Lettering with Personality

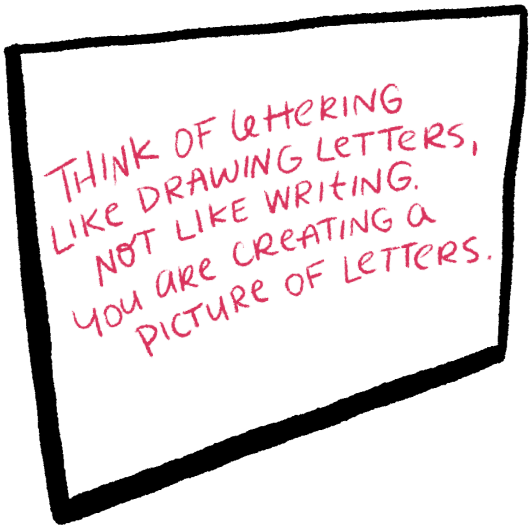
What is Lettering?

Lettering is the art of drawing words. Stemming from the days of illuminated manuscripts, lettering has seen several resurgences throughout history, most recently in the past ten or so years as people began to crave a hand-made style and the clean Swiss-style was phased out.

These days, it seems like you can throw a stone in any direction and you will see hand lettering somewhere. From packaging, to editorial work, to billboards, the list goes on and there is no limit to what can be made. From tactile, painted letters on windows and buildings, to store signage, to digital advertisements, there's a spot for everything in the lettering world.

Since this workshop focuses on how to add personality into your work, I'm going to just briefly touch on the basics and then dive into how to really push your style.

THE ART OF DRAWING WORDS, LETTERS, and PHRASES



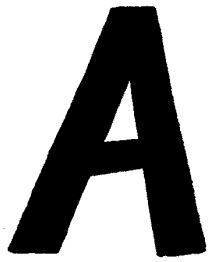
You can download these pages for your own use at bit.ly/ucdalettering

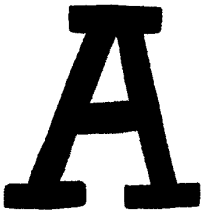
Styles

A few of the basic letteringa and typography styles you will encounter, and ones you can use as the base of all lettering styles, or even just start your lettering journey with are **serif**, **sans-serif**, **slab-serif**, and **script** lettering.

Serif: A serif is a stroke added to the beginning or end of one of the main strokes of a letter, so in an A, the top and bottom of the strokes. This style is generally seen in typefaces like Times New Roman, and is used when a designer is trying to convey a sense of timelessness.

Sans-serif: Literally meaning "without serif", a sans-serif letter is just that, a letter that lacks a stroke at the ends of the main strokes on a letter. These are seen in typefaces such as Arial, Helvetica, or everyone's overused favorite, Gotham. Sans-serifs are great because they are easy to read and quick to create when lettering a word.





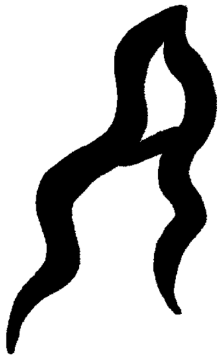
Slab-Serif: A slab serif is a serif letter where the serif stroke is the same width as the stems or main strokes of the letter. This style is often seen in vintage circus posters.

Script: Scripts are used in situations where elegance is necessary. Scipts are also created to mimic cursive handwriting. A quick search on Creative Market shows an abundance of this style.

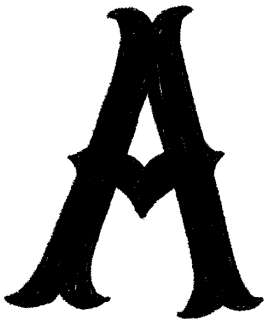
Other Styles

Some additional styles, though these barely scratch the surface on how many different lettering styles exist!

