

# Free Hand

## INTRODUCTION

Cultivating Handwriting means practicing it as a passion.

It is a powerful means of expression of our personality and our humanity, which belongs to all of us.

This course is the result of many years of teaching Calligraphy and Handwriting to students of all ages and from many parts of the world.

During these years I've noticed that many students have a low consideration of their own handwriting and almost seems ashamed to it. I've also seen that many of them can only write in block letters and have never been taught cursive writing.

The traditional calligraphic training proposes letterforms obtained with an edged square nib, which feels, for most people, archaic, difficult to learn and far from contemporary life. For this reason I teach, in this course, a writing that follows the rules of the Renaissance Italic copy books, but is executed with a regular pointed pen. This course also proposes, for inspiration, a number of historical documents of literates who lived and developed cursive Italic between the XVI and the XVIII century. These documents are examples of very personalized handwritings which developed according to the rules of Italic. Finally a number of exercises will begin the exploration of the visual potential inherent in writing. Our handwriting offers a clear image of Western history and culture and is of vital importance for the development of creativity and imagination and a practice which helps concentration and calmness.

*n. non est pollutus rum. non est pollutus i*  
*sumens. omnes ger* ***asumens. omnes ger***

*Study of Ludovico degli Arrighi's writing*

## CURSIVE WRITING AND ITALIC

The flourishing of handwriting in Europe coincides with the invention of the printing press. The invention of the printed book with movable type during the fifteenth century, stimulated enormously the ability of reading and writing among the general public. Italic, a slanted and compressed hand initially used in the chanceries all over Italy, was rapidly becoming popular. In 1501 the Venetian printer Aldo Manuzio published, with the help of his collaborator and type-designer Francesco Griffo, the first edition of pocket books using a typeface based on Italic. In 1522 Ludovico degli Arrighi, an Italian calligrapher, published the first printed Italic copybook in Rome (see fig.1). The success of Manuzio's prestigious publication and Arrighi's as well as other Italic copybooks (i.e. G.Tagliente and G.Palatino) made this hand ever more known and practiced daily.

In the second half of the sixteenth century Giovanni Francesco Cresci presented a new Italic cursive. The most important change was that this Italic was written with a pointed pen rather than a squared edge pen (see fig.2). This last change gave a real boost in the practice of handwriting and Cresci's hand became one of the main models for many decades.

