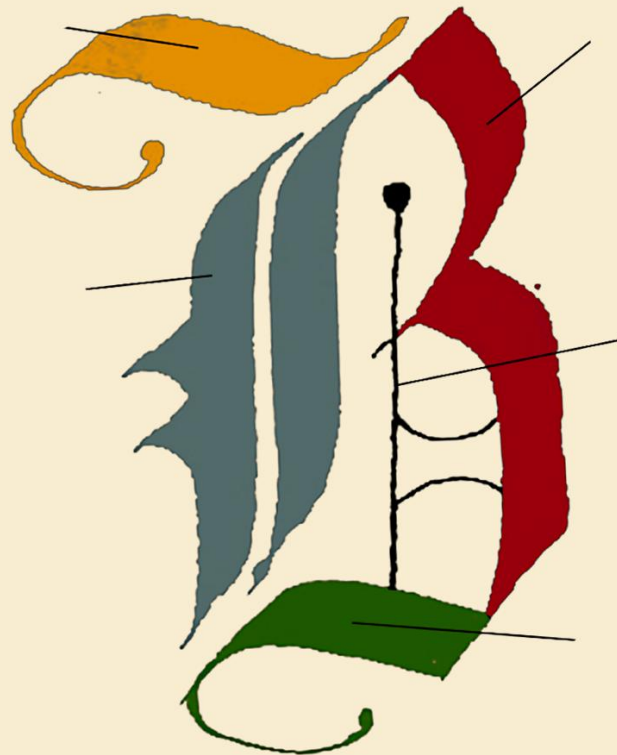


# BLACKLETTER CALLIGRAPHY

## BASIC LETTER STRUCTURE



## CRUCIAL ELEMENTS

The fundamental factors to start practicing Calligraphy include:

1. Tools and materials
2. Posture, pen holding, hand movement
3. Practice space arrangement

## TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Tools in Calligraphy are distinguished primarily base on the type of nib. In Western Calligraphy, traditional nibs have two main types: Broad-edged nib and pointed nib, in which broad-edged nib is used to write typefaces such as: Foundation Hand, Blackletter, Italic, Uncial,... and pointed nib is used in Copperplate Script, Spencerian Script, ...



*Shape of broad-edged nib*

## BROAD-EDGED NIBS AND RECOMMENDED BRANDS

To avoid confusion since there is a variety of choice for pens, I recommend three popular brands and types of nibs that I use in Calligraphy, together with a short description of each type and its feature for you to choose the suitable one.



*Speedball series C*

**Speedball C:** This is one of the most comfortable nibs in Calligraphy, suitable for beginners; it brings comfort even with different sizes of nibs.



*Brause Bandzug*

**Brause Bandzug:** The sharpness of the strokes is a strong advantage of this type of nib. Large size Brause Bandzug nib is easier to control.



*Mitchell Roundhand*

**Mitchell Roundhand:** The nib is very flexible, especially the small size. Sharp and slightly more difficult to use than the two types above, yet bring about high effect.



## INK

Ink in Calligraphy should be selected carefully to avoid strokes that are not as intended, below are some inks appropriate for practicing and creating artwork in Calligraphy.

The logo for Higgins ink, featuring the word "Higgins" in a bold, black, sans-serif font with a registered trademark symbol.

**Higgins** is perhaps the first brand to mention, in which Higgins Eternal is my favorite for practicing with both broad-edged nibs and pointed nibs. The ink is non-toxic and does not affect the quality of the nib, easy to clean the nib and create fine strokes with pointed nibs.

The logo for McCaffery's Penman's Ink, featuring the brand name in a stylized, gothic-style script font, with "PENMAN'S INK" in a smaller, serif font below it.

**McCaffery's | Penman's Ink** is formulated for Calligraphy pointed nibs, which can be written on skin. McCaffrey's ink can produce very fine strokes and create an embossing finish when the ink is dry. However, care should be taken when using this type of ink because the high adhesion of the ink affects the quality of the nibs. It is necessary to continuously add new ink when beginning to dip the pen in order to avoid ink changes its nature when exposed to air.

The logo for Dr. Ph. Martin's ink, featuring the brand name in a serif font inside a rectangular border.

**Dr. Ph. Martin's** is best known for its gloss ink and inks used on dark backgrounds. I really like the Bleed Proof White of this brand because the effect is exceptional and does not affect the quality of the nib. Take notice when using Dr. Ph. Martin's gloss ink; it is similar to Mc.Caffrey's because the ink has high adhesion and cannot be washed with water if left for a long time.

The logo for Finetec, featuring the word "FINE" in a serif font, a globe icon, and the word "TEC" in a serif font, all in a gold color.

**Finetec** | A great product for Calligraphy (especially pointed nibs). Along with the variety of color, Finetec also produces fine strokes well and reflective effect.

## PAPER



Despite the wide variety of choice for penmanship paper, please notice the type of paper you use to practice

1. Paper that has a smooth surface or not for broad-edged nibs
2. Paper that is low absorbent that does not cause ink to bleed
3. Paper size should be A4

My recommendation is Strathmore paper (Parchment or Drawing)

## PENHOLDING

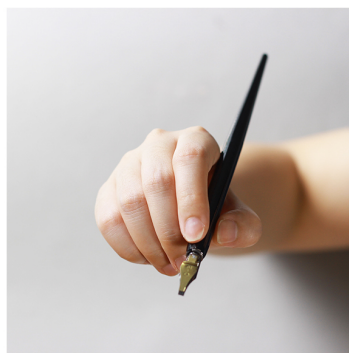


Index finger | Place the index finger on the tip of the pen holder, notice that the index finger and the palm of the hand are placed face down in the same direction with the nib. Index finger can be placed slightly to the right of the pen holder and only the tip of the index finger touches the pen holder.

Notice that the pen holder should be kept at the end joint of the index finger



Thumb | The thumb is placed on the left side of the pen holder, just below the index finger and not to place it on top or touch the index finger.



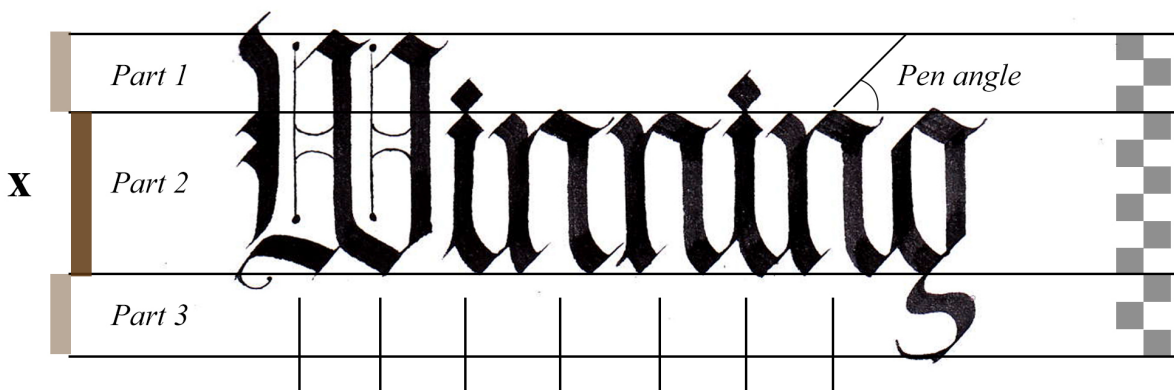
Middle finger, ring finger and pinky finger | The other three fingers are placed close together, the ring finger and pinky finger are bent and lean against the paper.

## PEN ANGLE AND LETTER HEIGHT

Pen angle and letter height are two important factors in forming the text's structure and using nib skills

### PEN ANGLE

Pen angle is the angle of the nib relative to the baseline; that means, with broad-edged nib, when we place the nib on the paper, it produces a thin stroke according to the width of the nib, and the direction of that stroke is the pen angle. In Blackletter, the angle is about 45 degrees.



