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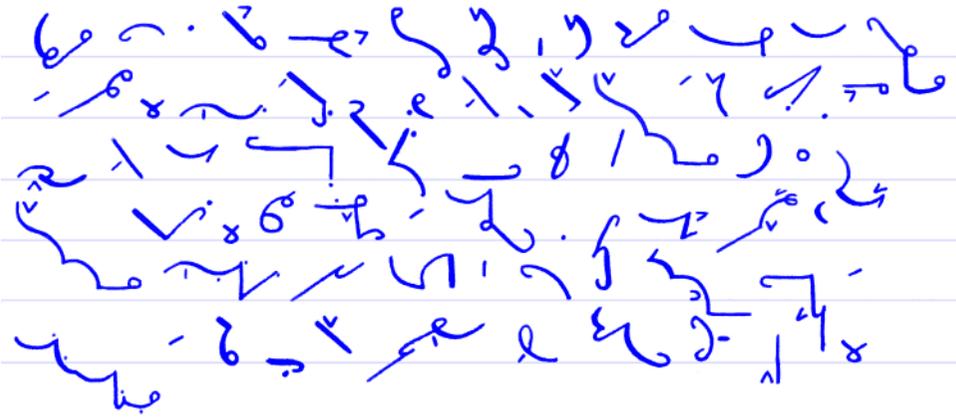
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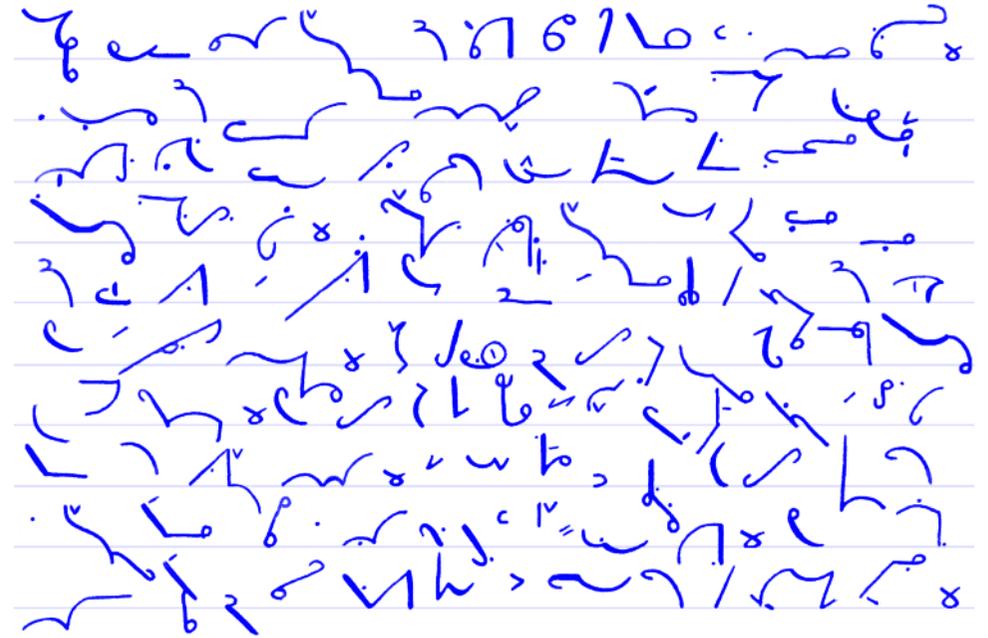
Fireworks Night

This was more a boys' exploit, as far as I was concerned*, but I was always interested in proceedings and results. Money obtained would be saved up to buy the fireworks, and I think watching the coins mounting up in the collecting jar gave just as much pleasure as seeing the fireworks burning. As well as the

excitement and anticipation, the children enjoyed the realisation that monetary reward followed on from hard work, creativity and inventiveness, and all this gained by reusing stuff that would have been thrown out.

* Omission phrase "I was (con)cerned"

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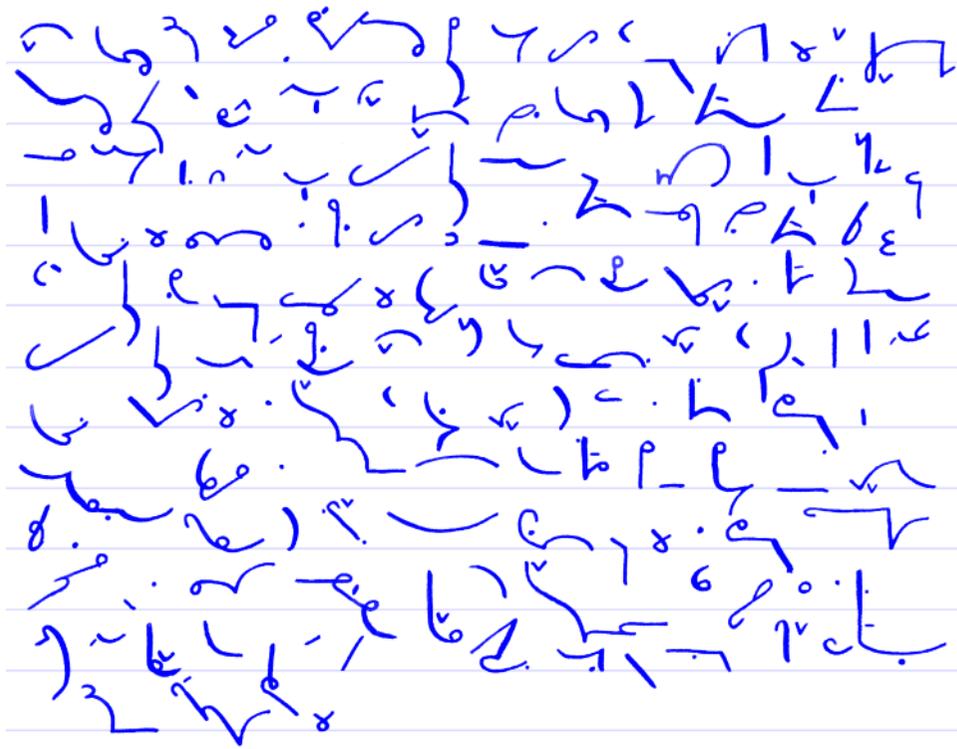
Fireworks Night

In those days single small fireworks were sold, as well as larger boxes with a mixed selection. The names were quickly memorised: Roman Candle, Vesuvius, Molten Lava, Golden Rain, Silver Fountain, Jumping Jack, Crackers, Bangers, Catherine Wheel. The brightly illustrated fireworks in the shop's glass case were ogled, read and reread over the week, and decisions which to purchase were mulled over and rehashed many times. I think the general consensus would be one of each if possible*, and then extra Bangers if cash permitted. Every one

of them had the instructions "Light The Blue Touch Paper And Stand Well Back" or "Retire Immediately." On the night, adults would dispense them one at a time* from a fireproof box such as a metal bread bin with tight-fitting lid. Several empty milk bottles would be half buried at the end of the garden, from which to launch the rockets.

* Omission phrases "if poss(ible)" "at (a) time"

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Fireworks Night

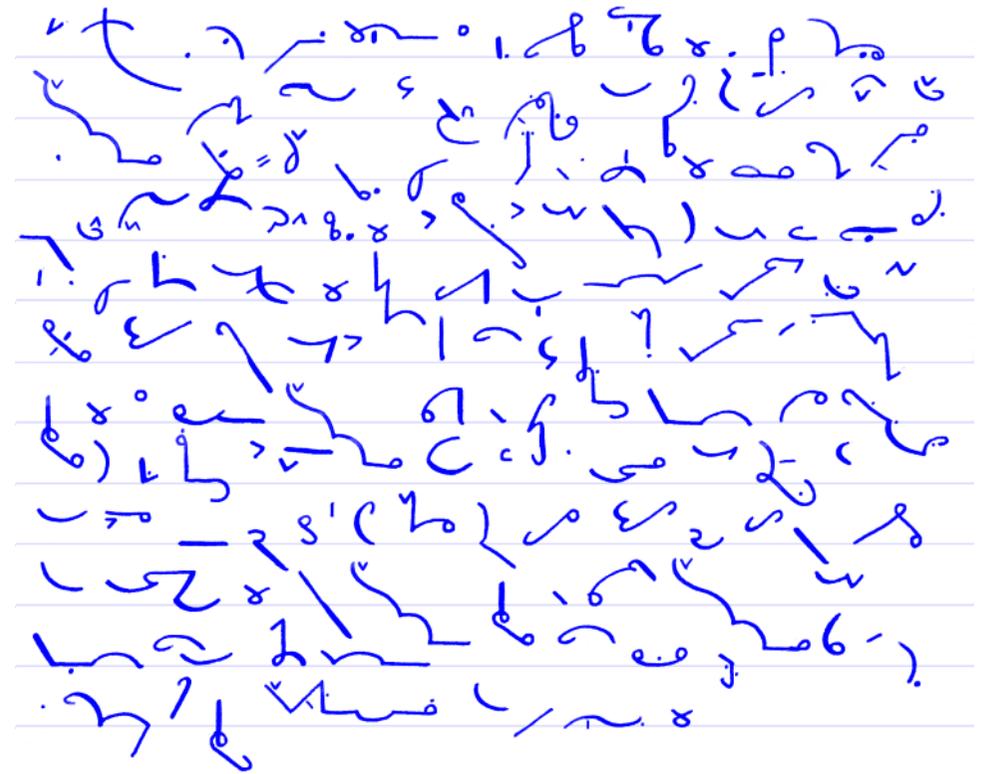
My favourites* were always the Sparklers, as it was the only one that could be held. I disliked the Bangers, which were* all sound and no light, but my least favourite was the Jumping Jack, because not only did you not know where it was going to jump, but you also had no idea when it had finished. Sometimes a stray one would give an extra last jump just when you thought it was safe to get closer. They would find me standing behind an adult, asking where it was now, and straining my eyes for the glimmer of light that showed it had not yet finished burning. A firework that failed to light was called a "damp squib" but investigating this was a matter for adults, as it could suddenly come to life just as the person

was applying another flame to it. A squib correctly refers to a small explosive device or firecracker that is used as a detonator, and therefore not designed for display, and which originally needed to be kept dry in order to* work properly*.

