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Blogs - 2013 - June

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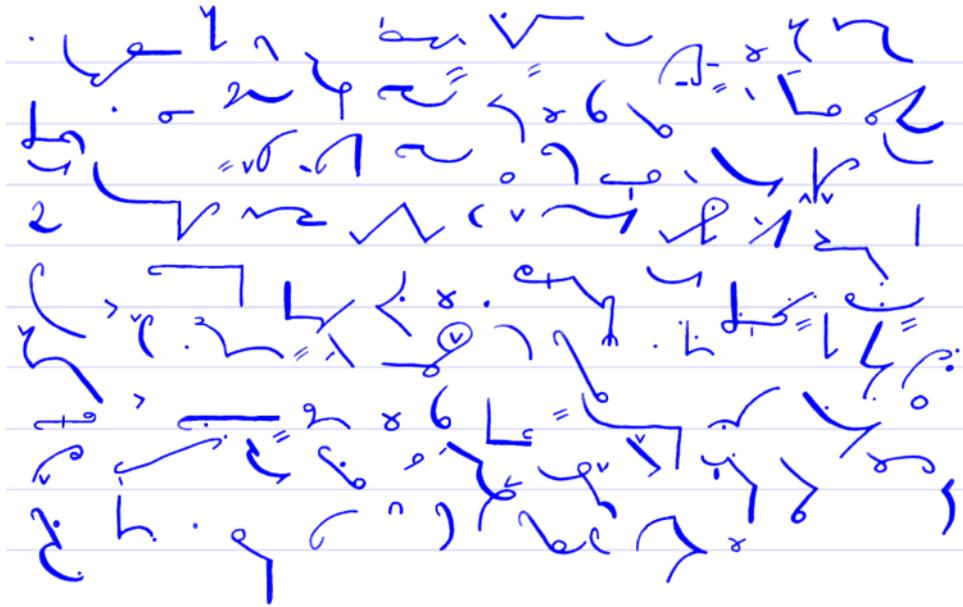
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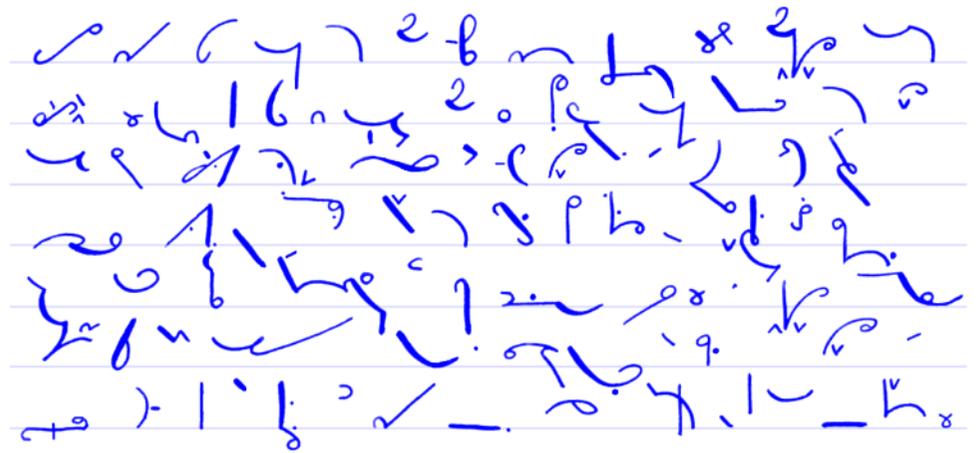
Stockwood Park Luton

A few weeks ago* I had the opportunity to visit Stockwood Park in Luton. I think I may have discovered a secret shorthand writing* gardener here. This piece of box hedging in the Victorian-style walled garden is very close to being the outline for "shorthand" and I am glad to report that I managed to resist the urge to clip it further to the correct dictionary shape. The sculpture in the Discovery Centre I think may be either a warm-up exercise or perhaps an attempt at the gently* leaning

curves of the Gregg system. This twig-effect metal bench has lines wandering all over the place, and is obviously inspired by the notepad pages of someone who was bravely attempting a speed well beyond their present comfort level.

* Omission phrases "few wee(k)s ago" "short(hand) writing"

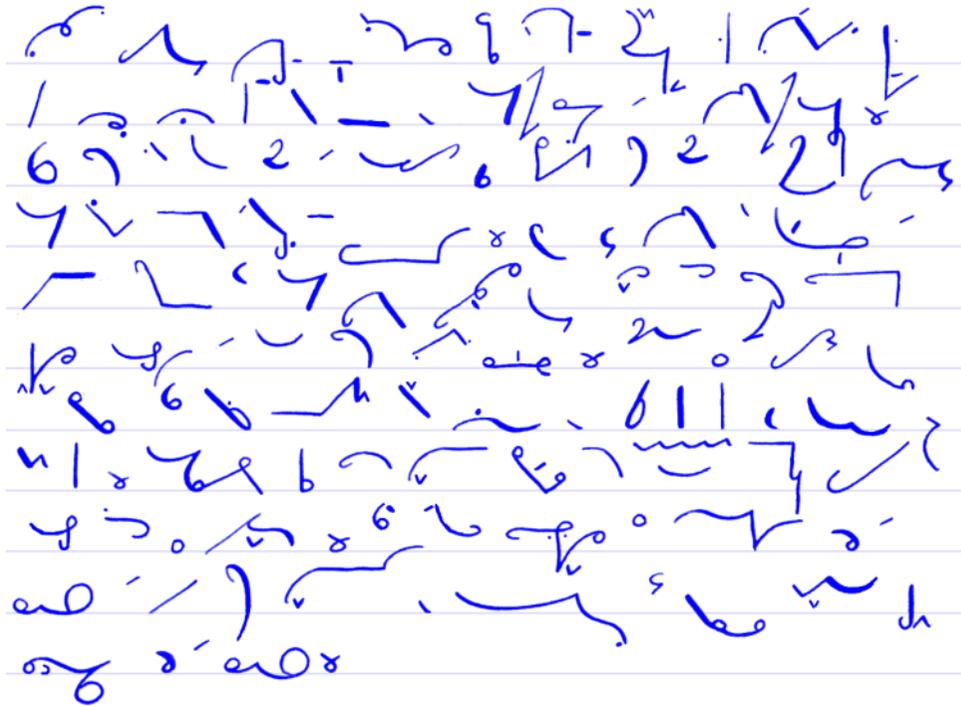
* Insert the last vowel as "gentle" would also make sense



