

# Letterforms

*You've practised forming the basic shapes and got an understanding of how to vary the pressure on the nib. Now it's time to start looking at letterforms. The easiest way to start is to get a feel for the letters by tracing over them. You'll need to use your layout paper for this exercise.*

### STEP 1

Using bleedproof layout paper, or tracing paper and a pencil at first, try tracing the letterforms on the following pages. Even when using a pencil you can still practise adding and relieving pressure. This will help you get a feel for how the letterforms are created. Follow the arrows (see opposite) and note the order of the strokes as to which are made first, second, etc.

### STEP 2

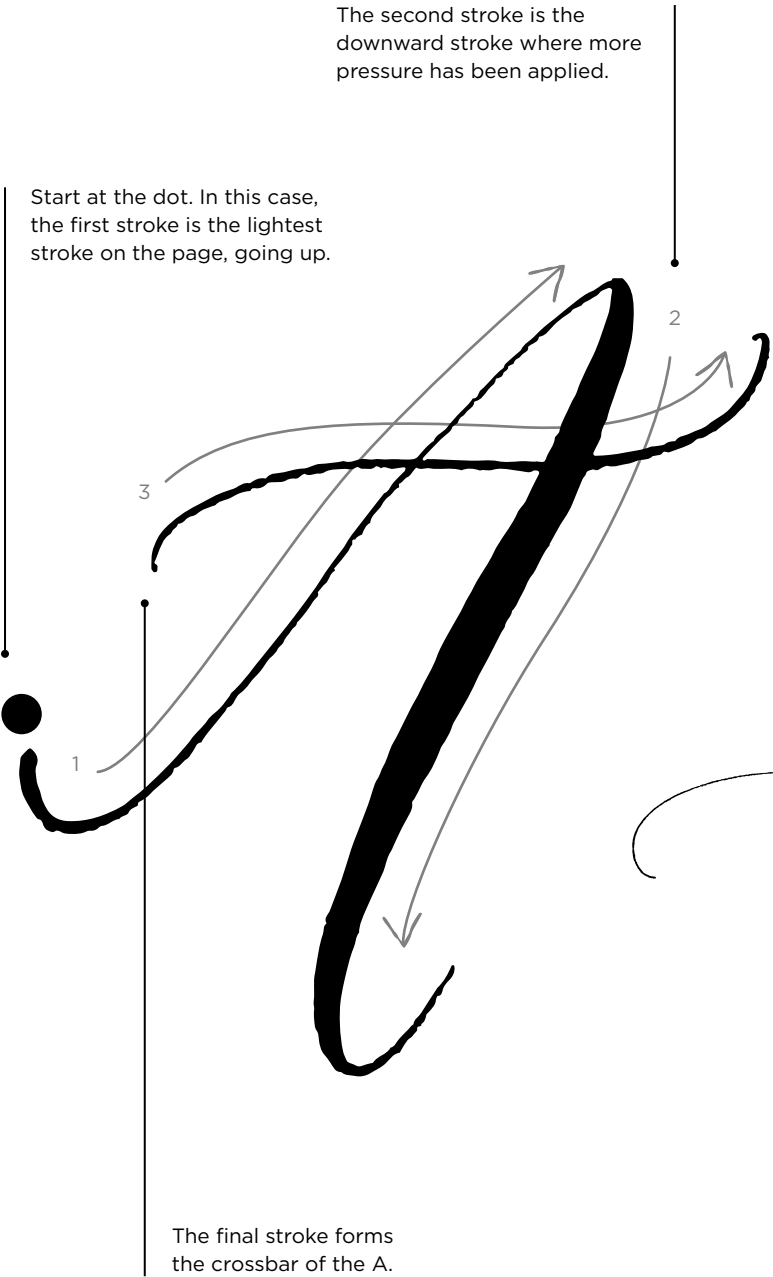
Now using your layout paper, try to trace the letterforms again, this time using the pen and ink. Remember to follow the arrows and make the strokes in the correct order.

### STEP 3

Go it alone. Look at the letterforms and practise copying them, without tracing. Keep repeating and work at getting a consistent result.



Layout paper is a thin paper stock; if you are too heavy-handed you'll find you go through the paper, or dig in and pick up paper fibres. Think about how lightly you can apply pressure and you shouldn't have any problems.



The second stroke is the downward stroke where more pressure has been applied.

Start at the dot. In this case, the first stroke is the lightest stroke on the page, going up.

The final stroke forms the crossbar of the A.

