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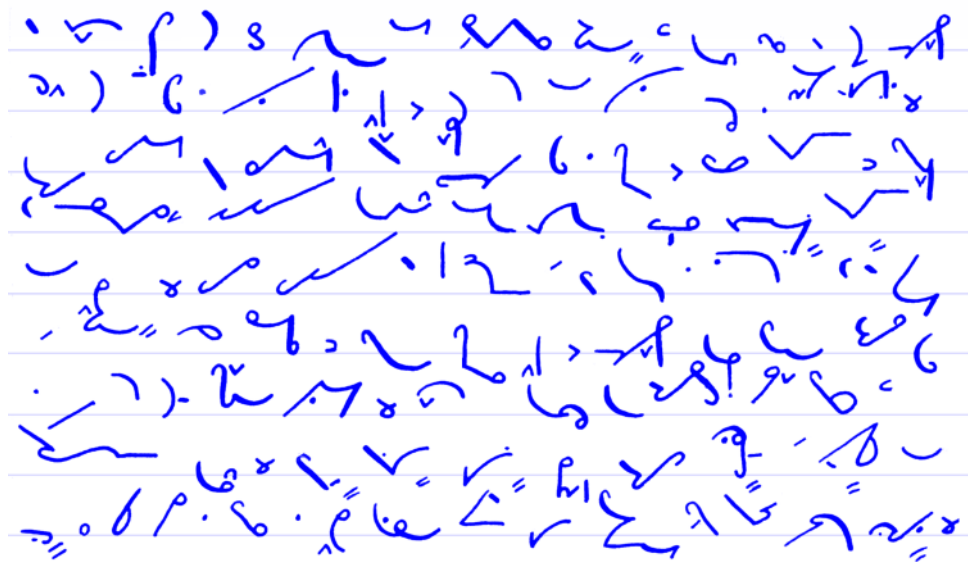
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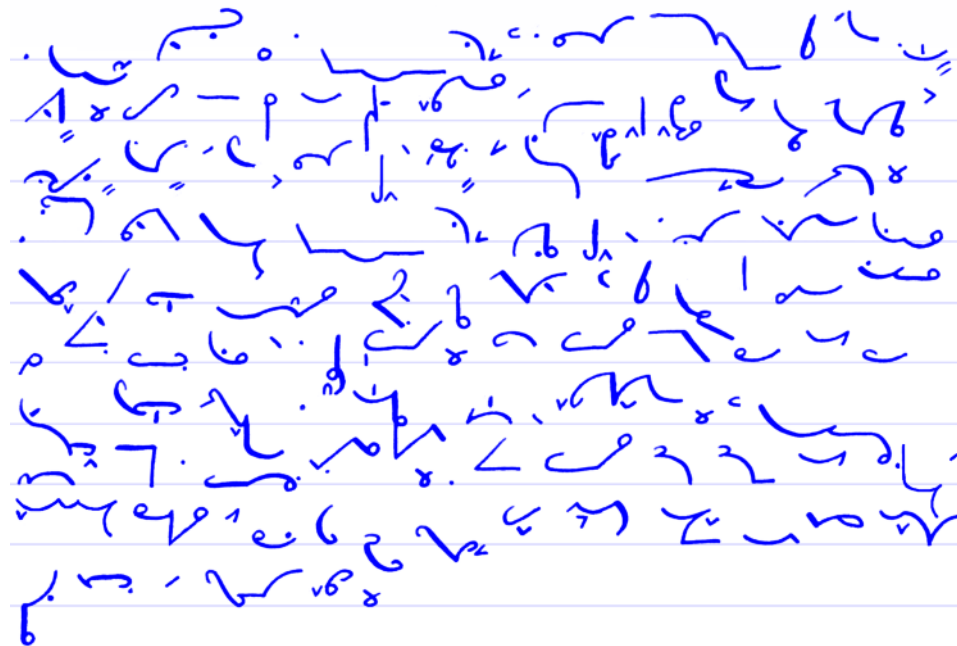
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### Blue Bell Hill

All of my childhood was spent living in the suburbs of London, with few opportunities to see the countryside around us, other than a rare day out to the seaside, or in later years the annual holiday. If we wanted to be surrounded by greenery, then a trip to the nearest park would provide that experience, and we were fortunate enough to live close to Greenwich Park in South London. Once we were all at work

and able to afford a car, that all changed and most Sundays would bring trips out to the countryside, visiting everything that was within an hour or so driving range. My favourites have always been high places with panoramic views. Blue Bell Hill, situated between Maidstone and Rochester in Kent, is just such a place, a south-facing chalk hill overlooking the upper part of the River Medway.



### Blue Bell Hill

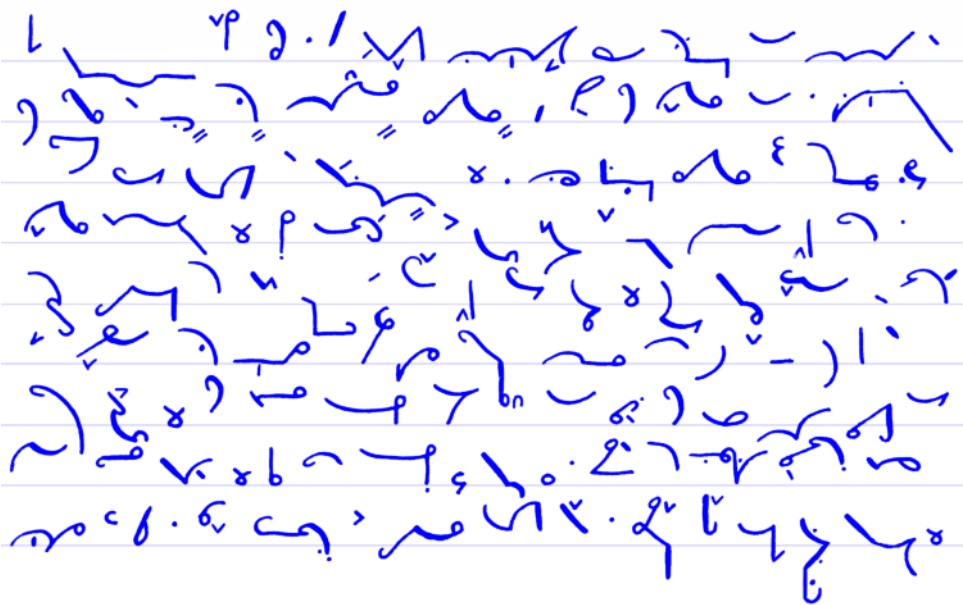
The viewing location is a picnic area with a small car park just off Common Road\*. One can sit in total silence and look out southwards over the fields and villages of the Medway Valley and over to the small town of Snodland on the far side of the meandering river. The grassy slope beneath the picnic area leads down to a metal paling fence, behind which grow numerous shrubby trees, and below that, just visible at certain angles, is the chalky\* cliff face of a disused quarry. More quarries can be seen in the near foreground, overgrown and providing an undisturbed home to wildlife. With binoculars you may get a glimpse of rabbits. The chalk quarries

were worked in the 18th\* and 19th centuries, and the scene then would have been brilliant white and noisy, unlike now, almost entirely shades of green and perfectly silent.

