

Published in Palmers Penmanship Budget (1919)

Lessons in Text Lettering

By W. E. Dennis

Lesson Number ONE

To do text lettering well and rapidly at the same time, requires considerable practice, but it seems as though anyone who has the fine perception of form and skilful touch requisite to an artistic writer could also become a good text letterer. The things necessary are good models, and a few hints as to how to go about it.

Materials

Soennecken pens, turkey quills and reeds are used. The best is that which you can use best. Most engravers use the Soennecken pen, probably because it is easier to obtain.

India ink is generally preferred, although Chinese ink is about as good and some prefer it. Japan ink (Walkden's or Arnold's) is also good.

The Old English is one of the most beautiful and useful of all alphabets, and, no doubt, one of the most difficult. The practical way to make it is simply to indicate with pencil or locate the letters, then with the broad pen or quill, corresponding in width to the letter, clip them out at one stroke, putting on the spurs usually with a narrower pen. As much retouching and trimming may be done afterwards as is desirable.

In this alphabet each letter was penciled out very carefully, then with a broad quill pen the letters were made in ink. After that considerable time was spent in lining up and retouching where there appeared any chance for improvement; last, all the flourishes were put in as an embellishment. This mode of procedure is not a practical way to do Old English, but still it may be well enough to practice, to train the eye and get as good a conception as possible of the letter.

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Lesson Number Two

German Text

ANOTHER beautiful alphabet is German text, not quite so legible and dignified as Old English, but very rapid of execution and especially valuable for diploma filling, etc. It is less mechanical than Old English from the fact that it is made up almost entirely of curves, whereas Old English has more angles and straight lines, but the pen manipulation is much the same, and if a person can make Old English he/she can soon learn to make German text, or vice versa. It is a question as to which is the more difficult; one seems about as much so as the other, although German text can be done with the greater speed. Grace seems to be the characteristic feature of German text, and in order to get the leading quality it is highly important to be as offhand as possible in making it. As in offhand script writing, a certain freedom seems necessary in its execution, and a labored effort reveals itself at once in the work.

A clear conception of the letter, as in Old English, is of great importance, for the hand will try to make what the fancy dictates, therefore study the letter, from it thoroughly and train the eye to be so critical that it will at once detect any fault made by the hand, then practice, and practice only, will do the rest.

In this alphabet the aim was to produce graceful models, but do not be satisfied with the study of just one alphabet. Study all the good forms you can get hold of, ever remembering there more than just one particular way to make a letter, also that no alphabet can be said to be absolutely perfect and beyond criticism.

In the next lesson, a more rapid and practical style of Old English and German text will be given, something where less attention is paid to finish but more to speed and utility.

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Lesson Number Three (\*reference image 90)

Rapid Old English and German Text

In these Old English and German text alphabets we have something much less elegant in form and finish than those given in a preceding lesson, but far more profitable to these who consider lettering from a remunerative standpoint.

These alphabets were probably done in less than one-twentieth of the time consumed in making the first ones; therefore, as few people are so critical as to notice every little fault they will have to take their place ahead of the elaborate ones when it comes to getting money out of the game.

In these specimens of practical work the object was not to show how beautifully the letters could be made, but how rapidly, consequently, all unnecessary work was left out. Every letter was made, without sketching in pencil, retouching or going over in any way, a fine pen being used only where hair lines appear in the Old English capitals. All the small letters were made with the quill entirely. So it is easily seen that the work was done in a very short time. Of course it could be greatly improved by lining up and retouching with a fine pointed pen, but all this takes time. Much of the diploma filling and general lettering of engrossers has to be run right off without even taking time to lay it out in pencil, the same as these specimens, which serve to show the kind of work that pays. Therefore, let us emphasize the importance of speed, but do not try to get speed first.

Aim to get quality first and rapidity will come afterward. It will be a good plan to study and practise well on the first alphabets, getting all the form well fixed in mind. Learn to handle the quill or pen skillfully, than see what you can do in rushing things off a little faster.

Diagram of Letters Showing Principles

In order that the student in lettering may get a clear conception of the small letters in Old English, it will be well to study carefully this diagram and note how all the letters are made up from a few principles. This rule holds true with all alphabets. When it is seen on just what principles the letter is constructed it then becomes easy to master the form.