### TEXT HEIGHT PROPORTION

In general, text height is divided into 3 parts which are specified as follows (including text with both lowercase and capital letters)

Part 2 is called x-height, which contains one space letter such as: o, e, a, n, m, ...

Part 1 contains the ascender of upper letters such as: h, k, l, ... and the whole text is contained in part 1 and x-height

Part 3 contains the descender of lower letter such as: g, j, y, ..., and the whole text is contained in x-height and part 3

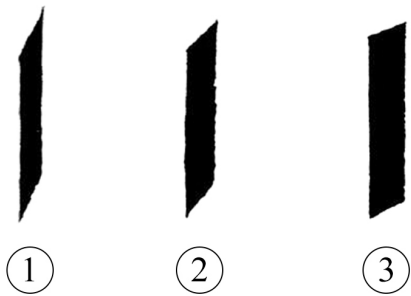
### TEXT HEIGHT CALCULATING

We calculate the height of the text based on the width of the nib and we do by drawing adjacent squares from top to bottom with the side equals to the width of the nib. In Blackletter, the basic proportion is **3: 5: 3** (I normally use 3: 6: 3, the unit is one stroke) and these numbers correspond to the three main parts of the letter above.

## PEN ANGLE CONTROL

As mentioned in the previous part, pen angle is an important factor to characterize the text. In addition, pen angle changes results in the change of the stroke width in different directions. In basic technique, the angle of the pen should be consistent in the entire process (refer to the following examples for further understanding)

### VERTICAL STROKE



With the same straight line drawn from top to bottom as described, changing the angle of the pen leads to the change of the stroke thickness. The second one has the pen tilt of 45 degrees results in a medium-width stroke. If the pen tilt is bigger than 45 degrees (stroke 1), the stroke is thinner; likewise, if the pen tilt is less than 45 degrees (stroke 3), the stroke is larger than the average one.

## PEN ANGLE CONTROL



The picture is an example of continuous control of pen tilt. In all directions and all form of strokes, pen tilt remains unchanged.

### STROKE THICKNESS



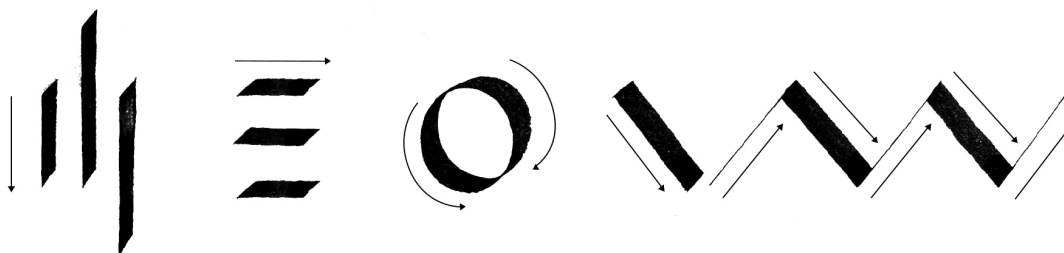
By stably controlling pen tilt, the angle of the pen in Blackletter is 45 degrees, which means the horizontal and vertical strokes of the letter have the same thickness.



Notice that with a 45 degree angle, the stroke which is perpendicular to the pen tilt has the largest width (because the stroke shows the entire width of the nib) and the stroke inclines in the same angle with the pen tilt is called the hairline stroke (thinnest stroke).

## RULES OF STROKE AND WARM-UP

At the first step of practice, it is necessary to learn rules of writing direction, and then do the basic warm-up exercises.



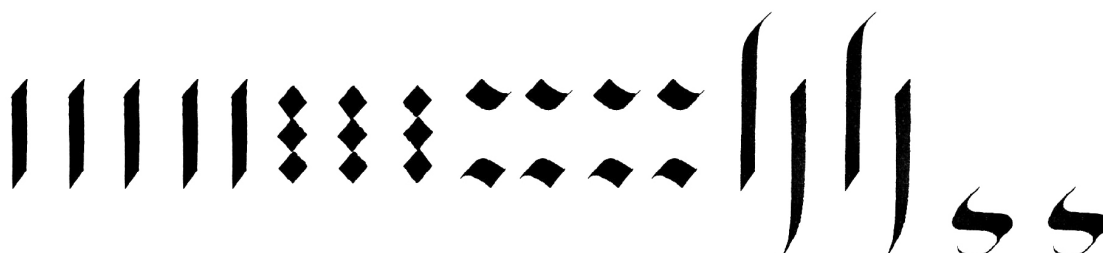
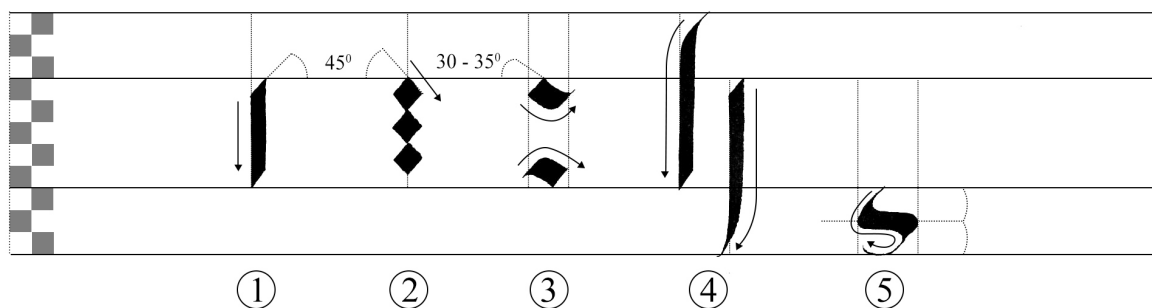
For Blackletter in particular and basic Calligraphy of broad-nib group in general, take note of the rules of writing direction: write from top to bottom and from left to right. There are many typefaces that write from bottom to top, but at the basic level, the rule will help you control the strokes better.

## BASIC STROKES

### *Lowercase alphabet*

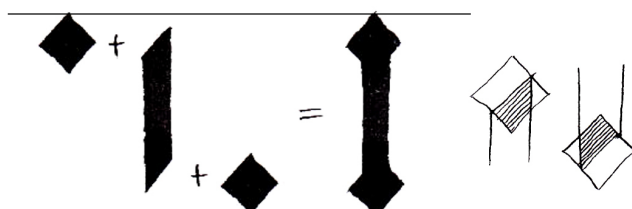
Next, we write basic strokes of the lowercase alphabet. The reason why basic strokes are important is because all letters in the alphabet have their own group and are formed from the basic strokes. Practicing basic strokes well helps improve the shape of the letters.

In Blackletter, there are four basic strokes (numbered below). Notice the position of the basic strokes in the letter height proportion.



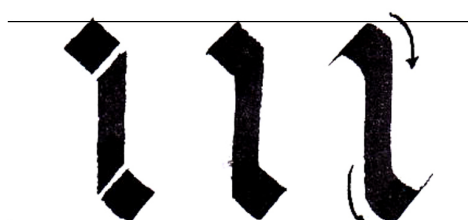
## RULES OF COMBINING BASIC STROKES

Basic strokes themselves cannot form letters. It is necessary to combine them according to some rules and from those rules, letters will be formed. Four basic rules of lowercase alphabet are summarized below.



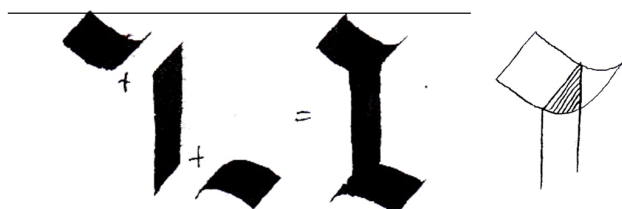
### Rule 1

Combine basic stroke number 1 and number 2 to form straight stroke as described, this kind of stroke is used as the head (ascender) or the foot (descender) of some letters. The picture on the right shows the overlapped part of the two strokes.