\* "road" and "route" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

\* "chalky" Inserting last vowel is essential, as "chalk cliff faces" also makes sense

\* "18th" Always insert the vowel in this, and in "tenth", as the outlines are otherwise the same

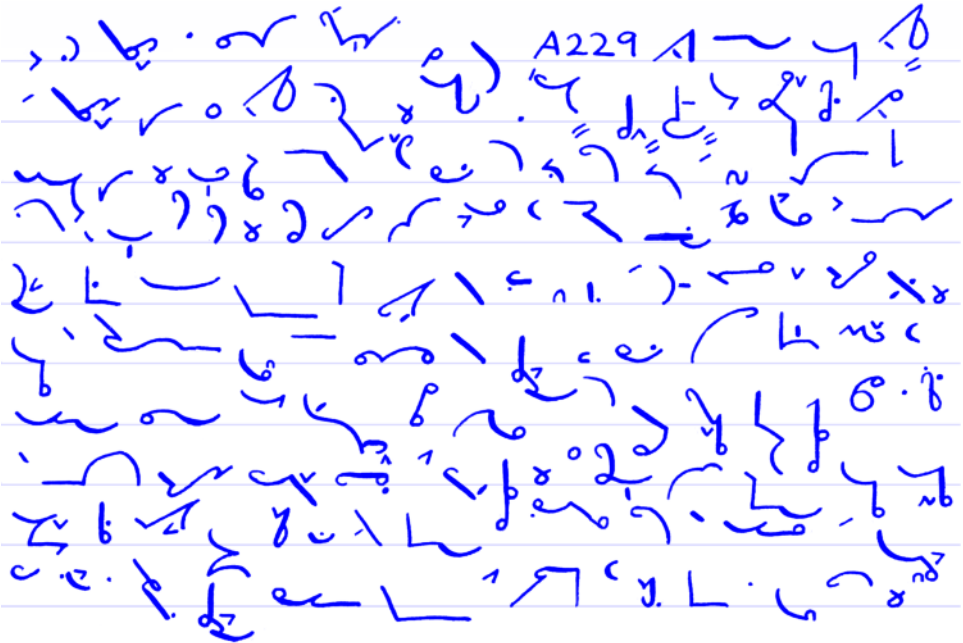


Blue Bell Hill

At the picnic site there is a large upright memorial stone, erected in memory of three members of Kent Air Ambulance Service who lost their lives in a helicopter crash near the village of Burham. The men's dedicated service with that organisation saved the lives of many people. Sitting in front of the view, I feel I could be\* looking out from an airplane window or about to take off\* and fly out over the fields. Seeing the birds gliding to and fro on the rising air currents that such hills produce makes me wish I could see it all from their point of view\*. They are of course interested only in hunting their next

meal hidden in the long grass below. It is more interesting when the bird is a hawk or kestrel, hovering almost motionless with just a slight quivering of the wings, followed by a high speed dive into the vegetation beneath.

- \* "could be" Not phrased with the "I", because that is too much like "I can be"
- \* "take off " Hook F to represent "off"
- \* Omission phrase "point (of) view"

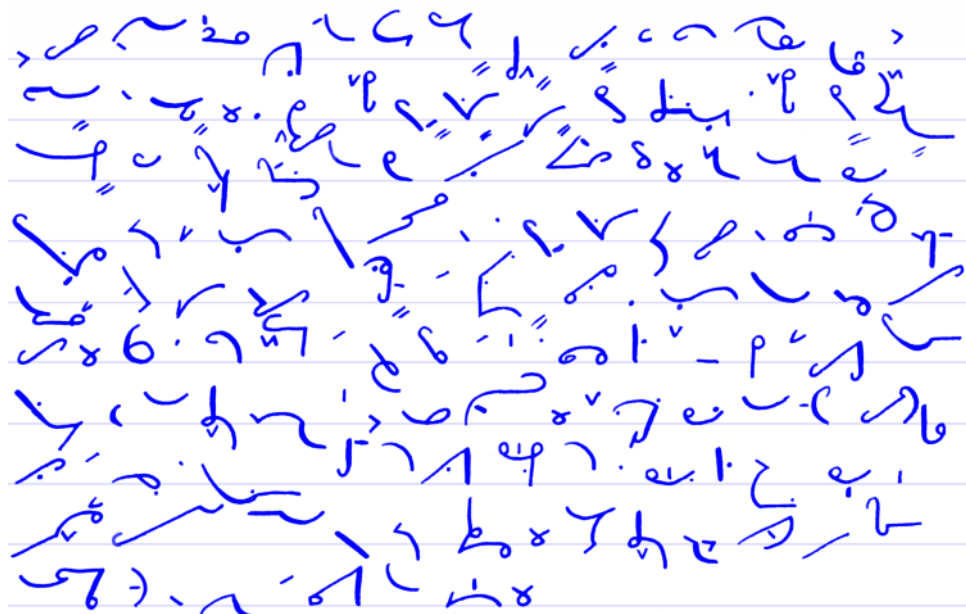


Blue Bell Hill

To the east, behind a small promontory, is the busy A229 road\* going into Rochester, and behind the hill is Rochester Airport. In addition the North Downs Tunnel for the high speed trains runs underneath the hill. None of these can be either seen or heard from here and you have to look at the map to know they are there. There is one little noise that cannot be ignored and that is the voice of the camera saying "Take another picture of it, you'll be glad you did," and so of course I always obey. Photos of panoramic views can sometimes be disappointing when seen later on at home and I find that including something in the foreground, such as leaves or bushes, provides depth and distance, as well as a contrast of colour between the nearby greens and the blue distance. As there is

no limit to taking photos nowadays, unlike the days of real film\*, I just end up taking snaps from all angles and viewpoints, in order to\* avoid a possibly disappointing single picture and the regret that I didn't take a few more.

- \* "road" and "route" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning
- \* "real" Insert the diphthong. Use a simple thick dot for "reel", as these two could be misread for each other in this context
- \* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"
- \* "avoid" Always insert the diphthong, as it is similar to "evade" in shape and meaning



### Blue Bell Hill

To the west, long walks lead off along the North Downs Way with more magnificent views of the "Garden of England". The south west side of Blue Bell Hill has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in order to\* provide protection for several rare chalkland plants. I have never seen bluebells here, but the name probably refers to a blue bell which was used to summon horses to draw vehicles up the hill between Maidstone and Chatham, hence the name being two words rather than one. This is a very quiet and peaceful place, and on a summer's day I could sit on the wooden plank bench without any desire to move on to the next location. I imagine the scene in other weather conditions, rain and mist, a pink dawn or red sunset, or a

