

Taken from Lessons in Ornamental Penmanship
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(Copies written by EA Lupfer)

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THE STUDY OF FORM

Two things are essential in the execution of superior penmanship. They are perception and performance. The hand cannot well perform that which the mind does not perceive. On the other hand, the hand unconsciously endeavors to follow the dictates of the mind. In other words, the hand, thoroughly and carefully trained, becomes the ready servant of the will and intellect. Poor writing owes its existence quite as much to poor perception as to poor performance. Therefore, if you would get the most out of these lessons, study carefully and critically the form before you begin to practice upon it. By so doing, you will not only learn to write a much finer hand but will do so in much less time.

And this matter of perception is quite as difficult to acquire as the ability to execute. Eye training is therefore just as important as muscular training, and as tedious to attain.

Before beginning practice upon any exercise, principle, letter or word, study it carefully, noting first the relative height and width; second, its general shape, whether round-like or square-like, long or narrow, regular or irregular; third, note carefully the main divisions of the letter, and finally take into consideration the little things such as turns, angles, beginning and ending strokes, etc.

Draw the letter carefully and perfectly just as perfectly as you can perceive, using a well sharpened pencil and an eraser to make corrections in order to get just exactly what you perceive. If you can get a better idea of form of a letter by tracing it, do so. Some of our finest penmen, in their endeavor to get to be such, worked for hours attempting to draw a perfect letter before attempting to practice it. You will do well to utilize the same method. Much unnecessary effort is expended and not a little paper wasted by practice following superficial observation.

Therefore you would make no mistake in having a clear form in your mind before placing it upon paper. Someone has very wisely said that you must think good writing before you can hope to execute it. Nothing truer was ever spoken. Begin now, therefore, to study form and to study it systematically and therefore scientifically.

THE MOVEMENTS

There are two forces employed in writing, one which may be termed the creative force and the other the controlling force. The two should always go hand in hand, else scribbling on the one hand or cramped writing on the other hand is sure to be the result.

In creating motion, three sets of muscles are employed by all superior penmen. The muscles located on the forearm in front of the elbow move the fingers. The muscles on the upper arm move the forearm at the elbow. The muscles on the chest and back move the upper arm at the shoulder. In the best writing, all of these muscles cooperate to produce the final product.

We have also three means of controlling this three fold action. The first and most important control is that known as "will." The second control is that secured by resting the forearm on the muscle in front of the elbow. The third means of control is the little finger as it comes in contact with the blotter upon which it glides and rests alternately.

The idea that the hand should rest and glide upon the nails of the third and fourth fingers is not used for ornamental writing. None of our finest penmen write that way. Instead, nearly all of them rest the hand

upon the side of the little finger, usually upon the flesh somewhere between the nail and first joint. This little glide and rest aids in controlling the otherwise jerky and spasmodic movements of the upper arm.

In writing the minimum small letters, the little finger rest should slip freely in making most of the upstrokes, and it should rest or slip but very little in making the downstrokes. There are a few exceptions to this rule but they will be noted from time to time when the letters are given for practice in which the exceptions occur.

We have said nothing thus far about the rate of speed. Your nervous condition will have much to do in determining the rate of speed at which you should practice writing. A good rule is to write freely enough to keep the nervous system from shaking the lines, or fast enough to keep the wobbles out of curved forms. Rapid writing is out of the question where real gracefulness and accuracy are desired. And in ornate penmanship, it is not quantity but quality that counts. Therefore, use enough speed to make your writing graceful, but not enough to prevent accuracy and precision.