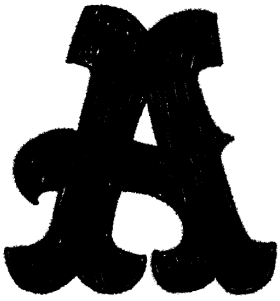
WOOD TYPE



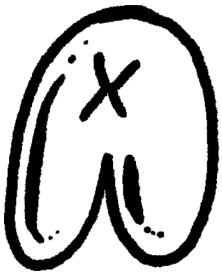
HORROR



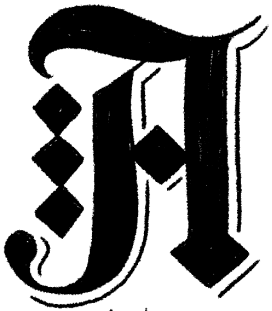
CIRCUS



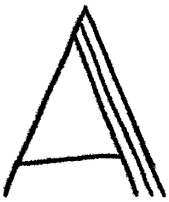
TUSCAN



BUBBLE

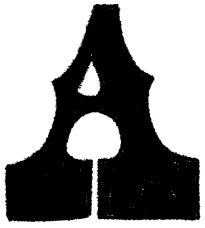


BLACKLETTER



ART DECO

SIGN PAINTER



SPURRED

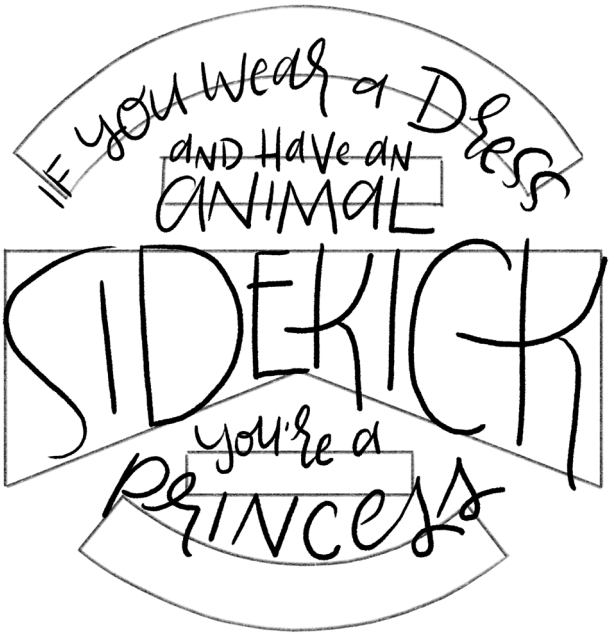
THUMBNAILING

When starting to build a composition, I like to start out with what I call the **skeleton**: the base letters with no embellishments or style. I just want to get a feel for the phrase I am lettering and work on putting the pieces together like a puzzle. Often I start without grids, and try to see what I can come up with first, but if I find myself getting really stuck, I will start out drawing a rough grid to get myself going.

THUMBNAILING WITH GRIDS!

Alternatively, you can thumbnail using **grids** that you lay out prior to drawing your letters and fill in your phrase after. ***Stefan Kunz*** offers a lettering grid brush pack that is very useful for this sort of thing, especially if you are just starting out ***(You can purchase it at www.typoxphoto.com/shop)***. You can also make your own grids, but keep in mind hierarchy and weight when building it out. The heavier it is on top, the more you will want to balance it at the bottom. Grids give a sense of structure to your overall piece.

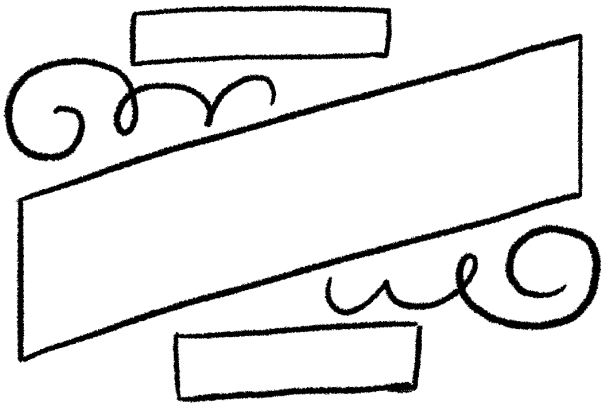
Here you can see how I started out with a grid (from Stefan Kunz's grid brush pack) and began just getting my phrase in there. As I continued, I redrew the lettering about three or four times total, drawing over my previous layout and making adjustments to how the lettering fit (keep in mind, this was done digitally which makes working over the top of previous sketches much easier), the hierarchy of the words, and which letters would be uppercase and which would be lowercase because I like to mix them together. Once I got the layout set, I started to outline my letters and add in the detailing, ultimately reaching the last image before I inked it up in Photoshop.