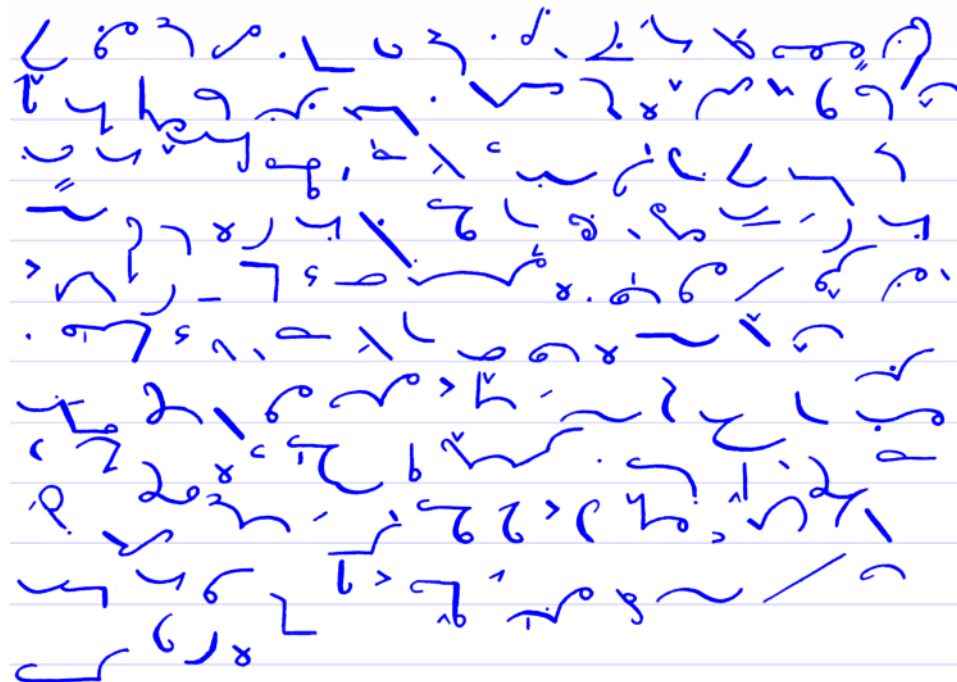
sunny\* day of thick snow\*, but realise we are not going to be here at such times\*. Only the desire to avoid\* rush hour traffic encourages us to leave and head for home. (804 words)

\* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

\* "sun, snow, sunny, snowy" Always insert the vowels

\* "at such times" Halving for the T of "times"

\* "avoid" Always insert the diphthong, as it is similar to "evade" in shape and meaning

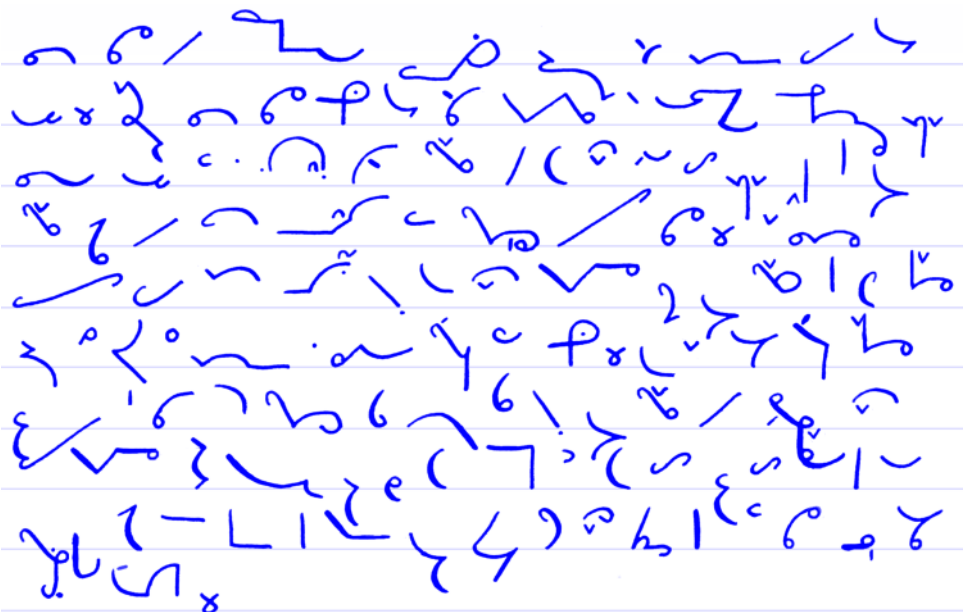


### Sales

January sales were once the big event of the year, a chance to shake off the post-Christmas lethargy and dive into the department store melée to grab a bargain or two. I learned about this from my Nan in the nineteen sixties, who stocked up with knitting wool every January, to keep her going throughout the year. She knitted baby clothes for friends, to supplement income, and she needed all the help she could get with the cost of materials. The summer sales are slightly less of a scrummage with the opportunity to stock

up for next summer. Going by my email inbox, there seem to be sales more or less\* all the time and many of them no longer have names that match the seasons. With clothing, it is primarily a clearing out of seasonal stock, swapping between warm and cool clothes, and then all the other items would also be included in the sale, to take advantage of the crowds and the impulse to spend money rather more quickly than usual.

\* Omission phrase "more (or) less"

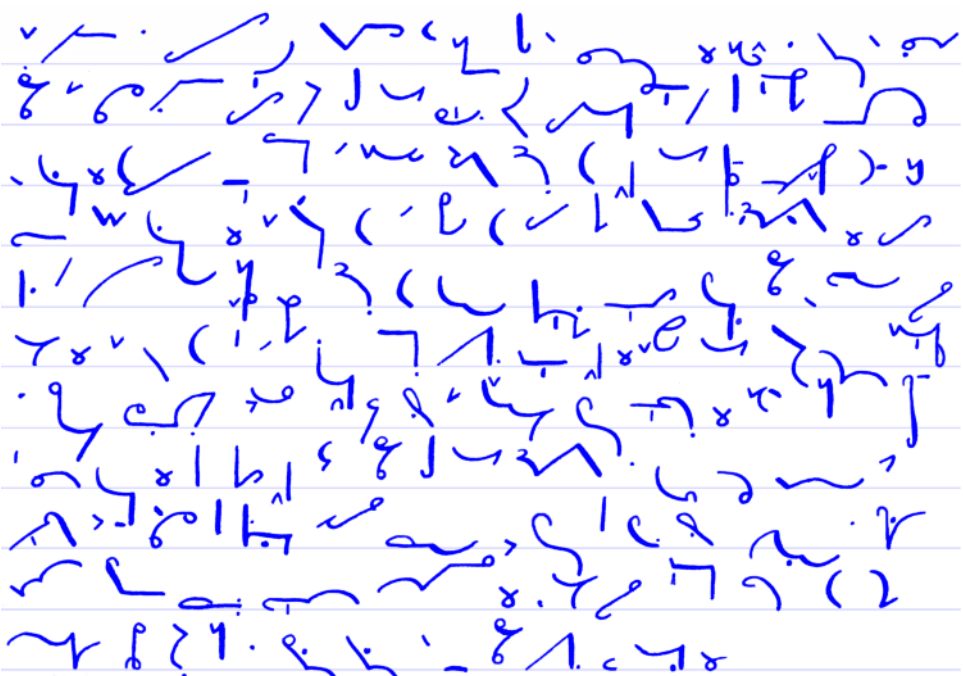


Sales

Some sales are stocktaking clearances, to clear the old to make way for the new. I suspect that some sales exist for the sole purpose of encouraging customers to try something new, with an alluring low price, which they might not want to try out at full price, and these are more accurately called promotions rather than sales. I sometimes wonder whether I am actually paying for my bargains through the full prices at other times of the year, as the shop has to make

a certain profit in order to\* exist. If I only bought items when they were on sale or promotion, then maybe those paying full price are subsidising my bargains, although the benefit to them is that they get what they want, when they want it, in pristine condition, and they can take it back if they change their mind, which you cannot do with sales goods, unless faulty.

\* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

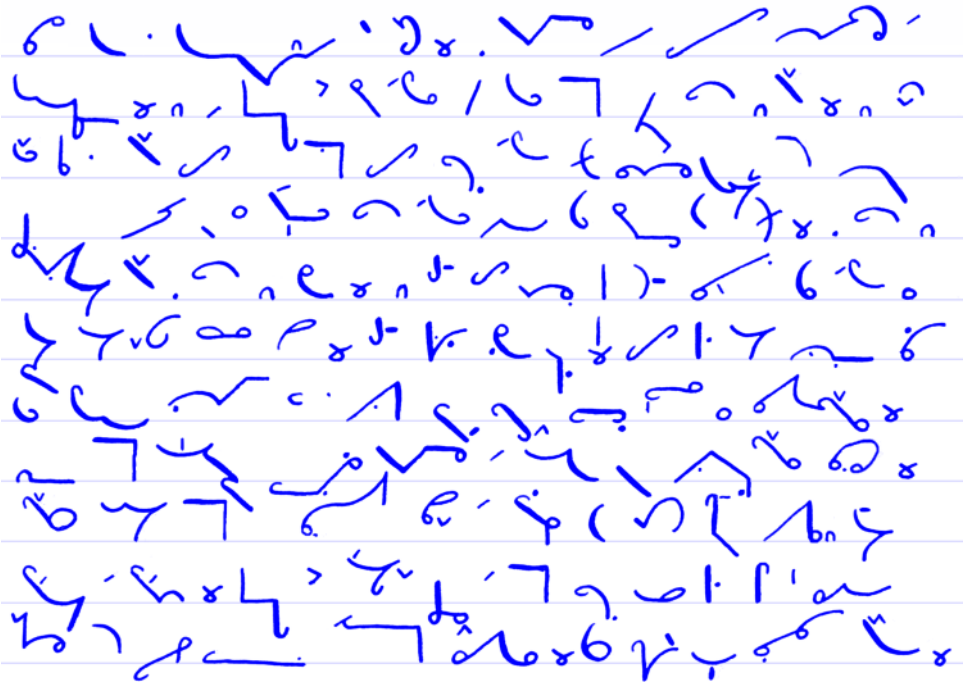


Sales

I recall a wonderful shoe bargain that I took advantage of some years ago. I found a pair of smart sandals on the sales rack, one of which had been in the sunny shop window which had caused\* the colours to fade. They were good quality and I knew I would be wearing them out in the dusty countryside, so I did not care about the fading. I bought them and stashed them away at the back of the wardrobe. One day, much later on, I decided to start wearing them, having demoted the current everyday sandals to garden use only. I put them on and continued getting ready to go out. Whilst in the bathroom I noticed a

strange squelching noise with each step on the vinyl floor covering. I thought I had trodden on some food. It turned out that the sandals had been in the wardrobe a few years too many, and the rubber of the soles had degraded and was sticking to the floor at every step, leaving a trail of little black sticky crumb marks. The only use I got from them was the mental satisfaction of thinking I had a spare pair of good sandals ready when needed.

\* "caused" Special outline, so as not to clash with "cost"

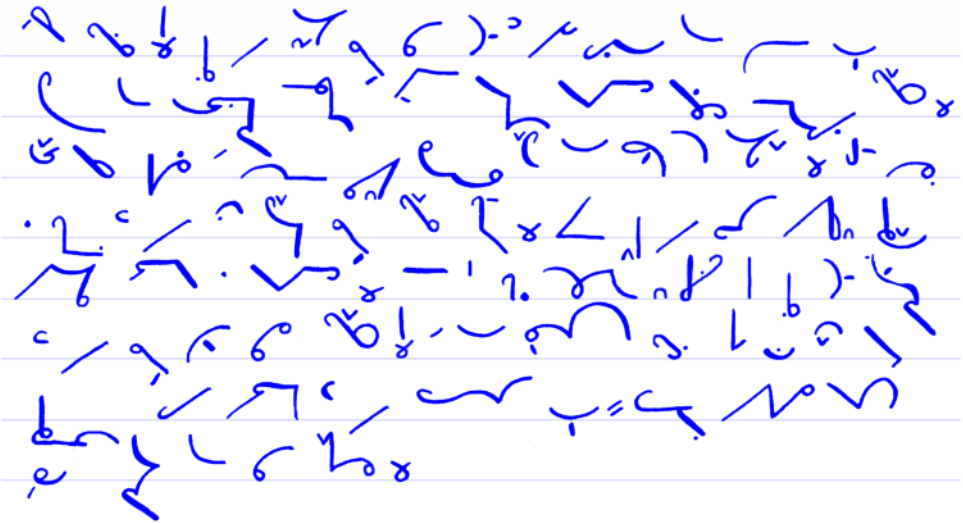


Sales

Sales have a vocabulary all of their own. The bargains are wonderful, marvellous and fantastic. You should take advantage of the special offers, which often get cheaper the more you buy. You might find it is a Buy One Get One Free offer (sometimes conveniently or maybe disparagingly referred to as BOGOF, more often written than spoken, though). The more you buy, the more you save. You don't want to miss it, so hurry, this offer is available only while stocks last. Don't delay, save today! One day only, mega sale event, everything marked with a red, blue, brown, green cross is half price\*. You can get

unbelievable\* clearance bargains and never-to-be-repeated price slashes. Prices not only get slashed, sliced and blasted, they also drop, reduce, fall, plunge and plummet. Take advantage of the online discounts and get free next day delivery on certain items, or use the click and collect service. This is truly no-hassle buying.

