

“Born to please”: The Art of Handwriting Instruction

ARCHIVED ONLINE EXHIBIT

Originally exhibited at the Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina

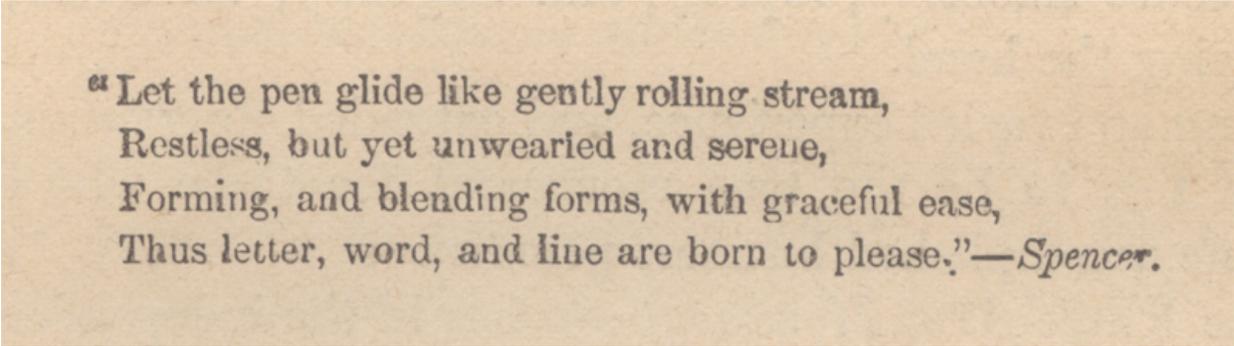
Archived October 13, 2013

This exhibition is the electronic equivalent of an exhibition mounted in Thomas Cooper Library in 2008. Both versions were created by Jeffrey Makala.

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INTRODUCTION



“Let the pen glide like gently rolling stream,
Restless, but yet unwearied and serene,
Forming, and blending forms, with graceful ease,
Thus letter, word, and line are born to please.”—*Spencer*.

In the Early Modern period, the need for both rudimentary literacy and writing skills expanded to a larger proportion of the population. The attendant need for instruction in writing was answered in part by the new technology of printing, which allowed writing manuals to influence larger numbers of teachers and students alike. With penmanship no longer confined to the scriptorium and the legal world, the growing sphere of secular, growing transnational mercantile networks brought about significant changes in how elites and the educated classes conducted its public and private lives through handwritten documents.

In America, compulsory public schooling was required by law in some areas of New England beginning in the 1790s. The attendant need for textbooks and copybooks for handwriting instruction boomed along with a growing United States population over the nineteenth century. Competing theories and methodologies for teaching handwriting emerged.

Related advances and innovations demanded their own subgenres: shorthand, blackboard writing, Melvil Dewey's "library hand," as well as books that addressed new social situations relating to this expansion in letters: sample books of business letters for skilled tradesmen, etiquette manuals and courtesy books, and finally the emergent genre of typewriting manuals at the end of the nineteenth century.

Many of these books came from the William Savage Textbook Collection, which was maintained by the School of Education for many years as a reference collection for state educators. The collection, totaling over 4000 volumes of American schoolbooks from the 1780s to the 1980s, was transferred to Rare Books and Special Collections in 2005 and is fully cataloged and available for research. Additional sources may be found in Rare Books and Special Collections, and we welcome further interest and questions.

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EARLY MODERN HANDWRITING MANUALS

A Handwriting Master at Work.

– From a print in a 1549 Italian handwriting copybook by Urban Wyss. Note the arrangement of writing tools on the tables in his studio.



Vespasiano Amphiareo, de Ferrara, frate, 1500 or 1501-1563.

Des Schreibbuch des Vespasiano Amphiareo.

Venegia: 1554.

Reprint: Jan Tschichold, ed. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Dr. Cantz'sche Druckerei, 1975.

1 of 250 copies.



More than 19 editions of this work by a Venetian writing master were issued between 1548 and 1620. The work, his only printed book, is a masterful exploration of Cancelleresca, or Chancery hand, used in Early Modern Italy, and first perfected by Ludovico Arrighi earlier in the century. The widespread adoption of copperplate engraving in the sixteenth century allowed elaborate depictions of writing hands and the reproduction of early manuscript examples in printed books.

