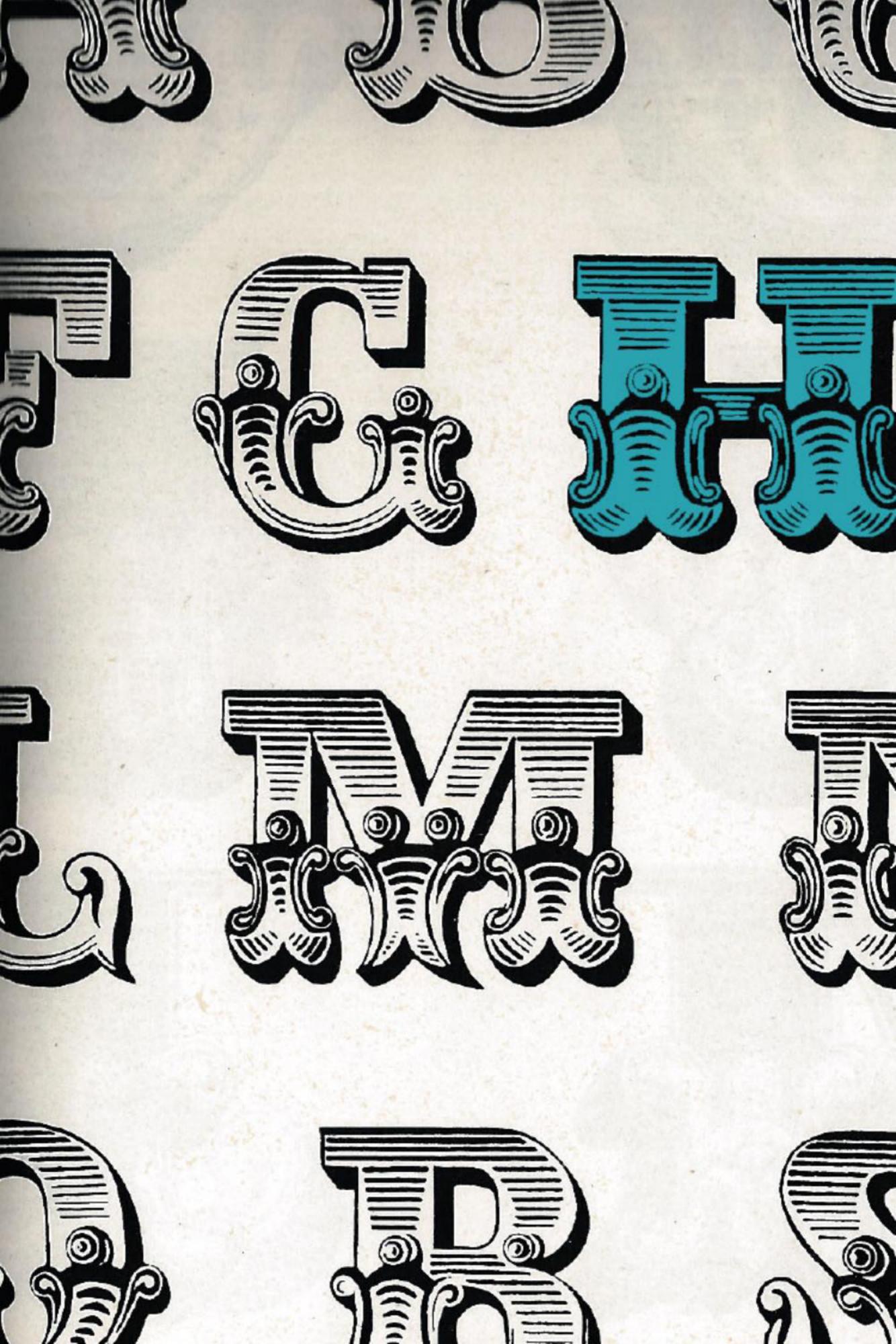# A little GUIDE to HAND LETTERING

A little guide to hand lettering

by: emily eck

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Calligraphy, which translates to "beautiful writing," was the original way books were printed 500 years before commercialization and printing presses. Reading materials were hand lettered with specialty pens, paper and ink, using creative lettering styles. Centuries later, the practice of calligraphy still finds popularity with people who keep up the art of lettering and designers who are interested in artistic text. Lettering is an art form that involves making letters by hand.

Handwriting expresses tone and personality in a way that cannot be duplicated by fonts

F G & H H

L M N

A B S

HISTORY OF LETTERS

Lettering goes back millenniums before the printing press ever arrived on the scene. Modern letters have Egyptian hieroglyphics at their roots. In written-language-development eras, the talent and tastes of individual lettering artists forged the cornerstones of lettering design. As artists began teaching letters as an art form, it was natural to teach something they knew well. Their own letter designs, evolving from earlier cultures, took on the names of the root cultures. This practice was especially predominant across Europe, where the arts rose to higher levels of reverence. Writing did not start with the Roman alphabet, but for practical purposes, Roman capitals are the beginning of our modern alphabet. Some of the significant predecessors are:

Egyptian Hieratic: **3,000 BC**

Phoenician: **1,000 BC**

Greek: $\alpha \beta \gamma \delta \varepsilon \zeta$ **600 BC**

Roman had been perfected around 100 AD. Its influence continued to spread around the Mediterranean and into Europe. A number of national lowercase styles were emerging. Notable among these were Uncials used in Ireland around 500 AD.

Œquia omnequ-
fit antequamfi
atnon futnoic

Charlemagne decreed that a standardized lowercase be developed. This style known as Carolingian became the official lettering style of the Holy Roman Empire in 768 AD. It was very clear and simple to read and write and was used to rewrite many ancient manuscripts.

BENEDICATETC
VSTODIATVQS
FGHPKMLRXYZ

Gothic was created and used by Germanic peoples and monks around 1200 AD. It continued to be used until shortly after the movable type printing press was invented in 1457.

cor. Jdem profecto sunt se meet nepotes. Meminis tis credo. aghklqvuwxyzs

Also known as Blackletter

Bookhand style was created in Italy shortly after the introduction of printing. It very closely resembles our modern lowercase.

ABSOLVI·TANDE^ ALIQVANO·DELE GATVM·MIHI·ABS TE·CFJKPRUWXYz

Also called humanist, originated in the fourteenth century Italy and is the basis of our lowercase Roman today.

