

NATIONAL DIPLOMA *in Calligraphy*

Module A



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Of all the questions about the National Diploma, Module A seems to raise the most number. We have tried to address the queries in the many reports that have been written over the years, and also at workshops and on Ladder of Progress courses, but there still seems to be some confusion. This leaflet is to try to address some of these.

*****Please relate comments and suggestions here to the National Diploma in Calligraphy Handbook.**

Historical Study

Number of words

We do not count words! In fact, the number of words, put in as a guide in the latest handbook, was included only because of questions raised from the previous guides as to how many words were expected. Please note that at each level it says 'in about ...of your own words'. It is not prescriptive. If you are skilled at précis and can include all the information you need in fewer words, then all well and good. If you need more words, then take them. We do notice if this module looks a little thin, and we do always read the entire submission, regardless of the number of words given as a guide at each level.

Foundation

For the Historical Study of Letter-forms at this level you should include photocopies, starting from Roman Capitals, of the major writing styles and leading right up to the present day. Calligraphy did not end with William Morris, nor Edward Johnston, there has been wonderful calligraphy done since then, which cannot be missed out. Think of the many changes there have been to letter-forms in the last 100 years, and you will realise that a few sentences will not cover this time period sufficiently. Label the illustrations. Make sure they are neatly trimmed and pasted in straight (it does matter – some of your marks are for presentation). Essentially, at this level, we are looking for an account of the changes in letter-forms of the major writing styles. (May I also add as a point of clarity that Alcuin did not invent Caroline Minuscule. He, and others, used it in the great bibles produced at Tours, but it was not his invention! Scripts evolve.)

Intermediate

At Intermediate level more than a repetition of an account of the changes in historical writing styles is required. You are asked to give a critical

assessment linking the work of contemporary scribes with historical lettering styles. There are examples of artworks from modern scribes for just about every major historical writing style which can be used. The best entries here have used photocopies of modern calligraphy and put them beside an historical example. Then an assessment is made of how letter-forms have been changed, how the x-height may have been tweaked, how letters may be narrower, slanting, modern forms of some letters used, and so on. Each writing style and example should conclude with whether you think it has been successful or not in each case.

Advanced

At Advanced level, more is expected again. This time there are two aspects of study here, one involves an historical scribe, and the other a contemporary letterer. For the former, research into the manuscripts they produced or are associated with, writing style(s), any decoration they may have done, the time at which they were working, their patrons, other manuscripts of the period, and so on, would all be relevant.

The last section in this module asks for personal observations and views on the work of a contemporary lettering practitioner. This is usually a calligrapher but does not have to be, so letter cutters, type designers, those who cut letters into wood and on glass – all of these would be interesting to the assessors. Here photocopies of work, details of training, who the practitioner worked with, major commissions, writing/lettering styles, etc could be included, but remember it is your personal views and observations, not simply an account.

Historical Letter Analysis

This is no doubt something carried out in most good calligraphy classes, and it is hoped that by studying the letter-forms in detail, the candidate's letter-forms will be improved.

Foundation

Analysis is expected only for minuscule letters and not for majuscules, so no Roman Capital analysis or Italic Majuscules needs to be included here. People vary in their approach on this, but the most successful have been to have an enlargement of Foundational Hand (English Caroline Minuscule/ Round Hand) or Italic – whichever is the chosen basic hand.

Then using the seven points of Johnston's letter analysis: pen nib angle, x-height (plus heights of ascenders and descenders), letter *o* shape, serifs, slant, speed and stroke sequence, apply these to the historical example, and record observations in writing as well as annotating manuscripts. Those studies which have gained the most marks have then written out each letter copied from a photocopy enlargement, and written the letter in a more modern form, if appropriate.

Intermediate

At this level analysis of at least the three writing styles applied in the other modules is expected, (minuscules only, though including Uncials, if used). Again the best entries have used the analysis as detailed at Foundation level.

Advanced

Obviously a detailed analysis, as above, of the writing style of the scribe under study is expected. Again, the most successful entries have then looked at the major writing styles and analysed about 6–8 of these too.

In addition to this, notes of historical materials and ways of working is specified. This will include knowledge of tools and materials as well as ways of working on illuminating with gold leaf on gesso, shell gold, historical pigments and egg tempera painting, skin (vellum and parchment) and quills, papers and so on with copious examples of the candidate's own studies.

Please also note: *minuscule* is *minus* – less than - majuscules. If you remember that some minuscules are certainly less than majuscules but not all are *mini*, hopefully your spelling will then always be correct!



****The Guide for Tutors for the National Diploma, in which there is a book list that should be helpful, is available from CLAS Sales.**