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## Graphology

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### Abstract

Personality assessment is serious business. It goes on all the time and involves everybody from the Prime Minister to modern Miss Telephonists of 1969. Because of its intangible nature people search for tangible systems to define it. The way a woman wears her face, a man his laugh, the way we act, talk and write, help to form some sort of register, permanent or hopefully immutable. People like to know most things about most other people. I just don't understand you, sighs a puzzled lover; a disillusioned contemporary looks to the bottom of his beer mug for support. Both clutch at any technique that offers to crack the code of those that matter to them.

Graphology has struggled hard with its metamorphosis from art to science. If the ecdysis is not yet complete it is not for want of trying. The approach in graphology has been modified from an artificial and laboured point by point analysis of handwriting, the "school of fixed signs" of Michon, to a wider assessment of the traits and general forms inherent in writing. Pulver, Kraepelin and Klages, Allport, Vernon and Saudek, Roman, Lewinson and Zubin, these are the names that have introduced a commonsense, rhythmical and balanced line to handwriting analysis. While not entirely acceptable, it is intriguing and full of promise. Inevitably the subject finds itself variously ascribed to a booth along with Mme. Lizandra and her magic ball, phrenologists, homeopaths and cocktail party astrologers, or to the laboratory with psychometrists, forensic scientists and employers. It is not an entirely happy resonance.

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# GRAPHOLOGY

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## BEYOND THE TRACES

Any tracker will be able to tell you a deal about preceding events by observing scuffs in the sand, footprints, spent matches and so on. Handwriting is a similar spoor or tracing, representing the focused activities of a person as thought follows thought and is relayed. Some claim, like the tracker, to be able to assess the reasons behind the marks, and then by further study to gain insight into the personality and workings of the writer's mind. They maintain that writing style is a product of personality, as is any observable behaviour, so long as some control can be imposed on the environmental situation. Thus traits, recognisable in any script (and different cultural forms pose the usual problems here), tally with definable traits in personality. Others do not make this extended claim with graphology but feel it has great use in monitoring the changes in a person's character, whether from experience, drugs or therapy. No claims are made that it allows greater insight into a certain personality than one or two interviews would afford, but its projective permanence is extolled.

*"The Moving Finger writes; and,  
having writ,  
Moves on: nor all the Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a  
line,  
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word  
of it."*

*(from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam)*

## DIRECTION OF FLOW

The earliest form of symbolic and permanent communication utilised the knotting of reeds and twine, followed eventually by the engraving of designs on wood or stone. These markings were necessarily effected by hand. Then came the pictorial techniques of ancient writing, the hieroglyphics of Egypt and the ideograms of China, still in use today. The direction of flow of these pictures was variable with different cultures, or could be read across or from top to bottom as with the Cartouche of Cleopatra on the Rosetta Stone. It was not until simplified symbols began to be strung together, like replicas of articulated sounds, that writing developed a fluency of line.

Ancient Greek and Hebrew maintain a backwards and forwards movement with successive lines, rather like the plowing of a field. The gradual predominance of left to right flow has been attributed to the greater proportion of people born right handed, it being easier to write in a direction away from the body. The explanation may be more complicated however. In his studies of the right to left writing of the Szekely tribe of Transylvania, the Hungarian anthropologist Sebestyen observed how one of the last adherents to this language wrote in vertical columns from top to bottom, but beginning at the left; then to read the message the inscription was turned in a clockwise direction till the lines were horizontal. The newly aligned writing was of course read from right to left, apparently against the rules of predominant right handedness, though the actual writing had been from left to right in columns.

## SLANTS AND SLOPES

The slant of handwriting is one of the first features to strike the eye. A rightward slant is one that leans more than five degrees from the vertical in its upper zone. This is meant to depict the self reliant, feeling personality and only when it becomes significantly tilted, 45 degrees or more, does it indicate someone with an over-excitable and sentimental temperament. The alcoholic is reputed to manifest this excessive slant, along with unsteady, tremulous strokes of the pen and a tendency to write lines that slope downwards towards the right. Hitler's nearly prone signature is likewise looked on as revealing severe pathology.

Erect writing, within 5 degrees of the

vertical, indicates the person governed by reason. It is certainly a more controlled variety of script and it is interesting that an academic training often induces a straightening of the script. Much will depend on the writing school of the person when young and on his compliance with scholastic strictures. Leftward sloping writing, so called backhand writing, characterises the defiant individual, and if extreme often indicates previous childhood conflicts and unresolved tension with the parents. Some graphologists have suggested that the leftward slant shows up "mother fixation", finding the slant commonly in matriarchal societies. Writing that varies in slope represents the individual with pronounced ambivalence of response, varying between fixation and protest, love and hate. In passages of expressive writing, as in letters, emotional pieces of news are often written in a more pronounced slant to the right than relatively innocuous sections.

## LEFTHANDERS

The leftward slant is in fact the more natural tendency of the left hander, and in order to compensate for this the paper is often held skew so that the resultant hand is acceptably sloped to the right. That the leftward slope is more convenient for the left hander has been shown in the cases of those who lose the right arm, like Nelson, and subsequently change from right to left slope while maintaining most of the other characteristics of their handwriting. Left handers also show a greater facility at writing reverse image or "mirror" writing than right handers; furthermore, latent left handers writing with their right hands are far more able to perform mirror writing than their truly right handed fellows. Leonardo da Vinci, equally adept with either hand, wrote a conventional right handed script for general communication, and mirror handwriting for his diary.

