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Blogs - 2021 - February

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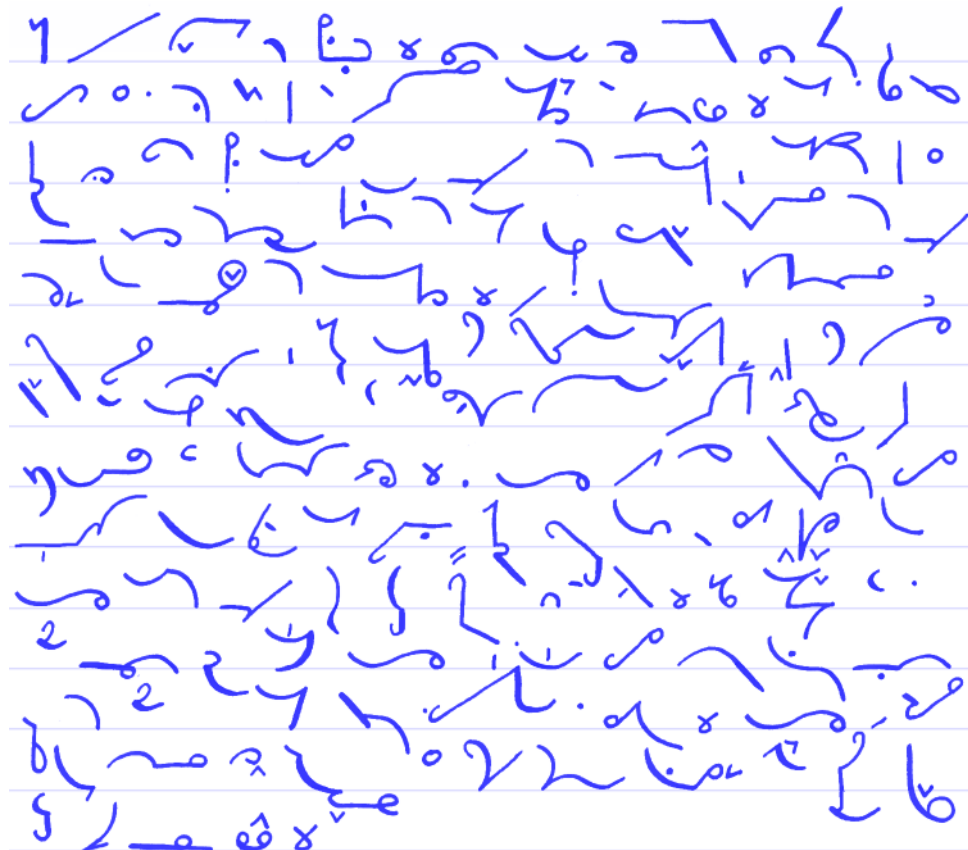
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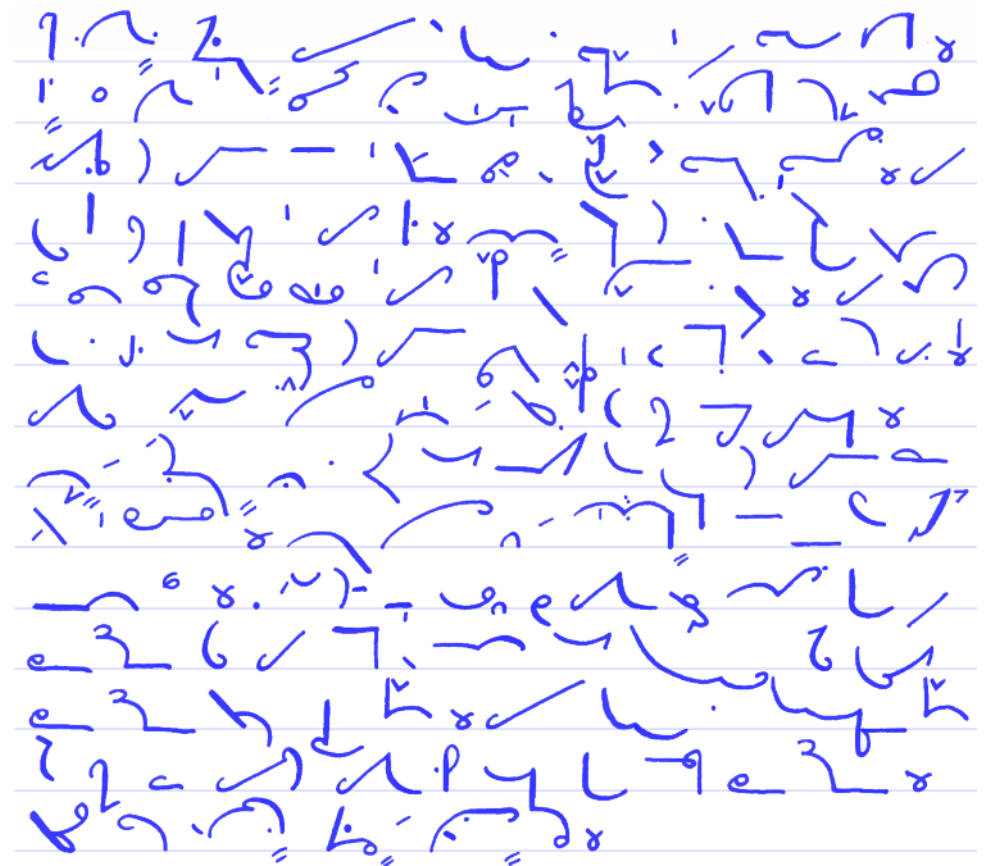
Staycation Letters

I do rather like the word staycation*. Some new words can be somewhat jarring but this one has an air about it of relaxed enjoyment of home comforts. In the past it would have meant more staying in one's own country or county, but in the last year it has come to mean remaining at home or only visiting nearby parks or country areas for exercise or entertainment*. Our fictional holiday makers would probably use email but I think that nowadays they are preferring to write out their letters by hand instead, to bring that sorely lacking reality and personal touch to their communications with family and friends. The names are the most popular ones currently being chosen in the UK and it would be prudent for you to sort the outlines for names in your

country, so that they do not trip you up. I think it is unlikely that a shorthand exam would have unusual names but common ones may be "fair game" to test your shorthand knowledge before awarding a certificate. Names should always have the maximum amount of vocalisation, as there are so many variants, and avoid shortening devices that do not show the exact sounds. (200 words)

* "staycation" Keeping the two parts of the word as separate strokes ensures the outline remains recognisable

* "entertainment" Contraction that omits the middle N



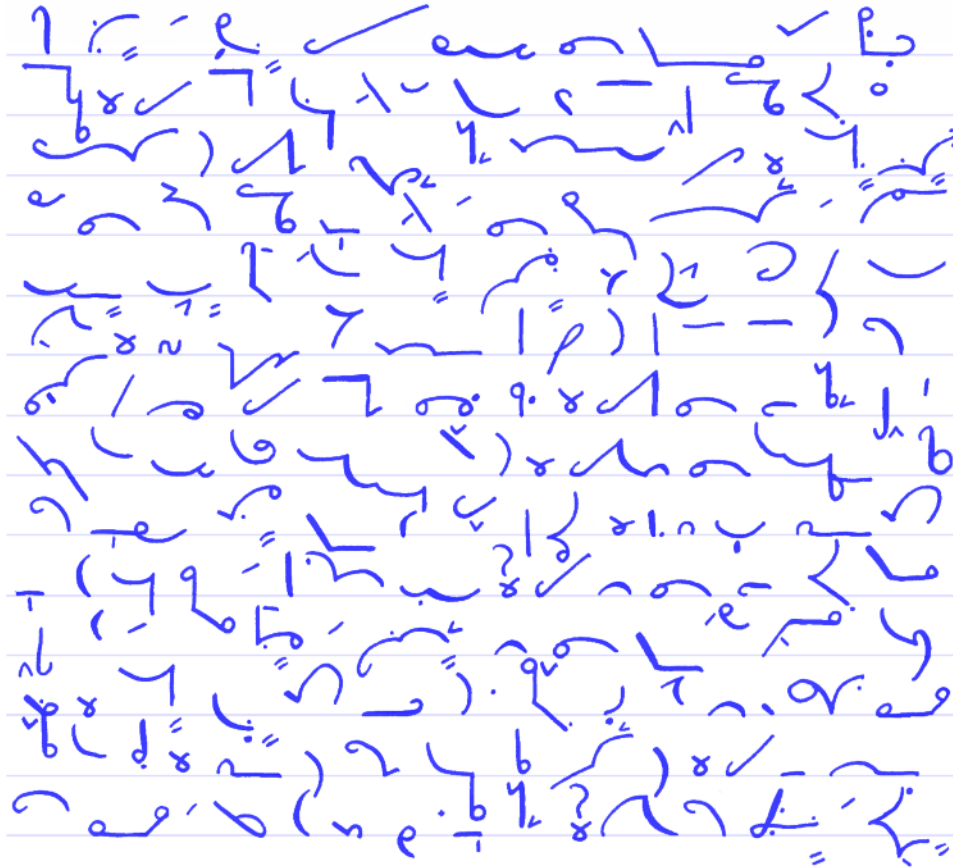
Staycation Letters

Dear Alfie and Jacob, We are all having a great time on our garden holiday. Dad has left half the lawn uncut and it is now a wild area of grasses and weeds, so we can go on bug hunts, to identify all the creepy crawlies. We even had three different butterflies on one day. Mum bought us a big paddling pool, with some smooth stones on one side to be like a beach. We also have a tent in the greenhouse, so we can sleep outside, but without getting too cold or wet! We have been writing letters home and posting them through the kitchen window. Mia and Oscar made a shop in the garage for food, so we can stock up on snacks. Maybe later on, you and Muhammad* can come over and join

the game with us. The not so good news is that we have to spend the morning doing our school work, then we get to camp in the afternoon, and then finish the school work before dinner time. We are having a fantastic time, although during the cold weather we have stayed indoors doing extra school work. Best wishes* from Oliver, James and Logan. (200 words)

