



<https://www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand.org.uk>

<https://www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand-reading.org.uk>

<https://long-live-pitmans-shorthand.blogspot.com>

Images & Text © Beryl L Pratt

Blogs - 2014 - July

2 Con Prefix

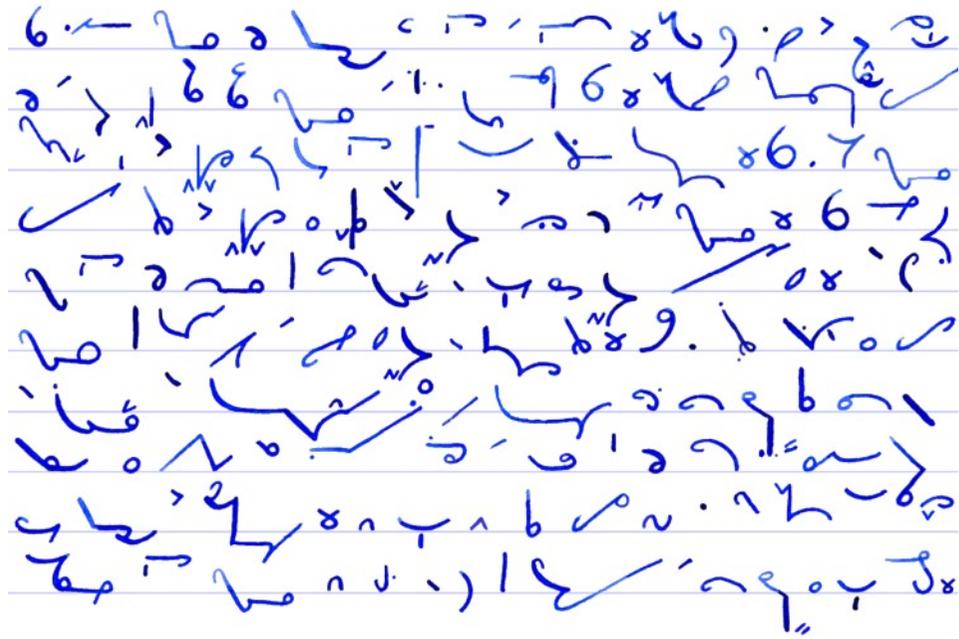
8 Fish Newsletter

12 Spring Clean

15 Pen And Ink

All material is copyright Beryl L Pratt and may not be republished, or reposted online, in any form. This file is intended for non-commercial personal study use only. The only permitted download site for this file is <https://www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand-reading.org.uk>

PDF Date: 26 November 2020

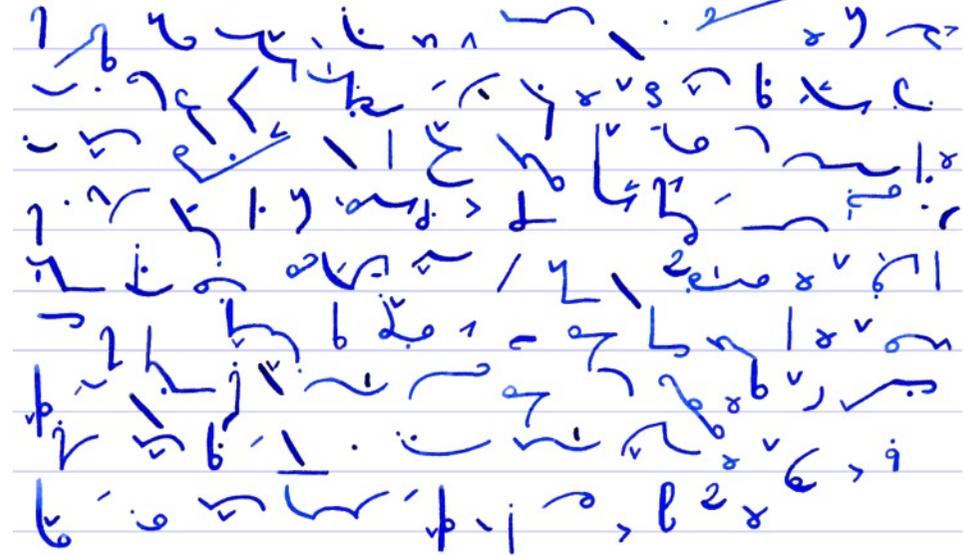


Con Prefix

This article practises words beginning with Con and Com. I have been through a list of the 2000 most common words and pulled out all those with this prefix and added a few extra as well. I have used proximity* where appropriate*, but all the outlines here have the Con Dot in their basic form. This is the only prefix where the position of the outline is decided by the vowel of the main word and not the prefix. This is because the sheer number of con words makes it more convenient to know the second vowel rather than the first. All other prefixes do follow the rule and use the first vowel to determine position. As usual, the composition below is one of convenience of vocabulary, as our fictional friend Mr Speedy* does seem to be basing

his report of his career, actions and opinions on words from certain pages near the beginning of the shorthand dictionary. You know how it is, once you have a particular item in mind, in this case the Con prefix, you tend to see it everywhere, and Mr Speedy is no exception.

- * "proximity" in shorthand is writing two outlines close together
- * "appropriate" Insert the diphone, and the first vowel in "proper", as these are similar in outline and meaning
- * "A Most Distinguished Writer" article of 8 July 2012



Con Prefix

Dear Readers, I have been invited to convey to you how I came to be a shorthand writer*. I was employed in a very comfortable job, undemanding and low paid. I spent my days obeying the every command of my superior, be it filing papers, tidying the office or making tea. During a particularly boring day, I was sorting the contents of the desk drawers and came across an old notebook containing some sort of convoluted writing which I took to be shorthand consonants. I consulted it again during the tea break*, admiring its conciseness and the great skill

taken to produce it. I somehow decided not to be controlled by my own lack of skill or prospects, I wished to regain control of my days, and become a commander of my own life. I listened to the considered advice and comments of my family, and decided to commit myself to the study of shorthand.

- * Omission phrase "short(hand) writer"
- * "tea break" Insert the vowel in "tea" to differentiate from "outbreak"



Con Prefix

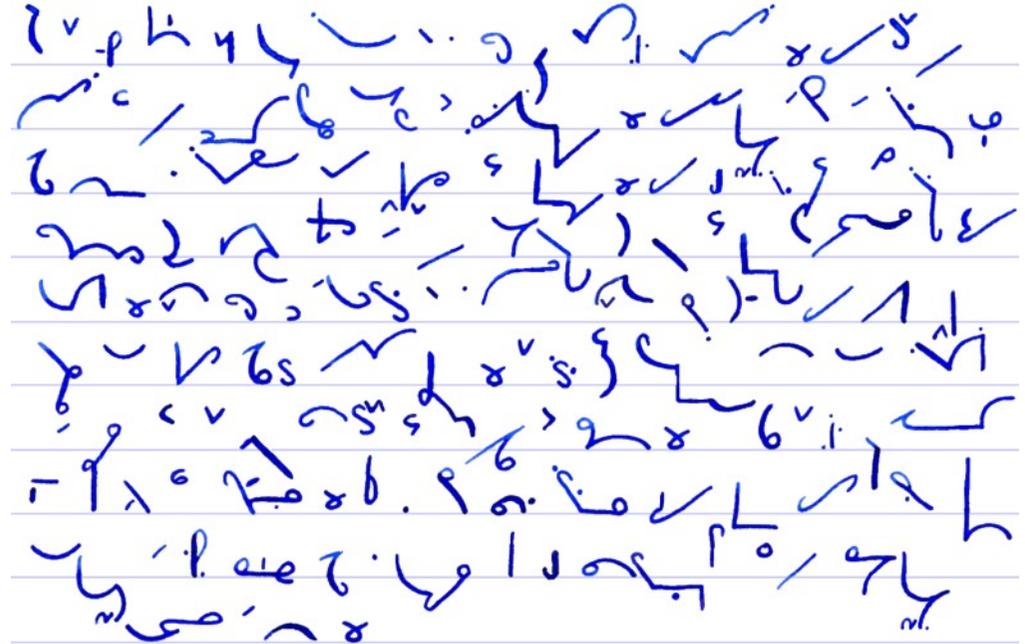
It was my constant dream that maybe one day I could take committee notes, like the writer of the old notebook must have done. I knew that the subject was not common, but having communicated my interest to some good friends, they advised me to investigate* the subject at the town community centre library. Eventually I sent a communication to a local bookseller who found the appropriate* books for me to study, containing everything I needed to know. I committed myself to this decision and commenced learning the new subject. I now felt that I was a small part of the* shorthand community spanning the years, carrying on this commendable study into

the future. My friends commended me on this new venture and recommended that I continue with the plan. I was confident that I could maintain my commitment and reach my goal of complete mastery of the subject.

