

NOTES ON ITALIC MINISCULES  
FOUNDATIONS OF CALLIGRAPHY by SHEILA WATERS  
Chapter Eight

BRIEF BACKGROUND

During the last 100 years more has probably been published on the history of Italic and instructions on how to write it than on any other calligraphic style.

Historical Italic evolved through three definable phases: informal, semiformal, and formal spanning two centuries between 1400 and 1600 in Italy and later throughout most of Europe. Its twentieth century revival has also passed through three phases.

In both cases, development has grown from a primary need for speedy handwriting that was cleaner and more legible than the contemporary writing. A degree of formalization into an acceptable and elegant bookhand for manuscripts and documents then followed.

The third phase in the twentieth century has been an explosion into such variety of Italic-inspired styles that can confuse any beginner who is learning basic Italic letter shapes and trying to maintain the regulation 45 degree pen angle and 5-7 degree forward slant. Italic now runs the gamut from narrow, formal upright and unjoined letters, to wide, joined, informal cursive, with countless hybrids, reminiscent of not only Copperplate with its loops and flourishes, but also Gothic cursives. The sky is now the limit. ... Surely, this need not indicate degeneration at all; instead, it should demonstrate the richness of diversity.

***The old rules apply very narrowly, but they remain the strongest starting point for later experimentation: the purer and more consistent the model, the better the foundation.***

ANALYSIS OF FORMAL ITALIC MINISCULES

Pen angle: 45 degrees measured from the letter slant **NOT** from the baseline. Exceptions – letters such as v, w, x and y should be made with a steeper pen angle for the thick diagonals (not necessary for thin diagonals)



Pen scale: Average of 5 nib widths to body height. Ascenders and descenders 4 to 5 nib widths. Matching capitals approximately 7 nib widths.

Slant: 5 to 10 degrees forward from vertical.

Width of letters: based on n and u: half of body height (2 1/2 nib widths)

INDIVIDUALITY

“The model represents an ideal of legibility and pattern, .... Even when making a copy slowly your writing will be different because it is yours .... Regard the model, therefore, not as an impossible standard but as a guide to economical method and form ... bear in mind that legibility should come before speed and that no two persons can write alike.” Alfred Fairbanks

This observation was given in relation to Italic handwriting but also applies to formal Italic.

Figure 2. Examples of informal, semiformal, and formal 20th century italic with traditional variations. Most reduced from actual size

monstratis, ante q̄ ipsius corpus sepe  
viva absoluat. Inimēta super hoc m̄.

abilities; and therefore small and quick  
1 and historic symbols of sound, artistic or

Emperor on horseback. Shield blank. f. 1v  
(united), leaf of rose-stained vellum with  
2 1: inset, poem in gold "AD LIBRVM" eu

I read, long years were to go by  
before I really understood it and  
3 made it my own. There would come

I enclose the results of the Hand-  
writing Prize. with some comments,  
4 which may be helpful to any interested  
enough, and a note on points and

which is much the most satisfactory when  
one contemplates the letters individually, is  
5 undesirable in a script, since any, even the

the Montgomery County Opportunities  
program which effectively trains and place  
6 Montgomery County citizens who formerly

any creed could have done to make  
and more than any fate could have  
7 make me happy. You have done it ji

8 But TODAY, WELL LIVED, makes every  
yesterday a dream of happiness,  
and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings.  
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might  
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;  
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light  
9 That doth both shine and give us sight to see.

no sterner than is involved in penning this  
in possible use as an example of the infinite ad  
10 Ludovico degli Arrighi's Cancellaresca Corsiva

Therefore will we not fear, though  
the earth be removed, and  
11 though the mountains be carried

Who lay so close and frozen  
In winter's blustering.  
12 The northern winds are quiet

13 & some delightful  
country grass and  
woodland in  
Gaithersburg  
Maryland

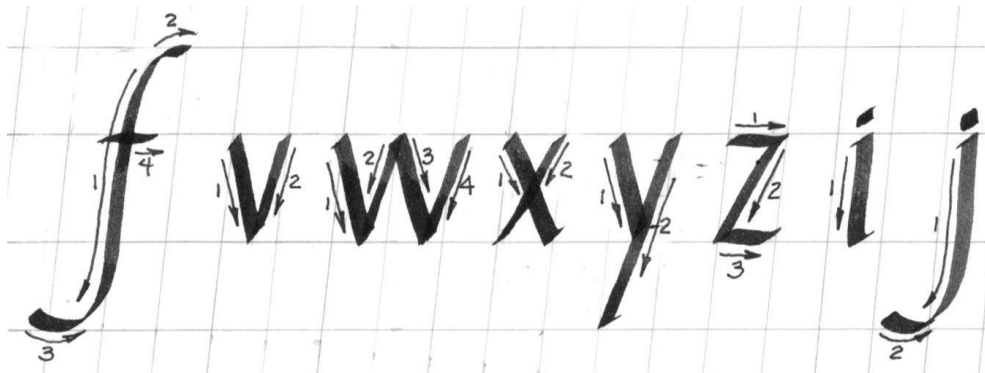
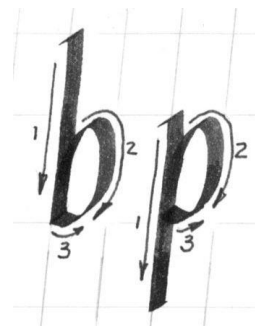
14 Those who deny  
Freedom to others  
deserve it not  
for themselves,  
and, under a  
Just God, cannot  
long retain it

ABRAHAM LINCOLN - April 6, 1859

15 Spring <sup>SOWS</sup>  
Summer <sup>GROWS</sup>  
Autumn <sup>REAPS</sup>  
Winter <sup>SLEEPS</sup>

# FORMAL ITALIC MINISCULES - DUCTUS

5 PEN WIDTHS HIGH - PEN ANGLE 45 DEG. TO SLANT - LETTER SLANT 5 DEG.



3 PW

5 P.W.

O O O O  
O O O O

25 PW

45

n n n n  
n n n n  
n n n n  
u u u u  
u u u u

a a a a  
a a a a  
a a a a  
b b b b  
b b b b  
b b b b

5° SLANT

45

cwm fjord bank glyphs  
vext quiz

CARVED SYMBOLS ON THE BANK OF A FJORD IRRITATED AN ECCENTRIC PERSON

LEEN  
SIMON