

# Yes! You Can Read That Handwriting!

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## *In-Lab Preparation:*

- ✚ *This will be a large class of individuals with varying levels of experience – Watch your screen and your neighbor's. Catch a lab assistant when you need assistance.*

## **Yes, you can read almost any document in almost any language (Just try!)**

1. Start from what you know – a name, a place, numerals.
  - a. Find your name in a document – your own name, or a parent's name – a name you are familiar with.
  - b. Where and when was the document created?
2. Compare a variety of documents/handwriting of the same people. Look for older records (begin with the census), work back to become familiar with the handwriting changes.
  - a. See how different your name appears in different documents with different handwriting.
3. Trace the handwriting: Trace on plastic sheet to feel the flow used by the original author.
4. Look and Write: Write on paper. Can you make the letters look the same as in the document?
5. Study the handwriting - Search “handwriting”, “script”, “old handwriting guides”
  - a. Handwriting guides, alphabet samples from the time period, language, and location of your document from FamilySearch Wiki, Google, etc.
  - b. Online Hand Writing Tutorials (see below)
  - c. Use foreign word lists to help decipher difficult words
    - i. FamilySearch > Search > Wiki > [language] word list > Ctl+F to search for the group of letters you have been able to identify. Move through the hits to compare to the typed foreign word with the handwritten foreign word
  - d. Indexing helps
    - i. Handwriting Helps  
[https://www.familysearch.org/indexing/help/handwriting#!/lang=en&title=Alphabet%20\(Secretary%20Hand\)%#%2Flang=en&title=Alphabet%20\(Secretary%20Hand\)](https://www.familysearch.org/indexing/help/handwriting#!/lang=en&title=Alphabet%20(Secretary%20Hand)%#%2Flang=en&title=Alphabet%20(Secretary%20Hand))
6. Consider the context of the word you cannot read – does it make sense? – watch the structure for a template/Boilerplate
  - a. Grammar – what helps our words make sense and sentences have correct meaning  
Example: Lula's Mexican birth record <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-95H3-WWB?cc=1922462>
  - b. Template – documents were written in certain formats even before forms were created.
    - i. A template may also be called a boilerplate – watch for specific terminology associated with each type of document.  
Example: “In the Name of God Amen” to begin a will.
      1. William Gillam's will (images 1059-1063)  
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G9G4-9FT1?mode=g&cat=456845>

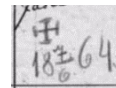
## What are those tricky letters and funny marks on the document?

1. Long s, double s, Thorn – examples on image 2 of Isle of Man Parish Registers, 1598-2009 St Anne Baptisms, marriages, burials 1690-1849 (MS10355/1)  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-6RSK-Y5?i=1&wc=ST5K-VZQ%3A1381236802%2C1381236801&cc=1784428>
  - a. A long S ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long\\_s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_s)) is often confused with a cursive f, except it flows rather than returning like an f (see original U. S. Bill of Rights <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1408042>)
  - b. A double s is often led by a long s, may be mistaken to be a p – Mississippi <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9BSD-8BT?cc=1473181>
  - c. A thorn looks a lot like a ‘y’ but means th. (See Secretary Hand <http://rycote.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/Palaeography-Guide-abbreviations> scroll down the page: “the”)
2. Abbreviations, Contractions, Dashes, D<sup>o</sup> – examples:  
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GR5N-S9J4?i=13&wc=M6F1-2T5%3A249633801%2C249633802%2C249633803&cc=1949804> (Ditto marks, etc.)
3. Often confused letters/frequently misread letters
  - a. *Tips for Reading Old Handwriting* on Ancestry.com  
[https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tips\\_for\\_Reading\\_Old\\_Handwriting](https://wiki.rootsweb.com/wiki/index.php?title=Tips_for_Reading_Old_Handwriting) scroll down and use the hyperlinks at the bottom of the page, also.
  - b. Other examples of what you can find searching the internet
    - i. *Learning to Misspell Your Ancestor’s Name*  
<http://sites.rootsweb.com/~fljgstb/Newsletters/2011June.pdf> (page 7 of 10)
    - ii. *The Source* by Ancestry.com (search Google Books) <https://books.google.com/>
4. Using foreign word lists to help translate difficult words
  - a. FamilySearch > Search > Wiki > [your Country] word list > Ctl+F to search for the group of letters you have been able to identify. Move through the hits to compare to the typed foreign word with the handwritten foreign word.

