



THE ART OF THE PENCIL COMP

If you improve your drawing skills, you will become a better designer. Period.

Drawing letters requires fidelity to proportion and attention to detail. Learning how to see to draw is crucial because the ability heightens your awareness of everything you design. Nothing can replace the intimate contact of a pencil to paper, the wellspring of coordination, discipline and observation it releases.

No such artistry is needed to operate a computer; it is a tool. To paraphrase Truman Capote's acid comment about Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* ("That's not writing; that's typing."), computer drawing is not drawing; it is clicking.

Even if you never draw a letter after you graduate from school, lettering will have taught you: 1 attention to detail; 2 discipline; 3 patience; 4 form; 5 volume and spatial relationships; 6 craftsmanship; 7 draftsmanship; 8 legibility; 9 heightened analytical skills; 10 how to see—how to really look at a curve; 11 color spacing; 12 individual kerning; 13 word spacing; 14 optical adjustments, such as entasis; 15 quick visualization; 16 the value of a rough; 17 positive and negative space; 18 not to fall in love with your first sketch; 19 historical styles; 20 appropriate font selection; 21 how to combine fonts; 22 font identification; 23 optical scaling adjustments; and 24 to redo the job until it's right.



Placement of caption 01, caption 02, caption 03, caption 04, caption 05, and caption 06 (clockwise)

The Practiced Curve

The physical act of drawing by hand—no matter what tool is used—imprints the nature of the lines, straight or curved, into the mind of the student. The object's shape must be analyzed, interpreted and kinetically translated into a drawing, which involves a thinking process that, once learned, becomes second nature, and that, once a degree of drawing skill has been mastered, is recalled automatically.

Drawing by hand forces the learner to dissect a shape or form and its volume as well as the manner in which a curve accelerates or flattens. Not only must a shape be observed acutely; the space that defines the shape also must be understood unequivocally. In fact, frequently it is more difficult to tweak the computer's formulae into a desired shape than to draw the shape by hand. A curve drawn on a computer with Bézier points is formed with algorithms automatically and does not require the same analytical skills as drawing the same curve by hand, which the mind deeply remembers. Hand drawing can be tedious—often requiring an enormous amount of effort, repetition and time—but its rewards are long lasting.

Lacking drawing ability, a user of a drawing program can create an outline of a curved object and, by manipulating the arms of Bézier points, produce a smooth, curved line. But what is missing is the ability to see that the shape has been correctly reproduced or interpreted—or that it is the intended shape. A student may draw a dozen sketches of the same object but remain unable to tell which is the correct one; a teacher must point out the good one and explain why it is good.

If you learn to draw curved letters that appear to be equal in size, that knowledge will be forever ingrained in you. Because there is no mathematical rule that can be used to arrive at the subtlety, you must figure it out. The straight and curved stems of a two-weight font require equal degrees of finesse because as a curved stem diminishes in thickness to form the thin stroke, it will

appear to have less mass than a straight stem of equal thickness. It must be widened to appear to be the same color. This is not an idle task. The letter must be drawn over and over and reduced to a small size so that you can properly evaluate the relationships. It must be viewed at a distance, adjusted, viewed again and so on—until it looks right. The exercise hones your perception.

A square with rounded corners poses problems of transition from straight to curve. For a smooth appearance, a curve should accelerate from the straight line into the curve, avoiding an optical corner. There are no absolute rules that govern this transition; you must use your eyes to gauge its smoothness.

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The design world is experiencing a revival of Bank Gothic, a squarish letter with rounded corners. In large sizes, the straight lines appear to be concave. If the straight line is bowed minutely, it will appear to be a straight line instead of a collapsing shape. The Greeks knew this subtlety and swelled their columns to prevent their sides from appearing concave. The steps to the Parthenon curve toward the viewer to appear horizontal. The nuance is called entasis, meaning distension.

George Bickham's 1743 *The Universal Penman* is the source book for formal script types. The reverse curve appears repeatedly in the capital and lowercase letters. Technically, the "s" shape is known as a primary ogee. It is a line that reverses itself at midpoint; one half of the curve may arc more quickly, though its overall appearance should be smooth and flowing without the flat areas that make a line appear bent or taut. The simple shape requires practice to master, and it can be varied endlessly.

The curve abounds in nature. An outline of the human body, for example, is composed of numerous ogees. The curve is seen in the meander of rivers, the shape of a shoreline wave, flowers and leaves. Art, likewise, produces countless curves. Al Hirschfeld, a 98-year old living treasure who draws caricatures of the Broadway stage for *The New York Times*, fills his drawings with undulating ogee curves. The Art

Nouveau period produced objects and architectural detailing that were mainly reverse curves, and Art Nouveau artist Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations are celebrations of the curve.

The One-of-a-Kind Logo

A designer who can create a two- or three-minute logo rough, an impossible task with a computer, is a valuable asset to any design firm. But all of the above drawing has to come first. If the rules of proportion and spacing are understood, are second nature and are combined with design ingenuity, the three-minute rough is possible. Simple procedures must be followed. With every sketch, explore a new direction—not minor variations of the previous sketch. The first rough should examine the basic possibilities: caps, lowercase, small caps, italic and bold-face. These can be more resolved to indicate a style: serif, sans serif, script display or decorative. Further refinements are necessary to correct spacing, proportion and weights. The degree of finish depends on the amount of time allotted—and the speed of the designer.

The world of design is filled with computer-generated logos. Rarely do fonts meet a logo's exacting requirements. Instead many are stretched, squeezed, curved, tapered, sliced, perforated, eroded, torn, shaded, outlined, inlined, highlighted, mutilated and generally abused. The same approach is available to any designer who has the same computer programs, which does a client a disservice. A client deserves a legible, unique, identifiable, copyrightable logo, which requires drawing skills.

Logos are an important part of commerce and the bedrock of advertising; their design is serious business. I urge you to study typography, letterforms and drawing because all are vital ingredients of a successful logo, a productive career and a happy life.

Katherine Anne Porter, one of our great American writers, said it best to a group of graduating high school students: "Practice an art for love and the happiness of your life. You will find it outlasts almost everything except breath." ■CMYK

Doyald Young has taught lettering, logotype design and typographic basics at Art Center College of Design for 26 years and is the author of *Logotypes & Letterforms and Fonts & Logos*. www.delphipress.com | doyald@pacbell.net