Doodling, Hand Lettering and Stamps
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I think it is fair to say that for many of us, part of the appeal of stamping is the ability to create an attractive project even when we feel that our own drawing abilities are lacking. Stamps can free our creativity because they get us past that roadblock. With the intimidation of having to draw something set aside, we can play with color, mediums and design to create something wonderful.

But we can get into a different kind of rut if we limit ourselves to only images created with a stamp. Other image sources we commonly use include preprinted paper, stickers and other purchased embellishments, die-cut and punched shapes, die embossed images, photographs and found ephemera like book pages, advertisements and old calendars.

Notice though, that all of these involve images created by someone else (with the possible exception of photographs.) Maybe it is time to get out all those pens and markers we’ve invested in and try a little drawing to round out our stamped creations. We are after all creative people. We can do this!
If you are really motivated, you might take a class at the local community college and dust off the drawing skills you may not have used since high school art class. But let’s go a little simpler, and instead focus on something all of us have done at one time or another, doodling and hand lettering, and use them with our stamps.

Those creative squiggles and patterns you create while talking on the phone or sitting in a meeting could be just the thing to add some fun liveliness to your next stamped project. And being able to add words to a piece can be very useful to any stamper. Let’s explore!

Next: A page from one of our Sponsors.
RubberHedgehog Rubber Stamps
Animal Rubber Stamps and More

http://RubberHedgehog.Com
This eArticle was inspired by a YouTube video from Rachel Bland. The way Rachel worked was a revelation to me. It is a mixed medium piece using a stamp, hand lettering and doodle drawing. At first the piece looks like a bit of a mess and you aren’t really sure where she is going with it.

At one point early on when I was just starting to like the piece, I became sure she had ruined it. But keep watching. She starts with one stamp on a colorful background and adds doodling and hand lettering in bold black and white inks and then adds more color until she has created a very fun and lively piece.

Even if this isn’t your style, I think you will enjoy watching what she does. Her process is really interesting. It got me thinking about when is the “right time” to stop. When is something done? I would have stopped sooner in the process, but after seeing what she accomplished, I wonder how often I stop “too soon”. Something to think about.
You can of course doodle or hand letter with just about anything that will leave a mark, from pens to crayons to markers to paint. But most often, doodling and hand lettering is done with a pen. People whose focus is doodling, patterns or line art, very often use black sketch pens to create the basic framework. Black ink on white paper creates bold contrasts just as a black stamped image on white paper does. It helps the design pop on the page. But also try an opaque white pen on black or other dark paper or try colored pens. Or you might add color to black ink doodles with white or colored gel pens, markers, watercolors or other art mediums.

While calligraphers often use calligraphy pens with chisel tips, for hand lettering, we are going to use the same fine point black sketch pens we’ll use for doodling.

You will also optionally need a sharp pencil, an eraser and a ruler. You can doodle without these things, but they are handy for setting up guidelines especially when you want to create straight edged doodled borders.

Stamps: Ink Stain - Bartholomew’s Ink, Footprints - Visual Image Printery
Pens for Doodling & Lettering

When choosing a pen for doodling, you want a tip (called a “nib”) that moves smoothly across the paper with a minimum of skipping. You want a fine point bullet nib rather than a soft brush nib and ink that dries quickly so you won’t smudge it as you work. You want a pigment-based ink rather than dye-based so that your lines won’t feather and bleed. If you want to color in your doodles with watercolor or other wet media, you’ll want to be sure that the ink is permanent. (Obviously, if you instead want soft feathered or rough grungy lines, you would use something else. It’s doodling — don’t get too hung up on rules!)

Sakura’s Pigma Micron size 001 pens are often recommended for doodle art, but many people purchase packs of Micron pens with a variety of nib sizes. A very fine nib can be handy for adding pattern and detail in tiny areas, while a thicker nib lets you color in larger areas more quickly and create heavier lines when needed. Sakura offers Zentangle Pen Sets intended for doodling as well as their Micron branded pens.

But Sakura isn’t the only company making pens for line art. For example, Copic has sets of Multiliner pens in various colors.
Prismacolor has Premier Illustration Markers and Staedtler has Pigment Liner Sketch pens. If you don’t have a suitable pen, any of these might be pens to consider.