In the 1600's Aldus Manutius created the "Italic" typeface. It became a very popular typeface as well as a written script. The Italic Script remains fundamental to calligraphy to this day.
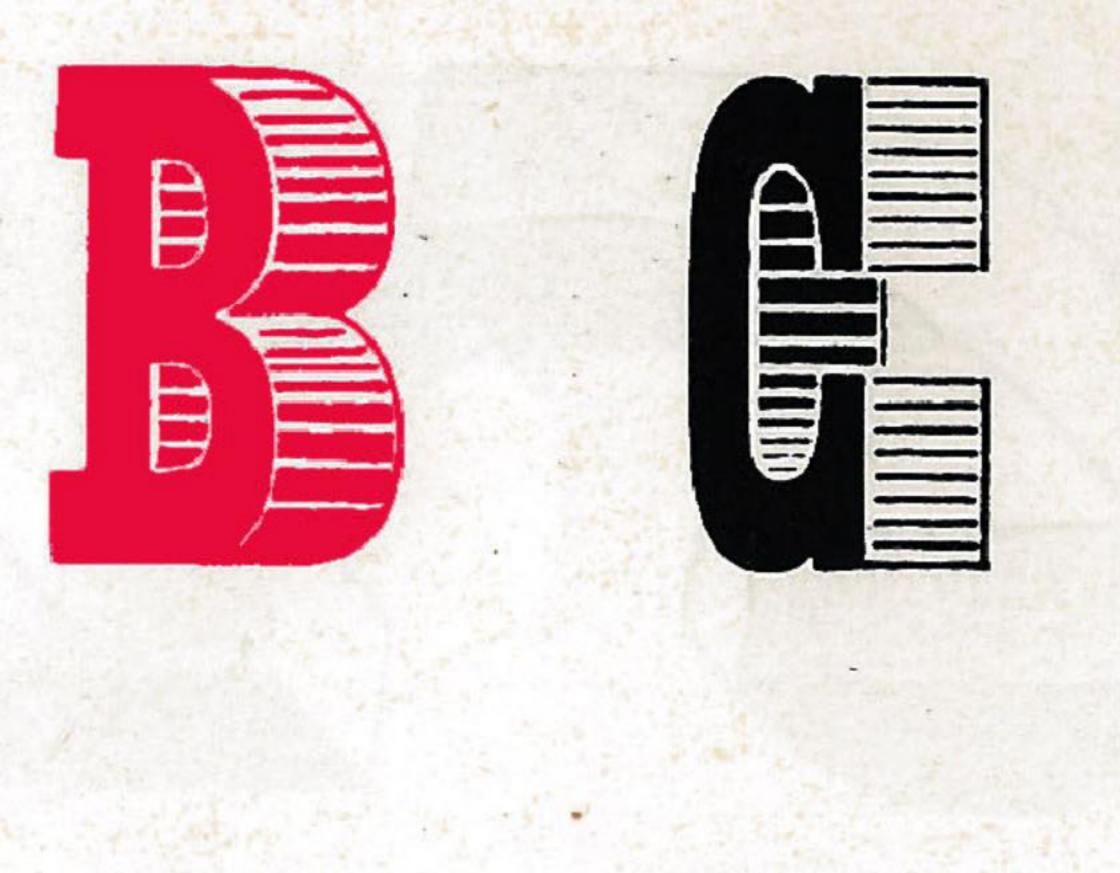

Multi concionatores in
natura sua, licet occulte
superbi sunt et multun
innitur· dfghjqkvwxyz

*This lettering is something personal, oragnic, unique and spontaneous. It mirrors the character and personality of the writer and often his mood of the moment.

In the 1700's a metal quill tip replaced the feather quill. The writing style became known as Copperplate because it was the same style that was used in a new type of printing where the letterforms are engraved into copper plates.

*Often called script derives its name from an engraving style in the 17th century

B G

I J K

B G

BASICS OF LETTERING

Typeface Classifications

There are many different classifications and sub-classifications of typefaces, but the most common two types are: Serif – these typefaces are the more traditional ones. They are distinguished by a short line or finishing stroke on the end of character strokes and stems and; Sans-serif – as the name suggests, these are distinguished by their lack of any Serifs.
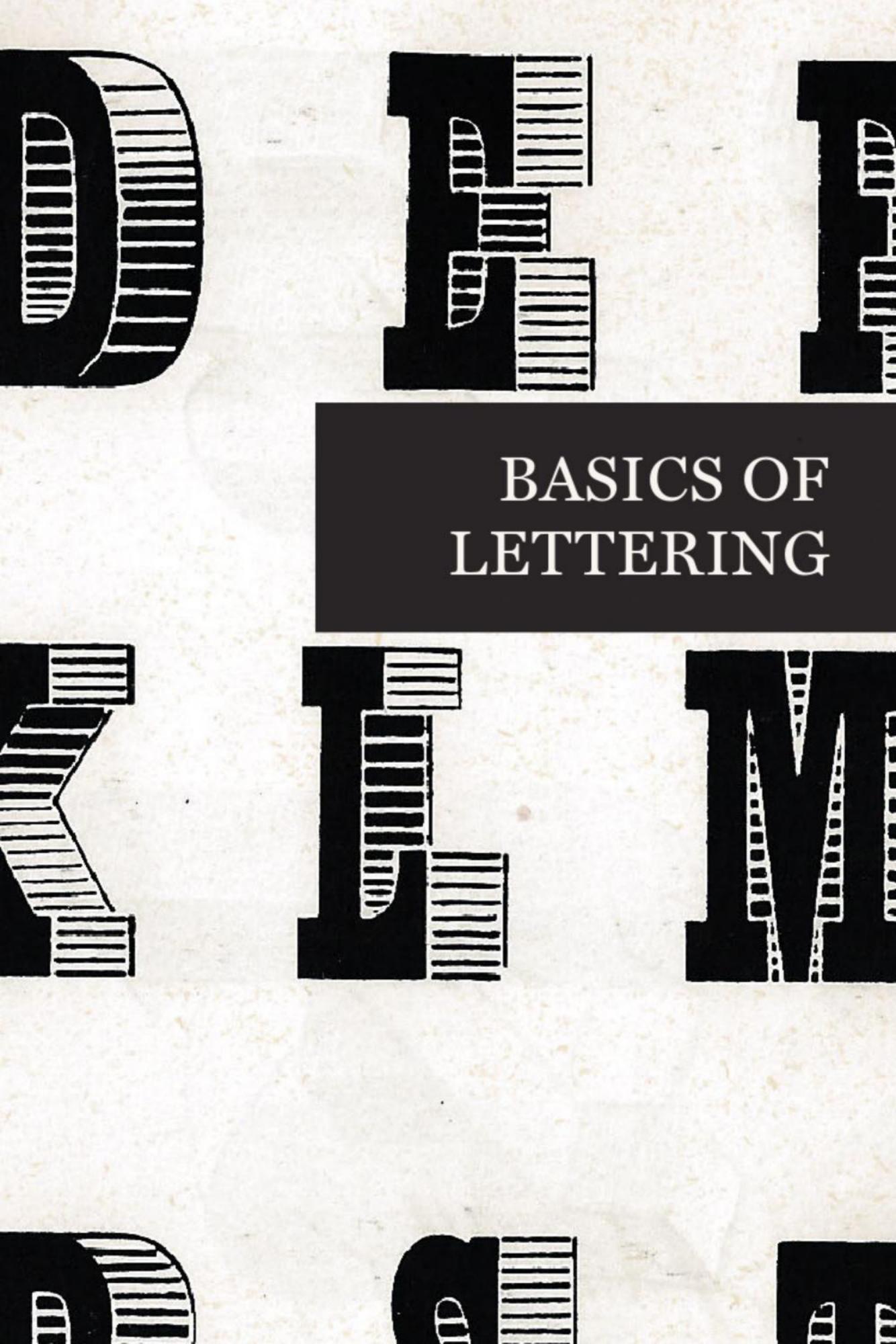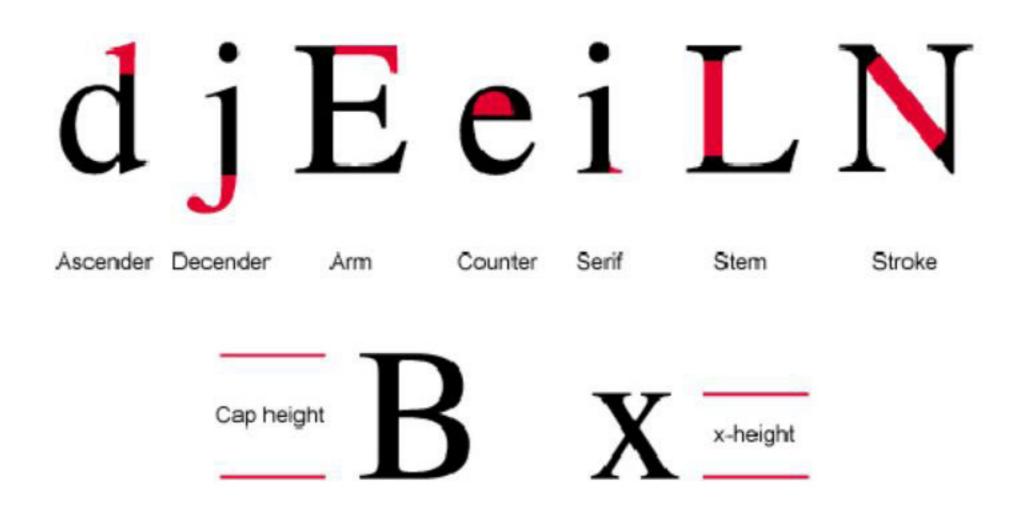
Alignment