* "Muhammad" This name ending in D has full stroke D, versions ending in T use a halved M, which makes each more legible

* "Best wishes" Upward Ish in order to join the phrase



Staycation Letters

Dear Ella and Sophie, We are sending you some pictures of our staycation activities. We got fed up not being able to go out clothes shopping as normal, so we had the brilliant idea of making our own. Auntie Emily sent some of her clothes to cut up and some spare material, and last week* Uncle Noah dropped off Auntie Lily's old sewing machine which was in their loft. You have to turn the handle to make it stitch, so it can go very slowly, which means we get the seams straight. We had some great ideas down on paper for new fashions invented by us. We have made some fantastic dresses from cousin Isla's big old white teeshirts. Did you know you can also cut them into strips and do arm knitting? We made some great shopping bags out of that, and Thomas and William made some

big soft rugs for their bedsides. Auntie Evie also gave us a stripy* sheet and that made two swirly skirts for dancing. You can see from the photos it is really easy. We could* make more skirts and post them to you, is that a good idea? Love from Jessica and Charlotte*.

* Omission phrase "las(t w)eek"

* "stripy" Insert the final vowel, to prevent misreading as "striped"

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

* "Charlotte" Ensure the L is clearly halved, and with the vowel sign added, so it does not look like "Shirley"



Staycation Letters

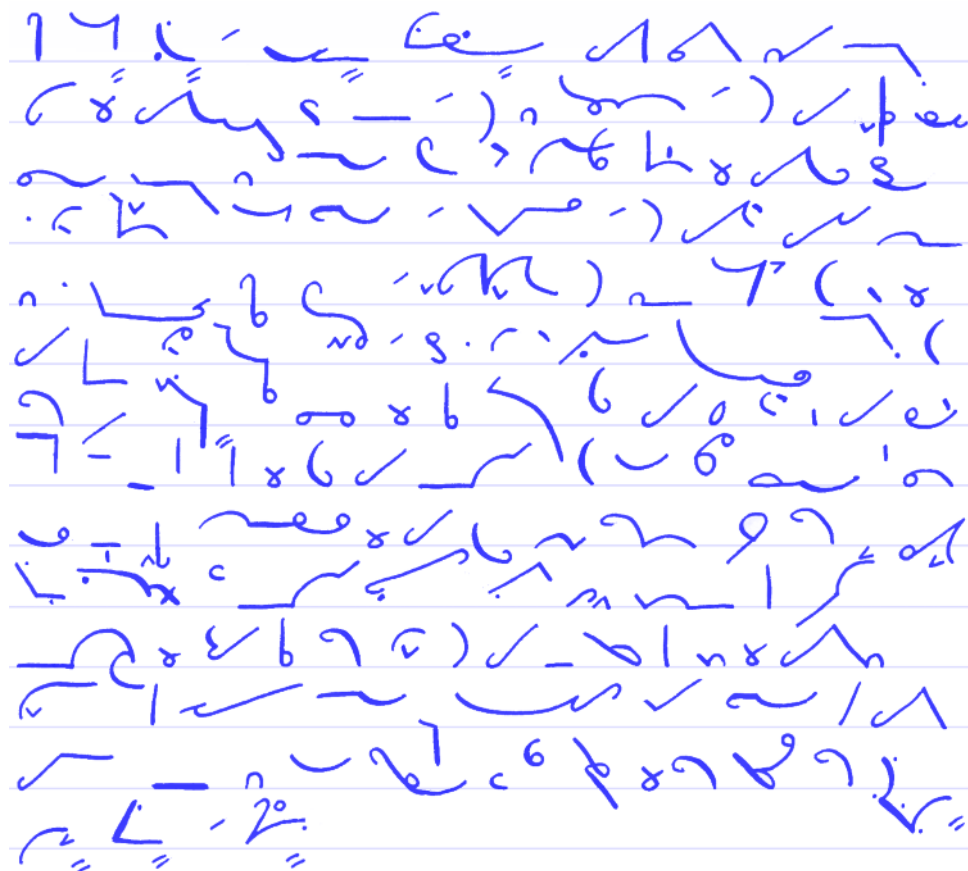
Dear George and Harry, How are you both doing now that we are all having to stay home? We were all hoping to go out with you all to the concert in the park, but that is now off and seeing it on screen is just not the same. We decided to do something a bit different so we can all enjoy some music together. We dressed up in our dancing clothes, put on the concert music, and we did all the songs and dances from our living room. I have emailed you the video. Grandma Olivia and Grandpa Lewis, who live in the annexe with us, still had their Christmas lights out, so we made a special background of them and some coloured lamps. The curtains were shut and Dad waved torches around to make disco lights, which looked really awesome. I am

sure the neighbours heard us but at least* it was in the daytime. What do you think of our performance? I know your piano lessons have stopped for a while, maybe you could* dress up as old timers and record some old songs for us, we would love to see that. Best wishes* Lucy and Amelia. (200 words)

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

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

* "Best wishes" Upward Ish in order to join the phrase



Staycation Letters

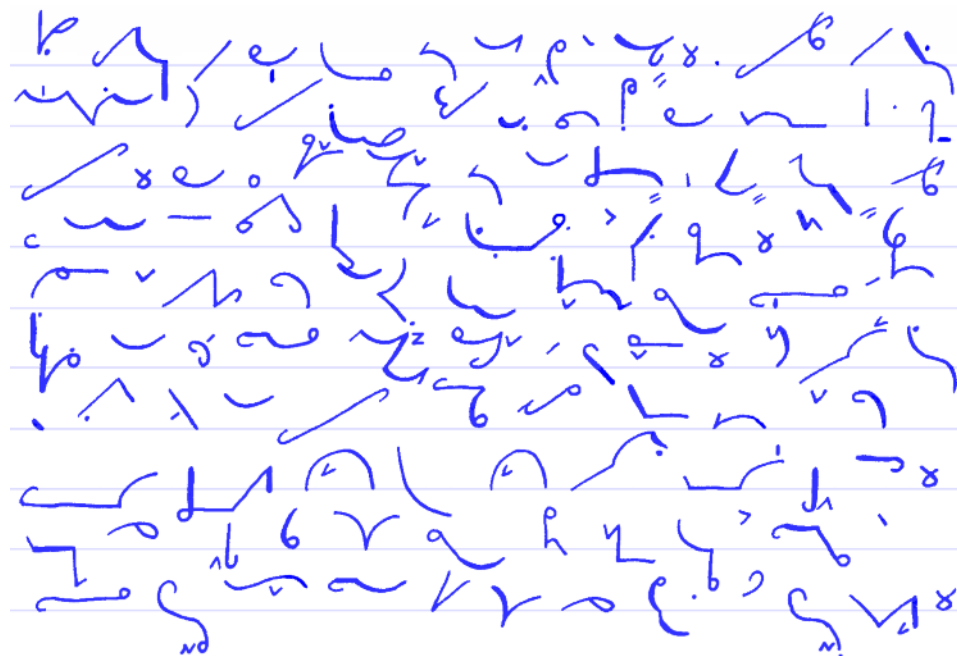
Dear Auntie Ava and Uncle Alexander, We do hope you are keeping well. We have not been able to come and see you for some time* and so we decided to send you something to keep you going over all the long months at home. We have been spending a lot of time in the garden and parks, and so we thought we would make you a picture of the trees, flowers and wildlife, so you can enjoy them too. We took lots of photos, and spent a lot of rainy afternoons copying them from our Ipad screens. It is harder than we first thought but we soon got quite good at it. Then we coloured them in, as well as sticking on some things cut out of magazines. We even made the frame ourselves from cereal

packet cardboard with coloured yarn wrapped round to make it really colourful. That way it is very light so we could* post it to you. We hope* you like it and we are going to do another one of our garden, which we hope we can give you in person when that is possible. Very best wishes from Isabella, Leo, Jack and Charlie. (200 words) (Total 1000 words)

* "for some time" Halving to represent the T of "time"

* "Ipad" "Ipod" Always insert the second vowel

* Omission phrase "We (h)ope"

