

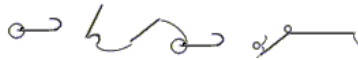
# The not complete-idiot's guide to:



## Alternative Handwriting



## and Shorthand Systems



## for Dummies



### Introduction

The letters you are now reading, while well adapted to the eye to be read, are so ill adapted to the hand to be written that schools teach longhand as an alternative to printing them. The more cursive longhand is easy to learn, but only about 10% faster than printing. Alternative handwriting systems offer 100% or better improvements in handwriting ease and speed. If you could spend the rest of your life taking notes or keeping a journal/diary while writing two or three times faster, then, gee, why not?

As a bonus for learning an alternative system, you can be almost certain that no one you know will be able to read anything you write, so you will have learned not only a fast but secret way to write. Learning an alternative to longhand can not only be fun and way cool, but practical as well.

Most alternative systems write words the way they sound, not the way they are spelled. English spelling is so quirky that winning a spelling bee is a major achievement, and even the champs falter at some point. While the Phoenicians may have needed only 26 symbols to represent their speech sounds, English has from 32 to 50 speech sounds depending on who's doing the counting, and using only 26 letters to represent them just doesn't cut it.

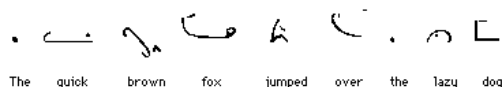
To make up for the missing symbols, several letters are often combined to represent a sound. This wouldn't be so bad if there was any consistency involved, but as all children and ESL students know there isn't, as English is only about 40% phonetic (which is to say 60% of common words have irregular spellings). For example the "sh" sound can be spelled 13 different ways: ocean, machine, special, pshaw, sure, schist, conscience, nauseous, she, tension, issue, mission, nation.

With vowels things are even worse (about 20 spellings per vowel sound!). The "oo" sound has 29 different spellings: rule, ruby, flue, troupe, fruit, through, maneuver, wooed, group, ooze, grew, rheumatism, move, bruise, canoe, two, moon, do, plus 11 other spellings found in less common words. On average, there are [at least 13 different ways](#) to spell each sound in frequently used English words. If all English words are counted, there are [28](#) different spellings for each sound, or over 1,100 ways to spell 40 sounds. No wonder even very good spellers have only about a 50/50 chance of correctly spelling a word that is new to them.

The way out of this madness is to write using a phonetic alphabet—one sound, one symbol. Because multiple letters are often used to indicate a single sound, the average English word has more letters than sounds. Writing phonetically requires learning more symbols initially, but requires fewer symbols per word, and so is faster. If each sound is represented by the simplest possible symbol (single stroke lines, loops and hooks), the number of strokes needed to write a word can be greatly reduced in comparison to longhand. This is how the alternative systems can be so much faster than loooooonghand, which uses several strokes per letter and often several letters per sound.

### Pitman Shorthand

The better known alternative systems include the Pitman system, developed by Sir Isaac



### Other sites by Alyson

#### Popular Sites:

Fun with Dimensional Analysis  
Medication Math for the Nursing Student  
WWW Collection of Favorite String Figures  
Poems to Memorize & Memorable Poems  
Alternative Handwriting & Shorthand Systems  
Handywrite  
Small Animal Euthanasia  
Ryan's Favorite Kid Poems  
World's Funniest Jokes

#### Mindfulness Sites:

For wisdom follow: The Path of the Dog  
Are You a Doggiesattva?  
The Five Precepts of Buddhism  
The Diamond Sutra: Condensed version  
The Platform Sutra of Huineng: Condensed  
The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation  
Ch'an Teachings of Huang Po on One Mind  
Zen and the Art of Mindful Bus Riding  
Beginnings: First Lines from Scriptures  
Two Zen Stories  
14 Mindfulness Trainings of Thich Nhat Hanh  
14 Thoughtfulness Trainings  
Westfulness and Eastfulness  
World Religion Simplified  
Mindfulness Meditation Bell, Gong, Timer

