

# Brush Love

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Adobe MAX 2020

Brush Lettering with Debi Sementelli & Laura Worthington

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**RESOURCES** [lauraworthingtondesign.com/news/article/max2020](https://lauraworthingtondesign.com/news/article/max2020)

# Lettering Supplies

## WHERE TO PURCHASE LETTERING SUPPLIES

John Neal Bookseller | Paper & Ink Arts

## BRUSHES WE RECOMMEND

**Pentel Color Brush** | Color Brush Refills

*The fountain/cartridge based brush we typically use in our brush lettering workshops. You may either purchase refills for the ink when it runs out, or dip the brush in other ink or gouache.*

**Raphael Kolinsky sable brush**

*Excellent pointed brush for lettering, chose from sizes between 1 and 6 (sizes 2, 3 and 4 are most popular)*

**Escoda brush**

*A less expensive sable brush*

**Pentel Sign brush**

*A small, flexible pointed brush*

## PAPER

**John Neal Bookseller's brand**

*Good all-around practice paper sold in bulk, typically used in our workshops*

**Borden & Riley cotton comp**

*Good replacement for tracing paper; higher quality yet still moderately transparent*

**Pacon tracing paper**

*The tracing paper used in our workshops; sold in loose sheets instead of a pad or roll*

**Borden & Riley vellum paper**

*Lighter weight, smooth, translucent, good for final work*

**Borden & Riley Bristol plate paper**

*Heavier weight paper, good for final work*

**Other good brands of paper**

*Canson, Bienfang, Daler Rowney, Rhodia*

**Paper types to consider listed from least to most expensive:**

*Marker paper, Cotton Comp, Ledger, Vellum, Bristol, Watercolor*

## INK

**Moon Palace Sumi Ink**

*Inexpensive ink that's great for brush work, Laura's personal favorite*

**Artist's Ink**

*Lots of colors!*

**Winsor & Newton Gouache**

*High quality, reliable and consistent results*

# *Lettering Posture & Body Mechanics Tips*

## **POSTURE**

- Keep both feet on the ground
- Sit close to the table
- Table surface at an angle or surface at waist level
- Forearm resting on the table, but elbows off
- Stay in the same position; move the paper, not your body

## **BODY MECHANICS**

While you can hold the brush much like you would a pencil or pen, brush lettering incorporates movement of the wrist, forearm and elbow and shoulder; fingers are for gripping the brush and creating small, subtle details. If your letters look shaky, relax your grip and focus on using your wrist and arm to create your letters.

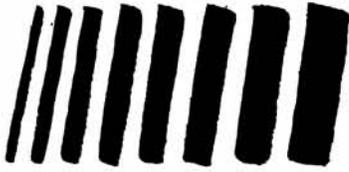
The tripod grip is ideal; thumb, index and middle fingers are equally positioned around the base of the brush. Hold the brush on its side for heavy strokes, upright for light strokes.

Pulling strokes are easier to control than pushing strokes turning your paper to the side to create horizontal or diagonal strokes will take advantage of the natural control you have with pulling strokes. Lastly, use a light touch and letter SLOWLY!

## **TIPS FOR LEFT HANDED LETTERERS**

There can be a bit of a steeper learning curve initially for left handed letterers, and your posture, body mechanics and brush handling techniques may be quite different than right handed letterers, so feel free to experiment and find what works best for you.

- Position paper at a steep angle (Inclined baseline)
- To avoid smearing the ink, experiment with hovering over the page or use a bridge or mahl stick to rest your arm on
- Reverse the direction of the strokes; pushing strokes may be easier than pulling strokes
- Try drawing letters or words from right to left



**Straight strokes** focus on maintaining a consistent width throughout the stroke. Try pulling strokes (top to bottom), pushing strokes (bottom to top) and horizontal strokes from both directions. Also, try varying the lengths of the strokes to get accustomed to both wrist and full arm movements.



**Tapered pressure/release strokes** Begin with putting pressure on the brush for a heavy stroke, then slowly lift the brush to end with a light taper. Try pulling strokes, pushing strokes and horizontal strokes from both directions. Also, try varying the lengths of the strokes to get accustomed to both wrist and full arm movements.



**Pressure & Release** Start with a heavy stroke, then gently lift the brush to make the stroke lighter and tapered. Try starting with a light stroke, and try this as horizontal strokes.



**Transitional stroke** Start with a light upstroke, then slowly pull the brush around into a heavy down stroke. Pay close attention to the transition from light to heavy and vice versa.

