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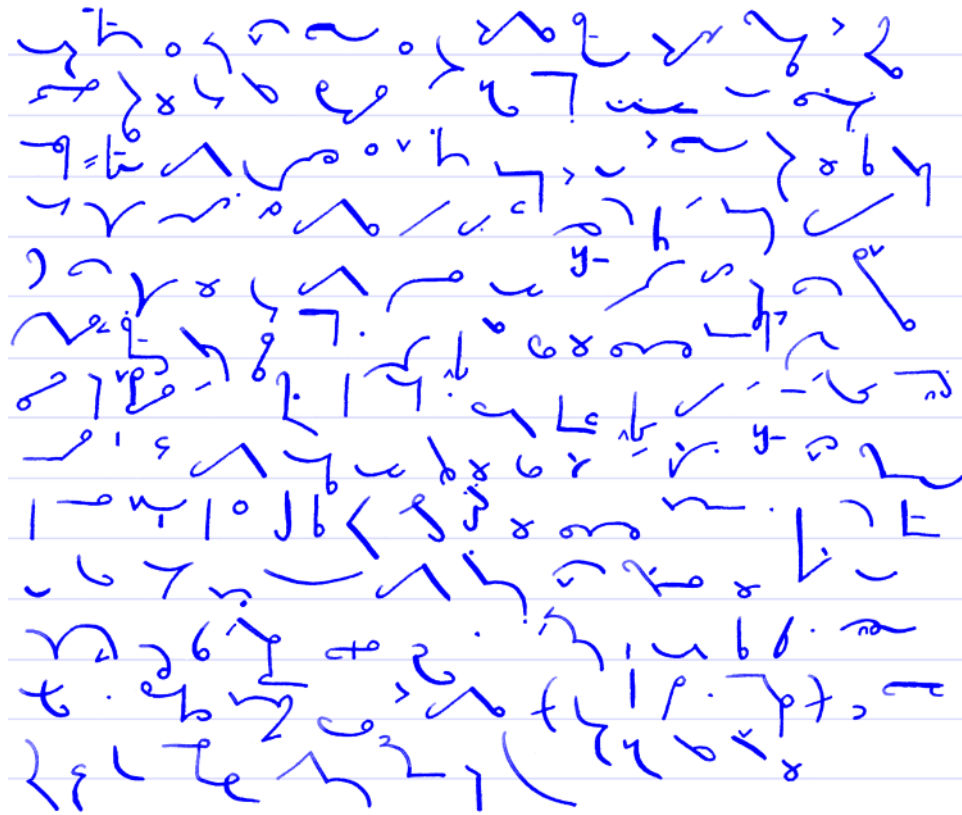
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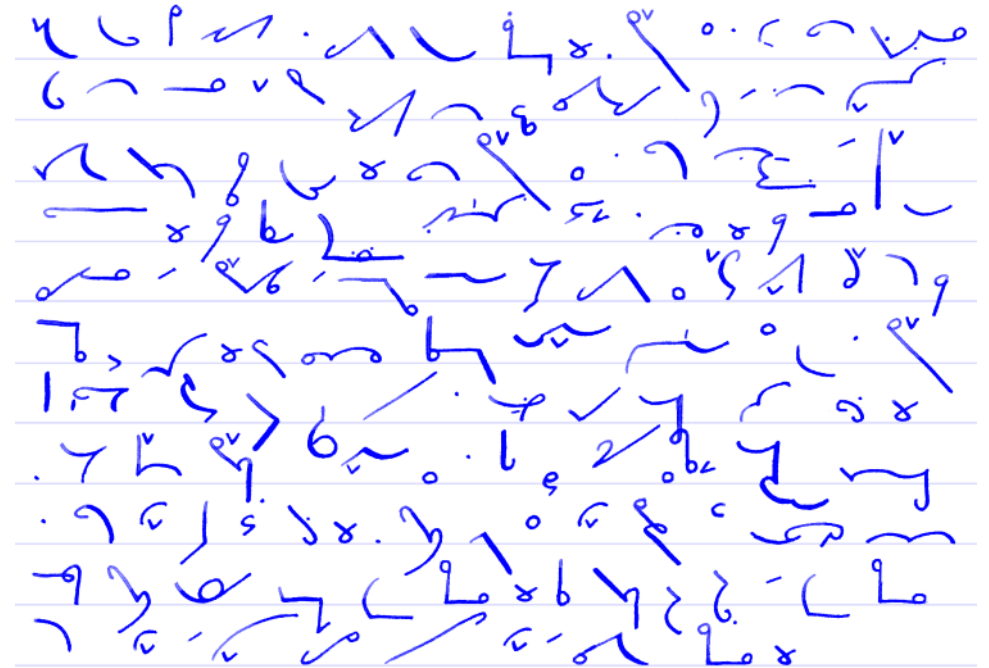
Spidery Writing

Now that autumn is here, my garden is full of webs strung between the branches of the shrubs and across the paths. For the past several weeks* I have been getting entangled in seemingly extra-toughened web filaments, as I attempt to get to the end of the garden path. It is better in the early morning as the webs are wet with mist or dew, and I can see where they are more easily. If the web looks new I don't really want to destroy Mr Spider's laborious construction before he has got a meal out of all his efforts. Sometimes I can lift half of it sideways and drape it onto a nearby twig out of the way, and quite often the occupant carries on with the web in its new

position. If it is* old and holey, I don't mind breaking it because I know it has done its job and has been abandoned. Sometimes I make a detour or duck under, often only to meet another web barring my progress. In earlier years this obstacle course would have been a horror, but now it is just an amusing inconvenience, a sentiment I am sure the owners of the webs (if they had such a capacity) would agree with, especially when they have extensive repair work to do after I have passed by.

* Omission phrase "several wee(k)s"

* "if it is" Halving to represent "it"