Your letterforms are constructed from a series of strokes. This letterform has been constructed in three stages. These strokes are made in a certain order and combine variations of the basic shapes we've been practising in our warm-up exercises. You don't have to keep your pen on the paper and do it all at once; you can stop and lift the pen from the paper after each stage.



It's good calligraphy practice to place a piece of paper under your writing hand as a guard sheet. This will prevent your hand rubbing across your work. Otherwise, oils from your skin can transfer to the paper surface and this may affect your writing.

SO NOW WE’RE READY  
TO GET STARTED...

Dip the nib in the ink, submerging it so that the little vent hole is covered. Wipe off excess ink from the underside of your nib on the rim of your ink pot, so you don’t drip across your paper. Then you are loaded and ready to go. To start with, it’s all about getting to grips with some practice strokes. To create your thick downstroke you need to place the nib on the paper and exert enough pressure for the tines of the nib at the end to splay slightly, and pull down to make your stroke. Practise this and see how you get on. Now for the upstrokes. For these you want the nib to be just touching the paper and then to push the nib up. Don’t be alarmed if your upstrokes are a bit wobbly – that’s perfectly normal for starting out. You will need to practise control – I promise this will come.

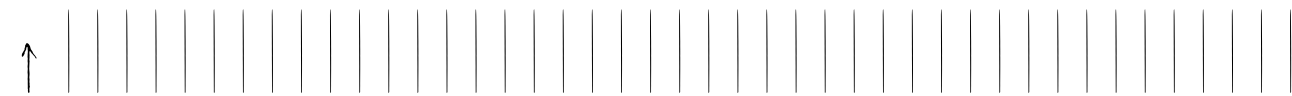
What you are looking for here is to be able to get a nice super-thin line, and then a lovely contrasting thick line, so we have a great balance. To start with, just practise creating these straight strokes up and down, thick and thin, so you can get a feel for the difference in pressure.

Work on creating your up- and downstrokes. Start by practising vertical lines, like the ones at the top of the facing page. Once you’ve mastered this you can move on to try the shapes below... Once you’ve got to grips with going up and down, work on joining the strokes together to create zigzag shapes, applying and relieving the pressure gradually. Move on to practising more fluid curves, following the shapes opposite. Follow the arrows, and remember that the strokes you make going down are your thick strokes, and those going up are thin strokes.

THEN...

When you’ve had a go at these you can move on to the shapes on page 24. These are going to help you with forming the letters later on. All the letterforms you will be working with will be composed of different shapes and curves.

This is a new skill, so be patient: the more you practise, the more intuitive it will be. Eventually it will become part of your muscle memory, so that adding and relieving pressure is something that you don’t even think about – you just do it!



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L L

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# PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

*Consistency is key! Try and work on getting the same result every time. You are trying to make controlled, accurate forms on the paper. Once you've got to grips with adding and relieving pressure fluidly around a curve you can put this all together to create oval forms. Coming back to these exercises will improve your stroke quality.*

How should it feel? When making your thin or hairline strokes, you want to feel as if you are just lightly 'kissing' the paper. The lightest of touches is all that is required here. If – like me – you tend to be heavy handed, just think even lighter still! Your thick stroke should then just be adding a touch more pressure to this.

Not sure if you're doing things right? Look down the length of your pen. Your nib point and vent hole should be at the top, so you can create a nice thick stroke. If your nib is turned to the left or right and on its side you will encounter resistance so you can't

create your downstrokes easily – you will hear the resistance in the paper. An easy way to check this is to look at the weight of your stroke: is your stroke thick when you are coming down or is the thickness all at the bottom?

Remember, the angle at which you use the pen stays the same, so don't be tempted to turn it around curves and corners!

If you are getting nerdy paper fibres stuck to the end of the nib, that's a sure sign that you are pressing too hard, so ease off. Depending on what

kind of practice paper you are using you can also feel of the underside, if it seems as if you have made an intense new form of braille, then you are probably pressing too hard.

There is no shortcut to learning calligraphy – practice really does make perfect, and you'll always find there are ways to improve on what you've done. Always be prepared to learn something new and develop – you'll get so much more out of it that way.

When you make an oval, picture a clock face. Start at 12, and then go anti-clockwise down to 11 and start gradually applying pressure, relieving it again by 6.

If your stroke is jagged, check the angle of the nib. If you're not at the correct angle the tines of the nib won't split properly and you won't be able to get a smooth downstroke.