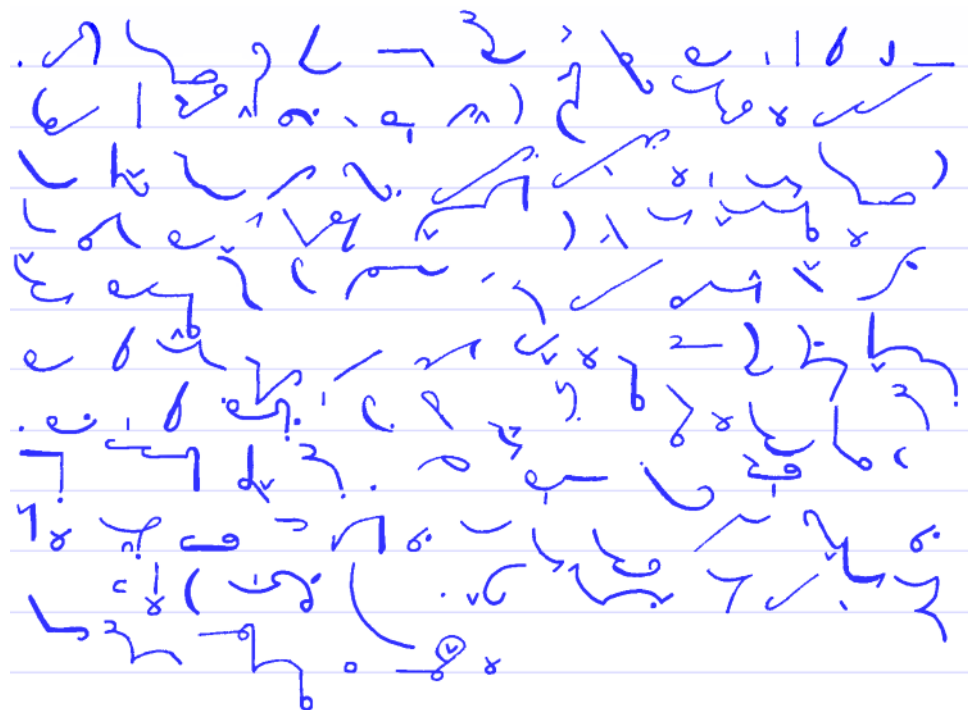


A Bit Of Snow

At last we have had our snow fix here in the south of England. The winter months are bare and unappealing, so we are convinced that we need some settling snow to make it a true winter. Snow is highly unlikely here in December, but January and February are the months when anything can happen, depending on the vagaries of the jet stream. About this time last week* I returned from shopping, having admired the spring crocus and daffodils in front

gardens and enjoying the sunshine and blue sky. I was really far too wrapped up in winter clothes and once back home I very quickly discarded layer after layer, relieved to cool down again. To get the most out of this “early spring”, as it appeared, I took photos of the groups of crocus flowers in my garden, which are easily missed as they have a short flowering period.

* Omission phrase "las(t w)eek"



A Bit Of Snow

The weather forecast throughout January kept warning of the possibility of* snow, but it just did not come this way, it always seemed to scoot* round us and travel northwards. We were being deprived of having our own brief winter wonderland. But now the forecast was for heavy snow and the percentage of likelihood was up in the nineties. Finally the snow clouds arrived over last weekend* and here we are, surrounded by shallow snow, just enough to turn our world white. Today's walk was not so much admiring the scene* but just concentrating on every step to avoid the icy patches. Finger tips* were getting colder and colder*, despite wearing the most snug combination of gloves that I had. Insulating gloves cannot hold heat in, if the

fingers are not providing the heat to begin with! They unfroze after a while, and for me the only way to ensure warm extremities is exercise.

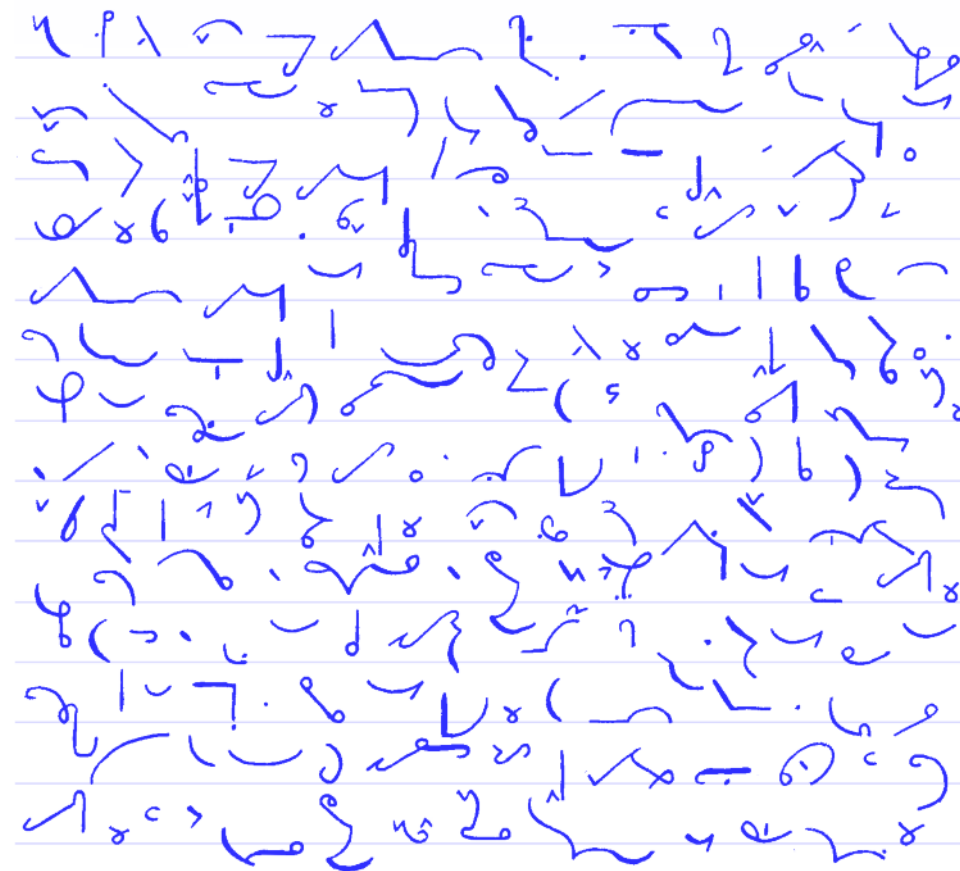
* "possibility" Optional contraction

* "scoot" Insert the vowel, as "scout" could also make sense

* Omission phrase "las(t w)eekend"
"col(der and) colder"

* "scene" Insert the vowel so it is not misread as "snow"

* "to being" Based on the short form phrase "to be"



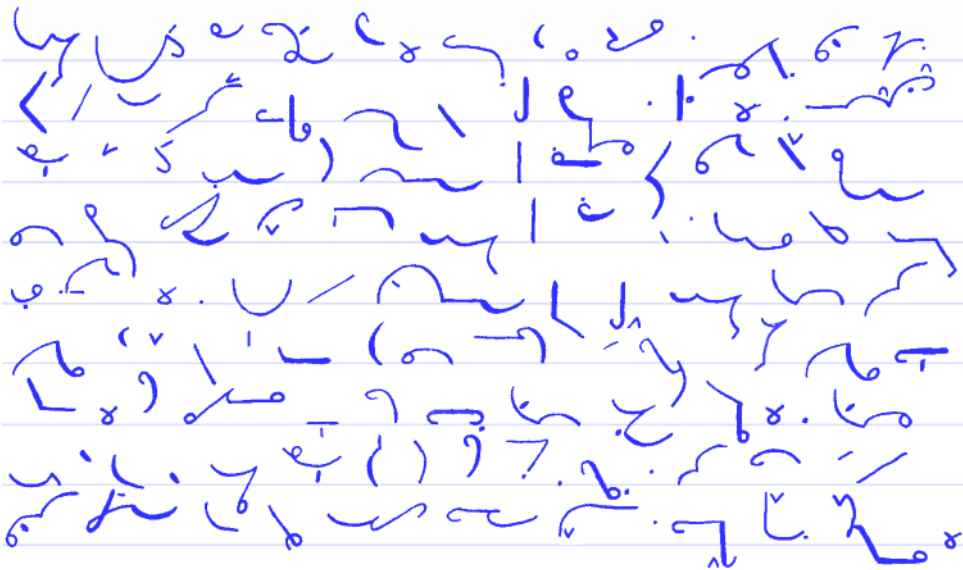
A Bit Of Snow

I have set up my kitchen webcam, draping the cable through the house and upstairs to my computer corner. I can see if the birds are looking for food in the cleared patch outside the kitchen window, which means I can go down and replenish as necessary. This causes the slight distraction of working with one eye on the webcam window in the corner of the screen, but it does save me from having to go down at intervals to check up. Sorting out the birdbaths is a necessity in freezing* weather, hammering them with the broom head to break the ice. Two are of stone, but the third one is a metal dish on a stand so it is easy to clear, I just topple it and the ice falls out. My efforts were repaid by multiple visits from

mobs of starlings, all splashing about noisily in the cold water. They cannot all fit in at once*, and one of them actually tried to have a bath in the snow, in frustration at not getting a space in the dish. They came back a few hours later for another session, and once again* I went out to replace the grey slush with fresh water. With all the vigorous splashing, I found icicles forming under the stone rim.

