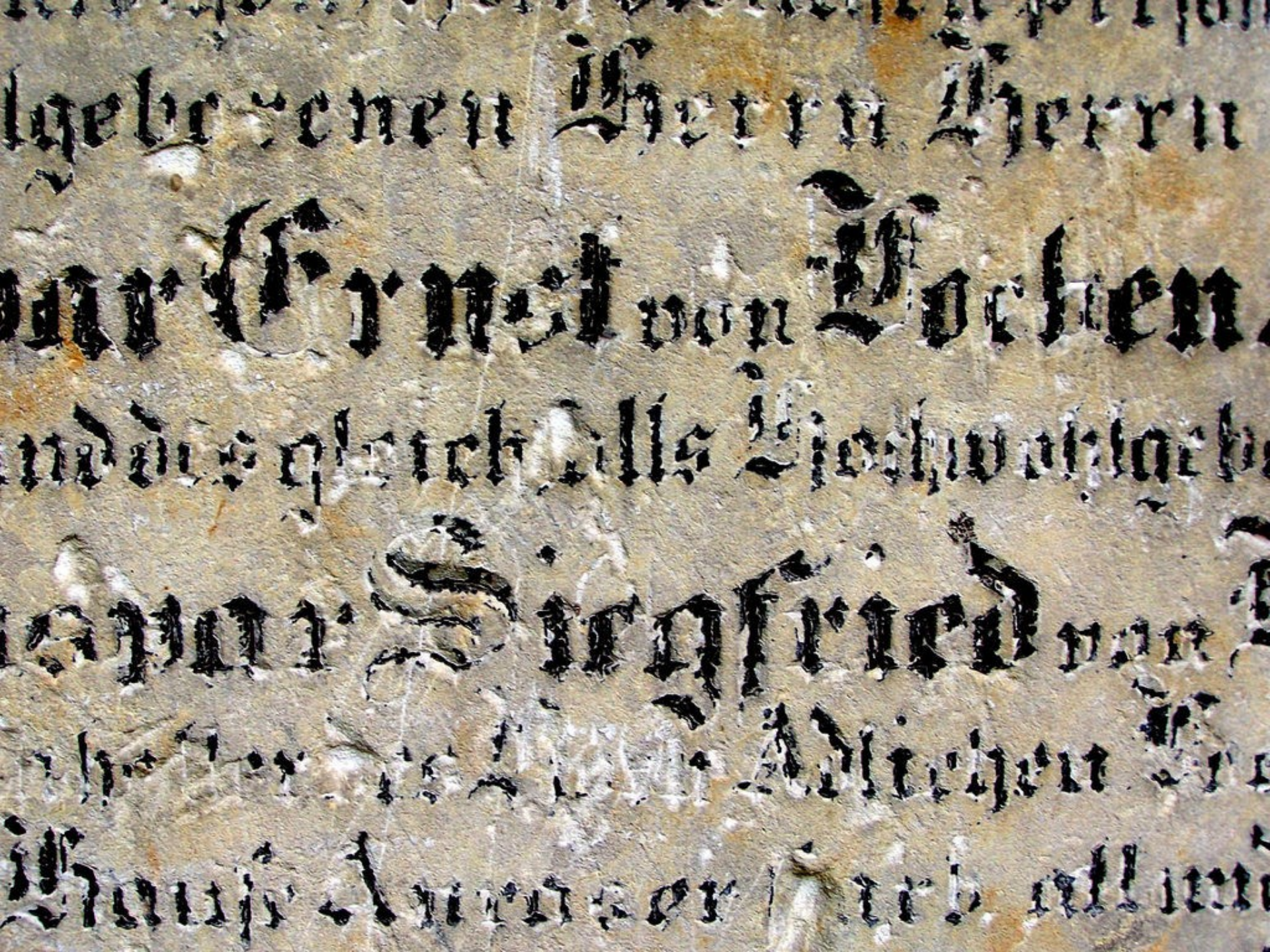
Deciphering Old German Documents Using the Online German Script Tutorial

Bradley J. York

Family History Technology Workshop

11 March 2009



Bescheinigung

über die Endzahlen aus der Aufrechnung der Quittungskarte für

Vor- und Zuname (bei Frauen auch Geburtsname) { Daniel / Schulz

geboren am 2 ten November im Jahre 1881

zu .....

Kreis — Amt — Rüpland

Versicherungsanstalt Schlesw. Holst.

(Name der Anstalt, welche auf der aufgerechneten Karte verzeichnet ist)

Quittungskarte № 1

Zahl der Wochen, für welche Beiträge entrichtet sind — in Lohnklasse	I	II	III	IV	V	Z.-M.
	—		32	X	20	5 Stck

Dauer bescheinigter Krankheiten vom	bis einschließlich	Dauer militärischer Dienstleistungen vom	bis einschließlich

Dienstsiegel der Aufrechnungsstelle.