**Freeform strokes** Have fun! Experiment with strokes of different shapes, sizes, lengths and tapers.



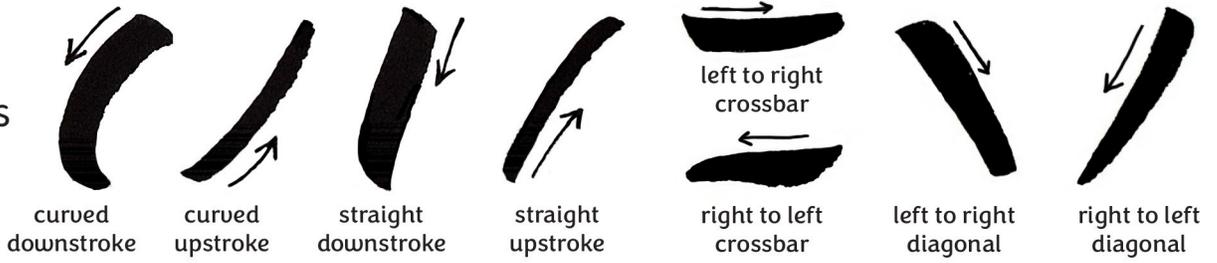
C  
A  
W  
B  
D

C  
A  
W  
B  
D

C  
A  
W  
B  
D

**C**-caps height    **A**-ascender height    **W**-waist line (*height of lowercase letters*)    **B**-baseline    **D**-descender length

BASIC STROKES



A B C D E

F G H I

J K L M N

O P Q R S

T U V W X

Y Z

A B C D E

F G H I J K

L M N O P

Q R S T U

V W X Y Z



## Where to add Flourishes

- Add flourishes to the entrance and exit points of a letter
- Sketch/Letter the entire word first, then add flourishes
- Flourishes may be added to ascenders, descenders, cross-bar, ending & beginning points

## Tips of lettering Flourishes

- Practice! Go over the flourish several times with a pencil to commit to memory then try it with a brush
- Use as many pulling strokes as possible- turning your paper to the side to work with the horizontal strokes
- Stopping and starting points- near the horizontal and vertical axes, you may find that clockwise strokes are easier to make

## The Parts of Flourishes

arc of straight strokes



curved strokes



ogee or 's' shaped curves



loops



spiral



reverse direction



**ASCENDERS** these flourish styles may also be applied to: b · d · f · k · l

h h h h h h h h h h  
h h h h h h h h h h

**DESCENDERS** these flourish styles may also be applied to: f · j · p · y · z

g g g g g g g g g g g g g g  
g g g g g g g g g g g g g g  
g g g g g g g g g g

**MISCELLANEOUS FLOURISHES**

n n n n n n n n n n  
n n n n n n n n  
t t t t t t t t  
s s s s s s s s s s

**NUMERALS**

1 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 5 5 5 5 6 6 7 7 8 8 9 9

A A A A A A A

A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A  
A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A

B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B  
B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B B

C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C

D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D  
D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D D

E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E

E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E E

F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F

F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F F

G G G G G G G G G G G G G G G G G  
g g g g g g g g g g g g g g g g g

H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H H  
h h h h h h h h h h h h h h h h h

I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I I

J J J J J J J J J J J J J J J J J

K K K K K K K K K K K K K K K

L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L

M M M M M M M M M M M M M M M  
m m m m m m m m m m m m m m m

N N N N N N N N N N N N N N N N N

O O O O O O O O O O O

P P P P P P P P P P P

Q Q Q Q Q Q Q Q Q Q

R R R R R R R R R R R

S S S S S S S S S S S

T T T T T T T T T T

U U U U U U U U U U

V V V V V V V V V V

W W W W W W W W W W

X X X X X X X X X X

Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y

Z Z Z Z Z Z Z Z Z Z Z

**Play with Ligatures:** Try creating both traditional ( tt, th, ll, bb, etc..) and non-traditional (Caps with lower case) letter combinations that connect in a way that brings more fluidity to the word. Use some of the examples below or create your own.

Caps connecting to lower case.

Creating an upward slant adds diversity and is more pleasing to the eye.

*The Other Happy*

Connect from top, bottom or middle of Cap.

*Star Altogether*

Traditional th and bb ligatures. Again, angle up at top of bb.

*aardvark* Unique ways to create ligatures: aa, mm, ll. *hubby*

*summer summer*

*hello hello hello*

*brittle* Create a 3 letter ligature.

Consider several different letter style combinations of the same letter

*or ou wo va*

Ligatures that create a more natural look.

