



**Course Title:** Calligraphy and Letterform: Methods, Models, History, and Practice

**Course Code:** ART 50

**Instructor:** Ann Miller, AB, AM | [www.pennib.com](http://www.pennib.com)

## Class Sessions and Recording

**Meeting days and times:** 6 Wednesdays, Apr 19 - May 24, 7:00 - 8:50 pm (PT)

**Meeting location:** Zoom (details will be shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)

**Class sessions will be recorded.** Live attendance is required. Given the amount and diversity of the materials presented and the scope of work that is required to fully participate in this learning experience, students who miss more than one class session will not be eligible for a letter grade *without permission from the instructor*. Should you live in a time zone that makes joining live sessions difficult, or have other requirements that prevent your attendance, **you may arrange permission with the instructor to view the videos only.**

Please sign in a few minutes early as sessions will begin promptly.

## Course Features:

- Live session
  - Introduction lecture, demonstration, discussion, and student Q&A time before class and at end of each session
- Assignments & Coursework
  - Readings and Reference materials posted in Canvas
  - Assignments and course images posted in Canvas
  - Discussions in Canvas
  - Students will upload several exercises/assignments per week in Canvas
  - Instructor will provide individual feedback on all assignments
- Communication
  - Individual questions via Inbox or email will receive detailed replies

## Course Summary

The purpose of this six-week course is to awaken the student to the art of calligraphy and to provide a broad foundation for exploring techniques and skills in formal lettering.

In this digital age, when it is rare to visit paper, pen, and ink, we may lose touch with the physical act of writing but, more importantly, with the power of the written voice. The contemporary field of text art has been steadily growing with worldwide effect. This class offers the student a means to reignite the physical connection with letters and to enable a more fluid relationship between the voice in our head and the voice on paper. This is a highly interactive class, with exercises throughout. Due to the degree of focus required by formal lettering, calligraphy is often considered a martial art, since it is organized, strategic, and target-oriented.

There is a short pre-class assignment prior to the first meeting that will be our visual introduction to each other, allowing time to become familiar with the Canvas system and begin our conversation and mark-making process.

The first session lays the groundwork for making the letterform with accuracy and the second session explores the organic moving, continuous line of cursive script. The following three sessions cover specific hands such as Uncial, Blackletter, and Italic, and include time for practice as well as for doing small creative assignment projects. There will be several options for fun projects described in class including a final session addressing abstract use of invented and distorted letterforms. All exercises are designed to deepen visual perception and improve understanding of design and the rhythms of writing. What you learn in this class will be applicable to the wider realms of design that demand creative visual judgment such as in painting, printmaking, and the graphic and book arts.

Each session includes extensive reading and reference material for download, verbal explanation of the assignment, live demonstration of technique, and time for questions. The Canvas area online contains extensive resources for asynchronous reference, detailed critiques, and support for your ongoing individual work. Be prepared for at least 4-6 hours homework per week as we take a deep look into the major areas of calligraphy design and begin to understand and create meaningful letters, words, and text.

The class is designed for anyone who enjoys letters, from beginners to advanced calligraphers. You may want to update your daily handwriting, make a single carefully designed letterform, or enjoy practicing the historic scripts. As you spend quality time with the process of making letters, new ideas for creative design will naturally occur, releasing personal creativity onto the page.

### **Grade Options and Requirements**

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)

- Students must attend and/or watch at least **5 class sessions** and complete at least **6 *required* assignments** from 6 different weeks.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - Students must attend and/or watch all **6 class sessions** and successfully complete **12 *required* session assignments** before the end of the semester, allowing two weeks after the last zoom session for completion of work and feedback. Work is assessed in terms of engagement, effort, and creative progress and not against a fixed achievement goal. There will be a pre-class assignment prior to the first zoom session, which should be completed before class convenes, to allow time to get familiar with Canvas interaction and course structure. Throughout the class, there will also be many optional and additional assignments to do as your schedule permits.

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports. Please inform the instructor of any official requirements to ensure you work toward fulfilling your grade.*

## Materials

Students are encouraged to assemble their supplies prior to the first day of class. An online list for **Art 50** is available on my page at [johnnealbooks.com](http://johnnealbooks.com). Basics are always available through Blick at [dickblick.com](http://dickblick.com) if you prefer, but more extensive and advanced materials specifically for calligraphers are available through [johnnealbooks.com](http://johnnealbooks.com) and [paperinkarts.com](http://paperinkarts.com). This supply list will be available in Canvas when the course opens.