* "freezing" "frozen" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

* Omission phrases "at (w)uns" "wu(n)s again"

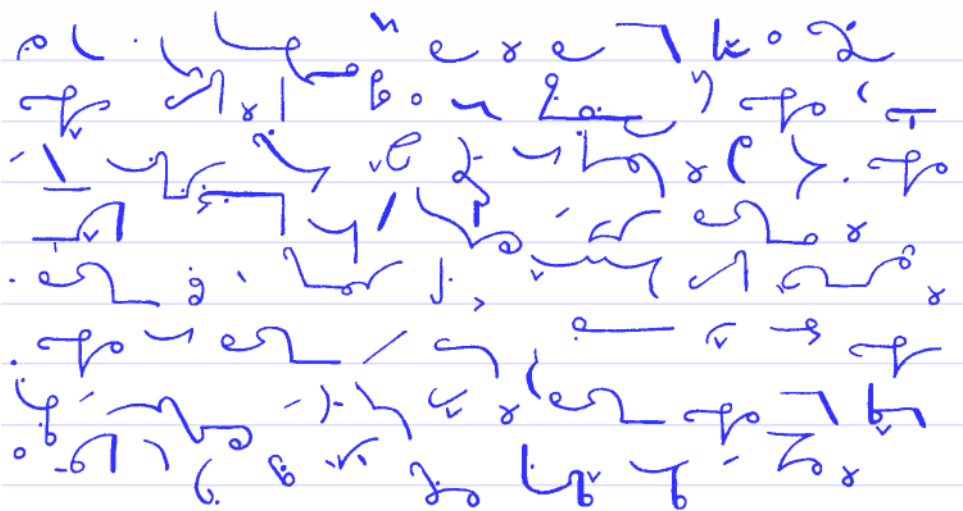


A Bit Of Snow

Fortunately the fish pond has not frozen* over. Clearing that is always a miserably slow and chilly job, which in really cold conditions may have to be done several times a day. The accumulation of snow on the pond netting was making it sag, which was solved by stringing some spare washing line cord underneath it, anchored to a fence post, to keep the nets aloft. The fish are lurking deep down, underneath the foam lily leaves that I put on to give them

some cover and privacy until the leaves grow back. They are circles cut from green foam kneeling pads. The foams now all have two inches of snow on them so they are catching the breeze a little more, and are slowly jostling for position in one corner, like a crowd of tiny icebergs.

* "frozen" "freezing" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning



A Bit Of Snow

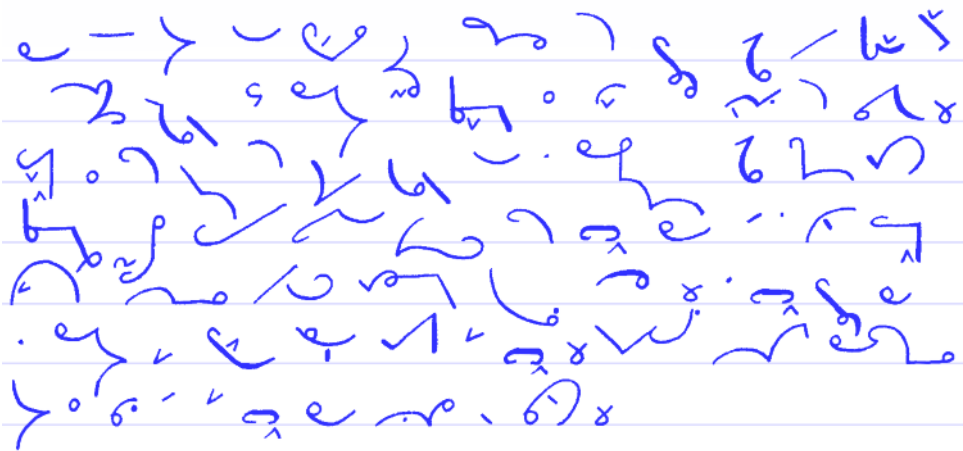
Let's have a few facts and figures* about snow. Snow can be defined as frozen* crystalline water. It starts as individual hexagonal ice crystals that grow and become intricately branched, whilst suspended in the atmosphere. As they fall, the crystals collide and aggregate into large formations, and ultimately snowflakes. A snowflake consists of approximately ten to the nineteenth* water molecules. The crystals in the snowflake are clear but they scatter light because of the crystal facets

and imperfections, and so appear white. Snowflake crystals can be described as: solid or thin plates, hollow prisms, dendrites, needles and columns.

* "frozen" "freezing" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

* Omission phrase "fac(t)s (and) figures"

* "ten to the nineteenth" In normal writing, this would be shown with a superscript 19

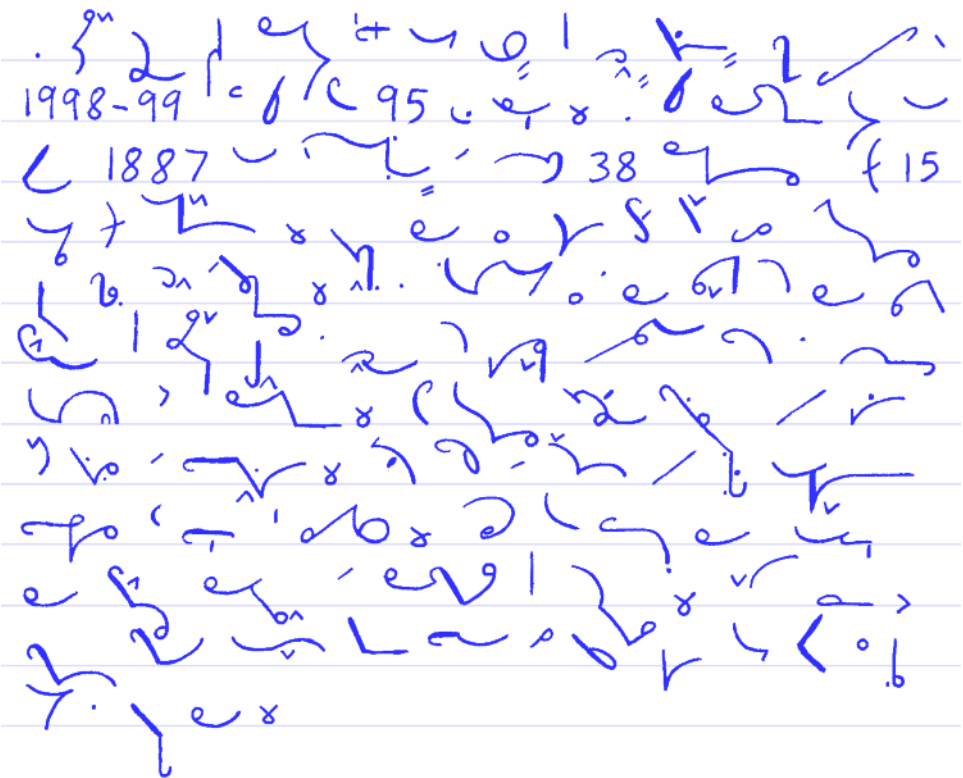


A Bit Of Snow

Snow can fall in flurries, showers, storms or blizzards, and these are defined by the measurement of visibility, with the snowfall described as light, moderate or heavy. Whiteout* is very poor or zero visibility in a snowstorm, and this term also describes the situation where uniform illumination from ground snow and a low cloud layer makes recognition of landscape features

impossible. A ground blizzard is not a snowfall but the blowing of snow already on the ground. Partially melted snowflakes fall as sleet, and on the ground snow melts to slush.

* "Whiteout" Keeping both original forms in this compound word



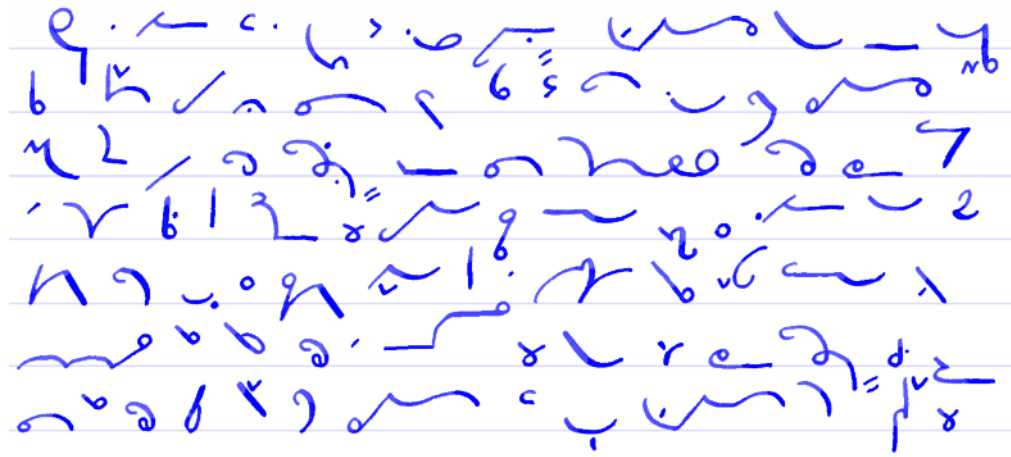
A Bit Of Snow

The highest season total snowfall occurred in the United States at Mount Baker during the winter of 1998-99 with just over 95 feet of snow. The largest snowflake fell in January 1887 in Montana and measured 38 centimetres (15 inches) in diameter. Powdery snow is easily blown by winds and forms deep drifts around obstructions. An avalanche is a snow slide or snow slip, flowing at high speed down a mountain or hillside, resulting from a mechanical failure of the snowpack. Other forms of frozen* precipitation are hail, ice pellets and graupel. Hoar frost and rime are needle-like

crystals that grow on surfaces. Machines for clearing snow include snow blowers, snow ploughs and snow brushes at airports. I'll* stick to the broom brush in my back garden as the best tool for the job, as it's only a bit of snow. (993 words)