* T "inves(t)igate" Omits the T

* "appropriate" Insert the diphone, and the first vowel in "proper", as these are similar in outline and meaning

* Omission phrase "small part (of) the" When "part" is written this way in phrases, it does not take an F Hook for "of", as that could be misread as "number of"

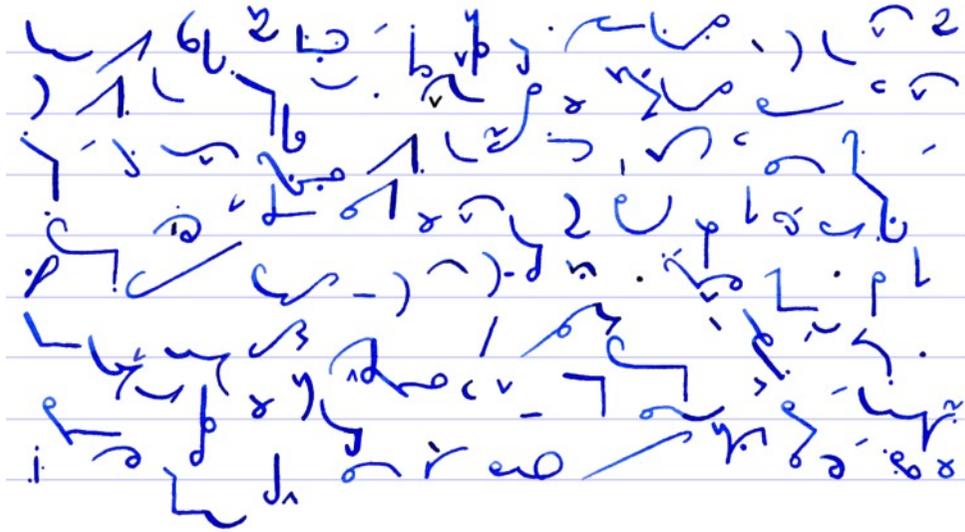


Con Prefix

Although I studied at home, I did have the company of a friend who was also committed to learning. We combined our learning with our weekly conversations in the comfort of the conservatory. We would continually swap and compare notes, and then make a comparison of our outlines with the dictionary. We did not compete with each other, as the competitive frame of mind* was not helpful at the beginning*, and our only competition was to be with the dictation recordings that we followed. My friend would often complain of a lack of live dictation, so we read out passages in turn and this complaint rapidly disappeared. I complained that he was overtaking me in

ability, and he said that I should be more compliant with the rules of the system! This I committed to do and quickly caught up with his progress. At first the subject seemed complex, but we took one step at a time*, in continuous and steady succession, and within a few weeks* it did not seem complicated at all, as our skill continually increased and improved*.

* Omission phrases "frame (of) mind" "at the (be)ginn(ing)" "at first" "at (a) time" "few wee(k)s" which can also be written "few (w)eeeks" (retaining the joined diphthong sign), but this version is faster

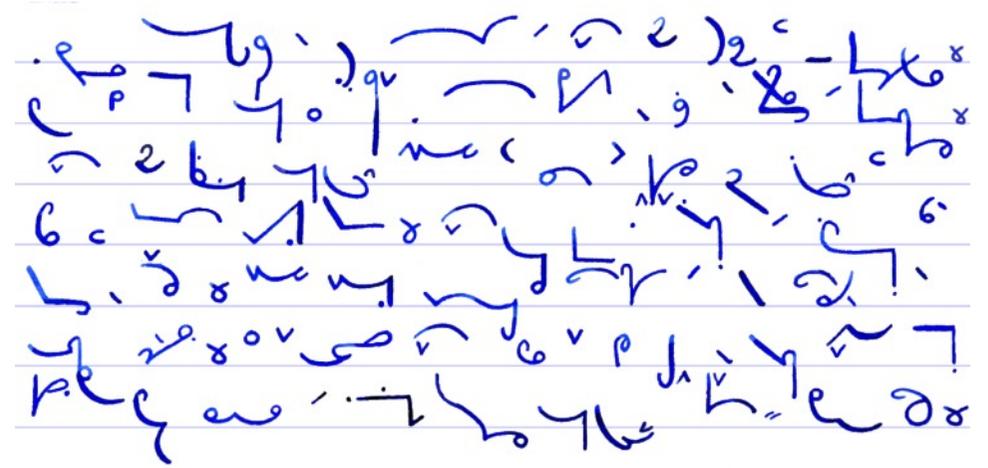


Con Prefix

Having reached this condition of shorthand dedication and commitment, I decided to attend a local conference to see if my shorthand was ready for combat conditions in a live situation. I approached the conference centre with my pad and pen in my briefcase ready for action, but also with some trepidation and conflicting emotions on the task ahead. My confidence was not sufficient to sit at the front near the stage

where everyone could see me, so I made a compromise and took a seat at the back conveniently underneath one of the loudspeakers, which resolved the conflict of possibly not hearing the speaker in the distance. I was confident that I could get something of the speeches, and eventually committed myself to taking down some whole sentences, rather than isolated words and concepts.

Blank lined paper for notes.



Con Prefix

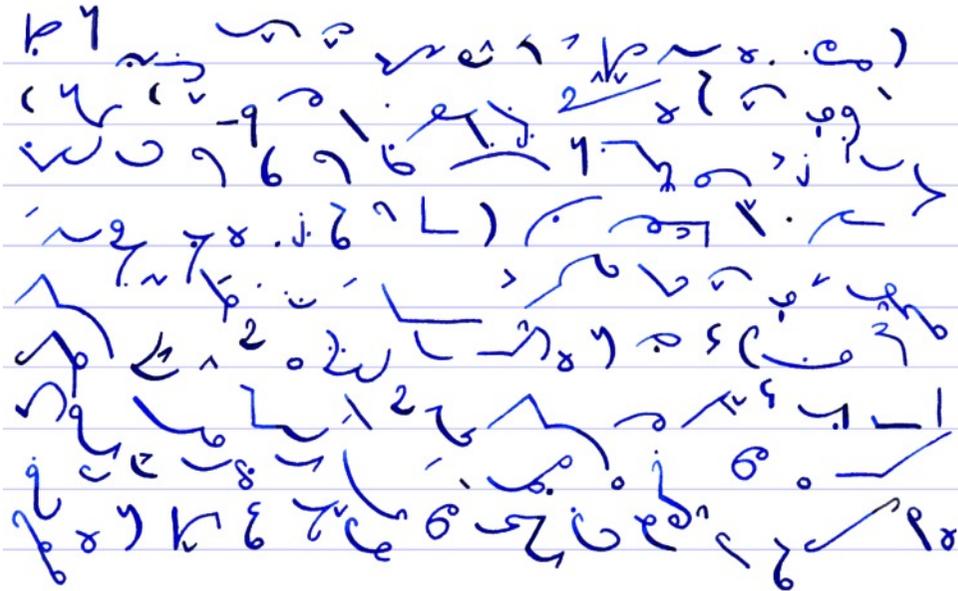
The speaker's introduction consisted of easy material, and my shorthand was consistent with good dictionary forms. However, as he got into his stride, the matter started to consist of business jargon and technical terms* My shorthand descended into confusion and I knew that some of the outlines would be confused with others when I came to read back. My confidence took a battering and conflicting thoughts began to arise. I knew I needed to maintain

more control and be more conscious of intrusive worries. As I increased my efforts, I settled down to better writing, getting at least* every other sentence, and connected the forms into convenient time-saving phrases.

* Omission phrase "tech(nical) terms"

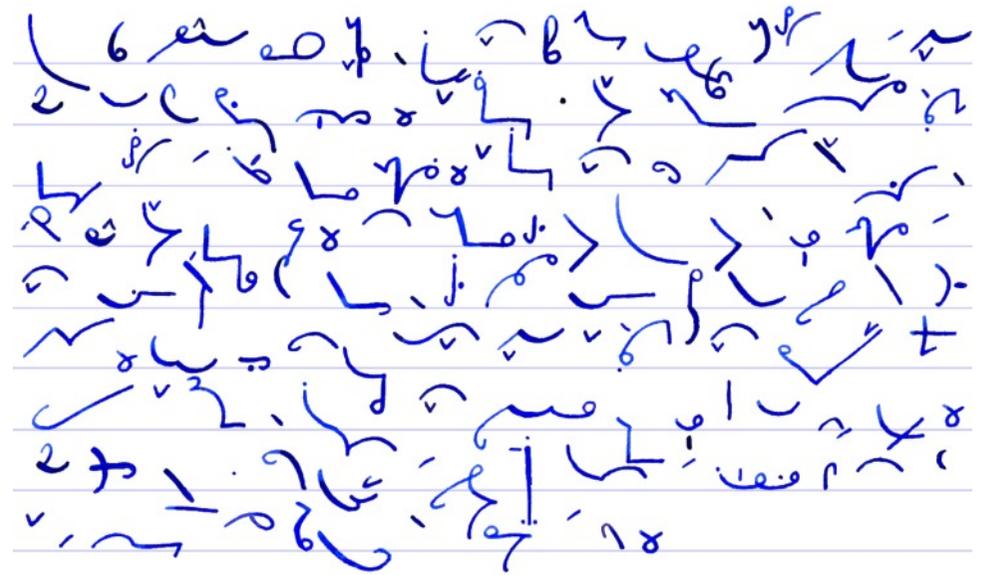
* "at least" "at last" Always insert the vowel, to differentiate

Blank lined paper for notes.



Con Prefix

At last* I had made the connection in my mind between the sound heard and the outline written. The consequence was that I felt that I could consider myself to be a reasonably competent shorthand writer*. Although my notes consisted of partial information from this very fast matter, I had captured some of the content in full and written consistently neatly. The content of this particular talk was later misquoted by a local reporter, and I posted a comment and picture of the relevant part of my notes on the newspaper's website, showing how shorthand is essential for accuracy. I was amazed* that the other commenters were also considering the



Con Prefix

After this resounding success, I decided to continue my studies, and for the next few months* I was constantly reading and writing shorthand in every spare moment. I constructed a file of practice materials, consulted the dictionary constantly, and composed books of drills. I contacted my friend regularly by email to swap sound file dictations with each other. My notebooks contained page after page of notes and drills, and my ink bottle began to contain less and less* ink, as it was being used up so rapidly. Having gained more confidence in my writing, I consulted my superior at

benefits of taking up shorthand, and even the reporter himself replied that he needed to give it consideration in order to* avoid any complaints in the future and to enhance his contributions, as well as his career prospects. I was delighted with this online conversation, as well as encouraging the conversion of several people to this wonderful subject.