The first session requires a medium marker tool plus printouts of the worksheets provided. This list notes the minimum supplies required, with some further suggestions. We will discuss and demo many optional tools and media in the first session, and I'll welcome questions regarding other supplies at any time.

### SUPPLIES YOU WILL NEED FOR SESSION 1

Printouts on copy paper from the PDF file for Session 1 assignment (4 sheets)  
Medium sized marker (large tip of Mono Twin permanent marker), pen and ink if you have it on hand, or even pencil.

### REQUIRED

- **Drawing paper** - 9 x 12" pad - Strathmore Drawing 400 Smooth (preferred) or Canson or Blick Sketch Pad (better quality makes a big difference for practice; avoid using copy paper for formal work)

- **Tracing paper** - 9 x 12” pad; a [small pad](#) - Canson Tracing is a good choice, wrinkles less than regular tracing paper. Canson Pro Layout Marker is a bit less translucent and doesn’t wrinkle.
- **Graph paper** - [Calligraphy practice pad](#) for pen and ink, gridded 8 squares to the inch. Makes ink practice easier.
- **Pencil** - 2 pencils of your choice such as Faber Castell H or 2H or mechanical pencil (.03 or .05mm) for precise guidelines, sketching, tracing
- **Basic Pen Set** - [Speedball Calligraphy Project Set](#): C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4, and 2 pointed pen nibs - with plastic pen holder (the least expensive choice for beginners, though you may order individual nibs or full sets from John Neal or Paper & Ink Arts. *Are you left-handed? - Speedball offers left hand nibs.*
- **Speedball monoline nibs** - [B-0](#) and [B-3](#) (you need one large nib and one a couple of sizes smaller; these come in sets of two and will fit a regular Speedball holder; B-0 and B-1 come together and B-3 and B-4 come together. If you don’t want B-0 & B-1 pack you can get the B-1 & B-2 pack instead or buy the full set at JNB.)
- **Markers** - [Tombow Lettering Set](#), contains the following items:
  - 2 Tombow Dual Brush pens (1 Black and 1 Light Gray)
  - 1 Fudenosuke calligraphy brush pen
  - 1 Mono Twin permanent marker (has two points, medium and fine)
  - 1 Mono drawing pencil
  - 1 Mono eraser
  - Instruction guide
- **Pilot Parallel Pen** - [3.8mm](#). Portable screw top fountain pen style (also, the 6mm nib size is useful for designing in general, and excellent for practicing large Gothic scripts) These well-made pens are used in the demos and come in sizes 1.5, 2.4, 3.0, 3.8, 4.5, and 6mm) Note: you will need to buy a converter\* if you want to use your own ink (such as Noodler’s, Pelikan Fount, or diluted sumi) in this pen. They can be bought as a set as well. See next item.
- **Pilot Parallel Pen Converter\***: [Pilot Con-40](#) to load your own ink into the pen, and you’ll want to have one for each pen.
- **Non-waterproof black ink** (such as [Yasutomo Liquid Sumi Ink](#) - 6 oz, water resistant)
- **Nicker Poster Colour** - ([S10222](#)) Vermilion 1 jar
- **Color** - A tube or two of gouache for color work, such as Burnt Sienna or Carmine and Ultramarine Blue or similar warm/cool combination (Holbein or Winsor & Newton). You may also use any watercolor pans you have on hand.
- **Basic studio tools**: water bowl, small ink containers, lint-free wipes, Xacto blade, scissors, T-square, ruler (cork-backed is good), old toothbrush for cleaning nibs (most students have these on hand; the T-square is important)
- **Standard** ruled [binder paper](#) or this [excellent pad](#) from JNB, plus copy paper for informal practice and printouts

**RECOMMENDED/OPTIONAL now and for the future...**

- A **lightbox** is highly recommended. We will discuss in class.
- A **better paper** - The [Aquabee SuperDeluxe Sketchbook](#) is a satisfying paper, heavier, well-sized, with a good surface texture for more formal writing and color.
- **Walnut Ink** - [Walnut ink](#) - if you like to work with earth tones; lightfast, semi-permanent ink from crystals, just mix with water, not expensive and wonderful in color.
- **Small Brush** - for filling in letters and spaces, maybe a size 1 or 2 or an old brush marker (Pentel or water brush) that you can wash and dip into the ink or paint
- **Other color possibilities:** A tube of **gouache** for color work, such as Burnt Sienna for warm tone and Ultramarine Blue for a cool hue, or similar warm/cool combination (Holbein or Winsor & Newton) You may also use **pan watercolors** if you have them. I will demo using both watercolor and gouache in the nib for colored lettering in Week 4, though color use will not be mandatory for assignments. (*Budget: colored pencils or markers that you have on hand may be used for practice.*)
- A **journal** book for continuing calligraphy and letterform explorations, a dedicated place to collect words and phrases for personal practice.
- **OPTIONAL** - You may want to add one of the following textbooks to your library, though excerpts from each are included in the class:

