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A series of horizontal lines for handwriting practice on the right side of the page.

## Last Fling

All the carefree summer days of roaming around London with neither jumper nor coat are well and truly past now and so I have been having my last fling at going out to the local parks and green spaces while I still don't need to wear hat or gloves. Having looked up the word fling, it is quite gratifying to find a complete description of what I had in mind but which I could not quite find the words for. The phrase "last fling" means a short period of unrestrained pursuit of one's wishes or desires or a period of indulgence on the eve of responsibilities. The wishes and desires refer to getting outside and visiting places in the last few mild and pleasant sunny days before the colder weather arrives. The responsibilities refer to my ten staff (fingers) to keep them properly clothed and protected from the cold so that they can continue working with reasonable accuracy, speed and comfort.

Today has been the first chilly day of the year, gloriously sunny but very windy with fluffy clouds scudding across the blue sky, alternating with times when the clouds join together and the wind increases. When the wind stopped it was obviously the last fling of almost summer weather but as soon as it started again I was sure that winter was only around the corner. The last of the summer flowers are waving in people's front gardens and in the shops snow scene Christmas cards are beginning to appear. Like the person who put their trousers on back to front, I don't know if I am going out or coming home again. This is a rather sorry admission for a born and bred Briton as this is perfectly normal for the time of year. In other countries the blue sky is sometimes grey. Here the grey sky is sometimes blue and worthy of grateful comment when it is.

There are good and bad flings. One particular last fling that is not a good idea is just before a weight reducing regime or perhaps during one but when the party food or sweets are not going to be there for long. This is clearly not helpful for the plan of action and the desire for quick results. A desperate last fling is really a lack of determination, proof that resolve is weaker than it needs to be and maybe the decision was not really a firm one. A good last fling is doing just a few more lines of shorthand practice before putting the books away and doing something else. I sometimes have a last go at shorthand about bedtime. I always have a pen and pad on the bedside table anyway, as ideas or words to be looked up can occur at any time.

I often listen to a talk on the Ipod when settling into bed, as nothing else is going on to take attention from it and just occasionally I attempt to write some of it in shorthand. Mostly it is way too fast and as I don't actually have to do it, I end up producing scribbled nonsense that could never be read back. It would be better to make a good effort or none at all rather than get into sloppy habits. I do better if I just take whole sentences which in practice means getting every other sentence or utterance. This reduces the pressure but with effort still required in order to reach the end of the sentence either by speeding up or remembering it. Sometimes it is easier to just listen for unusual words or interesting phrasing opportunities. The talk is generally more interesting than shorthand writing so it is easy to abandon the good intentions and promise to resume the practising some other time.

## Last Fling

I am introducing some new flings for the shorthand learner's consideration. Early fling is practising during the morning getting-ready routine, while waiting for the toaster to pop and the kettle to boil. Mid-morning fling is practising in break time. Midday fling ditto, both before and after eating lunch. Afternoon fling is the same as morning but probably shorter as you will have been working very hard all day. Evening fling is a session of serious study with no other distractions and will probably include some "extra mile" pages of shorthand. The bedtime shorthand fling is optional, possibly confined to practising some delicious flowing phrases that are going to save precious seconds, which is an incentive to do them, even though you are more than ready to turn in. Night-time fling is only if you wake up unable to sleep and make the sensible decision to read a page of printed shorthand in order to replace the troublesome thoughts with soothing, calming and friendly shorthand outlines. All these little flings add up and instead of flinging your pencil away in disgust, you will be flinging your hat in the air in celebration of obtaining your shorthand exam pass and certificate. (831 words)