Stockwood Park Luton

Once you are well into your shorthand studies, you may discover all sorts of shorthand outlines in your surroundings. If you do, then you know that the shorthand is settling comfortably into the back of your mind, in that special storage area, amongst all the other lines and shapes and their possible meanings, ready to be accessed by

your brain as it attempts to decipher the constant stream of visual information that it is bombarded with during waking hours. An outline can be seen just about anywhere, being a simple combination of straight lines and curves, so it all depends what you are giving most of your attention to at any given time.



Stockwood Park Luton

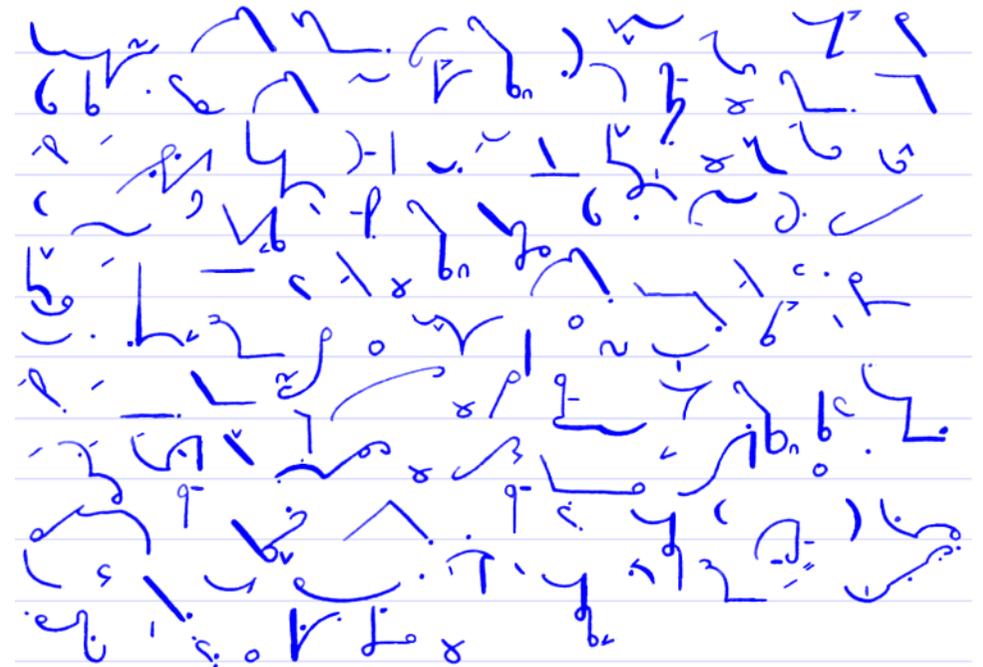
Lastly we have the Luton coat of arms with its motto "Scientiae et labori detur" which means "May it be given to knowledge/skill and labour/industry". This is very apt for shorthand, and anyone who has started their shorthand journey will know that the knowledge part can be obtained quite quickly. However, without the labour of focused* and regular practice, that knowledge will be useless if the mind cannot furnish the correct outlines instantly and in very rapid succession. Shorthand writing*is one of the few subjects that is best carried out* by aiming to "just do it" without having to think about it. In this

respect it is more like sports or any activity where instant action is required. Thoughts often crystallise as mental words and sentences, and are therefore likely to interfere with the business of writing down someone else's words and sentences.

* Omission phrase "short(hand) writing"

* "focused" Insert the first vowel in this, and in "fixed" as they are similar in outline and meaning

* "carried out" Halving to represent the T of "out"



Stockwood Park Luton

Eventually the labour of practising will produce ease of writing and if you enjoy the subject, then it is a pleasant labour, and not toil or drudgery. Practising can be stopped and restarted at any time, so it need not become tiresome. I have often found that many short periods of study produce better results* than a long session, where tiredness and tedium can build up. Labouring to keep up with a speaker in a work situation is entirely different, as you have no choice of stopping and coming

back to it later on. Such struggling only produces discomfort, fatigue and errors followed by embarrassment. One of the pictures on the shield is a circular straw beehive, representing the straw plaiting industry that Luton was famous for, with the bee in the centre, a model of industrious hard work and unrelenting concentration on completing his daily tasks. (796 words)

* Omission phrase "better (re)sults"

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, consisting of several lines of cursive shorthand symbols.

Quotes 2

- Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others- Otto von Bismarck
- Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself. Eleanor Roosevelt
- It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan. Eleanor Roosevelt
- No one can make you feel inferior without your consent. Eleanor Roosevelt
- Gardens are not made by sitting in the shade. English proverb

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, consisting of several lines of cursive shorthand symbols.