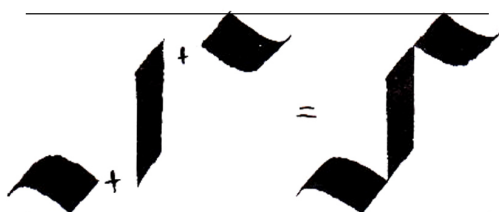
### Rule 2

The second rule also uses basic stroke number 1 and number 2, but they are combined at a different position. This is usually used for the beginning and ending of the letter (eg, letter n), notice that the links are written in a smooth curve.



### Rule 3

In this rule, basic stroke number 1 and 3 are combined, the strokes overlap and the intersection is described as the picture on the right.



### Rule 4

Similar to rule 3, this last rule also uses basic stroke number 1 and number 3, but the strokes only touch rather than overlap. Note: basic stroke number 4 is used in the same way as number 1, number 5 is added separately and does not follow the rule.

On the right are some examples of applying the rules to form letters, in the order of: a, b, n.

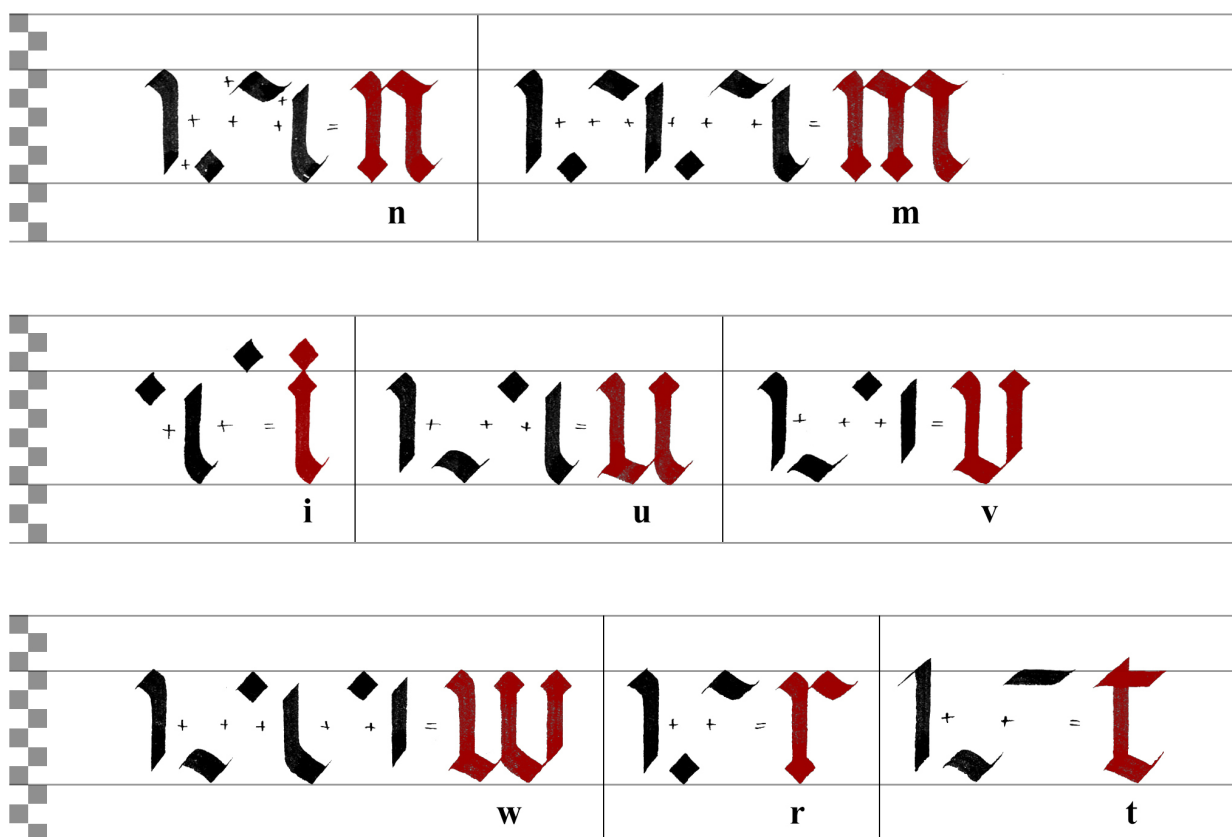




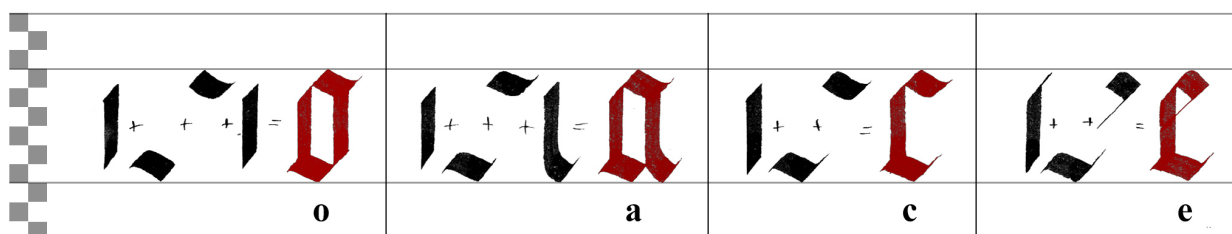
## LOWERCASE ALPHABET

We have just finished the most basic part of the Blackletter which are the basic stroke and other fundamental factors. Now I begin to instruct the lowercase alphabet. The alphabet is usually divided into 4 groups as described below. Note: the red letters are completed letters and in case you cannot recognize the letters (because Blackletter is harder to read than Roman), there are notes in Roman letters below.

### *Group 1: n, m, l, u, v, w, r, t*

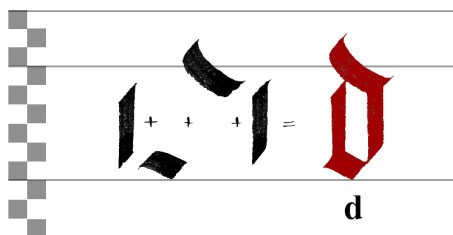


### *Group 2: o, a, c, e, d*



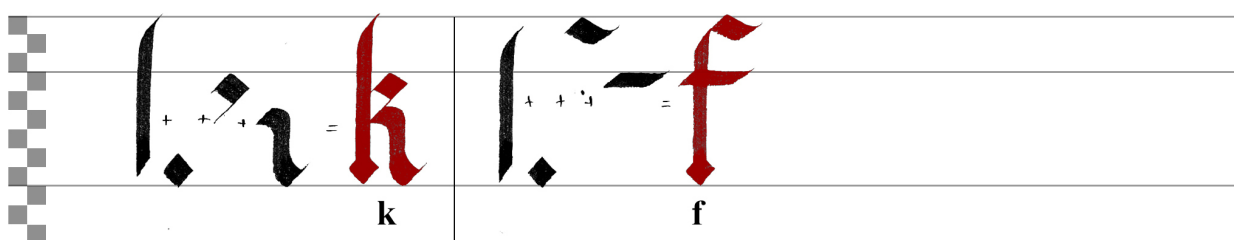
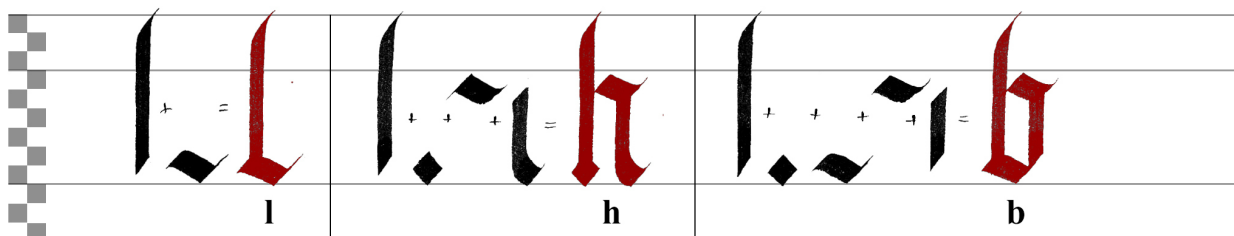
*Note: Letters in the two groups above are written within x-height*