Pierre le Bé, fl. 1601.

Béle Prérie où chacun peut voir les lettres Tant Romaine que de Forme En leur fleur et perfection. Avec leur vraye proporçion. Reduites au pied du Compas.

Paris: 1601.

Reprint: Jan Tschichold, ed. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Dr. Cantz'sche Druckerei, 1974.

1 of 250 copies.



le Bé was a writing master from a well-known family involved in cutting letters for the burgeoning printing industry. He published this manual of letterforms in 1601; its title is an anagram of his own name. The book contains four complete alphabets, all superimposed upon a background grid to properly illustrate their correct proportions. le Bé himself made all the engravings for this work, including the ornaments and borders.

Andrés Brun, b. 1552?

Andrés Brun, Calligrapher of Saragossa: Some Account of His Life and Work, by Henry Thomas and Stanley Morison, With A Facsimile in Collotype of the Surviving Text and Plates of his Two Writings Books, 1583 & 1612.

Paris: Pegasus Press, 1929.

Copy 136 of 175.



Like many Early Modern writing masters, Andrés Brun, in Spain, had some level of involvement in the printing and engraving trades. Because they were engraved on copper, the print runs of books of letterforms that masters such as Brun produced (known as copybooks) were very small. First printed in an edition of likely no more than 300 copies, the 1616 text reproduced here in an early twentieth century facsimile is taken from the only known surviving copy.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Denis Diderot, 1713-1784, and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, 1717-1783, eds.

Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres.

Paris: Briasson, 1751-77.



Published in 17 volumes of text, followed by 6 volumes of illustrative plates, followed by 4 additional text and 2 plate volumes (and a 1780 2-volume index), the Encyclopédie was the largest authoritative compilation of recorded knowledge to date. These two plates, of several illustrating the entry for Ecriture (writing), show the proper equipment needed to write and the correct method of gripping the pen. The images of young ladies and men at their writing desks refer to the article's text on the proper posture for writing while seated.

Andrew Wright.

Court-Hand Restored: Or, The Student's Assistant in Reading Old Deeds, Charters, &c. With an Appendix; Containing, the Ancient Names of Places in Great Britain and Ireland; and Also, an Alphabetic Table of Ancient Surnames. A Work Not Only Useful to the Learned, But Absolutely Necessary For Young Students and Others, Who May Have Occasion to Converse With Old Charters, Deeds or Records.

London: Printed for the Author, and sold by Walter Shropshire, 1788.



Wright's handbook, as the title implies, is a late eighteenth-century aid, primarily for law students and historians, to properly understand the scripts used in earlier legal documents and court papers. The engraving shown here, one of several in the volume, reproduces examples of a medieval court hand along with its contemporary equivalent. A large portion of the book is devoted to appendices of Latin variants of British place and family names, which are as useful today by legal scholars as they likely were in the eighteenth century: Lutetia = Paris; Ellandunum = Wilton; Wiltshire; de Curva Spina = Creithorne.

The Complete American Letter-Writer, and Best Companion for the Young Man in Business. Containing Letters on Trade and Merchandise, Expressly Calculated for the Youth of the United States. Also, Several Forms of Precedents Used in the Transaction of Business in America. To Which Are Added, Familiar Letters on Interesting Subjects.

New-York: Richard Scott, 1807.



A later edition of a book first published in Philadelphia in 1793, the American Letter-Writer is a compilation of sample letters for every occasion, from the formal to the familiar. Its expressed purpose is to "supply the young tradesman with a small compendium of useful knowledge, as to the business of his profession." The less business-inclined letters are

included to provide instruction and moral guidance as well as aids to various newly-encountered social situations. This reference book, coupled with some level of instruction in handwriting, would allow any young clerk or skilled tradesman to successfully negotiate the growing commercial world of the New Republic. This volume, interestingly, also includes *Essays on Love, Courtship, and Marriage, To Which is Added A Complete Letter-Writer on Those Subjects*, also published in New York in 1807, in a contemporary binding.

