

Beginning Calligraphy :

Helpful information for new scribes...

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Getting Started :

Most scribes get started because they have a specific project in mind, usually for a friend or family member. Others get started because they have an interest in art, drawing, or want to do some form of A&S that isn't string-related. Whatever your reason, it can be intimidating and hard to get started when faced with the vast plethora of things to do that can be involved in doing C&I, like gilding, illumination, vellum/parchment preparation, pigment grinding and research, rubrication, paleography, and more. All are included to various degrees in the art of calligraphy and illumination, and you don't have to do them all at once. Doing calligraphy and illumination is a journey that you will fill with many small steps, some huge frustrations, and those few euphoric successes.

Terminology or Lexicon :

Sometimes it almost seems as if scribes are speaking another language, discussing uncial, batarde, hand, nibwidth, abecendarian.. They're not, I promise. Here are some common words heard around scribery circles.

Abecendarian - Abecendarian sentences contain every letter of the alphabet and are good practice for scribes to use. "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dogs."

Armigerous - Armigerous awards are award which convey a level of rank or "arms". If you have not received your Award of Arms, and their Majesties gift you a Coral Branch, then because the Coral branch carries WITH it an Award of Arms, the Coral Branch is armigerous. All Armigerous scrolls in Atlantia require the heraldry of the recipient to be both verbally blazoned in the text, and visually blazoned on the actual piece.

Ascender - The upper stem of a lowercase letter, such as in h, d, and k

Calligraphy - The study of penmanship or handwriting. The art of writing beautifully.

Clerk Signet - Kingdom office in charge of all scribal activities in Atlantia. It currently falls UNDER the Triton Herald's office.

Descender - The lower stems of letters, such as in p, q, or f in some scripts.

Gilding - The application of gold leaf to a surface, in this case the manuscript

Hands - **NOT FONTS.. HANDS.** I swear if I hear one more person ask me what font I use there's gonna be an incident which will make it difficult for me to retrieve my pen from the chirurgonate... ahem. Hands refer to specific styles of calligraphy, which changed often through history. Older hands are simpler, and less elaborate than later period hands, and often easier for the beginner to learn.

Uncial - Early hand originated around 2nd or 3rd century AD, typified by very rounded "fat" letters and simple pen strokes.

Insular Majuscule - Used mostly in early medieval Britain and Ireland.

Specifically in the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Book of Kells. An evolutionary step from Uncial to Gothic, we start to see long form "s" and slightly elongated letters.

Caroline Miniscule – The next evolutionary step, used in 8th -11th century. Created to add legibility to written works. Insular Majuscule had the letters so close together that the words were difficult to read.

Early Gothic - (Proto-Gothic, Late Caroline). Used widely in Western Europe from late 11th century to mid 13th century. This was my first hand and current favorite because it wasn't as celtic-looking, but has a pretty simplicity to it. Amazingly enough, the font on this handout being used for the titles is a combination of Early Gothic and Gothic Textura Quadrata. The double pronged ascenders is a key note of this hand.

Textura Quadrata - (Black Letter, Old English) Non-cursive angular hand. This hand is used in the Lutrell Psalter as a primary example of this hand done to perfection. For the most part this hand is like rap music. It's very difficult to understand what's being said as communication is sacrificed for artistic presentation. So to speak. It requires a great deal of care to be done both correctly and legibly, and it is difficult to do both.

Batarde - 13th century, created to make a legible "secretary" hand to counter the textured appearance of the Quadrata. Called "bastard" because it is a mix of cursive and Textura parentage. Batarde, is the French parent of the English Bastard Secretary. Evolved at the end of 13th century, used until mid 16th, (especially in the reaches of Burgundy where it is rumored to have evolved.

Fraktur & Schwabacher Date from 1400, appeared as typeface a century later. Used in later period German scripts, and the Flemish scripts quite a bit. It's pretty much exactly what you would get if you handed a German a French floofy manuscript and told them to make it pretty. You get a very heavy, yet swoopy hand that marches along the page and is elegant right on cue.