*gg ff*

*extreme slant* Upright  
NARROW WIDE

STYLE OPTIONS TO TRY

BASIC TEXT

generosity & Excited

PUTTING FEELING INTO  
THE WORDS

Magnificent

Soft soft

Generous

Excellent

Marvelous

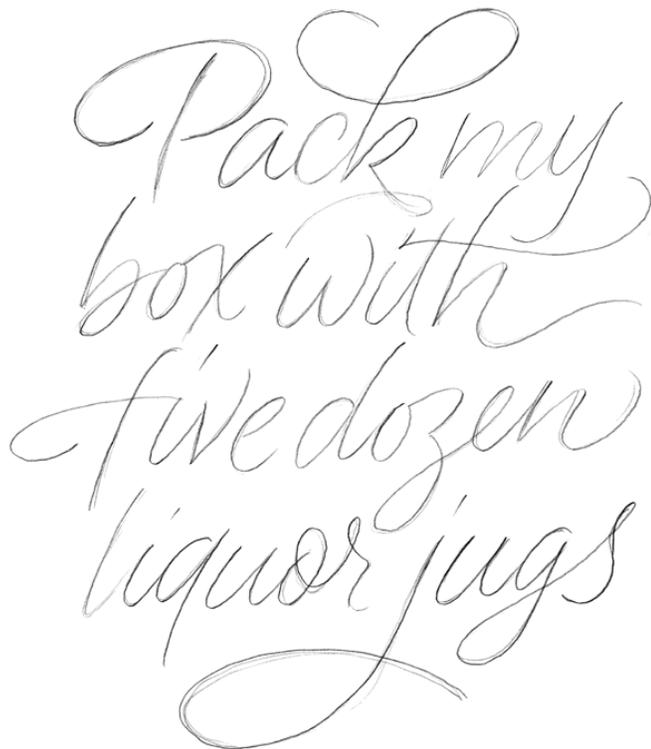
# THE PENCIL SKELETON

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The pencil skeleton is an excellent approach to composing a hand lettered piece –you can see how the letters in a word may interact with each other, experiment with swashes, letter styles and decorative elements and how all of the components of your composition fit together within the framework of a larger composition. It offers a step in between that of a thumbnail and a more tightly refined first draft.

The pencil skeleton may also establish a foundation or guide for which to layer more complex lettering over the top of, with a brush, pointed pen or other lettering tool. Lettering with a brush, for example, can be daunting as there is much to consider: letter styles, composition, the skill require to handle and manipulate the brush, and more. By starting with a pencil skeleton, you've already made the decisions about composition, letter style, etc. and can move on to lettering on top of the skeleton, focusing on that skill alone.

**pencil skeleton**

A light pencil sketch of the cursive phrase "Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs". The lines are thin and serve as a guide for the final lettering.

**lettering over the pencil skeleton**

The same cursive phrase "Pack my box with five dozen liquor jugs" is shown with the final lettering. The lines are thick, dark, and expressive, demonstrating the use of a brush or pointed pen over the pencil skeleton.

Pack my  
box with  
five dozen  
liquor jugs

# Composition Tips

- Research and compile reference images
- Determine hierarchy
- Create a color palette to work with
- Sketch thumbnails
- Try working within a container, shape or frame
- Explore how the letters interact with each other
- Pair contrasting lettering styles
- Go with a theme
- Consider the flow of the design & its cohesiveness
- Choose a focal point
- Go beyond letters: design complementary illustrations or icons
- Create thumbnails with pencil and/or brush
- Sketch a pencil skeleton as a starting point
- Letter multiple renditions to experiment with variations of letterforms and composition
- Combine the best lettering elements together into one piece
- Refine lettering by tracing over lettering with brush, pen or pencil
- Finalize: scan and refine in Photoshop, draw vector outlines, redraw using a lightbox

TIPS ON HOW TO

## Assess Your Lettering

### **STYLE**

Do all of the letters look like they belong together?

Does the style work for the message you want to convey?

### **CONSISTENCY & PROPORTION**

Are the thicks/thins consistent throughout and in the right places?

How about the widths of the letters? Spacing between the letters?

# From Screen to Paper

Take your lettering into the digital realm with these notes and tips

## Adobe Capture

There's a lot of things that Adobe Capture can do - for lettering, it can work as a replacement for a scanner; by taking a picture of your lettering, it will save the image to your Adobe library, where you can later access in it design programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator. It also creates outlines around your lettering that you can edit or adjust.

*Here's a step by step guide to using Adobe Capture with your lettering project:*

1. Take a photo of your lettering in SHAPES mode. Crop the image and decide if you
2. Make some adjustments in the app: erase, brush, crop, and rotate your image. You may also opt to use the 'smooth' feature.
3. Name the image and save it to your Adobe library to access in an Adobe design program.

## Adobe Photoshop

Photoshop is very useful during the iterative process of creating lettering - particularly while working with a pencil skeleton or with early rough drafts. Take a picture or scan in your lettering and make simple adjustments, such as moving, scaling, rotating or warping letters. Print this rough draft out and use it as the basis for another round of hand lettering or save as an image to place into Adobe Illustrator to use as a guide for drawing vector outlines.

If you're working with a larger composition, such as phrase or with illustrative elements, use Photoshop to arrange these elements.

Also, Photoshop works great for making final refinements to textured or complex lettering as some lettering may be too complex to accurately capture details with vector outlines. Scan in high resolution and revise with brush & eraser.

## Adobe Illustrator

Perfect for drawing vector outlines around your lettering, or editing outlines from the image you've saved into your library with Adobe Capture!

From a scan or saved image, place lettering image into Illustrator. From here you may either use the lettering as a guide to draw your own outlines, or if you'd like to have Illustrator draw outlines for you, select the image and in the menu bar, select OBJECT, then IMAGE TRACE, then MAKE AND EXPAND.

If you've used Adobe Capture with your lettering, go to the Libraries panel, find the image and drag and drop it onto the pasteboard. From here you may either use it as a guide draw your own outlines, or edit/adjust the outlines Adobe Capture created for you.