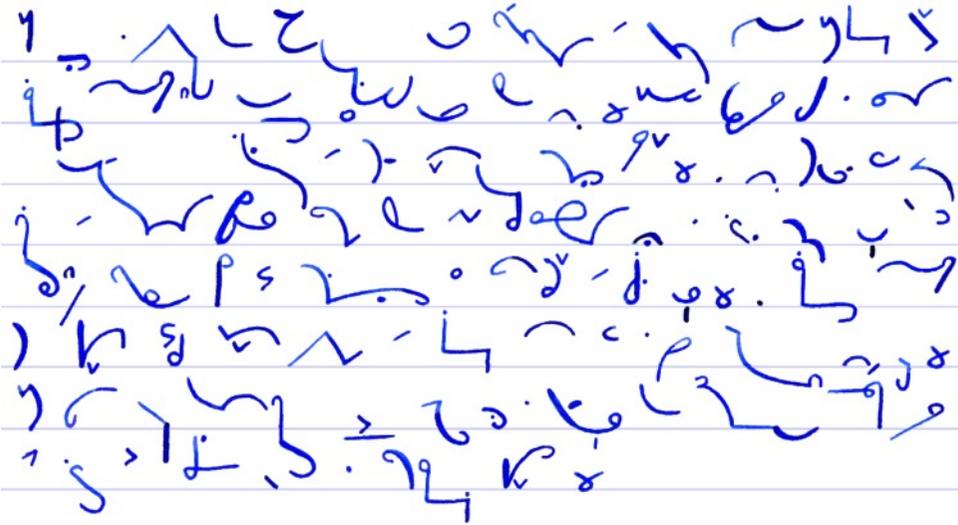
* "at last" "at least" and "amazed" "amused"
Always insert the vowel

* Omission phrases "short(hand) writer" "in ord(er to)"

the company where I worked to confirm my willingness to take notes at any meetings if required. Shorthand was beginning to become* a very convenient and useful commodity for me, and common sense told me that I should make the most of this combination of skill and opportunity.

* Omission phrases "ne(k)s(t) few (mon)ths" "less (and) less"

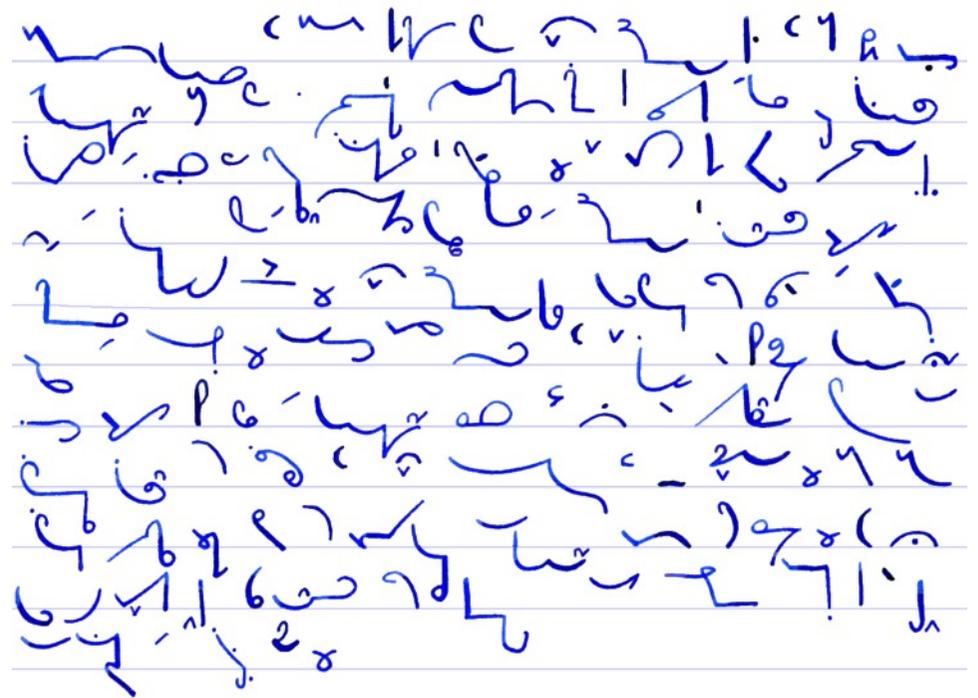
* "to become" Based on the short form phrase "to be"



Con Prefix

I had gained a reputation for handling confidential information properly*, and before long I was contacted by the construction department manager in connection with* his next staff meeting. I knew this was generally a small informal affair and so my confidence remained high. The meeting was convened in order to* hear contributions and suggestions from the staff, and I successfully made a complete word for word note of what each person said, with the remainder as more concise and condensed notes. The construction manager was delighted with

Blank lined paper for notes.



Con Prefix

I became convinced that I now had the control over my working day that I had set out* to gain, and eventually I was offered a lucrative long-term contract at head office, to attend conventions, conferences and congresses in order to* produce commentaries on proceedings. I also had the job of recording committee meetings and confidential staff and management conversations, and working on communications between the directors of the company. My working conditions have been converted from slow and boring, to fast and interesting. In conclusion*, I must mention that I continue to study consistently, having made the connection between study efforts and eventual success, with the aim of reducing further any

Blank lined paper for notes.

the contents of my report, and contacted me with a list of future meetings to attend. I was well paid for my contribution to the company, and even earned a bonus for working extra hours and the completion of the task to a very constricted deadline.

* "properly" Insert the first vowel, and the diphone in "appropriately", as these are similar in outline and meaning

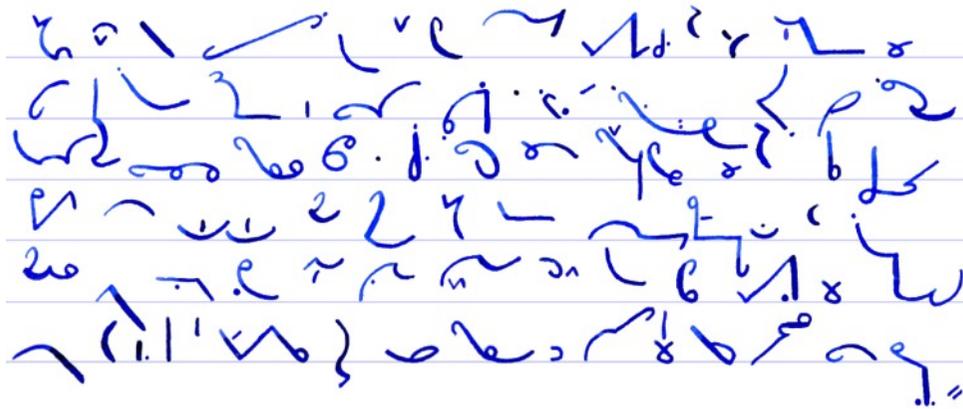
* Omission phrases "in connection (with)" "in ord(er to)"

conflicts, confusions or concerns that might interfere with good shorthand writing*. I hope I have converted readers to consider* the subject or to greater confidence in continuing to improve their skill. They may even wish to write out this communication from dictation, in the expectation* of getting it all down in commendable and competent shorthand.

* "set out" Halving to represent the last T

* Omission phrases "in ord(er to)" "in (con)clusion" "short(hand) writing" "to (con)sider"

* "expectation" Optional contraction

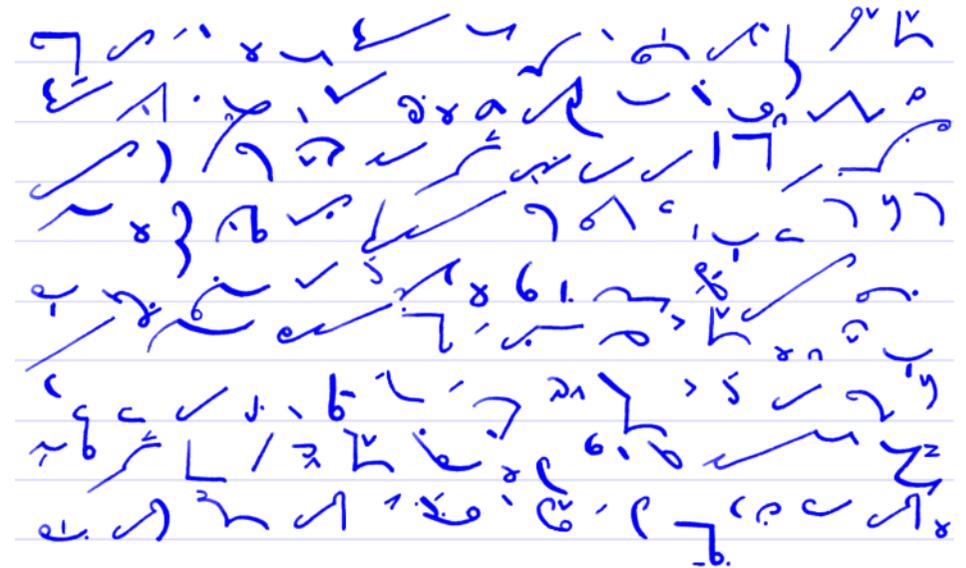


Con Prefix

I think you might be wondering if I ever managed to read the contents of that old notebook. Well, it was not company work but merely concealed a complete and comprehensive shopping list concerning family Christmas presents, as well as a condensed version of some private conversation. Although its discovery started

my uncommon shorthand journey, I think I can make the constructive comment that confidential shorthand notes should be kept safe and not left lying around for others to read. Maybe they did it on purpose so that the next person would learn! Best regards, Mr Speedy. (1870 words)

Horizontal lines for writing or reading practice.



Fish Newsletter

Greetings one and all. Now that we are in the middle of summer, we thought it was high time that we wrote a newsletter to all our friends. First of all*, we do not have any bad news to report, as the winter was very mild and we really wondered whether we had got our calendars wrong. There was loads of rain, which we were very happy with, but no cold or ice or snow* to freeze the ceiling of our pond world. This did make the supposed winter seem rather longer, as we were active and awake most of the time. You might know that when it is cold we

tend to doze off and mooch around the bottom of the pond, away from the ice, and not really take much account of time passing. However, that is all past, and we are now enjoying the sunny* weather, warm water and the abundance of flies and other goodies that land in our water.