Some professional lettering artists use alcohol ink markers (like bullet tip Sharpie markers) to draw letter shapes, but for our purposes, we are going to use sketch pens.

I already have a ton of markers and pens and you probably do too. If you are going to get into doodling in a really big way (and yes, many people do), then you might want to purchase a set. But if your plan is to add a doodled border to a card or add a few dots, patterns or details somewhere in your piece, I would encourage you to first try the bullet tip pens and fine tip markers you already have and see how you like them.

For this eArticle, I pulled out sketch pens I already had in my stash: a Faber Castell Pitt Artist Pen (199 very fine nib), and old sets of Staedtler Sketch Pens (.05 mm, 0.1 mm, 0.3 mm and .5 mm) and Zig Memory Systems (01 in five colors.) I also used Ranger’s Inkssentials Opaque White pen and Sakura’s Gelly Roll White pen. The pens I already had worked fine for my purposes.

**Tip:** Be careful with the finest pen nibs. One of my really fine sketch pen nibs was damaged (the tip bent) when I used a too heavy hand a while back. Pens should skim the paper surface and not be pushed deeply into it. If that is what you have to do to get a mark, then consider using a different pen or different paper.

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If all you are doing on your piece is doodling or lettering, then you can choose paper based on what works well with the pen(s) you are using and other art mediums you plan to use for added color. But here we are talking about stamped projects that include doodling and some hand lettering, so a good stamping surface needs to be part of the consideration. I encourage you to start with your favorite stamping paper.

Lately, I’ve been reaching for a pad of “Canson Watercolor Cold Press 140 lb paper” when I stamp. I like the way stamps work on it and it takes water-based mediums and colored pencils well. It’s not the smoothest paper for pen line art, dragging on the pen a bit when you draw on it, but it works.

For this article I also pulled out a pad of “Canson Pro Layout Marker paper” (18 lb Smooth) that worked beautifully with sketch pens. It’s thin paper and so would need to be layered to create a card, but the pens just glide across the paper.

Play around with stamping paper you already have in your stash to see how it works for your added doodling or lettering elements.
Stamps for Doodling & Lettering

When combining doodling and stamping, pay attention to the style and tone of both. For example, large funky doodled details might not work well with a very detailed photo realistic image or with an image that has a very elegant feel. It instead might be perfect for solid stylized images, some outline images or quirky, comedic or cartoony images.

On the other hand, stamp images with an elegant look might work with graceful hand drawn swirls and swashes. That detailed photo image might work with more subtle patterned doodling.

Solid stamps and outline stamps can provide you with a lot of possibilities for adding doodling. You might for example add doodling inside solid or outline stamp images. Or you might add lines or dots or other patterns around the edges of stamped images. This can work especially well with shapes.

Let’s start with doodling. It is not intimidating. We’ve done it since we were very little, except then we called it drawing and our parents hung it up on the refrigerator as great art.

These days, it is something we do in the margins. It’s not hard. The only real difference here is that we are going to incorporate it into our stamp art and instead of the ball point pen we doodle with in a meeting or that crayon we used as a child, we are going to use quality sketch pens and paper.

Even if you don’t see yourself as great at drawing, you may surprise yourself. A doodled border or some simple doodled designs in the background may be the finishing touch on your next card!
Doodling & Stamped Images

Combining stamp images and doodling can be a lot of fun and creatively satisfying. Solid stamps, outline stamps or other stamps that include open areas can be good candidates for doodling.

Simply stamp your image as usual. Make sure the stamp ink is dry. Then use a sketch pen to add details and patterns either over the solid areas or within open areas of the image. Try this with the more typical black sketch pen or with colored pens if that fits the image. I stamped this palm tree silhouette in a light green ink so that the black doodling on top would show up well. (The red balls are meant to be hanging ornaments.)

If you are unsure of what you want to do inside a particular stamped image, stamp it first on scrap paper and play around with patterns inside, over or around the image until you come up with something you like.

You can also doodle around the edges of a stamp. This swash style heart image from Posh Impressions is one of my favorite stamps because it is so versatile. I’ve used for probably fifteen years as a central image that I often surround with a border of lines, dots and lettering. This lets me use the image as a birthday image or as a Valentines image or a “thinking of you” image, all depending on the words that I use around the heart.