* "favourites" uses reversed Vr, "favoured" uses normal VR

* Omission phrases "which (w)ere" "in ord(er to)"

* "properly" Insert the first vowel, and the diphone in "appropriate" as these are similar in outline and meaning

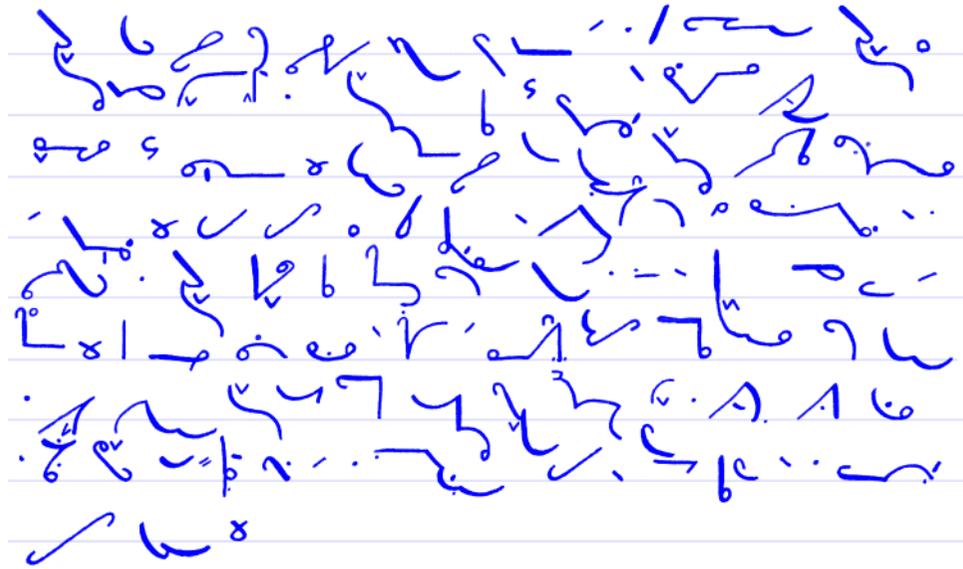


Fireworks Night

On the morning after, the air reeked of smoke, as did yesterday's clothes. The sooty remains of fireworks littered the garden, with the beautiful illustrations in shreds, although one might find a postage-stamp* sized piece still attached to a stump. Sticks from the rockets could be found lying around the streets. All the splendour of the night before was now cold grey ashes on a still, damp November morning. At the time we had no camera to record the event and I suppose that we probably enjoyed it more without the distraction of trying to record and capture the displays. As single

fireworks sold to children became less prevalent, so did the construction of the Guy, along with an increase in the suspicion that any coins given would be spent on other items, especially ones that one would not want to be responsible for encouraging. Public firework displays to celebrate Fireworks Night became more common, and it seemed to make more sense to attend those and see a very much larger display of pyrotechnics for our money.

* Omission phrase "pos(t)age s(t)amp"

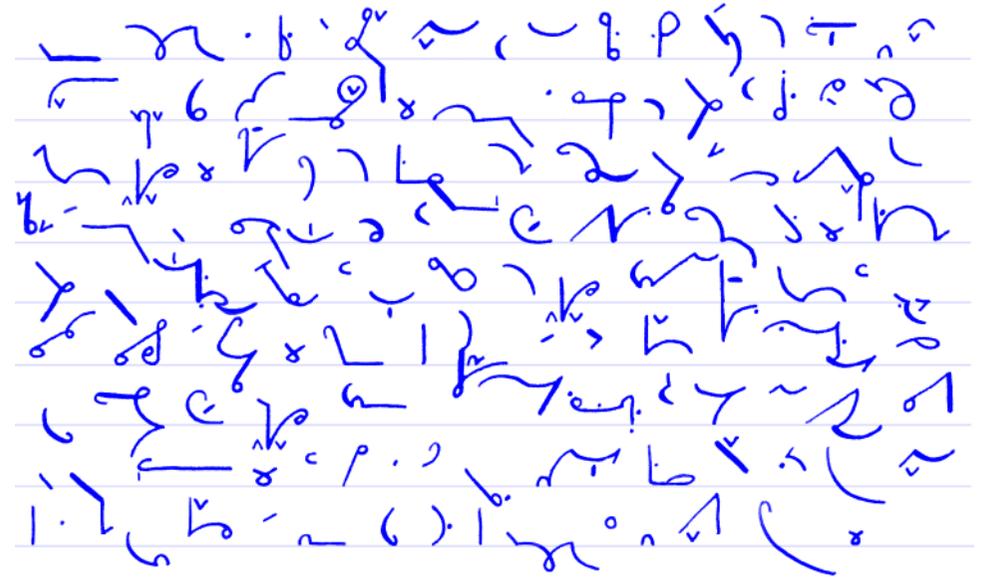


Fireworks Night

Bonfires have been used throughout history to bring people together, and a large crackling bonfire is almost like a firework itself, with the plumes of sparks rushing skywards with the smoke. They have been used for funeral pyres, religious ceremonies and beacons. Whether one is just disposing of rubbish, or as the centrepiece of a celebration, a bonfire derives its attraction

from being an act of defiance against cold and dark. It gives the same sense of control and security that one gets from having a real living fire in the grate indoors, providing warmth, light, a rosy red face, an endless supply of hand-toasted bread, and a captivating way to overcome the discomfort of a gloomy winter evening. (1071 words)

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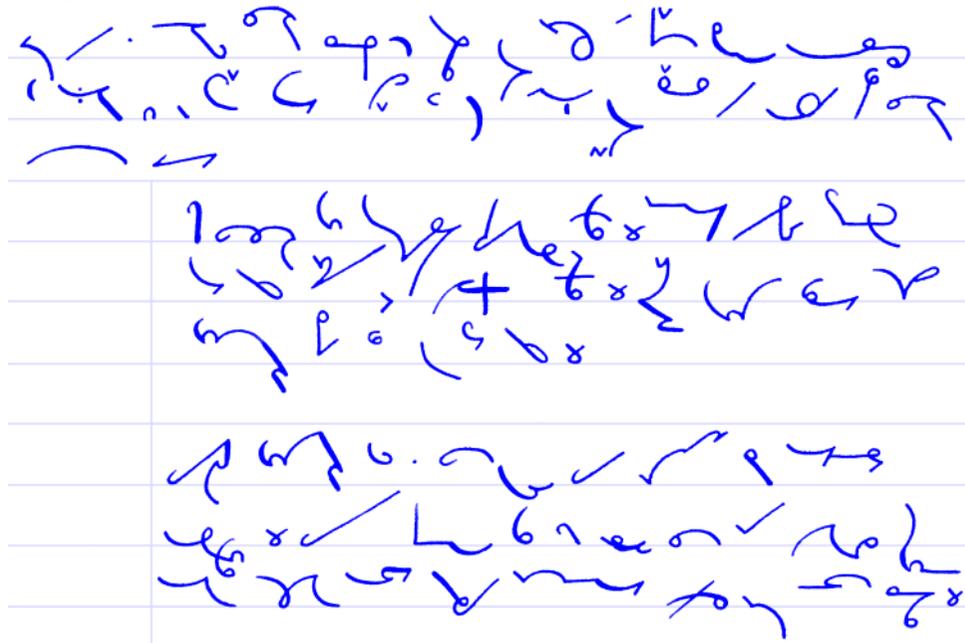


Let Me Rephrase That

To give yourself a taste of high speed writing without any stress, sweat, bother or aggro, you might like to try this little exercise. Make up a 60-word passage that contains lots of phrases and familiar outlines. Trawl through your textbook or the phrasing pages on the main website for ideas and keep to simple common words that flow readily from your pen. Tailor the passage to be undemanding and pleasant, with no surprises or outlines that you are

not totally familiar with, to avoid hassle, hesitations and challenges. Practise it assiduously and all the time maintaining the most even graceful flow of outlines that you can manage, concentrating on that only and not rushing ahead to "beat the clock". With such a short piece, you will know the text by heart after writing it a few times, and you can then say it to yourself as you write further.

Blank lined paper for writing practice.