(Ort und Datum:) Lenkendorf 30/1. 20

(Aufrechnungsstelle:) Amt

Script Tutorials - Paleography, Old Documents, and Family History Research - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/
Google
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Script Tutorials

Resources for Old Handwriting & Documents

How do I read an old document?

This website offers guidance in the deciphering of manuscripts and other old documents that were printed in old typefaces or written in old handwriting styles. Languages covered here include English, German, Dutch, Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The content of this website may be useful for genealogical, historical, and literary research.

English Script Tutorial
English

German Script Tutorial
English | Deutsch

Dutch Script Tutorial
English | Nederlands

Italian Script Tutorial
English | Italiano

French Script Tutorial
English | Français

Spanish Script Tutorial
English | Español

Done
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German Script Tutorial - Welcome - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/welcome.aspx
Google
German Script Tutorial - Welcome
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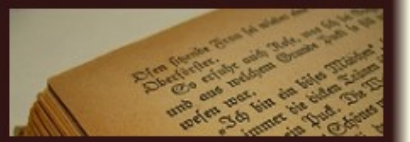

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Find out what items you need to learn and practice Old German Script.

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Begin learning the letters of the alphabet in Old German Script.

Transcription Tests
Transcribe letters, words, or passages and receive feedback.

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IMMIGRANT ANCESTORS PROJECT

IAP Website
View information about the Immigrant Ancestors Project and, if you wish, become a volunteer.

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German Script Tutorial - Tools & Materials - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/tools.aspx
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German Script Tutorial - Tools & Materials
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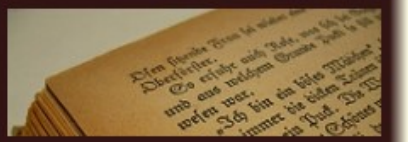

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Tools & Materials

Writing Old German Script

As we mentioned on the previous page, the key to reading old German Script is learning how to write it yourself. We will therefore begin this tutorial by teaching you how to write letters and words in the Gothic style.

The first step in learning how to write is to acquire the proper writing supplies. It is important to remember that old German documents were *not* written with ballpoint or roller-ball pens. Sometimes they were written with a pencil, but generally the writer used a wooden or metal pen or a nib holder about 8 inches in length, with a metal nib inserted at the large end of the tapered pen holder.

Acquiring Basic Tools

You may use a fountain or ballpoint pen to do the exercises on the following pages, although we strongly recommend that you use a calligraphy-style dip pen and an ink bottle instead. If you practice writing old German Script with the same materials as many of the old German scribes, you will likely learn how to spread and maximize your ink just as they did, and thus you might better understand how old documents were written. Writing with these ancient tools helps you gain a "feel" for how people once wrote. It also helps you appreciate old German Script as an art form.

We recommend that you obtain the following items to get the most out of the exercises in this tutorial. You will most likely find them in the calligraphy section of a stationary or art supply store. Each of these items is described in detail below:

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German Script Tutorial - Preparation - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/preparation.aspx
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Check Your Nib

Before you begin writing, make sure that your nib is securely fastened to your nib holder. Make sure that you are using a *round nib*, as specified on the previous page. Also make sure that your nib is clean, sharp, and intact.

When you dip your nib into your ink bottle, submerge it until it is just above the *breather hole*. As mentioned on the previous page, this hole is an ink supply indicator and will tell you when the pen needs to be re-dipped.

Maintain Your Ink Supply

Always hold your pen close to the nib as you write. The farther away from the nib that you hold the pen, the less control you will have and the more likely you will be to drip or splatter ink. Also hold your pen as parallel to the paper as possible, or at about a 45-degree angle relative to the page. Though it may seem that tipping the pen up will help the ink flow down more steadily, it is surface tension—not gravity—that is doing the work. The more the surface of the ink touches the paper, the more it will stick to the paper.

When the ink supply on your nib runs low, the surface tension holding the remaining ink in the breather hole will break and the hole will open up, appearing empty. At this point you may still have enough ink left on the tines to write a stroke or two. If you watch the ink level in the breather hole carefully enough, you may be able to re-dip your nib at the right times so as to avoid running out of ink in the middle of a stroke.

Take care not to puncture your paper (or your skin, for that matter) with the tip of your nib. Unlike ballpoint pens or pencils, dip pens don't require a lot of pressure to write. Remember to be light and gentle, especially with thin strokes. After you get accustomed to it, you can try applying more pressure to produce thicker strokes. It will be messy at first, but it won't take long to get the feel. Don't forget to wipe your nib with a cloth or paper towel every 10 minutes or so, and then rinse it with warm water when you're done.

