

Calligraphy — Workbook

This workbook turns the Calligraphy course into daily hands-on practice with your own pointed pen. You will assemble and test a kit, drill pressure and the fundamental strokes, build the Copperplate and Spencerian alphabets, and work through a real envelope batch and a coordinated invitation suite. Keep every dated practice page; the included trackers and templates are designed to be reused on real client work.

Tools, Ink, and Setup

Assemble a working pointed-pen kit, prepare your nibs, and lock in posture, paper rotation, and the slant grid.

Exercise: Prep and Test Two Nibs

Prepare a new Nikko G and one more flexible nib (Gillott 303, Brause EF66, or Leonardt Principal) by removing the factory oil with toothpaste or a quick flame pass. Load each with sumi or walnut ink and pull ten hairlines and ten full shades. Note how each nib feels.

- Which nib gave crisper hairlines, and which gave more dramatic shade contrast?

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- Did either skip or blob on first use, and did re-prepping fix it?

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- Which nib will you make your default learning nib, and why?
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Worksheet: Kit and Surface Test Log

Test your ink on at least three paper or envelope surfaces. Record how each behaves so you never guess on a real job.

Nib name and flexibility (stiff / medium / soft)

Holder type (oblique / straight)

Ink used (sumi / walnut / white / metallic)

Surface tested (brand and type)

Feathering? (none / slight / heavy)

Flow (skips / good / too wet)

Verdict (use / avoid)

Checklist: Workspace and Slant Setup

- [] Printed a 55-degree Copperplate guideline sheet with ~5mm x-height
- [] Taped the guide under translucent practice paper
- [] Rotated paper counter-clockwise until downstrokes pull naturally toward me
- [] Confirmed both nib tines touch the paper evenly
- [] Set side lighting so I can see wet ink shine
- [] Grip is relaxed (knuckles not white)

Pressure and the Basic Strokes

Build the thin-up, thick-down mechanism and drill the fundamental strokes that assemble into every letter.

Exercise: The Daily Swell Drill

Fill one full line each of hairlines, full shades, and swells (hairline to full shade to hairline within a single downstroke). Repeat for five minutes. Then circle your three best and three worst marks on the page.

- Where does your swell go wrong: slamming on pressure, or releasing too late at the curve?

• Are you seeing railroad tracks, and is the cause too much pressure or ink that is too thin?

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- What single change (ink, grip, nib, rotation) will you test tomorrow?

Exercise: Fundamental-Stroke and Oval Reps

Drill each fundamental stroke to a full line: entrance/exit, underturn, overturn, compound curve, oval, ascending loop, descending loop. Then do continuous slanted ovals like a spring lying on its side, keeping width and slant identical across the whole row.

- Which fundamental stroke is your weakest, and how does it differ from the guideline?

• Are all your ovals the same width and slant, or do they drift as the row goes on?

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- Is the shade always on the descending (left) side of the oval?

Worksheet: Stroke Self-Critique Sheet

After a practice page, score each dimension and write one fix. Repeat daily to track your weak point over time.

Date

Stroke or letter group drilled

Slant consistency (1-5)

Height consistency (1-5)

Shade placement correct (1-5)

Spacing evenness (1-5)

Baseline steadiness (1-5)

One fix for tomorrow

Checklist: Diagnose a Bad Stroke

- [] Railroad tracks -> reduce pressure or thicken ink
- [] Blob at top of shade -> ease pressure in gradually, do not slam
- [] Skipping hairlines -> re-prep nib, thin the ink, confirm I am pulling not pushing
- [] Catching and spraying -> stop pushing the nib upward against the grain
- [] Wobbly shade -> loosen grip, steer from the forearm not fingers

Copperplate and Spencerian Alphabets

Build the full Copperplate minuscules and majuscules by family, then drill Spencerian movement and letterforms.

Exercise: Copperplate by Letter Family

Pick one lowercase family per session (underturn: i u t w; overturn: n m h v y; oval: a o c e d g q; ascending loops: b h k l; descending loops: g j y z). Drill its shared stroke, then each letter to a line, then the test word for that family.