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#### Lesson Number Four

##### German Round Hand

AN indispensable letter to the engrossing artist is that known as German Round Hand. It can be made with great rapidity, is easy to read, and serves admirably for body text, where a great deal of solid reading matter is to go within a small space. It can be made so compact as to require much less room than Engravers' script, is much easier to execute, and if anything, even any rapid than the latter. It is used a great deal by illuminators where a start letter is richly illuminated, and the rest of the page lettered in this very practical style of text.

Not much trouble will be found in handling this letter after Old English and German text have been mastered, for it is really made up principally from these two alphabets, a sort of mongrel type, but a very useful one nevertheless and anybody who desires to do engrossing should learn to run off this letter in a neat way, with as much speed as possible.

The style where the letters are connected with a hair stroke is difficult, and it is well in this particular to rule vertical lines in pencil as a guide, especially with beginners. This connected text will be found useful where it is necessary to fill considerable space, where it is desirable to stretch a line out pretty well, or to make a contrast in the work. The double line lettering is done with a two-pointed Soennecken pen, which is also used sometimes for German text, and is useful to penmen and engrossers who have to turn off rapid work.

Student will find this style of text lettering a very satisfactory one to practice and will soon understand why it can be done so rapidly. It is used for body text by engrossers more than any other.

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#### Lesson Number Five

In this lesson are given some specimens for speed work. So important is speed in practical pen work that it cannot be emphasized too much. If you want to make money out of pen work, you must be quick at it, for it is very rare indeed that a patron can be found who is willing to pay a penman for a lot of time spent in finishing and truing up work which is really only seen by the critic, and lost entirely to the eye of the general public. The work that sells is the catchy effective kind which can be knocked right off at a reasonable cost. For that reason let the student who is looking for dollars in pen work fasten on to those styles of lettering that can be handled quickly and at the same time make a good show.

In the specimen "Cedar Rapids Business College" etc., everything is done on the quick order. The main line can be lettered in a few minutes, being one-stroke letters, and "Cedar Rapids, Iowa," is also quickly done. Another few minutes would be enough for the flourishing. Now the person who usually pays for such work imagines it is done very slowly, never dreaming for a moment that it is dashed right off, consequently, he does not, as a general thing, object to paying a fair price for it. A piece of intricate lettering where hours are spent on the elaboration of the work, would not, as a rule, be appreciated enough for the pen artist to feel safe in charging for the full value of his time. But if he is working for fun, then that is another thing. Let him while away hours in finishing up something to gratify his fancy, remembering that the pay for such consists in the pleasure he is getting out of it.

In the next lesson will be given work more elaborate for those who wish to do something more than mere text lettering. Practice well on these exercises and get them down fine. Study form and arrangement so that you can run things off impromptu, as the greater part of all commercial artwork has to be done, in order to make it profitable.

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Lesson Number Six - Display Work

We present cut herewith a head-line in Old English, together with a little rustic lettering, German text and offhand script, for practice in laying out work.

The first thing is to get a good compound curve in pencil for the heading with a pair of dividers, shifting them until in proper position for making the required curve. Now lay out the lettering in pencil, taking special care about the spacing; and a word in regard to spacing will not here come in amiss. Spacing is one of the most important things in lettering, for no matter how perfect the letters are made, if the spacing is poor the effect will not be pleasing. Spacing is determined by the eye and not by measurements. The idea is not to make the letters exactly the same distance apart by measuring, but to get them so that they look the same distance, part and the same may be said in reference to uniformity in height and line of letters for certain ones will bear making a little higher and larger than others and yet in effect they will appear uniform. Artists lay, "Draw, objects not as they are, but as you see them." So in lettering, do act be so particular to have the have the characters all so exact in size and an equal distance apart as to get an arrangement that is uniform and harmonious as a whole that is pleasing to the eye, whether exact in measurements or not.

The head line in this specimen, after being sketched in pencil was put in with a broad quill pen and then lined up with a T-square, thereby getting perfectly vertical letters with smooth outlines and what others retouching would improve the general appearance was then added.

In the he, "Cedar Rapid," will be found a very rapid, easy and effective letter, although the tint, darkened at the top, can be done with a brush much more easily and rapidly than by tipping, him not intended for a line cut. Sketch the letters very freely in pencil, and with a stub pen make the outline, getting as much of a rustic effect as possible, then with a brush and diluted India ink, a few minutes work will complete the letter, which blends in beautifully with text lettering and offhand penmanship. Next comes "Iowa" and the line of offhand shaded script, and last of all the flourishing, which is really the most difficult part.