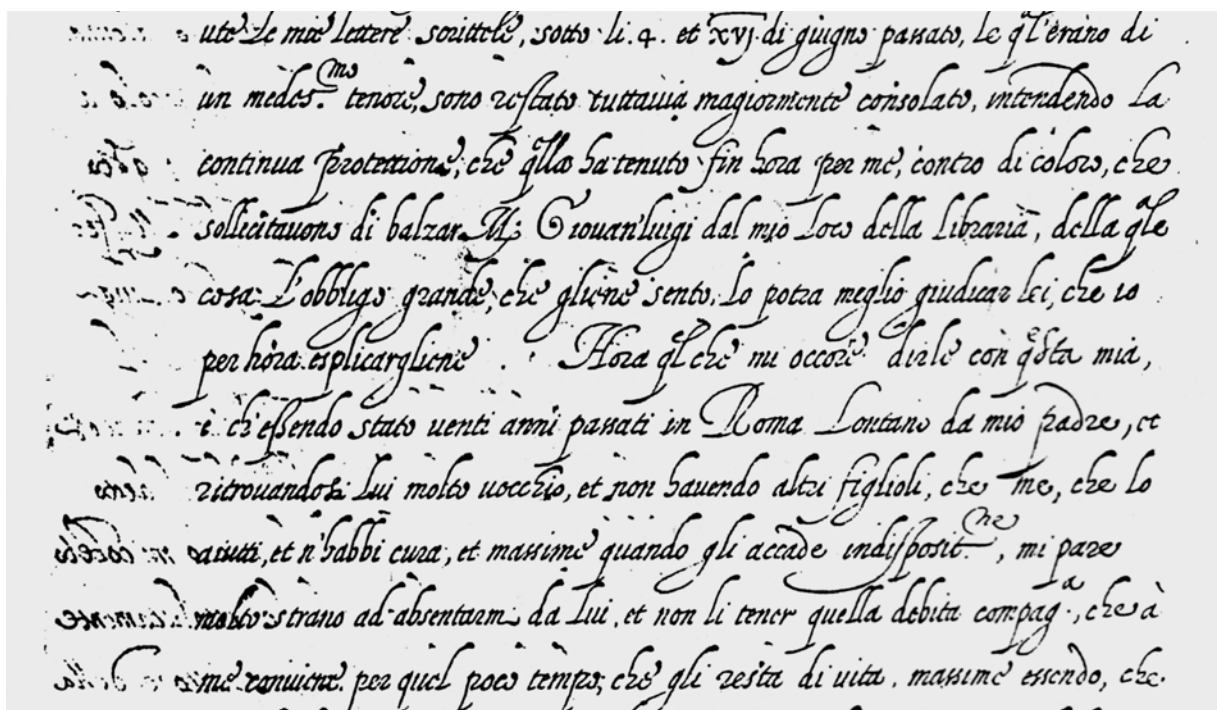
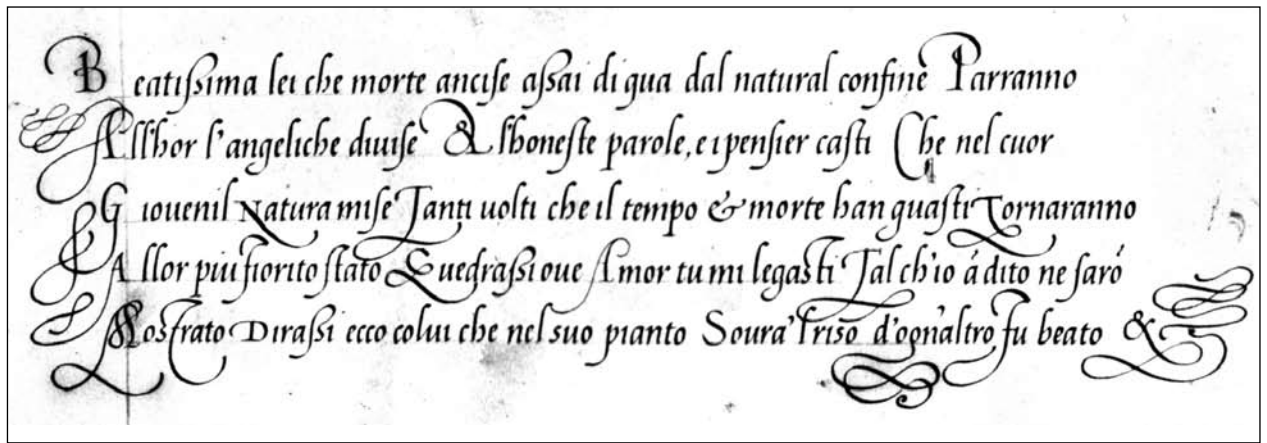
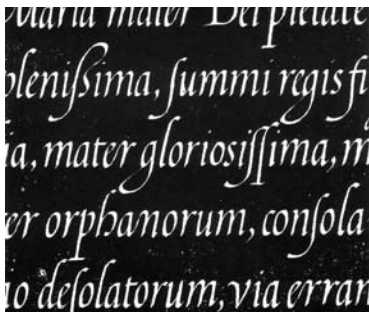


Fig.2 - Gianfrancesco Cresci,  
Rome, 1572 Vatican Library  
Vat. Lat. 6185



*Bernardino Cattaneo. Copybook 1545  
Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MA.*



*Victoria & Albert Museum - London  
"Arte de Escribir" by Francisco Lucas, 1571*

The use of italic by secretaries, scribes and literati from the sixteenth century on, makes this hand the best Western example of a creative, personal and very easily legible hand.