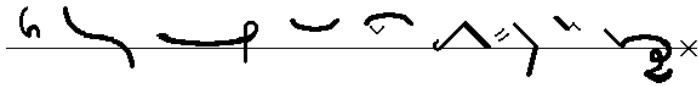
#### Thrival Sites:

Buyer's Guide to Food Preparedness Products  
Sustainability Issues: From vision to practice  
Survival Retreat? Maybe now is the time  
Battling Bermudagrass  
Human Chow: Cheap Food  
Private Retreat: Alyson Acres

#### Sustainability Issues:

Earth at Night: Do you live in the glow?  
Environment, Power, and Society  
The Prosperous Way Up and Down  
Circles of Non-belief: The Federation alternative  
Envision Tucson Sustainable  
Community Urban Micro Farms  
Alternative Farming  
Washing Machine Magic  
Eco-nomy 101: Why you can't do just one thing  
Confessions of a Generalist  
The Post-Car Culture  
Rainwater Catchment: How to harvest scarcity  
Stop Pumping Ground Water  
From Horses to E-cycles: A brief history  
Sustainable Tucson: Hows to sustain  
Ethics of the Borg Collective  
Alternative to the Federation  
Cruise Ship Earth: Enjoy the cruise  
Expecting the Expected: Disaster happens  
Understanding the Exponential Function

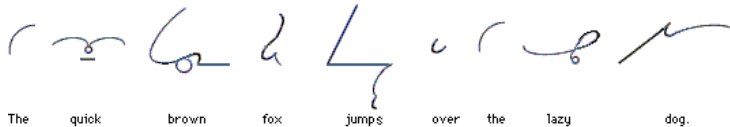
in 1837. It is based on geometrical curves and lines in varying lengths and angles written on lined paper. Lines are also written thin or thick using a special flexible fountain pen tip, though a pencil will work. Here's an example from [The Joy of Pitman Shorthand](#).



Th-you F 'R NtrST N M-eye WB-PJ Bt+ow PtMn-(SHrt ND)  
Thank you for your interest in my Web-page about Pitman Shorthand.

The Pitman system is a complete phonetic alphabet, though diacritical marks have to be added alongside the lines to indicate vowels, which is awkward. When speed is important they are often omitted. But since it is possible to write each word that sounds different in a unique way, I consider Pitman's system to be a form of handwriting as well as shorthand. Shorthand is a system of abbreviation in which only a bare outline of a word is written—just enough (note the middle line above) to allow you to later decipher from the word's outline and its context what the word is. Shorthand systems go for maximum speed at the expense of readability. Shorthand systems can become readable once you learn to sight read all the outlines or "brief forms," which can number in the thousands, but just learning the basic symbol set won't cut it. The Pitman system is still used, especially in England. Do check it out. It is not easy to learn or become proficient in, but it is fast (up to 10X faster than longhand!), elegantly austere, and has been adapted for use in many languages other than English.

### Gregg Shorthand



[John Robert Gregg](#) devised the most famous of alternative systems in 1888. All lines are of the same thickness, position relative to a line is irrelevant so lined paper is not needed, and awkward diacritical marks are avoided though not absent. Gregg Shorthand won out over Pitman Shorthand in America, and was widely taught in public schools as an essential skill needed by office workers to take dictation. Many books are available, and most public libraries in America will have copies. Unfortunately, Gregg Shorthand is only a shorthand system; you can only write outlines of words. If you write something and then immediately transcribe it, as secretaries tend to do, then no major problem, but if you try to read something you wrote last year, then a major effort may be needed to decipher it, unless, that is, you have so mastered the system that you can sight read thousands of brief forms.