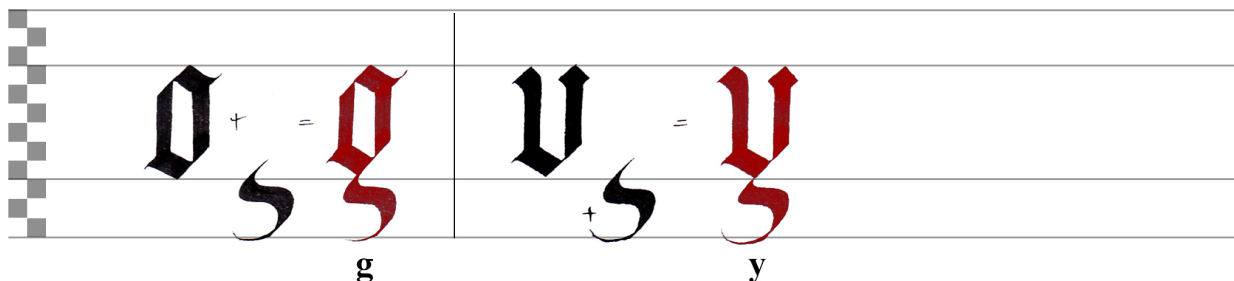
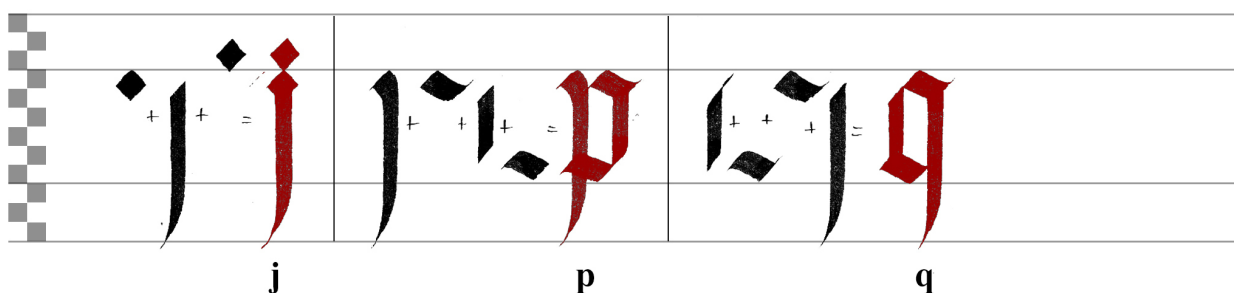
*Structure of the letter's head  
Take note of the head of letter  
"d". Similar to the basic  
strokes, we duplicate the  
stroke and reverse one of them  
to form a seamless stroke.*

### **Group 3: l, h, b, k, f**



*Note: Letters in this group are written within part 1 and x-height*

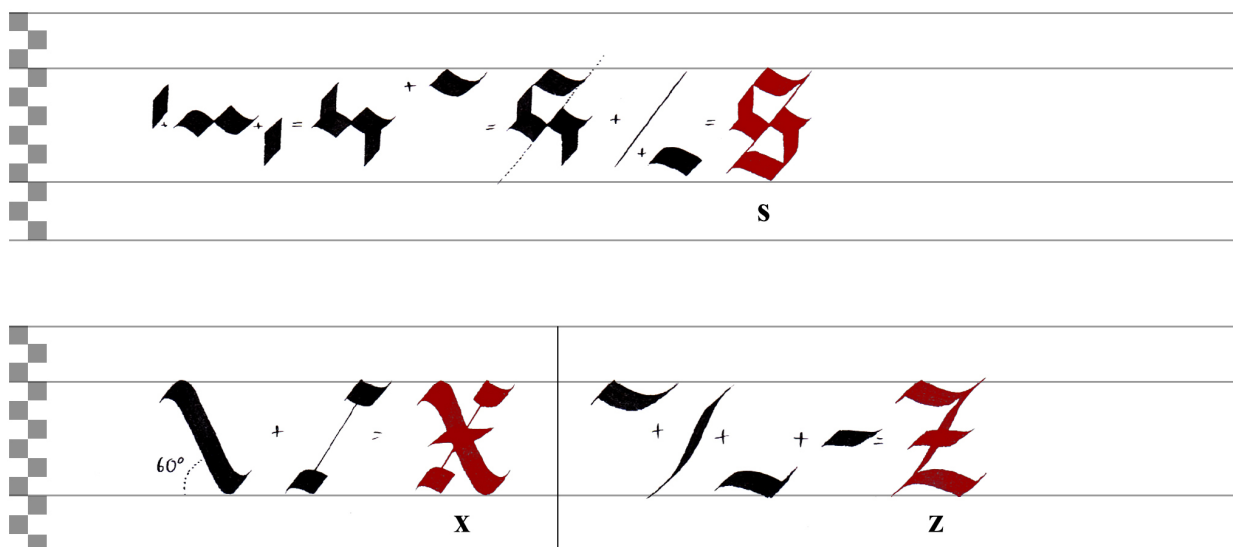
### **Group 4: j, p, q, g, y**



*Note: Letters in this group are written within x-height and part 3*

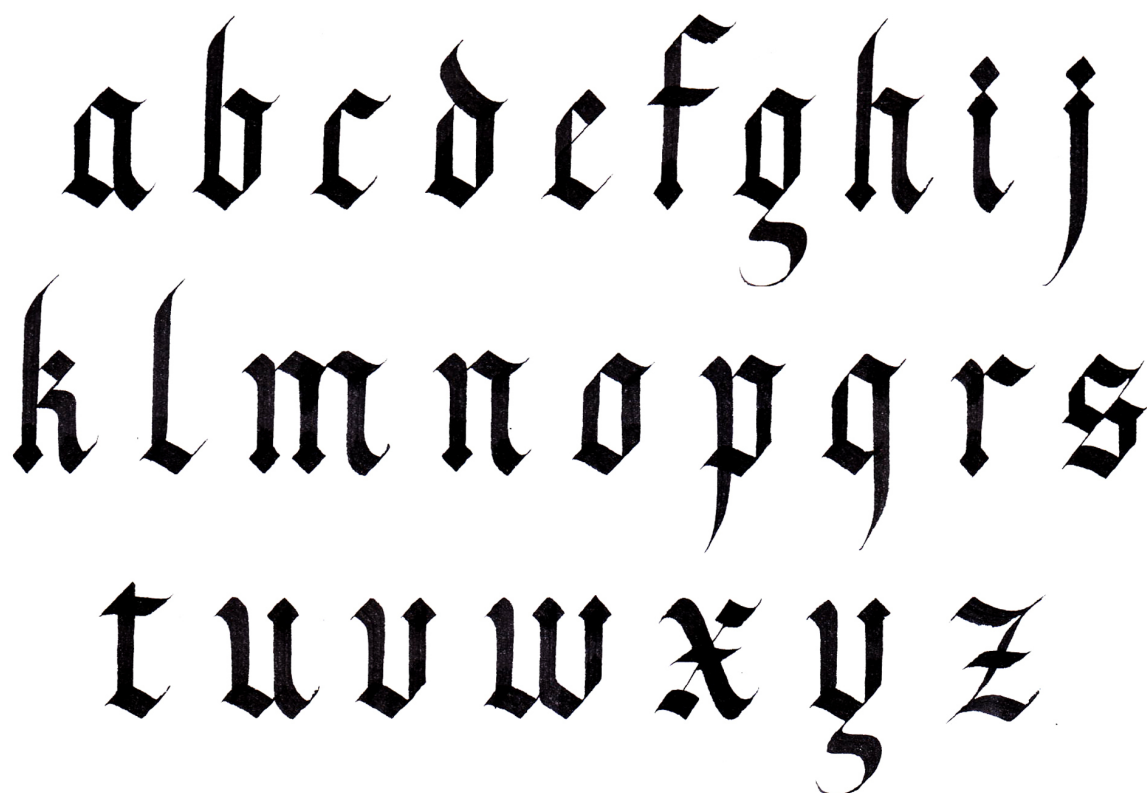
### Group 5: s, x, z

About group 5, this group does not follow the rules of the basic strokes as the previous groups. Pay close attention to the structure of the letters when practicing.



