

Hand Lettering & Brush Pen — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into pen-on-paper practice. Each section pairs with a course module and gives you drills, fill-in worksheets, and checklists to build real control with a brush pen. Work through it with a pen actually in hand — the goal is filled drill pages, a documented alphabet, and one finished, framed piece, not just notes.

The Brush Pen, Your Hand, and the Core Stroke

Set up the right tools, then drill thin-up, thick-down pressure until the contrast becomes automatic.

Exercise: Pressure Ladder Drill

On smooth paper, fill a full page alternating one thick downstroke (firm press) and one thin upstroke (feather-light) side by side, like a ladder. Then fill a second page of the eight basic strokes — thin upstroke, thick downstroke, underturn, overturn, compound curve, oval, ascending loop, descending loop — one full row each. Go slowly and keep the pen angled at about forty-five degrees.

- Which two of the eight basic strokes wobble the most for you, and where does the wobble happen — the transition or the curve?

- Did your thick downstrokes stay even, or did the tip skip or split anywhere?

- After a full page, does switching pressure feel more automatic than when you started?

Worksheet: My Brush Pen Kit Inventory

List the actual tools you own or plan to buy so the gear is never the reason you struggle. Note tip type and the paper you are pairing it with.

Pen 1 — make and model (e.g. Tombow Fudenosuke hard)

Pen 1 — tip type (small-tip / large-tip)

Pen 1 — assigned use (smooth-paper finals / rough-paper drills)

Pen 2 — make, model, tip type

Practice paper — brand and finish (e.g. Rhodia dot, smooth)

Paper that frayed a tip (to avoid)

Ink colour(s) on hand

Eraser type (for later drafting)

Total kit cost to date

Gaps still to buy

Checklist: Set-Up Before Every Drill Session

- Chosen a small-tip pen with a fresh or known-good tip
- Working on smooth, coated paper (Rhodia, HP Premium32, Canson marker, or bristol)
- Printed or drawn guide sheet with baseline, x-height line, and a slant line near 55 degrees
- Holding the pen about two to three centimetres up from the tip
- Pen angled down toward the paper at roughly forty-five degrees
- Paper rotated so downstrokes pull comfortably toward you
- Sitting upright, feet planted, forearm free to glide
- Warmed up with one row of thick-thin pressure ladders before lettering

Letterforms — A Full Alphabet

Assemble a connected lowercase and uppercase alphabet by naming the strokes, then fix joins and spacing.

Exercise: Name-the-Strokes Alphabet Build

Letter the lowercase alphabet grouped by family — oval (a, c, d, g, o, q), arch (h, m, n, r), loop (b, e, f, h, k, l), then the rest. For each letter, say the component strokes out loud as you draw (for example, a equals oval plus underturn). Lift the pen between strokes; accuracy beats speed.

- Which letter's stroke breakdown surprised you once you named it?

- On which letters did you put thickness in the wrong place (thin downstroke or thick upstroke)?

- Which family felt easiest, and did its muscle memory carry into the next family?

Exercise: Connect and Re-Space a Word

Pick a short word (your name, hello, or thanks). Letter it three times at full size, leaving generous gaps and keeping every connector a thin upstroke. Squint at each version to find any gap that reads as a hole or a crowd, then keep the best-spaced one.

- Which letter pair joined awkwardly, and how did you lengthen the connector to fix it?

- Were any of your connectors accidentally thick — and how did that change the word?

- Which of your three versions had the most even rhythm, and why?

Worksheet: Letter Anatomy Self-Diagnosis

Letter your full alphabet once, then use typography vocabulary to record exactly what is off so you know what to drill next. Fill in a specific note for each part.

Baseline — do letters sit on it consistently? (note any drift)

X-height / waistline — are lowercase tops landing at the same height?

Ascenders — consistent in height and shape? (h, l, b)

Descenders — consistent in length and shape? (g, y, p)

Counters — are enclosed spaces (o, a) open enough?

Stems — are main downstrokes straight and even-weight?

Crossbars — level and well-placed? (t, A, H)

Numerals — which of 2, 3, 5, 8 has reversed thick-thin?

Top priority to drill next

Checklist: A Letter Reads as Professional When

- Every upstroke is thin and every downstroke is thick
- Curved thickness sits on the descending side of the curve
- Connectors are hairline-thin, not heavy
- Strokes meet cleanly even though the pen lifted between them
- X-height stays consistent across the whole word
- Spacing looks like equal areas of negative space, judged by squinting
- Capitals are bolder and can carry a flourish; lowercase stays calmer

Finding Your Own Style

Treat style as adjustable dials — contrast, slant, weight, spacing, bounce — and lock your choices into reusable style sheets.