Generally text should be left aligned, simply because we are used to reading that way. Without good reason, only consider centering or right aligning text if it is a small amount, such as a heading or caption. Also, justifying text (where it has a straight edge on both sides) should be used in moderation too.
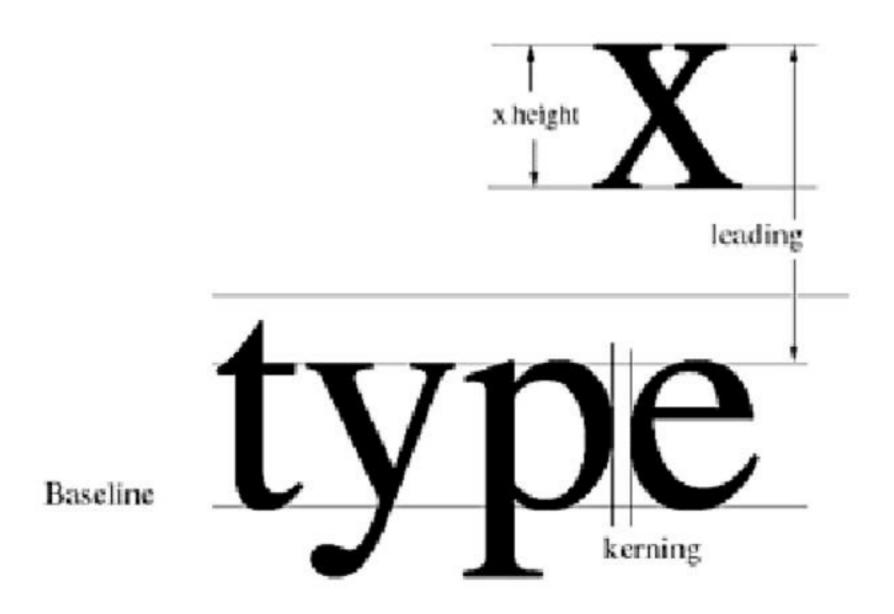
Anatomy

Here are a few of the basic parts of the anatomy of typographic characters.

d j E e i L N

Ascender   Decender   Arm   Counter   Serif   Stem   Stroke

Cap height   B   X   x-height

x height

X

leading

Baseline

type

kerning

Leading

Vertical line spacing is referred to as Leading in typography and print, which is because in the old days of printing and setting blocks of type, strips of lead were inserted between the lines according to how much space was required. Leading's role in typography is to generate sufficient space between the lines to make it readable. As with all matters of typography, it is a balance between reading comfort and aesthetic style.

Kerning & Tracking

Kerning is the adjustment of the spacing between individual characters. Tracking, however, is the spacing of a group of characters. These two are often confused, but the way I remember them is that Tracking sounds like a long line of railway tracks, where as Kerning sounds like kernel, which is an individual object.

Tserifs**ext**

Serif Font

Text

Sans Serif Font

Sans Serif

Sans Serif lettering is a style that has no tails on the letters. These letters are made of straight lines. Popular lettering styles or fonts that fall into this category include Courier, Gill Sans and Ariel. They only became popular in the nineteenth century and are considered modern as a result.

Glyphs

Glyphs refers to all the available characters in a font, from letters to numbers and all the special characters.

Measure

This refers to the length of lines of text in a paragraph or column. Most people tend to just refer to it as column width though. Measure is an important thing to get right in typography as it can be crucial to the readability of the text. If the measure is too wide the text may be difficult to read as the eye has to move a lot more after each line is read. If it is too narrow it can also be tiring on the eye to read, as the eye is constantly moving back and forth. A narrow measure will also lead to a lot of hyphenation.

Serif

Serif lettering styles are letters that have tails on them. If you examine a font on the computer or text in a book, you will notice that some letters have tails and some consist of straight lines. Popular serif fonts or letter styles include Times New Roman, Bodini and Baskerville. Serif fonts are usually easy on the eyes when reading and work well for body text.
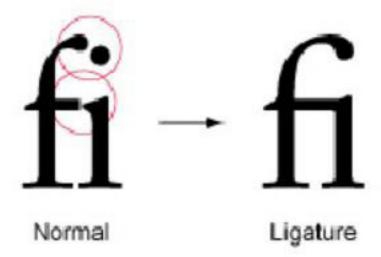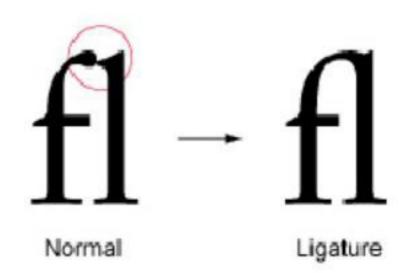
Faces

A face describes the style of lettering you see as the final product. There are six standard classes of lettering faces: Roman, Gothic, Script, Text, Italic and Contemporary.

Ligatures

When parts of the anatomy of characters either clash or look too close together, they can be combined in what are called Ligatures. These can be for functional or decorative reasons depending on how obvious the clash is. Mostly this is only an issue with serif fonts although sometimes sans-serifs will need ligatures to be set too.

fi → fi

Normal   Ligature

fl → fl

Normal   Ligature

Calligraphy

Calligraphy style lettering is characterized by lines that alternate thin and thick. The style is similar to Gothic, but with smoother edges and less points. Calligraphic lettering often takes on a ribbon-like effect and is used primarily for headlines.

Gothic

Gothic style lettering typically features very sharp edges, based on the styles of Gothic architecture. Gothic lettering is often used for headlines and titles, but it doesn't work well for body text. The sharp lines make it difficult to read when used as body text, primarily because the letters often run too close together. Gothic is a decorative lettering style and, as such, used less frequently for functionality.