* "frozen" "freezing" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

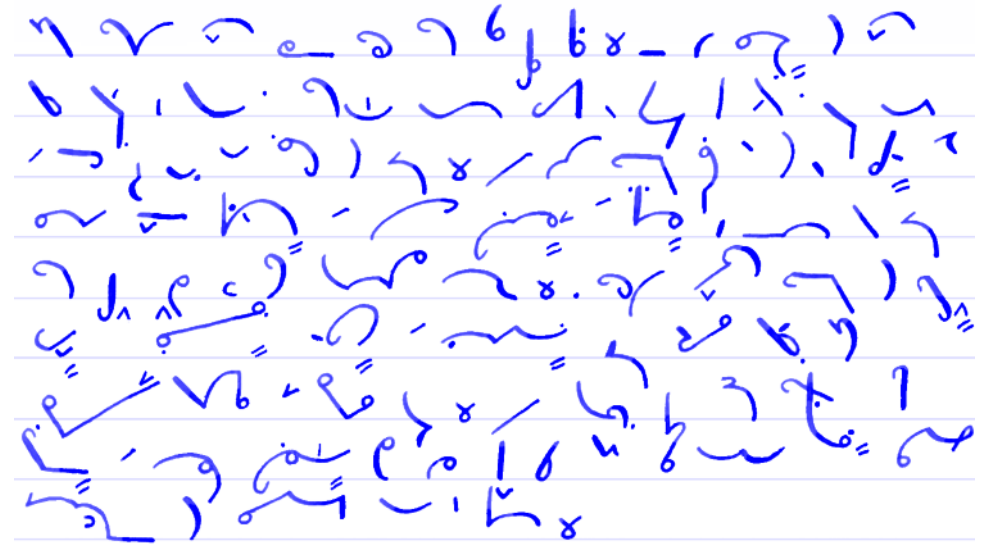
* "I'll" Apostrophied forms always have their vowels written in. Here the full diphthong is written unjoined, so it does not look like the phrase "I will"



Fraser's Friends

As we have had an article with a few of the commonest UK forenames being given nowadays, it is time we met some other people, those with the more common British surnames and I have asked our friend Fraser to give some reminiscences from his school, college and early days at

work. We know he is going to draft his article in shorthand, which will be very neat, as he will be writing at a leisurely pace while calling up memories of his past friends and colleagues. Being old school, Fraser tends to call some of his friends just by their surname, with no forename or title.



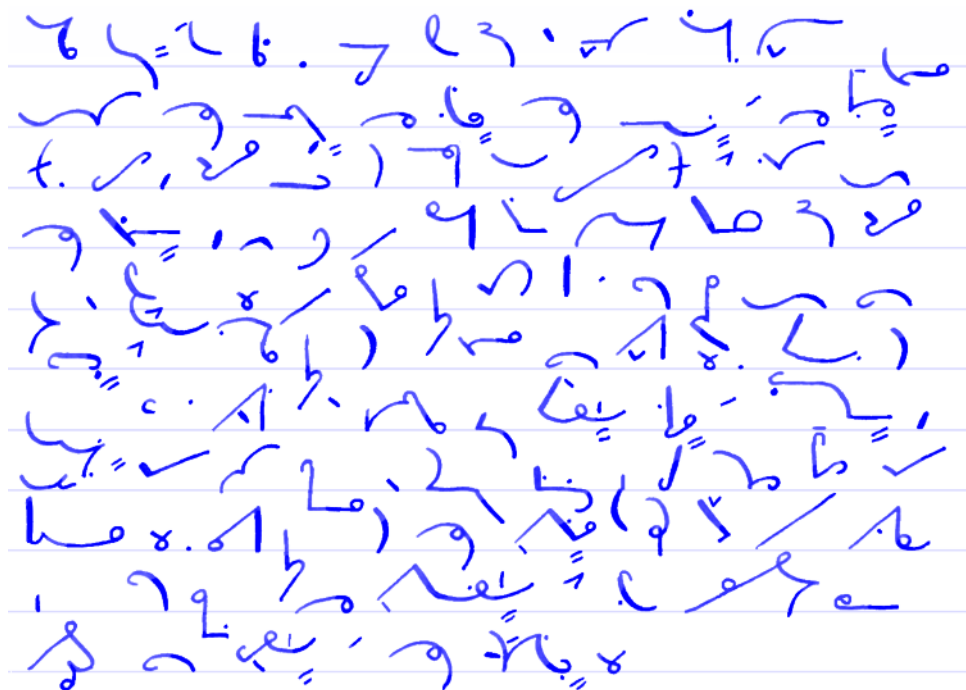
Fraser's Friends

I remember very well* my school friends from those distant days. Good old Smith was my best buddy, but being a very common name, we had to change it up a bit now and again, but that need not concern us here. Our little group consisted of us two, Jones and that smart guy Taylor, and later on Williams and Adams who came up here from down south when their families moved. The friendly rival group was Brown, White, Harris, Walsh and Martin who were* always boasting of their superior abilities on the sports field. Our

favourite teachers were Professor Davies*, Dr Black and Mrs Wilson, as they let us do just about anything as long as the homework was handed in on time.

* Omission phrases "very (w)ell" "who (w)ere"

* "Davies" This version can be distinguished by using a long vowel in the second syllable, as opposed to the shorter vowel of "Davis"



Fraser's Friends

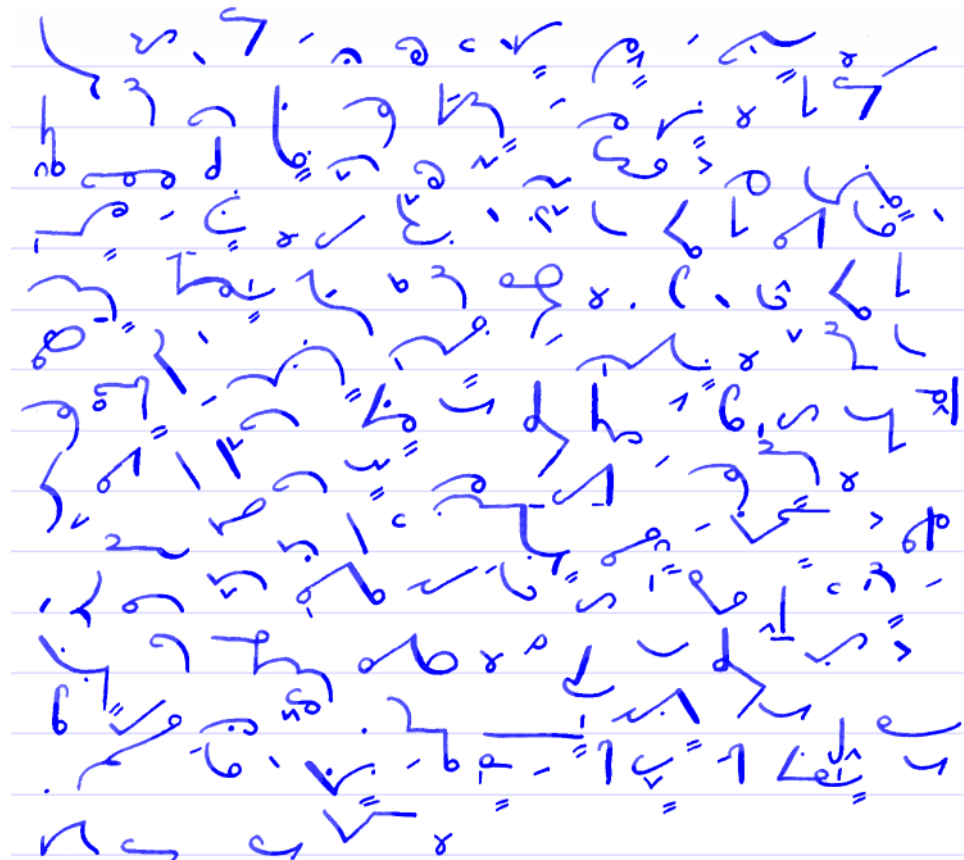
In those far-off days, the kitchen staff were all kindly auntie like figures, namely Mrs Cooper, Miss Evans, Mrs King and Miss Thomas (the one who always gave us extra in winter) and the aptly named Mrs Baker, who made sure our Sunday packed lunch boxes were always full to overflowing. Our sports teacher also had a very suitable name, Mr Green, and the maths* teacher was, of course, Mr Wright. The janitor was Finlay, with a rota of helpers who were* Johnson, Edwards and Clark, who knew all our little tricks to escape detection*, but they generally remained tolerant of our adventures. The head teacher was Mrs

Roberts assisted by the rather reticent but very strict Miss Robinson and the ever resourceful school receptionists Mr Watson and Mrs O'Sullivan.

* "maths" The second-place contraction only covers "mathematics", so advisable to vocalise "maths" or "math"

* Omission phrase "who (w)ere"

* "detect, deduct, dedicate"" and derivatives, these need the vowels inserted in order to distinguish



Fraser's Friends

After that I went to college and made friends with Hall, Lewis and Young. Our tutors were Mr Davis*, Mrs Turner and Miss Hill. At the college Christmas dance my friends and I made the acquaintance of the Misses Phillips, Collins and Allen. We finally all applied for jobs at the head office of Moore and Thompson, and four of us were successful. The other two found jobs at the solicitors* establishment of Miller, Morris and Murphy. I worked for Mrs Carter and Mr James in the Despatch Department*, and the others went into the Accounts Department which was headed up by Mr Knight, Miss Wood and Mrs Walker. On the weekend I used to meet up with MacDonald, Hughes and Parker of the Sales Department, who shared some of my hobbies*, and we often went on sports

outings with Ward and Bennett from Customer Services. As the junior in Despatch, I ran all the deliveries to our main clients, the architects Cook and Webb in the town centre, the lawyers office of Bailey and Scott, and Dr White and Dr Jackson in the health clinic near the park.