Rotunda – Italian hand used continually from 12th to 18th century. Trust the Romans and their Catholicism to not evolve with everyone else until the VERY end of period, when they started getting crazy with cadels. It eventually becomes the humanist hand, with its clear rounded letters.

Illumination - Any text decoration, historically referred to gilded decoration which reflected the light, leading to the name.

Minim - the height of a lowercase letter, excluding the ascender and descender. Also known as the "x height" or "body height."

Nib - The metallic part of the pen which comes in various sizes and shapes, which produces the letter shapes. The actual writing part of the instrument.

Promissory Scroll - A scroll that's generally made using a computer, or a pre-fabricated design, to give someone for an award, to hold until a real scroll can be done.

Serif - A short decorative stroke used to finish off the stroke of a letter. Many different types exist. (diamond, note-head, square, slanty)

Terminal - a stroke that does not end with a serif.

Triton Herald - Head of the Heralds in Atlantia, whose signature is required on all armigerous awards. Currently Mistress Rhiannon who signs in blue ink and needs a very long name space left.

Equipment:

Figuring out what tools to use in making your scroll is one of the more highly debated subjects among scribes. Many of the pigments used in medieval times were highly toxic and extremely expensive. Also, pens were often carved from reeds or quills, which can be difficult to make and use, and sometimes less durable than modern creations. Unless you're a really gung-ho beginner who doesn't mind an excessive learning process before creation, I would recommend getting the basics first before spending the money on period supplies unless you're loaded. In which case, get me some too.

<u>PEN OPTIONS</u>	<u>PROS</u>	<u>CONS</u>
Calligraphic Markers – (ZIG for example)	They're neat – no ink, and you have 2 sizes nibs to choose from. They're also really portable for practice	Letters are crude, tips go fuzzy after not much use, they go dry fairly quickly, and they are about \$3 each. Also not lightfast.
Cartridge Pen – Schaffer, etc.	Ink comes in little tubes and is therefore easy to change and neat. Uses real ink & real nibs	The ink cartridges are expensive, the ink itself is usually really watery, changing the cartridges can be messy, and the nibs are extremely rigid and prone to clogging.
Pilot Parallel Pen	Pressurized Cartridge, neat lines, a lot of options in terms of nib sizes. Highly rec'd by Maestra Juliana Fiorentini	I haven't used it myself, but you are looking at around \$50 for an entire set of nibs & cartridges, which seems REALLY expensive to me.
Dip Pens (General)	Closest to period fashion that is easily commercially available. "Proper" way to learn	Requires "loose" ink, nibs, and pen holders all bought separately. Ink can be messy, nibs can be hard to change and have to be replaced regularly.
Speedball nibs – "C"	Easily available in every A.C. Moore & Michaels, relatively inexpensive.	They rust. The quality is pretty shoddy and you can not sharpen, and the letter quality isn't great.
Brause / Tape / Mitchell Nibs	Slightly stiffer metal, good quality nibs for hairlines and letter shapes, more flexible than the Speedball, comes with their own reservoirs. Mitchells are a little more flexible than Brause or Tape, and are therefore a little better for cadel work or long swoopy strokes.	They're not carried by the general commercial public. I order mine online from paperinkarts.com and I've found one art supply store that carries them locally.

Quills : Quills, in the hands of an experienced calligrapher are a great deal of fun. They're very light, very flexible and require a great deal of control to use effectively. I don't recommend beginners use them unless they really want to because it's difficult enough to learn how to write again without throwing materials challenges on top of it.

Inks - I generally use oak gall ink, which was made by Guenievre de Monmarche. Ask her for the recipe.

I started out using an ink recommended by Maestra Lucia Bellini. .

SUMI ink - It's Japanese ink, that comes in a bright green bottle. Ask at the local art supply stores, since the label is written in Japanese. It's a good deep black, but the ink does contain lacquer and is acidic, and will over time eat your nibs. It also eats corks, so don't put it in fancy bottles with cork tops, as it will ruin the ink and cork. (And probably your carpet.) You don't need a big bottle. You'd be surprised how little ink you use over time.