ABCDEFGHIJ KLMNOPQRS TUVWXYZ

Block

Block lettering is a plain, straight forward lettering style that is character-ized by letters that are typically very large and written in all capitals. This is a headline style lettering that features straight lines and a blocky appearance.
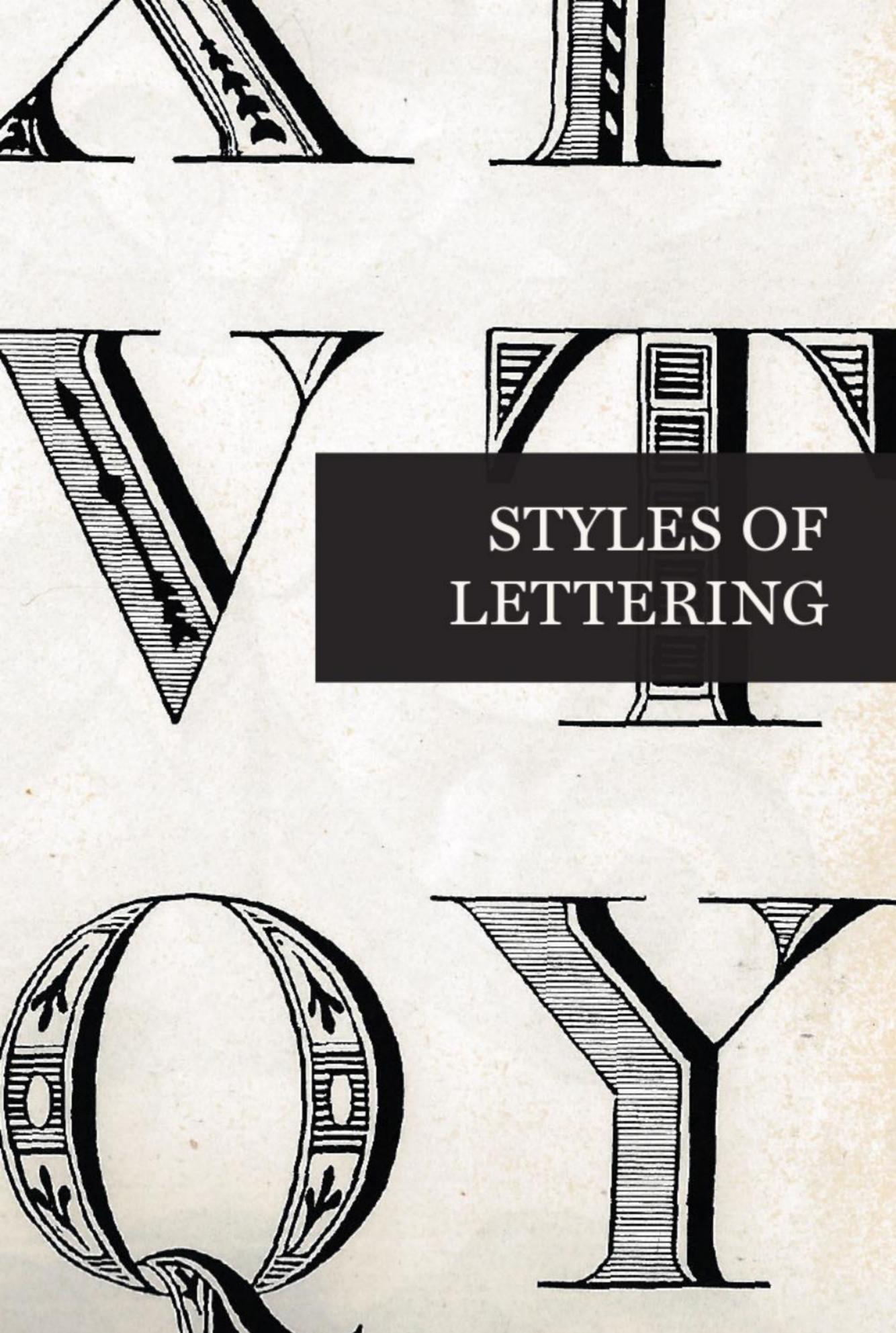
Graffiti

Graffiti style lettering is char-acterized by fat, rounded or sharp-edged characters. Graffiti lettering is often done with three dimen-sional shading and can take on elements of Gothic or Calligraphic lettering.

Sub Styles

Within each of the letter-ing styles are sub styles that can be applied to the main lettering types. These include round hand, cur-sive, italic, bold, Old English and contemporary.

U R R

V S

STYLES OF LETTERING

Everything represents some level of communication. For effective communication, lettering legibility is most important. Five elements determine legibility: style, size, letter spacing, word spacing and line spacing.

Words alone cannot convey a sensible message. Clarity of letter formation helps to make a document readable. Style will give feeling to your message. It is important to select a style that is consistent with the communication. To do this, a lettering artist needs to recognize styles and the message each style conveys.

Foundational Hand

The Foundational Hand is the one that calligraphy newcomers often learn first as an introduction to the art form. Although the term for the style was created in the early 1900s, its inspiration comes from a 10th-century script called the Ramsay Psalter. A nib width of four is used to create the upper and lowercase lettering of the Foundational Hand, which is used for formal designs such as wedding invitations and special event envelopes. The letter "O" is the guide point for the Foundational Hand alphabet.

Unical Hand

The Unical Hand style of calligraphy stands apart from other varietals because it has no lowercase; it is purely an uppercase writing style. Unical Hand came to be popular around the seventh century and is mostly chosen for bold, informal work such as brochure titles and letter greetings. The guiding letter for Unical Hand is the "O," keeping a wide, round base as the guide for drawing other letters. Unical Hand experts select a nib width of four for writing in the style; three to three and a half is also accepted.
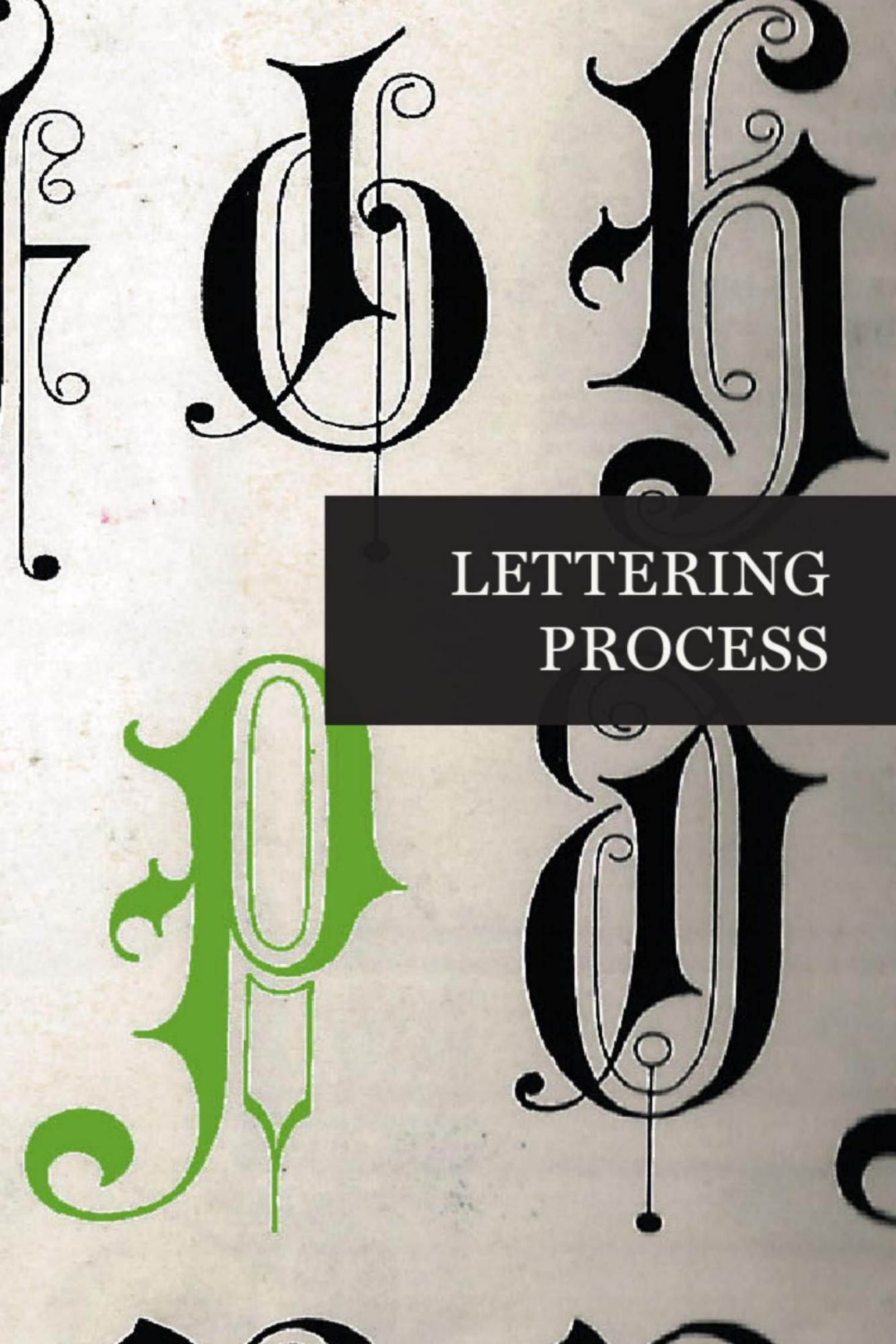
Gothic Lower Case

Gothic Lower Case is similar to the Unical Hand in that it supports only one lettering style; its letters are solely lowercase, much like the Unical Hand is only uppercase. The Gothic Lower Case style became popular in the 13th century but has since evolved from its original state into a more angular and sharp lettering design, giving an almost diamond-like shape and extra flourishes on the tops and bottoms. Gothic Lower Case writers use a nib width of five to create their letters, with each letter based on the "O" shape as a guide.