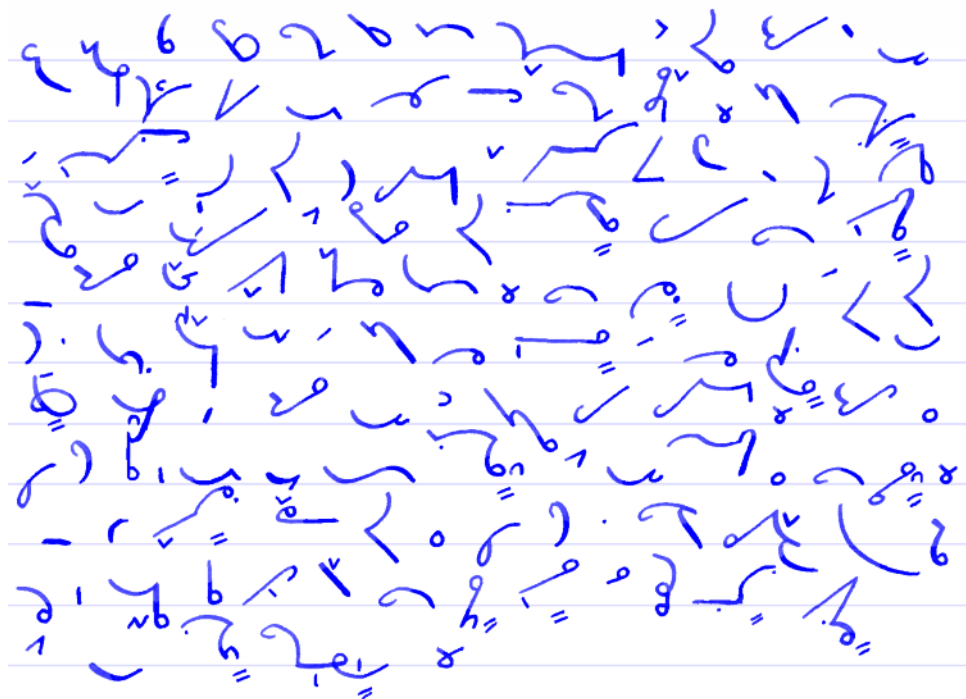
* "Despatch Department" Intersection would be unclear or descend too far

* "Davis" See note on Davies above

* "Young" Not using the short form

* "solicitors" Special use of the Ster Loop, despite the vowels in that syllable, to obtain a very convenient outline

* "hobbies" "habits" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning



Fraser's Friends

Whenever I visit those places from the past, I am reminded of the shops that we all knew so well, which are now mostly gone from the High Street. I remember Mitchell and Morgan shoe shop, whose window I regularly checked over to see the latest arrivals in footwear*, and the sports shop Campbells, where Mrs Rogers* could always find the right items for me. Mr Lee's fish and chip shop was a favourite on Friday night, and I remember Miss Cox and Miss Jefferies in Foster's newsagents* who always knew what papers we wanted. That one is still there but now under the name of Matthews*, and the new manager is Mr Hughes*. Good old Reilly's cycle shop is still there, a remarkable survival after all these years, but nowadays it is run by Mr Hugh* Ross and his assistants Kelly, Richards* and the young Matthew* Ferguson.

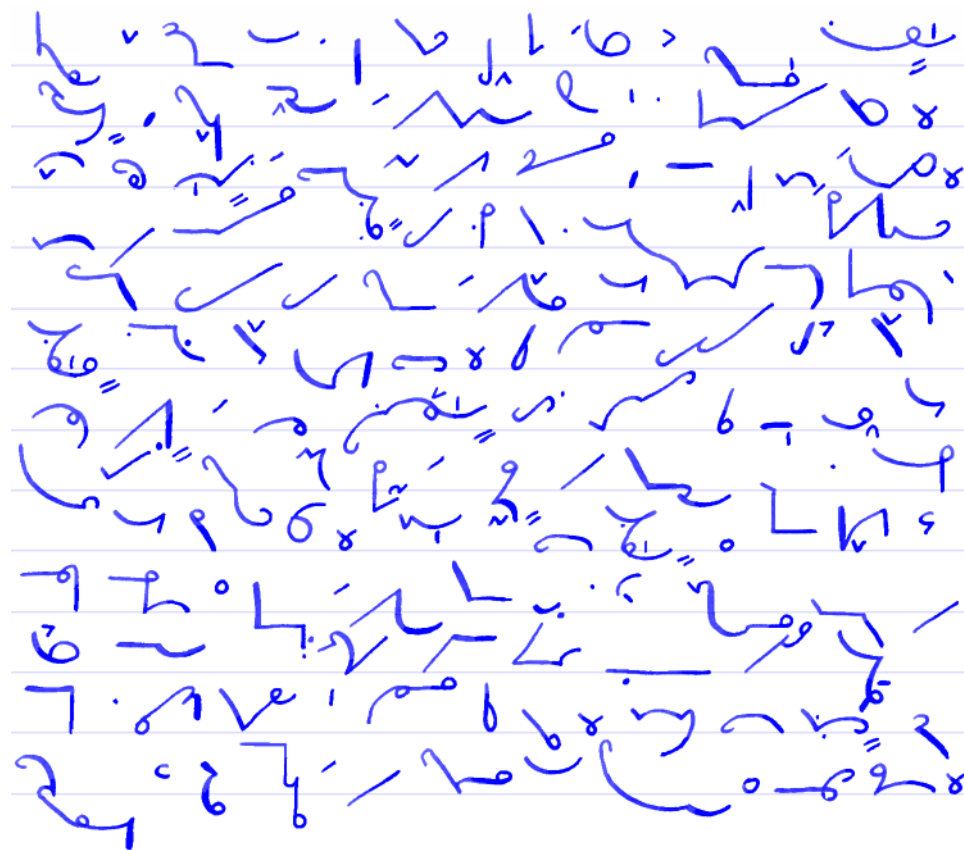
* "footwear" Insert the first vowel in this, and in "knitwear, nightwear, underwear" as they are all similar

* "newsagents" Based on the distinguishing outline "agent", compare "gent" (halved) and "agency" (all full strokes). A British term for a small shop that sells newspapers, stationery and snacks.

* "Rogers, Richards" Note Richards has fuller outline, to distinguish

* "Matthews, Matthew" Note diphthong cannot be joined if there is a final circle

* "Hughes" "Hugh" Note downward Hay is used when there is a hook or circle at the end of the stroke



Fraser's Friends

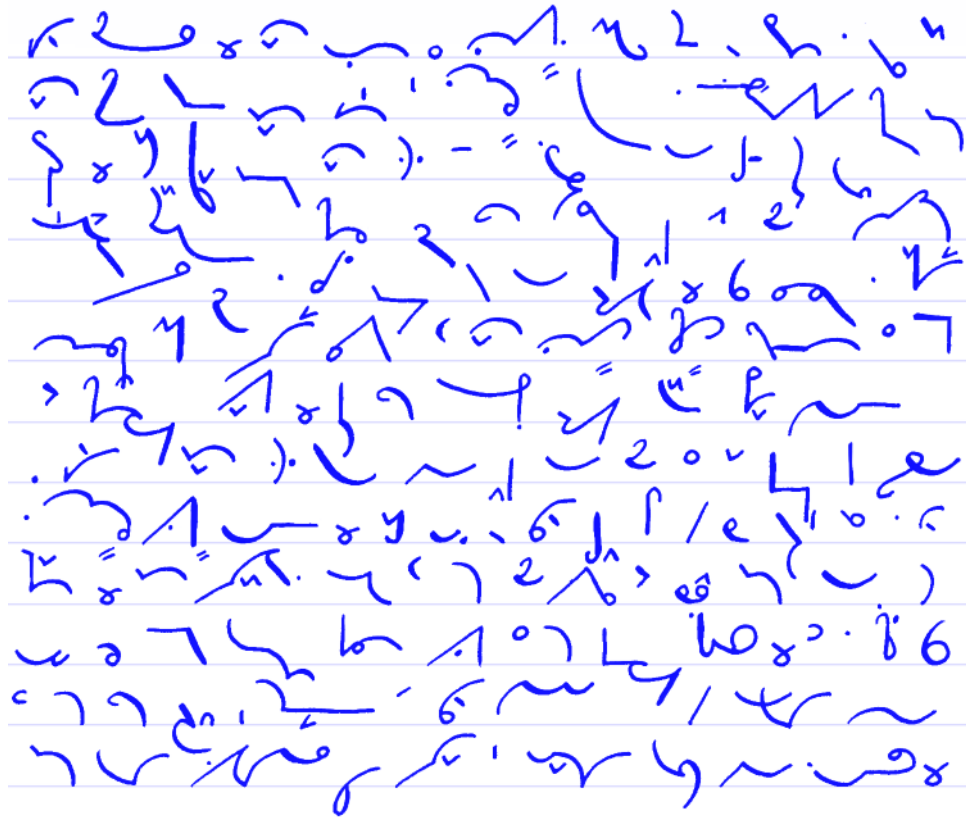
At present I work in a different part of town, at the offices of the Brooks Anderson Partnership who provide accounting and reporting staff on a temporary basis. My friends Murray and Griffiths and I are the shorthand writers* who go out to meetings and conferences. To improve our careers, we set up an informal Saturday afternoon club where we practise and revise in the cosy atmosphere of Nelson's café by the village green. Just last week* we were joined by Mrs Reid and Miss Williamson wanting to learn, which is good news for the future of our profession, and I think Stewart* and Howard are beginning to take an interest in the subject as well. I know Mr Nelson is delighted with the extra custom, as dictating and reading back need a lot of

drinks to keep our voices going, and there are regular chocolate cake* rewards for those who get a hundred per cent on last week's* test piece. I am sure Mr Pitman would be very pleased indeed* with all these activities and our progress in furthering his excellent system. (881 words)