THE SPENCERIAN AND PALMER METHODS

H. C. (Henry Caleb) Spencer.

Spencerian Key to Practical Penmanship. Prepared for the "Spencerian Authors" by H. C. Spencer.

New York and Chicago: Ivison, Blakeman, Taylor & Co., 1866.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



Platt R. Spencer developed his "Spencerian" method while teaching handwriting in the early nineteenth century. Instead of teaching penmanship as a series of stylized, memorized letters, Spencer broke down letters into common elements based on natural forms, which could then be combined to form individual letters. His first published work was in 1848, and after his death, his family continued in the business, which essentially dominated penmanship instruction in America after the Civil War. Books such as this 1866 edition were successfully marketed by members of the Spencer family to schools across the country.

A. N. (Austin Norman) Palmer, 1859-1927.

The Palmer Method of Business Writing: A Series of Self-Teaching in Rapid, Plain, Unshaded, Coarse-Pen, Muscular Movement Writing For Use in all Schools, Public or Private, Where an Easy and Legible Handwriting is the Object Sought; Also for the Home Learner.

Cedar Rapids: A. N. Palmer Co., 1915.

Gift of Elizabeth Newton.



The Palmer Method was the second major handwriting technique popularized in the late nineteenth century, fully displacing Spencerian handwriting by the 1890s. Palmer found the Spencerian method too slow, ornamental, and inefficient, especially in the way it required lifting the pen off the page. If one tried to write too rapidly using a Spencerian script, clarity quickly deteriorated. To compensate, Palmer developed a quicker, simplified and more pragmatic script more attuned to business writing than creating "pretty" letterforms. Palmer allied his philosophy with the muscular Christianity movement of the late nineteenth century, and his business empire of correspondence schools, pads and copybooks, manuals and training materials grew quickly to be the dominant tradition in American handwriting instruction from the 1890s through the Progressive era.

Frederick M. King, Ed.D.

Palmer Method Cursive Writing: Grade 5. Centennial Edition.

Schaumburg IL: A. N. Palmer Co, 1984.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



Proof to the longevity and influence of A. N. Palmer's methods, the company which bears

his name existed into the 1980s. By the mid-twentieth century, the Palmer method lost favor in the schools. Handwriting instruction moved to first teaching manuscript hand, or block printing, at an early age, followed by teaching cursive writing once printing has been mastered. The Palmer Company – here in its Centennial edition – attempted to adapt its methodology to changing pedagogical needs in creating new copybooks such as this one.

A Reaction to the Palmer Method
Mary Monica Waterhouse Bridges.
A New Handwriting for Teachers.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1899.



In this elaborately-produced edition with lithographs and copperplate engravings, Bridges makes a case for revisiting the great sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian letterforms and incorporating them into a new hand to be taught in the schools. “It is certainly desirable that there should be more good models for slow writing, as there is abundant occasion for its use....It would be a good thing if reproductions of these...were hung in schools, not only to give to children the history of their own Alphabet, but also to show them how lovely a thing handwriting can be.”

Emily Dickinson – Spencerian?

P. J. Croft., ed.
Autograph Poetry in the English Language. Facsimiles of Original Manuscripts
from the Fourteenth Century to the Twentieth Century.
Volume II.
London: Cassell, 1973.



Dickinson’s very distinctive oblique, looping script, shown here in two 1861 manuscripts addressed to her sister-in-law, illustrate several problems with which her posthumous publishers and scholarly editors have had to contend. As she never intended her verse for a wide audience (the vast majority was collected and published only after her death), her capitalization and especially her punctuation style remains idiosyncratic, and heavily influences how one reads the poems. Thomas Cooper Library owns one manuscript letter of Dickinson’s, part of the William R. Bailey Collection of American Literature.

“Very large capital letters are in bad taste for ladies”

Mrs. Manners (Cornelia Holroyd Bradley Richards, 1822-1892).
At Home and Abroad; Or, How to Behave.
New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1869.



This antebellum etiquette manual (the first edition appeared in 1854) was intended for both young ladies and gentlemen, in an era when many, if not most, similar texts were divided along gender lines. Mrs. Manners here gives detailed, prescriptive advice

on behavior in most social situations, and devotes several chapters to the writing of letters and their forms. She expresses strong opinions on ink (blue black, not red black or brown black), paper (white, not blue), and letterforms (“gentlemen are generally, now, avoiding the huge capitals and great flourishes, which were once esteemed to be so admirable”). This copy is one of three known copies of this edition.