*Note: Letters in this group are written within x-height and part 3*

### LOWERCASE ALPHABET (a-z)



## LETTER SPACING

Letter spacing is a common problem for everyone working in the field of letters. Letter spacing is a decisive factor for forming words, ensuring readability and expressiveness of the phrase. Most important is the readability, Blackletter is a hard-to-read font in modern times, the use of good spacing is even more important. Let's take a look at how to use appropriate spacing.

### *Typical letter spacing*

spacing

In Blackletter, letter spacing is relatively easier to balance than letters in Roman groups because each letter in the Blackletter contains vertical strokes, which do not create too much space on the both side of the letter. This spacing has the right size, easy to read and commonly used.

### *Narrow spacing*

spacing

Many people choose to use narrow spacing in Blackletter because of the beautiful visual effect. Blackletter always contains parallel straight strokes; when narrowing the letter spacing we can create a visual effect evenly. However, narrow spacing can be difficult to read.

### *Wide spacing*

s p a c i n g

Wide-spacing text may be nice with some short phrases, suitable for headings or contents that are not too long (Avoid making it difficult to read).

### *Wrong spacing*

Too wide  
spacing  
Too narrow

This is the most important factor; letter spacing is the spatial balance of letters in a word, that means when looking at the whole, the letters need to be connected to ensure the formation of words. The picture on the side shows the wrong spacing.

## WORD SPACING

Word spacing supports letter spacing in ensuring that the text is readable, words are clearly separated. Word spacing must be wider than the letter spacing; for typical letter spacing, the spacing between words is approximately equal to one letter "o".

the jungle book

*Rewrite all letters in the alphabet with this sentence:*

**a quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog**

a quick brown fox  
jumps over  
the lazy dog

## THE END OF LOWERCASE ALPHABET AND NOTES

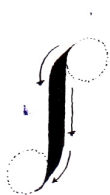
We have just completed the structure of the lowercase alphabet. In Calligraphy, Blackletter lowercase alphabet is one of the simplest alphabets, remembering the basic strokes and rules of combining those helps forming words accurately and consistently. In addition, regular practicing basic strokes is equally important. Maintaining the practice creates the habit of stroke understanding and developing individuality.

## CAPITAL LETTERS

In Blackletter, capital letters are more difficult than the lowercase in the letter structure, but the single strokes to form the letters are still simple and easy to write. Note: in Blackletter in particular and Calligraphy in general, the harmony of the shape, of the overall balance is the most critical factor to ensure the aestheticism of a single letter or piece of text.

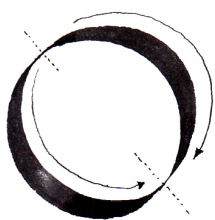
### BASIC STROKE

Similar to the method of practicing Calligraphy we have discussed, capital letters in Blackletter are formed from groups and basic strokes. There are two most important basic strokes that we need to practice.



#### ***Vertical straight stroke***

*This stroke is contained in most of the letters in the capitals, formed by three parts: the beginning and the end are sharp finials and the middle part is a straight stroke written from the top.*



#### ***Rounded and curved stroke***

*While lowercase letters usually contain simple straight strokes, capital uses more rounded and curved strokes as shown. The round is formed by two opposing strokes.*

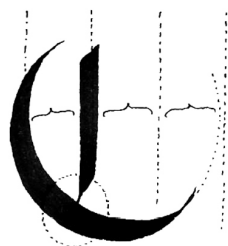
### COMBINING BASIC STROKES

Here is the rule of combining the basic strokes together. This rule helps form the structure of capital letters.



#### ***Two adjacent straight strokes***

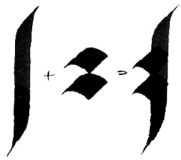
*Straight strokes are written side by side and are spaced at a very small interval. There are two types of writing this: Type 1, both the head and tail of the two strokes must be on the same oblique line; Type 2: the heads are on the same oblique line, but the tails are separated. Take a closer look later at specific letters.*



#### ***Straight stroke and half-rounded stroke***

*This combination creates the shape of letters like O, C, G, ... After writing a half circle on the left, we combine a straight stroke inside so that it lies on 1/3 of the whole circle.*





### ***Straight stroke and oblique stroke***

*By combining straight stroke and two short oblique strokes, we form the initial part of many letters in the uppercase alphabet. This combination is used together with the first one.*

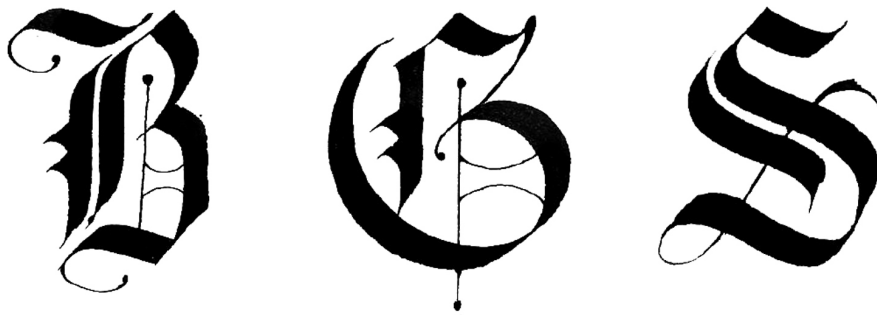


### ***Supplement***

*This oblique stroke forms the terminal feet of the letter, we may or may not write a thin stroke to add pattern to the letter.*

## SHAPE TYPES

The capital alphabet is divided into three main types of shape. Type 1: Represented by letter B, letters consist of straight strokes and oblique strokes. Type 2: Represented by the letter G, letters consist of bows. Type 3: Special letters that do not follow the general rule, for example: letter S.



## GENERAL STRUCTURE

We will analyze all the general elements in a capital letter in the letter B below.

### ***Banner***

*As a word balanced factor, there are some letters that do not have the banner on top*

### ***Main part***

*This is the main part contained in the basic strokes we have practiced; it helps create the general character of the text*

### ***Individual part***

*For groups of letters that are written alike at the main part, this part creates the characteristic of each letter.*

### ***Ornament***

*These are small details that are added to the letter to ensure a balanced letter space and make the letter more elegant by the pat-*

### ***Foot***



## CAPITAL ALPHABET

Let's start to learn about the structure of each letter in the capital alphabet. Similar to lowercase letters, they are divided into groups that are similar in shape so that we can practice effectively.