Let Me Rephrase That

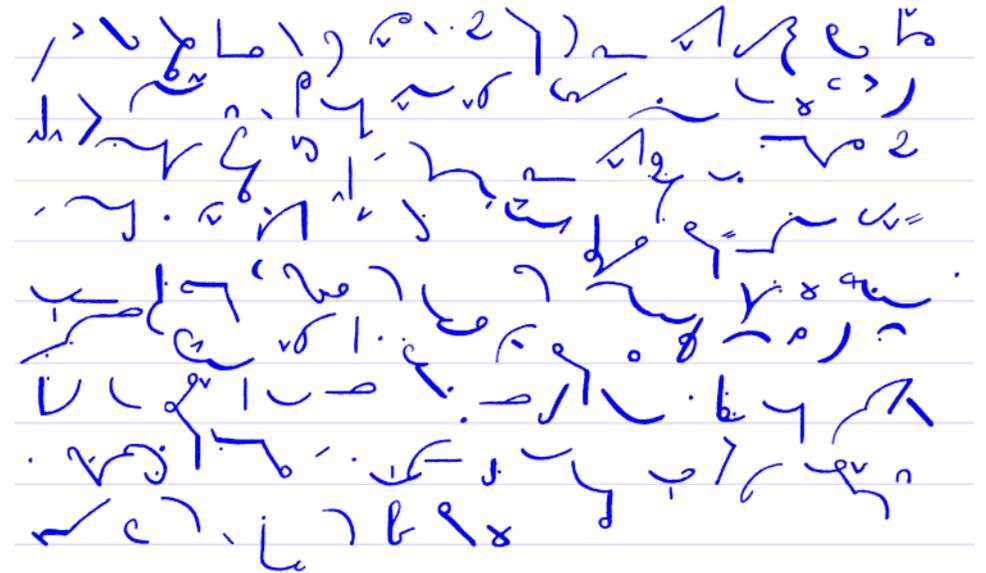
Here are a couple of sample 60-word passages full of phrases and time-saving intersections that enable you to fly along the line with ease, and no vowel signs are necessary with such simple matter:

"Dear Mr Smith, Thank you for your recent letter* which we have received* this morning. I acknowledge receipt of the application form for the post of shorthand writer* to the Legal Department of this company. I shall be glad if you will let us know the earliest that you may be able to start with us, if offered the post."

"We do not think that you will be able to find a more convenient way to learn the subject in the course of the next few months. We are taking this opportunity to send you some of our leaflets so that you can inform yourself in regard to the* best way of making the required improvements to your commercial skills."

* "letter" Downwards L in order to join the phrase

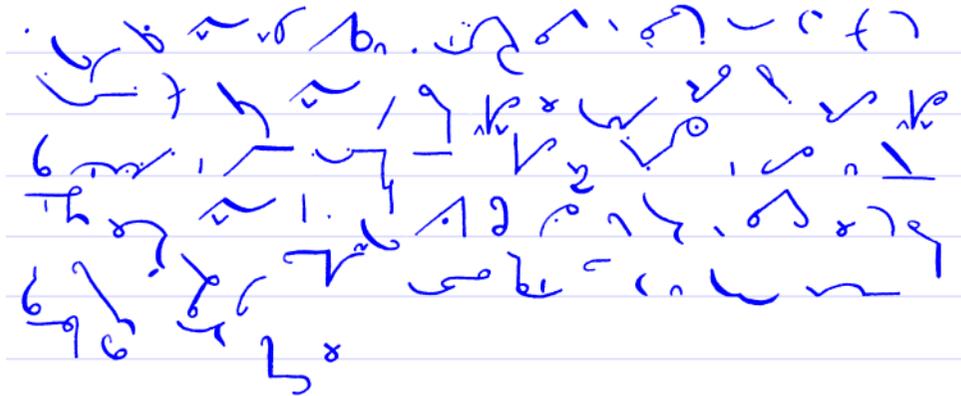
* Omission phrase "we have (re)ceived" "short(hand) writer" "in (re)gard (to) the"



Let Me Rephrase That

Each of the above passages takes up three lines of a shorthand pad, so you can write one of them seven times down the page, allowing you to settle into the writing style that you are aiming for. With all the usual mental challenges ironed out and removed, you can write consistently neat, gapless shorthand and maintain a light hold on the pen, avoiding the disastrous speed-killing white-knuckle "death grip" that prevents

your fingers from moving easily. Cultivating a relaxed flowing style at a comfortably low speed is just as important as the usual mad dash for high speed at any cost, the cost generally being a descent into illegibility, a proliferation of gaps and an unwelcome dent in confidence, none of which will inspire you to greater effort or to continue your study of the subject.

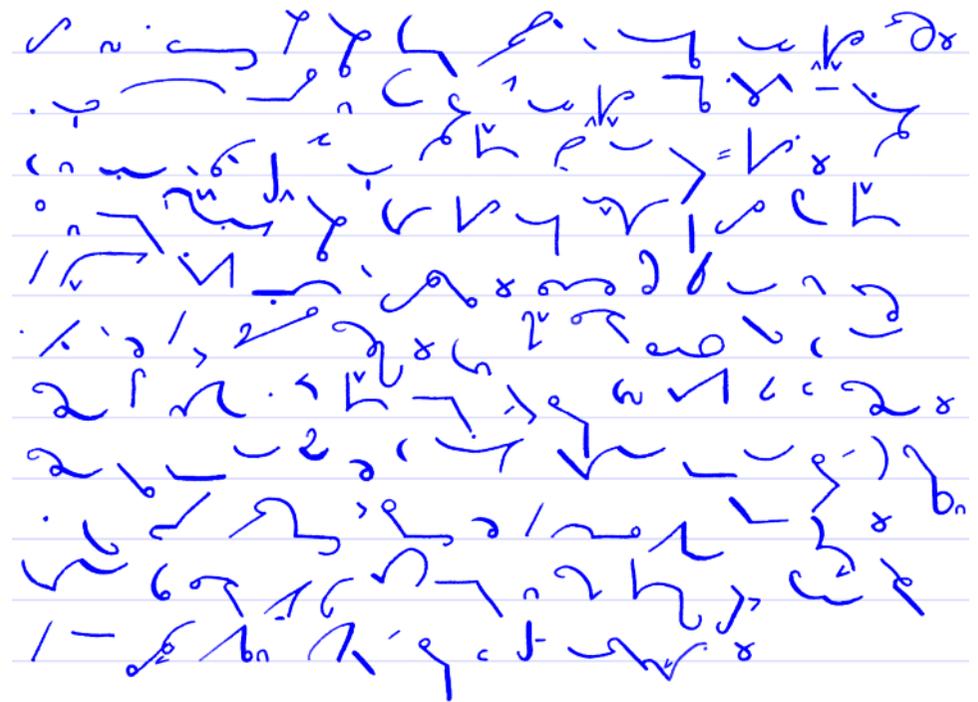


Let Me Rephrase That

An evenly-paced writing style reduces the unhelpful habit of hovering in thought (or panic) before writing each separate outline. If you are always stopping between outlines, this momentary but regular inactivity can turn to "shorthand paralysis" but once you

become accustomed to smooth writing at an even rate, there is less opportunity for that to happen. Your speed on these prepared passages will gradually increase of its own accord without you having to make extra efforts in that direction.

Horizontal lines for writing practice.



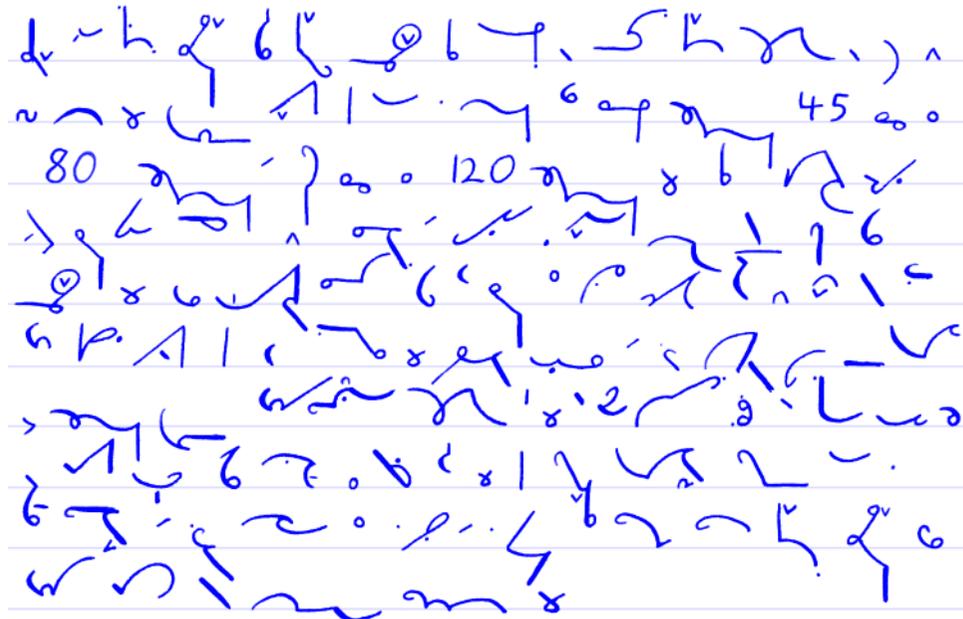
Let Me Rephrase That

Once you have a collection of such passages, they can be re-used to introduce new outlines and phrases. The known matter carries you along effortlessly and the new outline gets absorbed quite painlessly, without you needing to slow down, and with no time lost in page-turning. As you keep modifying the passages, they will turn into entirely different ones over time, much like the party game of Whispers. Sometimes there is just no opportunity to phrase a row of words, much to the shorthand writer's* frustration. If you try the sample sentences

above without any phrasing at all, you will have a hard time keeping up the speed that you have already achieved with phrasing. Phrasing puts together in shorthand words that naturally belong together in speech and so produces an even greater reflection of the spoken words, which makes reading back easier. Following this simple rule will also keep you from the temptation to join everything possible, which can seriously reduce legibility and speed, when done inappropriately.

* Omission phrase "short(hand) writer's"

Horizontal lines for writing practice.