Quotes 2

- A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty. Winston Churchill
- Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm. Winston Churchill
- The only thing in life achieved without effort is failure. Unknown
- Nearly every man who develops* an idea works it up to the point where it looks impossible, and then he gets discouraged. That's* not the place to become discouraged. Thomas A. Edison

* "develops" This is the dictionary optional contraction for "development" but it is safe to use it also for the verb

* "that's" Apostrophied versions are written as full outlines, ignoring the short forms

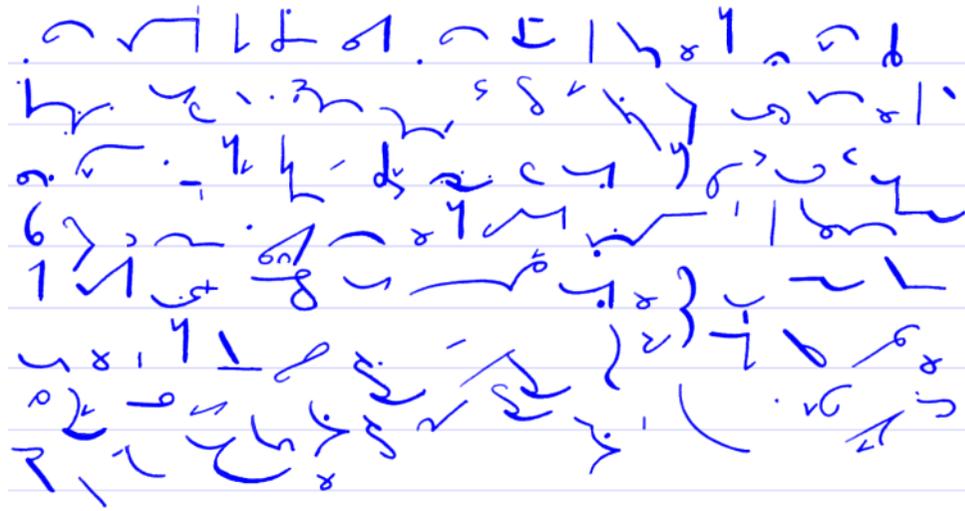
Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper. The notes are arranged in four horizontal lines, each containing a series of shorthand symbols and some numbers (e.g., 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100).

Quotes 2

- Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal. Henry Ford
- Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe. Abraham Lincoln
- The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time*. Abraham Lincoln
- The absence of alternatives clears the mind marvellously. Henry Kissinger (219 words)

* Omission phrase "at (a) time"

A series of horizontal lines for writing, corresponding to the lines on the left page.

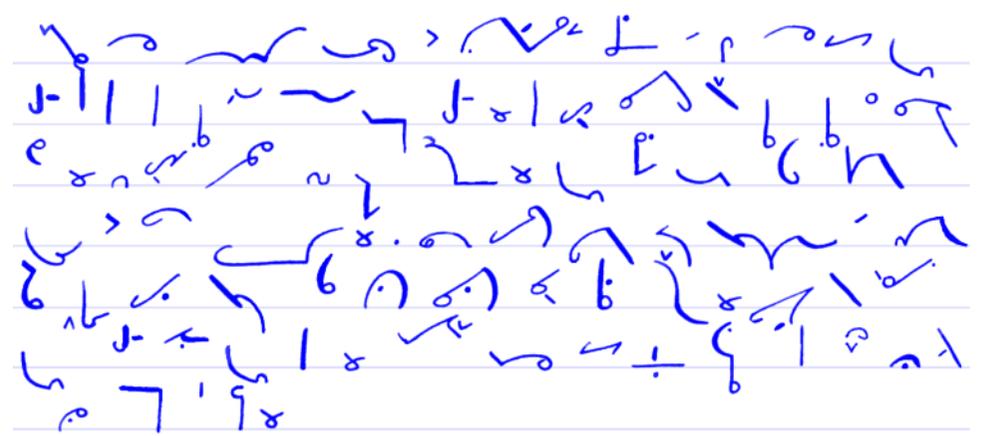


Get On With It

The more I looked at the task ahead, the more daunting it appeared. I had made my decision, admittedly in the comfort of a warm room with the plans on the paper pad in front of me. It all seemed like a good idea at the time, and, despite the impending effort needed, I was still of the opinion that undertaking this project would make a huge improvement. I had wanted

to embark on it for some time and had already incurred expenses in the materials needed. There was no going back now. But I had become used to planning and replanning, so that I would get the best result. As the saying goes, if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail, but after a while real action cannot be put off any longer.

Blank lined area for writing notes on page A.

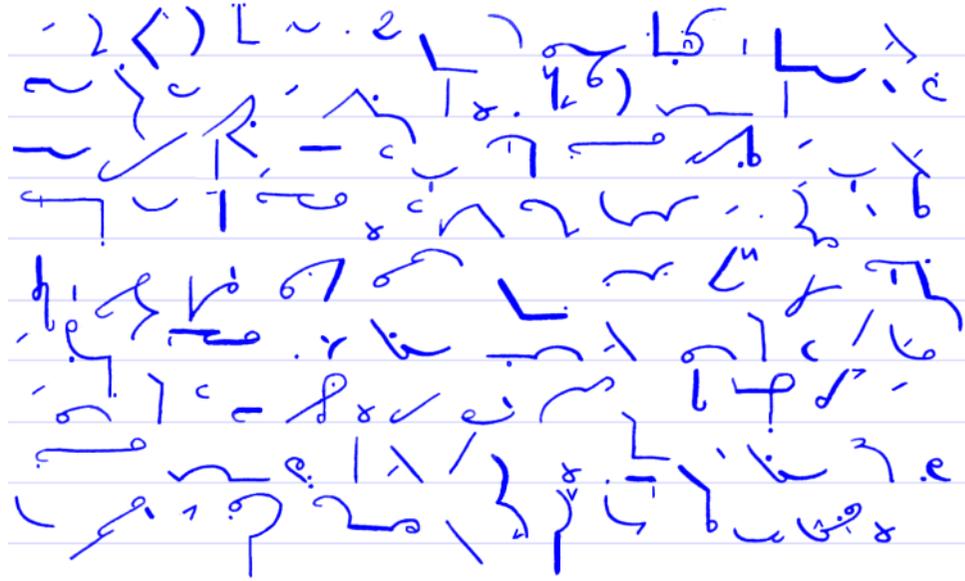


Get On With It

I positioned myself immediately in front of the laborious task and told myself, "If you don't do it, it's not going to get done. It won't happen by itself, it's as simple as that. You want the results, you have to do the work. If you start now, then it will be finished all the more quickly. The summer

weather will be here before long, and you will have all this out of the way before those lazy hazy hot days arrive. You'll be sorry if you don't and glad if you do." I replied to myself, "OK, that's it, mind made up, let's get on with it."