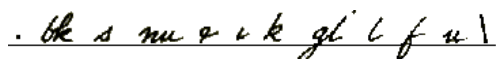
Although Gregg Shorthand is nominally phonetic, in practice outlines sometimes follow the sound of a word, and sometimes its spelling. Dictionaries are available to show you how to outline tens of thousands of words, but the need for such dictionaries should tell you something of the inherent ambiguities of the system. The system is fast, attractively cursive, but frustrating for personal use since each vowel symbol can represent several possible vowel sounds. It is the exact opposite of printing alphabetic characters by hand; handwritten text is readable, but blocky and slow to write, while Gregg Shorthand is highly cursive and fast, but only marginally readable.

### Teeline Shorthand



[Teeline Shorthand](#) is taught to journalism majors in some Commonwealth countries, mainly the UK, but is little known elsewhere. James Hill, an instructor of Pitman Shorthand, developed it in 1970. It is simpler than Pitman Shorthand, without the need to use both thick and thin lines, or diacritical marks. It is not phonetic, but instead is based on the standard alphabet, and so retains the inadequacies of that alphabet. Vowels are often omitted for speed at the expense of readability, as in most shorthand systems. It is intended to aid in taking dictation by creating word outlines, and so needs to be transcribed soon after it is taken. It is, therefore, more suited to professional than personal use.

### Alphabetic Shorthand Systems



The book is new and I can get it for you.

- A Tale of Two Islands
- Island Ethics: Earth Island as metaphor
- The Book: From beyond the Federation
- The Ascent of Life: Chapter 1
- Apocalypse Past: Chapter 2
- The Reconstruction Era: Chapter 3
- The Particulars of Human Life: Chapter 4
- Ascent of the Inquiring Ones: Chapter 5

#### Satirical Sites:

- Take the Super Post-Mensa IQ Test
- Infidel Guides: Islam, Theism, Atheism, ...
- World Religions Simplified
- The True Right to Life Movement

#### Literature/Poetry Sites:

- Mom's Favorite Poems
- Lorien: A Poem
- Ryan's Favorite Kid Poems
- Tucson Literati Discussion Group
- Walled-in: A Poem
- Poems to Memorize & Memorable Poems

#### Interesting Sites:

- Sun Tour America by Solar E-bike
- Sustainable Technology to Enable
- Grammys Urban Micro Farm
- Solar Slow Cooker Design
- Celebrate Inquiry
- Pastaology 101
- Flying Spaghetti Monster Camp
- The Book: An Infidel's Biblia
- Global Warming 123 (bing-bang-boom)
- How to Use OpenSeaDragon
- Battling Bermuda Grass
- San Pedro Valley Community Cultural Center
- One Homestead: An intentional community
- Making Tree of Life: Fun with phylogenetics
- Making Boxes for Rock & Mineral Collection
- Making a Mass Balance Scale
- Ryan's 50 States Flashcards
- Adventures of MeraLee
- eBike Touring Association
- Cochise Stronghold Trail

### External Links

#### Learning Shorthand for the Office

Take Notes Quick and Effectively.

#### The Joy of Pitman Shorthand

Celebrate Pitman Shorthand here.

#### John Robert Gregg

Find out more about the inventor of Gregg shorthand.

#### Teeline Shorthand

Learn about this system of shorthand.

#### Handywrite

A free DIY system online.

#### Speedwriting

Learn about this alphabetic shorthand.

#### Easyscript

Learn a bit about this commercialized shorthand.

Various systems of rapid writing based on alphabetic print or longhand characters have been devised. [Speedwriting](#), Stenoscript, Forkner, [Easyscript](#), AlphaHand, Baine's Typed Shorthand, HySpeed Longhand, Abbreviatrix, Quickhand, and Carter Briefhand are examples. [Keyscript](#), a new system based on Pitman's, claims to be the fastest of the Alphabetic systems. Few if any new symbols need to be learned. Most systems consist of rules for abbreviating words together with memorized abbreviations. If the rules are consistently applied, they can be reversed to decode your notes. These systems have the advantage of working with both pen and paper, and with keyboards. Word processing software, such as Word, could possibly be set up to decode and expand words as you type which would allow you to speed type.