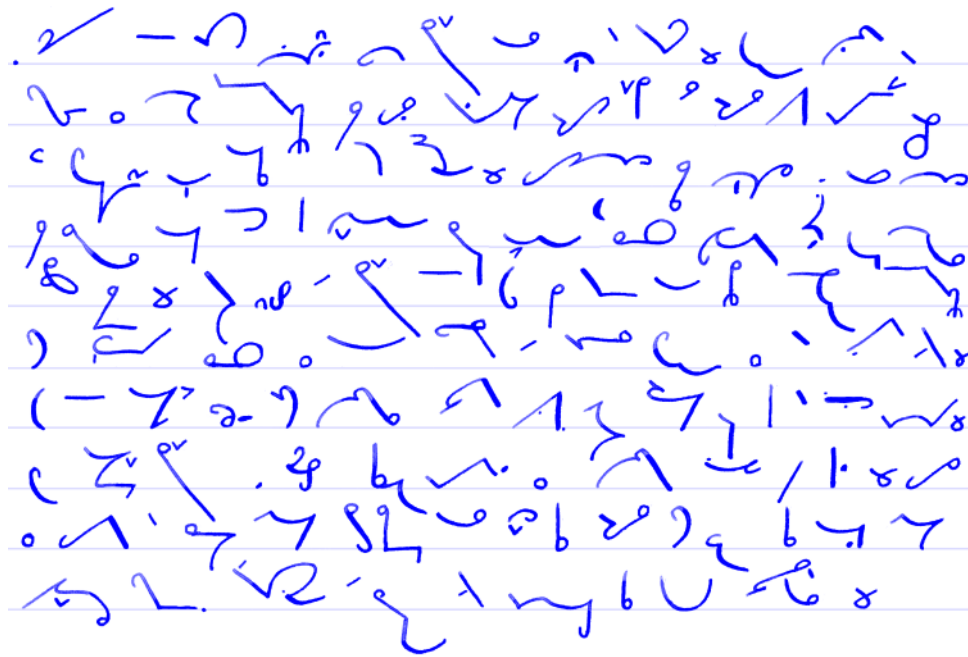


Spidery Writing

I have often sat and watched a web being constructed. The spider has a lot more patience than me, because I stop to watch him when he is halfway through and am likely to leave before he has finished. Mr Spider is a very methodical and tidy character. He does not zigzag randomly and create a mess. He goes in circles and spirals, and keeps going until the web is either the right size or he gets to the middle. People sometimes describe handwriting looking "as if a spider had crawled all over the page" but this is

rather an insult to our industrious little friend. The only time spidery writing is an advantage is when the shorthand writer* is endeavouring to maintain a very light touch with the pen. The pressure should be as light as possible, with no more than the minimum extra pressure necessary to get the thick strokes. It is better to think of thin and thick strokes, or light and lighter ones, rather than light and heavy strokes.

* Omission phrase "short(hand) writer"



Spidery Writing

The shorthand writer* can also emulate Mr Spider in his mode of operation. Having laboured to perfect his method of capture, he waits patiently to one side, and is always ready to react to circumstances with virtually no notice or warning. One moment he is motionless, the next moment he springs into action at lightning speed, knowing that success will only be assured if he moves as fast as he can. Both student and spider can then sit back in satisfaction because they have captured their quarry, success is in their grasp and, of course, everything is "all wrapped up". They can enjoy the

fruits of their labours, and will be ready and full of energy to do it all again tomorrow. However, unlike the spider, the shorthand student* does not have to repeat his labour anew each day. Once his "web" of skill and knowledge has been constructed in his mind, it is always there whenever it is needed and only requires practising, polishing and speeding up to maintain its efficiency and usefulness. (572 words)

* Omission phrases "short(hand) writer" "shorthand s(t)udent"



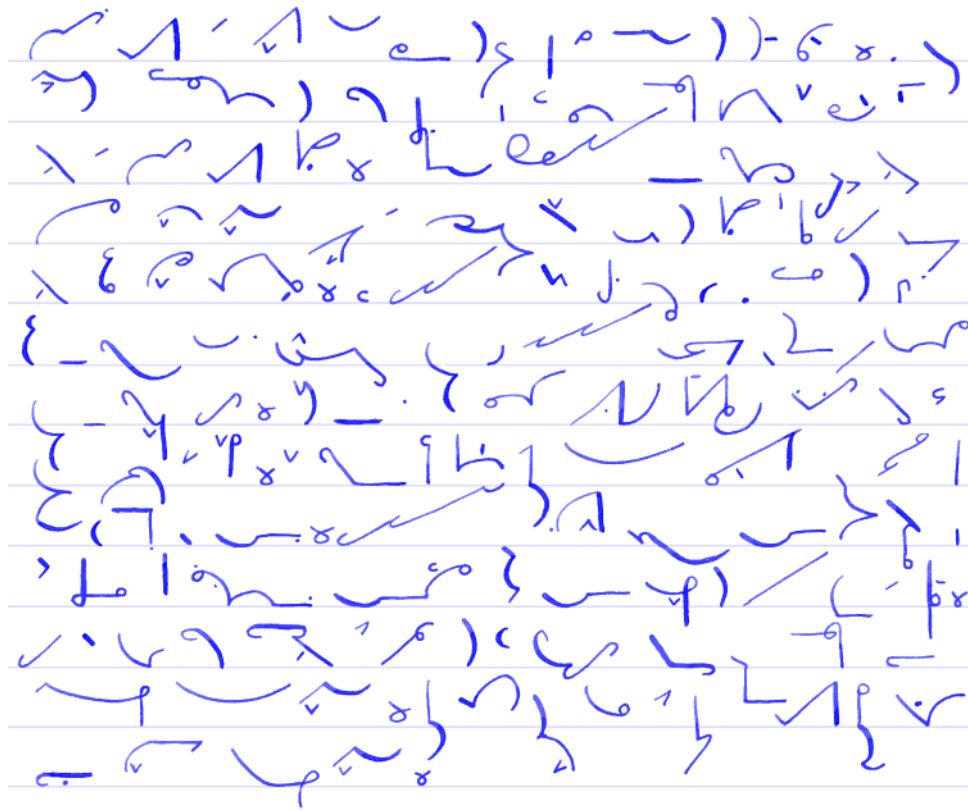
Fountain Pens

Before I could* read or write, I loved to scribble. I was given wads of pastel-coloured lined paper, and I would spend ages filling every single line with continuous identical* loops. Sometimes I would break the line, so that it appeared more like writing, but only when I had to, at those points where the hand had to move along the paper a bit. I enjoyed seeing hundreds of loops and lines emerging from the end of the pencil. Page after page was filled with this activity. I had obviously seen people writing and my attempt to emulate them was satisfying enough, without bothering

myself that it did not record or mean anything. This was the first facility drill I ever did, all without knowing that I would study shorthand many years later. Gazing down from above at my hand brought the satisfaction of seeing complete control over everything happening on the page.