* Omission phrase "first (of) all

* "snow" "sunny" Always insert the vowels in snow/snowy/sun/sunny, to differentiate

Horizontal lines for writing or reading practice.

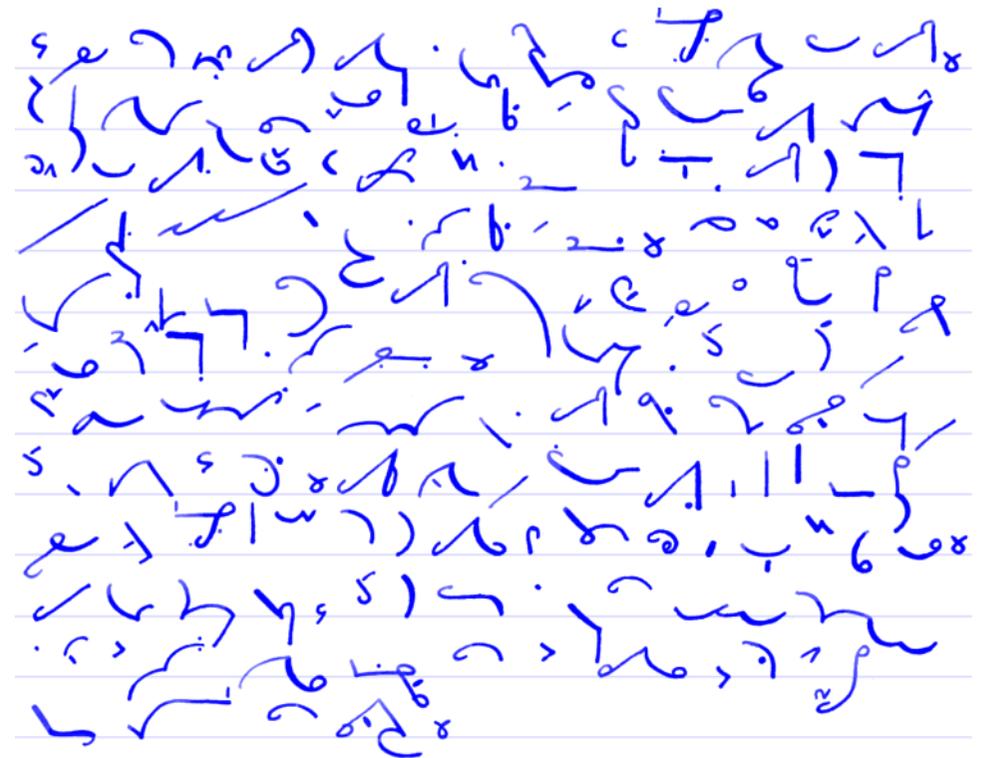


Fish Newsletter

We are pleased to report that our pond is looking much neater than of late. The pond owner has removed all the old bent and rusty wire fencing, that was leaning this way and that, and has replaced it with some much tidier and slimmer fencing that is actually standing upright and in a continuous straight row along each of the four sides. This is much better for us as we can now see what is going on above much more clearly. The netting all around is also more neatly organised, and the part over the top does not now sag as it is held up with crossing wires. We feel much safer with the netting, as we don't really like

visits from herons, ducks, foxes or cats. Fortunately the dinner pellets fall right through the holes. We are very glad to say that* there are plenty of gaps and holes between adjoining pieces of net for any sparrows to escape, if they find their way in, and a reasonable gap along the bottom edges for the frogs to come and go easily. This new arrangement suits everyone here very well and we are very pleased with the improved appearance and tidiness.

* Omission phrase "very glad (to) s(ay) that" "very (w)ell"



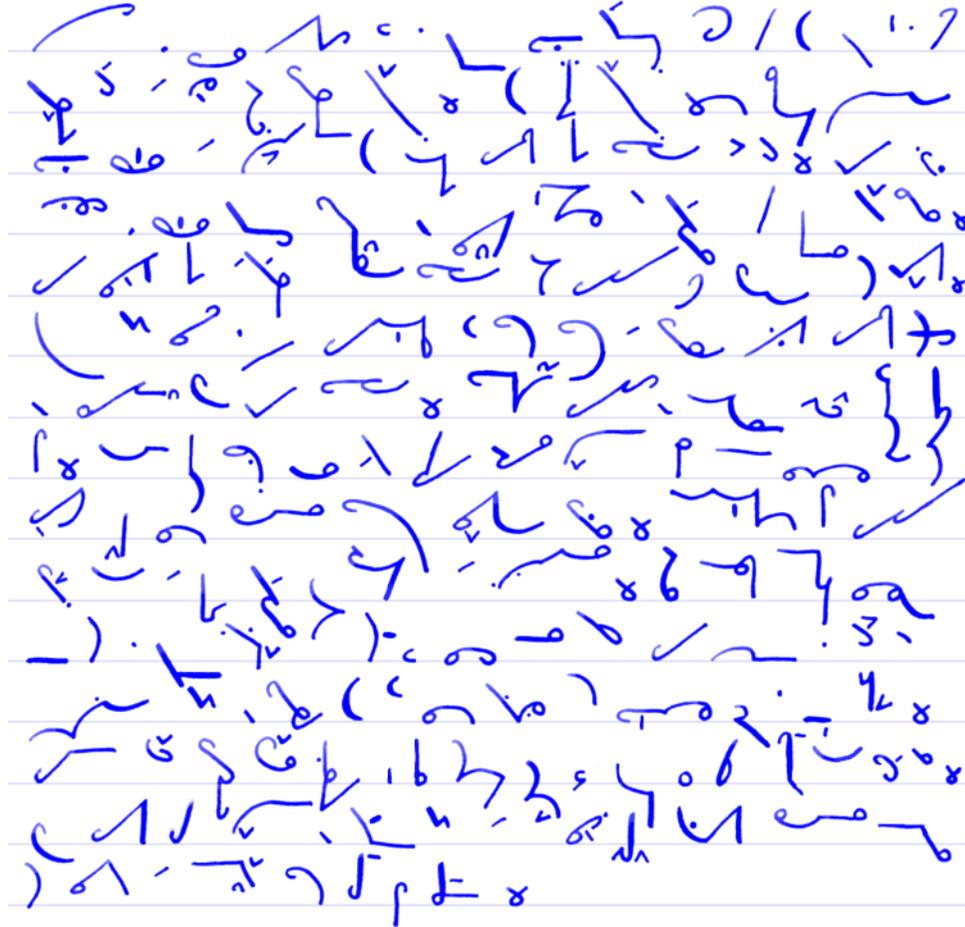
Fish Newsletter

With the recent very humid weather, we have had a few problems with oxygen levels in our water. Although it was lovely to have some nice sunny days, and plenty of blanket weed to lounge around in, we did find that one morning, about a week ago, the water was getting rather depleted and we were all feeling a little dazed and weak. Most of us lined up at the filter outlet to get fresh water from there*, but the flow is not as strong as it used to be, and things were getting a little risky. Fortunately the pond owner saw our plight first thing in the morning and immediately put a water spray from the hose into our pond, to help with the aeration*. We just love our blanket

weed but it had to go, as it was using up the oxygen at night, or so we have been told by some friends who know about these things. We felt so much better when the pond was cleared a bit more, including removing a lot of the lily leaves to expose more of the surface to the air, and the situation began to look more hopeful.

* "from there" Doubling used for "there"

* Some of the older New Era dictionaries show the first vowel as a diphone for words beginning with "aer-", to accord with the older pronunciation "ay-er"



Fish Newsletter

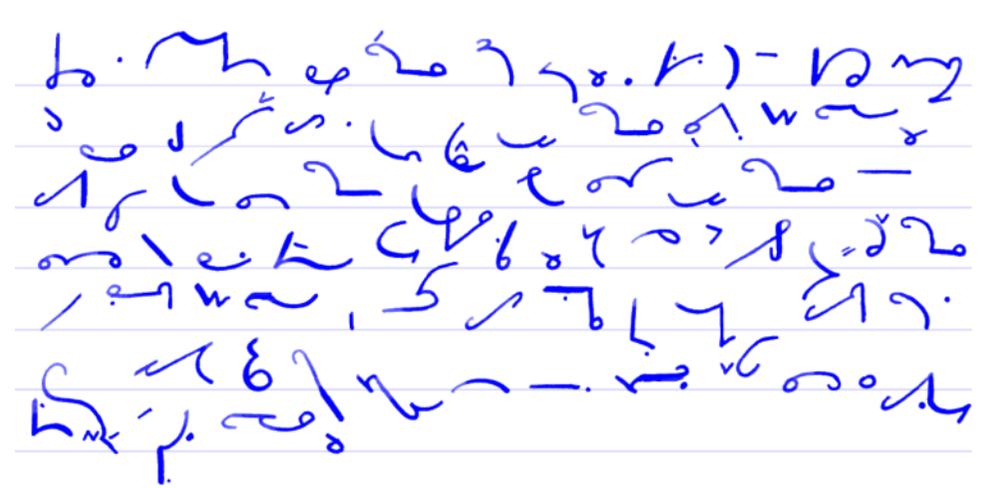
Later on the owners returned with a big grey boxy machine, which they put on a chair beside the pond, and lots of thin plastic piping. They attached the piping to some strange-looking grey stones and lowered them into the water at the corner of the pond. To our complete amazement* the stones began producing two huge columns of bubbles, which took us by surprise. We huddled at the opposite corner until we were sure everything was all right. After about half an hour, we noticed that very fresh and pleasant aerated* water was beginning to circulate over to our corner. Gradually we went to investigate, and found that it was not dangerous at all. In fact it was stirring things up, which we always like, as it can sometimes wash out

some snacks from their* hiding place. In no time at all we were playing in and out of the bubbles, full of energy and alertness. All this extra activity seems to have given us a bigger appetite, so when someone goes past, we make a point of milling about to persuade them that some pellets or crumbs would be a good idea. We can find plenty of flies etc but it is so much easier when the food is just dropped in front of us. However, we do generally like to poke about, and hunting down the varied snacks keeps us happy and occupied from dawn till dusk.

