



Fig. 1

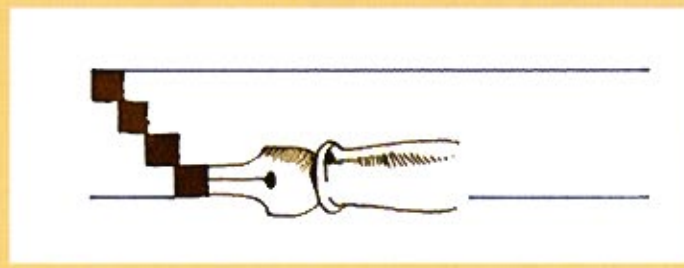


Fig. 2

on on on

Fig. 3

ductus

Fig. 4

mon mon mon

Fig. 5

SEVEN ATTRIBUTES OF ALPHABET STYLE

Johnston's main contribution to the field of lettering was his analysis of the basics of letterforms, which could be applied to any historical script. In other words, he showed students how to look at manuscripts and adapt them for contemporary use. He developed the *Foundational Hand* as a starting point for his beginners. His seven attributes can be applied to any alphabet style:

1. *Pen angle* measured from the writing line up to the angle at which the broad-edged pen is held (figure 1)
2. *Letter height* expressed in *nib widths (n.w.)*, (figure 2)
3. Basic shape of each letter of the alphabet based on the **o** and the **n** (figure 3).

Stroke sequence composed of:

4. direction,
5. order,
6. and number of strokes. A diagram of the stroke sequence of lettering with numbered arrows is called a *ductus* (figure 4)
7. Speed at which the scribe wrote

In addition to Johnston's list, the forward *slant* or *slope*, is measured in degrees from the vertical. The stems of the letters fall on this slope, and the curves have an optical relationship to it, as shown in figure 5. Many styles of writing are vertical, but some have a forward slope of anywhere from 5° to 35°.

PREPARING TO WRITE

Johnston's characteristics combine to form the basics of any hand, whether you're using a classic Renaissance script or modern poster lettering. All scripts require attention and patience to master. There are some crafts that can be done curled up on the couch in front of a television, but, needless to say, lettering isn't one of them!

In the next chapter, you'll write letterforms with a monoline pen to learn their skeletal shapes, and then in chapter 4 move on to a broad-edged pen, which is the basis of all Latin scripts used in European languages. This tool will help you learn the classical calligraphic forms, which can be modified for contemporary applications. A metal dip pen simulates marks made by a quill by medieval scribes, while giving you the most versatility for contemporary design. You can experiment with both tools before taking on the letterforms.

In preparation for writing, set up your drafting board. Leave enough room for ink pots and other materials close by. You'll also need a good desk lamp. Secure a few sheets of paper to the board with masking tape to act as a cushion for your writing. When you press against this surface, the ink will flow more readily from pen to paper. Tape a guard sheet across the bottom to protect your work from oils in your hands (figure 6). Adjust the slant of the board to a height that allows you to sit up straight and hold your hand in a comfortable position. Your ink and tools should be on your right-hand side (or on the left if you're left-handed), along with a jar of water and an ink rag.

Keeping your fingers clean while dealing with ink is always a challenge, and there are ways to consistently set up your ink that help. First of all, if you dip your pen directly into a large bottle, you'll soon have ink all over the pen holder and your fingers. Instead, pour some of it into a smaller container, such as an empty film can or shot glass, and dip your pen into this container instead. If you use a container with a good seal, you can save the ink for your next writing session.

It's a good idea to tape your ink container to the table or place it in an empty tuna can or lid of a jar to keep from knocking it over. Place a small sponge in the container to help clean the outside of the pen as you dip it, giving you a surface to press the pen against to gauge the amount of ink you're loading. For some kinds of ink, especially colored, it helps to use a paintbrush to load the pen reservoir, or you can squeeze the ink from an eyedropper.



Pouring ink into a smaller container such as a film can will save your ink and keep your fingers clean.

As you work with various materials, the area around your drafting board will become cluttered with bottles, pencils, brushes, papers, and other materials. Although some of this clutter is unavoidable, you should minimize it by straightening up as you work. There's nothing more agonizing than accidentally laying a beautiful finished piece in a puddle of wet ink!

Pen Angle Practice

To begin practicing with a dip pen, load it halfway up the reservoir. Test it on a piece of scrap paper to get the ink flowing and avoid blobs made by an overloaded pen. Position the pen's tip firmly on the page so the whole end is in even contact with the paper. Wiggle it a bit to get the ink flowing, then lighten up the pressure and make a stroke. Pause at the end of each stroke before lifting the tip to make a crisp finish (see figure 7). The repetitive forms shown in figure 8 can be used as decorative borders around a piece of writing.



Fig. 6

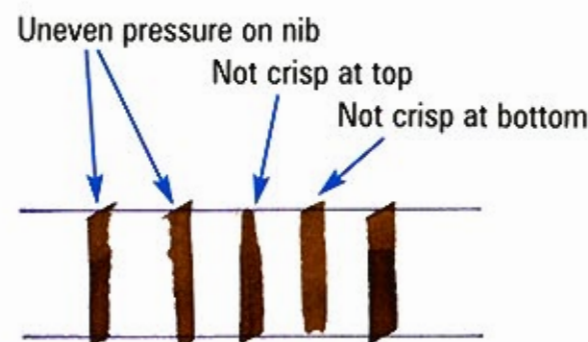


Fig. 7

Learn to judge the pressure on the nib to get a crisp stroke similar to the one shown on the right.



Fig. 8

Practice pen control by making rows of repetitive marks.