Here I’ve penciled in the words first to make sure they will fit. I will erase the pencil once I’ve finished lettering and doodling around the stamp.

You might do something similar with stamped balloons, flowers, text, etc. It’s a very simple approach that works well for a quick card.

Next: Doodle and stamped artwork.
Shona Erlenborn’s Art

Supplies (Stamps: Sparkle N Sprinkle), Cardstock (white glossy, black), Stamping ink (Memento black), Scrap paper or masking film, Alcohol ink markers (Copic Markers: RV02, BV00, V04, BG01, Goo, YGoo, Blender 0), Fine tip marker (black), Paper adhesive.

“Stamp three big flowers on white glossy cardstock in black ink. Mask the flowers to stamp leaves. Color in flowers and leaves with Copic Markers. Draw stems and doodles on the flower petals with a fine tipped black marker. Stamp saying in black. Layer to black cardstock and then to white glossy.”

Finished Size: 5 ½” x 4 ¼”
Supplies: Stamp (Sparkle N Sprinkle). Outline sticker (Elizabeth Crafts), Cardstock (white glossy, black), Fine tipped markers (Le Pen: various colors), Dimensional adhesive, Ink (VersaMark), Embossing powder (Sparkle N Sprinkle: Belgium Cream), White pen (Uni-ball), Glue pen, Glitter (Sparkle N Sprinkle: Sparkling Snow.

"Place framed, black outline sticker on white glossy cardstock. Fill in the stems, leaves and petals with different doodle patterns with different colored fine tipped markers. Repeat with stem outline sticker. Fussy cut both."

"Place a piece of black card over to the right of card front, layered to a black card base. Attach the stem sticker so it continues from the framed sticker. Attach framed sticker to card base and the stem one over the black piece with dimensional adhesive."

"Stamp saying in VersaMark ink and heat emboss with cream powder. Draw little flowers with white pen. Use a glue pen to go over center of flowers and apply glitter."

Finished Size: 4 ¼” x 5 ½”. 
Nancie Waterman’s Art

Supplies (Stamp: Palm Tree - Rubber Stamp Plantation, Grass - Unknown), Archival Ink (Ranger: Sap Green, Pale Ochre), Canson Pro Layout Marker paper, Cardstock (green), Sketch pens (Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pen, Zig Memories System Millennium set, Paper adhesive (Xyron)).

“Stamp palm trees in light green ink on white marker paper. Doodle on tree trunk and add details to palm fronds. Add doodled hanging ball ornaments. Color in ornaments with red sketch pen. Stamp grass repeatedly under palms in yellow ink.”

“Hand letter greeting in black under stamped scene. I typed the words first in a word processor using a Papyrus font sized to fit the card. Then I put the stamped panel over the printed text on a light box, allowing me to trace the text onto the card.”

“Layer stamped panel on white paper of same size and then onto green card. Use black and red sketch pens to create doodled border.”

Finished Size: 5” x 7”.
Pulling Shapes From the Stamp

People create stamp art in many different ways and don’t always start with choosing the stamp. But if you do choose the stamp first, explore the lines and shapes within the stamp image to see if you might pull them into a doodled border or background to go with the stamp. For example, if the stamp is a flower with leaves, look at the leaf shapes. You might be able to draw a simple border of leaves that echo the leaves in the stamp.

Look for patterns within the image. Are there circles or lines that might work for a border around the stamp? Dots? Squiggles? Here, I used the zigzag patterns found in the wizard’s clothing.

Practice the elements that you are considering using on scrap paper first to see if you like the effect. If you are having trouble getting your pen hand to move the right way to create the line shapes, try stamping the image onto scrap paper and trace your pen over the bit of it you want to use a few times to get the feel of it before committing your pen to the final project.

Next: Doodle and stamped artwork.

Nancie Waterman’s Art

Supplies (Stamp: Wizard, Inkpnd/Footprints - Visual Image Printery), Archival Ink (Ranger: Jet Black), Watercolor paper (140 lb cold press), Colored pencils (Prismacolor), Sketch pens (Faber-Casteell Pitt Artist Pen, Zig Memories System Millennium set), White gel pen (Ranger Inksspirations), Paper adhesive.