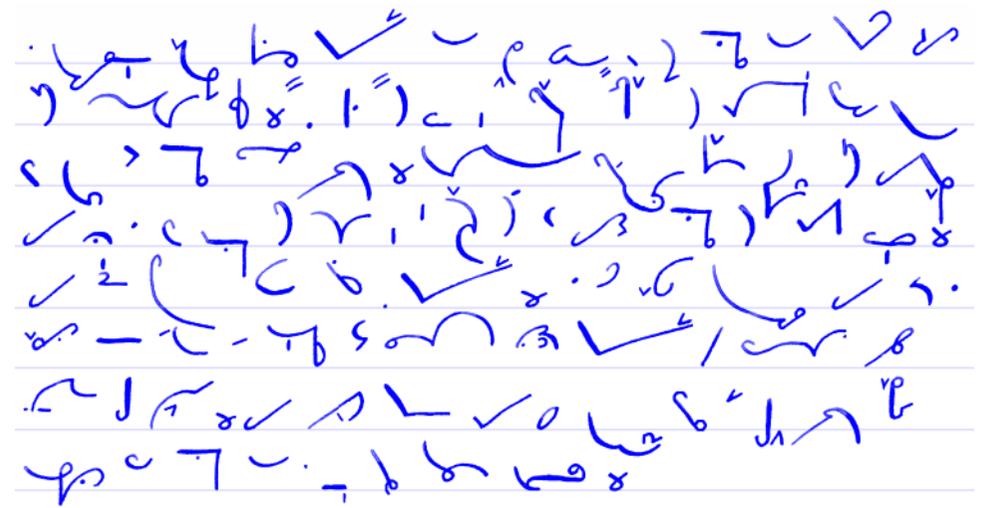


Let Me Rephrase That

Despite not attempting high speed on this type of exercise, it is interesting to occasionally time yourself to see how you have improved. If you can write it in a minute, that is 60 words per minute, 45 seconds is 80 words per minute and 30 seconds is 120 words per minute. It is helpful to weigh up the speed achievement against how scribbly and wayward the writing may have become during this exercise. If it is* unreadable scrawl, then that speed has less worth, although you might be glad that you at least* wrote it without gaps. Reasonable neatness and complete legibility will give value to the words a minute figure that you are

congratulating yourself on. All shorthand learning consists of adding new words to those already known and this method is based on that. It provides valuable practice in an agreeable and comfortable manner, as a rest and a change from the more tiring high-speed efforts that you will also be making from time to time*. (857 words)

- * "if it is" Halving to represent "it"
- * "at least" and "at last" Always insert the vowel
- * "Omission phrase "from time (to) time" with both T sounds represented by halving

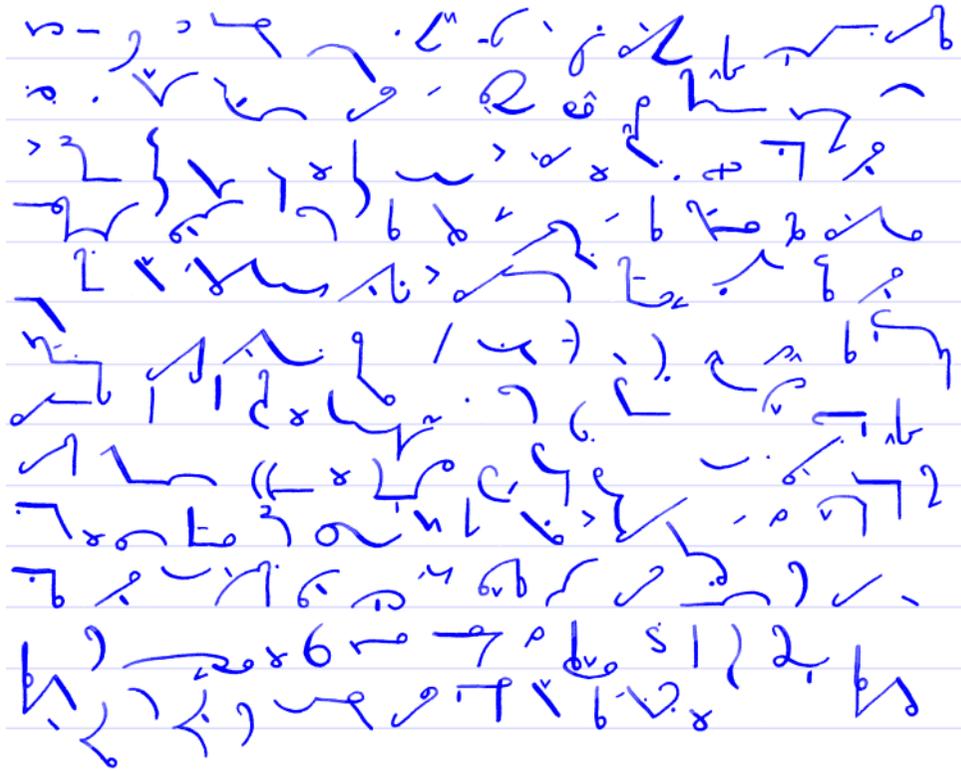


Thames Barrier

A few weeks ago* I visited the Thames Barrier in South London to see the gates in operation on one of their monthly tests. The day was cold, but bright and dry, so I looked forward to being* able to view all the gates across the river. Following their provisional time schedule on their website, we made an effort to get there early but on arrival saw that one of the gates was already closed. We walked further along past the barrier. A short while afterwards, we heard a siren go off and noticed that the

smaller landward barrier, which normally rests aloft, had been lowered. We rushed back to our first viewing place, on the downriver side of the installation, in order to get in a good position for some photographs.

- * Omission phrase "few wee(k)s ago" "in ord(er to)"
- * "to being" Through the line, based on the short form phrase "to be"

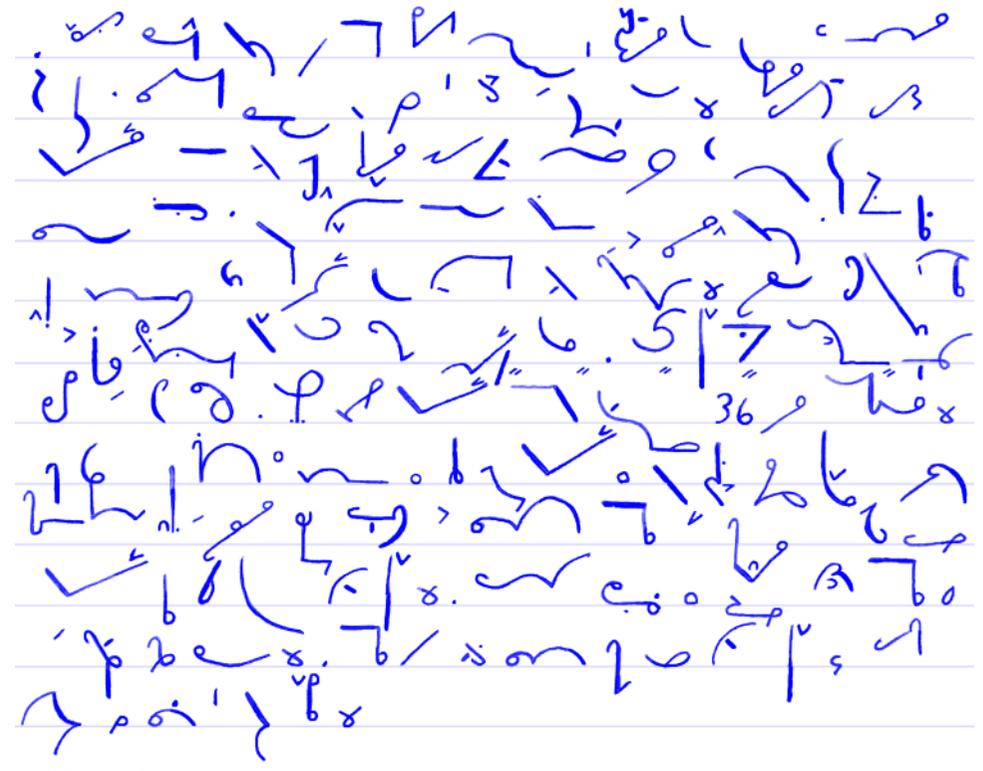


Thames Barrier

I am not quite sure what I expected, maybe a giant wall of steel surging out of the murky waters amidst a pile of foam, waves and sloshing sounds, suitably dramatic to match the importance of the work that it was built to do. It was nothing of the sort. The curved gate rose extremely slowly from its position on the riverbed, and its progress towards the surface could be tracked by observing the rotation of the circular trunnion shaft, with its rows of protective wooden rubbing strips, which enabled us to see how far round its quarter circle it had travelled. Eventually a very thin black line grew out of the water and became thicker and thicker*. Seagulls flew

over it, as if they were in a hurry to get through the gap. Some ducks were swimming about at the base of the piers and, as the mighty gates rose in ultra slow motion, not the slightest little wave came their way to disturb their meanderings. This is of course exactly as the designers planned it, so that there is no disturbance to ships or shore through unexpected waves caused by its operation.

* Omission phrase "th(icker and) thicker"
See more at www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand.org.uk/phrasing4-omission.htm#OmittingRepeatedSound



Thames Barrier

The siren sounded before each gate started moving, but I don't think it was for visitors with cameras, although it was a handy signal to switch on, point and zoom in. We saw one of the barriers go up and down twice and we joked amongst ourselves that maybe they had to check something again, a bit like going back to the house before a day's outing, to make sure that you really have locked up properly*. Using their own computer models of the conditions, supplemented by information from the Meteorological Office, the National Tidegauge Network, coastal stations and other sources, the necessity to use the barrier can be forecast 36 hours in advance.