## European!

Czech Republic death date example 7 June 1864

<https://digi.ceskearchivy.cz/5611/397/1528/999/62/0>



Look for templates such as this Italian Birth Document Translation template

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italian\\_Birth\\_Document\\_Translation](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Italian_Birth_Document_Translation)

“Google” search for handwriting examples such as:

[https://docs.google.com/file/d/10ismuFCUHzSx70S834\\_nyT6wQTApSdMRBEQzufMdKpegFlKVS73NJ3YYhwj/edit](https://docs.google.com/file/d/10ismuFCUHzSx70S834_nyT6wQTApSdMRBEQzufMdKpegFlKVS73NJ3YYhwj/edit)

Germanic Font Generator – Alte deutsche Schrift / Sütterlin <http://www.deutsche-handschrift.de/adsschreiben.php#schriftfeld>. Type a name or place to see what it looks like in eight different old German handwriting styles.

(See also: “Seven Practical Suggestions” on how to work with an unfamiliar handwriting styles, found in BYU’s Italian Script Tutorial <https://script.byu.edu/Pages/Italian/en/basics.aspx>)

## Teaching yourself at home during Bunny Slipper time (on your own after lab)

- Collect for later
  - Use the browser to bookmark webpages of tutorials or other helps,
  - Pinterest <https://www.pinterest.com/> - make boards for scripts, lists, or images, etc.,  
Evernote <https://evernote.com/>, etc.!
- How to Search and examples of what can be found in those searches
  - FamilySearch Research Wiki (<https://www.familysearch.org/>) > Search > Wiki  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main\\_Page](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page) ) Explore!
    - Search by location or language, or name of style (if known)
  - ‘google’ (search) then read down the titles, URLs, & descriptions. Examples:
    - terms such as: “difficulties reading German script”:

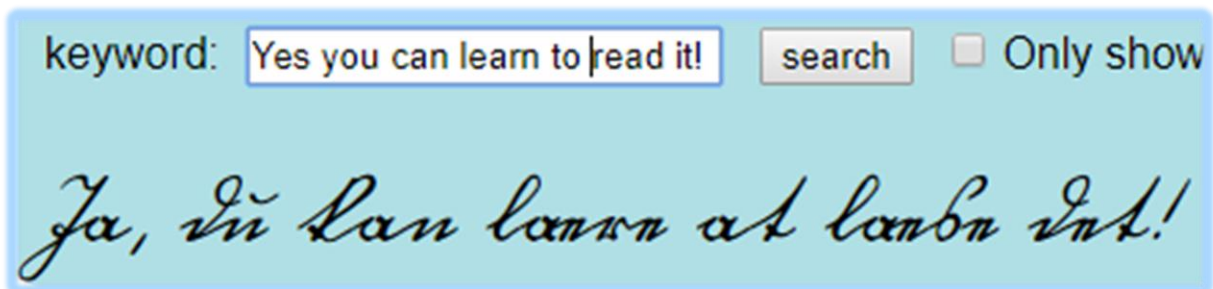
[PDF] **Handwriting Guide: German Gothic - FEEFHS**  
[feefhs.org](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page) guides/German\_Gothic.pdf ▼  
Reading old German records requires a knowledge of basic German genealogical terms and familiarity with German handwriting. Difficulty in reading a.
    - titles such as: *The Handwriting of American Records for a Period of 300 Years* by E. Kay Kirkham Inc.