* "amazement" and "amusement" Always insert the vowels in these and their derivatives

* "aerated" See note on "aeration" in previous paragraph

* "from their" Doubling for "their"

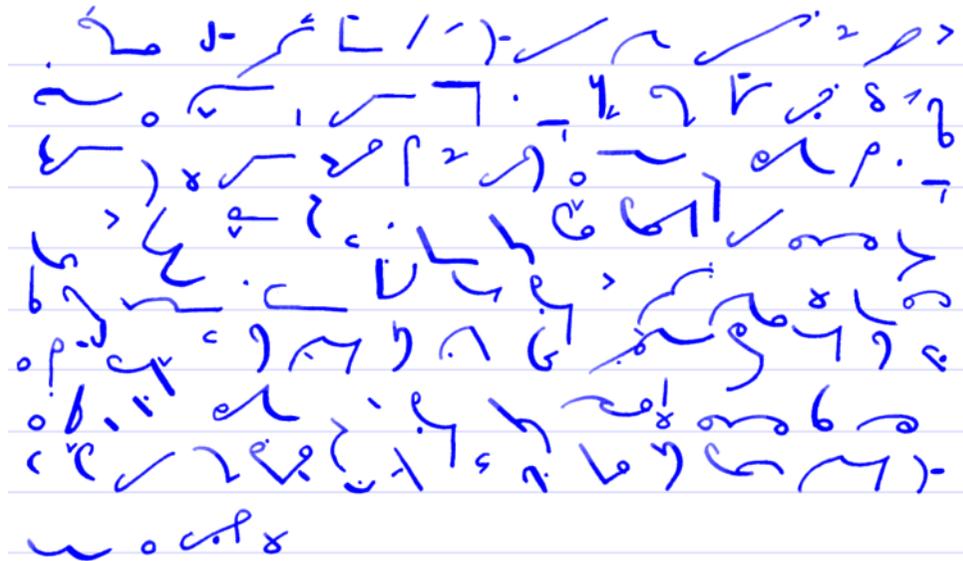


Fish Newsletter

It seems a long time since the frogs were here. The jelly was quite delicious and I am sure the pond owners did not really want a few thousand new frogs hopping about the garden. We do still have some frog visitors, and several small new frogs can sometimes be seen jumping along the edges. I think

most of the resident full-size frogs are scattered about the garden, but occasionally one gets tipped into the water from a flowerpot, and we think that this is probably to prevent him coming to grief while someone is weeding the damp and shady corners.

Handwritten lines for notes or additional text.



Fish Newsletter

The frogs don't really talk much, and so we are left wondering what the rest of the garden is like, but we can get a good idea from the tall waving plants and the trees that we can see. We can always tell what the weather is going to do, as we have such a good view of the changing sky, although when a big bird flies overhead we sometimes feel it is prudent to make a

Horizontal lines for writing practice.



Fish Newsletter

When it is very hot, we like to rest under the water lily leaves. Personally I prefer it when three leaves come together, leaving a small triangular gap for me to look through. It has to be quite small, so that my bright orange colour is not too obvious. Once we have been fed, this is our favourite activity whilst we chew on the pellets or bits of crust, although there is always someone who is convinced that there are still a few pieces of food floating about behind the plants in the corner. Once it is all quiet, we

Horizontal lines for writing practice.

quick dash for the safety of the lily leaves. If someone is sitting nearby with their lunch on their lap, then the resulting splash onto their plate is just too bad, as we have to think of safety before manners! Sometimes this means that either we or the sparrows end up with the bread parts of their former lunch, so nothing is wasted.

dream of lakes, rivers and seas, and what it might be like to swim in miles and miles of water. But on waking we are glad that we are not face* with sharks, seagulls* or fishing nets, and that our meals are regular and dependable.

* Omission phrase "face (to) face"

* "seagulls" The stroke S for "sea" is retained in derivatives

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, including the title 'Fish Newsletter' and introductory text about tench fish.

Fish Newsletter

You might be wondering how we know about sharks, and the answer is that we have some tench friends in our pond, who, we are told on good authority, can look quite shark-like with their long dark greeny grey body, moody-looking face and their habit of darting suddenly for their food when they come up. They generally stay on the bottom to eat things that have sunk down, but sometimes they join the crowd

for the food, as they feel it is probably safe at those times. That is all the news from our pond, and we hope you have enjoyed seeing some pictures of our home and friends. With best wishes, Fish, Tish* and Swish. (1308 words)

* Ish goes down after plain T, and up after D, to provide additional differentiation. Also up after Tr to balance the outline.

Series of horizontal lines for writing practice.

Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper, including the title 'Spring Clean' and introductory text about cleaning wardrobes and drawers.

Spring Clean

I have just spent a couple of days turning out some wardrobes and drawers. The weekend weather was hot and humid, too uncomfortable to travel about unnecessarily*, or even to sit in the garden. Discomfort with the sticky and clammy conditions turned into impatience with the untidy areas of the house, the scattered items and little piles of things waiting to be either used or put away somewhere. Questions* began to crowd in, demanding an answer. "Why is that there when I don't want it any more? What is in that box*, and if I don't already know, then it is unlikely to be anything that I want or need. And that item, I thought I threw that out ages ago, why is it still here? I will never wear that sun hat again, so I don't need to find a storage place for it at all." Time to

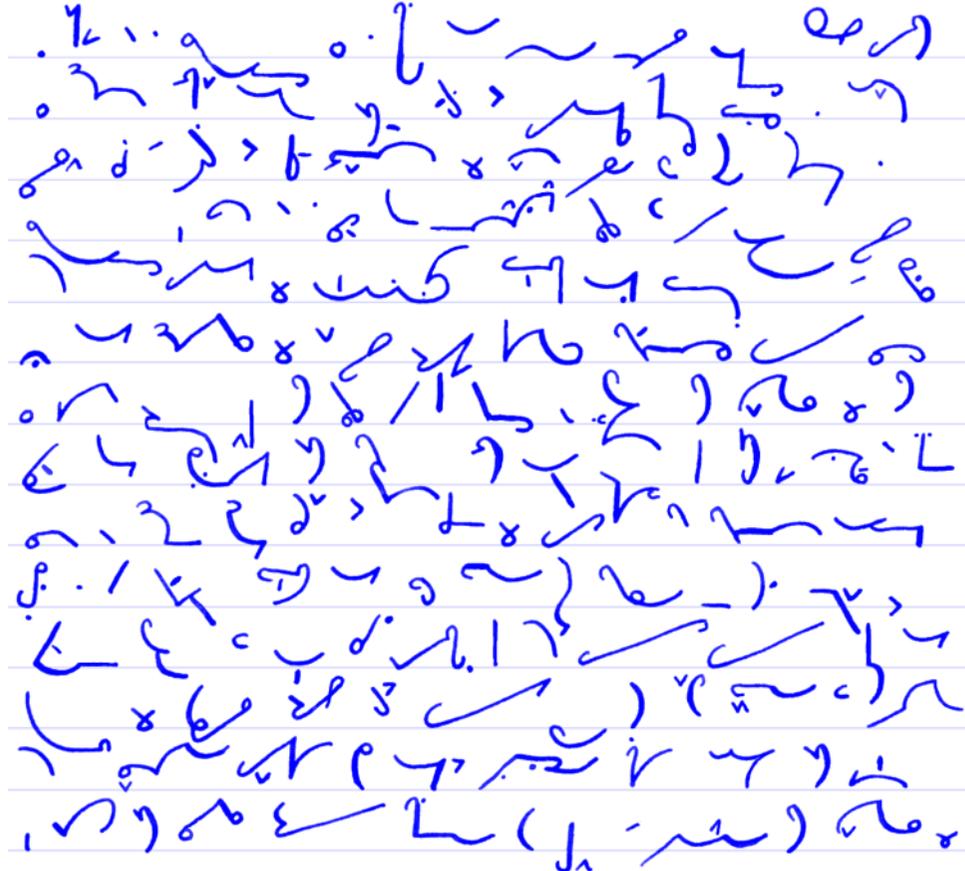
put a rocket under all this stuff! I find the best way* to deal with it is exactly the same as I do in the garden, "Would I buy this plant or this item, if it were not already here?" The fact that* I am asking myself the question* should give a clue to the answer.