During this time the Duty Controller has to make his decision and, if the barrier is to be deployed, he must advise river traffic and users, instruct the closure of the smaller gates on the tributaries, and then close the barrier itself just after low tide. The normal sequence is to close the landward gates first and proceed towards the centre. The gates are opened some time during the next low tide, when the water level is the same on both sides.

* "properly" Insert the vowel, and the diphthong in "appropriate" as these are similar in outline and meaning

Thames Barrier

London's flood defences were rebuilt after the North Sea floods of 1953, when a high spring tide combined with a heavy storm travelling round the coast of Scotland resulted in a swell of high water being funnelled southwards, affecting Holland, Belgium and down the east coast of Britain. There was no night-time radio broadcasting, and areas already affected had their telephone lines destroyed and so could not warn those further down the coast. Sea defences were breached, the land inundated, and people and their homes were swept away at night without warning. Residents had no chance to make plans to

evacuate or prepare in any way. The only means of communication in the areas were amateur radio operators who formed a voluntary network. Loss of life included those on ships and fishing vessels that were lost at sea. After this catastrophe, in Holland the Delta Works scheme was planned to protect their land from inundation via the river estuaries, and in the United Kingdom improved flood defence plans were drawn up, with the Thames Barrier designed to safeguard the City of London*.

* Omission phrase "City (of) London"

Thames Barrier

The pier engine houses are the best-known* and recognised part of the installation and are constructed of timber frames with a cladding of steel sheets. There are ten gates spanning the river, six navigable ones, with their rising gates resting on the riverbed and four non-navigable ones at the banks whose gates are kept aloft and then lowered when required. The rising gates are made of hollow cells, so that air and water can enter and leave as the gates change position. Each rising gate weighs fifteen hundred tonnes and the gate arm attached to the trunnion shaft weighs eleven hundred tonnes, most of which is solid steel blocks to counterbalance* the weight of the gate.

Each shaft is rotated by a rocking beam, using an oil hydraulic system powered by 190-horsepower electric pumps. Underneath each gate is a curved concrete cill, the largest of which weighs ten thousand tons. Underneath the cills are pairs of service tunnels running between the piers containing power cables, services and drains. The riverbed between the piers is protected by a filter layer of 6-tonne rocks to prevent the scouring of the bed as the water flows faster between the piers.

* Omission phrase "bes(t) known"

* "counterbalance" On its own "counter" is doubled

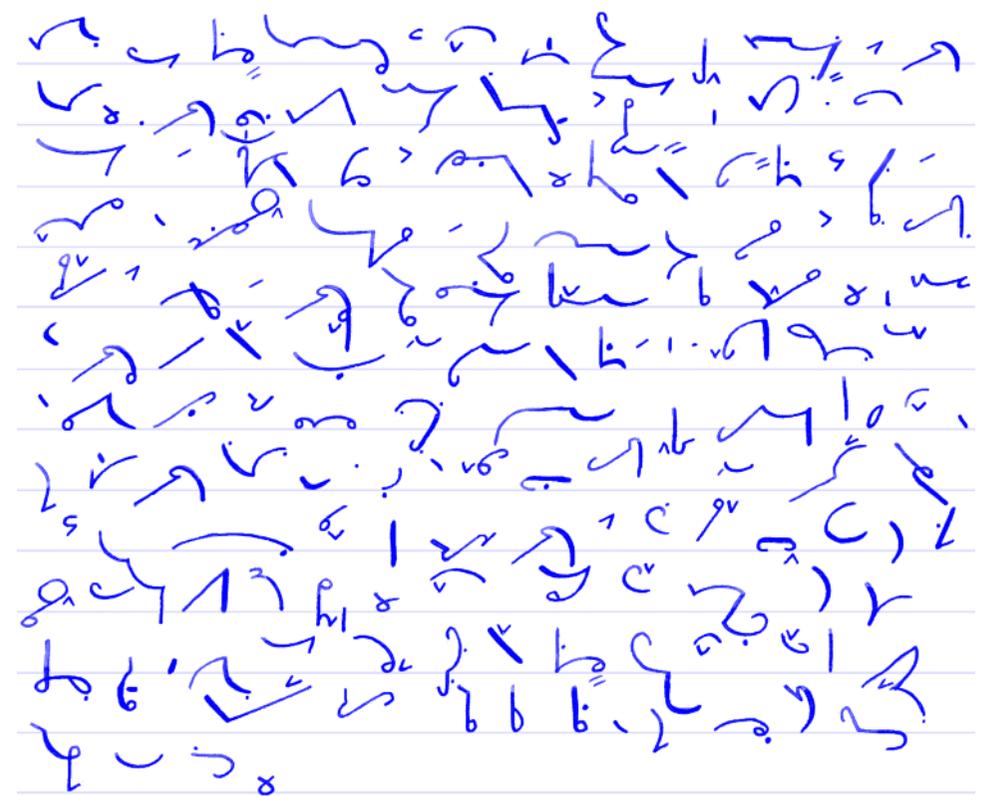


Thames Barrier

Since it became operational in 1982, the Thames Barrier has been raised over one hundred times. Smaller gates on other tributary rivers along the Thames are also operated in conjunction with the main barrier. Its protection works both ways, as floodwaters from upstream can also pose a threat if they are prevented from flowing

away to the sea by an oncoming high tide. Closing the gates keeps the tide waters out, thus retaining the low level on the upstream side of the barrier and giving the floodwaters more room to collect safely, before being released on the following low tide.

Horizontal lines for writing practice.



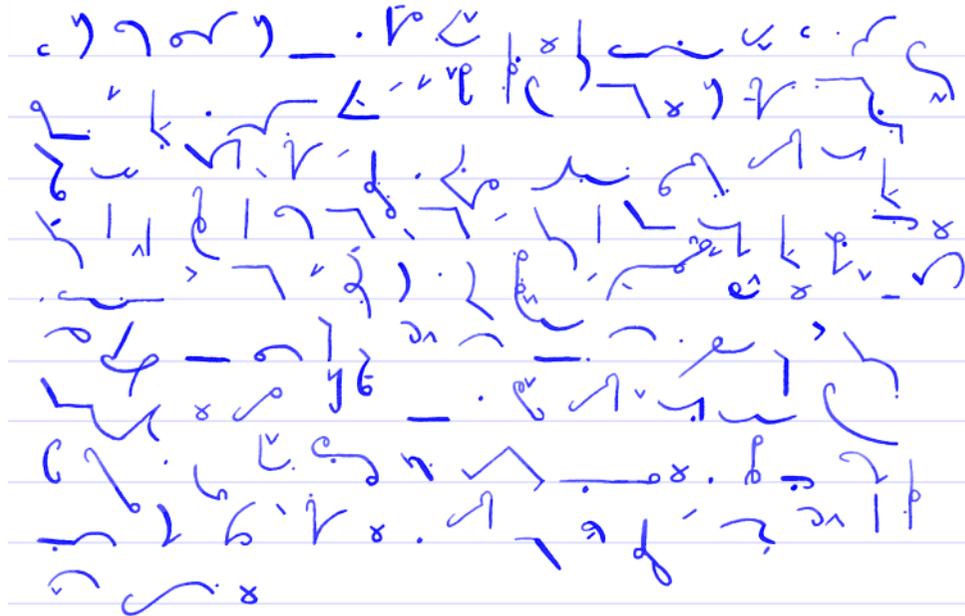
Thames Barrier

I lived near the Thames for many years, with my home overlooking the town of Greenwich and the river valley. The river seemed to represent not only the backbone of the City of London*, but also a more natural and uncontrollable element of the landscape. It appears to be well tamed, with the jetties and miles of warehouses, factories and ships making full use of the watery highway, and the embankments and riverside paths seemingly defining its boundaries. But I knew that rivers are by nature not willing to be tamed and on a wild stormy night of heavy rain I would sometimes imagine looking out of the

window at first light to see the whole river valley under a sheet of silent grey water, not really possible with the 50 metre height difference between the river and the flat high ground along whose edge the houses in our road were situated. My anxious flight of imagination was easily dismissed, but those who live in the areas threatened by Thames flooding might find it reassuring to visit the barrier on one of its test days, to see the means of their protection in action. (1195 words)

* Omission phrase "City (of) London"

Horizontal lines for writing practice.