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

* "ide(n)tical" Contraction, therefore on the line

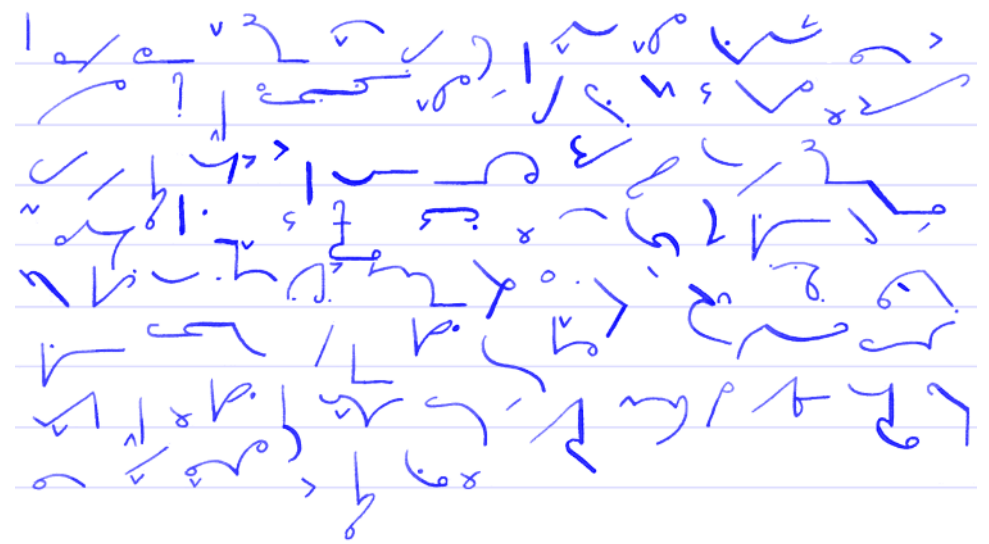


Fountain Pens

Learning to read and write in school was completely different, as the going was so slow. The busy and noisy classroom was very distracting, but with some extra help I soon caught up and learned to read at last*. As soon as we were given permission to join up the letters, my writing, real and meaningful by now, was at last on its way to catching up with those lines of loops. When we were about 10 years old, the class was told that they could bring in a fountain pen if they wished and we were encouraged to ask our families if they could provide one. I was given a small reddish tortoiseshell-pattern pen with the filling lever on the

side. I practised with it at home, and it was another hurdle to fill and use it without getting too inky. We were not allowed to bring ink bottles, but all the desks had ceramic inkwells, although the ink inside was rather thick and dusty. We all felt very grown-up and the result was that everyone began to take extra care and interest in their writing. It was also easier for us and the teacher to read, as it was not pale grey like the pencil writing.

* "at last" and "at least" Always insert the vowel



Fountain Pens

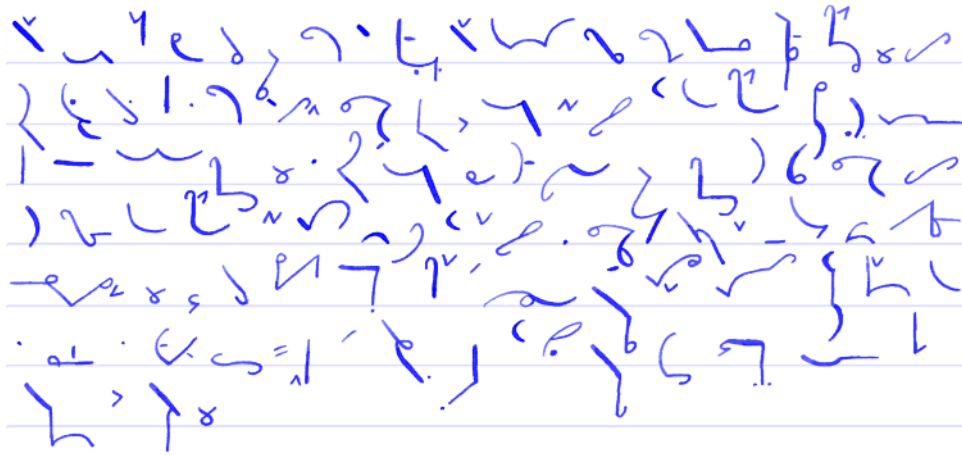
At secondary school, I worked my way through different writing styles, varying some of the letters, trying out calligraphic styles and generally playing about with the appearance. I wonder whether our teachers enjoyed all the different ink colours that we used for our workbooks, and I certainly had a good time with the turquoise* and green. My favourite* was the italic pen, and I remember turning in a Latin homework passage as a page of beautiful amethyst sloping italic calligraphy, which took at least four times longer than normal to write out. At least* it was entirely clear

and readable, and I am sure such artistic endeavours brought some wry smiles to the teacher's face.

* "favoured" uses normal V, "favourite" uses reversed V

* "turquoise" Modern pronunciation, the dictionary shows older pronunciation "tur-koiz"

* "at least" and "at last" Always insert the vowel



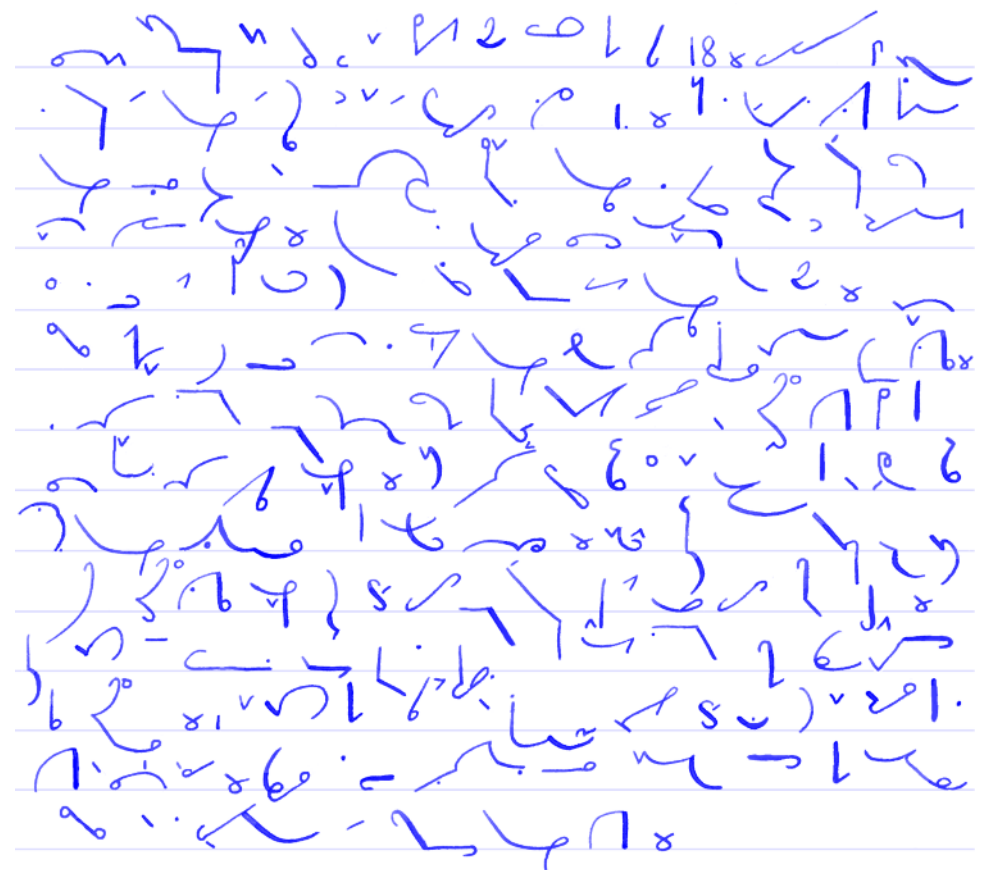
Fountain Pens

By now I had several pens to choose from, all donated by family members from the backs of dusty drawers. One especially favoured* pen had a very round smooth tip to the nib and I used that for drawing, as it was easy to make it go in any direction. A sharp nib is not so willing to change direction, so this smooth one was perfect for drawing and I also made sure that I used the smoothest paper I could*, for the ultimate artistic experience. When the

pen started getting dry and missing bits of lines, I learned that it was time for a soak, a thorough clean-out and possibly ditching that last bit of thickened and gritty ink at the bottom of the bottle.