Blank lined area for writing notes on page B.



Get On With It

And so the job was attacked, not a shorthand book or something else educational, but digging up the garden path in order to* reshape and repair it. The idea was to make it all flat, going where it should go, with no muddy cracks and weeds, and no puddles collecting in odd corners. With help from the family and an assortment of destructive but useful tools, sledge-hammer, big mallet, giant chisel, crowbar and safety goggles, the old paving

came up, some of it without much fuss and some of it with great resistance. We soon learned to take advantage of existing joins and cracks to make splitting it up much easier. The good bits of paving were saved for reuse and the smashed fragments put aside for the new foundations.

* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

Blank lined paper for writing practice.



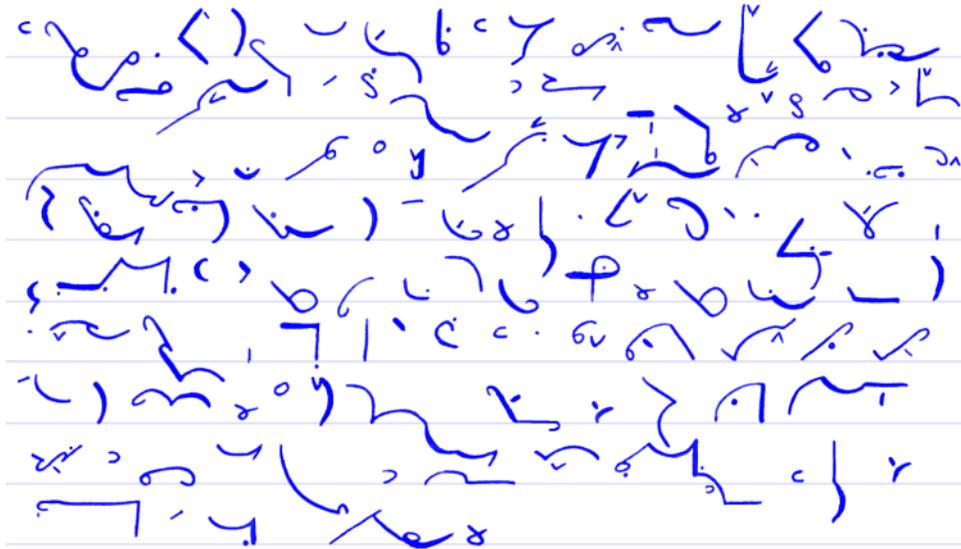
Get On With It

The altered route was dug out of the lawn, lined with the rubble and hammered down with the sledge hammer. Then a dry concrete mix was thrown down and watered in with the hose, on the light spray setting. A bit of poking with a bamboo stick ensured that the mix went down all the holes. Each stage was completed and satisfaction gained from mentally ticking it off the progress list. We ended each day by

congratulating ourselves with, "That was a good day's work, all ready for the next bit tomorrow." Never was a hot shower so welcome and so necessary, and the day's dusty labour ended with a fragrant and restful* evening, plenty of restorative hand cream, and an earlier than usual bedtime.

* "restful" Omits the lightly sounded T

Blank lined paper for writing practice.

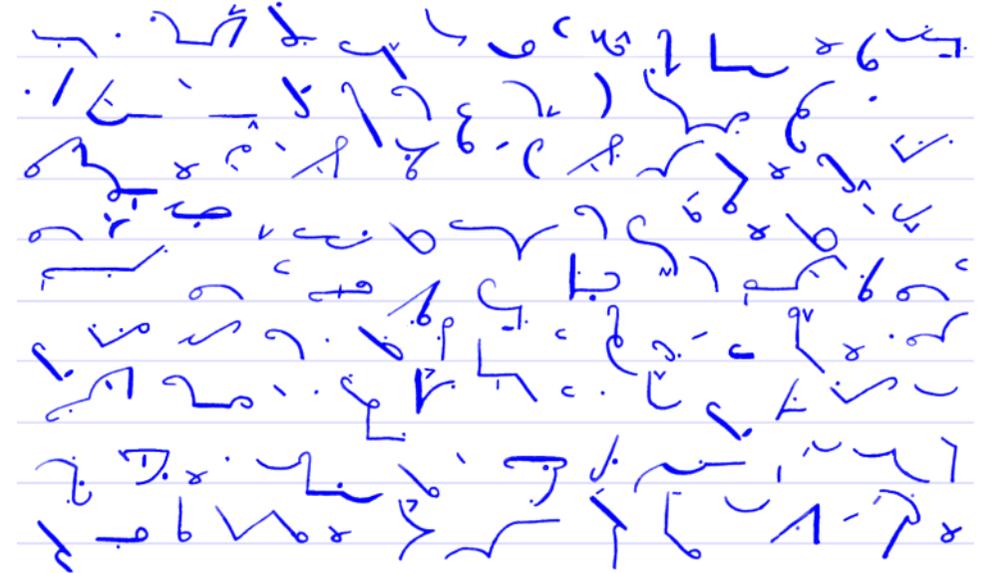


Get On With It

With perseverance the job was completed in four days, with only the surrounding garden tidying jobs remaining, grass relaying and plant moving, what I call the "good bits". I spent most of the time looking forward* to the end result, as I did not really enjoy humping lumps of concrete around, although placing the crazy paving was quite fun. It was a giant version of a jigsaw puzzle, but without the guarantee that all the pieces will fit or even exist.

Pieces fitting together was a minor problem, but getting it all flat, with a slight slope to allow the rain to run off, was more important. As I was removing the broken old path laid long ago, I wondered what someone in the future would make of my handiwork when it was old, cracked and needed replacing.

