

The Art of the Letter

WASAL Art Course Proposal (Winter/Spring 2022)

Jacki Whisenant

Syllabus (draft)

This class is an active examination of the written word, and the ways in which language is expressed visually on paper, from simple letterforms to elaborate calligraphic styles. We will work through different historical and modern approaches to writing, with both calligraphy pens and quill/nib pens as a fully immersive and mesmerizing study of words on paper. This class will practice elements of layout and ornamentation to bring depth and completion to a study of letterforms and how to both appreciate the historical practice and also give it your own flair.

Week 1

History, world practice, book construction
Materials: Papers, pens
Basic strokes (calligraphy pen)

Week 2

Kerning/leading: Measuring out spacing of letters and lines
Rotunda, Caroline alphabet (calligraphy/parallel pen)
Basic strokes (quill pen)

Week 3

Gothic and other blackletter alphabet variations (calligraphy pen)
Quill pen lettering: Copperplate alphabet (Quill pen)
(If offered in person, feathers and tools will be provided in class)

Week 4

Batarde alphabet and letter elaborations (calligraphy pen)
Cutting feather nibs, trimming, hardening

Week 5

Celtic style calligraphy: Uncial & Lombardic (Book of Kells)
Modern calligraphy styles: Wedge alphabet, free-flowing calligraphy
Page layout - intro

Week 5

Sign painting traditions, variations, styles
Layout: pages and words, layering lettering with size variation
Special effects (color fades, ornament, gold leaf)

Suggested materials:

Pilot Parallel Pen 2.5 mm (orange cap)
Nib holder and nibs (calligraphy and thinner crow quill: 128 or similar with moderately flexible nib end)
Thick paper: watercolor or 2 ply Bristol
Ruler
Ink (Sumi ink or Dr. Martin's)

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Materials: Paper

Writing surface

Parchment

Papyrus

Paper

Surface and weight

Materials: Pens

INK: Technical pens

There are many ways to use ink, and your method should reflect what your style goals are. Are you looking to create something painterly or something precise?

Micron: These pens are the standard technical pen, with a range of nibs. By varying your pressure you can still get a range of mark variability up to a certain point, but too much pressure will shorten the life of your pen tip.

Copic Multiliner SP: These pens are more expensive than microns, but the ink cartridges are refillable and the nibs can be replaced individually, so it's a little more eco-friendly if you are doing a lot of work with pens. The nib can be a little more scratchy until you break it in.

Rapidograph: These are the original technical pens, with all-metal tips and a fine wire with a weight to keep ink flowing. They can last a lifetime, but clog easily, so wash out with water and Windex if they will be stored for any length of time. To revive, let the tip soak in Windex overnight before filling with ink and GENTLY shake to get ink flowing.

Ball Point pens: (Otic shown here, but any brand) Usually not archival, but just fine for sketching if that's not a huge concern. The pressure required for drawing makes this a good tool for transferring.

Crow Quill/Dip pen: Very traditional method of inking. Depending on the flexibility of the nib you can get an expressive, tapered line (good for feathering the end of a line into a fine point). Requires an inkwell which can be a bit slower, but a hidden benefit is that the act of moving your hand to dip helps to relieve cramps as you introduce a bit of movement into your artistic practice. The ink needs time to dry so take care not to smudge wet lines, and watch for drips. Exchangable nib, requires refilling from an ink well - has the benefit of easily changing ink colors without an extensive cartridge swap. Can come in line or calligraphy forms

Calligraphy pens with cartridge: (Pilot Parallel) Perpetually flowing ink and a solid flow - this is one of the nicest pens I've worked with so far

Feather Quill: Traditional writing implement fashioned from the flight feather of a bird - wears out with use and must be trimmed to maintain a clean edge

Reed pen: Traditional tool, with stiffer tip than a quill - good for blocky lettering

Brush pen: Variable line width - very painterly and expressive, requires a little more care to control the line. Can be a cartridge pen or a physical brush dipped in ink



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Lettering Styles

There are many styles that can be used in a lettering practice, from historical to contemporary. We will practice the formation of various alphabets on both grid and plain paper, to explore the aesthetics of the written word through the ages. Though the specific styles tend to be from a historical European practice, we will look at the work of master calligraphers that hail from all corners of the globe through process videos of their approach to writing in a wide variety of languages and styles.

Historical

Rotunda

Caroline

Caroline

Rotunda

Gothic

Gothic

Textura quadrata

Textura quadrata

Batarde

Batarde

Uncial & Lombardic

UNCIAL

Copperplate Cursive Script

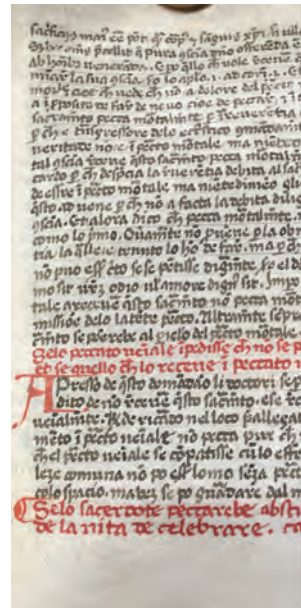
Copperplate

Contemporary

Modern calligraphic approaches range from slightly ornamented cursive styles to bold, blocky lettering, to sweeping lettering

ABCDEF

Walking



Layout

Page structure

Consider where the eye is drawn - is there a flowing ornament that directs the viewer's gaze, or a color element that attracts attention?

Margins can be a space for ornament, notation, or resting space for the eyes

Think about the use of ornamented capitals or cadels (see Book of Kells) to begin a line, or the layered colors of sign painting

Motion