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

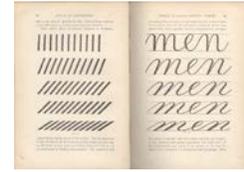
Vertical vs. Oblique Penmanship

John Jackson, F.E.I.S.

The Theory and Practice of Handwriting; A Practical Manual for the Guidance of School Boards, Teachers, and Students of the Art, with Diagrams and Illustrations. Revised Edition.

New York: William Beverley Harison, 1894.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



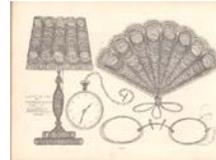
Jackson, the author of several books on vertical penmanship and publisher of “vertical penmanship pads” and “vertical copy books,” here, in a book on handwriting theory for teachers, makes an extended argument in favor of using a vertical hand. In surveying contemporary writing manuals, Jackson finds that angles for script ranging from 10 to 70 degrees from upright are all taught as correct. The illustrations here are meant to show that the vertical lines at the top are clearly the most legible and the preferred script. This volume bears the ownership marks of Patterson Wardlaw (1859-1948), dated Feb. 1, 1896. Wardlaw was professor of education and Dean of the School of Education at USC, whose building is now named for him.

F. W. Tamblyn.

F. W. Tamblyn's Home Instructor in Penmanship. Fourth Edition (Revised).

Kansas City: F. W. Tamblyn, 1917.

Gift of Elizabeth Newton.



Tamblyn, as another American handwriting entrepreneur, emphasized different hands for different purposes, and this Home Instructor carried lessons in plain business hand as well as lessons in artistic writing and lettering, engraver's script, and instruction in creating decorative flourishes and ornamental penwork such as the illustrations here.

Frank O. Putnam.

Helpful Suggestions for Teaching The Practical Writing Course; Teacher's Manual.

Dallas, Chicago and Atlanta: Practical Drawing Company, 1920.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



Putnam's Practical Drawing Company offered correspondence courses in penmanship for teachers, following the philosophy that continual attention is needed for one's handwriting not to “backslide,” and that teachers, above all, needed to maintain and perfect their hands as “inspiration and stimulus” for their pupils. This teacher's manual to Putnam's Practical Writing course is intended for introductory business writing and was to be used with any of Putnam's 8 student texts.

Berry's Writing Books. Book 4. South Carolina Edition, 1911-17.

Chicago: B. D. Berry & Co., 1911.
William Savage Textbook Collection.



This slim workbook of 20 exercises is aimed at the 4th grade. Berry produced one for each year of schooling, primarily using quotes from contemporary poetry as the basis for its copying exercises. In the pages above, the first half of the exercise is practice, and the following page is intended for the completed assignment. One Spencerian pen stroke/form exercise is also included for each lesson. This book was printed for exclusive distribution in South Carolina schools at a fixed price of 5 cents each.

Alfred C. Cox and A. G. Baker.

A Copy Book for Teaching the Disabled Soldier to Write Well With the Left Hand.

[London]: Ministry of Pensions, ca. 1918.
Joseph M. Bruccoli Great War Collection.



This undated copybook provides a series of lessons and exercises for left-handed writing for soldiers and veterans whose right hands were injured or amputated. As in the American Civil War, a wide variety of new surgical innovations, equipment, and rehabilitation techniques all rapidly advanced out of sheer necessity following the First World War.

VARIANTS & UNIQUE EXAMPLES

Marion E. Lewry.

Noble's Handwriting for Everyday Use.

New York: Noble and Noble, Inc., 1953.



This manual, from mid-century, shows the changes occurring in handwriting instruction at this time, as manuscript printing is recommended for Grades 1 and 2, with the transition to cursive writing taking place in Grade 3.

Walter B. Barbe.

Zaner-Bloser Handwriting. Workbook: Manuscript.

Columbus: Zaner-Bloser, Inc. 1977.



