

Styles of Script

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In this article we will examine the various styles of pointed pen script and the sometimes confusing terminology that apply. The samples provided in the reference image should allow you to visually compare and contrast the different styles of script.

In the United States, the Copperplate style of script is a very popular form of pointed pen calligraphy. It adorns many of the wedding invitations that calligraphers are commissioned to pen. The modern usage of the term Copperplate applies to several styles of shaded script. Therefore, we will use it as a starting point for this discussion.

Historically, Copperplate was the term applied to the English roundhand script so wonderfully represented in Bickham's *The Universal Penman*. This monumental work displays the roundhand script from some of the finest historical English writing masters engraved for printing. Sample 1, originally penned by English writing master Joseph Champion, Sr. (1709-1765) was included in Bickham's book. The specimen illustrates the beautiful flowing shaded letterforms based on ovals that typify this style of script. It is ironic that English roundhand should start off a discussion on pointed pen script since it was not a pointed pen form. Instead it was executed using a quill pen. Furthermore, we know from Bickham's *The Young Clerk's Assistant* that, contrary to popular belief, the quill was cut to a narrow broad edge and not sharply pointed. Yet these historic letterforms are the basis of the modern 'Copperplate style' of calligraphy.

The handwritten specimens of English roundhand were engraved for printing purposes onto a 'copper plate' by a master engraver. Hence, the eventual use of the term Copperplate for this form of script should not be hard to fathom. Modern Copperplate instructional manuals emulate this quill pen style using a pointed flexible steel pen.

The earliest usage of the word 'Copperplate' applied to English roundhand that I have come across can be found in Sir Ambrose Heal's monumental 1931 publication entitled, *The English Writing-Masters and Their Copy-Books 1570-1800*. Though usage of the term likely predates this publication. It should be noted that there were several variants of English roundhand script including a less ornate less shaded hand that was used for day-to-day correspondence.

The next calligraphic style we will examine is Engrosser's script. This form of script is similar in appearance to English roundhand; however, looks can be deceiving. Several historical terms correctly apply to the script shown in Sample 2 (penned by the author). These include Engrosser's' script, Engraver's script and roundhand. Since this style of script was used extensively for the calligraphic embellishment of documents, known as 'engrossing', the term Engrosser's script was applied. For the purpose of this discussion I will use the term Engrosser's script when referring to this calligraphic style.

The progenitor hand for Engrosser's script was the previously described English roundhand. For this reason, the term 'roundhand' is sometimes used to describe this style.

However, unlike traditional English roundhand, Engrosser's script is not a form of handwriting. In fact, Engrosser's script has been more accurately described as the equivalent of engraving on paper. It developed as an attempt to simulate the exacting roundhand letterforms used by engravers. Hence, the term Engraver's script was also used to describe this form of script. The oval-based letterforms are literally drawn using a pointed flexible steel nib such as the legendary Gillott 303 and a series of interrupted strokes that are loosely analogous to the ductus in text lettering. Consider that the capital 'S' seen in the word 'Script' (see Sample 2) was executed in four separate strokes. Therefore, a fundamental difference between traditional English roundhand (Copperplate) and Engrosser's script rests in the execution of the letters, i.e. handwriting versus drawing, respectively.

Next, we come to a uniquely American form of cursive handwriting called Spencerian Script. Sample 3A, penned by Platt R. Spencer, Sr. is representative of this hand. Developed in the first half of the 19th century by PR Spencer, Sr. as a shaded form of cursive handwriting, it was based on the graceful ovals and curvatures he observed in nature. Of course, the name Spencerian derives from the originator of the hand, Spencer. The lowercase letters are typically delicate in appearance and less shaded than the forms of script previously mentioned. Prior to Spencer's contribution, handwriting in America was based on an English roundhand style as typified in the American instructional books of the time like Jenkins' *The Art of Writing*. The emergence of Spencerian script would usher in the 'Golden Age' of ornamental penmanship in the United States. This period would extend through the early portion of the 20th century.

Spencerian script, in its original form was executed with a quill pen. The eventual availability in the mid-late 1800's of high quality steel pens together with the skill of properly trained penmen, both men and women, would lead to a further refinement of the basic hand by those who came after Spencer. A good example of this refinement can be seen in Sample 3B penned by master penman Earl A. Lupfer (1890-1974), former Principal of The Zanerian College. There were several forms of Spencerian script including more ornate styles, a delicate 'ladies' hand, a more rapid monoline style as well as others.

Eventually, the artistic ability of the penman together with high quality steel nibs like the legendary Gillott Principality, the development of the oblique penholder, smoother papers and legendary ink formulations such as Arnold's Writing fluid would combine to embellish the basic Spencerian letterforms into a dramatic variant called Ornamental Script. A wonderful example of this script, penned by master penman HP Behrensmeyer (1868-1948) is shown in Sample 4. Ornamental script can be thought of as a stylized form of Spencerian script. Added to the basic Spencerian letterforms are beautiful swirls and curls that followed rules of symmetry along with dramatic shades opposing almost invisible hairlines.

Is it or is it not handwriting? The short answer to that question is 'yes' it is still handwriting. However, Ornamental script represents a Spencerian form that floats gracefully between the realms of handwriting and art. Hence, the term 'Artistic' writing

was also used to describe this hand. It is interesting to note that Spencerian script and Ornamental penmanship are undergoing something of a renaissance due primarily to the efforts of master penman Michael R. Sull. The script has even found a foothold in England due to the efforts of master penman Brian Walker.

The various styles of script were not always used exclusively of each other. In fact, it was a common practice to use Spencerian/Ornamental capital letters in combination with Engrosser's script lowercase letterforms to great advantage. This makes it difficult to classify specimens from past masters into neat categories.

The final style we will examine is Business penmanship, also called plain penmanship. It should be noted that both English roundhand and Spencerian script were successfully employed business hands. However, the style we will be focusing on was developed in the late 1800's for teaching in business colleges and eventually in grade schools. Sample 5, penned by master penman EC Mills (1872-1962), is a fine example of this monoline cursive hand. Business penmanship is essentially a non-shaded form of cursive handwriting that evolved after the development of Spencerian script. Since the style did not require shading, a flexible pen was not needed. Modern practitioners of the hand can easily use either a fountain pen or a ballpoint pen to equal effectiveness. I am certain that many calligraphers will remember being taught a version of plain penmanship such as The Palmer Method or the Zaner-Bloser Method of writing in school.

Hopefully, you should now have a better idea of the basic styles of pointed pen script and the terminology used to describe them. In the next installment we will examine the implements used for shaded script in the Copperplate style. Specifically, the oblique penholder/pointed flexible steel nib and the reasons why they are useful for shaded script styles.

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Styles of Script

1) English Roundhand (Copperplate):

Virtue & Friendship

2) Engrosser's script (Engraver's script):

Engrosser's Script

3) Spencerian script:

A) *On the Spencerian*

B) *Study and practice should be properly combined*

4) Ornamental script:

J. B. Henderson

5) Business Penmanship:

Haphazard practice is very poor