“Stamp wizard and inkpad on watercolor paper. Color with colored pencils and fine tip markers.”

“Use a ruler to lightly pencil guidelines for the border. Draw a zigzag doodle inside the lines in black. Add add dots in red and green sketch pen. Color open areas with yellow colored pencil.”

“Hand letter text in open area of card in black, coloring in letters completely. Once dry, partially color inside letters with white gel pen.”

Finished Size: 5 ½” x 8 ½”.

“This is the first version of this eArticle’s cover. In the end, I decided to calm down the doodled border a little by making the border more blue. I also re-did the hand lettering to be a little less bold. Which version do you like better?”
Marilyn Sweeney’s Art

Supplies: Stamps (Michael Strong, A Stamp in the Hand), Inks (Memento: Grape Jelly, Distress: Faded Jeans), Watercolor markers (Tombow: 366 turquoise, 476 dark blue; Marvy: 7 orange, 72 green, Liquid Pearls (Ranger), Opaque white pen, Paper adhesive.

“Stamp image in grape ink. Color with markers as shown. Outline the image with the turquoise and orange markers, and draw a frame with the same colors. Use orange accents along the frame. Accent the frame and sea star with Liquid Pearls.”

“Brayer the front of a scrap of blue cardstock with faded jeans Distress ink. Accent the card with Liquid Pearls and opaque white pen. Glue the main design onto the brayered cardstock and attach all to a white card stamped with the swirls.”

Finished Size: 5” x 7”.
Creating Doodled Borders

One of the easiest ways to use doodling in your stamp art is to doodle a border. It can be a simple understated border of dots or tiny dashes or something much more elaborate, with row upon row of hash marks, circles, zigzags, dots and swirls.

Try it! Use a sketch pen to draw two parallel lines cross a piece of paper. Then start filling it in with repeating patterns. Try it with wavering lines or without the outer lines. Add more horizontal lines and details.

Try creating frames, playing around with your design so that you like the way the patterns meet at the corners. You don’t have to stick with rectangles either. Try circles, ovals, diamonds and free form shapes. You might trace the shape lightly on the paper with a pencil or you might use a shaped die-cut as a card layer with your doodle border hugging the edges.

If you are unsure of yourself, practice doodling borders before you start drawing on your actual piece. These are pages of doodled borders that I did while watching TV one night. Some of them are based on a pair of parallel lines filled in with shapes, dots,
dashes and patterns. Some are simply lines of repeated images. Some are mostly straight lines while others are softer, wiggling lines. I surprised myself and found I liked most of the borders I created; there were only two that really didn’t please me. (If I were doing them on an actual card, I might use a ruler to keep the lines straighter.)

Playing around with different patterns like this while watching TV, talking on the phone, in a meeting or wherever, is a low-stress way to come up with potential border designs for your stamp art. Sometimes when you are feeling under pressure to create something for a particular project, the creative muse gets blocked. Just playing around with shapes and lines can let your creativity run a bit freer. Save your doodles in an art journal or a folder and pull them out when you are stuck for an idea for a stamped project.

Next: Doodle and stamped artwork plus a page from one of our Sponsors.
Marilyn Sweeney’s Art

Supplies: Stamp (Shoe: Limited Edition), Inks (Memento: Grape Jelly; Distress Stains: Dusty Concord, Tumbled Glass, Bundled Sage, Victorian Velvet), Liquid Pearls (Ranger), Foam tape, Spellbinders Nestabilities die, Inkssentials white opaque pen (Ranger), Mini foam dauber, Gel pen (purple), Paper adhesive.

“Die-cut three sizes of the nesting dies on white cardstock. Color each die-cut with Distress Stains. Outline the largest piece with the opaque pen. Use the foam dauber to accent the outer edges of each piece with contrasting stains. Stamp the smallest piece and accent with the Liquid Pearls.”

“Attach the three pieces with foam tape in between each layer. Glue the assembly to a white card and accent the edges with a purple gel pen.”

Finished Size: 5 ½” x 4 ¼”.

