Handwriting recognition is used most often to describe the ability of a computer to translate human writing into text. This may take place in one of two ways, either by scanning of written text or by writing directly on to a peripheral input device.

The first of these handwriting recognition techniques, known as optical character recognition (OCR), is the most successful in the mainstream. Most scanning suites offer some form of OCR, allowing users to scan in handwritten documents and have them translated into basic text documents. OCR is also used by some archivists as a method of converting massive quantities of handwritten historical documents into searchable, easily-accessible digital forms.

The second group of handwriting recognition techniques, often referred to as on-line recognition

The process of online handwriting recognition can be broken down into a few general steps:

* preprocessing,
* feature extraction and
* classification.

The purpose of preprocessing is to discard irrelevant information in the input data, that can negatively affect the recognition. This concerns speed and accuracy. The second step is feature extraction. The purpose of this step is to highlight important information for the recognition model. The last big step is classification. In this step various models are used to map the extracted features to different classes and thus identifying the characters or words the features represent.