Rules usually call for dropping of most vowels, some words, and using semi-phonetic spelling. An example of "Briefhand" might be:

*"The Sierra Club sued the Forest Service to stop clear-cutting on the National Forests of Texas, and judge Robert Parker decided that clear-cutting "took" red-cockaded woodpeckers within the meaning of the Endangered Species Act."*

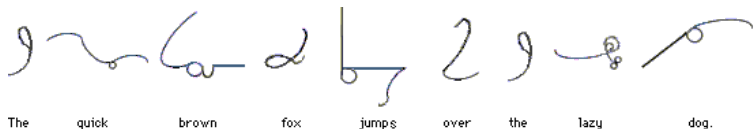
Which might be abbreviated to:

*Srr Clb sued FS to stp cc on NF's in Tx, v jdg R.P. dcd'd cc "took" RCWs undr ESA.*

Shorthand systems based on alphabetic characters can always fall back on longhand where clarity is important or when you might forget what an abbreviation stands for, such as "RCWs" standing for "red-cockaded woodpeckers." The example above, unless transcribed soon, would likely become undecipherable.

Still, given that many people are spending more time typing than writing by hand, these systems have their appeal. As modifications on longhand, they retain the shortcomings of multi-stroke symbols per letter and, not being phonetic, the vagaries of English orthography. They lack the elegance of the symbol systems, such as Pitman's and Gregg's, that at least avoid the mistake of building on the flawed foundation of longhand.

## Handywrite



Unlike the other systems mentioned, except Pitman's, this is both a handwriting and shorthand system. It contains symbols for all the consonants and vowels needed to write English phonetically, and so when words are written in full, the writing is unambiguously readable. Simple strokes, very much like those in Gregg Shorthand, are used, so the system is cursive and fast. In fact, most of the symbols used for the consonants are the same as used in Gregg Shorthand. The main difference is that enough symbols have been added to represent all necessary vowel sounds. In this it is like Pitman's system, but without dependence on position relative to lines, strokes of different width, or use of diacritical marks.

Even when written in full, words are much shorter (fewer strokes) than when written in longhand. When abbreviations are used, making Handywrite into a shorthand system, writing becomes progressively faster as more abbreviations are learned—but at least you can get by without using or learning any abbreviations, unlike the shorthand-only systems. Normal punctuation symbols can be used which adds to readability. A [Handywrite Web site](#) is available to aid in learning the system (for free).

The handwriting at the beginning of this page is the title in Handywrite.

## Bell's Visible Speech

Although not intended as a replacement for longhand, this system provides a means of recording human speech sounds, and not just those used to make words, but virtually any speech sound! Alexander Melville Bell, whose more famous son was Alexander Graham Bell of telephone fame, developed [Visible Speech](#) in 1864 as a kind of universal alphabet that reduces all vocal sounds into a series of symbols. He was working with the deaf and wanted to illustrate for them how speech sounds are made by using a shorthand system based on anatomical positions within the human vocal tract.

It was the first system for notating the sounds of speech independent of any particular language or dialect. The International Phonetic Alphabet is based on Bell's work.

## The International Phonetic Alphabet

### Keyscript

Learn a bit this about relatively new alphabetic shorthand.

### Visible Speech

Bell's Visible Speech.

### IPA

The International Phonetic Association.

### Blissymbolics

And now for something really different.

### Shorthand Shorthand Shorthand

Advice about learning any shorthand system.

### Unifon

A one sound one letter alphabet.