### *Group 1: M, U, V, W, Y, P*

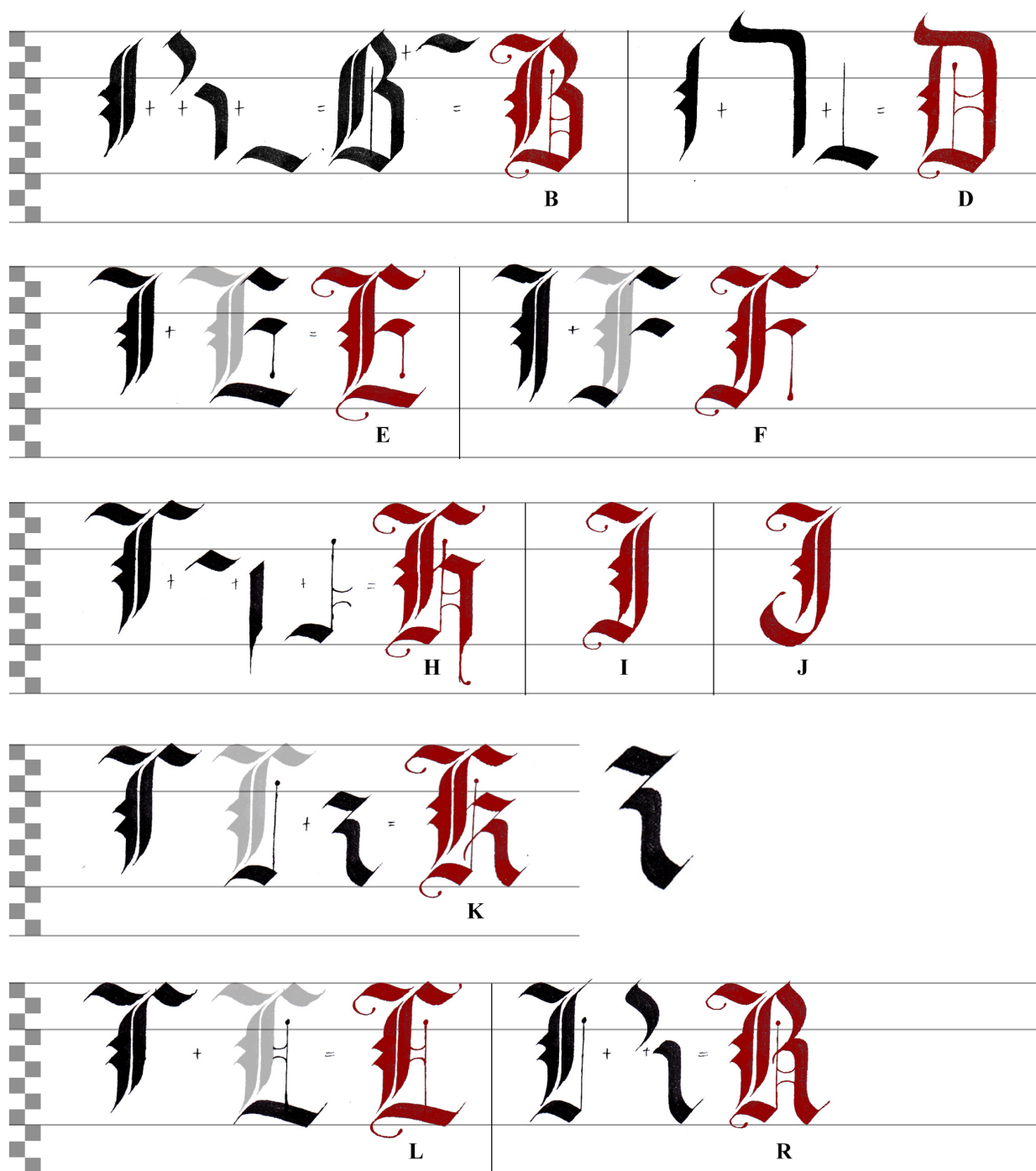


### **Note about group 1**

Letters in the first group of capital alphabet consist of straight strokes and basic strokes, in which letter U and V differ only at the last stroke, letter V is added the bottom part to create letter Y and letter P has a small part that needs to be filled while writing.



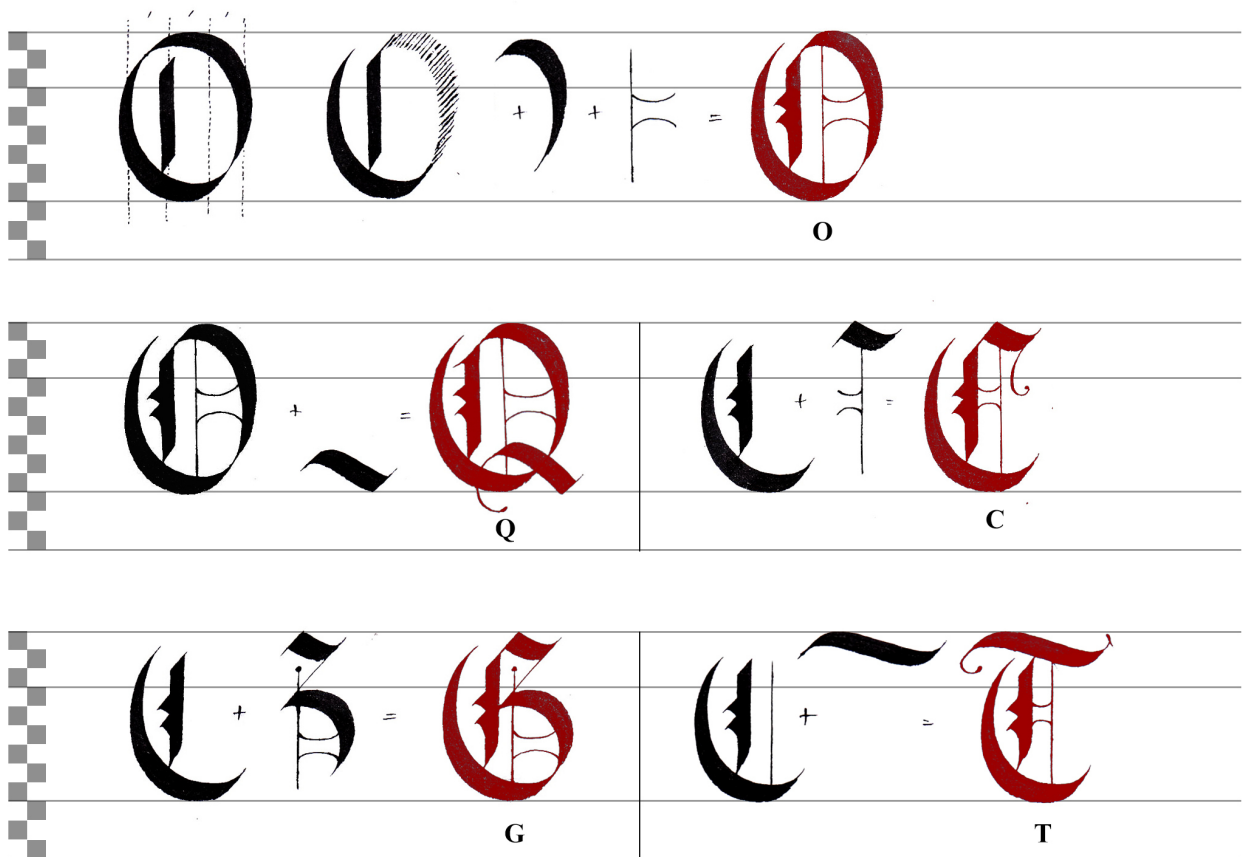
**Group 2: B, D, E, F, H, I, J, K, L, R**



**Note about group 2**

Similar to group 1, group 2 also contains letters with basic strokes, in which letters B, D, and R have similar shape, while E, F, L are alike in structure and finally, I, J differ at the last stroke.