Supplies: Stamps (Stamps by Judith, Rubber Tapestry), Cardstock (cream, cream textured), Designer paper, Inks (brown, green, dark pink), Glitter, Glitter glue pen, Paper Distresser tool, Eclipse paper.

“Stamp jar on 3 3/8” x 3 3/4” piece of cream paper in brown ink. Stamp another on Eclipse paper for a mask. Color lightly around inside edges of jar and at bottom of jar with grey marker.”

“Cut out mask and put over jar. Stamp leaves and flowers at top of jar, and some at bottom. Remove mask.”

“Stamp texture stamp in a few places in dark pink ink. Distress all edges with tool, and ink edges in brown. Mount to 5” x 4 1/8” piece of designer paper. Stamp sentiment in brown, trim, mount to designer paper, and attach to card.”

“Draw two 1 1/2” lines at opposing corners with glue pen. Sprinkle glitter on lines, and shake off excess. Dot glue in center of all flowers and sprinkle glitter. Mount to 5 1/4” x 4 1/2” card cut from textured cream cardstock.”

Finished Size: 5 1/4” x 4 1/2”. 
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Creating Doodle Backgrounds

Rather than always reaching for preprinted paper, you might instead use doodling to create a background for your stamped image(s). Try pulling lines and shapes from within a stamped image for repeating background designs.

Or use simple drawn shapes that fit the theme of the card. How about drawing rows of little flower pots for a card with a gardening theme? Doodled bubbles might be great when working with images of fish, water or glasses of Champaign. Rows of tiny drawn stick figures might be fun to use with stamps of childish subjects.

Or just create patterns of dots or lines or squiggles, cross hatching, zigzags. Here I’m just creating a simple dot pattern that could be “wallpaper” behind the vase of flowers. You can place the doodles randomly or measure out placement with a ruler and mark where you want them with light pencil dots. (Erase the pencil after you’ve finished your doodles.) Or you might use large plastic cross stitch canvas or stencils to create placement patterns.
Back in school, how many times did you sit in class encircling something on your paper with a pen, doing it again and again and again, like creating ripples in a pond? Try this outlining using a stamp in the center.

Encircle the image with one or more lines of ink. Try solid lines. Try dashed lines. Try dots. Try squiggles. Try little hearts, flowers or simple leaves. Pull a shape from the stamp and use that. Try different colored ink.

Here I’m encircling the fish using a black sketch pen. I could alternatively have used blue, but I’m thinking I might color between the encircling lines using shades of blue ink.

If you really love to doodle, you might solidly fill an entire background with doodles and mount your stamped images on top.

**Next:** Doodle and stamped artwork.
Shona Erlenborn’s Art

Supplies (Stamps: Sparkle N Sprinkle), Cardstock (white glossy, black, pink), Stamping ink (Memento: Bahamas Blue, Pear Tart, Lilac Posies), Fine tip black marker, Spellbinders Butterflies Circles die /embossing folder, Spellbinders Standard Circles & Mega Ovals dies, Dimensional adhesive.

“Stamp three large butterflies on glossy white cardstock in Bahama Blue, Pear Tart and Lilac Posies. Doodle around the butterfly outlines with a fine tip black marker.”

“Stamp green circle around blue saying. Cut and emboss with butterfly circle die and embossing folder; layer to black die-cut circle. Die-cut stem using oval die and then doodle down the stem. Layer the background to pink cardstock. Add the ‘flower’ with dimensional adhesive.”

Finished Size: 4⅛” x 5½”.
Marilyn Sweeney’s Art

Supplies: Stamp (Feather - Custer's Last Stamp), Inks: Clear embossing ink, Heat tool, Distress Stain (Dusty Concord), Cardstock (glossy white), white opaque pen (Ranger: Inkssentials), Embossing powder (clear), Paper adhesive.

“Stamp the feather image in clear embossing ink onto white glossy cardstock. Apply clear embossing powder and heat the piece.”

“Color the whole surface with Distress Stain. Draw spirals with the opaque pen, being sure to clean the tip occasionally on scrap paper. Mount the image on a purple card.”