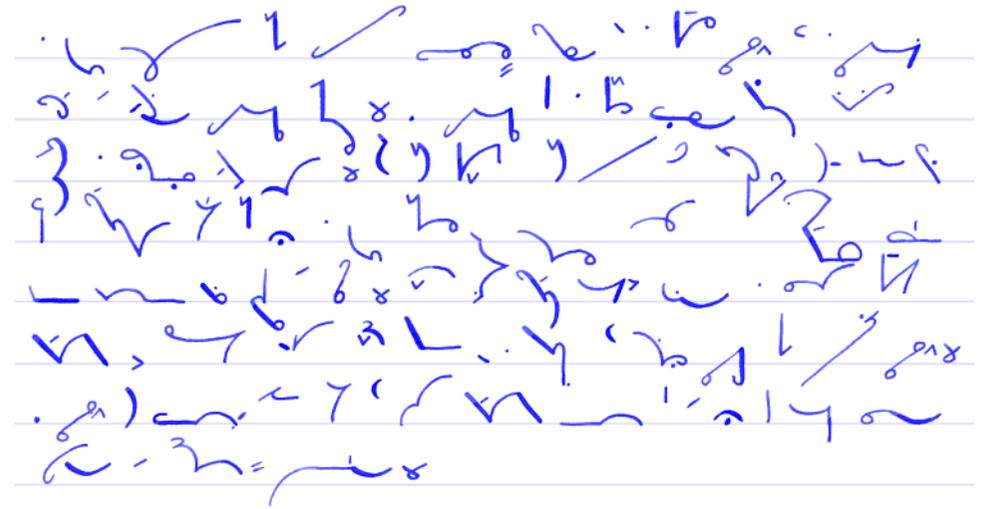
Favourite Gifts

When I was very small, I was given a doll's china tea set. It was gleaming white with a little flower sprig on the teapot, the milk jug and on the side of every cup. I was utterly captivated by this new ability to control and dispense the shapeless, shifting, slippery water in the teapot, pour it out, transfer it from cup to cup, and pour it back into the teapot to start again. The clink of the cup on the saucer was an especially satisfying and luxurious sound. I could* also most generously give some of it to those around me, giving me a reason to

do all the pouring back and forth*. Once I had been given a supply of water, I needed nothing further, other than perhaps a few tiny squares of bread to represent the cakes. The satisfaction gained from the tea set game was the element of control. The water could be stored, dispensed and moved around at my whim.

* "I could" Not phrased, so it does not look like "I can"

* Omission phrase "back (and) forth"

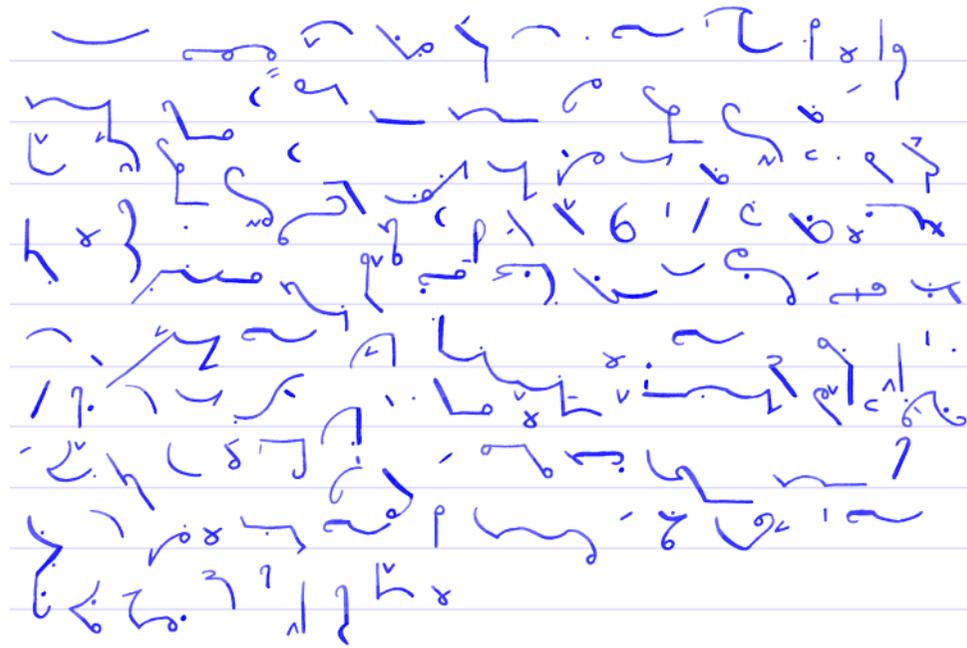


Favourite Gifts

A few years later I had the wonderful Christmas present of a dolls' house with a hinged front, and opening windows and doors. The windows had a diamond glazing bar pattern, and there was a staircase up the middle. Although I was delighted, I was rather short of furniture, so I could not play with it properly* until I had made a few items to fill the rooms, mostly matchboxes stuck together to make beds, tables and chairs. My brother enjoyed fitting a small

torch bulb to the central hall wired back to a battery that remained hidden at the rear of the house. The house was gloomy and cold until that little bulb came on, and made it into something welcoming and warm-looking.

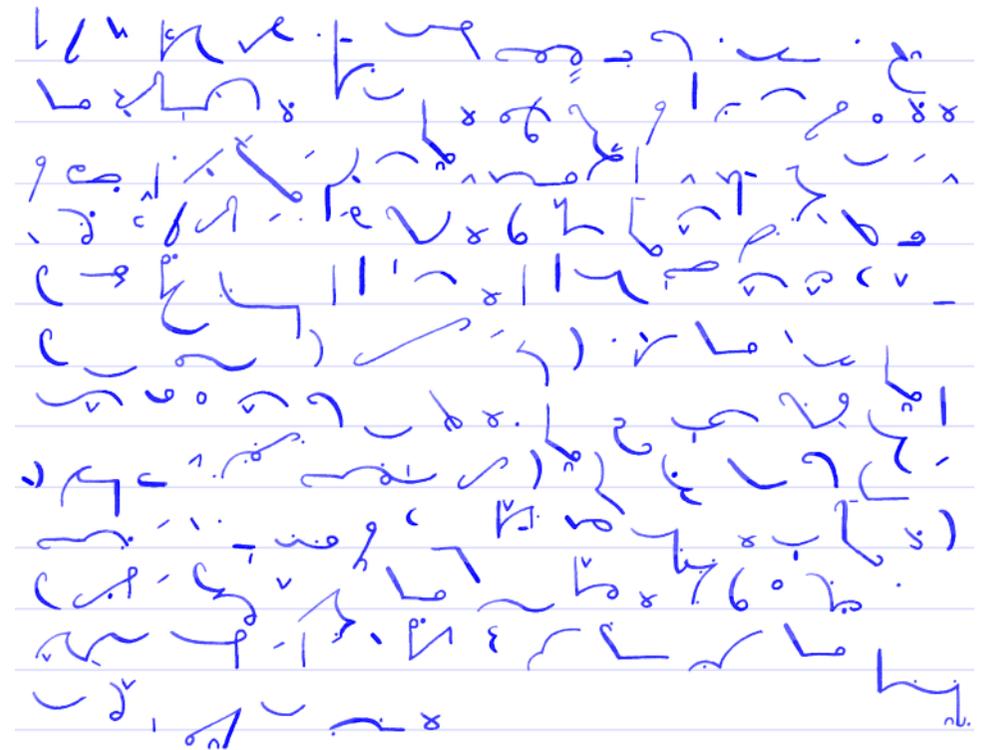
* "properly" Insert the vowel, and the diphone in "appropriate", as these are similar in outline and meaning



Favourite Gifts

Another Christmas my parents bought me a garden modelling set. It consisted of miniature bricks that snapped together to make walls, plastic flower beds and tiny plastic flowers that could be inserted into the holes in the beds with a special pointed dibber. There was a selection of trees that stood up by themselves on large flat bases. Cardboard rectangles of printed striped grass and crazy paving in squares and

curves enabled me to rearrange the garden layout ad infinitum. The garden would be spread out on a large tray or in the shallow lid of a box. I augmented the supply with cellophane and shiny paper for ponds, cotton wool bushes, and scraps of green fabric to make larger vegetation or hills. I kept the garden set for many years, and endless variations on garden shapes and themes were tried out during that time.

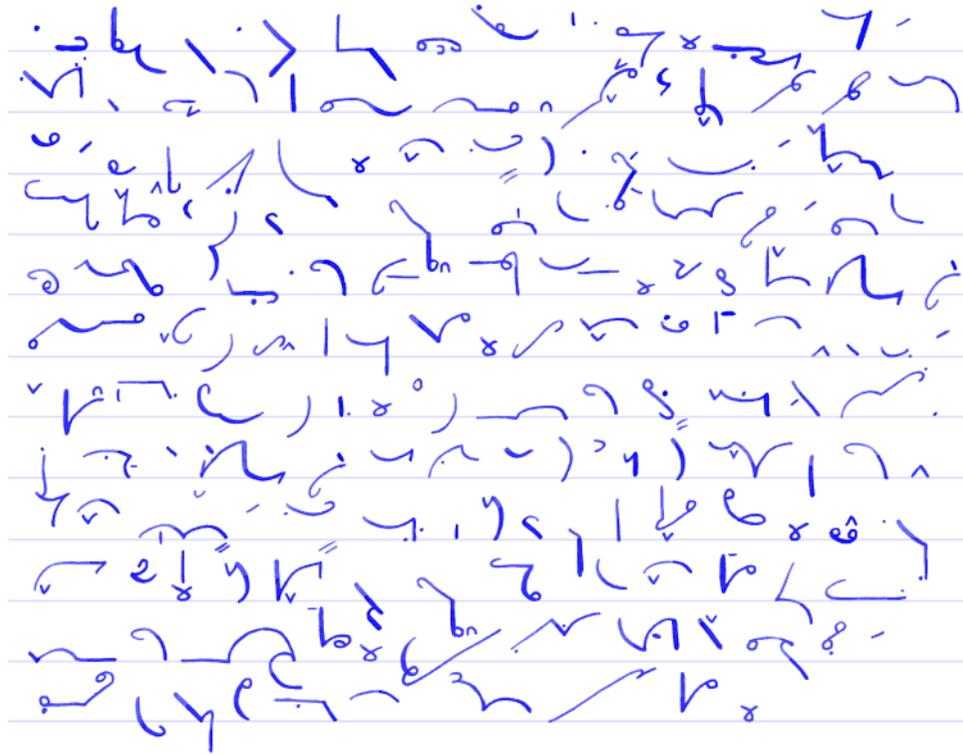


Favourite Gifts

At the age of about twelve, I received a totally unexpected Christmas gift from an uncle, a beautiful box of watercolour paints in tubes*. Some months previously, he had let me use his paints. He squeezed out a row of blobs and showed me how to mix it, how to draw and fill in, and how to erase with just water and a soft brush. This item tops my list of best gifts ever, because of the startling effect it had on me. It had never crossed my mind that I could ever own something so wonderful, and here was a whole box of new tubes in my hands, as my very own possession. The tubes would

have been no more precious if they had oozed liquid gold and the Alizarin Crimson one was especially favoured, being thick and creamy, and of a good intense hue that could be diluted almost indefinitely. No drop of paint was ever wasted and over the years I refilled the box many times. This has remained a lifelong interest, and it all started with that little black metal box, diminutive in size but huge in impact.

