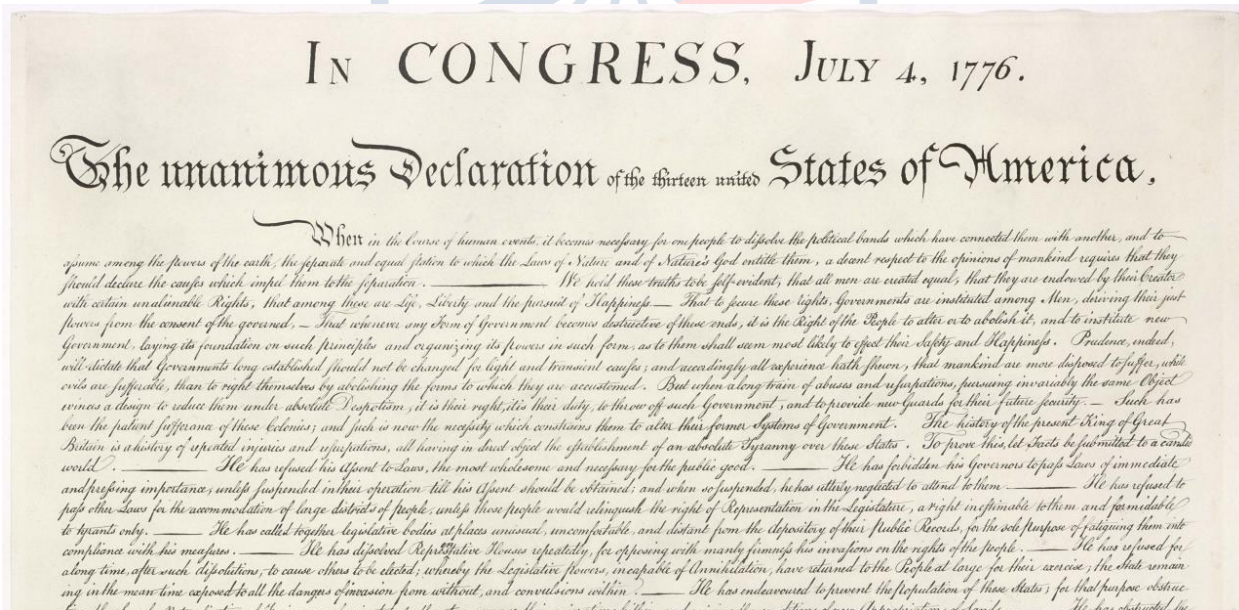


Introduction to Penmanship During the Revolutionary War Era

The Importance of Handwriting in the 18th Century

In the 18th century, writing by hand was more than just a practical skill. It became a symbol of status. Penmanship schools emerged during this time to train future expert scribes. The elegance and refinement of one's handwriting were highly valued.

Copying important historical documents, like the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, was a crucial task in the early United States. Professional scribes like Timothy Matlack and Jacob Shallus completed this work. In the amateur world, people in different professions and social classes developed their own distinct handwriting styles. Gender-specific flourishes also emerged, requiring both men and women to adopt their own unique handwriting styles.



[Link to the full text of the Declaration of Independence](#)

Styles of Writing

Reading and writing were taught to children at different ages and as separate skills. Children usually learn to read around 4 to 7, while writing begins to be introduced around ages 9 and 12. This allowed the children to gain the motor skills required for the complex quill pen that would be used.

There were different styles of script or calligraphy taught. They included:

1. Roundhand

The rounded, flowing letterforms of the roundhand are its defining feature. A balanced appearance and fluid, continuous strokes are highlighted in the cursive style. There are several situations when roundhand has been used, including formal invitations, certificates, and historical documents. It frequently conjures up images of a formal, conventional writing style. Simpler forms are employed for daily handwriting, while more intricate structures are utilized for decorative purposes. The complexity of the script can vary.

2. Quick Running Hand

A cursive writing style known as "Quick Running Hand" is defined by its quickness and effectiveness. It was created with practical applications in mind, primarily for usage in commercial and administrative documents. The letters in the script are joined and have simplified, frequently truncated versions. Because of its speed and legibility, it is well-suited for tasks that need a quick and effective writing style, like record-keeping and correspondence.

The writing was done using a quill pen made from bird feathers, and the ink used was often imported.

Penmanship Exercises

Gentlemen, merchants, and clerks especially sought to develop their penmanship skills to make it look seemingly effortless. Penmanship and acquiring the skill was looked highly upon by many, including political philosophers like [John Locke](#), who even wrote about it in his book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*.

Penmanship books had illustrations and engravings for learners to observe. Handwriting manuals would also teach basic lessons of arithmetic, grammar, math, etc. Each of these manuals is written to serve a specific purpose based on the life path of the learner most of the time. Some of these manuals even taught those how to write and mail a letter.