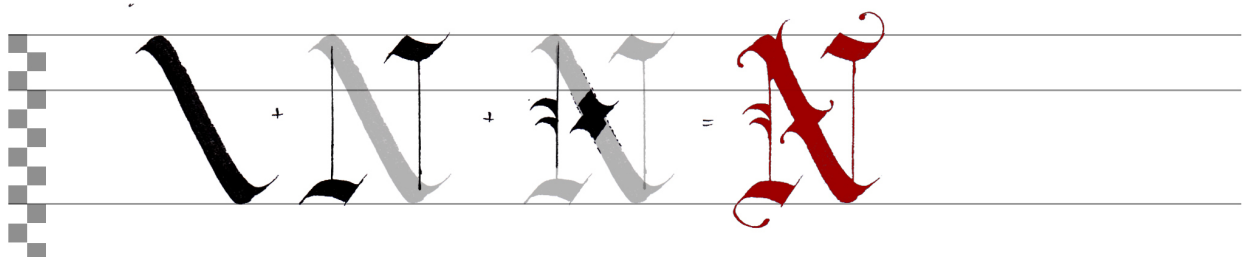
### Group 3: O, Q, C, G, T

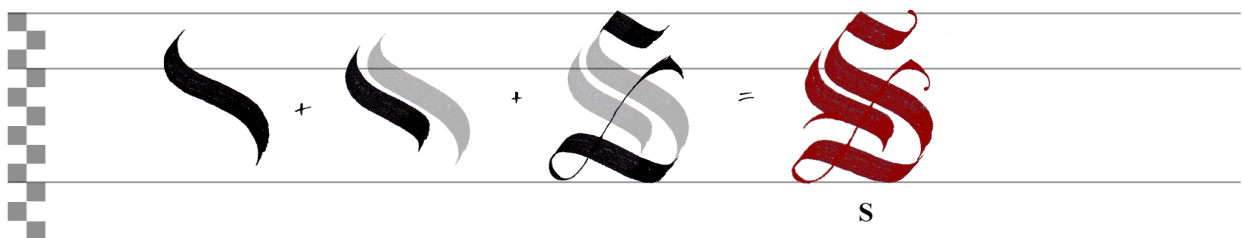
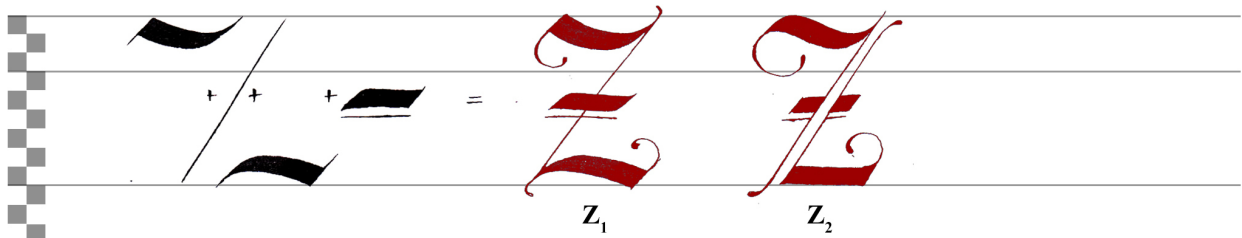
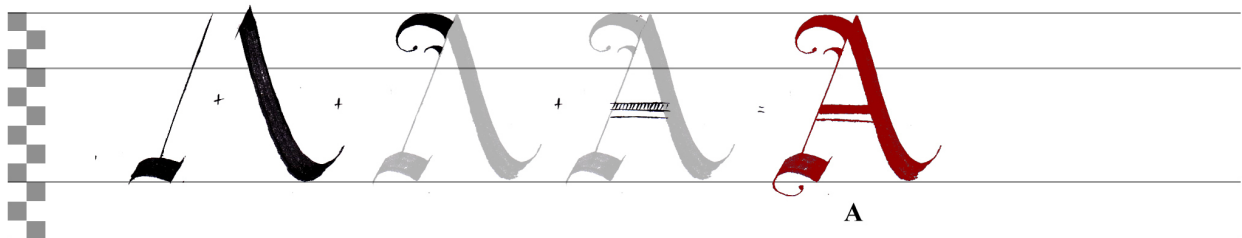
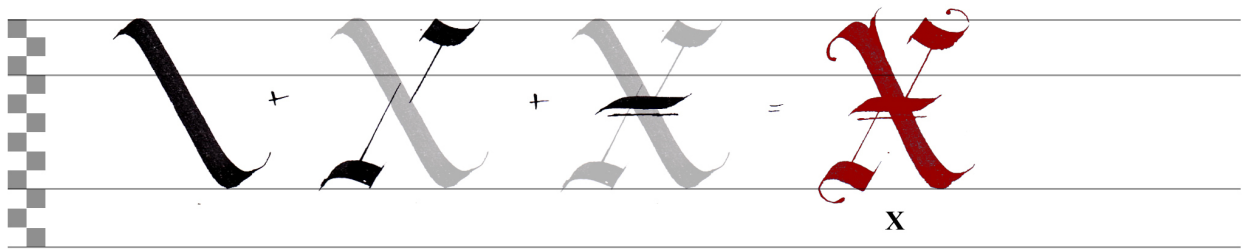


### Note about group 3

Letters in this group are harder to control than the previous two groups. In Calligraphy in general and Blackletter in particular, letters contained in a round shape are more difficult to practice. To write effectively, imagine the shape of the letter O before writing is very important.

### Group 4: O, Q, C, G, T





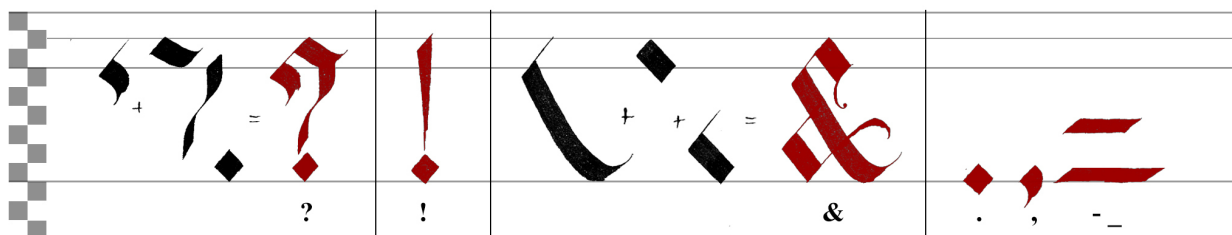
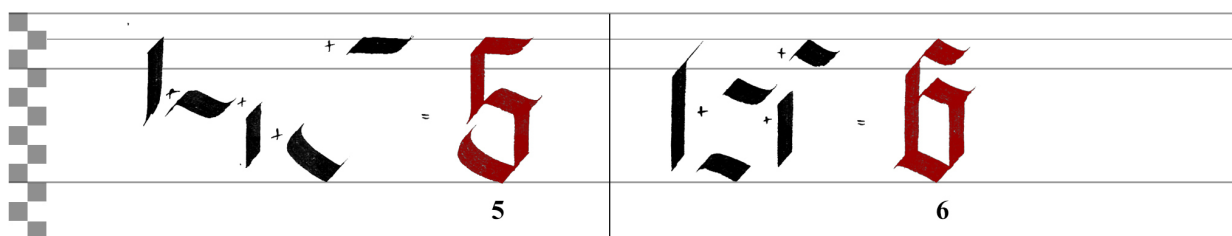
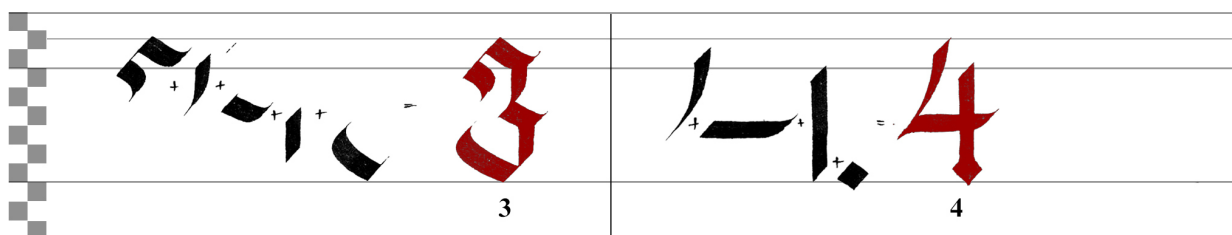
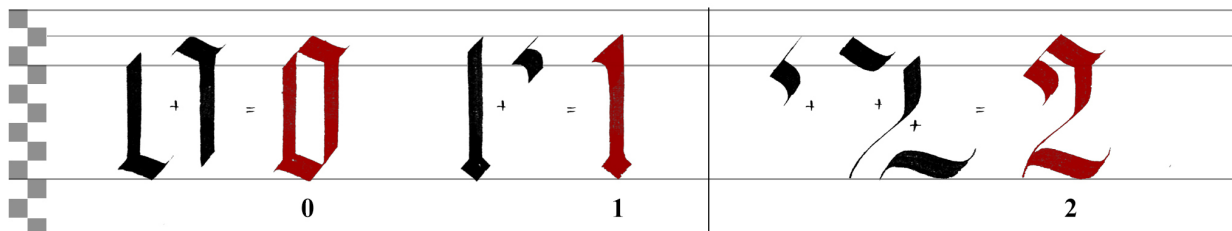
#### Note about group 4 and sum up capital letters