* "favoured" uses normal V, "favourite" uses reversed V

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

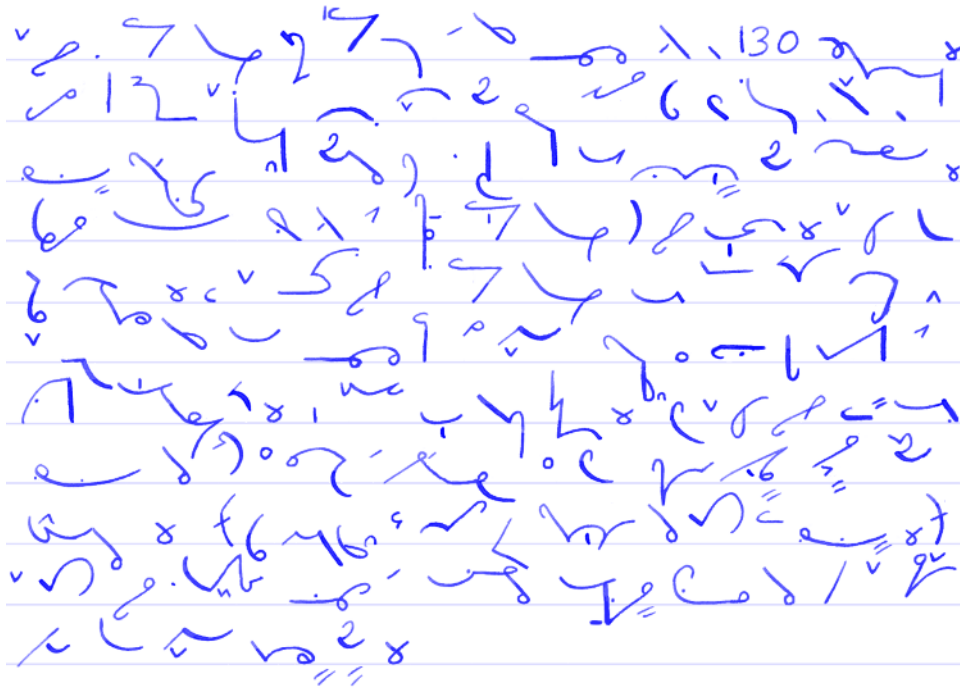


Fountain Pens

Somehow I forgot about pens when I started shorthand classes at the age of 18. We were told to bring a pad and pencil, and so that is what I and everyone else did. I had a furry red tartan pencil case full of colourful stripy pencils, the cheapest available bought from my local newsagent. After a few weeks*, someone enquired what I wanted as a gift and the information was passed back "Pencils for shorthand." To my surprise and delight, she gave me a clutch pencil and several little containers of long thick leads. The metal cap could be removed from the top of the barrel and used to sharpen the lead, as it had some tiny metal ridges inside. I was

really pleased with this as I no longer had to suffer all those messy pencil shavings at inconvenient moments. I found that it was better to have two or three shorter sharpened leads inside, so that the blunt one could be popped out and the next one dropped down. It was also quite quick to give the tip a twist in the cap during the lesson to regain its sharpness. But I also had the choice of continuing to use the blunt end, so I always had a lead of some sort. This was a great relief, because I never again had the unpleasant surprise of a wobbling and broken pencil lead.

* Omission phrase "few wee(k)s"

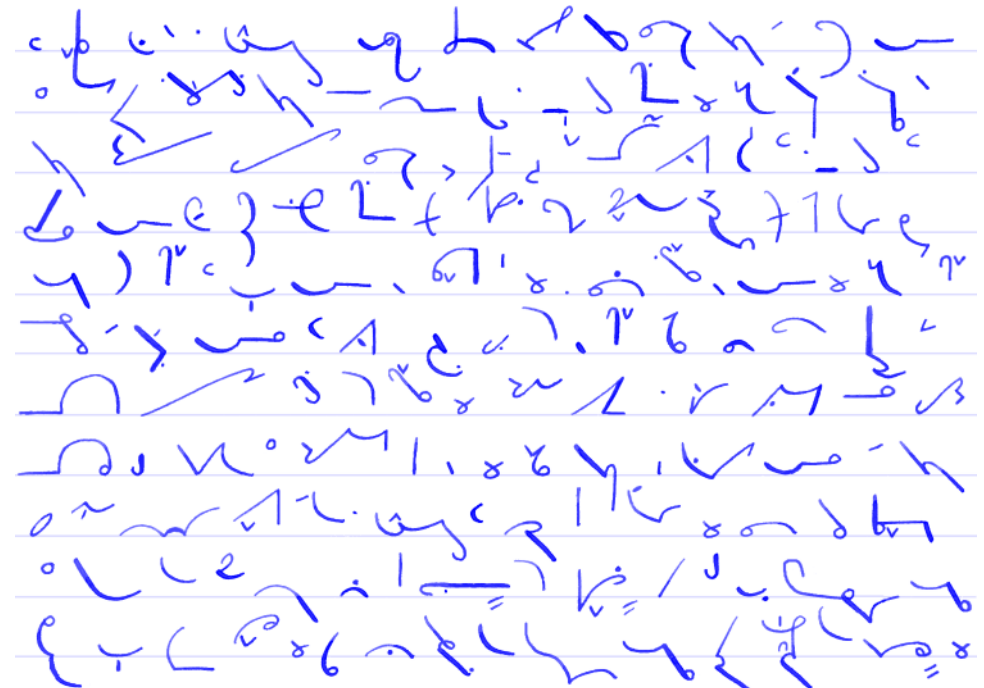


Fountain Pens

I used the clutch pencil all through the college year and passed exams up to 130 wpm. Once at work, I continued improving my shorthand speed, and was then able to afford to buy two Senator Professional shorthand pens through an advertisement in the "Memo" shorthand magazine. This was another step up and the trusty* clutch pencil was used no more. I still have all these implements. When I occasionally use the clutch pencil now, I can hardly imagine how I could have passed any exams with it as the writing produced is grey, difficult to read and the lead unpleasantly hard. But I

knew no better at the time. However, I still use the gold-nibbed Senator pens and they are as smooth and responsive as ever, truly the "Rolls Royce" of shorthand fountain pens. (These should not be confused with the modern cheap promotional pens also called Senator.) I also use a variety of the excellent and inexpensive Noodler's Flex pens, which I highly recommend for writing Pitman's Shorthand.