The **oak gall ink**, which comes out almost as black as Sumi without the reflective (sticky) lacquer property, and it flows just as smoothly. I love it. It does not however scrape AS easily as the SUMI does, but it does scrape off.

You can also mix up black or brown gouache to a thick consistency and put it into a dip pen if you can't find ink. It works ok, but it might take a bit of experimentation to figure out a good consistency. I tend to use red gouache on the recipients' names as it was a period practice to put important phrases in red for emphasis.

Feel free to use colored inks; reds and browns can be very pretty and effective.

AVOID ANYTHING THAT SAYS WATERPROOF INK. I MEAN IT. Waterproof ink will not come off. Of anything. It is horrible terrible stuff. Yes, it adds permanence to the scroll. It also adds permanence to your carpet, cats, bathtub, spare room, and your scribe clothes. No. Bad.

A few notes re: pens and inks

* Note: re Ink stains. There's this cleaning agent sold in the automotive department called "GOOP" It will take the ink out of your carpet with enough applications. I have saved my deposit on a seven month old stain with Goop. It's \$.99 or so too. Love Goop.

*Keep an old toothbrush, because with a little dish-soap, it's the perfect (and cheap) way to clean your nibs. You don't want to let ink dry and crust on the nibs because they will become clogged and useless. Wash your pen-nibs after every use, and dry them carefully. Air-drying may lead to water pockets getting caught in the nibs and causing rust. Wipe them on a paper-towel to leach out any remnants.

* You can load dip pens with a paintbrush. This prevents ink build-up on top of the nib, and also loads the ink more reliably.

Brushes

The easiest to paint with all around is a long and narrow bristled brush. Try to paint background first because it allows for more mistakes and corrections. Different shaped brushes can be used for different effects. Feel free to experiment.

For details, use very small skinny brushes. Sizes range from 18/0 (which is the smallest I've found so far) up to 0 which is middle, and 18, which is really large.

Most brushes come with nylon tubes to protect the brushes. Save those, because it will keep your brushes intact and in better shape longer. If you lose them, coffee stirrers trimmed down can work as a substitute.

Sable brushes are more period than nylon, and I personally think they hold the paint a little better. You may feel differently and that's ok. Low end Cornell or Windsor-Newton work ok. Keep in mind some people prefer nylon bristled-brushes, and that you should find what works for you. Most of my brushes are blends of sable and nylon bought on sale.

Paints

What kind of paint you use is one of the most "discussed" topics in SCA scribal discussions. There are some people who swear that acrylic paints are acceptable since there isn't such a thing as period paints that we can get anymore and the colors available in acrylics are closer to period colors in hue and depth. There are others who declare that acrylics are plastic and a helluva lot less period than other options like. It is UP TO YOU. If you like the effects you get with acrylics, then good for you. If you think watercolors are easier, great!

Acrylics – These are thoroughly modern constructions, made of a base that dries to plastic. They have very vibrant colors. However they dry out quickly (which makes blending and shading tricky) and can't be reconstituted which can be a waste of paint. The good part is that the scrolls are highly water-resistant. The bad part is that it can look very modern in effects if not treated correctly, which requires some artistic training.

Watercolors- Watercolors are a pigment mixed with a binder. They require a lot of paint to make opaque, and are not water-resistant at all. When they dry out, they can be reconstituted fairly well, and blending and shading effects are easy to achieve.

Goauche – A pigment, mixed with a binder AND an opacifier. These are pretty easy to make opaque, and require less paint to get good coverage. Period paints were made with a pigment, a binder, and sometimes an opacifier, so the popular opinion is that these are as close to period paints as you can get *conveniently*. These are also not water-resistant, and have the same shading and blending abilities of watercolors. You can reconstitute left-over paint so don't throw away your leftovers.