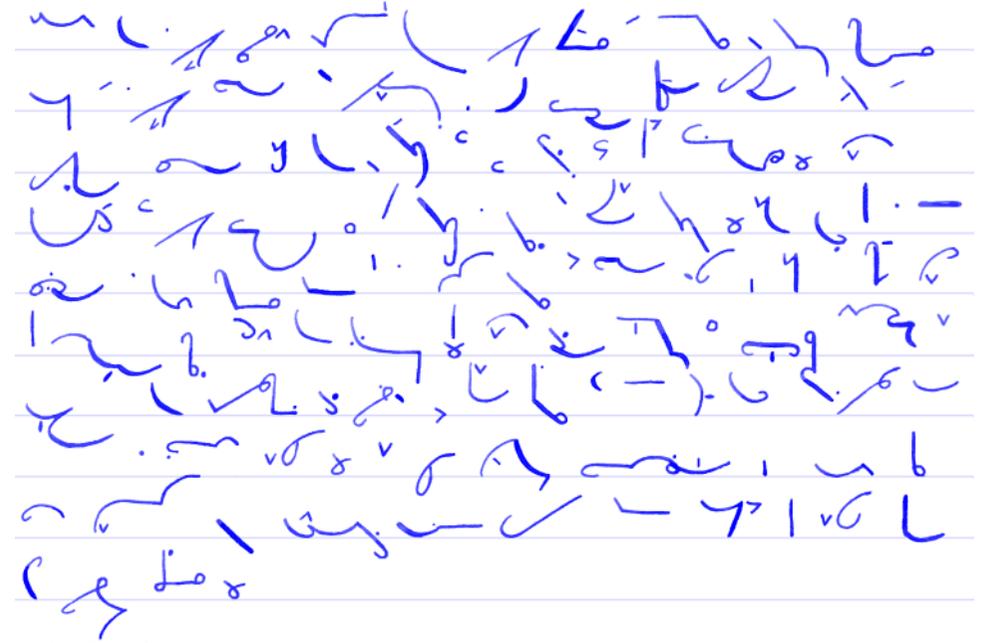
* "tubes" Helpful to insert the diphthong, as "tubs" could also make sense in this context



Favourite Gifts

A gift does not have to be an object, it can be someone passing on a skill. Gaining the knowledge and ability to create or do something makes you realise that the desired result rests in your hands, and is not out of reach after all. My Nan was a prodigious knitter and I admired the quantity of items that she was able to produce, some for family use, and some for friends and neighbours, to gain a very welcome extra income. I would spend time holding the wool hanks while she wound it into balls. One of my aunts taught me how

to knit, and I duly copied everything she did. As she came from Spain, I ended up learning the Continental method of holding the wool in the left hand, so what I did was entirely different from how my Mum and Nan knitted, but I was able to do it twice as fast. Sounds a bit like the shorthand! I was delighted to be able to produce clothes for my dolls which were quick to make from colourful oddments. These were rapidly followed by simple hats and scarves, even better as they kept me warm rather than the dolls.



Favourite Gifts

I now have a real house to look after, real jugs and cups to pour drinks into, and a real garden, all requiring the usual cleaning, dusting, washing up and weeding, something I did not have to bother with when playing with the toy equivalents. My fishpond with real goldfish is much better than a piece of shiny paper. I have even had a go at cementing a few bricks together on a little piece of the garden wall,

but I do draw the line at moving trees around for effect! My painting cupboard has grown considerably, and I am glad that I no longer have to restrict paint use to the tiny dabs that can so often result in a cramped style. I still love the crimson but now it is more likely to be fountain pen ink where I can enjoy it while doing other useful tasks.

A few weeks ago* we went to see the
 refurbished Cutty Sark clipper ship at
 Greenwich. I was not so much looking at
 the ship, whose appearance I was well
 familiar with, but my interest was in the
 glass canopy. I had seen lots* of pictures
 of the proposed glass enclosure, but seeing
 it for real on a clear sunny day was quite
 astounding*. It is designed to look as if the
 ship is once more* sailing on clear blue
 seas, and the final result has certainly
 achieved this. The ship itself is held up on a
 steel girdle* and the glass meets the ship
 at what would have been water level.
 Inside the canopy is a museum and you
 can walk around underneath the hull. At
 the entrance end, there is a small area
 where you can buy souvenirs. Just like the
 real sea, the canopy changes colour with
 the sky, deep blue or icy grey. I think it
 would be quite interesting to be there when
 the rain was pouring down hard on it, and
 one would certainly get a feel for life as a
 freezing* wet deck hand trying to work in a
 howling gale. There is a spacious clear

Cutty Sark Update

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 the rain was pouring down hard on it, and
 one would certainly get a feel for life as a
 freezing* wet deck hand trying to work in a
 howling gale. There is a spacious clear

paved area all round, so that the people
 can spread out and get a view of the whole
 ship at once*. Being a rather cold day, it
 was not crowded so we were able to stand
 well back and get reasonably uncluttered
 photos.

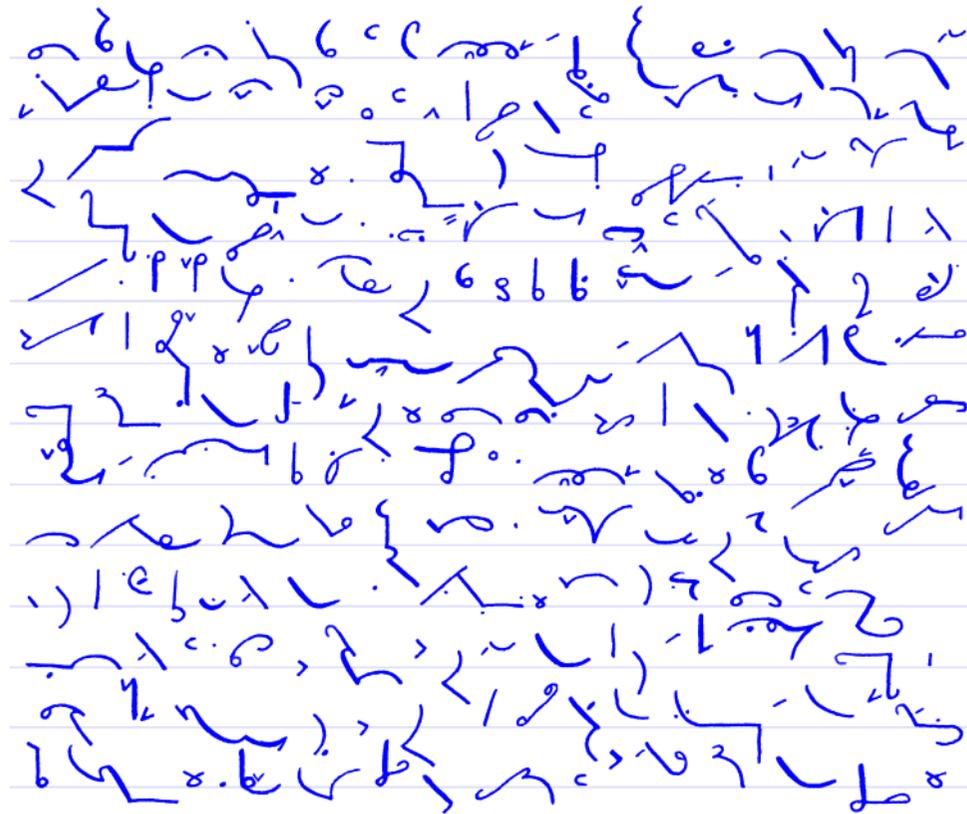
* Omission phrases "few wee(k)s ago" "at
 (wu)ns"

* "lots" and "masses" Always insert the
 vowel

* "astonishing" and "astounding" Always
 insert the vowel in these and their
 derivatives

* "girdle" Ensure the G is thick, and always
 insert the vowel in "cradle", as the
 meanings are similar in some contexts. You
 cannot insert a vowel in girdle.