* "trusty" Insert the last vowel, as it might be misread as "trusted" which also makes sense



Fountain Pens

When deciding the fate of a fountain pen under consideration, it is important to use the best smooth paper and fresh ink, as cheap absorbent paper can make even a good pen drag. I have bought pads of paper that were wonderfully smooth to the touch, but when I actually wrote on them with a good pen with generous ink flow, there was excessive drag (at least* from the shorthand writing* point of view*) and it felt as if the nib was dry with no ink to slide on. The same applies to ink. I have tried expensive and budget inks that wrote beautifully wet or too dry and this seemed more dependent on the colour rather than the brand or price. I would not reject a whole range because

one of the colours did not perform as I wanted it to. I think it is better to vary the inks and paper first, and not immediately "write off" a fountain pen that may not be at fault. Some pens described as being for shorthand may be aimed at Gregg or Teeline, which do not need flexible nibs as they have no thick lines. These may possibly have firm nibs which would be unsuitable for Pitman's.

* "at last" and "at least" Always insert the vowel

* Omission phrases "short(hand) writing" "point (of) view"

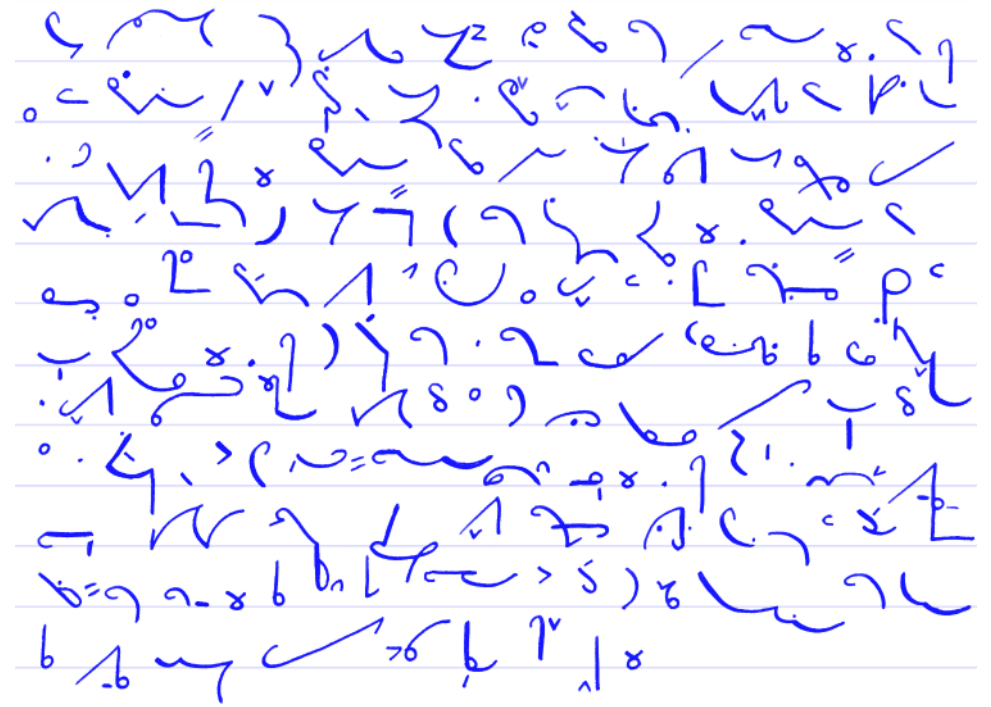


Fountain Pens

Once you are proficient in shorthand, you will find that you can use anything to write with and still read back. You will know your outlines so thoroughly that you recognise them however they are written, especially as they are words that you have already heard. Shorthand students* have speed increase on their minds all the time, and so it makes sense to use the best tools you can, and always be looking to improve your materials as you get the chance. A superior pen is going to help your writing immensely and is an essential accompaniment to the more obvious task of increasing your shorthand writing ability. The expense should be seen as an investment for the

future, in the same way as you are paying for books, pads, pencils and maybe classroom lessons as well. Once you have experienced a good pen with flowing ink on smooth paper, I think it is unlikely that you will ever go back to an indifferent pencil again, unless you are having to take notes in the rain. I hope that you are able to find ways to make improvements to your writing equipment early on in your shorthand journey and do not wait as long as I did to enjoy the benefits, both in pleasure of writing and in shorthand speed. (1433 words)

* Omission phrase "shorthand s(t)udents"



Apple Harvest

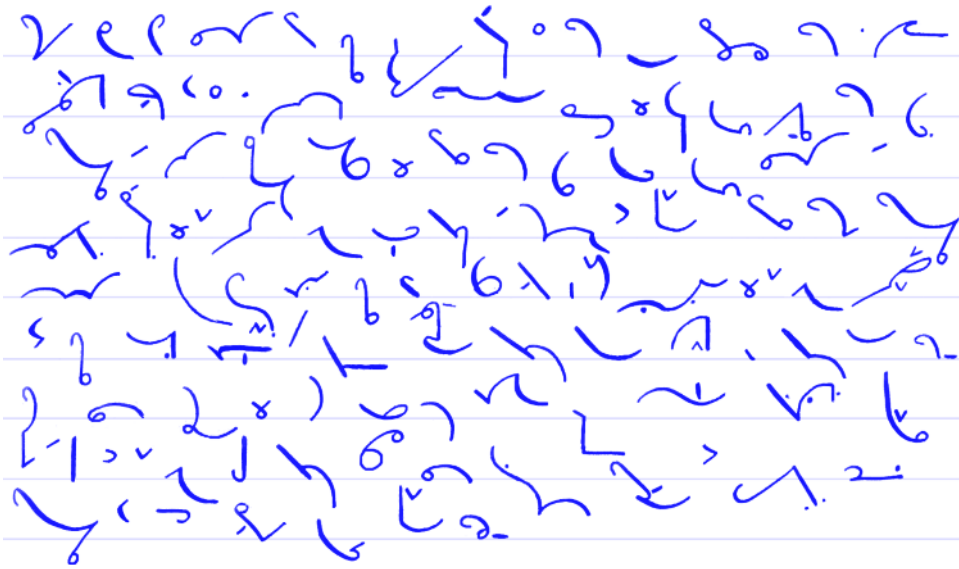
Over the last month or so we have been enjoying lots* of apples from our garden. The apple tree is called Spartan which I planted to ensure a supply of my favourite variety of apple, at least* for a short period during the year*. Spartan apples are not commonly sold in the supermarkets where I live and I can usually only get them from farm shops. The Spartan apple skin is dark plum red and the flesh is white with a delicate fragrance, sweet with no sharpness. The tree was bought from a very good nursery that concentrates its efforts on providing a wide selection of strong healthy plants as their main business, rather than indifferent plants as an adjunct to all the other non-gardening

consumer goods. The tree, although on a medium rootstock, grew healthily and produced generously right from the beginning, laden every year with abundant pest-free fruit. It is at the corner of the pond, so I think it is benefiting from having its roots underneath where the soil does not dry out.