*Foundations of Calligraphy*

Sheila Waters

John Neal Bookseller (2006)

ISBN 0966530519

Very detailed explanations, lots of reliable and essential info

*Calligraphy & Letterform*

Christopher Haanes

2022, Matura Press (order from Christopher Haanes)

Excellent introduction to the history, conceptual foundations, with both basic and advanced writing techniques

*Calligraphy*

Julien Chazal

2013, Stackpole Books

Informal cursive models, light background and history, detailed alphabets with a focus on rhythm and movement; European flavor and loads of hints; all major alphabets including cursive pen and pointed pen examples

*The Art & Craft of Hand Lettering; Techniques, Projects, Inspiration*

Annie Cicale

ISBN: 1579908098

Easy to follow, straightforward letter models with ideas for usage, applied calligraphy, crafts

- Other supplies that you already have on hand can be used in addition to this list, and there will be a reference bibliography for download with additional books on lettering for your library.

### **Pre-Class Assignment**

This will be sent via email as a .docx file by the instructor and posted to Canvas on the Friday prior to class.

### **Weekly Outline**

*There may be some changes to this general outline along the way. Course requirements will be clearly stated in class at the beginning of each session.*

#### **Prior to Session 1**

Get ready. Organize your workspace and gather tools and supplies. Read the introductory materials and do the Pre-class Assignment, which is an informal lettering exercise as a personal introduction to each other. It sets the stage for making letters and begins our conversation.

#### **Week 1 - Romans**

Introductions: Discuss examples from introductory exercise

Demo: Workspace and tools, media, mark-making basics

Demo: Parts of the letter

Demo: Letter construction, skeleton Roman capitals and minuscules

Grid and Page Layout: Method, spacing and basic rules of the page

Reading: Know the terms for the parts of the letterform and read the history!

Assignments: Get to know the structure of skeleton Romans, majuscule and minuscule by using the worksheets provided. Access the supporting file *Pointers on Letter Formation*. Rule up a practice page for x-height, ascenders, descenders and majuscules. Practice letters with pencil or marker.

(4 hours homework)

#### **Week 2 - Freehand Writing**

Freehand Writing: What is its history?

Demo: Warmup, rhythm, flow, movement

Demo: Freehand model and variations

Demo: Modular elements of script and specifics of form – slant, interval, spacing, connectors, pressure/release

Demo: Continuous line rhythms, text block variations

Assignments: Warmup flow, alphabet practice, continuous line, make a list, & text block variations

(6-8 hours homework)

**Week 3 - Upright Hands - Uncial and Humanist Minuscule**

Irish Uncial Hand and Humanist Minuscule: History, images, models

Demo: Uncial models – Broad-edged pen technique

Demo: Monogram

Demo: Assignment – Pangram layout, pen angle, spacing, margins, counters

Assignments: Practice, monogram bookmark, and three pangrams  
(6-8 hours homework)

**Week 4 - Gothic Scripts**

Blackletter Scripts: History, images, models

Demo: Modular forms, spacing, pen angles, entry and exit strokes, variants

Demo: Making an accurate historical copy with a filigree capital

Assignment: Full page pangram or alphabetic sentence  
(6-10 hours homework)

**Week 5 - Slanted Scripts**

Italic Script: History, models, and discussion

Demo: Page layout, spacing, serifs, flourishing

Practice: Italic models, capitals and minuscules

Assignments: Weathergram haiku; Italic spatial composition with grayscale and overlap  
(6-8 hours homework)

**Week 6 - Notan, Text Art and Contemporary Design**

Text Art Essentials: Calligraphic trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Demo: Alphabet Variations – Breaking boundaries – Abstractions

Demo: Text as texture – Asemic writing

Demo: Dark/Light Theory – Giving equal meaning to positive figure and negative space

Critique of selected work/wrap up/questions and comments