* Omission phrase "looking fo(r)ward"



Get On With It

I kept an "archaeology" basket nearby for the things that I found during the digging. These included a large chunk of cow bone, probably from when this area was farmland less* a hundred years ago; lots* of rusty* nails and other rusted* metal objects; brown pottery, some old and glazed, but the cleaner pieces clearly from flower pots; pieces of white crockery, some with curves, ridges, fluted decoration or scalloped* edges, some with blue patterns* and one from a "best set" teacup with transfer print and gold stripe; a small yellowed fragment of a plastic doily with a tiny blue chequered* pattern in imitation of crochet; an intriguing piece of greenish chain link, but not enough of it to be able to guess its purpose; foil milk bottle tops in red and orange.

* "less than" Downward L for convenience of joining

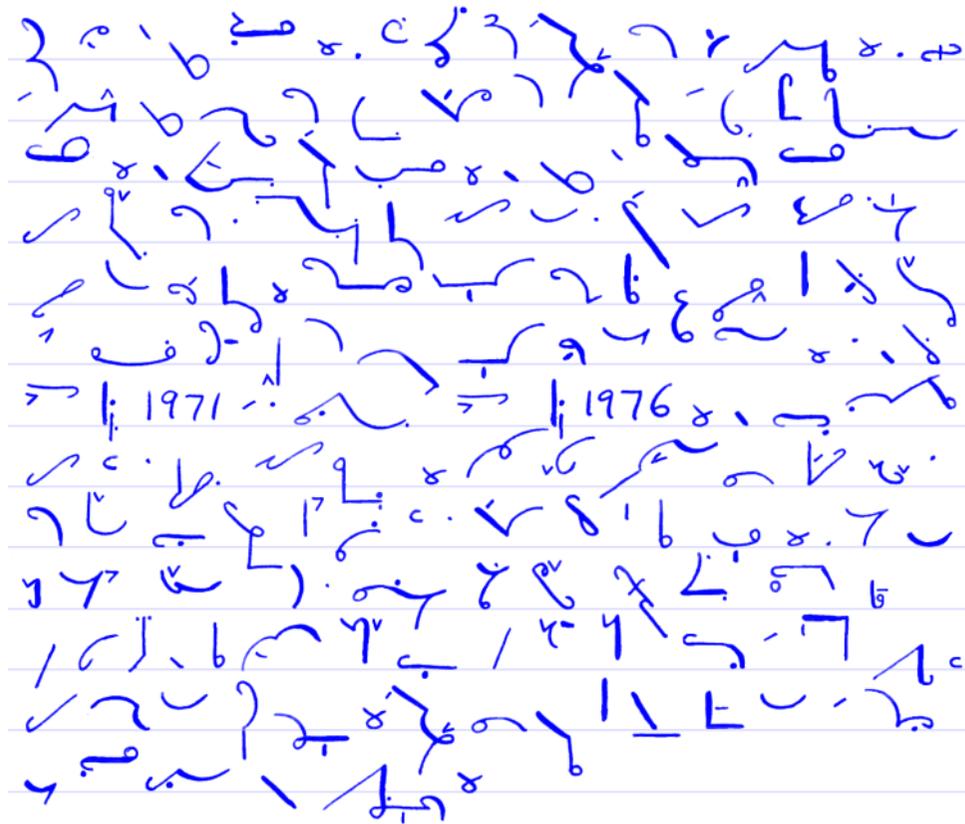
* "rusty" "rusted" Ensure the T stroke is clearly full or half length, as these two could be misread for each other

* "scalloped" The first vowel is pronounced O, despite the longhand letter A

* "lots" and "masses" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

* "patterns" Insert the vowel after the P, as it is similar in shape and meaning to "appearance" in paragraph 8

* "chequered" Keep the R Hook clear, as "checked" and "check" would also make sense



Get On With It

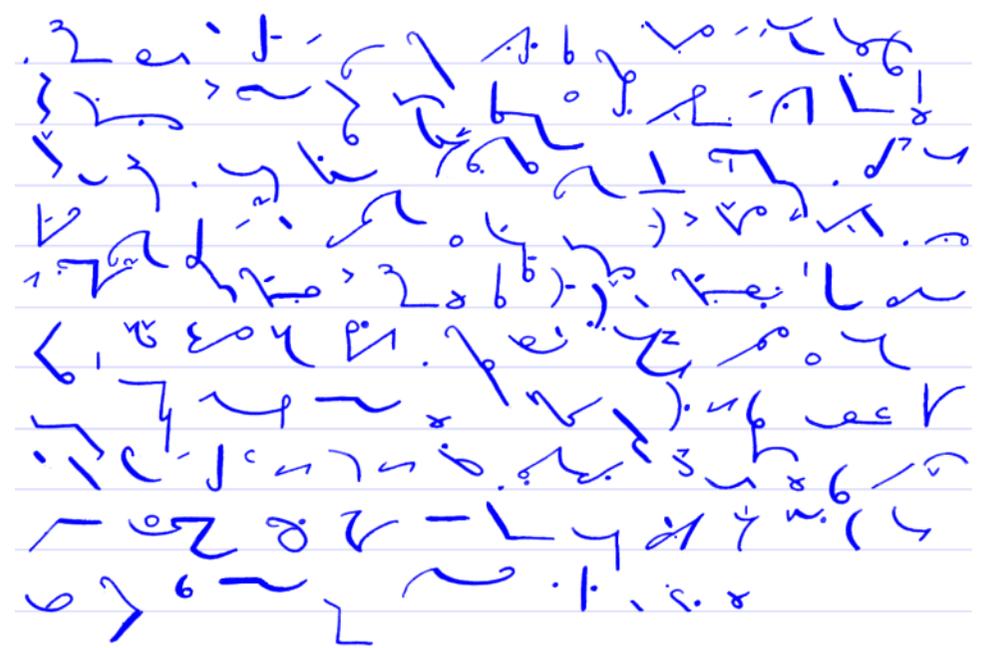
There were lots* of pieces of glass. The flat shards were obviously from old windows. The curved and rounded pieces may have been from thick bowls or bottles and thin delicate drinking glasses; two chunky bottle necks; two pieces of obscured glass, one stripy from a cabinet door and one in a blob pattern that was commonly used for front doors; fragments of coal from the days when this house had open fires and the cinders thrown out or maybe the coal stored in the garden; a two pence coin dated 1971 and a halfpenny* coin dated 1976; two green marbles, one with a twist and one streaky. Lastly*, while relaying some turf, I found a very tiny grey plastic toy seal with a ball balanced on its nose.