* "lots" and "masses" Always insert the vowel as these two are similar in outline and meaning

* "at last" and "at least" Always insert the vowel

* Omission phrase "during (the) year"



Apple Harvest

There are several other small apple trees but they were bought as very young specimens from a local household store that has a limited gardening section. They had few roots, very thin branches and little strength in themselves. Apples from these have been few, small and miserably spotty. I really should have known better and removed all the tiny apples from the branches immediately after flowering, to let the trees build

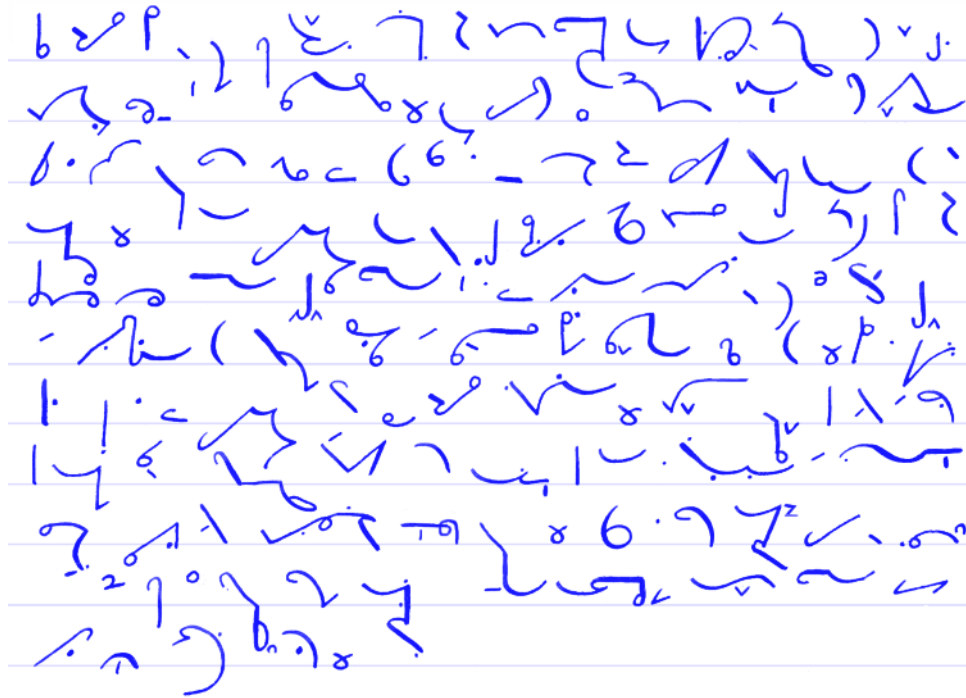
themselves up, but I was impatient. I should have realised that the trees needed to grow much bigger and stronger before being allowed to bear any fruit throughout the summer season. So next year I will have to take my own belated advice and do what I should have done before, as well as some firm pruning of the whippy weak branches that cannot support even the tiny fruits.



Apple Harvest

Artists drawing an apple often show them with bits of branch and leaf intact. A ripe apple will fall into your hand and not tear off bits with it. If the apple is ready, just a slight nudge should allow it to drop into the hand, so it makes sense to test the bottom apple in a cluster first, preferably with both hands free, and not holding the

bowl with the other hand. Ideally any falling apples would land on soft mud or grass, but mine have a concrete path to fall on. Just disturbing the branch can bring down any loose ones before I get to them, so maybe I should put a bucket of water or a bag of compost underneath where I am picking to prevent smashed apples.

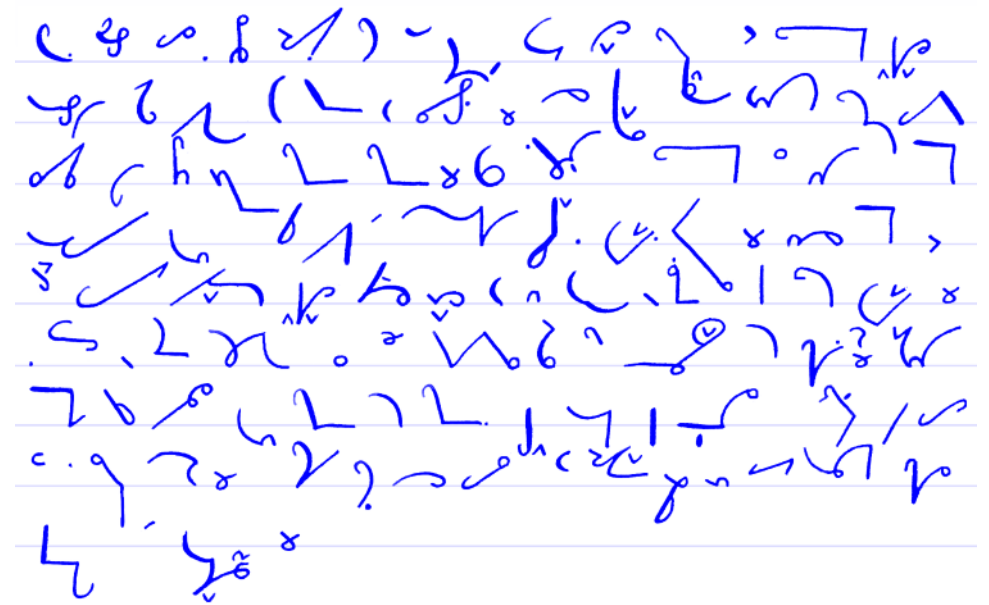


Apple Harvest

It is always sad to see the tree finally empty, although I am grateful for the delicious harvest, so I tend to leave the fruits on as long as possible*. If the weather is warm, I know they are ripening just a little bit more, and if it is cold, then that is a good method of cold storage, better than having them all indoors. Any windfalls have to be eaten straight away and this is of course no hardship at all, although it sometimes means going down the garden on a cold rainy morning to see what has blown down, and retrieving them before the

snails and slugs start sliding towards them. On such a chilly day, eating a cold windfall apple is not always appealing. I like to dice it up and stir it into the hot breakfast porridge, or include it in a banana and mango smoothie, heated up to resemble custard pudding. This is a very enjoyable way to consume what the tree has produced from the inedible ingredients in my garden – rain, mud and fresh air. (628 words)