* "unnecessarily" Downward L to keep the outline compact, despite the final vowel

* "question" Optional contraction

* "box" Insert the vowel so it does not look like "bags"

* Omission phrases "bes(t) way" "fac(t) that"



Spring Clean

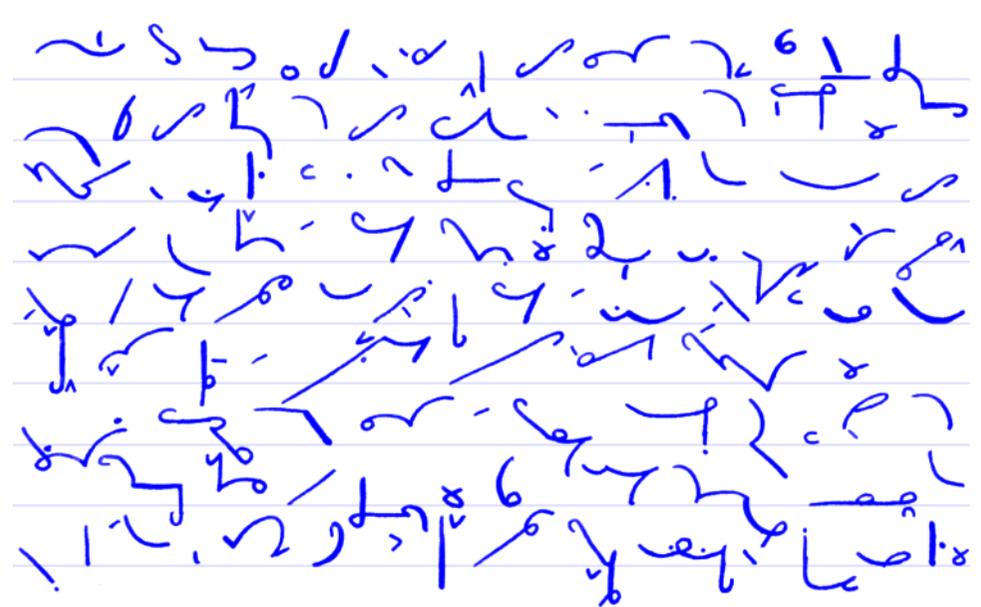
The idea of a spring clean is a tradition in many countries, undertaken as soon as the weather is warm and dry enough to throw open all the windows and doors, cleanse* the entire house contents and banish all the dust and grime. My recent effort was not so much* a spring clean but more of a hunt for accumulated possessions that are no longer used or wanted. Unintentional clutter needed clearing and space made in the wardrobes. I used to watch the television programmes where someone is helped to clear out their possessions which had begun to overwhelm* their lives. They are chosen for the severity of their problem and their inability to deal with it on their own, but the methods of attack seem to work whatever the size of the task. One particular programme included stationing a large portable crusher in the front garden,

so that the person could say goodbye to the junk forever, with no chance to retrieve it or wonder where it was in the future. This was always the point where the owner was either crying with relief, or smiling widely as they enjoyed regaining control, not only of their home but also of their habits that were dragging them down and ruining their lives.

* "cleanse" Ensure to close the NS circle, so that it does not look like N hook which would be "clean", inserting the vowel helps.

* "so much" Including the M enables the phrase to be written

* "overwhelm" This is the dictionary outline, with a Dot Hay against the semicircle W, for the pronunciation "over-HWelm". It is unlikely these would need to be written in, as the outline alone is quite distinctive.



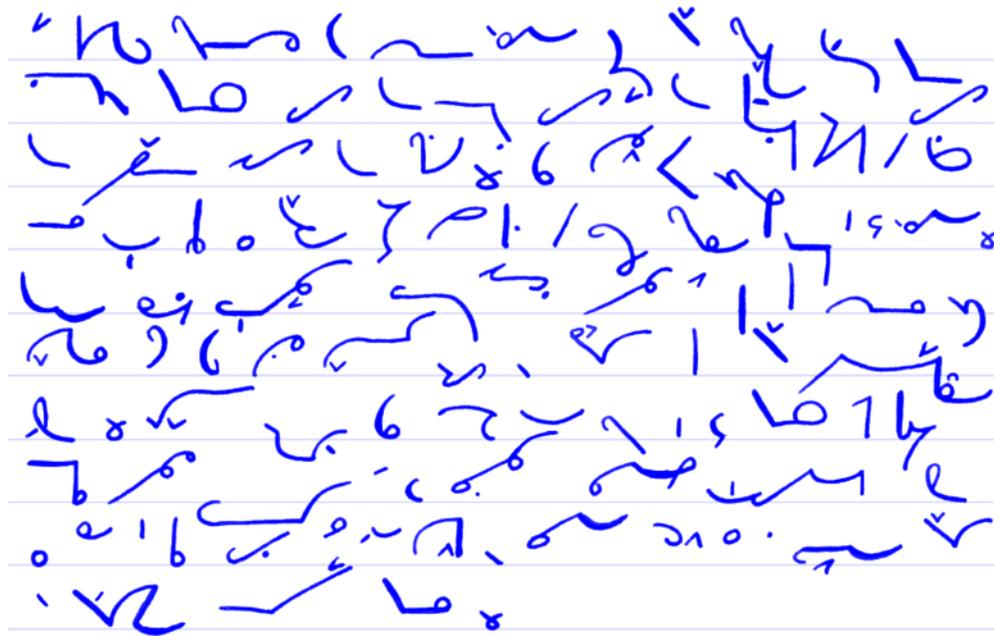
Spring Clean

My own plan of action is generally to sort out one small area that has become disorganised, maybe just one drawer or one shelf of a cupboard or closet. I prefer to end the day with a particular task completed, and ready for another one tomorrow, if time and energy permit*. There is no need to turn the whole house upside-down, which only results in running out of energy, and ending up with things being lightly dusted and rearranged rather than sorted properly*. Piecemeal clean-ups can be small and pleasantly interesting,

especially when lost or forgotten items are discovered. This not only removes the excuse for putting it off, but also the pleasure of the tidy result provides the incentive to continue next day.

* "permit" and "promote" Insert the second vowel in these, to differentiate

* "properly" Insert the first vowel, and the diphone in "appropriately", as these are similar in outline and meaning



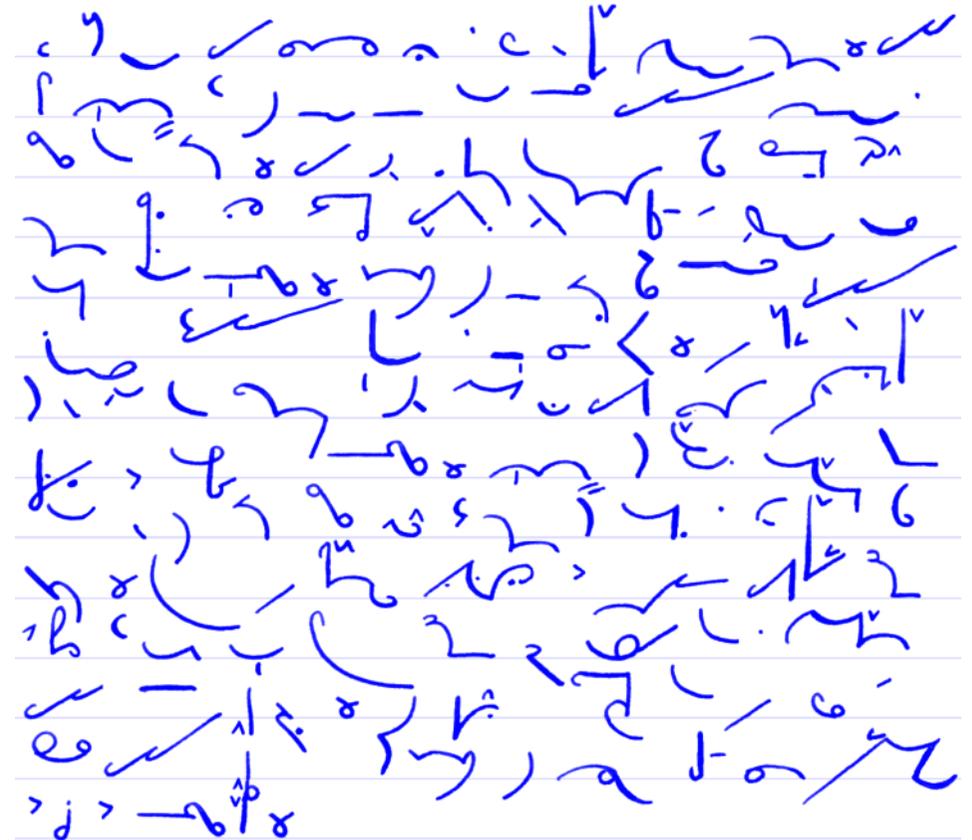
Spring Clean

On the television programmes they make sorting easier by providing four big cardboard boxes, one for keep, one for donate to charity, one for recycle* and one for trash. This allows the job to proceed much faster, because no decision is final until the last day, which frees the person to get on with the sorting. Having seen the gloriously clear and clean result, and the difference it makes to their lives, they are then less likely to want to spoil it by

reintroducing stuff. I like to follow this method in principle, but without the boxes, and it definitely gets results quickly and without hassle - as long as the unwanted stuff is sent on its way and is not allowed to hang around as a growing pile of bulging carrier bags.

* "recycle" Not in dictionary. The combination of Ray+SKL does have a precedent in the outline "arteriosclerosis".

Horizontal lines for writing notes.