This 1970s elementary school workbook is for manuscript hand, or block printing, and notably recognizes the existence of both right- and left-handed students. Zaner-Bloser, which is still in business, began as the Zanerian College of Penmanship in Columbus, Ohio, in 1888. Elmer Ward Bloser, who had been an instructor of Spencerian penmanship, came on as a partner in the 1890s. The college was incorporated into a new corporation, the Zaner-Bloser Company, in 1895, and had a bestselling writing text in 1904, *The Zaner Method of Arm Movement*.



Donald Neal Thurber.

D'Nealian Handwriting, Book 1.

Glenview IL: Scott Foresman Addison Wesley, 1999.

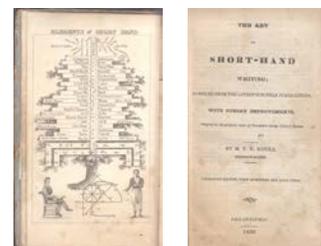
William Savage Textbook Collection.



After the Palmer method was replaced by teaching manuscript hand followed by cursive handwriting in much of the second half of the twentieth century, one alternative approach used was D'Nealian handwriting. A sloped manuscript hand that is a building-block to a cursive hand, D'Nealian was created to alleviate the sometimes difficult transition between “ball and stick” block printing and learning a brand-new cursive script. The method is widely adopted in schools and is not without its critics, who claim its approach adds an unnecessary “third step” in the transition from block printing to full cursive script.

M. T. C. Gould, 1793-1860.

The Art of Short-Hand Writing, Compiled from the Latest European Publications, With Sundry Improvements, Adapted to the Present State of Literature in the United States.



Philadelphia, 1830.

There are numerous historical examples of complete symbolic writing systems, shortened word forms, the use of ligatures, and other methods for saving time when capturing the spoken word on paper, or for saving space on the written page. Likewise, language code systems have long been employed by states and individuals for every use from diplomatic communications to diary entries. Modern shorthand (tachygraphy, or occasionally called brachygraphy) dates to several early seventeenth century English texts, with numerous systems and variants continuing into the present, and stenography is the act of writing shorthand. This system by Gould is an early nineteenth century system modified for and marketed (like *The Complete American Letter-Writer in Case 2*) to American audiences.

“Library Hand”

Melvil Dewey, 1851-1931.

Simplified Library School Rules.

Boston: The Library Bureau, 1904.

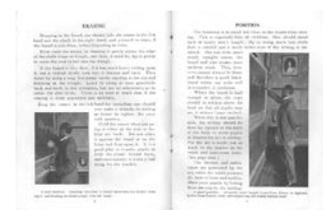


Dewey, besides authoring the library classification system that bears his name, was the most influential library science theorist, publisher, and educator of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He founded The Library Bureau as a library supply company in 1876. Through its publishing arm, he supplied the textbooks that trained several generations of American librarians and influenced nearly every aspect of their work, down to the specialized “library hand” developed for writing legibly on catalog cards. Dewey was also involved in spelling reform efforts (hence the use on these pages of the words “disjoind” and “alfabets”) and in later life would spell his surname “Dui.”

Charles Paxton Zaner.

Blackboard Writing.

Columbus: O. Zaner & Bloser Co., 1911.



For teachers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writing on the blackboard was the most efficient way to communicate quickly to an entire class. Attendant handbooks for teachers on the theory and practice of writing vertically on the blackboard were published and are numerous enough to constitute their own subgenre. This example uses photographs of writing positions and examples of text on the blackboard to especially good effect.

Sample Letters For All Occasions

Sarah Annie Frost.

Frost's Original Letter-Writer.



New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1867.

Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature.

Guides for properly composing letters for all occasions had often been included in conduct manuals, or courtesy books, intended for young ladies and gentlemen. By the nineteenth century, as some forms of universal education became more common, cheap handbooks for letter writing proliferated for the middle class audiences, like this guide that includes "three hundred letters and notes," "together with appropriate answers to each."

The Polite Letter Writer, Or How To Correspond On All Subjects, In A Refined and Elegant Style.

New York: H. J. Ivers & Co., 1882.

Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature.



This short (48 page), cheap paperback letter writing guide for business and personal use also includes chapters on conduct, wedding etiquette, and quotations to use in speeches and toasts. Note the aspiratory language in the title.