Finished Size: 5” x 4 ¼”.
A Note on Doodling Names

These days, thanks in very large part to Rick Roberts and Maria Thomas, the pair behind Zentangle, doodling has gained a place in the craft industry, with line art patterns given names and instruction offered through books, DVDs and classes by certified instructors.

Rick and Maria have trademarked the name of their business, “Zentangle,” to try to keep it from becoming a generic term and have applied for a patent on their teaching method. (Their focus is as much on the process as the results.)

If you Google “doodling”, you will likely come across their “Zentangles” as well as “Zendoodles”, “Line Art Patterns”, “Line Weaving”, “Doodles”, “Zenspirations”, “Pattern Art”, “Creative Doodling” and more, as various people have tried to come up with their own names or more generic names for what is basically doodling or pattern drawing.

I encourage you to explore them all and not get too bogged down in the naming. I’ve tried to include lots of links in this eArticle for you to explore, but new sites pop up all the time and existing sites keep putting up new patterns and new doodled pieces of artwork, so explore and be inspired, whatever it is called!

What you read or see in this eArticle is simply doodling, playing with lines, open spaces and solid fills. I haven’t taken any classes and any line art I’ve done for this eArticle is not based on anyone else’s patterns or approach.

If you really get into it and want to do whole pieces of intricate doodled patterns and/or want to find out what the whole Zen approach to doodling is all about, you may very well want to take classes or purchase instruction books.

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Finding Inspiration for Doodling

Patterns have been used in all kinds of ways throughout history. Keep your eyes open for interesting doodles, patterns, borders and flourishes in art, textiles, needlework, quilting and illustrated manuscripts. The Helpful Art Teacher’s post on *Rhythmic Line Designs and Patterns* is a good place to get you started. She looks at sources of inspiration including, patterns in nature, Native American pottery patterns, graphic design and illustration from Art Nouveau and Op Art.

Google “doodling” or any of the various names for doodle inspired art, and you are sure to find all kinds of inspiration. For example, check out [Joanne Fink’s website](http://www.joannafink.com/) and her Sakura YouTube video, [Zenspirations Borders & Frames](http://youtube.com/zenspirations). Also see the [Zenspirations section](http://www.sakura.com/) of Sakura of America’s website.

[Creative Doodling with Judy West](http://www.creativedoodling.com/) is a site that can inspire your doodling muse. Or Try [Zendoodle on Squidoo](http://www.squidoo.com/Zendoodle). If you are looking for pattern ideas online, try [TanglePatterns.com](http://www.tanglepatterns.com). They’ve got lots! These tend to be presented in squares, but many could be adapted or used as inspiration to create borders, background or smaller patterned areas on stamped cards.
Hand Lettering: Drawing Letters

Another time when having a good pen is handy is when you want to add text to a stamped project. If you have a stamp that says what you need in a style that works, it’s a quick easy way to go. I’ll admit it. I’m a stamps first kind of girl myself. But what if you don’t have the right text stamp? Or what if you want to personalize a project with someone’s name or other details? Alternatives might include using individual stamp letters, sticker letters or printing the text using a computer printer. But a creatively satisfying way to go is hand lettering.

By hand lettering, I’m not actually talking about calligraphy. Calligraphy is more about writing letters beautifully, while lettering is more about drawing letters. Both can range from fairly clumsy amateur attempts to great art. As stampers, most of us are probably looking to create something in between. We want something that looks good and not clunky and that works with the rest of our project, but we don’t necessarily need perfection — and sometimes we actually embrace an imperfect handmade look.
One thing that I am guilty of doing when it comes to hand lettering on a card is simply winging it. I’ll create a card, visualize the text I want, pull out a pen and start writing or drawing the letters. Invariably, I flub a line or get the spacing wrong so that the letters start out nicely spaced but wind up squeezed together as I begin to run out of space! Help!

For those of us without drafting skills, there are things we can do to avoid ugly lettering syndrome. First, practice lettering on lined paper to get a feel for the space you’ll need. Then when you are ready to use it on a stamped project, use a ruler to lightly create guidelines for the text to sit on so that your letters wind up level. The guidelines could be straight and drawn with the add of a ruler or straight edge or they could be curved. You will erase the guidelines when you are finished penning in the letters.