Spring Clean

When I was young, we sometimes made an effort to tidy the living room. We would tell Mum that she could not come in, because we were making a surprise for her. We shut the door firmly and then scooted around the room, straightening* mats and curtains, wiping up dust and stuffing things into cupboards. I am sure she could hear all this going on, but we were convinced that we were doing a good secret job. Our idea of tidy was to not have very much* on show, and in the end we had merely relocated the disarray to the inside of the cupboards. Mum was finally invited back in to see her surprise, and found that the room was indeed a lot tidier than before. After our

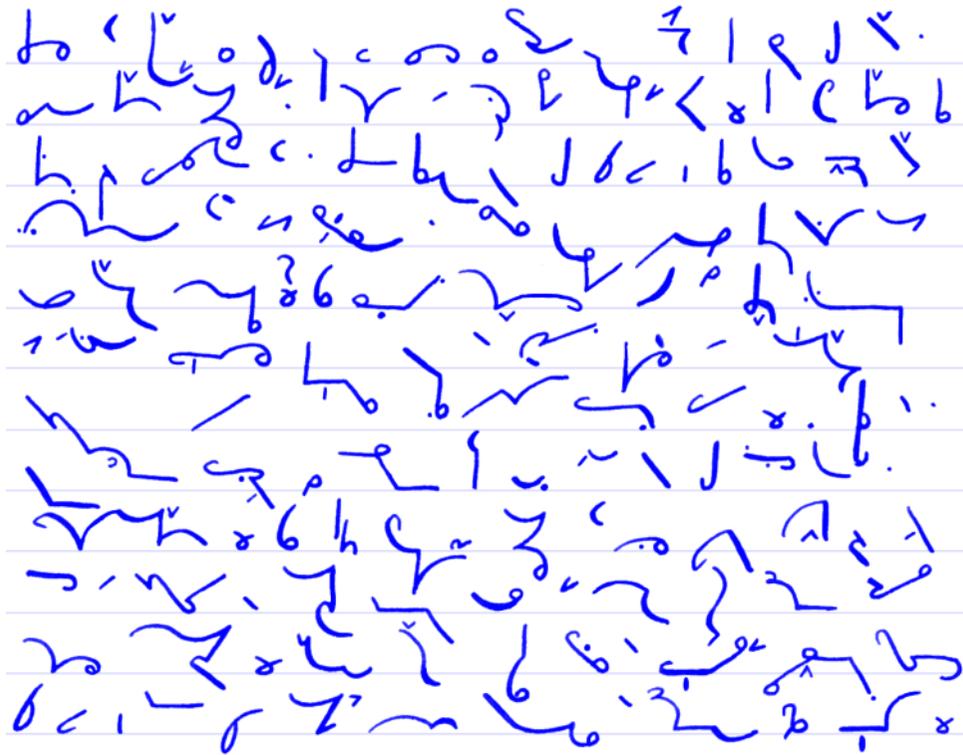
triumphant revelation of the miracle we had worked, and the statement that now no further work would be necessary for a long time, we would go out to play. She was duly grateful for our efforts and as soon as we were outside I am sure she must have* done some rearranging of the contents of the cupboards.

* "straight" is halved, "straightened" is disjoined = "strai + tend"

* "very much" In full, in order to join the phrase

* Omission phrase "mus(t) have"

Horizontal lines for writing notes.

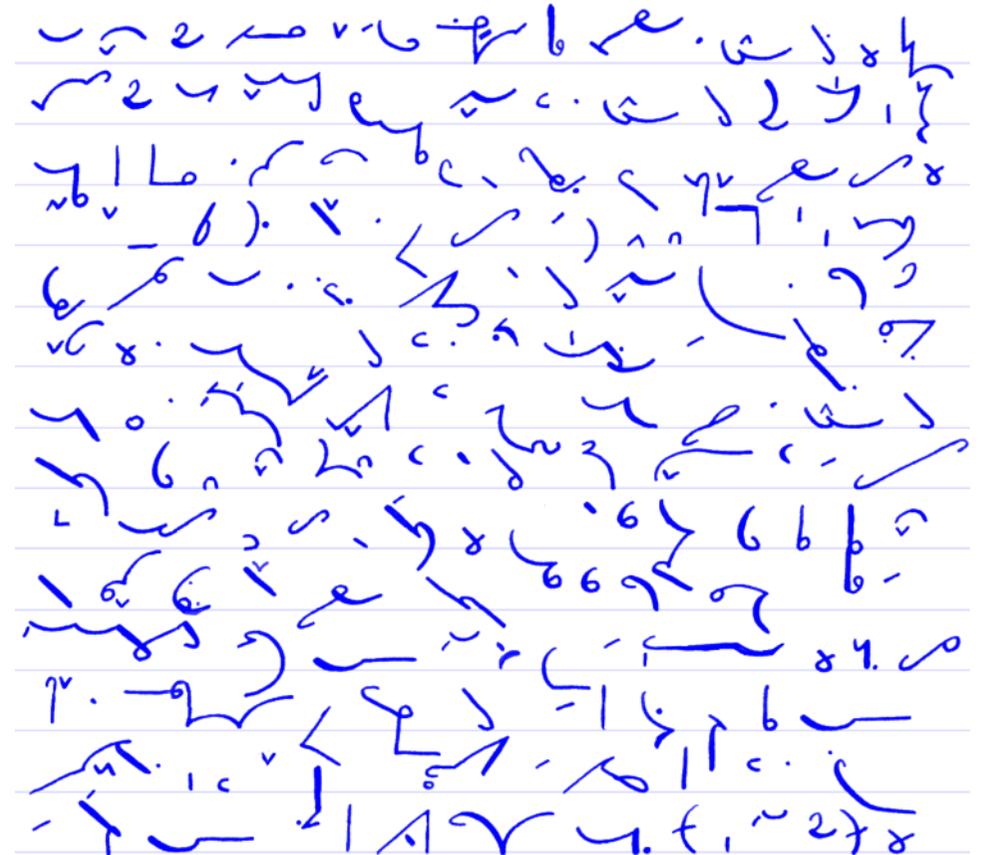


Spring Clean

It seems that tidying is easiest to do when someone is planning to visit and the fact that* it has to be* done by a certain time ensures an early and earnest start on the job. At other times it is tempting to tell oneself* that a task does not have to be done just yet, but it is often countered by the alarming thought, "Supposing a surprise visitor rings the doorbell in the next five minutes?" This scary reminder usually has the desired effect, and the offending crumbs, teacups, bits of laundry, tools*, and unfiled paperwork are rapidly cleared away. The disadvantage of a big clean-up is the expectation* that it need not be done again for a very long time. This attitude virtually ensures that mess will be allowed to build up again, and I prefer to endeavour to keep things on the move, so that the work always remains manageable.

I have not arrived at this place of glorious housekeeping perfection just yet, but I can still enjoy the immediate benefits of working towards the goal. (1040 words)

- * Omission phrase "and the (f)act that"
- * "it has to be" is better not written as one phrase, which would look the same as "it is to be". By writing separately, you can show the "as" in its correct position.
- * "wu(n)self" Omits the N
- * "tools" Insert the vowel, as "towels" would also make sense here
- * "expectation" Optional contraction

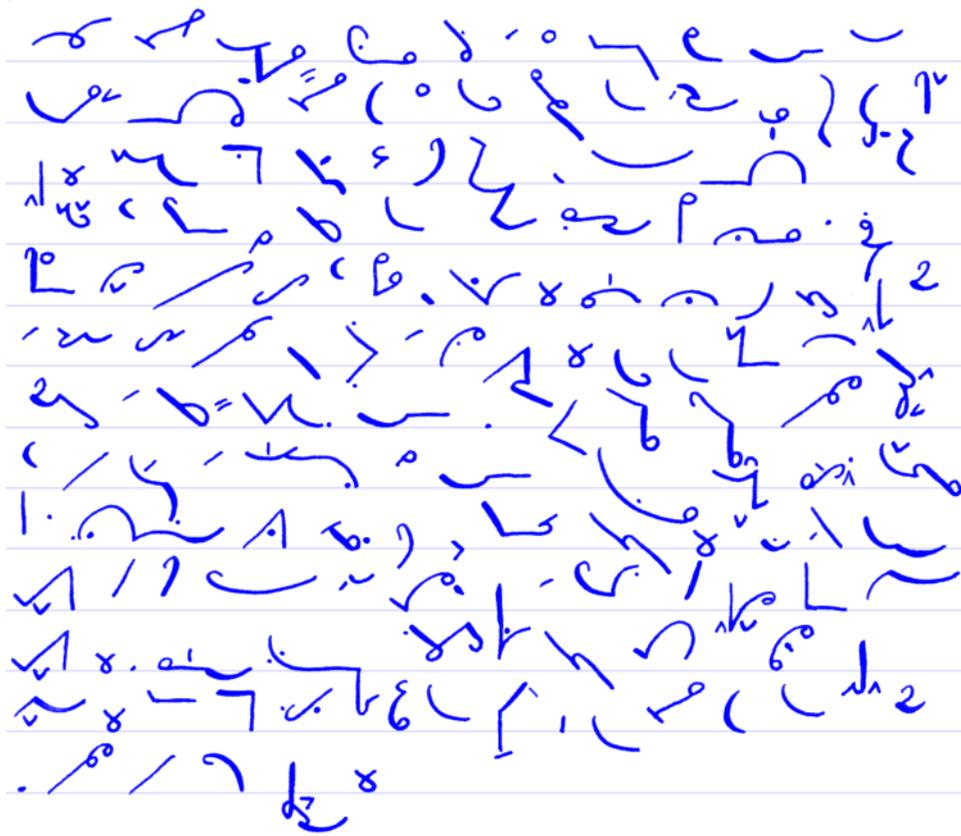


Pen And Ink

In my shorthand articles, I often extol the advantages of using a fountain pen. At the time I learned shorthand, in the 1970's, writing with a fountain pen was not unusual but I think that nowadays it takes a little more effort to persuade people to try using one. I could just say buy a cheap one and see how you get on, but I am sure this would result in a complete rejection of pen writing after a very short while. An inferior pen with a hard, unbending and possibly scratchy nib is a horror to write with, and if you have never used a fountain pen before then you might assume that all pens were like that and wonder why anyone would

want to bother. If that is all that is available, then its disadvantages might be slightly lessened by using paper that is very smooth and non-absorbent, and fresh ink, not old, thick and clogging. I did once try an extremely cheap plastic pen and it failed to deliver its ink reliably, but when I ditched the cartridge and replaced it with a converter* and bottled ink, it wrote very well indeed (but not shorthand).