- \* "half-price" Using stroke F instead of hook, in order to join the phrase
- \* "unbelievable" This is using the short form for "believe" in the middle



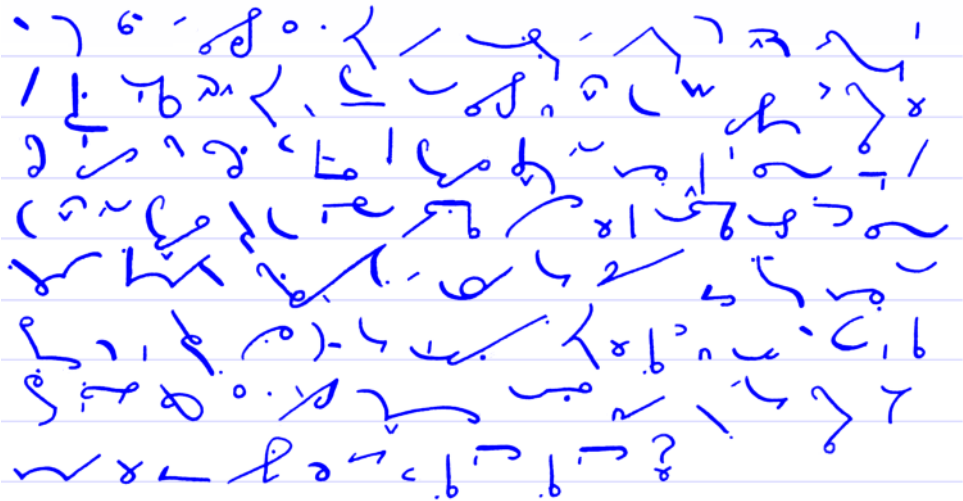
Sales

Stop press! It's our annual super sale, so what are you waiting for, look no further for incredible extraordinary\* rock-bottom, bargain basement, give-away\* prices. Find the best deals and make huge savings, either in store or online. Don't miss a trick with our mad Friday super price drop. Check out our greatly reduced designer ranges and grab a bargain. Go on, treat yourself, you deserve it, it's so affordable with our super low sales prices! And in

smaller print at the end might be the disclaimer, we regret that our normal no-quibble returns policy is not available for sale items.

- \* "extraordinary" Optional contraction
- \* "give-away" Much faster than using the short form, a hyphen and "away" separately.





Sales

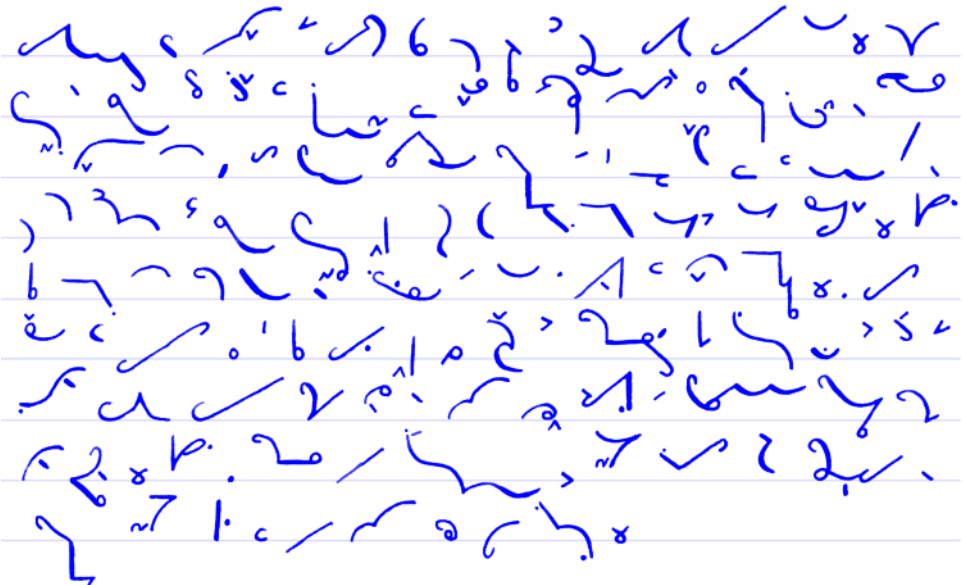
All your thoughts and hesitations as a shopper are intercepted\*, and repeated or countered, and printed on large dayglo\* notices around the shop, to overcome any hesitation you might have about the wisdom of the purchase. There is one particular phrase that tugs at everyone's desire not to miss out on something good, which they might not otherwise be able to have, causing regrets later on. It encourages instant action, something absolutely admirable, praiseworthy and necessary for the shorthand writer\* who cannot afford to miss any spoken word, but possibly less so for the unwary shopper. It's what you knew all along, but it is

splashed across the posters as an urgent reminder, in case you are putting off the purchase until tomorrow. Who can resist the words, "When it's gone, it's gone"? (923 words)

\* "intercepted" Note that the outline for "anticipated" uses full N and T strokes, and not a halved N, which provides greater distinction between these two outlines

\* "dayglo" was originally a brand name so sometimes spelled with capital D

\* Omission phrase "short(hand) writer"



Frogs

We have not been able to rely on the weather this year to tell us what season we think we are in. Early flowering of spring plants combined with continuing cold nights and frosty mornings has brought confusion to gardeners like me who want everything happening predictably and on cue, either cold with nothing much to see, or warm with the spring flowers out, so that they can be enjoyed in the sunshine. At least\* it is keeping me from being too complacent and in a rut with my activities. The one sign that winter is on its way out is the arrival of the frogspawn at the far end of the pond,

on the shallow shelf where there are lots\* of little mounds of weed and overhanging branches from the low shrubs. At least\* the frogs are conforming to the annual pattern, although there is no way to predict the actual day when our little friends will appear.

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

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

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper. The notes are dense and cover most of the page, with some numbers like 360 and 17 visible.

**Frogs**

Whilst taking some pictures of the frogspawn and the four frogs sitting on the remains of the blanket weed with their heads up, I noticed a large number of small lumps beneath the water on the lower shelf. All the lumps had frog legs and some of the bigger lumps had quite a few in all directions. I realised that this was one of those bumper frog years, which is not surprising with the absence of really cold weather that might have reduced their numbers. Frogs have better distance than

close vision, and almost 360 degree vision, so they always see me coming, and dip down below the surface before I get anywhere close. I have to approach from behind the pond, shielded from view by the low plants, moving slowly and not presenting a dark threatening figure against the bright sky. I have tried zooming in the camera from afar but just end up with sharp focus pictures of the netting and pieces of grass.

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper. The notes are dense and cover most of the page, with some numbers like 265 and 33 visible.

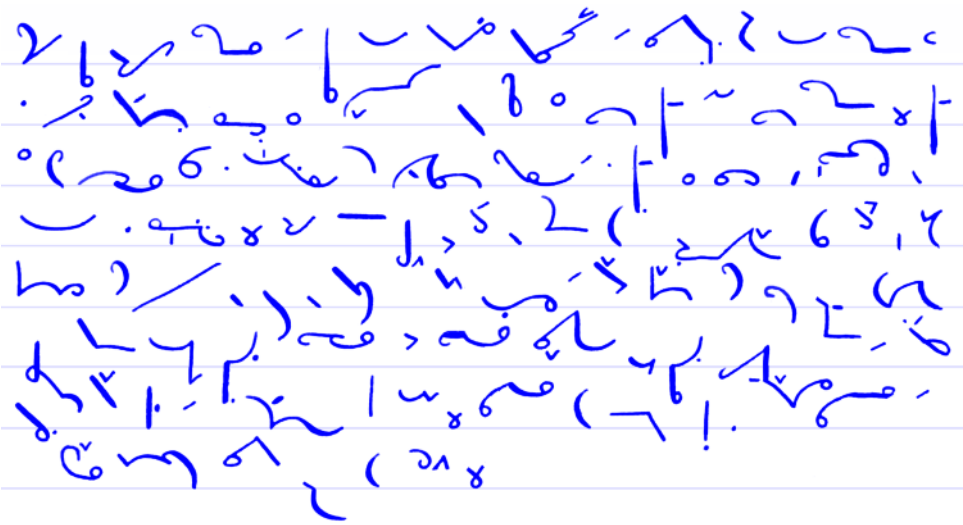
**Frogs**

I think of them as visitors to my garden but they might see it differently. Frogs are amphibians that have been around for 265 million years and are related to newts, salamanders and slowworms. There are about 5,000 species of frog in 33 families. The word can be traced back to a root word meaning jump. Their leg muscles account for 17 percent of total body mass. The tadpole is an aquatic larva which sounds much less attractive. They are amusing\* to watch but fall short of being cute and