Flourished Italic

For a bit of extra-fancy lettering, try the Flourished Italic style, which calls for long letter stems with the letter "a" as a guide. The style became popular in Italy's 16th century and is used for creative, nonformal work. Flourished Italic calls for a five nib-width pen, though smaller pens may be used to create smaller flourishes. The Flourished Italic may also be used as inspiration for page decorations; once the lettering is mastered, flourishes may be created as simple designs to fill corners or a border.

LETTERING
PROCESS
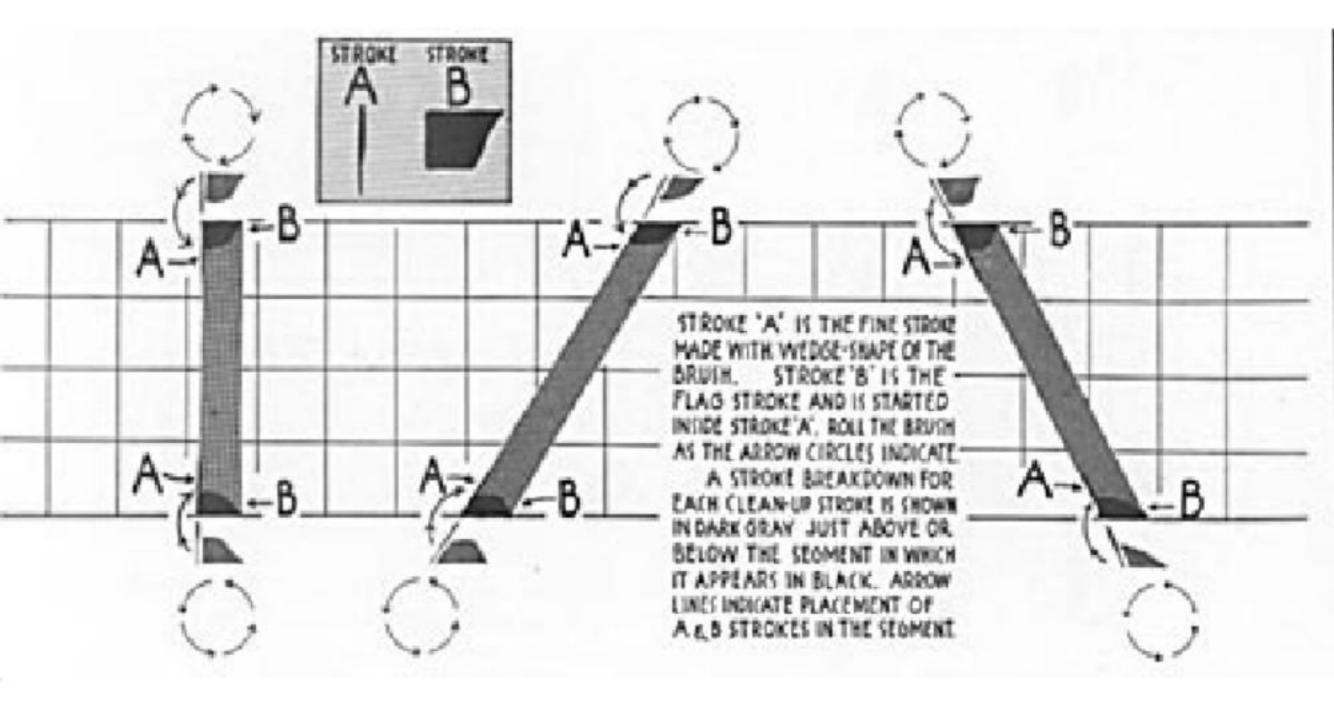
The two most important tools you'll need depending on the style you are going for are; a ruler, pencils, and pens or ink. Pens for lettering fall into two categories: Technical Drawing pens and Dip (or Nib) Pens. The big hurdle to overcome with hand-lettering is practice. It's a skill, and regular practice will improve it.

PRACTICE STROKE NO.1

PRACTICE STROKES NO.2 & NO.3

PRACTICE STROKE NO.4

THE SIX PRACTICE STROKES

PRACTICE STROKE NO.5

PRACTICE STROKE NO.6
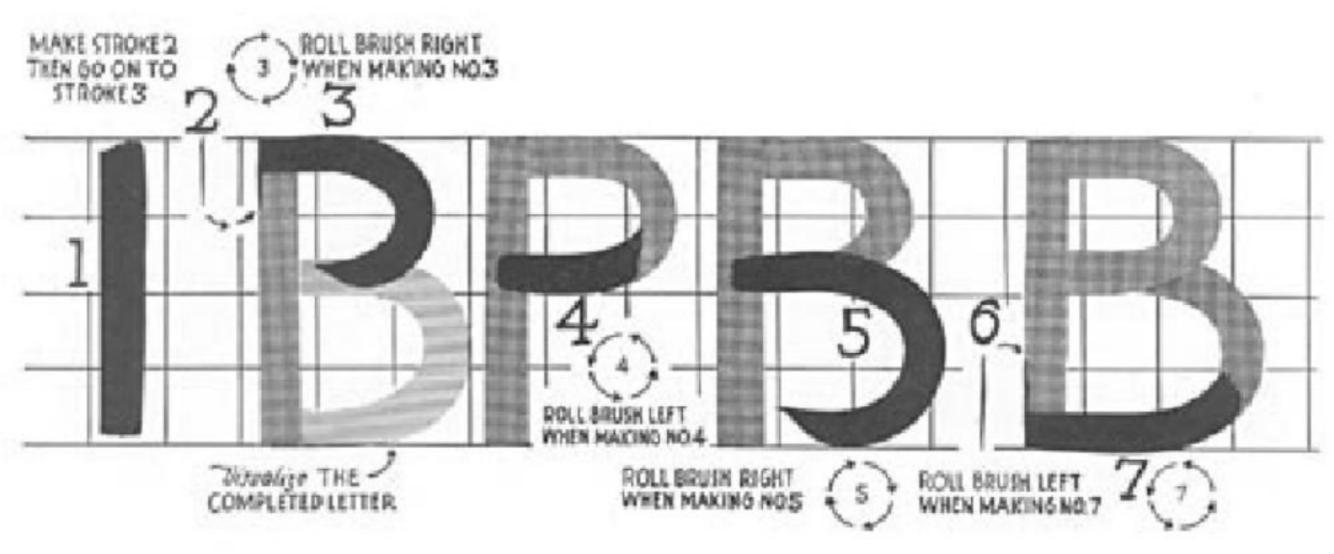
For beginners it is hepful to practice basic strokes of an alphabet such as the Gothic alphabet show above.

Besides the basic strokes shown above, another group of strokes called "clean up strokes" must be perfected to complete the alphabet. As the stroke is pulled, the brush is twisted in the fingers to create the "B" stroke in the gray box at the top

STROKE 'A' IS THE FINE STROKE MADE WITH WEDGE-SHAPE OF THE BRUSH. STROKE 'B' IS THE FLAG STROKE AND IS STARTED INSIDE STROKE 'A'. ROLL THE BRUSH AS THE ARROW CIRCLES INDICATE. A STROKE BREAKDOWN FOR EACH CLEAN-UP STROKE IS SHOWN IN DARK GRAY JUST ABOVE OR BELOW THE SEGMENT IN WHICH IT APPEARS IN BLACK. ARROW LINES INDICATE PLACEMENT OF A & B STROKES IN THE SEGMENT

Once you understand the basic strokes and clean up strokes, you are able to assemble complete letters as shown below.