* "freezing" and "frozen" Always insert the
 vowel



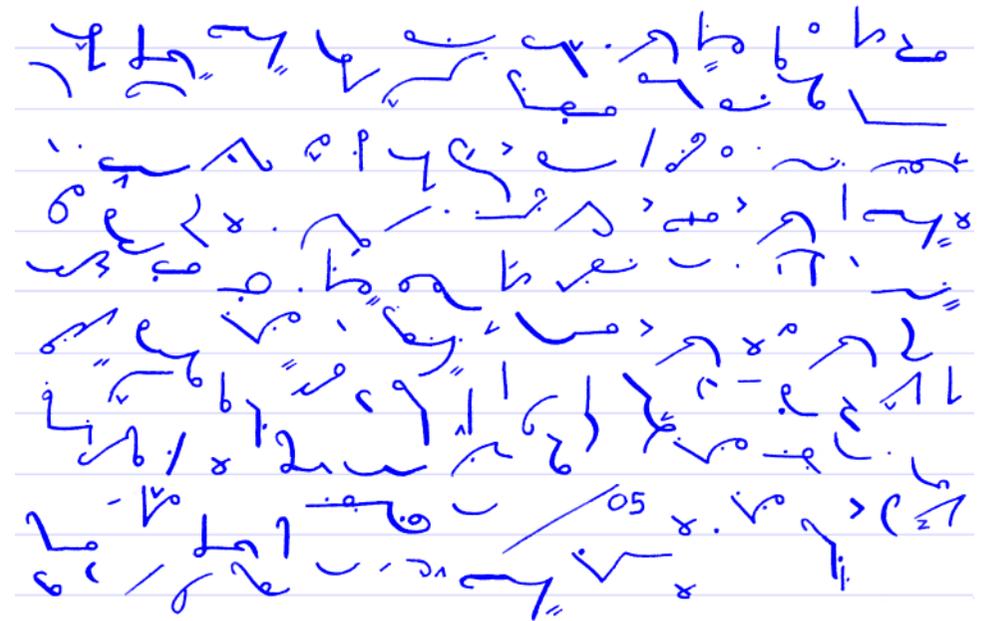
Cutty Sark Update

Some of those visiting may compare this with other museums and displays that they have seen, maybe better, maybe not, but the comparison in my mind is with how it used to be when I lived in the area and visited the ship regularly many years ago. The Cutty Sark was interesting historically, but not particularly attractive, being housed in a concrete hole in the ground, with props to hold it up, rather a sad sight for such a magnificent ship that has spent its days gliding and battling through the oceans of the world* at high speed. Whilst it was undergoing refurbishment and repair, I had read several articles criticising the work being done on the ship. Some seemed to want it to be a seaworthy vessel once again* and lamented its stale existence as a museum piece. Others

realised that this would mean replacing so many parts that it would be almost an entirely new ship and that if one wanted to see it afloat, it would end up being a replica. I am so glad that someone with imagination came up with a solution to the problem of the ship not being at sea, and had the amazingly* creative but simple idea of bringing the sea to the ship, which serves both for effect and for protection of its fabric. The design fully deserved to be the winner when all the options were being discussed.

* Omission phrase "of (the) world" "wu(n)s again"

* "amazingly" and "amusingly" Always insert the vowel



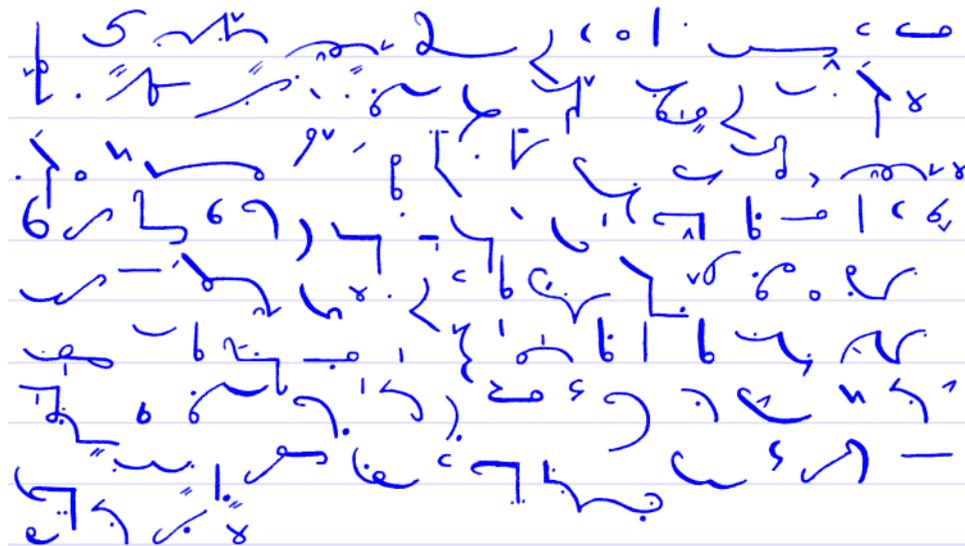
Cutty Sark Update

Inside the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre nearby, the River Thames itself has turned to glass, or more likely plexiglass, as can be seen in this picture of a glowing* rope of lights set into the floor of the Centre, which serves as a mini-museum as well as souvenir shop. The loops are an accurate representation of the course of the river at Greenwich. In one of the glass cases the Thames seems to have turned to resin, in a model of King Henry the Seventh's Palace of Placentia on the banks of the river. As the river was not constricted like it is today and was able to spread out at will, it was obviously thought

quite safe to build right at the water's edge. There is now nothing left of this Palace except for a few bricks and tiles discovered during excavations in 2005*. The Palace predated all the other royal buildings that are still present in and around Greenwich Park.

* "glowing" Insert the diphone, so it does not look like "golden"

* "2005" Long slash to represent the current century, arbitrary sign with no phonetic value



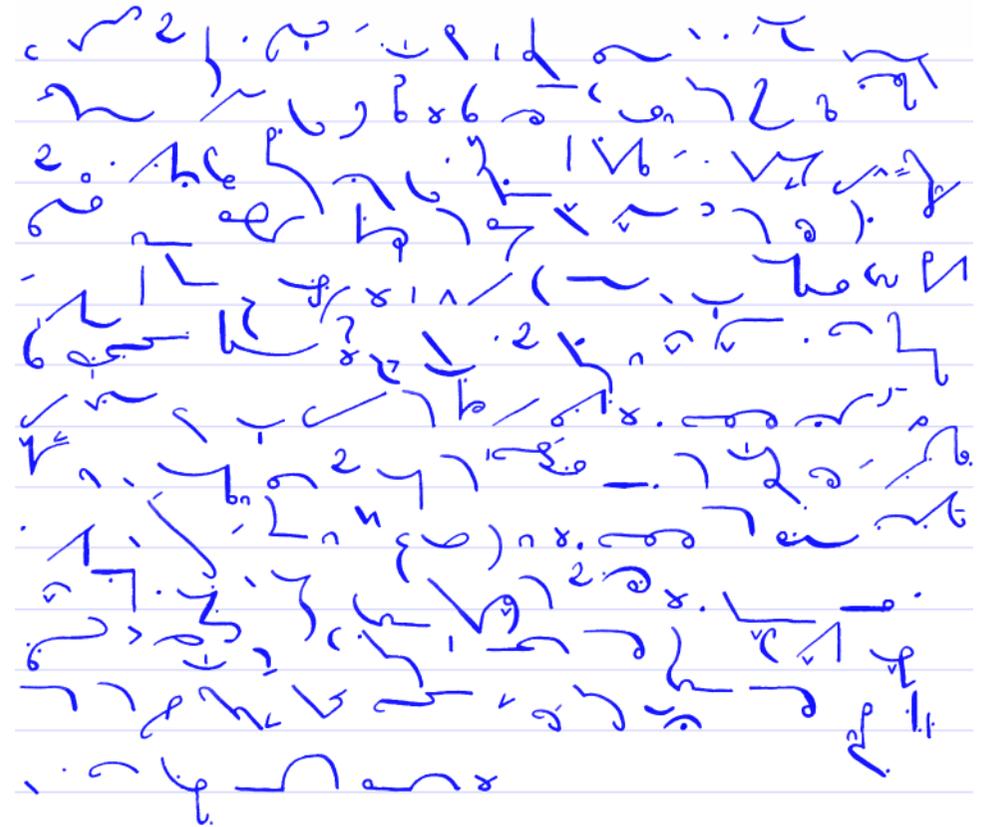
Cutty Sark Update

Outside the National Maritime Museum there is another ship that has had an encounter with glass, an artistic rendering of a sailing vessel entitled "Nelson's Ship in a Bottle". The bottle is about two metres high and sits atop a tall plinth near the entrance to the museum. This is one attraction that is very easy to get a good photo of, even on crowded days, because at that height no-one can obscure the view! The ship with its floral batik-style sails is

safely ensconced in its protective case, but I think that on some days it does envy the lovely Cutty Sark who is sailing free on her own sea of glass, with the fresh air blowing about her and the figurehead Nannie Dee once again* facing with gritty determination everything that the weather can send her way. (785 words)

* Omission phrase "wu(n)s again"

Blank lined paper for writing practice.



Shorthand Christmas Cards

When I learned shorthand, it was a well-known and common subject, but it has become something of a novelty to many people, and very many are not even sure what it is. This means that news of your journey towards mastery of shorthand is a ready-made conversation starter, maybe even an ice-breaker at parties and a perennial wow-producer, as long as you can successfully demonstrate your skill by writing what your friends say and reading it back to them instantly. But how are they going to know in advance that you have started on this stenographic adventure? To avoid becoming a shorthand bore, you might like a more attractive way of letting people know where your talents are headed. The Christmas "mailshot" is the ideal opportunity

to introduce some shorthand into your correspondence, giving your unsuspecting friends and relatives a riddle to ponder and ask you about when they next see you. The Christmas card sending marathon might get an injection of enthusiasm if you can publicise your shorthand ambitions. The picture gives a selection of the most common wordings that appear on commercial cards, so that you can either write inside the card, or use the appropriate* part of the graphic on the front of your own hand-made cards, suitably edited to a more festive colour scheme.

* "appropriate" Always insert the diphone, and the dash vowel in "proper" as these are similar in outline and meaning

