

Your Handwriting, Your Self

By Annette Poizner, Ed.D., RSW



One of my favorite quotes comes from Swiss graphologist Max Pulver. He wrote, "The feeling for and love of handwriting are spontaneous happenings. At a precise moment of our life, their written form falls suddenly under the light of our consciousness." Every graphologist has had just such a moment. Perhaps I facilitated such a moment for a number of faculty members at the University of Toronto, who gathered last September to evaluate my doctoral research investigating graphology, or handwriting analysis, as a therapeutic tool used within psychotherapy.

At a doctoral examination, known as the "oral defense," the faculty prepare thought-provoking questions about the research. One of the questions I was asked intrigued me. "How could graphology be used by laypeople who wanted to derive self-insight without actually training to become a graphologist?" An intriguing idea...Could simple principles be extracted from graphological theory and applied by individuals to their own handwriting? The answer, most definitely, was yes. Here, I will address a few ideas about signatures. Your signature is emblematic of you and each time you pen it in your characteristic style you reinforce certain messages about yourself, to yourself. You might as well become aware of the messages you are reiterating each time you sign your name.

Graphologists see a few common problems when assessing signatures. Many people have a 't' in their first or last name and cross that 't' with such gusto that they inadvertently slash out a part of their name. For graphologists, this graphic behavior is an act of self-negation. Your name is your representative on the page. Slashing out the words on the page that represent you denotes a trend toward self-criticism and even a degree of anger and irritability that is bound to result if you are prone to giving yourself a hard time about mistakes or foibles. People often ask whether changing handwriting is a path to personality change. Relative to the signature, the answer is "Yes." If you have been crossing out your name each time you sign a cheque, stopping that bad habit will be a first step toward change.

On a different front, some people have adopted a signature that is a highly impressionistic, quite illegible scribble. They justify this type of signature by insisting that it would be hard for anyone to forge. In fact, the opposite is true. Anyone can copy a tangled swirl of loops and lines and it is harder to detect the forgery when there are no characters to assess. Letters provide definition and so make forgery more difficult. On a psychological level, rendering the self so illegibly shows a reluctance to be known by others in a personal sense and can indicate someone who hides under a persona or otherwise throws up a smokescreen to keep others distant. Such a person is, on some level, secretive, perhaps hiding out of a sense of inadequacy. When people have signatures that are a mess of swirls and lines, I encourage them to work on a new signature that is legible and has more substance and definition. Doing so gives a more positive message to the self, the message being, "I am who I am and I'm willing to commit myself to being true to myself."

What are the best features to have in a signature, you might ask? Simplicity, balance and tastefulness are good starters. Excessive ornamentation is showy and reveals a need to impress. The down to earth writer writes clearly, showing an earnest intent to communicate and express. Too much narrowness in the signature betrays tension and a tendency to repress feelings. Too much expansion, meaning a signature that is too large and loopy, may denote a need for attention and potential problems with self-discipline.

In signatures, as with all other areas of life, moderation is the key.

Learn more about graphology on Thursday, July 8 at 8:00 PM when psychotherapist Annette Poizner demonstrates interesting principles that guide the interpretation of handwriting in her illustrated presentation, "Handwriting and Personality," at Israel's Judaica Centre, 870 Eglinton Avenue West. The cost is \$10.

Annette Poizner, Ed.D., is a Registered Social Worker in private practice who offers individual, couples and family therapy, as well as executive coaching. She is a certified graphologist, an Ericksonian therapist trained in clinical hypnosis and a Director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of Toronto. Contact Annette at: www.annettepoizner.com or (416) 280-6442. Annette is also the Chair of the Jewish Health Alliance, a professional network for health-care providers which explores the intersection between Jewish thought and the healing arts at lectures and workshops. Visit: www.jewishhealthalliance.com or call (416) 208-0610 for information about upcoming events.



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