

Intro to Calligraphy

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Introduction

Calligraphy is the art of putting words on paper. It has existed since writing was created, and there are many calligraphic traditions around the world. This class will go over the fundamentals of practical medieval European calligraphy.

Materials

Materials in bold are available for a \$10 material fee.

- Pen
 - **Felt tipped** - use for practicing on regular lined paper, but do not use on scrolls.
 - Cartridge pen - more portable than a dip pen.
 - **Dip pen** - made of a nib holder and a metal nib.
 - Nibs - come in many sizes. 1mm is a good starter size. Brause and Mitchell are good brands.
 - Nib holders - you want standard, not copperplate.
 - Quill or reed - the most period option, but also the most fiddly.
- Ink
 - Noodlers and **Sumi** are good brands for modern ink. Waterproof inks will tend to clog your nibs, so look for non-waterproof.
 - Iron gall ink - made from galls from an oak tree and iron sulfate. See resources sheet for purchasing info.
- Paper
 - **Bristol smooth paper** (or other hot-press watercolor paper)
 - Pergamenata - a plant-based imitation parchment
 - Parchment/vellum - made from the stretch skins of animals
 - Try to use standard frame sizes to make the recipient's life easier. Common frame sizes are: 5x7, 8x10, and 11x14.
 - **Graph paper** is helpful for practicing.
- Eraser - a white eraser or kneaded artist eraser is best. Pink tends to leave marks.
- Ames guide - will save you so much time drawing lines. Tutorials available online.
- T-square - used with the Ames guide and art board to draw straight lines.
- Art board - can be purchased from art supply stores, or you can buy MDF and cut it down.
- Exacto blade or pen knife - used to hold down the paper, which tends to buckle from the water content of the ink. Perg and vellum buckle more than paper.

Fundamentals

- **Always pull the pen.** Pens are not made to be pushed up, and the ink will not want to flow. Scripts are designed so every stroke can be pulled.
- **Keep constant pressure.** Thick and thin in period calligraphy is controlled by the angle of the pen, not how hard you press.
- **Wash your hands.** Any dust or dirt (or chocolate!) you have on your hands will smear the paper. You can also wear gloves, or use a cover sheet so you don't rest your hand on the paper (I recommend this method).
- **Write on an incline.** Not strictly necessary, but will be easier on your back and allow the ink to flow easier. An art board will help you here.

Terms

- **Pen angle** - the angle at which you hold the nib relative to the baseline. Common angles are 45, 30, and 0. This controls the thickness of your lines. The goal is consistency.
- **Nib widths** - refers to the height of the script relative to the width of the pen. Turn the pen to 90 degrees and make little horizontal marks on top of each other, like stair steps, to measure nib height.
- **Ascenders/Descenders** - the high parts of letters like l, k, d, and b that rise above the line, and the low parts of letters like j, y, p, and q that fall below the line.

Tips

- **Slow down!** You will not write at your normal speed. Slowing down will help with consistency and help you avoid spelling mistakes.
- **Focus on one thing at a time.** Work on your form with a felt tip pen, then work on the dip pen. Focus on making straight lines, then on spacing, then ascender height, etc.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** That is the only way to improve. Keep your old practice sheets so you can look back at them later.
- **Mistakes are period** and most are fixable. The only time I'll scrap a scroll is if I misspell the name of the recipient, kingdom, or royalty.
- To begin, learn from a **ductus** (guide sheet that shows the order and direction of strokes for an alphabet), then eventually you can learn to copy scripts from period exemplars.