Egg Tempera – Haven't worked with it myself but recently some paint companies are going back to the old recipes of using glair or yolk as a binder with the pigment, and are offering them. Master Tristan has switched to them from his acrylics, so that speaks for itself. They're available at Pearl Paint in Washington DC & online.

Brands – I've only ever worked with gouache and watercolor, so those are the only types with brands I can speak to. There are lots of cheapie little art sets that are sold; however the cheaper the paint, the less pigment, and the lower quality of ingredients, generally speaking. Caveat Emptor. But a tube of watercolor/gouache will last you FOREVER.. The only one I've run out of yet is white.

Reeves is a good one to avoid for this reason. I bought a set, and really didn't like it at all. Had to use a TON of paint to get any coverage whatsoever. Also there was an oily film that I couldn't quite get completely rid of.

Windsor & Newton makes nice gouaches though they are among the most expensive, and keep in mind you can always mix most of your colors. The tiny watercolor tubes are also great, and will last you a pretty long time. I prefer them, myself.

Grumbacher – I've only used the watercolors, but I've liked the results with them so far. They're similar to W&N, but a little cheaper.

Pelikan watercolors, which are in cake form, and inexpensive. . I've had people tell me they really like them though I found that I had to limit the amount of water to get the color depth I wanted. They work nicely on wood though.

Some good initial colors to start out with, Ultramarine, Zinc White, Viridian, Alazarin Crimson or Cadmium Red, Black, Yellow, and Violet. That covers most heraldic colors, and you can mix up shades to do most everything else.

For Gold and silver. – I like W&N Acrylics to simulate leaf when I don't actually leaf my pieces, because they have a good sheen that is close to actual metal, and are easy to work with for this purpose. I like W&N Gold. If you have a piece of gold jewelry on, it's a good idea to compare the colors since they will have variations from batch to batch.

PAPER

Good characteristics in paper.

Acid-free = high acid in paper discolors very quickly; acid free paper is preferable, so your work will last as long as possible.

Hot Press = Has a smooth surface good for calligraphers.

Cold Press = Has a texture to the surface, and is excellent for watercolor.

Weight = Heavier weight paper is generally better for scrolls. 100 lb or greater is generally where you want to be. Also, you want your paper to be heavy enough that your illumination won't warp it with the water.

An inexpensive one popular in the scribal community is Bristol board Vellum surface. It goes on sale right before school starts.

Vellum – Real vellum is extremely expensive, and shouldn't be used by beginners as it has some definite “quirks”, unless you've got cash to burn.

Parchment – Vellum made from sheep or goats, instead of cow. Slightly less expensive than vellum, but with the same “quirks.”

Pergamenata – This is a vegetable parchment that takes ink beautifully, but it is also on the pricy side. Not nearly as expensive as vellum but still pretty high. Baroness Juliana and Maestra Lucia and I like pergamenata, though Master Tristan swears that he hates it.

Miscellaneous Equipment

Ruler – Rulers absolutely rock. You can't have too many rulers. If you can find a ruler marked out in picas, get it, because picas are based off nib widths and it'll be easier to draw even increments for lines. See through rulers are REALLY useful.

Ames Lettering Guide – Fantastic for lining quickly so you don't have to use a ruler for each line. This can save you a LOT of time.

Protractor – helps you find angles when you're first starting to make sure your pen is angled right.

Micron Pens - these pens range from 01 to 10s. Great for outlining designs, and come in a variety of widths. Fairly inexpensive. Not vital.

Pencils – erasable is good.

Pencil Sharpener – I swear it's worth the twelve bucks to go electric if you don't buy mechanical pencils.

Erasers – White vinyl erasers are awesome because they don't leave pink marks imbedded in your paper. They're also softer so they pick up marks better. The kneaded rubber erasers are also exceptionally useful for erasing in odd tiny areas, and sometimes pick up paint and ink as well. The gum erasers are also pretty good for soft erasing when you are erasing around painted areas and don't want it to smear.