- * "converter" A cartridge-shaped device generally with a screw plunger mechanism, that allows the pen to be filled from an ink bottle

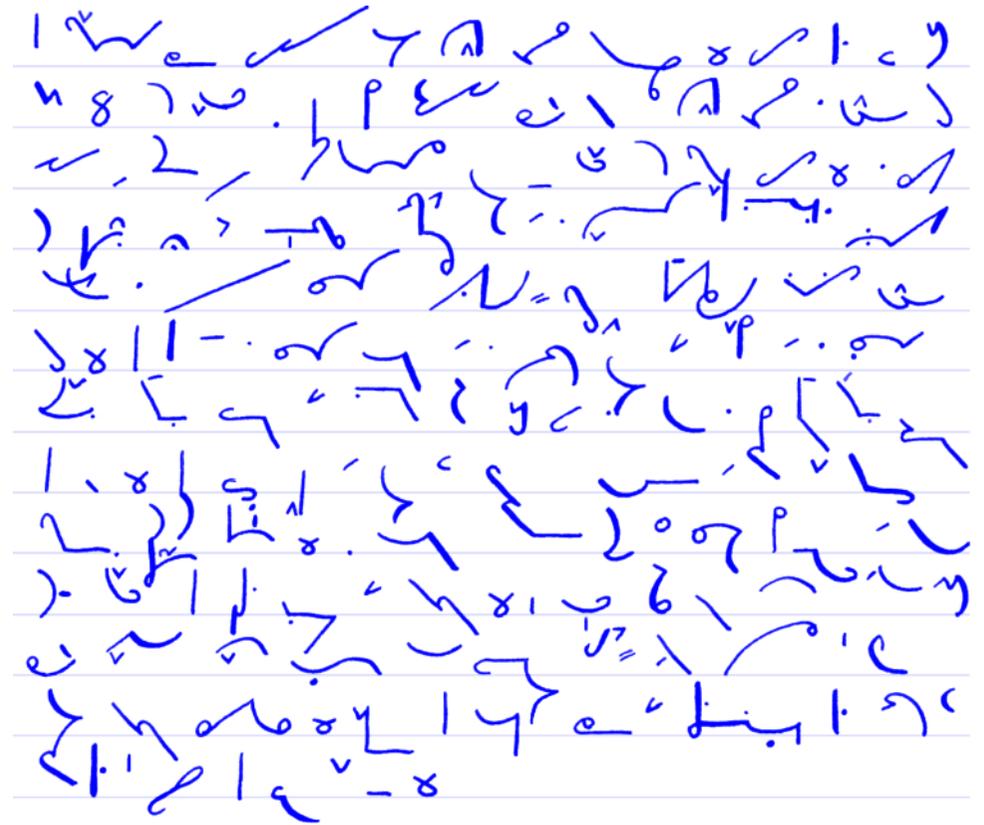


Pen And Ink

Mostly I use the Noodler's flex pens and as I keep several inked in various colours, I use them as often as possible for ordinary notes, so that they don't dry out. I never get bored with the pleasure of changing to another colour, although I find that black is the best for scanning, as it makes a consistently dark line rather than one that starts too pale. Some may wish to print out the shorthand and I would not want the result to be patchy and less readable. Even if I take my bounciest shorthand pen and best-performing ink, the cheap pads produce results that are fuzzy and unclear,

as the ink feathers into the surrounding fibres at an alarming rate, and bleeds through to the back of the paper. I end up having to write much larger in order* not to lose detail, and overly large outlines take longer to write. The sucking effect of the absorbent paper also slows down the writing. I can get away with this for jottings, but if I use them for shorthand, the results are very disappointing.

* "in order " Special phrase using R Hook and doubling to represent "order"



Pen And Ink

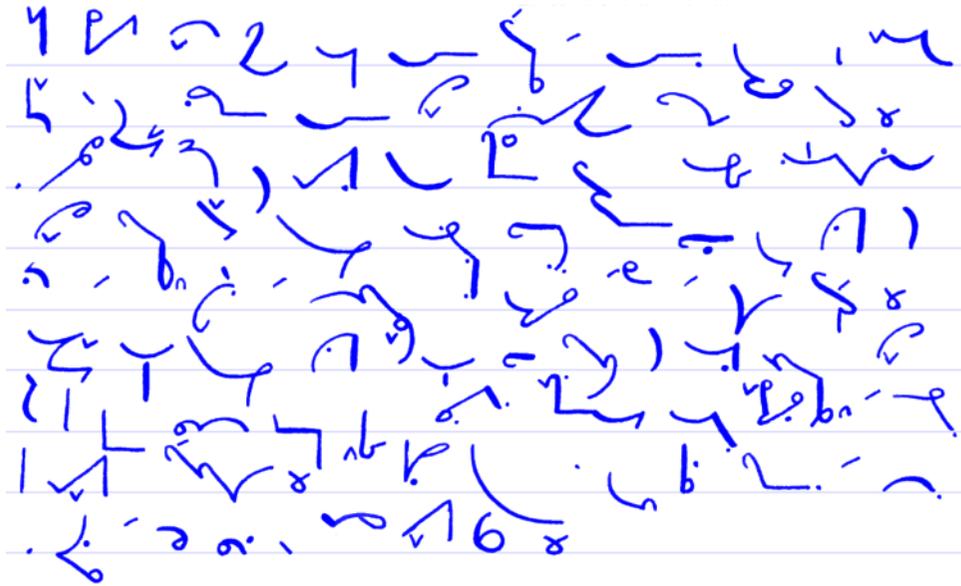
At primary school we were only allowed to use pencils. One day, when I was about 8* or 9, the teacher said that we would soon be allowed to use a fountain pen and we should ask our families if they could find or provide one. A search was duly made of the cupboards and drawers, and a likely candidate emerged in the form of* a rather small reddish-brown tortoise-shell pattern fountain pen. It had quite a small nib and a lever filler on the side, and a smart shiny pocket clip on the cap although I did not yet have a suitable top pocket to clip it to. It was cleaned out and filled with blue-black ink, and I began practising assiduously at home. The nib was not as smooth as it could have been, and being so fine it tended to catch on the paper. But

none of this put me off, and I was soon writing my name in careful joined-up letters on every available paper surface. I took it into school on the designated day and from that day on used it whenever I could*.

* Always write numeral 8, when it is alone, and not its outline, the T stroke would be confused with the numeral one, as well as various other words. Similar care needed with 18 and 80.

* Omission phrase "in the f(orm of)"

* "I could" Not phrased, so that it does not look like "I can"



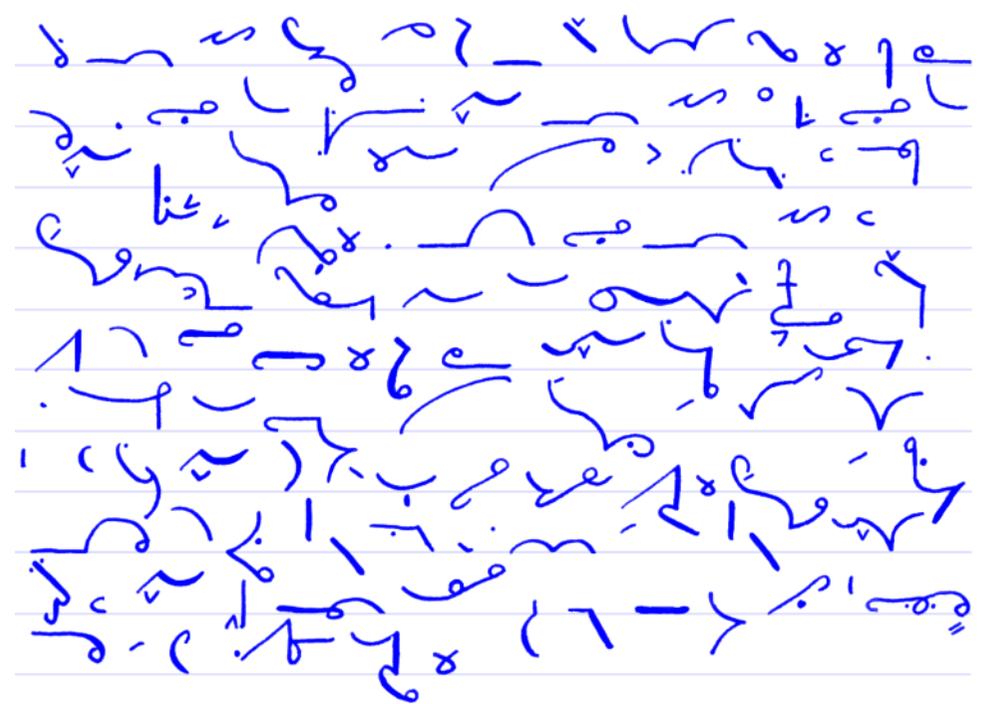
Pen And Ink

I had started my journey into ink blots and inky fingers, but I never tired of seeing the stark ink line emerging from the pen. The results were easy to read, being dark blue-black instead of the unappealing lines produced by the pencil, insipid greasy grey if the lead was hard, and woolly and imprecise if it was soft and easily blunted. Unlike the indifferent pencil lead, no great pressure was needed to produce the line, although it took some time to get out of the habit of dragging the nib sideways and

expecting it to write properly*. At last*, after a few days' practising and improving, the shapes and words seemed to almost write themselves.

* "properly" Insert the first vowel, and the diphone in "appropriately", as these are similar in outline and meaning

* "at last" "at least" Always insert the vowel, to differentiate



Pen And Ink

Pens came and went over the years, most of them given by family members. During school years, the craze for italic writing came and went, as did the craze for writing deviant forms of certain letters of the alphabet, with extra flourishes on the loops. The colour craze came and went, with homework presented written in swimming-pool turquoise*, bright red or grass green. All these school handwriting fads encouraged an interest in careful letter formation, and I learned early on that fancy

writing was of no use if it was not readable. Flourishes and strange colours or shapes had to be kept to a minimum, and had to be entirely abandoned when writing out exam answers, but they could be given full rein on Christmas cards and other artistic endeavours.

* "turquoise" Using Kway to reflect the modern pronunciation, the shorthand dictionary version has just K