MAKE STROKE 2
THEN GO ON TO
STROKE 3

3 ROLL BRUSH RIGHT
WHEN MAKING NO.3

2

3

1

Visualize THE
COMPLETED LETTER

4

4
ROLL BRUSH LEFT
WHEN MAKING NO.4

5

6

ROLL BRUSH RIGHT
WHEN MAKING NO.5

5 ROLL BRUSH LEFT
WHEN MAKING NO.7

7

7

Using the basic strokes shown, the basic Gothic alphabet can be easily achieved.

ABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQ
RSTUVWXYZ
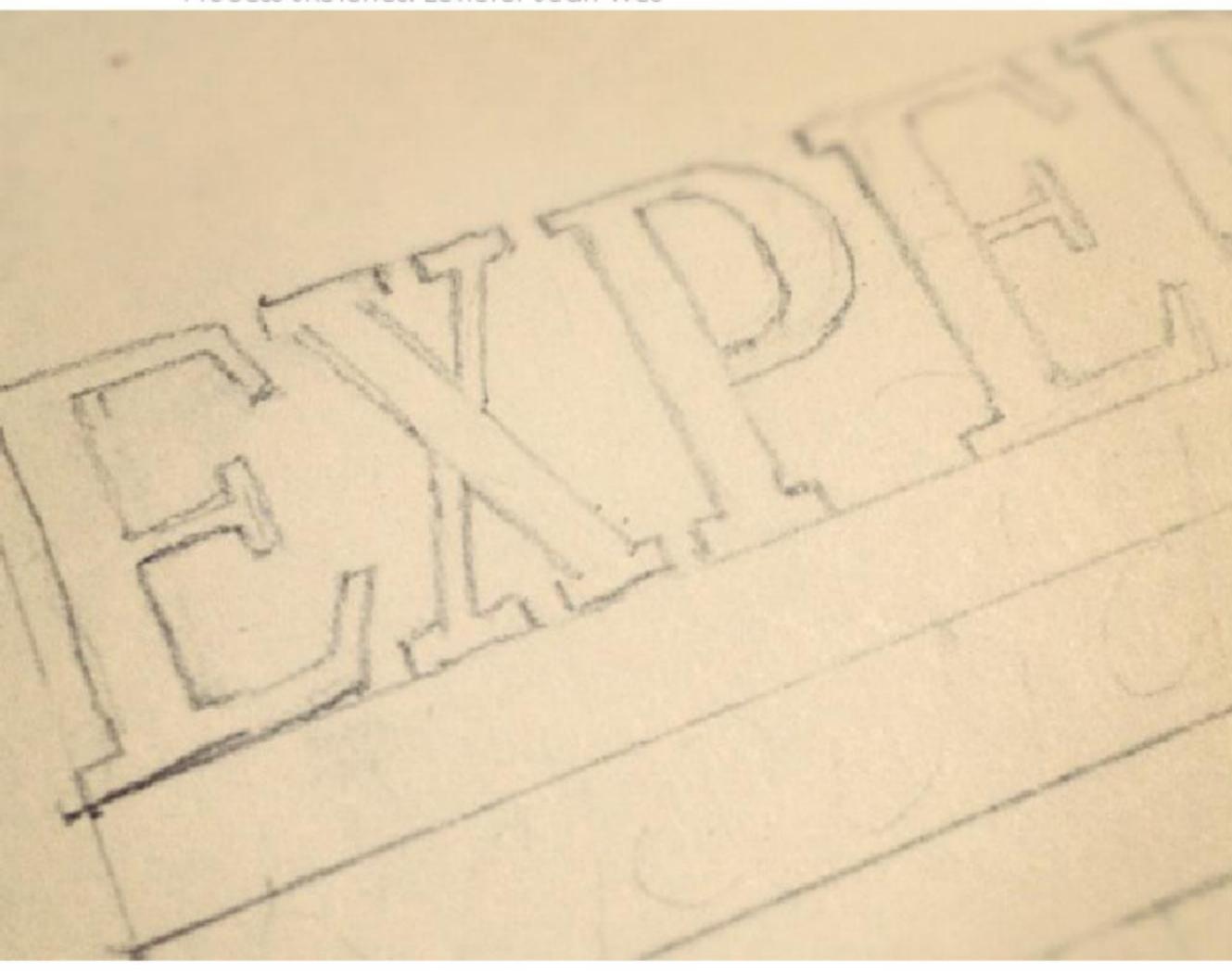
abcdefghij
klmnopqrst
uvwxyz

To begin free hand lettering roughly sketch out what you want to letter. It is helpful to start by using a ruler to draw in some lines with a pencil to serve as guides; and if you want to justify the text within a box.
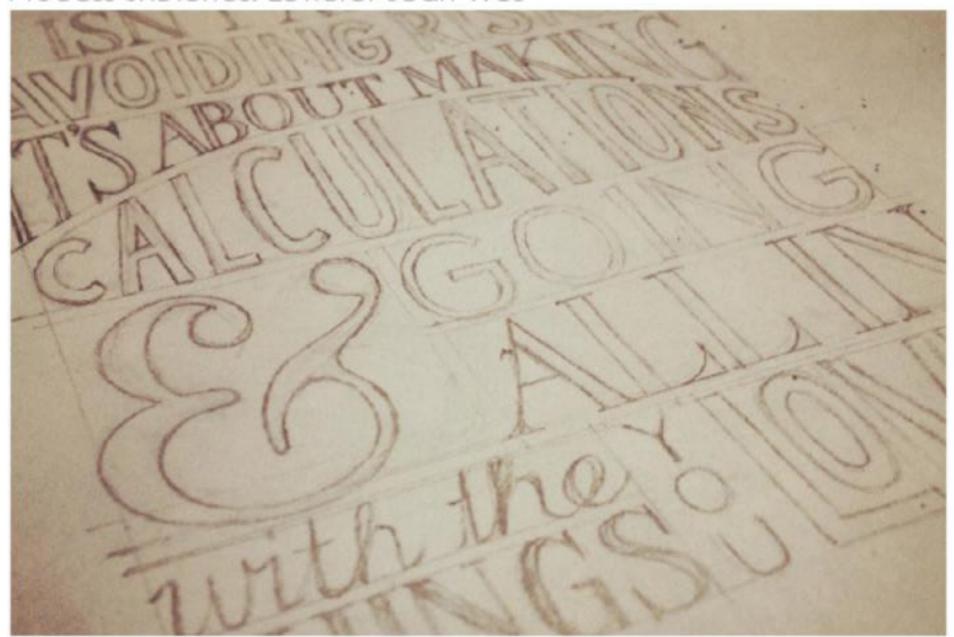
As you're drawing out your guides, you want to think about which words will be on each line and be picturing how tall the line height is based on the length of the line.

Make sure to account for leading between lines when you make your pencil guides. Notice the pencil guide at the x-height of the second line. This keeps it grounded so you don't start floating off of the baseline. The primary thing you want to nail in this stage are the styles, spacing (kerning), alignment and balance.

Now, you can finally begin the inking stage! Pay close attention to detail and after much patience, and often numerous breaks, you will see the conclusion that is hopefully your grand vision.