The only thing I did not enjoy finding was a seemingly endless supply of purple shaggy carpet tufts, each well attached to its lump of dry clay, which I thought I had cleared and got rid of when we moved in thirty years ago. Obviously some bits had become dug in and remained under the grass waiting to be rediscovered.

* "lots" and "masses" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

* "halfpenny" Pronounced hape-nee

* "lastly" Omits the lightly sounded T



Get On With It

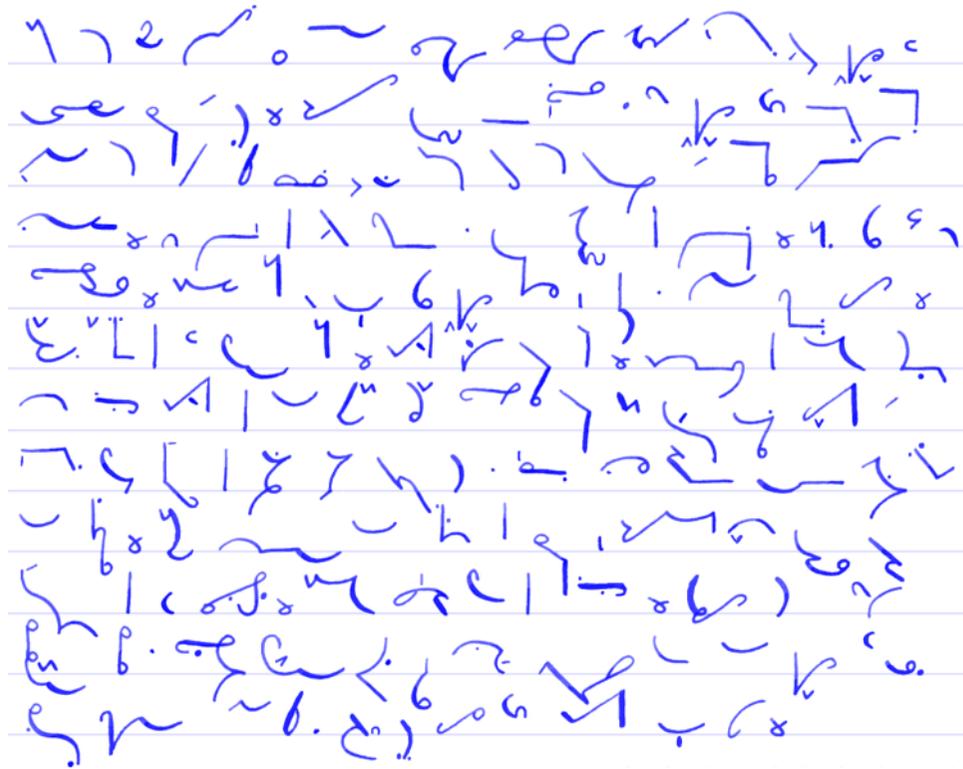
The work is now all done and will probably retain its pristine appearance* and novelty for some months, although the remainder of the garden paths I am conveniently describing as "rustic and laid back"! By the end of the year, the newer paving slabs will have become grubbier, the joins in the turf will have disappeared, and all we will have is photos to remind us of the piles of rubble, the mess and the gradual progress of the work. It is so easy to procrastinate* on doing certain jobs, but I find that once I have started, the prospect of soon enjoying the results is enough to keep the activity and interest going. I prefer to be able to say, "This time next week*" it will all be

over and done with" or "Past the halfway point now". These are my regular self-encouraging phrases and they will go back into storage until I need them for the next project that is going to take longer than a day to complete. (1131 words)

* "appearance" Insert first vowel, as it is similar in shape and meaning to "patterns" in paragraph 6

* "procrastinate" Omits the lightly sounded first T

* Omission phrase "ne(k)s(t w)eek"

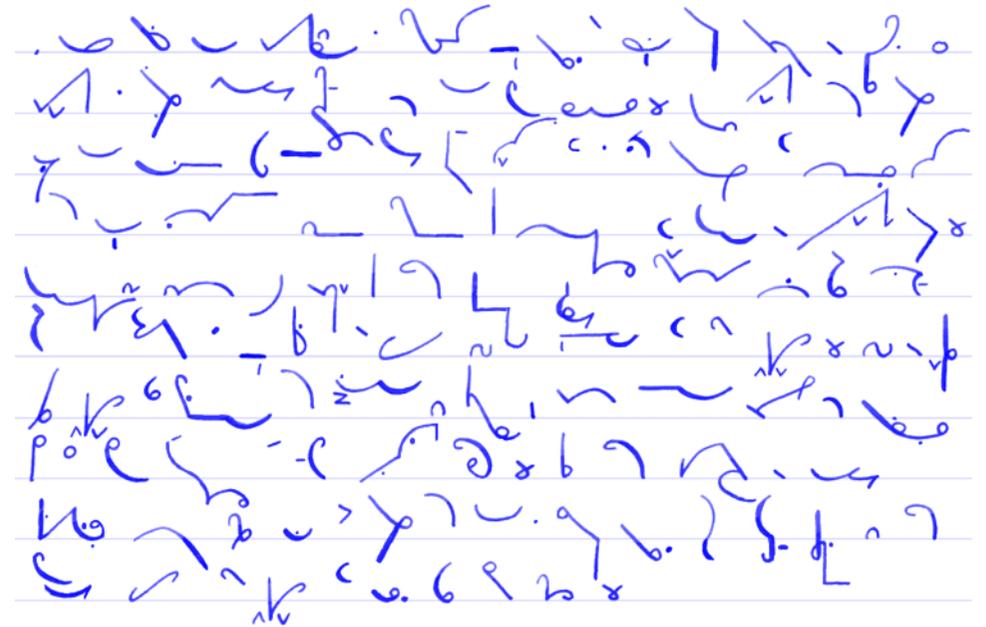


It's The Business

I hope* your shorthand learning is going smoothly and successfully, and that you are mopping up the outlines with increasing speed and ease. I wonder if you have come across a particular outline that you keep getting wrong, or which just sticks to the end of your pen or pencil and gets regularly mangled. You look it up, practise a few times and think that you have it licked. I did this with the word "correspondence". I knew I had to know this outline, but it was a long tricky one. Finally, I attacked it with everything I had. I wrote whole pages of it. To make sure it never escaped me again, I wrote it in giant size across the pad, about

