

Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

London Marathon

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A series of horizontal lines on a white background, intended for handwriting practice.

What Is Pitman’s Shorthand?

Pitman’s Shorthand is a method of writing that enables you to record words as fast as they are spoken. The system is written according to sound rather than spelling. Straight and curved strokes are used to represent the consonants. Vowels are indicated by dots, dashes and ticks written alongside the strokes. In this way the entire sound can be represented accurately and needs no guesswork to read back. In practice, you will find that the strokes on their own are sufficient to recognise the word and the vowel marks can mostly be omitted, enabling the higher speeds to be achieved. The commonest words such as “to, of, and, be, is” are represented by short forms, which are single strokes and signs, in the same way as we use cm for centimetres or MS for manuscript. There are many abbreviating principles, so that you do not have to write a full stroke for every consonant. For example S is shown by a small circle added to the stroke and a small hook at the beginning turns P into PR. Prefixes and suffixes like con-, -ing and many others are written very briefly. In this way outlines are kept short and in fact they are more readable than just joining all the strokes end to end in one long squiggle. I hope you will be encouraged to study the subject further and eventually be able to read this from the shorthand above instead of the longhand text. (245 words)

London Marathon

I like to watch the London Marathon on television, sometimes live and sometimes in the summarised reports on Sunday evening. It is especially interesting to me as I used to live a few roads away from Greenwich Park and know it all very well. I am always amazed at how many people can fit into what is normally a very peaceful and uncrowded park. I am not particularly interested in who wins the race, because I like to think that everyone is winning in their own way. They have taken the plunge and applied for a place, and have put in the necessary effort in training and creativity with their costumes, to ensure their victory, whether it is running in a set time or raising money and publicising their chosen charity. When the crowds are cheering, they are congratulating the runners for entering the race, regardless of their performance. There never seems to be any sense of rivalry with other runners, only a competition against their own timings and goals. I admire their stickability and resolve, and hope that those taking part and those watching can apply some of that attitude to other more practical issues of life, other than personal fitness for the runners or entertainment for the audience, in order to solve problems or get through difficulties victoriously. (220 words)

Cutty Sark

I am delighted to see that the tea clipper Cutty Sark has been reopened by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh today, after five years of restoration. During the 1960’s I passed this ship every day on the bus to school and sometimes got a longer view of it on the days when there was a traffic jam, although I was more concerned about being late for school than enjoying the cultural scenery. Living so near to all these historic buildings and sites gave me a strong sense of the continuity and development of the area. I was faintly aware of the miseries of the poor villagers in days long past when it was a tiny fishing hamlet, and the more comfortable but eventful lives of the nobility, and the rich and powerful, residing in the mansions up on the hill and around Greenwich Park. I did not spend too long imagining their lives, I was just glad that we were living in the neat, tidy, clean and prosperous modern world, in our warm houses with the luxury of indoor plumbing and good medical care. I considered our modern conveniences to be the greatest riches, as I was certainly not one to relish adventure or discomfort.

Occasionally I went on board the Cutty Sark as a local “tourist” and always enjoyed seeing the colourful figureheads lined up in the below deck area and the many glass cases with models of similar ships in full rigging. The cramped and musty cabins, bunks and workshops on the ship produced more revulsion than interest, and once again I felt grateful that I could leave the ship for the sweeter-smelling modern world outside. At that time the ship was docked in a big concrete hole, and it was possible to go down some steps to the very bottom, with the great hull looming above and one could not help wondering about the strength of the stays that held her up. None of the experience was very appealing and I am looking forward to seeing the refurbished Cutty Sark in all her glory, gleaming and beautiful, sailing on her very own sea of glass. (360 words)