

**THE SCIENCE OF PRACTICAL
PENMANSHIP: OR THE ANALYSIS OF
TASTE AND FREEDOM; PROSPECTUS
OF THE NEW YORK AND NEW
ORLEANS WRITING ACADEMIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649488643

The Science of Practical Penmanship: Or The Analysis of Taste and Freedom; Prospectus of the New York and New Orleans Writing Academies by Thomas P. Dolbear

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THOMAS P. DOLBEAR

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THE SCIENCE
OF
PRACTICAL PENMANSHIP;
OR,
THE ANALYSIS OF
TASTE AND FREEDOM.

ILLUSTRATED BY TWENTY-FOUR PLATES.

SEVENTH EDITION.

PUBLISHED BY
THOMAS P. DOLBEAR,
AT THE
NEW-YORK WRITING ACADEMY, 236 BROADWAY.

NATCHEZ:
LEVI DOLBEAR.

NEW-ORLEANS:
RUFUS DOLBEAR & J. W. DOLBEAR.

1850.

PREFACE.

ON the appearance of a new work, particularly one designed for schools, the first inquiry generally is for its passport to public confidence.

Utility is the only one which the present work claims; but, after so many works have already appeared on this subject, it will perhaps be thought difficult to sustain even such a claim.

The attempt to improve the Carstairsian system of Writing, after it has, by its own merits, found its way to public favor in England, France, Germany, and the United States, would seem to result from presumption or a short-sighted vanity; but a careful comparison of the two works, it is believed, will remove such an opinion with all who are willing to judge of their merits only by their contents and arrangement.

Carstairs has done much, doubtless more than any other author, to improve the manner of teaching the execution of writing. As the first to discover and publish to the world a method of teaching writing by three different movements, he has placed himself among the benefactors of mankind. His work has had great influence in convincing the public that a change was necessary in the manner of teaching writing. It is to him we are indebted for such suggestions as have led us to an investigation of the subject, and the consequent adoption of the present system, so far as execution is concerned.

But although Carstairs has many excellences, he is also defective in matter and arrangement.

Though his own ideas may have been correct, his explanations are often ambiguous. He observed that the best business writers used a movement produced by other joints than those of the fingers, but by mistaking the effect for the cause, he ascribes this movement to the hand and fore-arm instead of the shoulder, and by this error has led many to suppose he meant a lateral or swinging movement of the fore-arm. By the term *hand and fore-arm movement*, he doubtless means that play of the arm and shoulder which we have denominated the *muscular movement*, for he directs letters to be made by it, although the fore-arm movement alone can never form letters. Because the fore-arm rests on the muscles, he seems to have concluded that the movement was produced by them.

He directs the fingers to be used, but does not explain the manner of using them; and as they can be used in a variety of ways, the pupil is quite as liable to adopt the wrong as the right method. None of the subsequent publications have supplied the defects, or removed the ambiguities of Carstairs.

During an experience of some years, we have found that those who have been unsuccessful in learning to write complain of difficulties quite different in character and location. Finding all efforts to impart facility and dispatch unavailing while any of these remained, we have in vain searched both European and American works for an appropriate remedy. Though they contain directions for avoiding some of them, they leave the learner liable to fall into others equally objectionable. Over the greatest difficulties they seem to have gained a conquest only by shunning them.

Volumes have been pompously swelled to quartos and octavos; yet they are filled to a great extent with speculations *about* instruction, and about *errors* of instruction without giving instruction itself. They are so wanting in particularity, as to convey only a few general notions; and are therefore, in point of practical utility, little better than a set of copy slips.

Directions the most opposite in character have been advocated with equal zeal, and the instructions of one teacher condemned as erroneous by the next.

This disparity of opinion is expensive to parents, injurious to pupils, and an evidence of the defective condition of the prevalent mode of instruction.

That there is at present on this subject no suitable text book for schools is generally admitted. A desire to supply so necessary a requisite is believed to be a sufficient apology for the appearance of the present work.

Believing it important to the cause of education that the principles of this art be settled on such basis as shall lead all teachers to uniformity in their instructions, we have endeavored to treat the subject in such manner as shall convince every unprejudiced mind of its correctness.