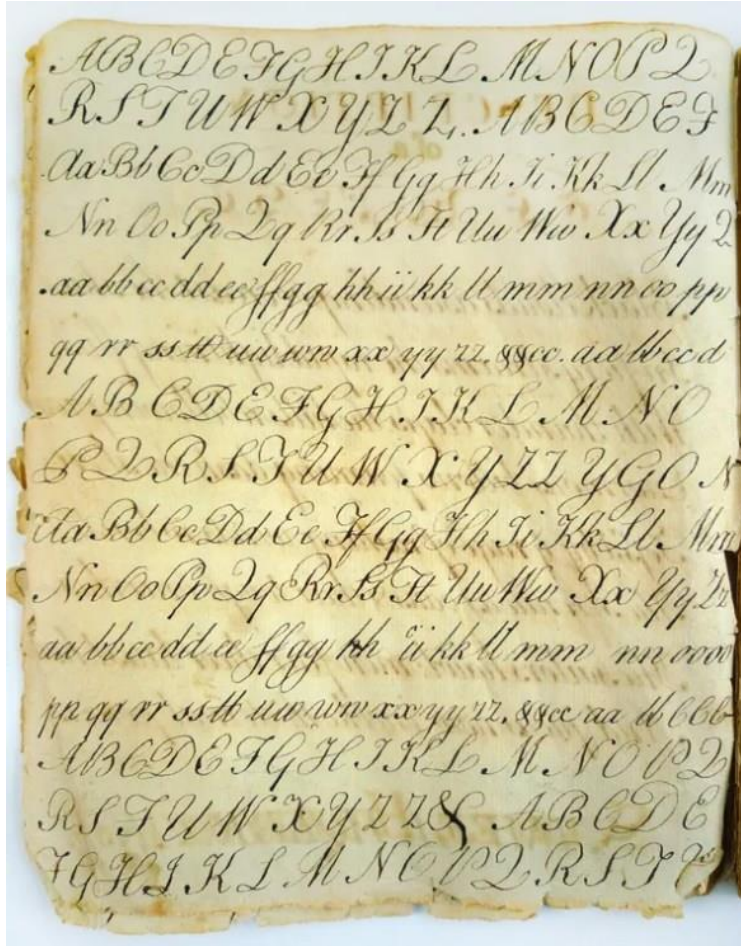
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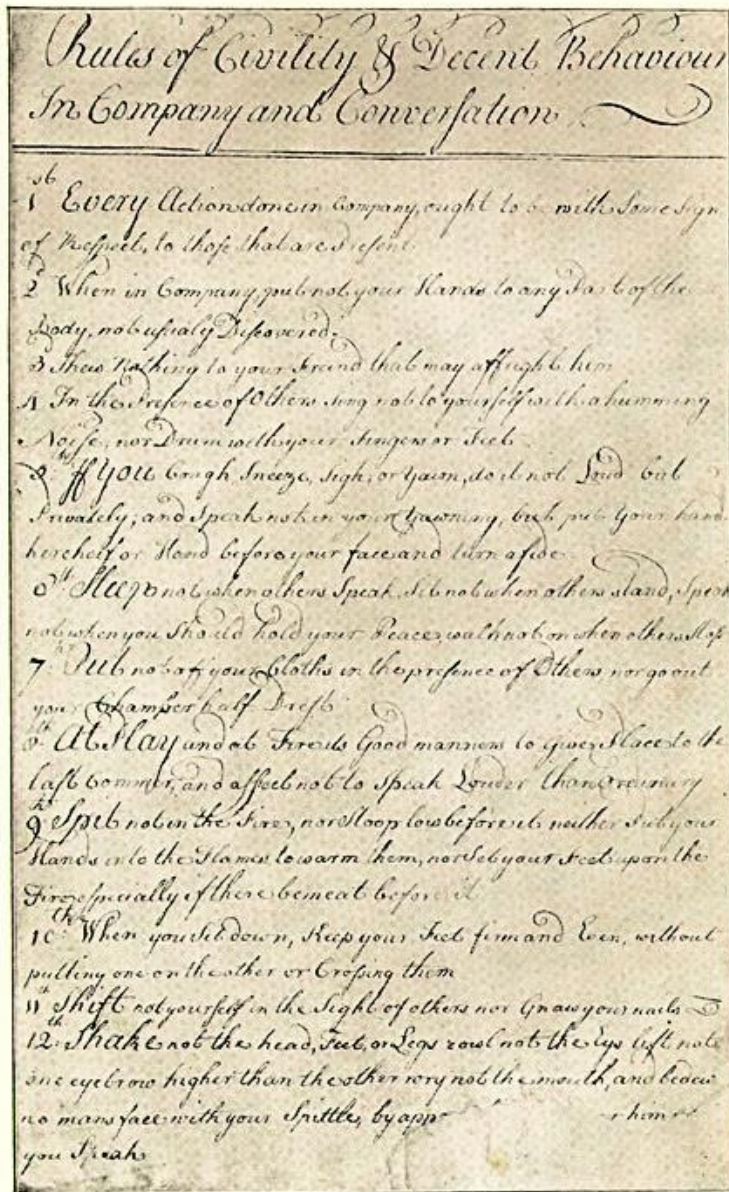


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Source: [Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University](#)

Books on etiquette, such as *The Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation*, famously copied by George Washington, served as more than guides on polite behavior. They were valuable tools for penmanship practice. Here is an excerpt:

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[Link to the full text of "The Rules of Civility"](#)

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