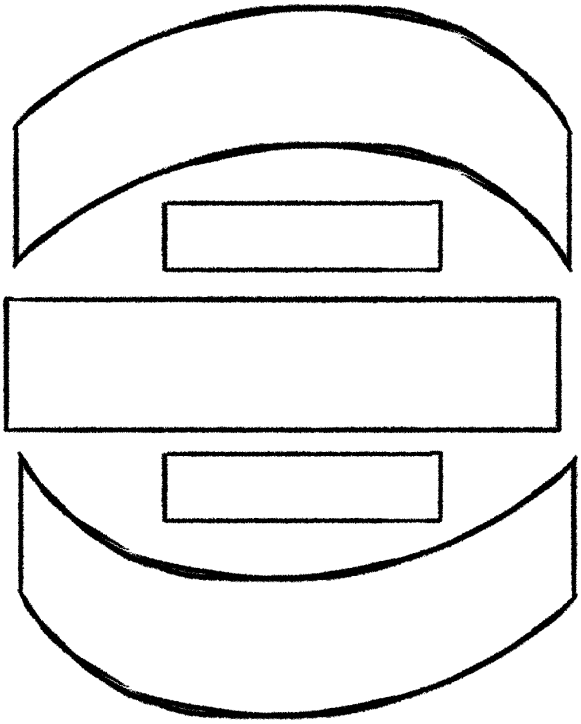


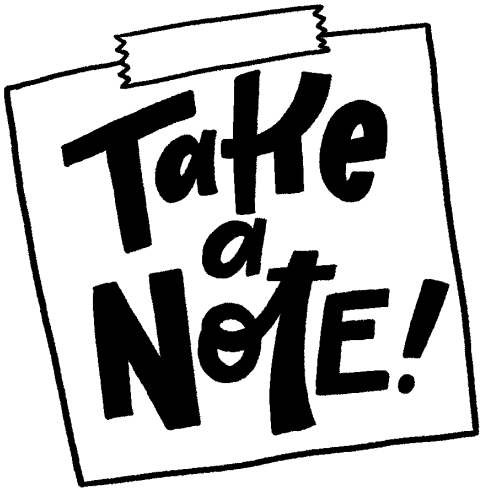
Let's talk Layouts!

If you're just starting out and feel intimidated by figuring out your layouts, start by looking at your vintage references and see what patterns you notice in their layouts. **Blocking in your shapes** is a great way to begin, and from there you can fill in your phrase, placing emphasis on what you want the viewer to focus on.

Here are a few layout grids to get you started with some additional ones on the next page.