Aware that to have a system permanently adopted, it must accord with the laws of organization, we have labored to have it based on the foundation of nature, rather than on the uncertainty of individual opinion: believing that by referring every principle as far as possible to such evidence, it would remove all doubt and exhibit the system in the light of truth. On doubtful points we have neither condemned on a single apparent exception, nor approved on the result of an individual experiment; but the multiplied experiments of five teachers during

a period of nearly ten years, aided by the mutual interchange of views and opinions, have been the test by which every point has been decided. No principle has been settled until reason and experiment have led to uniformity of opinion.

But why all this show and verbosity about nerves, muscles, &c.? pupils may learn without it. We answer, they may learn without it, but they may fail in the attempt as thousands have, by attempting to remove a difficulty without knowing *where* or *what* that difficulty was. Our object has been to treat the subject so fully that they *can* learn.

The inductive plan has been pursued through the whole work, to suit it to the development of the youthful mind.

To prevent one thing being forgotten while learning another, each principle is reduced to practice as soon as learned. The unshaded large hand is given for the use of the black-board and slate.

In adopting a style of letter for running hand, the object has been to give such an one as could be written with the greatest rapidity.

The analysis of the loop and capital letters will conduce not less to the beauty and uniformity of the writing than to the progress of the learner.

Some of the most important questions have been repeated in different parts of the work. Other repetitions have been used where the close connexion of the subject seemed to require.

For having deviated from the path of our predecessors by introducing so much matter not found in other works of the kind, our only apology is, that we have done so from a conviction of its importance; with what propriety is left to the decision of an intelligent public.

New-York, December, 1836.

INDEX.

	Page
Introduction, - - - - -	9
Lesson I.—Plates 3 and 4.—Definition of Pen- manship.—Position of the Body, Arms, Hand, Pen, Paper.—Tying the fingers, - - -	27
Lesson II.—Plate 5.—Arm Movement, - - -	33
Lesson III.—Plate 6. (<i>For the Blackboard.</i>) Form of the letters in Large Hand, - - -	37
Lesson IV.—Plate 7. (<i>For the Blackboard.</i>) The same continued, - - - - -	43
Lesson V.—Plate 8. (<i>For the Blackboard.</i>) Exercises in Large Hand, - - - - -	47
Lesson VI.—Plate 9. Capital letters, Analysis of,	51
Lesson VII.—Plate 10. Muscular Movement,	63
Lesson VIII.—Plates 10, 6, 16 and 9. Finger and Muscular movements, Combination of,	66
Lesson IX.—Plates 11 and 12. Text Hand, -	72
Lesson X.—Plate 11. (<i>lower part.</i>)—Analysis of Letters for Running Hand—Relative Propor- tions—Shading, - - - - -	74
Lesson XI.—Pl. 13. Practice on the First Com- bination.—Directions for Striking Capitals, -	83
Lesson XII.—Plate 14. Exercises in Perpendic- ular Columns, - - - - -	85
Lesson XIII.—Plate 15. Exercises for the Mus- cular Movement, - - - - -	87

Lesson XIV.—Plate 16. Application of the Second Combination, - - - -	91
Lesson XV.—Plate 14. (<i>lower part</i>). Exercises in Perpendicular Columns, - - - -	94
Lesson XVI.—Plate 17. Exercises for Practicing the Loop Letters, - - - -	96
Lesson XVII.—Plate 18. Practice on the Capitals, - - - -	97
Lesson XVIII.—Plate 19. Set of words alphabetically arranged, containing all the Capitals and Small Letters, - - - -	99
Lesson XIX.—Plate 20. Business Letter. Plate 21. Bill of Goods, showing different Styles of Capitals, - - - -	101
Lesson XX.—Plate 22. Ladies' Epistolary Hand. Plate 23. Epistolary Style, and Set of Capitals for Ladies. Plate 24. Styles of Fancy Hands, Form of Notes, Bills of Exchange, Drafts, Receipts, &c. - - - -	103
Penmaking, Plate 2, - - - -	107
Choice of Quills, - - - -	111
Choice of Knives—Holding the Quill, - - - -	112
Holding and using the Knife, - - - -	114
Cuts for making the Pen, - - - -	115
	116