* Omission phrases "short(hand) writers" "las(t w)eeek's" "very please(d) indeed"

* "Stewart" Note the noun "steward" has Ard stroke

* "cake" "cookie" Insert the vowel, to distinguish



Return To Mars

Hello Shorthanders*. My name is Marty and I have been asked to submit a piece about my journey back to my home on Mars, after an exploratory trip to your planet. I was advised to keep my essay quite conversational in tone, so that the few unavoidable* scientific terms would be more spread out and the shorthand learner writers would have a chance to catch up in between them*. This seems to be an ideal mixture, and I do really hope that my Martian Translation* programme has got all the terminology right. It was very interesting to watch, via satellite link, the whole of my essay being written out in shorthand as I dictated it, using a Mars Red Ink. I did not need to slow down at all, which saved both of us a lot of time. I am reliably informed that your shorthand represents all the sounds of your language, so new words can be formed at the same

rate as your technology advances. What a contrast this is with your very beautiful but archaic and slow longhand, which unfortunately many of your fellow Earthlings still rely on entirely for their* written communications.

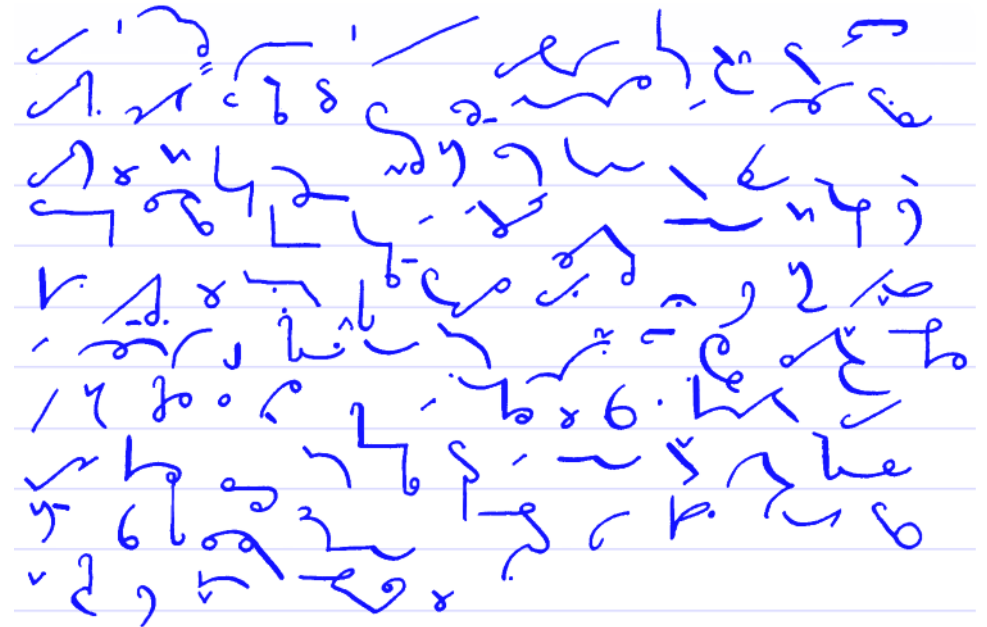
* "Shorthanders" The doubling includes the D sound, so not thickened. If thickened, this stroke would be "inker"

* "unavoidable" Compare distinguishing outline "inevitable" which has full T stroke

* Omission phrase "betwee(n) them"

* "Translation" Omits the N

* "for their" Only "if" is doubled or halved, as in "if their, if it"



Return To Mars

We on Mars look on rather wistfully* at your beautiful blue and green watery world, with all its plants, flowers, fruits, animals and mostly* pleasant* weather. About twenty years ago I was very fortunate to be chosen to visit, to collect samples, take photos and observe the inhabitants going about their daily routines. I kept out of everyone's way, made sure I was not recognised and, most importantly*, did not contravene any of your mutually agreed civilisation survival customs, which I think translates as laws, directives and commandments. This is an admirable way to run the administrative sections of your planet, and, going by the level of

advancement I saw, this seems to be working exceptionally well, at least* in the places I travelled through on my explorations.

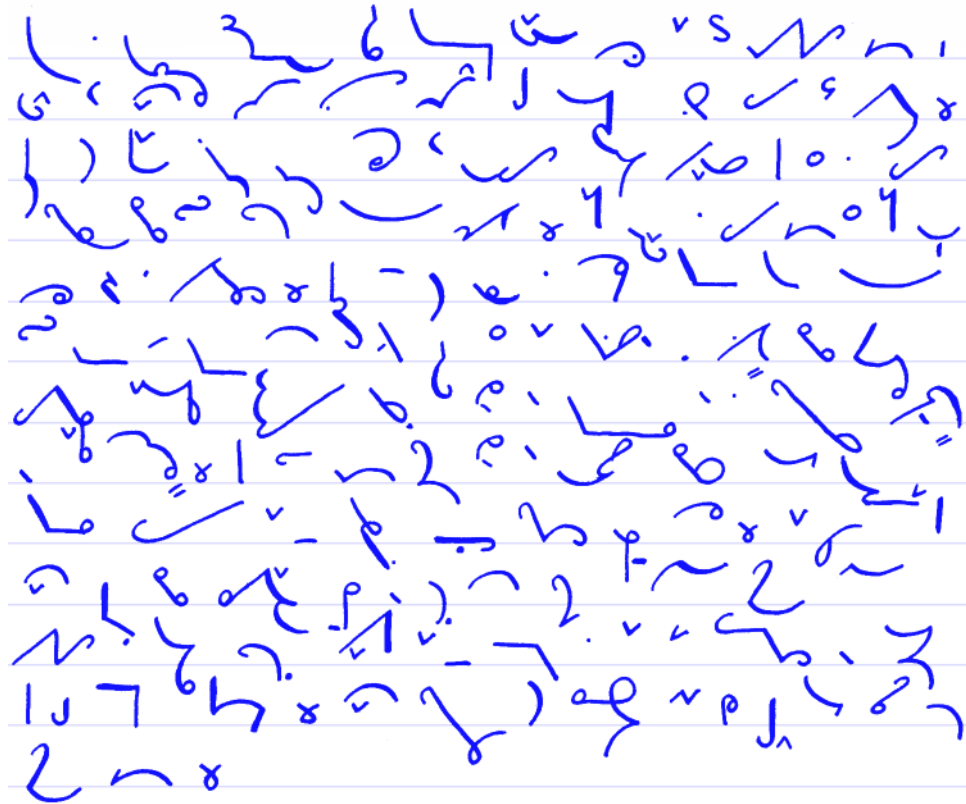
* "wistfully" Omits the T

* "mostly" Omits the T

* "pleasant" "pleasing" Insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

* Omission phrase "mos(t) importantly"

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



Return To Mars

After a few years working on this fact finding mission, I planned to return home but found that my little lander module had been inadvertently swept away with the rubbish. It was so tiny compared to your own machines that no-one recognised it as a one-person spacecraft from another world. I had to find a way home, as I had no means of building a replacement. It would have been* quite easy to send a message back for another craft to come and pick me up, but then, as I perused the Earth space agencies' websites, I noticed that they were posting lots* of pictures of a proposed Rover to Mars. It occurred to me there were* lots* of unused spaces in the vehicle box where I could* possibly gain permission to stow* myself. I still had my deep space survival suit to see me through the long journey, and, in return for this free

ride, I could keep an eye on the equipment to ensure it did not get damaged. My proposal was successful and I settled down for the half year journey home.

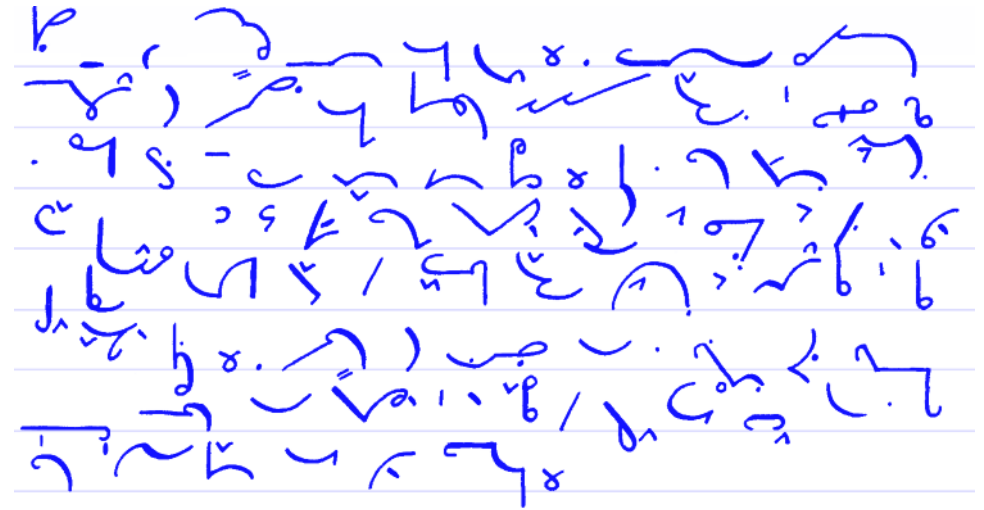
* Omission phrase "it would (have) been"
This is quicker than writing "have" with N hook for "been", as the angle is sharper

