



Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

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Handwritten shorthand symbols: a checkmark, a curved line, a vertical line with a dot, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, and a vertical line with a curve.

Handwritten shorthand symbols: a horizontal line, a vertical line with a dot, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, and a vertical line with a dot and a curve.

Handwritten shorthand symbols: a vertical line with a dot, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, and a vertical line with a dot and a curve.

Handwritten shorthand symbols: a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, and a vertical line with a dot and a curve.

Handwritten shorthand symbols: a vertical line with a dot and a curve, a vertical line with a dot and a curve, and a vertical line with a dot and a curve.

## Armed And Dangerous

I love using my digital camera, especially as there is no need to ration out how many pictures I take. There is no film and no cost of processing, as in earlier years. The only limit is the number of photos that can be stored on the camera's card. The first very cheap one I owned was able to store only eight pictures! It was a tiny pocket-sized thing, almost like a very large keyring, and could hardly be called a camera at all, more a toy. Things are entirely different now and my present camera can hold thousands of images. I do not have to lose any opportunities, and can take photos left right and centre, and sort them out later on. Nothing escapes capture any more, just as long as I have the camera with me. I am "armed and dangerous" and ready to take captive any view or scenery that takes my fancy.

This is just how the shorthand student feels when they get to the end of the book and are able to write down reasonably simple matter without too much hesitation. At the beginning they could only write eight outlines, and even remembering them correctly was quite a struggle. But having worked through the chapters, they now have the mental equipment and manual skill to capture an ever-increasing amount of words that would otherwise fade into thin air and be forgotten. They are "armed and dangerous" and ready to snatch words as they fly through the air, recording them instead of losing them. As a shorthand writer you can record exactly what you wish to record, and are in the enviable position of making that decision based purely on what you need to have a note of. Your decision is not influenced by the impossibility of writing huge amounts of longhand in a short space of time. No information need be lost. Your writing can keep up with the rate at which information is being presented, whether from someone else speaking, or whether you are composing a report, or writing a book, a poem, a diary or a shopping list.

If you choose to learn shorthand, you do not have to aim at high speed to get benefit from this skill. Normal longhand is about 20-30 words a minute. A shorthand learner will probably attain about 60 words a minute by the time they have finished the course book. They have already doubled or trebled the amount that they can write in a given period of time. If you never aimed for speed, but just wrote at a rate comfortable for you, as long as you wrote shorthand regularly, eventually it would speed up on its own, as you become ever more fluent at writing it as a normal part of life. This is how you learned longhand, and sheer practice and familiarity enabled you to write in joined-up script at a reasonable rate. You may write an address on an envelope very slowly, to make sure it gets there, but think about how quickly you can dash off your signature or write numerals. I don't think any school holds longhand speed classes, yet people become proficient at writing quickly, merely through constant use.

I find a very useful advantage is when taking down information whilst on the telephone. You can jot down everything you need to, without taking your mind and attention off the person and what they are saying. With longhand your mind is on the lengthy and slow writing of it and you can sometimes miss what the person is continuing to say, or get dates or figures wrong through having to scribble. A comfortable familiarity with shorthand enables you to catch everything and not have to burden your memory with the minor details that didn't make it into the longhand note.

## Armed And Dangerous

Once you are settled into shorthand writing, you can do your jottings with biro, pencil, marker pen, crayon, chalk, or anything at all, on the pad, the back of an envelope, the margin of the newspaper, or the palm of your hand. I have seen many telephone notes appearing in pencil on our smooth melamine table surface, but when notes start appearing on the wallpaper it is time for a check-up on the pad supply or the purchase of a pinboard. Longhand is used only for a summary of the matter, for others who need a message left for them that they can read. If you are in a discussion with someone about what they actually did say over the phone, your shorthand notes definitely make you "armed and dangerous" but I suggest you don't use those words on your CV or application form, or at the job interview. (789 words)