5 steps for getting started with brush calligraphy

A quick start guide for beginners (plus lowercase and uppercase examples)

learnbrushcalligraphy.com
1 | Supplies

All you need is a **brush pen** and some **paper**.

Seriously, that’s it. (Don’t worry. You can get fancy later.)

Try these brush pens for smaller writing:
- Sakura Pigma Pro Brush – fine
- Tombow Fudenosuke – soft or hard tip
- Pentel Sign Pen with a Brush Tip

Try these brush pens for larger writing:
- Sakura Koi Coloring Brush
- Sakura Pigma Pro Brush – medium or bold
- Tombow Dual Brush Pen

Try this paper:
- Rhodia notepad
- HP Premium Choice Laserjet Paper
- Canson Marker Pad

Where to buy: Local art stores, or online at Amazon, Paper & Ink Arts, and Jetpens.
2 | Understand Calligraphy

Calligraphy means "beautiful writing." But what does that really mean?

Anything written or created with your hands is handlettering. Let’s discuss the differences between the different types of handlettering.

**Handwriting** and **cursive** are what we typically use everyday to write memos or take notes. There aren’t any strict rules or requirements – the primary function is to communicate a message. **Calligraphy** is similar to cursive, except letters are created stroke-by-stroke as you lift your pen off the page. Notice the variations in stroke width. **Lettering** refers to any and all writing created by hand, including handwriting, cursive, and calligraphy. The difference is the effort to incorporate design aspects to the overall look of the piece that may or may not adhere to strict rules. Lastly, **typography** is commonly mistaken for handlettering, although it is actually refers to letterforms that can be used over and over again in their exact manner. Think typewriters or computer fonts.

**Consistency > perfection.** As you can see, the rawness and imperfections of handlettering and calligraphy give it a unique and personal touch. Thus, we aim for **consistency** and **good form**, not perfection.
3 | Learn the brush pen

It's easier to build good habits than to break bad ones.

Be sure to learn the proper way to hold your brush pen. You’ll write more easily and prolong the life of your pen!

**What is the brush pen?** It is a marker with a flexible tip. When you press the tip onto its side, it bends (or flexes) and allows you to create thick strokes. When you use only the very tip on the page, you get thin (or "hairline") strokes.

How to hold the brush pen:

- Place the pen gently, but firmly in your fingers. Rest the body of the pen near the knuckle of your index finger.
- Hold the pen at an angle – this is how you press down the tip onto its side.
- To create **thin** strokes, barely touch your pen tip to the page and use little pressure to make a thin stroke.
- To create **thick** strokes, press down the side of your pen tip to your paper and use heavy pressure to make a thick stroke.

**Try as many brush pens as you can!** They differ in size, type, flexibility, firmness, and pigmentation. You don’t have to get a ton all at once, but at least try one smaller tip and one larger tip.
4 | Study the basic strokes

Study the basic strokes. Practice the strokes. Repeat.

Practice these basic strokes to learn your brush pen, study their form, and build your muscle memory. The key is to observe where and when to apply pressure to create those **thick** and **thin** lines.

- Entrance stroke
- Full-pressure stroke
- Entrance stroke / Full-pressure
- Overturn stroke
- Underturn stroke
- Compound curve
- Reverse compound curve
- Oval
- Reverse oval
- Ascending stem loop
- Descending stem loop
5 | Practice, practice, practice

Don’t just write the letters. Create them, one stroke at a time.

You may be eager to start writing everything and anything you can, as fast as you can.

Don’t.

Instead, build your muscle memory with repetition, drills, and deliberate practice. The saying, “quality over quantity” could never be truer when it comes to brush calligraphy. The more time you devote to mastering the basics and understanding how to use the brush pen, the better you will increase your consistency and develop a critical eye.

Use the following lowercase and alphabet examples to practice building letters stroke by stroke. If you ever feel you are stuck or are struggling with a letter, remember to take a step back and go back to the basics. Identify the individual strokes that make up the letter. Practice those strokes over and over and identify your inconsistencies. Also, try different pens as you’ll find some are easier to handle than others and you may develop preferences for certain ones.

Note that the following alphabets represent only one style – there are endless scripts in the calligraphy world that range from traditional Copperplate to more modern styles.

While they may differ in appearance, structure, and form, they all share a common aspect: The variations of thin and thick strokes that are created by constant lifting of the brush pen.
Lowercase Alphabet

7 mm | Use with: Tombow Fudenosuke or Sakura Pigma professional brush (fine) | Print on: HP Premium Choice Laserjet paper

A B C D E F G H I J K L M