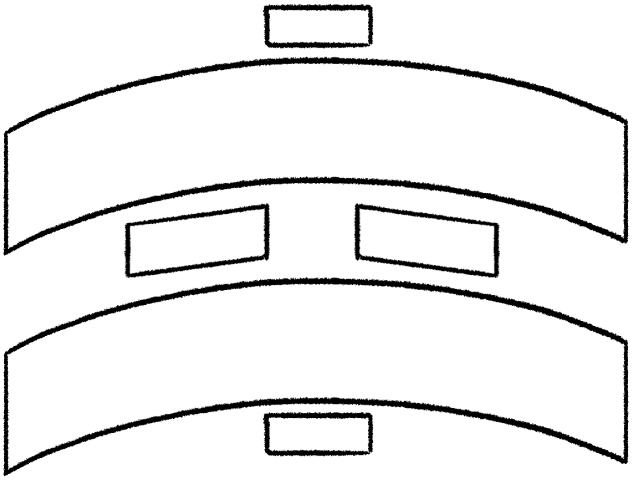


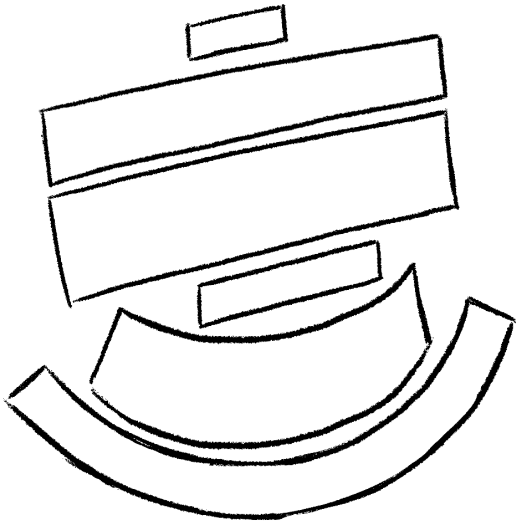


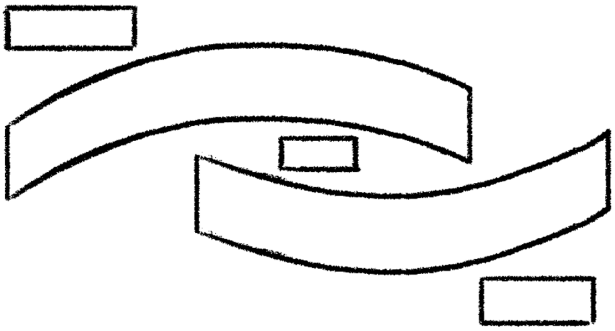
Determining what words are EMPHASIZED

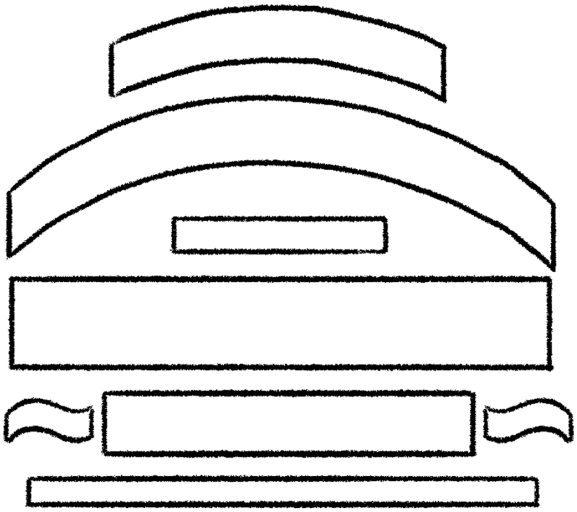
When working with **hierarchy** *(highlighting the important words)*, the easiest thing to do is write out your phrase, and underline which words you want to be larger. The best way to choose is to say the phrase to yourself and see what feels right to you. Don't highlight words like "the", "of", "and", "of" or other little connector words.

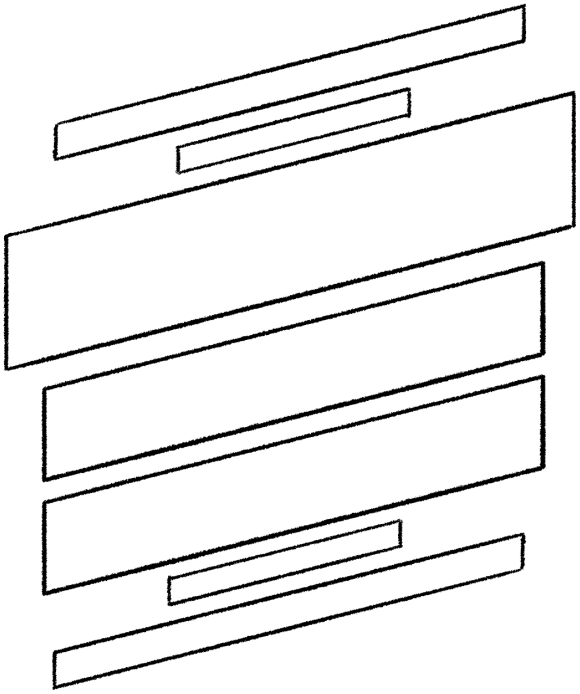
THE RAIN IN SPAIN LIES MAINLY ON THE PLAIN

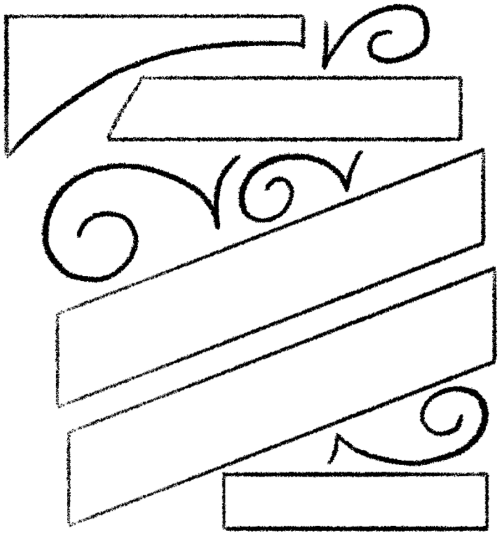












Exercise: Create Your Own Grids

Focus: Using the grids as a jumping off point from the previous page, draw out a few grids you can use yourself.