- Write minimum: do the arches and shades form an even picket fence?

- In your oval family, do a, o, c, and d all share the same oval shape and slant?

- Which connection (an, in, on, un) keeps spacing best, and which breaks rhythm?

Exercise: Spencerian Movement Rows

Lock your fingers and glide rows of connected ovals and push-pulls using forearm (muscular) movement only. Then write Spencerian minuscules light, with minimal shading, and finish with a few whole-arm capitals driven from the shoulder.

- Can you complete a row of ovals without your fingers doing the work?

- How does the slant and shade weight of your Spencerian differ from your Copperplate?

- Which capital felt most natural with whole-arm movement, and which fought you?

Worksheet: Alphabet Mastery Tracker

Log each letter and capital as you bring it to a consistent standard, so you can see coverage and gaps at a glance.

Letter or capital

Script (Copperplate / Spencerian)

Family or movement type

Drilled date

Consistent? (not yet / close / solid)

Notes (recurring error)

Checklist: Flourishing Without Wrecking Legibility

- Flourish is a hairline going up, shading only on the way down
- Crossings meet near a right angle, not a shallow graze
- Flourish shape is based on an oval, not a random scribble
- No more than one or two flourishes per word
- Rehearsed the flourish in pencil and in the air before inking
- Letters remain fully legible with the flourish added

Envelopes and Invitation Suites

Apply your scripts to a real envelope batch and a coordinated invitation suite, with a professional pricing and proofing workflow.

Exercise: Address a Centered Envelope

Choose a sample address. On scrap, write each line, measure its width, and mark its center. Light-rule baselines on the envelope, letter the address top-down with the name most prominent, let it dry, then erase the pencil with a kneaded eraser.

- Are all address lines centered under one another and sitting on their baselines?

• Did the name read as the focal point through size or flourishing?

• Did the pencil erase cleanly without smearing the ink?

Exercise: Mock a Three-Piece Suite

Design a mini invitation suite: main card, details card, and outer envelope. Fix one palette, one script-plus-typeface pairing, and one margin/alignment rule, then apply them identically across all three. View the pieces together as a set.

- What is your hierarchy: which element is primary, secondary, and tertiary?

• Which dense text did you typeset rather than hand-letter, and why?

• Viewed together, does any piece look like an outlier, and what would fix it?

Worksheet: Client Job Brief

Capture the details of a real or practice envelope or suite job before you start lettering. Confirm spelling and spares in writing.

Client name and event

Piece(s) (envelopes / main card / details / RSVP)

Guest / envelope count

Spare blanks requested (15-20% over count)

Ink color(s) and surface stock

Alignment and flourish style approved (Y/N)

Price per piece and extras

Deposit taken and due date

Checklist: Deliver a Clean Envelope Batch

- Addresses collected in one spreadsheet with confirmed spelling
- Spare blanks on hand (15-20% over count)
- Ink tested on a spare from the same envelope batch
- Proof envelope approved in writing before the batch
- Lettered in batches, ruling and erasing as I go
- Every finished envelope proofread against the spreadsheet
- Hand-canceled or advised client to, delivered with spares unused

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble a kit: oblique holder, Nikko G plus one flexible nib, sumi or walnut ink, white ink, and smooth paper; prep the nibs
2. Print a 55-degree guideline sheet, set posture and paper rotation, and calibrate to the slant
3. Run the five-minute swell, hairline, and oval warm-up at the start of every session
4. Drill the seven fundamental strokes to consistency, logging weak points on the critique sheet
5. Build Copperplate minuscules family by family, testing with words like minimum
6. Add Copperplate majuscules and a small library of tasteful capital flourishes
7. Drill Spencerian muscular and whole-arm movement, then its lighter letterforms
8. Address a centered practice envelope end to end, including light-ruling and erasing
9. Design and mock a coordinated three-piece invitation suite as one system
10. Take on a small paid envelope job using the job brief, pricing per piece with a spare buffer