The last group consists of special letters that are not in the basic structure, in which letter S is most difficult to control. When writing letter S, always take note of the isosceles trapezoidal shape to write the most balanced strokes.

Capital letters is a specific part in the Blackletter. In broad-edged nib Calligraphy, Blackletter is considered too complex in shape similar to the Renaissance art in general. However, Blackletter is quite liberal and not too coherent in structure and proportion so that the writer can customize as long as maintaining the balance and harmony of the composition and the spirit of the artwork.

## NUMBERS, PUNCTUATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Beside letters, numbers, punctuations and symbols are also an important part of communicating. Numbers can be written in different styles, below are samples of numbers, punctuations and symbols that match the shape of the letters we practiced in the previous section. Notice the height of numbers, punctuations and



## CHANGES IN HEIGHT AND NIB SIZE

Each individual has a unique aesthetic look. The parameters in Calligraphy are merely initial proportions to follow when practicing. Hence, we can change the height of the text and the size of the nib depending on the visual harmony of each individual, for example: With a certain size, we can write Blackletter with the height proportion of 3: 5: 3, 3: 6: 3, 3: 7: 3, 4: 8: 4, ... or any height proportion that is suitable for the content. Changing the text height will simultaneously change the correlation of the strokes, means that with the same nib size, the text looks thinner if the height is higher, see the example below to visualize.



The two phrases "Letter Height" are written in the same size but different in height, the phrase below looks more airy and thinner than the above phrase. We can conclude that everyone has an acceptable proportion for themselves.



*Balanced*

*Too low   Too high*

However, it is important to consider changes in height and it needs to be changed appropriately, avoid writing too low or too high that makes the letters become difficult to read.



Similar to letter height, letter proportion can also vary according to the writer, but avoid writing part 1 and part 3 too big or too small that may cause the loss of the letter's characteristic.

## WRITING STYLE AND PEN TECHNIQUES

Writing style is almost an improvisation and a way of expressing each individual. Along with some other advanced techniques, each letter has small but sufficient variations to express the writer's personality. Some styles are simple and laconic; some styles emphasize crucial features or even add external details to decorate the letter.



It is difficult to guide writing styles or related techniques, since each person has different expressions and related techniques are naturally formed after the writer has used the tools smoothly. Therefore, the best way to develop your writing style is to practice frequently and not be afraid to try other styles of letters.



## ANOTHER WAY TO WRITE LOWERCASE LETTERS IN BLACKLETTER

Another way means using a different way of combining basic strokes to form letter in lowercase alphabet, see the description below.



Stroke number (1) we have practiced in the previous section, stroke number (2) described next to it, this technique makes the letter slightly curved creating velvety feeling.



Similarly, stroke number (3) is converted to number (4) and on the right are sample letters. Refer to the entire alphabet below.

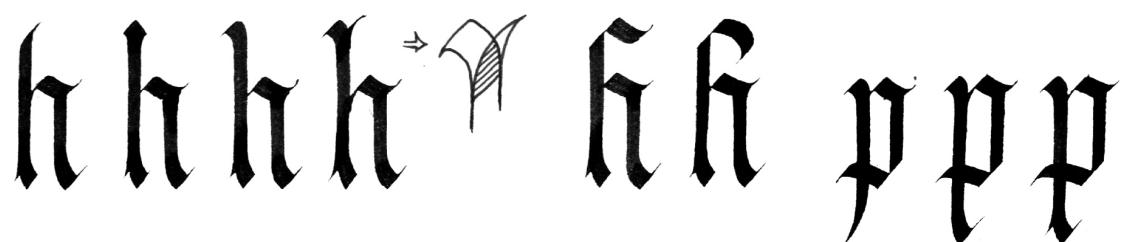
### Blackletter

a b c d e f g h i j  
k l m n o p q r s  
t u v w x y z



## LETTER VARIATION

This is also a critical part of Calligraphy, we cannot produce the same letter style for every piece of artwork, which is likely to limit the copiousness of writing styles. Below are some basic variants that I used for your reference.



The first type is the variant of upper-letter and lower-letter, with the letters "h" and "p" representing. On the left are four ways of writing letters with ascenders. In the middle, there are two ways to add supplemental strokes, and lastly are letters with descenders (note: this variant does not apply for letter "g").



After trying to write variants according to the general rule, we refer to other specific ways of writing each letter.

anatomy <sup>of</sup> letters

## WORD SPACING AND LINE SPACING

For contents that written in texts (many words), the balance between word spacing and line spacing is necessary to make the content easier to read (especially with Blackletter). Below is spaces between words and lines I normally apply, you can take reference of it and adjust spaces depending on your own purpose.

Writing is almost as important as speaking, as a medium for communicating thought.

Take the part "Writing is almost" as an example of word spacing. Usually, words are spaced by the width of the letter "o" (Described as letter "o" in red)

Writing is almost

Writing is almost as important as speaking, as a medium for communicating thought.

Space between the lines depends on the intention of the writer; the only important point to consider is the readability of the paragraph. I normally choose line spacing that is slightly larger than x-height, avoid the head and tail part of letters in two forms touching each other.

The finger movement consists in the action of the first and second finger and thumb, and is used chiefly in making the upward and downward strokes.

The fore-arm movement consists in the action of the forearm upon its muscular rest near the elbow; the hand gliding on the nails of the third and fourth fingers. It may be employed in making strokes in any direction.

*Sample paragraph*

## NOTES AND SUMMARY

Basically, we have completed the basic and most importantly in Blackletter, the balance and consistent of letters is the factor that decides the beauty of Calligraphy. Hence, regular practice is something I expect the most from those who have followed this modest material.

Calligraphy can simply be a hand-technique kind of art based on the typefaces that were originally invented. But it cannot be denied that there are many individuals who have achieved the ultimate technique in using pen as well as the liberation and sophistication in each stroke to create great emotions for the viewers (Example: Penman L. Madarasz).

The following section focuses on sample words written in alphabetical order. Let's pick up your pen and start to practice. Wish you success with Blackletter.

Anatomy

Balance

Connection

Dancing

Economic

Fantastic

Generation

Harmony

Illustration

Jewelry

Kindness

Landscape

Management



Naturally

Ornaments

Personmanship

Quotation



Reaction

Sculpture

Technique

Umbrella

Variation

Winning

Xylography

Youthful

Zephyr