four inches wide, and copied over the top of it endlessly until the paper was a soggy mass of black ink and fell apart in tatters. I was not making any attempt at speed, but I wanted my fingers to be able to form it without hesitation. I never stumbled over it again. This one was particularly satisfying as it is a graceful flowing shape, but this method should be used for any outline that needs severe drilling, and not just the beautiful easy ones that you already know well.

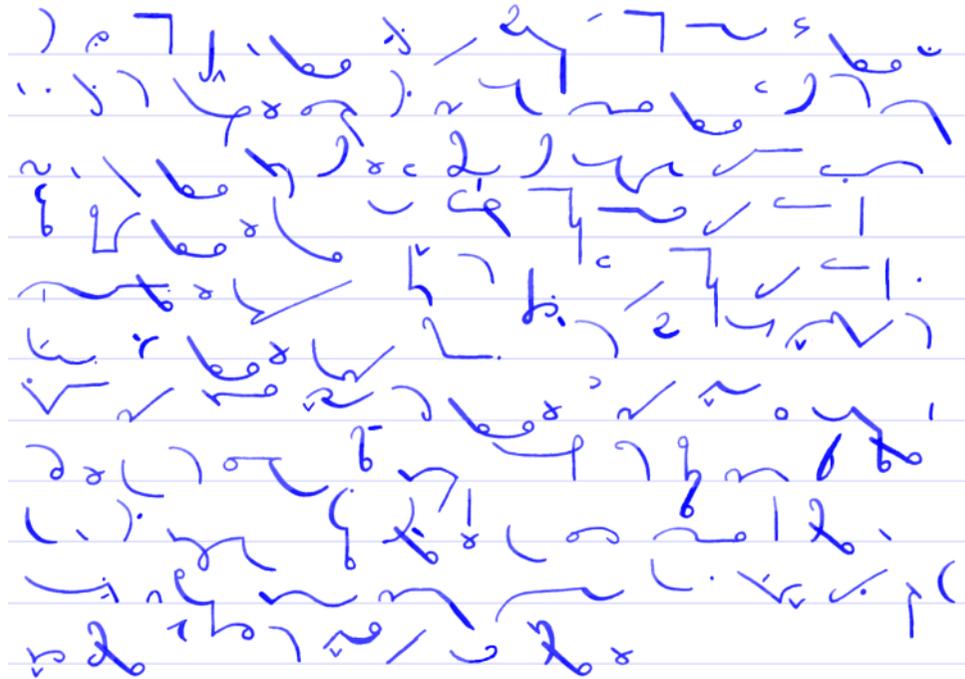
* Omission phrase "I (h)ope"



It's The Business

The next best thing to reducing a perfectly good piece of steno pad paper to shreds is to write a passage and include the troublesome word in every sentence. If you write your passage neatly in ink, then go over the top lightly with a hard pencil that makes little or no mark, you can practise it many times without having to rewrite the page. Eventually you may wish to try it from dictation, but that is not the primary aim of this method, although that would be

a good test of whether you have conquered that particular outline. You have to decide which is the outline that is plaguing or annoying you at present, but I am going to use the word business, as it has several forms and other related versions. It is very helpful to include the derivations, maybe towards the end of the passage, or in a separate piece, so that they don't distract you from overcoming the one particular outline that needs this special treatment.

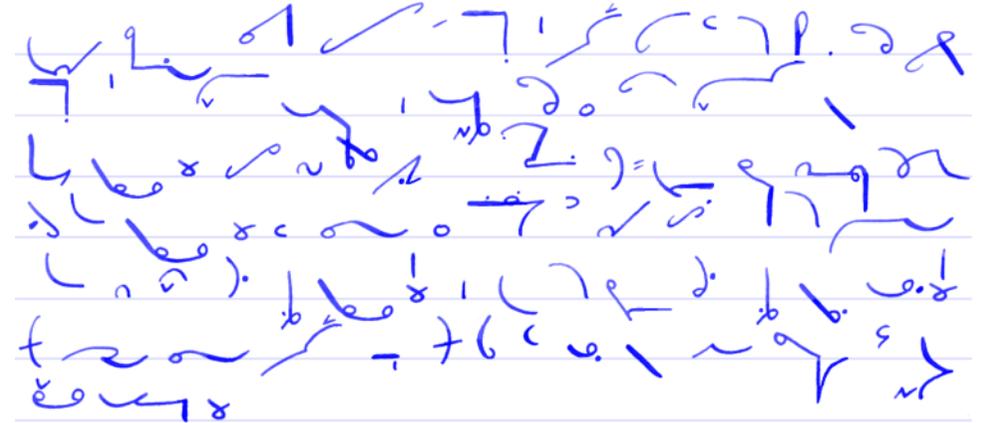


It's The Business

So let's get down to business, open our shorthand pad and get going with the business end of a pen or pencil. Some people say you should never mix business with pleasure, or maybe you have to put business before pleasure. When there is no pleasure involved, we can claim that it is strictly business. If there is* any questionable activity going on, we call it monkey business. If we are tired or disillusioned with our activity, we call it a funny old business. If you are practising your shorthand in the library or park, you are of course minding your own business. What you are writing is nobody's business

but yours. If your scribbling draws too much interest from strangers, you may just have to say to yourself "That's show business!" If someone makes it their business to interrupt you several times too many, you may be looking for a polite way to tell them to mind their own business and that your writings are none of their business.