cuddly, as they eat each other in their race to become the biggest and the fastest to grow, leave the water and live on land. The word comes from "toad poll" with poll meaning head. I rather like the term newtpole as well, but never having seen a newt in my pond or garden I don't ever get the chance to use it.

\* "amusing" and "amazing" Always insert the second vowel





Frogs

There are differences between frogs and toads in appearance, behaviour and habitat, although any frog with a rough bumpy skin is likely to be addressed as Mr Toad and not Mr Frog. Toad has other meanings as well, an unpleasant or loathsome person, and a toady is someone who grovels to another, a sycophant. I would go down to the pond to ask them to clarify this point, but I think at the moment\* they are rather

too busy to bother about names, and by the time they are free to talk, they will have disappeared back into the shady corners of the gardens, hiding under sheds, woodpiles and compost bins by day, and roaming at night. As long as they keep eating the slugs and flies, I am very happy to have them around. (613 words)

\* Omission phrase "at (the) moment"

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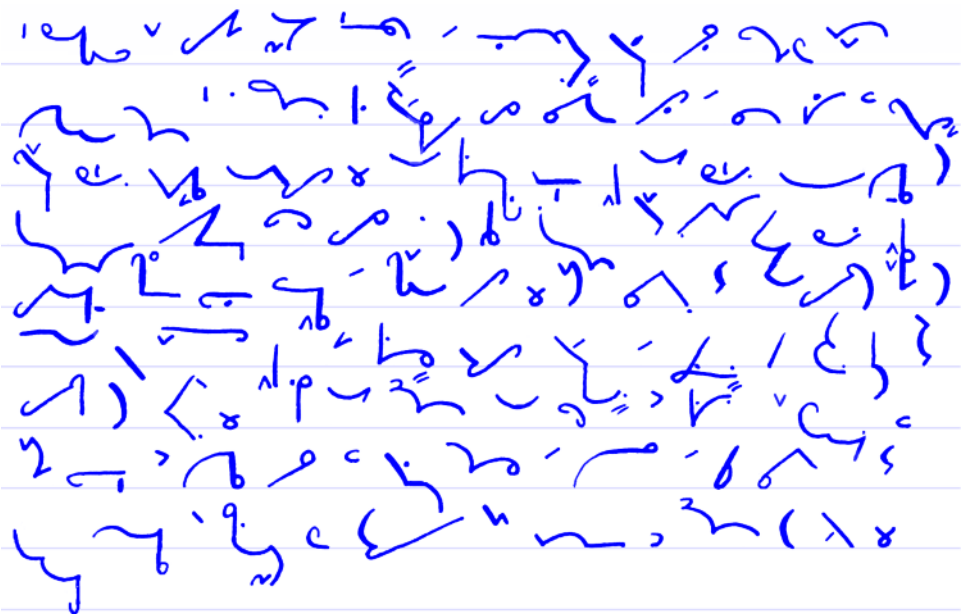
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Boat Race

On Sunday afternoon\* I watched the annual Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, from the comfort of my living room on a stormy day of blustery winds, heavy rain and some hail, with brilliant bright sunny\* periods in between. Any temptation to go out in the sunny\* interludes was firmly rejected more than once, an easy decision confirmed by the rapidly changing scene outside the window\*, dark grey clouds and driving rain. I was hoping that the weather was going to be kinder out on the Thames between Putney and Chiswick\*, which thankfully it was, although the water was choppy. Sat in the warm in front of the telly, I flinched when I saw the crew of the ladies race, with bare arms and legs, and just hoped that the 15-minutes of

strenuous effort they were about to make would warm them up.

\* Omission phrase "Sunday (a)f(ter)noon"  
Keep the last N hook clear, so it does not look like the similar phrase "Sunday ev(en)ing" which uses F/V hook and stroke Ing

\* "sunny" Always insert the vowels in "sun/snow, sunny/snowy"

\* "window" Prudent to insert the last vowel, as "windy" would also make sense, if you moved the comma to after "outside"

\* "Chiswick" is pronounced "chizik"

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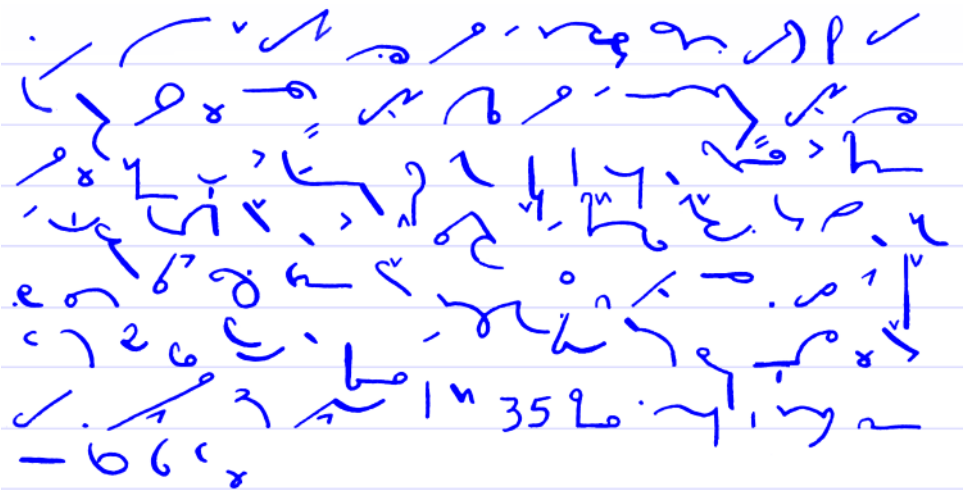
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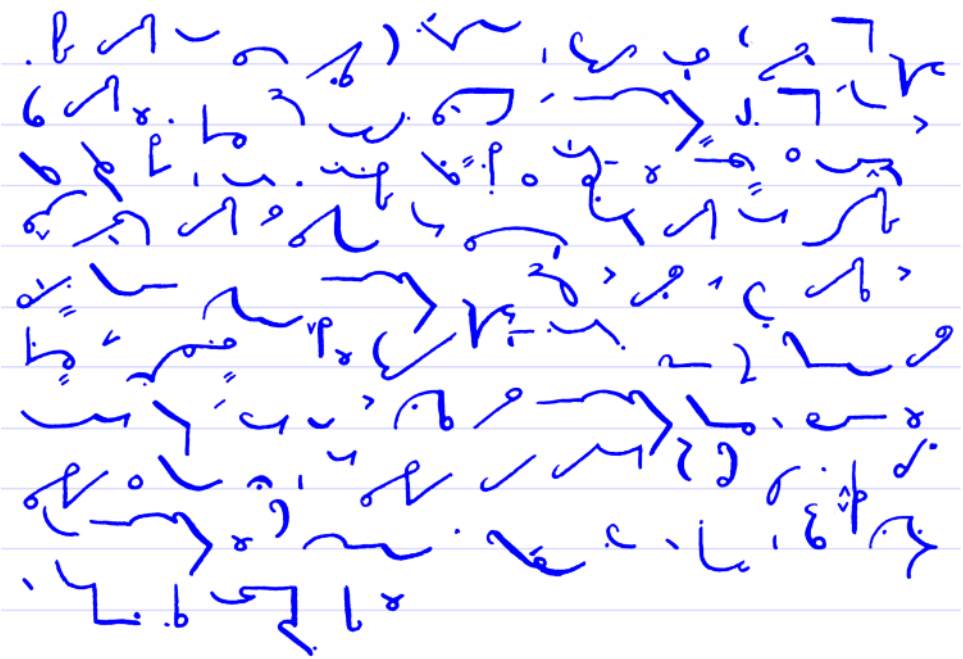
**Boat Race**