* Omission phrase "as long as poss(ible)"

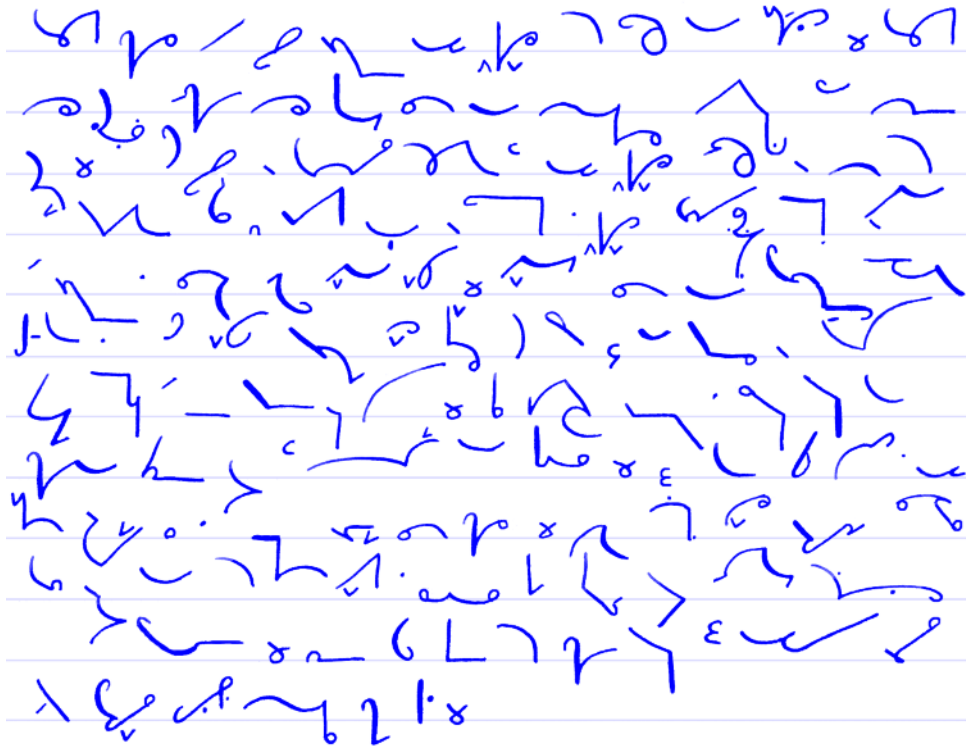


How To Practise

Every shorthand student wants the satisfaction of watching their hand zoom along the line, producing all the correct outlines instantly, and then reading them back without hesitation. Most advice that you will see from your web searches will tell you to practise, practise, practise. This is absolutely correct, as you will get nowhere if you just read and mentally digest the theory chapters. You must get to the point where the required outline jumps to mind without you having to construct it

from theory. The question to ask yourself is, what is the purpose of this particular exercise or drill? I think you will get the best results if you break your practising down into different goals and approach each one with a separate method. There are three main ways that I would like* to suggest to you: facility drills, dictation and visualisation.

* "I would like" Downward L in order to join the phrase



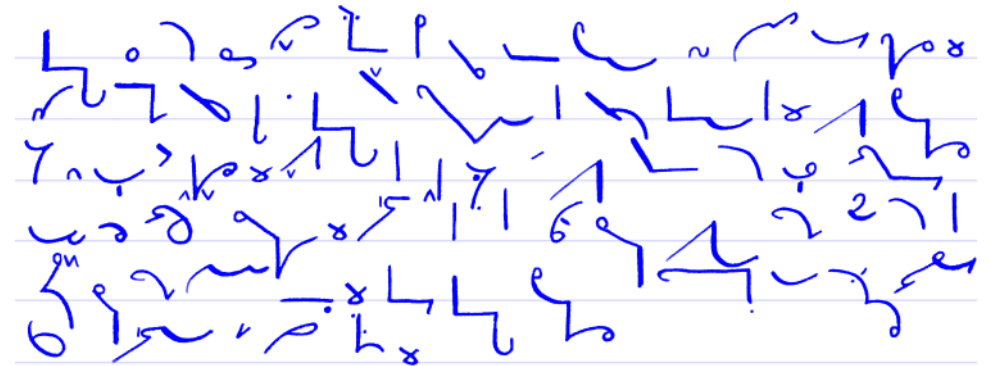
How To Practise

FACILITY DRILLS are used to practise new outlines or phrases in isolation. Facility means easiness and drill means doing the same thing many times, repetition in order to* make easier. They are used to familiarise yourself with new outlines and phrases, to improve your performance on those you already know, to correct an outline that you are consistently getting wrong, and to practise a smooth and even writing style. Writing the same thing over and over again* can only be* done for a short while, before the mind tires, so stop when the hand begins to falter, change the activity and come back to it later. It is helpful to keep a separate pad for drilling,

which you can fill with material in advance. When you have just learned a new item of theory is a good time to create some drills. Leave empty lines between the samples, for you to fill in, or write a sentence at the top of the page and leave the remainder blank. You can then take your drill pad with you anywhere to use up otherwise wasted minutes during the day.

* Omission phrases "in ord(er) to" "Over (and) over again" The second "over" is reversed to gain a good join

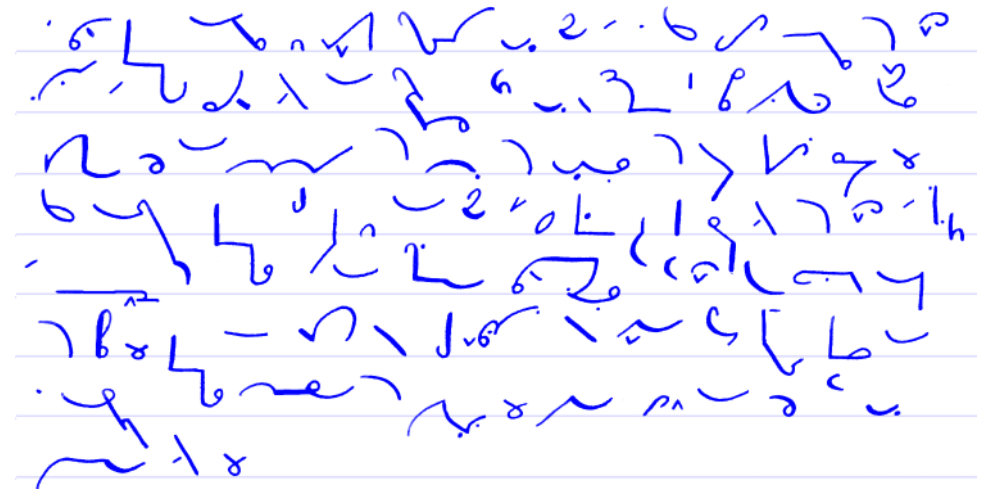
* "can only be" On its own "only" uses full strokes