Exercise: One-Dial-at-a-Time Study

Choose one short word. Letter it five times changing only the slant from upright to steeply leaning, keeping everything else fixed. Then letter it five more times changing only the contrast, then five changing only the weight. Isolating one variable teaches its effect far better than changing several at once.

- Which dial changed the mood of the word the most dramatically?

- At what slant and contrast did the word start to feel like you?

- Did adding a little bounce read as friendly or as a mistake — and why?

Worksheet: Reference Analysis Log

Collect lettering you admire and steal the mechanism, not the artwork. For each piece, record the dial settings and the one technique it does best so you can remix them later.

Piece / artist (where you saw it)

Contrast (gentle / moderate / dramatic)

Slant (upright / moderate / steep)

Weight (light / medium / heavy)

Spacing (tight / even / open)

Bounce (none / subtle / lively)

The one technique it does best

How I might borrow it into my own word

Exercise: Remix Three Influences

From your reference log, pick three techniques from three different pieces — say, long left-swinging descenders, dramatic contrast, and tight modern spacing. Letter your own word combining all three. Repeat with new combinations until a recurring personal look starts to appear.

- Which combination felt most natural in your hand?
 - What recurring move keeps showing up across your remixes (the seed of your style)?
 - Which borrowed technique did not suit you, and what will you drop?
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Checklist: My Style Sheet Is Complete When

- Full lowercase alphabet lettered in one chosen style
- Full uppercase alphabet in the same style
- Numerals 0 to 9 in the same style
- Three or four sample words showing my signature moves
- Slant angle, contrast, weight, and spacing noted in the margin
- Any signature move described (e.g. looped descender on g)
- Sheet named and dated for tracking progress

From Words to Artwork — Layout and Finishing

Compose words with hierarchy, draft in pencil, ink confidently, and finish the piece for sharing or framing.

Exercise: Thumbnail and Hierarchy Plan

Choose a short phrase (for example, make today amazing). Identify the one or two hero words, then sketch five or six tiny rough thumbnails arranging the words differently — stacked, in an arc, hero-word-large with small words tucked around it. Pick the thumbnail with the clearest hierarchy and best balance.

- Which word did you make the hero, and how will you make it read first (size, weight, style)?
 - Which thumbnail felt most balanced, and what made the rejected ones feel lopsided?
 - Where is the negative space doing work in your chosen layout?
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Worksheet: Final Piece Production Plan

Plan one finished piece end to end before you ink. Fill this in from your chosen thumbnail so the inking step is confident and fast.

Phrase

Hero word(s) and their size / weight / style

Supporting words and their (smaller, simpler) treatment

Pen(s) and paper for the final

Guideline plan (baselines, x-height lines, slant lines)

Decorative elements (ampersand, banner, flourish) and where

Inking method (brush pen direct / outline-and-fill faux calligraphy)

Signature placement

Checklist: Draft, Ink, and Finish Steps

- Drew baselines, x-height lines, and slant lines in light 2H pencil
- Drafted the full composition in pencil and fixed spacing before inking
- Tested the pen and warmed up the hardest word on a scrap of the same paper
- Inked confidently over the corrected pencil draft
- Let the ink dry completely before erasing
- Erased all pencil with a soft eraser, no ghosting
- Added a small signature or monogram in a corner
- Scanned at 300+ dpi or photographed flat in even daylight, straight-on
- Adjusted levels so ink is black and paper is white; spot-removed smudges
- Matted/framed the original or placed the scan on a clean margin for sharing

Your Action Plan

1. Buy one small-tip brush pen (Tombow Fudenosuke hard) and a pad of smooth paper (Rhodia or HP Premium32); assign a second pen to rough-paper drills.
2. Spend three sessions on pressure ladders and the eight basic strokes until thin-up, thick-down switches feel automatic.
3. Build the lowercase alphabet by family, naming the component strokes out loud; then add uppercase and numerals.
4. Letter short words daily, fixing connectors (thin upstrokes) and spacing by squinting until the rhythm is even.
5. Run the one-dial-at-a-time study to learn what contrast, slant, weight, spacing, and bounce each do.
6. Collect five admired pieces, log their dials and best technique, and remix three influences into your own word.
7. Create your first dated style sheet — full alphabet, numerals, sample words, and dial settings in the margin.
8. Plan a multi-word phrase with thumbnails and hierarchy, choosing a clear hero word.
9. Draft the piece in pencil over guidelines, fix spacing, then ink confidently and erase once dry.
10. Scan, level-adjust, sign, and present the finished piece; file it dated as the first entry in your portfolio.