Old Toothbrush – For cleaning your pen nibs.

Palettes or Ramekins – Plastic wells for paints. Very inexpensive, can be used many times. An old plastic egg carton can work for this.

Paper Towels – Absolutely necessary. Mandatory even.

Razors/ Exacto Knife blades – good for scraping mistakes out of existence.. GENTLY

Scribal Desk / Slanted Desk / Drafting Table – Having a sharp angle surface (30 to 45 degrees) to work on can spare you some massive neck cramps, and it also helps your calligraphy; otherwise when you move down the page, the angle changes, and so does your calligraphy.

Tracing Paper – You can copy directly from manuscripts, or designs, or you can retrace your work if an accident happens to your first attempt. (Ink spill.. cat prints..)

Books

The Art of Calligraphy: a practical guide to the skills and techniques, by David Harris, copyright 1995 by Dorling Kindersley Ltd., London. ISBN # = 1-56458-849-1

This book is absolutely a MUST-HAVE. One of the best ductus guides out there and really helpful with history. Also has a lot of period examples and good pictures. ~\$25.00

Teach Yourself Calligraphy, by Patricia Lovett. Copyright 1993, by Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. ISBN # = 0-340-59175-7

This book is useful in terms of sheer information. Not as good ducti, and also not as much historical information, so be careful about which hand you learn. But it has a great step-by-step guide for gilding, for making quill & reed pens, and a lot of other neat tips. £7.99 net in UK

The Encyclopedia of Calligraphy Techniques, by Diana Hardy Wilson. copyright 1993, 2002. Sterling Publishing Co. ISBN # = 0-8067-8911-4

This book has a lot of really good pictures, and demonstrations, especially for gilding. Ducti are also not bad. \$14.95

Paint Your Own Illuminated Letters, by Stefan Oliver. Copyright 1998, Quantum Publishing Ltd. ISBN # = 1-57717-218-3

This book is awesome. Has a lot of simplified heraldry (A MUST for AoA scrolls), good history backgrounds, and a lot of good step by step instructions. Also has excellent historical references, all of which are in period. \$19.95

Keep an eye out at Half-price book stores, PTA shops, student stores, Barnes & Noble/Books-a-Million/insert giant store here bargain tables. Also, don't under-rate the power of the local libraries! I have bought the David Harris book, but I used to check it out probably three times a month.

Also, if you are part of a group of scribes, consider going in together on a couple of these books. They're all excellent references, and you can probably sell them to other scribes later on, if you're no longer interested.

Websites

The Atlantian Scribal Page. Scribal handbook is definitely worth downloading, and if you have spare ink and a printer, definitely worth printing. There are also several good handouts from previous scribal classes that can be downloaded to read through. Generally good stuff.

www.scribe.atlantia.sca.org

Jerry's Artarama Website. – good for paints, brushes, and inks. They deliver!

www.jerrysartarama.com

A scribal step-by-step page, with great lessons and how-to's on illumination. Really good for beginners and intermediates.

www.rencentral/GSS/ -

Paper and Ink Arts is an online calligraphy supply store that carries a lot of neat items, including specialty papers like pergamenata and vellum, and great nibs like Brause and Tape. www.paperinkarts.com

If you're looking for period examples of illumination, a LOT of libraries have online pictures of their illumination collections. Just use the google search engine for what you can find. You'd be surprised.

www.google.com

Stefan is this guy who started compiling all the articles, email posts, and information that gets passed around the SCA on a daily basis. He made this website, called Stefan's Florilegium. It has a lot of info on it, and lots of good articles on calligraphy under "Scribal Arts"

www.florilegium.org

Great, another Handout. But NOW what?!

Now, you've got some background information to play with. Decide if you want to do BOTH calligraphy and illumination, or just one or the other. The plus side to learning both is that you know that the final scroll will fit your vision. The downside is learning two skills, if that can be called a downside. I highly recommend you learn both, because that means you don't have the stress of working with someone else's schedule, or worrying that your hard work is lost, etc.