## THE THREE ZONES

Another graphological technique is the dividing up of the script into zones. Thus unizonal letters like 'a' and 'n' occupy only the middle zone, whereas bizonal letters occupy additionally the upper zone, like 't', or the lower zone, like 'g', and trizonal letters like 'f' encroach upon the full writing space. The middle zone is considered to represent the sphere of actuality, so that when it is well de-

veloped the writer is considered to be well in touch with reality and able to relate with his personal and material surroundings. The upper zone is the sphere of abstraction where the interests and aspirations of the mind and spirit find expression. Artists and creators show pronounced excursions into this zone, though excessive flamboyancy or over-extension above the normal limits into what is termed the "stratosphere" shows up the person who is apt to over-indulge his imagination or to day dream.

However if the other zones are also well developed the handwriting may be perfectly compatible with the highly creative mind. Dotting the 'i' and crossing the 't' are both functions within this zone; when the procedure is carried out well above the parent stem this suggests flightiness and fantasy, while if the 'i' dots and 't' strokes are carried considerably to the right the writer is probably full of verve and even slapdash. It has also been said that crossing a 't' is a decisive action while dotting an 'i' is a self conscious movement.

The lower zone represents the instinctual drives of self preservation and sex. Large closed loops in the zone indicate the sensuous person, while such features as breaks in the loops, blotchiness, and flowery appendages show up the person preoccupied with the sexual or sensual. When the loops are reduced to single vertical strokes the person is either cold or finds himself in a position where his sexual life has to be well governed. In many ways these three basic zones are analogous with the primordial metaphysical concepts of a mind, soul and body, or the psycho-analytical division of superego, ego and id.

Persons of limited education and culture, children and the old show proportionally enlarged middle zones. Those with a facility for words show longer stems and loops, the middle zone often reducing to less than the three millimetre average. It is found that loops elongate at puberty, while before exams they tend to lengthen, perhaps as pent up emotions and instincts are released. A monotonous regularity of loop size indicates a dull temperament or over-control, whereas marked irregularity is a sign of extreme excitability and lack of control.

#### CONNECTIVE FORMS

By connective form of writing is meant the predominant linking pattern within words. The garland appears like 'u's joined together

with the angular links pointing upwards. The arcade is the reverse of this, like a series of 'n's. Mixed writing occurs when neither connection is dominant, and angular writing gives the impression of a general lack of curves in the middle zone. The garland, like the open hand, is used by the person with an open and liberal mind, a person of frank disposition. The arcade, held to represent the grasping hand, is the connective form of the more formal and aloof personality. Mixed connective forms betoken the person with intermediate traits while the sharp angular connective form signals the sharp intellect given to nonconformism or aggression; thus regular angles denote the theoretician but irregularity shows up the obstinate personality.

Attention is also paid to the linking of letters in a word, some claiming that the more connected the letters the more logical is the writer. Conversely, separation of letters is a sign of the intuitive mind. Most handwriting incorporates both forms, but occasionally the script may be remarkable for its degree of connectedness, including even the linking of whole words, or vice versa. Words that "die out" into a thread at the end, commonly those ending in 'n', 'm', or 'ing', are the property of intuitive people who may possess a sinuous dexterity in handling of others.

#### VALIDITY AND SIGNIFICANCE

There are many other cues that have been used to assess personality from handwriting. Pen pressure, expansiveness, fluency and speed, the size of capital and the degree of closure of such letters as 'o' have all been persuasively argued as indicators of certain traits. The validity of graphology is constantly questioned, and certainly in controlled trials where panels of psychiatrists have assessed the personality of patients and compared their results with the graphologists there has been poor correlation. But although graphology by itself may never furnish the full answer regarding personality, neither would one expect a single clinical sign to provide the diagnosis of a disease. Taken in conjunction with interviews, questionnaires and behavioural observations, graphology may indeed be of help to some professional workers, and as a projective test it is sometimes preferred to techniques like the Rorschach ink blot test.

Greater reliability is afforded in cases where a subject is being monitored before and after drugs or therapy. The writing of depressives

is often found to expand after successful therapy, changing from a hand that was originally cramped away into the corner of a page. Schizophrenics write with a tidier, reduced hand after improvement in their condition and it is interesting to note that some subjects who respond with pronounced psychical and physical symptomatology to hallucinogenic drugs, the so-called "strong reactors", show a significant increase in script size, as measured by planimetry, during the period of drug effect. "Non reactors" show no significant change in size. Other fields that engage the graphologist are forensic medicine and the detection of forgery, but these are subjects in themselves.

#### **SIGNING OFF**

Signatures are very important and represent what we wish to be remembered by. Everyone is conscious of a signature and many have practised their own for hours. Personal embellishments and subtleties of stroke are in-

corporated until "improvement" is established, often at the expense of legibility. Change in a signature is nowhere better seen than in the evolution of Napoleon's signature which was at first simply written and unremarkable, then became forceful, heavy and slashing at the height of his power, and confused, narrowed and manifesting self-covering strokes after the retreat from Moscow.

Placing of the signature is conventionally to the lower right hand section of a page. Extreme rightward shift indicates the impatient person while leftward placing is taken as an indication of anxiety. Dejected or depressed people drop the signature low down on the page, the signatures of suicides being often found towards the bottom left hand corner of the page. With all this said, it is as well that the only writing we have to contend with is our own, our friends' and our colleagues' (including the "Dear Dr." brigade), and that the only people who have to grapple with our signatures when it matters are officials and bank managers, who hold the keys to our anxiety, impatience and depression anyway.

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