

Become a Pro at Hand-Lettering: Lesson 1

By: Sareena N.

Welcome! Since you're reading this, you probably want to pick up some hand-lettering skills, or hold some interest for the art. If that's the case, then you've visited the right place! My name is Sareena, and for as long as I can remember, handwriting has been my passion. As I've grown older, I formed a deeper bond with the art, and have thus dedicated my time to spreading the joy that hand-lettering brings me — whether that may be showing my friends the basics of lettering, and creating calligraphy gifts for family.

Now with this series of tutorials, I hope that I can spread that joy with *you* and help you achieve your goals when it comes to hand-lettering and calligraphy.

Although the art may seem intimidating (referencing the beautiful lettering art that can be found on social media), the basics of lettering *really* aren't that hard to master. Specifically, this tutorial will focus on the basics of calligraphy, which is a crucial aspect of hand-lettering.

(Note: Hand-lettering refers to a large variety of fonts, such as print and block letters, while calligraphy is a primary font used in the creation of lettering pieces).

Calligraphy Basics

Before I get into more specifics, there are MANY calligraphy fonts, which I'm sure you've seen. Some notable ones are old English letters, blackletter calligraphy, and modern calligraphy. For the purposes of this tutorial series, I will start by demonstrating modern calligraphy, as it is easiest to master and requires very few materials.

In short, modern calligraphy takes a standard cursive letter, and thickens parts of it in order to create a visually appealing letter.

An example of this is:



alphabet
alphabet

However, the 'parts' that are thickened aren't random. Instead, the **downstrokes** of a letter are thickened, while the **upstrokes** of a letter are left thin. (Downstrokes are the parts of letters that are created when you pull the pen TOWARDS you, while upstrokes are the parts of letters that are created when you pull the pen AWAY from you). Example:



Basic Exercises

Now that you've gotten the gist of what modern calligraphy *is*, it's time that I introduce you to a couple basic exercises~

For these exercises, you will need a piece of paper, and a pencil/ballpoint pen. Because we're starting from the basics here, it's important to use a writing utensil that we have the most control over. Using a pencil or ballpoint pen (I prefer ballpoint pens since the tip won't break, and it doesn't smudge like gel pens), we will be creating **faux calligraphy**, which is just a fancy way of saying that we'll be imitating the calligraphy 'look' created by brush pens.

(Note: I will be demonstrating these exercises digitally, as it is easier for me to annotate what I'm doing). :-)

Exercise 1: Downstrokes and Upstrokes

Start off by creating a simple squiggle on your paper:



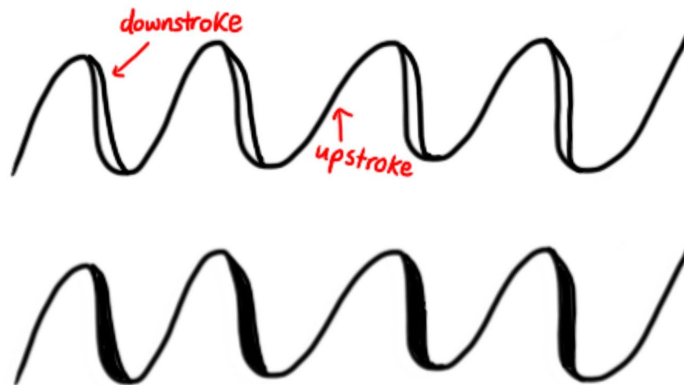
Then, using your pen or pencil, thicken the parts where you pulled your writing utensil TOWARDS yourself. This process might take a little practice at first, but it's important to master since it is fundamental to more complex lettering.

If you wish, you could fill in the thickened areas, but I feel that this style carries its own beauty, as well :)



Exercise 2: Shapes

When lettering, it's helpful to know that each letter is composed of basic shapes, which are shown below:



For example, the letter 'a' is composed of a circle and a line:



For this exercise, take the basic shapes, and visualize the downstrokes and upstrokes. Then, similar to the last exercise, thicken the downstrokes in order to create the calligraphy effect.

Forming Letters

As mentioned before, calligraphy is based on the cursive alphabet. Because of this, it's important to establish a 'cursive style' (as everyone's style is different). If you're not quite comfortable with 'cursive', then you could always start by using standard print.

This may take a while at first, but it will pay off eventually! Below is my cursive style:

Aa Bb Cc Dd
Ee Ff Gg Hh
Ii Jj Kk Ll
Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt
Uu Vv Ww Xx
Yy Zz

From my cursive alphabet, I then formed a calligraphy alphabet by thickening the downstrokes:

Aa Bb Cc Dd
Ee Ff Gg Hh
Ii Jj Kk Ll
Mm Nn Oo Pp
Qq Rr Ss Tt
Uu Vv Ww Xx
Yy Zz

When forming letters, it is helpful to pick up the pen each time you form a shape. It's a good habit to obtain, since it will later assist when using a marker or brush pen to form and connect letters.

An example:



Well, that concludes this first tutorial! Just remember: practice is the most important thing when learning how to hand-letter. Even though it may seem frustrating at times, don't give up. Hopefully you learned something new and were able to pass some time by reading this, and will read the next tutorial... which will be coming shortly :)

Thanks for reading, and good luck on your lettering journey!

-Sareena