NEW OFFICE SKILLS, OR, POST-HANDWRITING

Le nouveau secrétaire Italien-Français, ou Modèles de lettres sur toutes sortes d'argumens, avec leur réponses...

Gênes: Yves Gravier, 1809.



This manual, meant for the use of a private secretary in an aristocratic household, reproduces the same text in French and Italian on opposite pages. It includes groups of sample letters, the bulk of which concern interpersonal affairs such as congratulations and condolences, letters to parents and relatives, and “D’Amour, de Demandes en Mariage.” Included at the end is a brief chapter detailing commercial correspondence.

Henry Tuck.

The Manual of Book-Keeping; Or, Practical Instructions to the Manufacturer, Wholesale Dealer, and Retail Tradesman for Keeping and Balancing Their Books in an Easy and Simple Manner: To Which is Added A Complete Set of Books Showing the Business Transactions for an Entire Year; By an Experienced Clerk. 8th Edition.

London: Bell and Daldy, 1856.

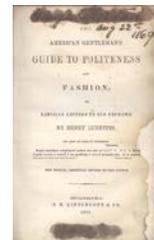


Clerks and secretaries needed to master cash accounting systems involving several sets of interrelated books, as the lithograph opposite this book’s title page illustrates.

Margaret C. Conkling, 1814-1890.

The American Gentleman’s Guide to Politeness and Fashion; Or, Familiar Letters to His Nephews. By Henry Lunettes.

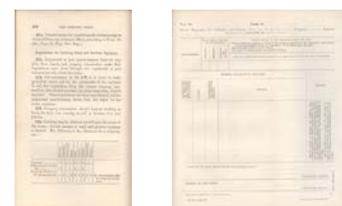
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1866.



Conkling disguised her authorship of this young man’s courtesy book by taking on the pseudonym of Henry Lunettes. She draws on a tradition of masculine authority in creating books of advice for young men from older relatives, of which there are many examples in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Conkling differs from many courtesy book authors in that her focus is quite equally divided between detailed examinations of fashion, health and hygiene as it is to the more common elements of conduct books such as proper habits, the choice of avocations and pastimes, and skills such as letter writing. Here, she stresses brevity above all else in business communications, with the only exception being in its execution.

Captain August V. Kautz.

The Company Clerk: Showing How and When to Make Out



All the Returns, Reports, Rolls, and Other Papers, and What To Do With Them.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864.

Just as civilian clerks and secretaries needed training to standardize recordkeeping practices in the business world, a similar approach to maintaining military records was crucial for both sides during the Civil War, as the armies swelled with civilian volunteers. Books such as this guide for company clerks, owned by a Captain from the 94th New York Regiment in 1864, supplemented official government regulations and documentation.

Ida McLenan Cutler.

Rational Typewriting: A New Idea in Teaching Touch Typewriting. Single Keyboard Edition.

Chicago: The Gregg Publishing Company, 1906.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



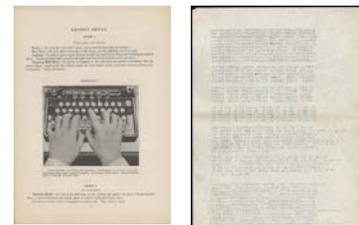
The first true typewriters were produced commercially in the 1860s and 1870s. By the turn of the century, their form and function in an office had become mostly standardized, and the role of the (male) secretary and clerk was to quickly change, as typewriter manufacturers marketed their machines as tools for women to use in taking dictation in the office. Schools were formed to train new office workers, and, like handwriting in the early nineteenth century, numerous methods and techniques were developed and patented.

James Edmund Fuller.

The Typist: A Course of Lessons in the Proper Fingering and the Efficient Manipulation of the Typewriter, Together With A Collection of Graded Material Suitable for Practise in the Application of the Art of Typing to Commercial, Professional, and Private Uses.

Cincinnati: The Phonographic Institute Company, 1926.

William Savage Textbook Collection.



This typewriting manual includes extensive illustrations showing proper hand and finger positions. The book is printed in oblong format and successively on one side of the paper, allowing the book to be open fully for the student typist and sit comfortably next to the typewriter or on a copy stand. This copy also includes a former student's typing exercise, shown here.