* "if there is" Doubling is used for "if there" but never used in "for their", so that these two are never misread for each other, similarly halving for "if it" but never in "for it"



It's The Business

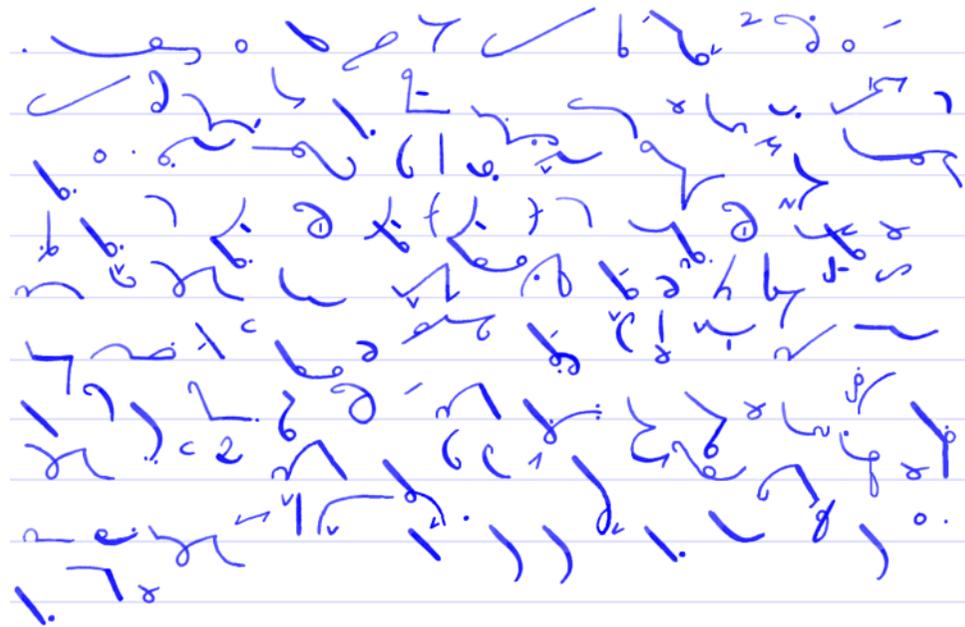
If you are streaking ahead wonderfully* and getting on really well with your study, the phrase used to be "getting on like nobody's business" but nowadays the phrase is more likely to be "doing the business". Once you have reached the magical three-figure speed, you can consider* yourself open for business. When something is exactly what you are wanting or looking for, you might say "It's the

business!" but if your speaker says "It's the bee's knees!" (meaning something really good) then that needs to be written separately, with the vowel signs included.

* "wonderfully" If you need to clarify that this is -fully (and not -ful) then write those two strokes in as well

* Omission phrase "you can (con)sider"

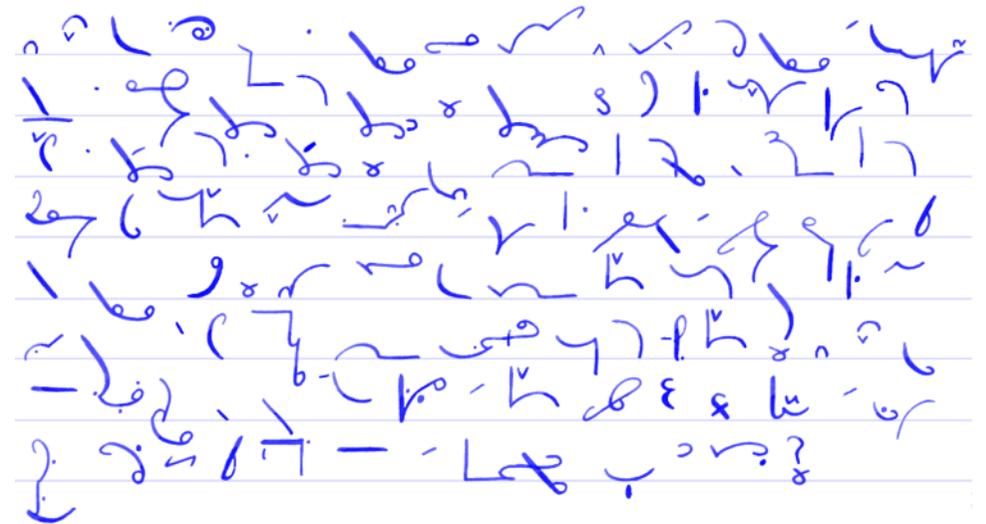
Blank lined area for student practice.



It's The Business

The intersection is best used only where it is obvious what the phrase is and where there is room for the Bee stroke to remain clear. If you need to record the word "biz", as a slang expression, then it needs writing separately and with the vowel, for example "It's the biz" or "showbiz" versus "show business (show business)" or "newbies" versus "new business". You may find yourself having to write the latest buzzwords, which you definitely don't want

to get mixed up with business words, and certainly not buzzards either! I know you are going to be very busy practising all these phrases, and you will be busily filling the pages. If you have constantly busied yourself with shorthand, you will be busier than ever and the busiest person will be the fastest. You can sing to yourself "I'd like to be a busy busy bee, being just as busy as a bee can be."



It's The Business

You might have ambitions to take a business course* to learn how to run your own business, and eventually become a successful businessman* or businesswoman*. Businessmen and women* spend their day entirely differently from either a busman or a postman*. If you make it your business to work at your shorthand skill, then in time writing accurately and easily at a reasonable and useful speed will just be "business as usual." You will, of course, have to make time in your busy day and not let the "busy-ness" of other activities make incursions into your study time. You might even go so far as to

put off delays and time-wasters with that bold, defiant and faintly threatening phrase, "Just gotta go and take care of business, know what I mean?" (932 words)

* "business course" If you use the intersection, write it first and the outline second

* Omission outlines/phrases "biz(ness)man" "biz(ness)woman" "biz(ness)men (and) women"

* "postman" Omits the lightly sounded T