Generally, calligraphy is a good place to start, since you have to learn to leave room for your calligraphy to illuminate around. So **pick a hand**. Preferably one that fits the scroll period/persona that either you play, or the person you're making the scroll for is.. Uncial is a good hand to start with. So is Early Gothic and Rotunda. Both are relatively simple in terms of letter-shapes.

First, figure out your minim height. Minim heights are determined by the hand and the nib width. Most hands have the minim as 4 or 5 nib widths. Ascenders and descenders are approximately half the minim height. Also, a good ductus will indicate a pen angle. Then, draw lines to help you practice forming the letters within the proper heights. Practice, practice, practice. You don't have to use good paper to practice on. The tracing paper that art stores sell in rolls is cheap and good for this.

After you have your hand down, pick a project. Either reproducing a period scroll for an A&S activity, or MUCH better yet, picking a scroll out of the backlog. It's generally better to start with lower award scrolls to gain proficiency. Award of Arms, or non-armigerous awards are good choices. Baronial scrolls are also a great way to get practice, and do something for your friends as well!

Then, check for the requirements for your scroll on the Atlantian Scribal handbook. Most awards have a badge that must be displayed on the scroll that represents the award. Armigerous awards, like Award of Arms', require the subject's registered name, and registered heraldry to be both blazoned in words and drawn, and in most cases you have to leave room for their Majesties' or Excellencies' signatures.

Trace your expensive paper out in tracing paper, and draw/measure out your intended design on the tracing paper. Then score lines inside for your text, and write it out. This is to make sure it fits properly, so you don't waste your expensive paper doing "mess-ups". It's also a good way to practice.

After you know your calligraphy fits, you can practice adding your illumination. Most pictured scrolls in books are really elaborate. You can simplify your designs as much as you want, and tracing paper is REALLY your friend in these instances. You can lift designs right up off the page, and trace what you want.

Generally I pencil to line my designs in, and then carefully paint them in with a little brush, using paint for outlines as Microns don't write on paint well. Also, don't be afraid to talk to your local scribes. Get involved, get advice. If you have odd questions, feel free to talk to the scribal laurels or the Clerk Signet, (a.k.a Head Scribe). The Clerk Signet can either answer all your questions or put you in touch with a local scribe. There is also an active Scriptorium in most Baronies. Check the Baronial website for times. There are also kingdom scribal listserves, and a global one. There's even an sca_scribes community on Livejournal.

Keep in mind that being a scribe is very individualistic. Depending on your artistic skills, you may not need to trace a thing. You may find that you can do Gothic Blackletter easier than Rotunda. Your hand may not look exactly like the one in the book. That's ok. Keep practicing. Try a little of everything and find your own style or what sort of illumination/calligraphy you enjoy most. Most people seem to find one they enjoy more than others. And don't get discouraged, practice is KEY!

If you have any questions, feel free to email the scribal lists. There's an Atlantian one, and probably a local one as well for your home group. Get in touch with other people.

RANDOM TIPS:

Every so often, art stores have 50% off one item coupon. Those are GREAT to buy sets of watercolors cheaply. Also drawing boards, desks, etc. Get a friend to find another coupon, and get stocked up!

Brushes come and go. Any time you see them on sale, grab a couple.

Keep a razor blade handy. Sometimes you can very very carefully scrape ink mistakes off your paper, and save hours of work.

Don't look for perfection right away. Look for improvement. This is a craft, and a skill. You just think you've been able to write all your life. :>

Remember that most people in Atlantia do NOT receive scrolls for their awards. If you make a scroll for someone you know, they will be both pleased and touched, no matter your skill level. And it's a lot of fun to watch people's faces light up when they see something you made and realize it's for them.

If you write poetry, songs, or do any kind of design work, being aware and able to use calligraphy in your work or documentation REALLY impresses A&S judges. So you can use it, even if you don't intend to ever make a scroll in your life.

Welcome to the ranks of the scribes of Atlantia!