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DETERMINING TENDENCIES

The Second Half of a Classification for Handwriting*

THEODORA LEH. SMITH

Mrs. Smith has been interested in various aspects of handwriting since before 1925. She studied for a time under Dr. Robert Saudek of London, and about twenty-five years ago began serious work on the classification of handwriting. A basic paper describing the six fundamental factors of handwriting classification appeared in this Journal in 1954. We are pleased to have this present paper which amplifies the earlier classification techniques and has value to all who study handwriting from a point of view of identification.—EDITOR.

Several years ago the author described in this journal six basic factors which could be used for the classification of handwriting.¹ These six factors were Size, Slant, Pressure, Form, Speed, and Spacing. They were found to be sufficient criteria for evaluating many specimens of handwriting.

An extensive study of over 23,000 cases has revealed that there are at least 100 additional factors which facilitate the classification of handwriting. This second report describes some of these additional habits whose particular use makes possible an accurate and reliable classification of any sample of handwriting. They must be used in conjunction with the six basic factors of course.

These factors are sub-divisions and are called "Determining Tendencies" because though perhaps they are not measurable, they will appear often enough to be called a tendency; and a strong tendency determines the look of a writing. Most of these are based on small personal habits that creep gradually into every handwriting.

There is really no such thing as keeping for a lifetime to the school model presented to the child from six to ten years old. This is actually quite an unnatural thing to do. Even when this considerable mental and physical feat is attempted, the writer unconsciously introduces diversions, such as slight variations in size, slight specialties in pressure, or slight individuality as to form. Careful examination will prove that no matter how stereotyped a writing may appear to be, there will be some significant modifications which can serve as identification points.

* The handwriting tendencies set forth in this paper have been collected and observed through the systematic filing and classifying of 23,000 specimens.

¹ This Journal, Vol. 44, No. 6, Pp. 810-816, March-April 1954.

As a general thing, young writers in their teens "take off" quite on their own, and frankly and freely introduce into the alphabet those motions which come most easily and freely to the hand and pen. By the time college days are over, several, if not many personal and specialized forms are pretty well settled into a habitual writing pattern. From this point on they can be used as marks of identification. Most of these characteristics are as unknown to the average writer as the number of ridges on the bottom of his feet. These "hidden" features most successfully baffle disguise and expose forgery. One or two or possibly three might coincide in two individuals, but there comes a point where common sense says it is unreasonable to say that these various habits could happen to another individual in exactly the same way. Some combinations are too improbable to happen in an ordinary world.

Writing by reason of all its thousand of peculiarities in combination, is the most personal and individual thing a man does, leaving a record which can be seen and studied. Writing as a whole process is very much more fixed than it is generally thought to be, and is in fact one of the most permanent and unconscious of human activities.

Loops. Possibly the greatest diversity in everyday writing is to be found in the nature of the loops. A loop for a "y" and a loop for an "l" can be made in many hundreds of ways. A few trends of loops are listed as markers for identification:

enlarged
tall or long
swollen
bloated
greatly exaggerated
reduced to a single line

short
 inconsistent in length
 regular and balanced in size proportions
 omitted altogether
 bent way over
 very heavy
 very light
 made in an angular fashion
 twisting around other letters
 swinging off to the left
 swinging off to the right

Each loop may not be exactly alike, but when there is one irregularity it is apt to be repeated many times. One may discover the trend. It is precisely because these peculiarities are not cooked up on the spur of the moment that they can be relied upon. They have come into being over a long period of years and are motor habits made in a totally unconscious manner. When a special habit is pointed out to a writer he is likely to be surprised by it. Most writers know but little about their own handwriting and would be almost incapable of describing it.

t-bars. Next in line for the number of variations are the t-bars. There are surely thousands of ways to make a t-bar, but most of them will come under one or two of these headings:

neat, careful, and exact
 careless, capricious, and unregulated
 simplified and under emphasized
 long, ponderous, and heavy
 slanting up
 slanting down
 overloaded
 a mere dot
 high on the stem
 low on the stem
 twisted and fanciful
 sharp and pointed downwards
 divided on both sides of the stem
 two or more t-bars
 to the right of the stem
 to the left of the stem
 made by a back left swirl of the pen
 t-bars the weakest feature
 t-bars the strongest feature
 angles found at the base of the t-stem
 circular arcades found at the top of the t-stem

Once an individual t-bar has been isolated, it will be found to repeat itself. The t-bars may be such that they have an important influence on the look of the whole writing. Even in a well-maintained forgery the writer is apt to forget himself

long enough to revert to his old habit, in this respect.