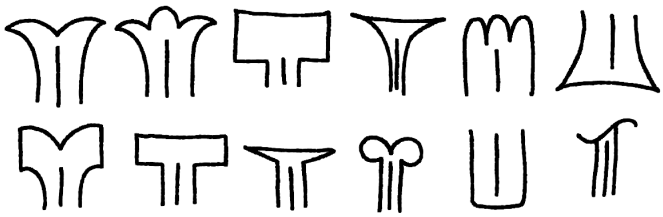
adding flair

Once you have your layout set up and your **skeleton** done, you can add some style and flair to your lettering. For me, this is where the personality of the lettering really comes into play. When drawing my letters, I will draw the outline, ideally in as few strokes as possible, so that I don't focus on the letter being perfect and instead let it find its own voice. I also use this time to continue to play with the layout and adjust the lettering to fit in the shapes and how it interacts with the other letters and words.

Using elements such as **shadows**, **drop lines**, **inlays**, and **caps**, you can add **dimension** to your lettering and take it from "oh that's pretty" to "WOW!".

Caps

The tops and bottoms of letters.

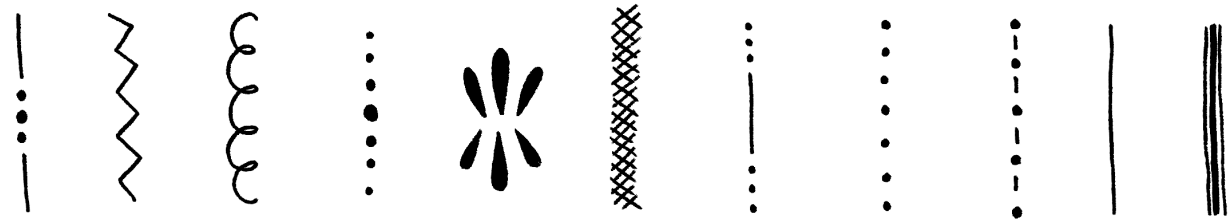


droplines & shadows

Droplines and shadows are easy ways to add dimension to your lettering. Added on either the right, left, bottom, or tops of lettering. Note: if using shadows, keep shadow direction consistent.

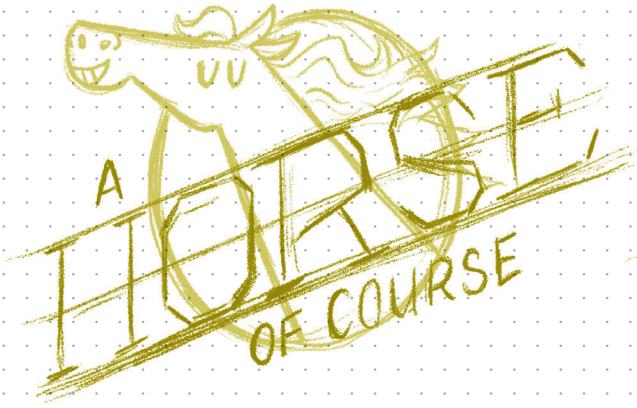
inlays

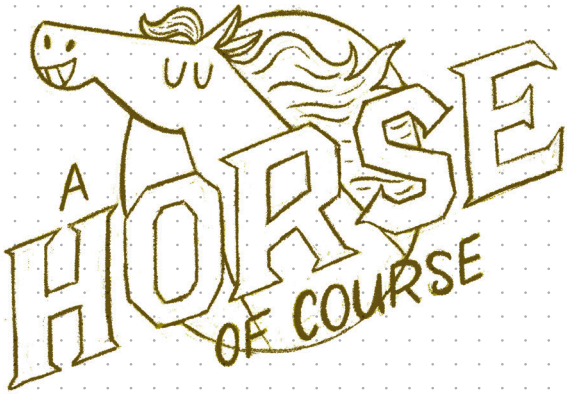
Decoration for the inside of the letters. Not necessary, but used in the right place can enhance lettering.



Lettering Exercise: A Horse of Course

Focus: Mixing circus poster style lettering and illustration.





Lettering Exercise: Night At Moonlight Manor

Focus: Add movement to lettering composition beginning in thumbnail stage.

about the instructor

SHAUNA LYNN PANCZYSZYN (PAN-CHEZ-EN)
I am a hand lettering artist and illustrator in Orlando, Florida, where I work out of my studio with my puppy, Teddy, the Director of Cute (for which he does a very heckin' good job). I have been working professionally since 2010 and have had the pleasure of working with clients such as Samsung, Publix, Adobe, Seventeen Magazine, Microsoft, and many many others. I am also one of the authors of Creative Lettering & Beyond from Walter Foster Publishing.

I am most active on Twitter and Instagram (@shaunaparmesan), as well as on my main side project, We Need to Talk.

You can see more of my work at shaunalynn.com, and email me at shauna@shaunalynn.com for work inquiries.

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Mister Teddy Bear, the Director of Cute