfolio. When I was selling my art as my full-time income, I constantly revised and improved the contents of my portfolio.

Here are a few tips for showing off your calligraphy:

- » Your portfolio can be a physical photo album and/or a digital collection on a tablet or phone. You can have more than one portfolio.

- » Photos of actual commissions make a much stronger impression than fabricated samples.
- » A simple, eye-catching brochure can complement your portfolio and attract more interest.

I sold two kinds of artwork as a professional artist — portraits and calligraphy — and had two separate portfolios. At first, my portfolios contained just a few things that I made up as examples. After a while, I could fill my portfolios entirely with photos of commissioned work. At that point, I had more orders than I could handle!

Getting Paid for Your Work

My advice is never work for free — except for close relatives. In the beginning, charge something, even if it's just enough to cover materials, to establish that your work has value. Offering free work can set unrealistic expectations and lead to misunderstandings.

Start with low prices to build a reputation and get your work seen. Let clients know your rates are introductory and will rise as you establish yourself. For hand-drawn calligraphy, \$5 to \$50 is a reasonable entry price.

When launching my business, I began with friends, offering them the best rates while reserving higher pricing for future commissions.

As your business grows, raise prices gradually with at least 30 days' notice to clients.

For more details on a pricing formula (see “[Finalizing the Sale](#),” later in this chapter).

Making Reproductions

If you have some calligraphy work that you feel works for notecards, consider creating a set of cards that you can wholesale to card and gift shops. Check with a printer on the cost of printing notecards. If the cost

is too high for your business budget, you can mount photos on plain paper stock. Also, computer software such as Photoshop can enable you to produce photo-quality reproductions of your work.

Numerous websites specialize in printing art reproductions on demand, which offer artists a convenient way to monetize their creations. One such platform, and a favorite among artists, is INPRNT (www.inprnt.com). You can set up an account for free — simply upload your artwork, choose your desired pricing, and let the platform handle the rest. When someone buys a piece of your art, INPRNT takes a percentage to cover production and operational costs, ensuring that the artists don't have to worry about logistics such as printing or shipping.

Showing Off the Goods

Before you deliver a completed work, show it to others — and always photograph it for your portfolio. I built my calligraphy business this way, often securing two or three new commissions just by sharing completed pieces with friends.

Ask for referrals by saying, “Who do you know that might need calligraphy?” When reaching out, mention the person who referred them, and if they become a client, send a small thank-you gift or card — a simple but powerful strategy.

Engage potential clients by inviting them to view your work. Say, “I’m a calligrapher, and many people like yourself enjoy my work. When might we meet at a coffee shop so I can show you my portfolio?” Assure them it’s just a viewing — no pressure to buy.

While they browse your portfolio, encourage interest by asking, “Have you ever thought about having something like this in your home, office, or business?” or “Have you ever wanted to present an award like this one?”

Taking the Order

I recommend that you ask for a deposit when taking an order — ideally 50%. This encourages prompt payment upon completion and makes costs more manageable for clients.

Guarantee satisfaction, offering revisions if necessary. Rarely did I need to redo a piece, but ensuring quality builds trust.



WARNING Be cautious with overly picky clients. If someone is never satisfied, it's best to refund their deposit politely rather than struggle with endless revisions.

Make detailed notes and rough sketches of a client's request, but avoid showing preliminary drafts unless they ask — non-artists may find them confusing.

Present your finished work with confidence. Your enthusiasm matters — when delivering a commission, a positive attitude reinforces its value. I often said, “I think you're really going to like this!”

Finalizing the Sale

When people ask you for a price quote, don't hesitate or try to avoid answering. You may want to ask for more details before you give them a price, but when you know exactly what the job entails, give them a precise quote.

A price formula based on a cost per character plus a charge for artistic design elements is entirely appropriate.

Beginners often ask me what I suggest they should charge. That's a difficult question to answer specifically because so many variables come into play. A good benchmark for a beginner is to start no lower than 10 cents per character and go no higher than 25 cents. For an established calligraphy, a dollar or more per character is not uncommon.



TIP

Do your best to control the presentation when delivering your work. Avoid interruptions and ensure only those approving the piece are present — unexpected guests can be distracting or overly critical.

To make the experience memorable, create a sense of anticipation. I often placed the artwork on an easel draped with a satin cover, setting the mood before revealing it. A well-planned unveiling adds excitement — yes, I even said, “Voilà!”

Matting and Framing

If you want to provide matting and framing of your work, you can increase your profits. If you go this route, quote people a price for your work both framed and unframed.

Matting and framing are truly an art form themselves. Tinted mats and decorative frames definitely can enhance the appearance of a piece of calligraphy. If you're interested in exploring matting and framing, a good way to begin is to look online and at your library for information on the techniques of mat cutting and framing. My website, newgoldenletters.com, has some helpful information on choosing mat colors and frame styles.