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GERMAN SCRIPT TUTORIAL

Letters Practice: a - e

a

b

c

d

e

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a b c d e f g h i j
k l m n o p q r s t
u v w x y z
ä ö ü ß

German Script Tutorial - Gothic Handwriting, Lowercase Letters: a to e - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/a_to_e_script.aspx
Google
German Script Tutorial - Gothic Handwriting, Lo...
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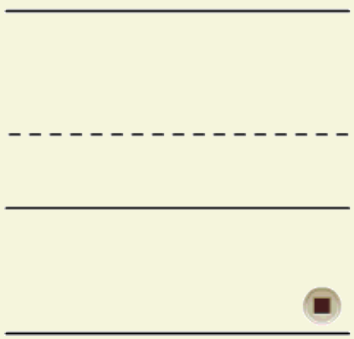
d



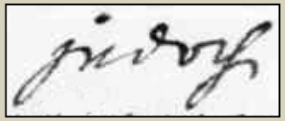
Description

This letter ends with an upper loop that is not "designed" to connect with other letters, although it sometimes does. The upper and lower portions of this letter can be so spread out that they resemble the letters *cl* (which occur only rarely in German) or *il*.

(Click on the letter to animate it.)

Examples

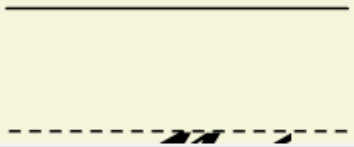
der



jedoch

wird

e



Description

The Gothic letter *e* may resemble an *n* or a *u*, although it is usually thinner than the *n* and has no stroke above it like the *u*. It is a very common letter and has several

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German Script Tutorial - Gothic Typefaces, Lowercase Letters: a to e - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/a_to_e_type.aspx
German Script Tutorial - Gothic Typefaces, Lower...

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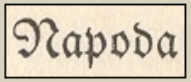
a

Description

The *Fraktur a* is very similar to most modern handwritten *a*'s: a single loop with a stem on the right.

Examples



Napoda

am

b

Description

The letter *b* often has serifs protruding from the top stem, yet despite this it is usually fairly easy to recognize.

Done
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http://script.byu.edu/german/en/example.aspx
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German Script Tutorial - Sample Document
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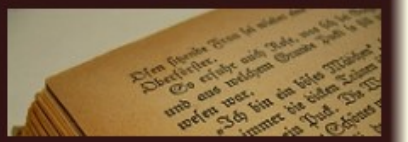

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Extraction Example

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http://script.byu.edu/german/en/test-letters.aspx
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Part III: Transcribe each of the following letters on your own piece of paper

Test Item #11

r

Test Item #12

D

Test Item #13

C

Test Item #14

I

Test Item #15

Ü

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German Script Tutorial - Letters Test - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/test-letters.aspx
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Part III: Transcribe each of the following letters on your own piece of paper

Test Item #11

r

Test Item #12

D

Test Item #13

Done
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German Script Tutorial - Words Test - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/test-words.aspx
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Part II: Transcribe each of the following words on your own piece of paper

Test Item #11

Lucas

Test Item #12

Karl

Test Item #13

Lorenz

Test Item #14

Hinrich

Test Item #15

Sybilla

Done
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German Script Tutorial - Words Test - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/test-words.aspx
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German Script Tutorial - Words Test
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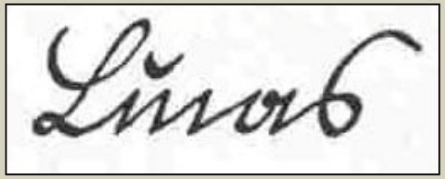
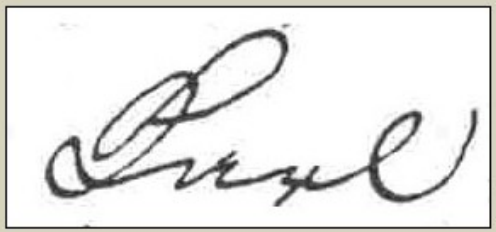
Part II: Transcribe each of the following words on your own piece of paper

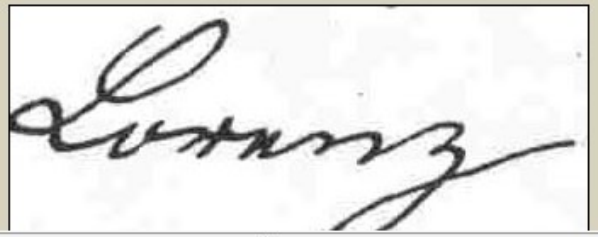
Test Item #11

Lucas 

Test Item #12

Karl 

Test Item #13

Lorenz 

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German Script Tutorial - Passages Test - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/test-passages.aspx
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German Script Tutorial - Passages Test
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Part II: Transcribe the following passage on your own piece of paper

Passage Transcription

Frühlingsgruß

Joseph von Eichendorff

Es steht ein Berg in Feuer,
In feurigem Morgenbrand,
Und auf des Berges Spitze
Ein Tannbaum überm Land.