INSPIRING LETTERERS
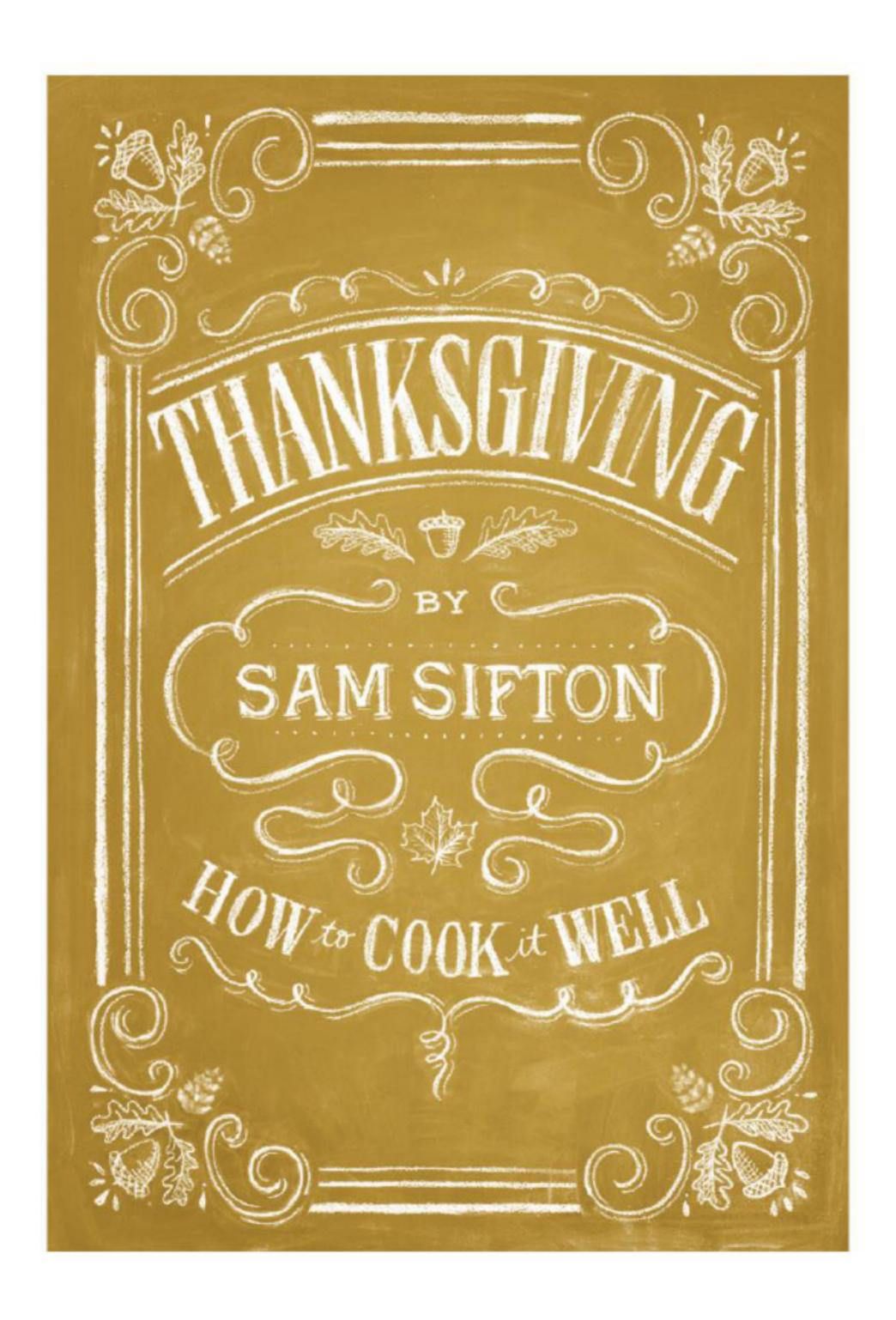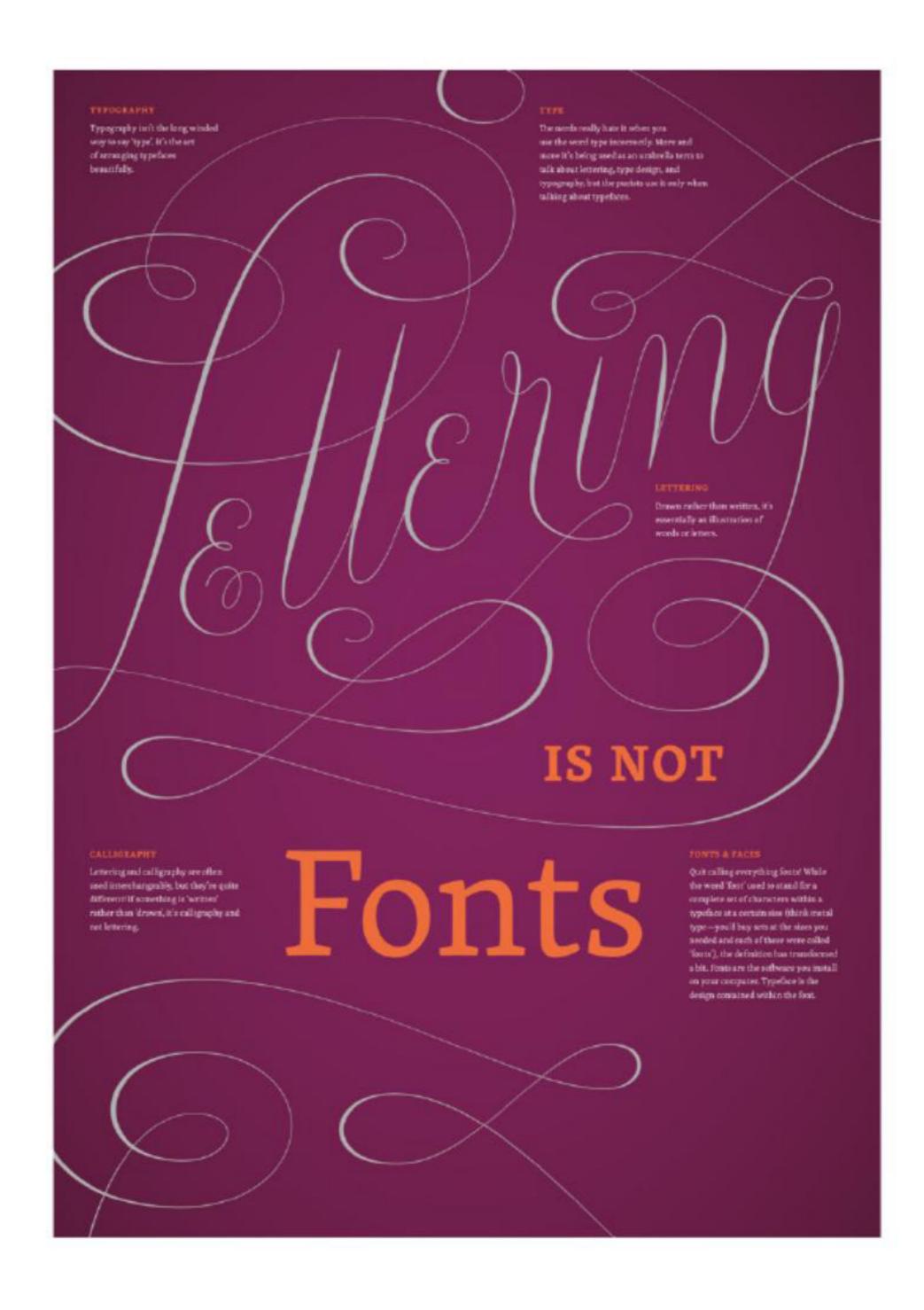
DANA TANAMACHI
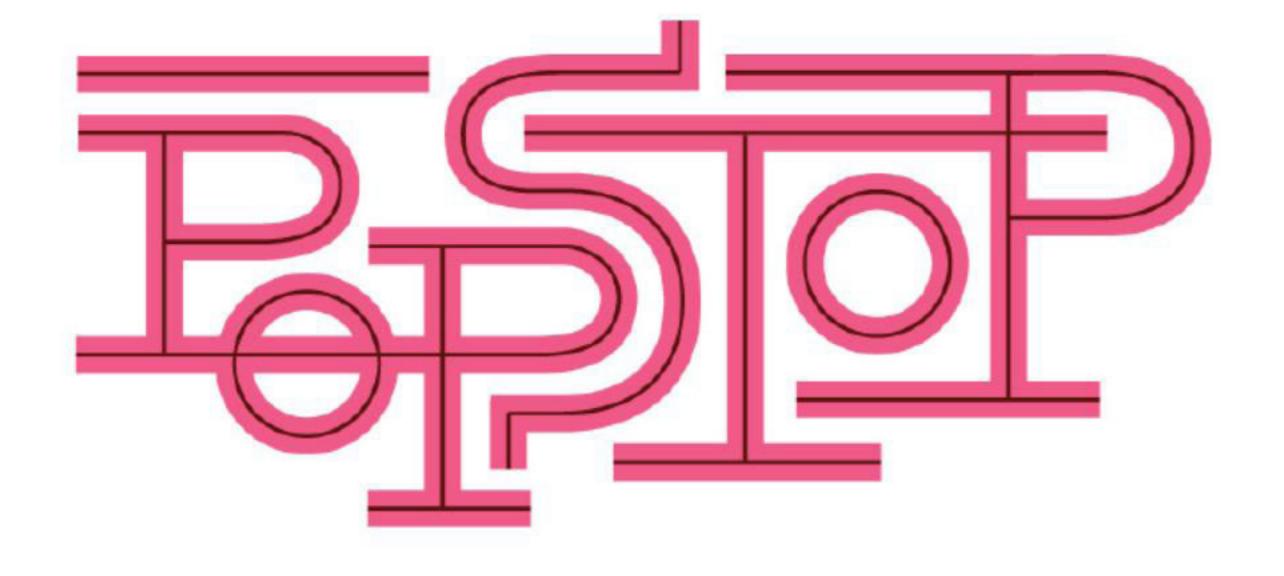
Dana Tanamachi is a graphic designer and custom chalk letterer living in Brooklyn, New York.