How To Practise

DICTATION is your second line of attack, as it puts together everything you have learned in the drills. You will get the best out of a dictation by preparing it before taking it. Read several times until you know all the outlines. Write it out neatly and read back your notes, and practise the new

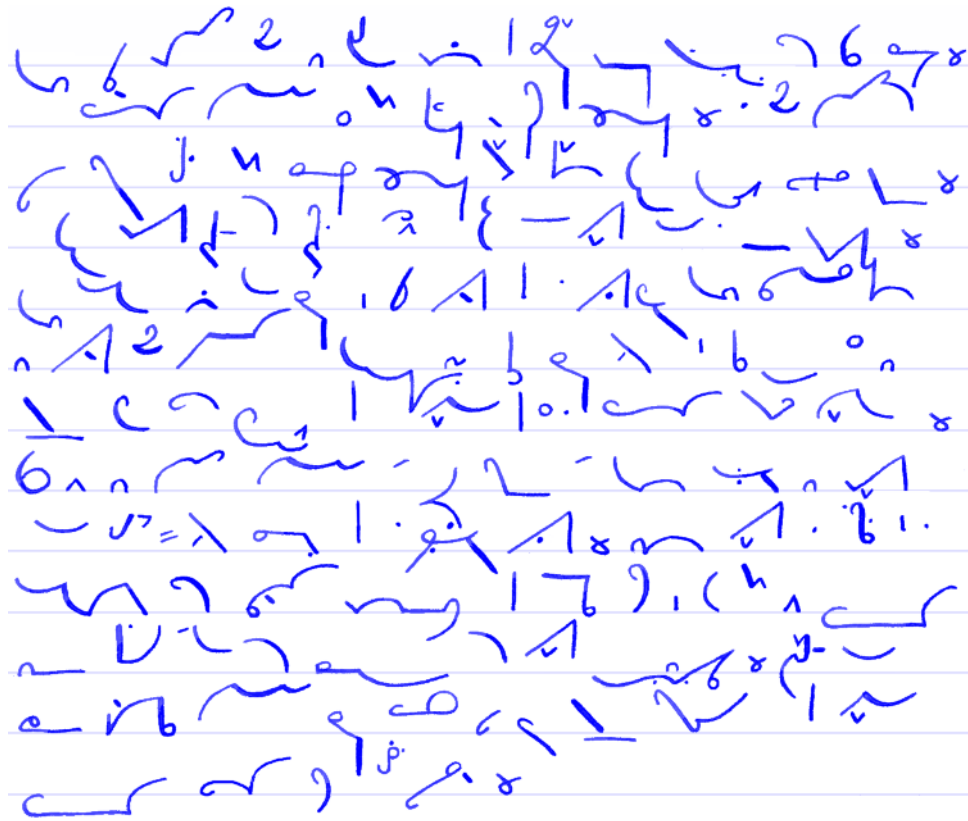
words and phrases separately. Record it at slow speed reading from the shorthand, or at higher speed from the longhand key. Take the dictation several times, correcting any errors and using the faster recording on the last attempt.



How To Practise

A slow dictation enables you to write perfectly neat shorthand and a fast one keeps your mind alert and shows up any problems that you need to work on, such as revision of short forms, holding words in memory or improving your neatness or page turning skill. Fast unprepared dictations do not teach you any shorthand

on the first take but they do speed up your mind and attitude and counteract any dragging sluggishness that might have crept into your studies. Dictations can also be done silently by writing over the top of the text in a newspaper, magazine or leaflet. Ring round any words that need looking up.

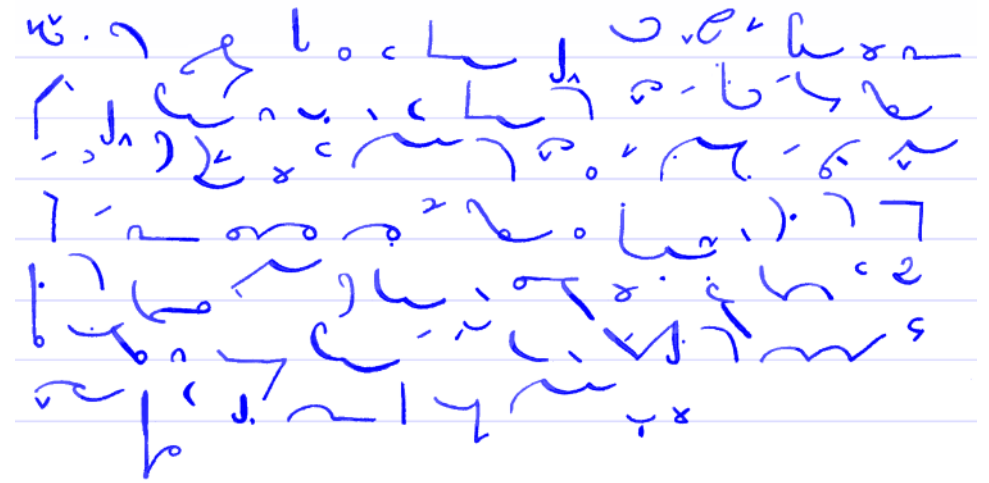


Armed And Dangerous

If you choose to learn shorthand, you do not have to aim at high speed to get benefit from this skill. Normal longhand is about 20 to 30 words a minute*. A shorthand learner will probably attain about 60 words a minute* by the time they have finished the course book. They have already doubled or trebled the amount that they can write in a given period of time. If you never aimed for speed, but just wrote at a rate comfortable for you, as long as you wrote shorthand regularly, eventually it would speed up on its own, as you become ever more fluent at writing it as a normal

part of life. This is how you learned longhand, and sheer practice and familiarity enabled you to write in joined-up script at a reasonable rate. You may write an address on an envelope very slowly, to make sure it gets there, but think about how quickly you can dash off your signature or write numerals. I don't think any school holds longhand speed classes yet people become proficient at writing quickly, merely through constant use.

* Omission phrase "words (a) minute"



Armed And Dangerous

I find a very useful advantage is when taking down information whilst on the telephone. You can jot down everything you need to, without taking your mind and attention off the person and what they are saying. With longhand your mind is on the lengthy and slow writing of it and you can sometimes miss what the person is

continuing to say, or get dates or figures wrong through having to scribble. A comfortable familiarity with shorthand enables you to catch everything and not have to burden your memory with the minor details that didn't make it into the longhand note.