Capital I. Another symptom of vital importance for identification is the capital letter I. The "I" can be:

greatly enlarged
 swollen and bloated
 elaborated in an exaggerated fashion
 simplified to a single stroke
 well proportioned
 tipping backward
 tipping forward
 bent over
 tall and thin
 short, small, and weak
 distinct and different
 simple and unobtrusive
 curved and intertwining
 thick and heavy
 thin and underemphasized

No matter how much thought and care have been put into a forgery, it may well escape the writer's attention that he is making his own kind of "I". It is an inherent part of him and comes to the fore naturally.

Word Units. There is the matter of the words themselves. They may:

tend to grow larger
 tend to grow smaller
 slant up individually
 slant down individually
 appear as separate units
 appear as a mere unconscious execution of a sentence

Then there is always the interesting and informative way in which these words end. It depends in part of course on how rapidly the writing is progressing. The end can come by:

a sweep up above the line
 a sweep down below the line
 a long sweep toward the right
 cut off suddenly
 turned back toward the left
 finally finished with hook, pressure, or dot

The small ending to a final, a right hook or a left hook, is a very personal matter and can separate one writing from another as nothing else can. Such a trivial point is unconsciously done, thus it becomes a sub-division of vital importance. Mr. Jones may make his final hooks to the right, and Mr. Smith make them to the left, and herein the two cases are divided in an almost hidden, but very definite way.

Mistakes. Then there is the whole problem of mistakes, which are rarely the slips of the pen that they may seem to be. They come in the form of:

- anticipations (letters brought in too soon)
- perseverations (letters unconsciously repeated)
- omissions (letters or words left out)
- reversed loops (the letter y written as a t)
- the substitution of one word for another
- misspellings
- words written twice
- tics, hitches and breaks of all kinds

There are also the personal mannerisms that people develop in the way these mistakes are crossed out. This type of graphic habit makes a study in itself.

Also mistakes are often corrected, touched up, added to, revised, written over, or retraced. This set of individual habits also provides a world of identification, for no two people will execute these little extras in the same way. Not only this, but there are small touches, such as an added top to a t-stem, a filled loop, two i-dots, two t-bars, two periods, a dot left by a tic and other extra dots, which have no place in the writing proper, but which can become a vital mark of identification.

(It has not been mentioned as far as I know that Abraham Lincoln when writing his signature using the A alone, usually put two dots after his initial.)

Many people place an extra dot somewhere in the signature itself. These can be very permanent fixtures, but identification experts may fail to mention them.

Signature position. The signature can be:

- too close to the text
- too far from the text
- on the right hand side of the paper
- on the left hand side of the paper
- rising
- falling downwards
- bigger than the text
- heavier than the text
- smaller than the text
- lighter than the text
- made in a different slant from the text

These subordinate divisions need not be referred to unless two cases are so closely alike that further investigation is needed in order to identify them. It is rare that two writings are so alike that subdivisions are required. But all document exami-

ners are aware that such cases exist. When this is true, the smallest and least obvious peculiarity immediately assumes the greatest importance.

It turns out that handwriting is not too much unlike finger prints except for the fact of movement and variety. But movement and variety can be accounted for and it is possible to spot trends that are independent of movement-trends that the writer is wholly unconscious of.

Special peculiarities. Lastly we can refer to the long list of special peculiarities which can be and often are, carried out throughout the entire work. Such a habit can be:

- the circle i-dot
- letters made as figures
- certain single letters enlarged or bloated
- gaps in the line for no apparent reason
- dashes used instead of dots
- punctuation careful, neat and exact
- punctuation careless and varied
- no punctuation at all
- loops that go up but do not come down
- a ruler used to keep a straight baseline with the
- down loops added afterward
- excessive underlining
- frequent exclamation points and quotes

These are determining tendencies. The tendency to do this or that will so mark a writing that it can be separated from all others of its class.

It is also important to add that the letters "o" and "p" are the two most distinctive and revealing letters in the alphabet. On the manner in which these letters are made the identification of an entire manuscript can depend.

The whole problem in handwriting classification is to find out what is personal and individual. Without this individuality handwriting could not be employed as it is to represent and transfer the value of the world's business. Money is only a minor medium of exchange. More than ninety-five per cent of the hundreds of millions of dollars of each day's business of the world is represented, not by money, but by documents, each of which is validated by a written signature. A classification for handwriting becomes more important with each day. These are a few points by which one may discover identity by means of such a classification.