An hour later I watched the men's race and I am glad to say that the\* stormy weather stayed away for both races. Oxford won the Ladies race and Cambridge won the Men's race. I took note of the vocab throughout and have divided it into two paragraphs of the dramatic and uncomfortable, followed by two of the hopeful and triumphant, and finally for the last two I have saved some choice phrases that you can apply to

yourself as you row against the winds and the tide with your shorthand efforts, overcoming all difficulties and achieving all your speed goals. By the way, the rowers were rowing at about 35 strokes a minute but I am sure you can go faster than that.

\* Omission phrase "I am glad (to) s(ay) that the"

Handwritten practice lines for the first page of the article.



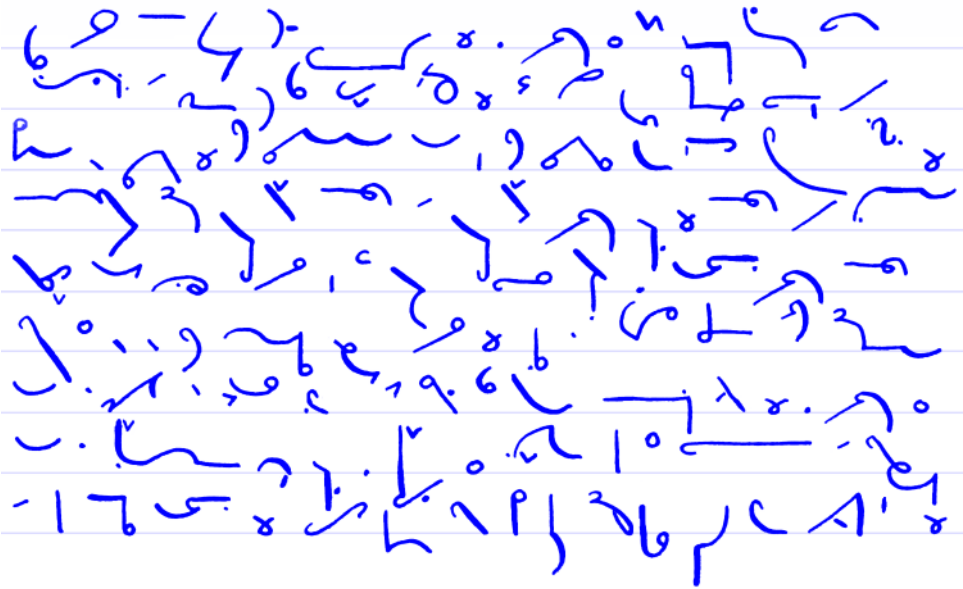
**Boat Race**

The state of the water in some reaches was appalling, but everyone knows that you've\* got to deal with this water. The teams were initially sluggish, and Cambridge didn't get off to the best possible start, but now the intensity of the pace-setting is unsustainable. Oxford has encountered slightly rougher water and is heading for the smoother water in the shelter of the Surrey bank, leaving Cambridge to deal with the worst of the waves and the evil waters of the Thames on the Middlesex side. They were caught

napping, you can see the breaking waves entering the boat, and near the end of the Ladies race Cambridge begins to sink. History is being made but not the history we wanted, although there is still an outside chance for Cambridge. They are making a bruising effort to continue but with this level of fatigue it's incredibly difficult.

\* "you've" Apostrophied phrases use full outlines and not short forms

Handwritten practice lines for the second page of the article.

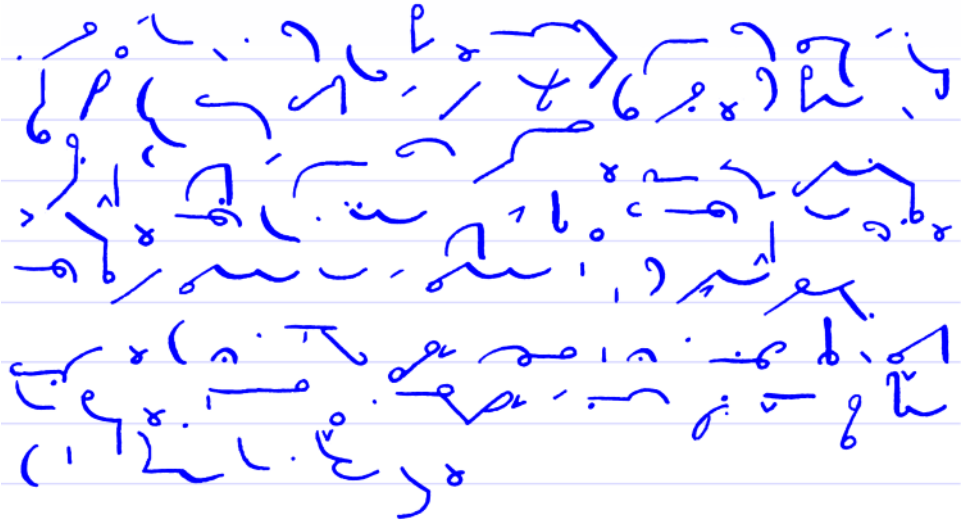


Boat Race

These races can change so quickly. The river is about to get far more animated and you can see those white horses. With the last few strokes the crew are starting to slip. They are hanging in, but their hopes have gone further adrift. Cambridge were beaten by Oxford and beaten by the river today. Oxford are lagging behind in the Men's race, but with both crews battling the angry river, Oxford probably has two to three\* minutes to save the race. It's a thankless task and

they are working in a world of noise, effort and the spray that is being kicked up. The river is in a dynamic mood today, the tideway is alive, it has character and personality, and it gets angry. One team member said it was the worst conditions she had ever rowed on.