Before the advent of the printing press, scribes were totally committed to a clear and perfectly legible hand and nobody thought of personalizing their writing, with the risk of making it less legible. For this reason few cursives had not developed. Despite the introduction of the printing press, the Renaissance brought an increased need for handwritten documents and letters. Secretaries, scribes and other writers, having to write day after day, developed some of the most creative cursives, delighting themselves with the letterforms and the rhythm of the dancing line produced by their pen and in so doing, they reached a strong personalization of their handwriting while keeping the fundamental rules of Italic.

Le lettere per tanto, quali dal Secundo trat-  
to acuto & sottile se' princi-  
piano, sono le infra scritte, Cioe'

·i i e e' i j m n p r

t u

le quali tutte deueno essere eguali, saluo  
che il p et il t hanno da essere un  
poco piu alte che li corpi de le altre

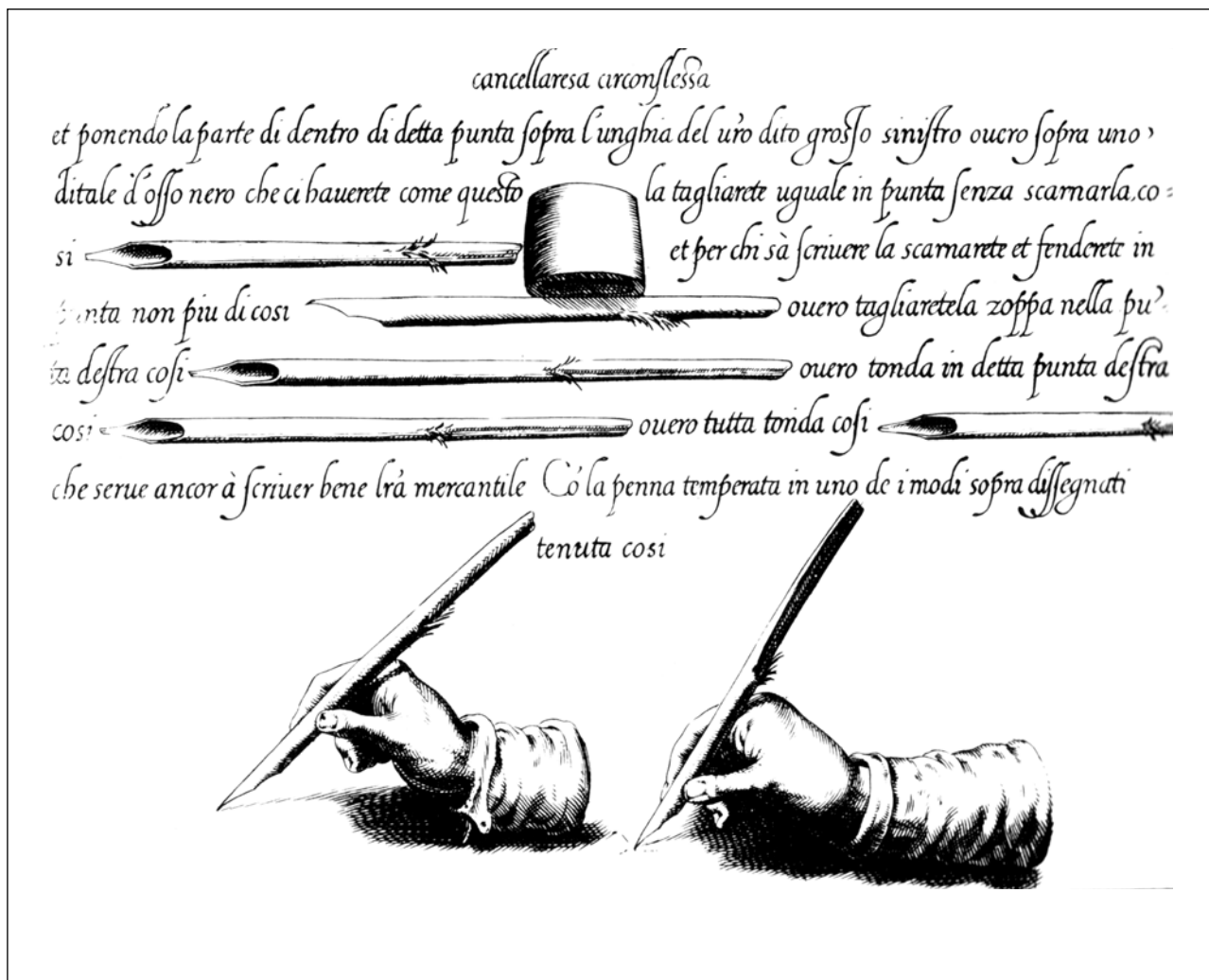
tre

come quiui con lo exem-

pio Ti dimostro

apatmtumprnotiarppgrstumputinatmpi  
Et questa piu alteza del p cioe' dela linea  
et non dela panza, a l'occhio mio as-  
sai piu satisface: Del t poi, si fa p farlo  
differente da vno, c.

Fig. 1 - Ludovico degli Arrighi  
La Operina, Rome ca. 1522



“Lo Scrittore utile” di  
 Giuliantonio Hercolani, 1574

## HOW TO HOLD THE PEN

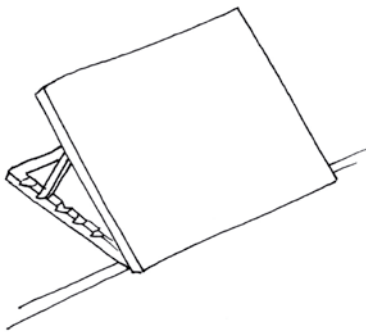
It is essential that you learn the correct, formal way of holding the pen. It should be kept between the thumb and the index finger, while the middle finger should work as a support. Keep your left hand on the table (or the one you don't use to write). The piece of paper should be kept horizontally in front of you.