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

* Omission phrase "there (w)ere"

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

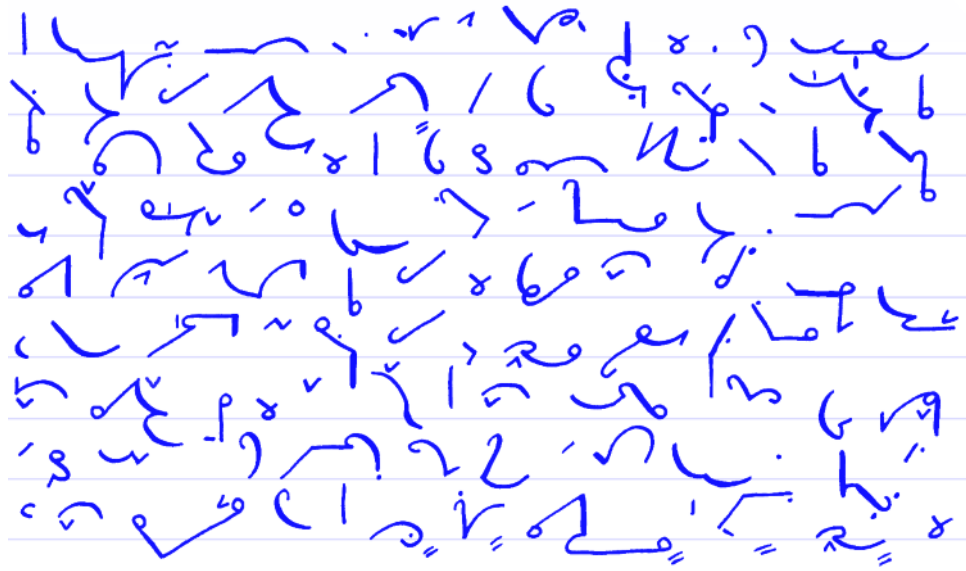
* "stow" Insert the vowel, to prevent misreading as "sit, seat, stay"



Return To Mars

At last good old Mars came into view. The gleaming circular capsule was released into the atmosphere and we were finally on course towards a sandy plain quite near to my home settlement. It was a very bumpy and noisy flight downwards, what with the jolt from the parachute opening and the

screeching of the jets to slow down descent, followed by the much quieter final lowering of the module on its nylon tethers. The Rover was encased in a pyramid shaped protective cocoon covered in balloons on all sides, which bounced along the ground for a very long time in the low gravity.

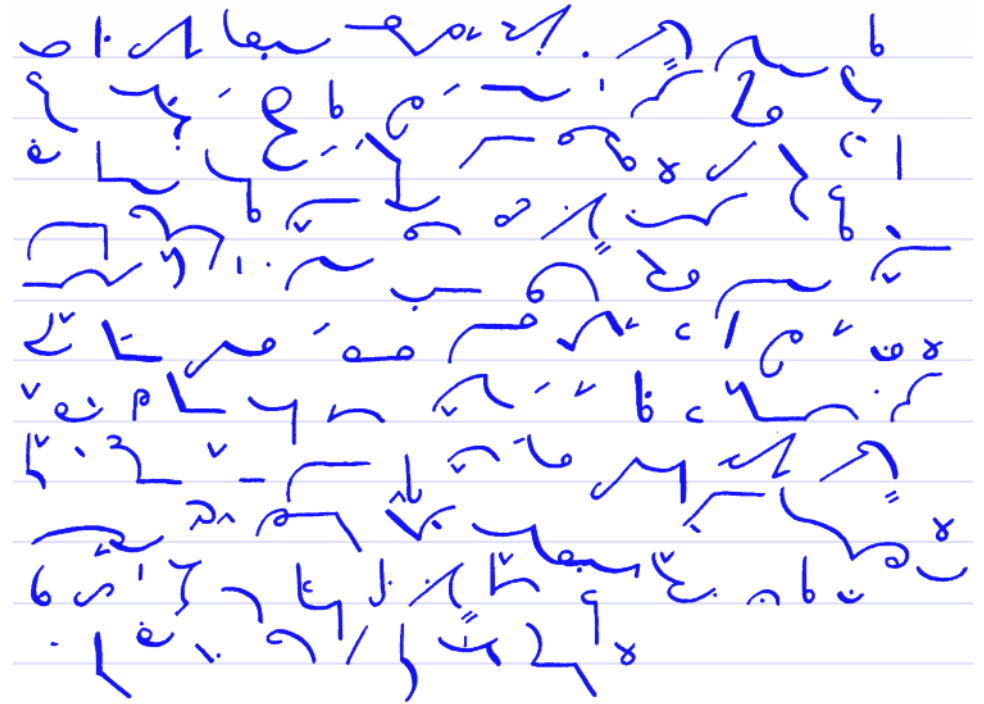


Return To Mars

It eventually came to a halt and the balloons deflated. The three enclosing petals fell away, revealing the Rover, which then proceeded to unfold its solar panels. It then spent some time charging up its batteries under the bright sunlight, and as evening approached and darkness fell, the camera head lowered and folded itself away. This was my chance to exit the vehicle without being recorded, and I sped away to

the mountains using the jet packs on my survival suit. I arrived at my neighbour's apartment within the hillside and spent the night there recovering from the journey and also having a debrief chat with my superiors over at Mission Control Headquarters* on Rocky Mountain.

* "Headquarters" Using the optional contraction for "quarter"



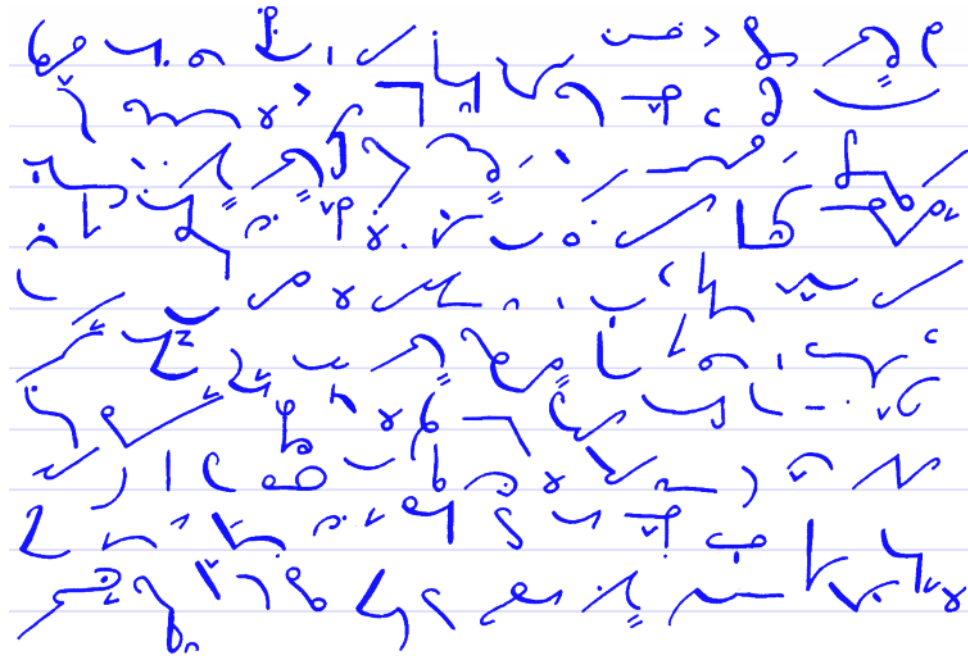
Return To Mars

Next day we had the fascinating experience of watching the Rover leaving its platform, unfolding and swivelling its wheels, and going on little journeys over the sand, taking photos and obtaining rock samples. We both thought it looked very much* like some sort of Earth animal, with its two camera eyes on a long neck, solar panels looking like shiny bug wings, and six legs, albeit with large wheels on the ends. I soon settled back into home life, and on the days when I became a little tired of work, I could* look out of my office window and

watch the Rover meandering around the landscape below, investigating the rock formations. This went on until the year 2010 earth time, when it finally met its end in a deep sand pit, from which it was unable to escape.

* "very much" Includes the M, in order to join the phrase

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



Return To Mars

This was indeed somewhat saddening, but we continued to follow the antics of the subsequent Rovers as they arrived from time to time. All the children get very excited when there is another notification of an Earth Rover approaching Mars, and all our cameras and telescopes are aimed at the anticipated landing site. The whole thing is a wonderful educational* experience for our young ones. We would like you to know that, at the time of writing, we are really enjoying seeing the new Rover Perseverance doing much the same, but clearly with far superior instruments on board*. This will keep everyone entertained for quite a while and we wish it every success in its mission. By the way*, you can see my return journey home and the bumpy landing on the sandy plain in the exciting close detail video recreation

produced by your space agency people,
using the Earth link below. (1019 words)

* "educational" The U diphthong sign is written outside Shun Hook, but in this outline inside the hook is the only place it can go

* "on board" On its own, "board" is full B and Ard strokes

* Omission phrase "By the way" Avoid this omission phrase when it is a full part of the sentence, as it could then be ambiguous whether "the" was omitted or not e.g. "I went by way of the bridge" "I went by the way of the bridge"

<https://mars.nasa.gov/resources/20314/mars-exploration-rover-mission-animation>

[illegible]