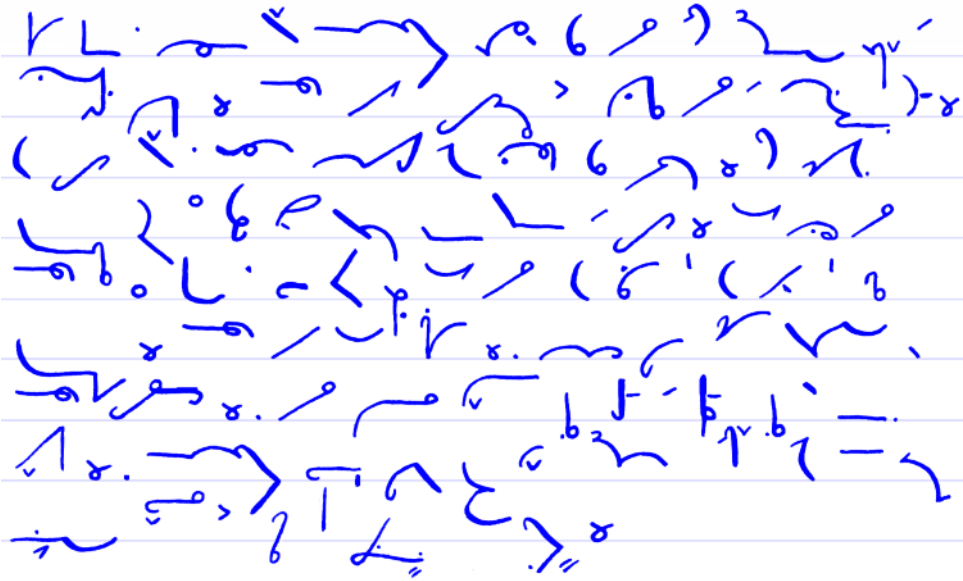
\* "two to three" Can't use an omission phrase here, as that would be "two (or) three"



Boat Race

The race is off to a very even start. Cambridge look very smooth and confident at this stage, they have clear water and are in charge of this race. They are starting to stretch out that lead and look more relaxed. You can hear the wingbeats of the boats. Oxford have a commanding lead and the advantage is with Oxford out in front.

Oxford are hanging in and hanging on but they are rowing reasonably cleanly. They made a couple of serious mistakes but made an excellent decision to head for safety. The cox is an experienced and calm steely guy, he is driving them on, asking for a final push.

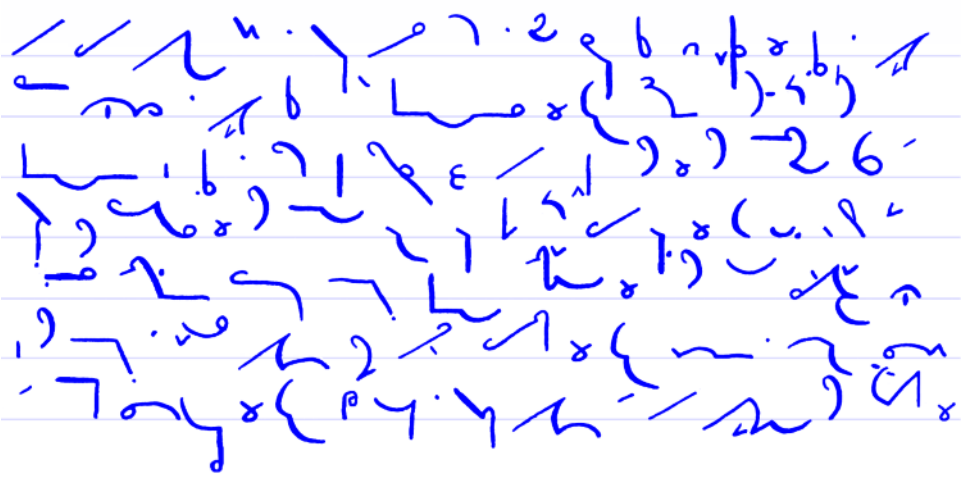


**Boat Race**

It will\* take a mistake by Cambridge to lose this race and they are working to try and maintain the lead. Oxford are the winners of the Ladies' race and emphatically so. They win by a handsome margin and have mastered this river. They are worthy victors, especially as those who have lost before, to come back and win. In the Men's race, Oxford is doing a great job to stay in the race, they sail on, they row

on, towards victory. Oxford are in control. The moment will shortly belong to Oxford once again\*. The race looks like it's done and dusted, it's all coming right. The Cambridge crew will be feeling light, warm and dry, and they can hear the echoing cries of the cheers at Chiswick Bridge.

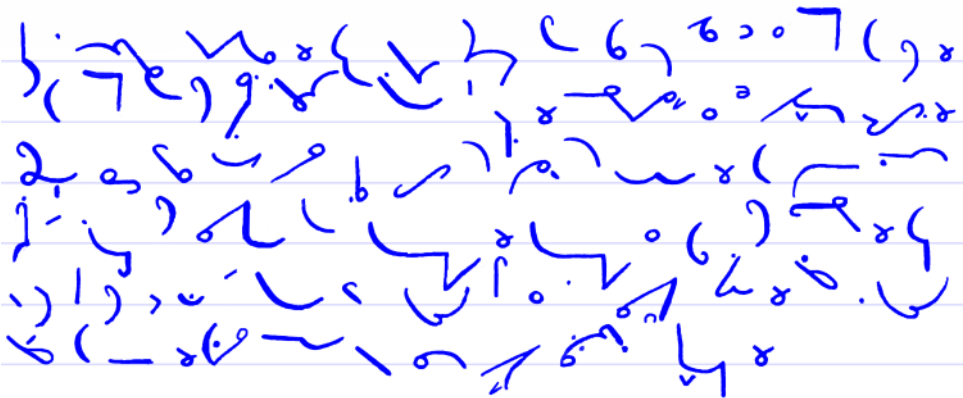
\* Omission phrase "it (w)ill" "wu(n)s again"



**Boat Race**

Are we reading about a boat race or a shorthand speed test, you decide. It's a real significant moment, a real test of techniques. They have worked so hard on their technique but it's a very different prospect when you are out there. They are gathering themselves and battling through nerves. They are going to have to do it the

hard way today. They need to step on the gas and break clear, keep digging and driving. They are in survival mode but they are keeping a nice rhythm through the rough water. They have to make a move somehow and get some confidence. They have settled into a better rhythm and are reasserting their authority.



**Boat Race**

It was an impressive performance. They have built so much over this year and that is what has got them through. They got their strategy absolutely bang on today. Experience is what is required to win. There is no second place in the race, it's win or lose or nothing. They look calm, controlled and confident, they are heading for victory. Victory is within their grasp. They had to see it through to the end and being able to

finish at all is a huge achievement. Past the finish post they come. There's\* going to be some real celebrating tonight. (1009 words)

\* If you have already written the short form for "there", add the Circle S and then also add an intervening circle vowel after the stroke, or put a wavy underline as a reminder.

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