Und auf dem höchsten Wipfel
Steh ich und schau vom Baum,
O Welt, du schöne Welt, du,
Man sieht dich vor Blüten kaum!

Options

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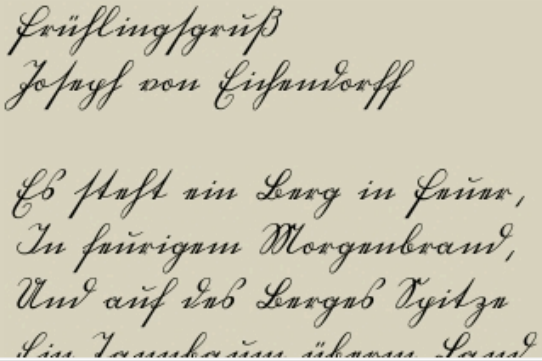

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German Script Tutorial - Results - Windows Internet Explorer
http://script.byu.edu/german/en/results.aspx
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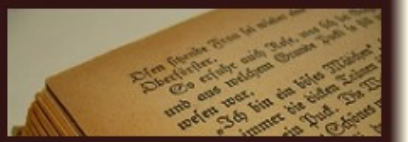

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Test Results

Bradley York, you are signed in.

Bradley York

You may print a copy of this report for your own reference.

Scores: Letters Test

12/12/2008 1:51:23 PM	0%
12/12/2008 1:45:14 PM	20%
1/16/2008 9:44:49 AM	0%
12/14/2007 7:06:32 PM	20%
12/10/2007 3:10:12 PM	0%

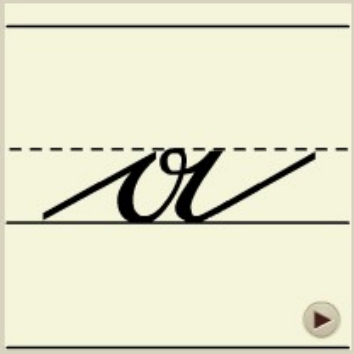
Scores: Words Test

12/12/2008 1:51:10 PM	0%
12/21/2007 4:42:21 PM	8.57%

Feedback

Based on your test performance, you should review and practice the following letter(s):

a



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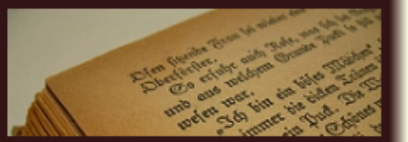

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New User

Create User Account

Please enter the following information and click *Register* to create your user account. Click *Cancel* to return to the overview page.

First Name:

Last Name:

Email Address:

I would like to receive email updates about new tutorial resources and materials.

Country of Origin (optional):
Select Country

Native Language (optional):
Select Language

User Name:

Password:

Benefits

Here are some of the benefits of creating a user account for the German Script Tutorial:

- Save your five most recent test scores for the letters, words, and passages tests
- Review the letters that you misidentified on the tests
- Receive email updates (if you wish) about new tutorial resources and materials

Note to IAP Volunteers

If you are already a volunteer for the Immigrant Ancestors Project, it is suggested that you use your user name and password from that user account.

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Websites

Homepage of Marcus Hahn

http://www.uni-saarland.de/~m.hahn/slp2000.htm
(in German)

Handwriting Guide: German Gothic Resource Guide

http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/rg/frameset_rg.asp?Dest=G1&Aid=&Gid=&Lid=&Sid=&Did=&Juris1=&Event=&Year=&Gloss=&Sub=&Tab=&Entry=&Guide=German_Gothic99-36316.ASP
(in English)

Palaeography: Reading old handwriting 1500-1800; A practical online tutorial

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/
(in English)

German Tutorial Page

http://www.germanways.com/tutorial1.1.htm
(in English)

GRT Publications: Dr. Roger P. Minert's Homepage

http://www.rogerpminert.com

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Conclusions

- The German Script Tutorial is one of the most advanced online tools available for learning to read and write old German script.
- This tutorial surpasses many other print and online materials because it is:
  - extensive
  - interactive
  - freely available
- If you have questions or comments, please contact Bradley York at script.iap@gmail.com.