[PDF]  
**The Handwriting of American Records For a Period of 300 Years by E ...**  
[www.keithbobbitt.com/.../am%20handwriting/The%20Handwriting%20of%20Americ...](http://www.keithbobbitt.com/.../am%20handwriting/The%20Handwriting%20of%20Americ...) ▼  
E. KAY KIRKHAM . [The Everton Publishers, Inc.](#) . The Handwriting Of American Records For A
    - etc.!
  - Cyndi’s List – Handwriting <https://www.cyndislist.com/handwriting/>
  - Deciphering Old Handwriting - by Sabina J. Murray  
<http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/oldhand.html>
    - Proper Names <http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/x-prop.html>
    - Places <http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/x-pob.html>
    - Occupations <http://amberskyline.com/treasuremaps/x-occu.html>
  - *A deed indeed Posted on August 5, 2015 by Judy G. Russell*  
<https://www.legalgenealogist.com/2015/08/05/a-deed-indeed-2/>
  - Difficulties Reading German Script? (FamilySearch Blog)  
<https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/difficulties-reading-german-script/>
  - FamilySearch > Get Help >
    - type “Toulouse” *Guide to Reading Parish Records of Toulouse* by Yvette Longstaff, <https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/517>
    - Glossary of United States Probate Terms  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Glossary\\_of\\_United\\_States\\_Probate\\_Terms](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Glossary_of_United_States_Probate_Terms)
- Quick Guidance
  - Tips for Reading Handwriting (Genealogy.com)  
<https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/00000010.html>
  - Deciphering Old Handwriting (Geni) <https://www.geni.com/blog/deciphering-old-handwriting-315811.html>

- 5 Tips for Deciphering Old Handwriting! (Legacy News) [https://news.legacyfamilytree.com/legacy\\_news/2015/09/deciphering-old-handwriting.html](https://news.legacyfamilytree.com/legacy_news/2015/09/deciphering-old-handwriting.html)
- Typing Diacritics (funny marks over and near letters for different languages)
  - Washington State University <https://slcr.wsu.edu/help-pages/microsoft-keyboards-standard-english-us-101/>
  - Keyboard shortcuts for International characters <https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Keyboard-shortcuts-for-international-characters-108fa0c1-fb8e-4aae-9db1-d60407d13c35?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US>
  - Keynote Support <https://www.keynotesupport.com/websites/special-characters-international-letters.shtml>
- Tutorials, Research Guidance, PDFs, etc.
  - BYU's Script Tutorials (English, German, Dutch, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese) <https://script.byu.edu/Pages/home.aspx>
  - Gothic alphabets (PDF) <https://www.sa.dk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Gotiske-alfabeter.pdf>
  - Palaeography – Interactive tutorial [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/tutorial/default.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/tutorial/default.htm) from The National Archives (TNA) of the United Kingdom [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)
    - Beginners' Latin <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/>
  - Rediscovering Rycote: the history of a lost Tudor mansion – Palaeography tutorial & exercises <http://rycote.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/Palaeography-Guide-abbreviations>
  - University of Nottingham: Manuscripts and Special Collection. Introduction to Reading and Understanding Medieval Documents <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/researchguidance/medievaldocuments/introduction.aspx>
  - University of Cambridge English Handwriting 1500-1700 – an online course <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/index.html>
    - Sample Transcriptions <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/samples.html>
  - Hebrew Alphabet [https://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit\\_One/Aleph-Bet/aleph-bet.html](https://hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/aleph-bet.html)
  - Gothic Alphabet examples (Swedish) [https://s3.amazonaws.com/ps-services-us-east-1-914248642252/s3/research-wiki-elasticsearch-prod-s3bucket/images/9/94/Swedish\\_Alphabet\\_Examples.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/ps-services-us-east-1-914248642252/s3/research-wiki-elasticsearch-prod-s3bucket/images/9/94/Swedish_Alphabet_Examples.pdf)
    - Type to see it written [www.tydatext.se](http://www.tydatext.se) (Use Chrome to translate the page.)

Open the reading help in a new window.

- <http://www.tydatext.se/tyskstil/>



Åsa Petersson. *Tyda text: Hjälper släktforskare att tyda svårläst text.*  
<http://www.tydatext.se/tyskstil/> : accessed 6 November 2018.