THANKSGIVING

BY

SAM SIFTON

HOW to COOK it WELL
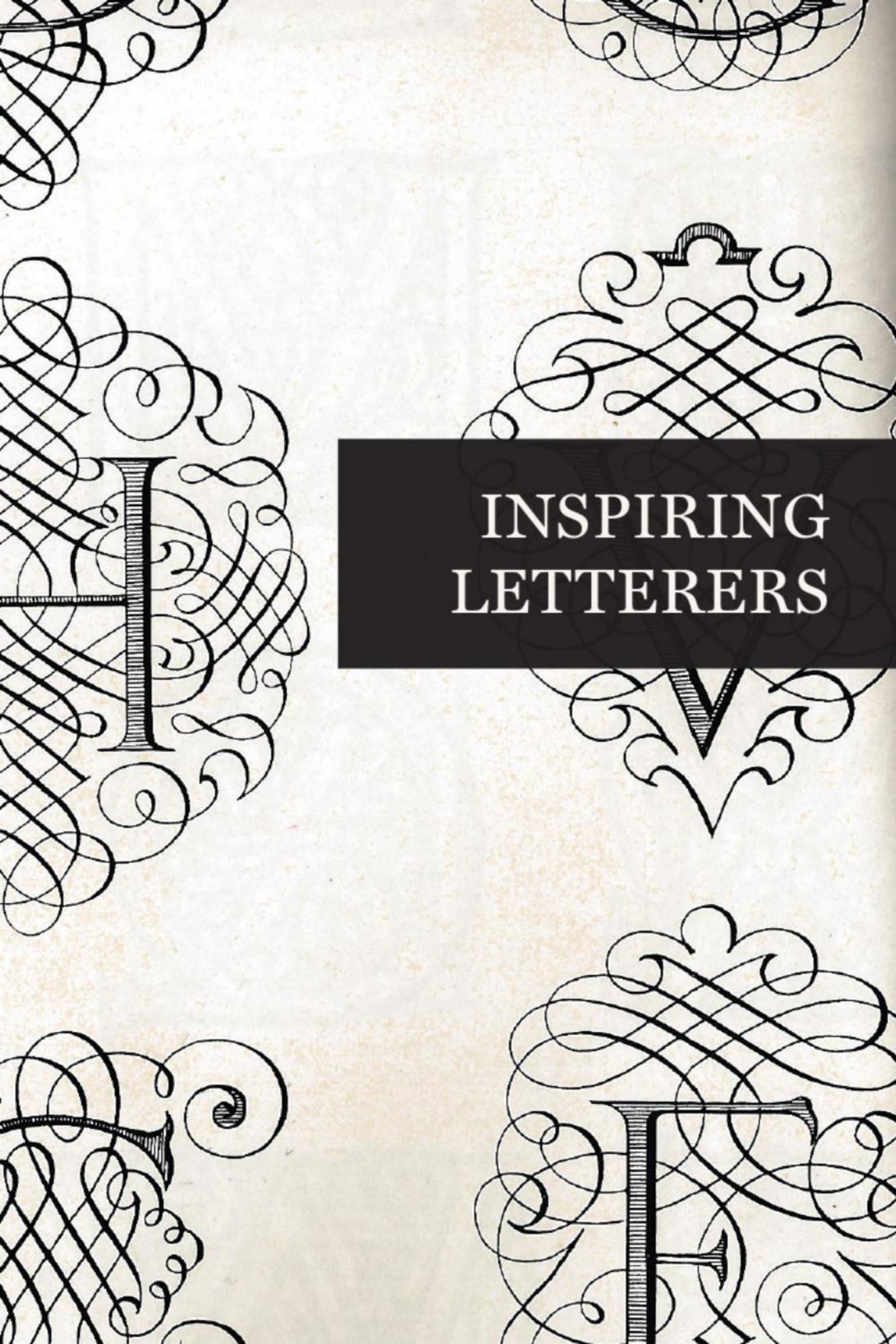
TYPOGRAPHY

Typography isn't the long winded way to say 'type'. It's the art of arranging typefaces beautifully.

TYPE

The nerds really hate it when you use the word type incorrectly. More and more it's being used as an umbrella term to talk about lettering, type design, and typography, but the purists use it only when talking about typefaces.

LETTERING

Drawn rather than written, it's essentially an illustration of words or letters.

IS NOT

CALLIGRAPHY

Lettering and calligraphy are often used interchangeably, but they're quite different! If something is 'written' rather than 'drawn', it's calligraphy and not lettering.

Fonts

FONTS & FACES

Quit calling everything fonts! While the word 'font' used to stand for a complete set of characters within a typeface at a certain size (think metal type—you'd buy sets at the sizes you needed and each of these were called 'fonts'), the definition has transformed a bit. Fonts are the software you install on your computer. Typeface is the design contained within the font.

JESSICA HISCHE

Jessica Hische is a letterer, illustrator, and crazy cat lady known for her silly side projects and occasional foul mouth.

HAIR

NAILS

KARMA

a novel in verse

Cathy Ostlere

Life
ISN'T ABOUT
AVOIDING RISKS
IT'S ABOUT MAKING
CALCULATIONS
& GOING
ALL IN
with the YOU LOVE
THINGS

SEAN WES

Co-founder of Bold Perspective, a San Antonio based design firm.
Hand Lettering Artist, Type Designer, Illustrator, Interface Crafter,
Musician, Christian, Husband, and Coffee Lover.

Create & Don't Stop Creating

Let's go & be ADVENTURERS

FEELS GOOD TO GET SOME STUFF DONE

YAY!

The Next Course

MARYKATE MCDEVITT

Mary Kate McDevitt is a letterer and illustrator living and working in Portland, OR. Mary Kate graduated from Tyler School of Art in 2007 with a degree in Graphic Design and Illustration.

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NY

wn for its

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