## SLANTED WRITING TABLES



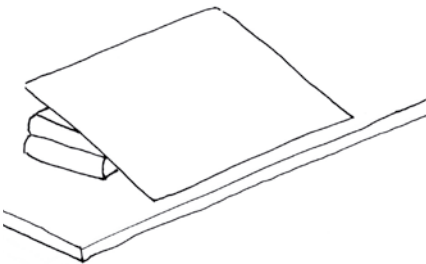
I recommend a slanted table which helps greatly in keeping a correct body posture. You can buy a drawing table or you can have someone make it for you (or make it yourself!). The simplest way to have a slanted work surface, is to place a board (1.5 mt wide by 1 mt. high) on the table, and raise it with a couple of thick books. The paper can be held in place with removable tape. Make sure the light comes from your left (or from the right if you are left handed). Otherwise your hand will cast a shadow on your writing.

## LEFT HAND WRITERS



Leonardo da Vinci was probably left handed, that is possibly why he wrote all his texts from right to left! If you are a left handed, you need to find creative solutions to allow yourself full freedom in developing your hand. The problem may not occur in this course, since you will always write with regular ball or felt pens, but if you use a fountain pen or begin to use pen and ink, you might find yourself in trouble! The best way to write freely is to keep the hand under the line of writing, as in the picture or a mirror of it (page 6).

## PENS AND PAPER



Choose to work with a pen that feels good to you! A fountain pen is good because it forces you to slow down and the ink produces a nice mark. All exercises can also be executed with a 2B pencil.

There are many different kinds of paper available, some more expensive than others. A pad of non-absorbent drawing paper will be good. Any non-bleeding paper will work fine. Use unruled paper and rule it yourself with light pencil marks or use the guide lines of pages 44 and 45.



*Left handed pen hold*



*Right handed pen hold*