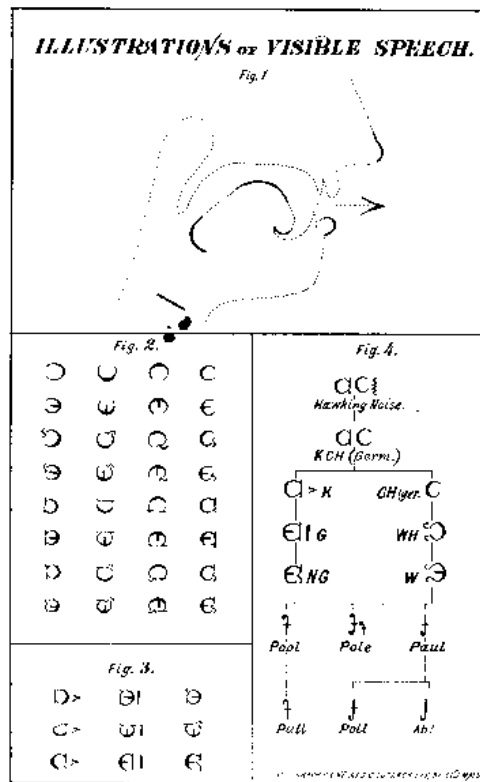
### Top 10 Poems from Alysion's

### Bucket List of Poems to Read Before You Die

1. The Rainy Day by Henry W. Longfellow
2. Fire and Ice by Robert Frost
3. A Dream within a Dream by Edgar Allan Poe
4. The Purple Cow by Gelett Burgess
5. If by Rudyard Kipling
6. To See a World by William Blake
7. Ten Little Limericks
8. First Fig by Edna St. Vincent Millay
9. Alone by Edgar Allan Poe
10. I'm nobody! Who are you? Emily Dickinson

 link

The [International Phonetic Alphabet](#) (IPA) is used by all serious students of speech. It has the advantage of being more easily printable by hand or keyboard than Bell's Visible Speech. The IPA is the final guide to accurate pronunciation, as all other guides and pronunciation keys used in most dictionaries are flawed. It is the product of the International Phonetic Association, which in IPA would be written:



## ði mtə'næʃənəl fə'netɪk əsəʊsi'eɪfŋ

While not intended to be fast, it is the most precise and accurate form of writing. It distinguishes between far more speech sounds than are minimally needed to identify one word from another. With IPA you can write dialects of English, other languages, and individual speech patterns. The phonetic alphabets used in alternative handwriting systems like Handywrite are much simpler, based on the minimum number of speech sounds (phonemes) actually needed to distinguish one word from another. This allows you to write basic English, but not the subtle nuances of English dialects.

### Blissymbolics

[Blissymbolics](#) is a rather intriguing effort to create a modern ideographic writing system based on



concepts rather than words. It is similar to Chinese and Egyptian writing systems. Written Chinese can be read by people speaking mutually unintelligible languages, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, or even Japanese.

Developed by the Austrian Charles Bliss, Blissymbolics was originally conceived as a universal written language that all native language speakers (speaking thousands of different languages) could learn and communicate in. The idea is that it would be much easier for everyone to learn an ideographic written language than a constructed spoken, quasi-European language like Esperanto, or, worse, expect everyone to learn English. If everyone in the world could just communicate with one another, Bliss thought, then international understanding and world peace would follow, or at least be more likely.

Today Blissymbolics is used to provide individuals with severe speech disabilities a written language to communicate in, although its more idealistic intentions have not been forgotten. Of course it makes no claim to being fast to write, but if you're looking for something really different, try Blissymbolics and have some fun with your brain.

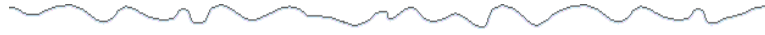
### Conclusions

Most people will probably never bother to learn any alternative handwriting system. Schools and colleges, although depending heavily on lectures, will probably never provide students with a means to take notes efficiently—as sensible as that would be. A few questioning souls, however, will realize that longhand sucks, and will seek alternatives. More power to them, and I hope that those who are willing to learn some new tricks will have fun doing so.

For some good advice on how to learn any shorthand system, check out [Shorthand Systems](#).

If I have omitted a system that should have been mentioned or committed some error, let me know (use Contact link below).

Eric Lee



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