It is important to know about archival framing, so you can prevent a mat or mounting board that's not acid-free from damaging your work over time. Many clients have heard of archival framing and might ask about it.

Mail-order businesses sell mats and frames at discount prices. I have ordered my frames and mats pre-cut from a wholesale supplier who shipped to me within a couple of days; and I could easily assemble them without needing a bunch of tools. You can find many options online, including PictureFrames (www.pictureframes.com). A lot of clients really appreciate this added service.

Keeping Your Business Legal

Maintain accurate financial records, tracking all income and expenses. Ensure compliance with business laws, including sales tax collection (where required) and income tax payments. Software like QuickBooks can help streamline record-keeping.

Will you need a business license? Requirements vary by location, so check with your local government or small business administration for guidance. Here are two things I can say:

- » If you're working from your home, the only license you probably need (and I emphasize *probably*) is a sales tax permit. That's the only license I have.



- » **WARNING** Be careful about who you ask about licenses. Ask the wrong person, and you may wind up being told that you have to pay for a license that you don't really need.

Before you make a business-license move, consult your secretary of state's website — you can find a fountain of information there that can get you started in the right direction. Other professionals, such as lawyers and accountants, can also provide you helpful information (but you likely have to pay for their expertise).

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About the Author

Jim Bennett, BFA, MFA, is an accomplished calligrapher, artist, and award-winning educator with nearly five decades of experience teaching and inspiring students. He's currently an art and calligraphy instructor for the Center for Lifetime Study, Marist University.

Jim's journey into calligraphy began in 1977 when he took on his first art teaching position — without having previously studied calligraphy, he was hired to teach it! Learning on the fly, he quickly immersed himself in the study of calligraphy and developed a deep passion for the craft, which led to a lifelong dedication to its practice and instruction. By 1982, his calligraphy classes had grown so popular that he compiled his lesson handouts into his first book, *You Can Do Calligraphy*.

Since then, Jim has taught calligraphy across all age groups, created a correspondence course for a college, developed an Italic handwriting curriculum (grades K–5) for a prestigious private school, launched an international calligraphy webring, and written several books on the subject, including *Calligraphy For Dummies*.

His contributions have been widely recognized, earning him awards such as the Virginia Artists Certificate of Distinction, two Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowships, the Southwest Ohio Art Education Association Educator of the Year, and recipient of the 2022 Millbrook Vineyards Wine Label Competition award.

Beyond the classroom, Jim exhibits his artwork online, shares insights through his calligraphy website, NewGoldenLetters.com, and engages with fellow enthusiasts through a dedicated calligraphy e-mail listserv.

Jim is married to his college sweetheart and lives in Poughkeepsie, New York. They have four adult children and eight grandchildren.

Author's Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the incredible team who helped bring this book to life. My heartfelt thanks go to my acquisitions editor, Alicia Sparrow, whose enthusiasm and vision were contagious; my developmental editor, Elizabeth Kuball, who guided me in shaping a meticulously structured table of contents; my project editor, Tracy Brown Hamilton, who kept me on track and managed every important detail; and my copy editor, Laura K. Miller, who masterfully polished my writing. Your expertise, dedication, and keen insights made writing and illustrating this book an absolute pleasure.

A special thanks to my good friend and multitalented artist, Franc Palaia, whose creative vision enriched both the instructional and visual aspects of this work. I also extend my sincere appreciation to Wiley's composition department for their meticulous layout of the many illustrations that make teaching calligraphy through this medium possible.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge the master calligraphers who have been my teachers and inspirations — Margaret Shepherd, Sheila Waters, Nan Barchowsky, Jacqueline Svaren, Tom Gordy, Donald Jackson, and Fred Eager. Their contributions to the art form have shaped my own journey.

Above all, I want to express my profound gratitude to my wife and family — my greatest supporters, champions, and unwavering sources of encouragement. Your belief in me and this project means more than words can ever say.

Thank you all!

I wish to dedicate this book to the memory of the artists and calligraphers of the past whose creativity and mastery shaped this timeless art (may we honor you), to the calligraphers and readers of today who carry forward its legacy (may you prosper), and to the scribes of the future who will enrich it further. May we all thrive as threads in

the continuous tapestry of this craft, uniting past, present, and future as one.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Associate Acquisitions Editor: Alicia Sparrow

Senior Project Editor: Tracy Brown Hamilton

Copy Editor: Laura K. Miller

Tech Reviewer: Franc Palaia

Production Editor: Tamilmani Varadharaj

Cover Image: Courtesy of Jim Bennett, 2025

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