When drawing guidelines, remember to allow space for descend-ers (the part of lowercase letters that hangs below the line, like the tail of a y or a g for example) and for any letters you want to draw much taller than the other letters. Usually you don’t want the descendents from one line hitting the tops of the letters below.
When you have the space allotted by the guidelines, lightly sketch your letters in pencil so that you can make corrections as needed. Working with a light hand lets you try a letter shape and retry it again if the first stroke doesn’t please you, lightly sketching in the basic shape. Notice that your hand also moves more smoothly when you are using a lighter touch.

Pay attention to letter spacing. You might be tempted to use graph paper to allot a set amount of space for each individual letter, but usually this is not the best idea. Typically, you want the space between letters and between lines of text to appear to be consistent. I emphasis the word “appear” because different letter shapes can create uneven looking spacing even if you were to use graph paper or a ruler to very carefully space them.

In typography, there is something called “kerning” which refers to adjusting the spacing between letters to create more pleasing looking type. In well designed typefaces, the space between letters varies depending on what those two letters might be. For example, a lowercase “w” is needs more horizontal space than a lowercase “i” or a lowercase “l”.
If you simply put each letter into a box on graph paper, the word “will” is going to look very odd indeed! If you type something on a computer, using a well designed font, this kerning is taken care of for you. You never have to think about it. But if you are lettering something by hand, it is something you need to consider. Consider printing out the word(s) using a computer printer using a font that is similar in style to the letter style you plan to use to help you with letter shape detail and shaping.

When you are happy with the penciled letters’ placement and shape, trace over the letters with your pen using even unhurried strokes. I find strokes that pull towards me are easier to control than strokes that push away. If you’ve got a good pen, you shouldn’t need to grip the pen tightly and bear down on the paper. The pen should glide across the paper. Once the ink is dry, use a soft eraser to remove the pencil lines.

Next: Stamped lettered art and a Sponsor page.
Supplies: Stamps (After Midnight, Stamp A Mania, Posh Impressions), Cardstock (white, black, light blue), Scrap paper or Eclipse Tape, Inks (brown, red, aqua, green), Chalk (blue), Markers (green, brown), Glitter, Glitter glue pen, Paper adhesive.

“Shade a 5” x 5 ½” piece of white cardstock with light blue chalk. Stamp sea horse in brown. Stamp fish and turtle second generation in desired colors.”

“Make masks of shell and starfish; place toward bottom. Stamp ocean bottom in brown over masks. Remove masks; stamp shell and starfish.”

“Freehand-draw greenery and grass bunches. Draw dots and short lines from bottom almost to the top with glue pen and sprinkle glitter. Write sentiment in brown on scrap piece of blue chalked paper. Trim, mount to black, and attach to card. Mount card to black cardstock, and then to blue card.”

Finished size: 5 ½” x 6”.
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Fattening Up Letters

Stick letters are the easiest type of lettering to create. With stick letters, you don’t have to worry about getting the letter thickness right. You simply can focus on the shape of the letters.

But you can fatten up stick letters fairly easily if you like. First draw the stick letters, leaving a little more room between letters to allow room for fattening them. Then outline them in pencil, with the outlines a little to each side of the original stick letters.

When you like the shape of the letters, trace only the outlines with your pen, ignoring the stick letters inside. When you erase the pencil marks, you’ve got nice fat letters that you can fill with color or with doodled patterns.

Learn More: If you want a slightly zany online way to learn to draw letters (or lots of other things), check out Children’s book illustrator, Shoo Rayner’s YouTube videos. If you go to his main ShooRaynerDrawing site and type “Letters” in the search box, you’ll get a variety of choices. Watch him draw letters and then practice your own.

Next: Stamped and hand lettered artwork.
Nancie Waterman’s Art

Supplies (Stamp: Flowers in Jug - Mostly Animals), Archival Ink (Ranger: Jet Black), Canson Watercolor paper 140 lb cold press, Cardstock (purple, purple/blue), Sketch pen (Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pen, Watercolor pencils (Prismacolor), Ruler, Paper adhesive (Xyron).

“Stamp flowers in black ink on watercolor paper. Color in with watercolor pencils.”

“Doodle tiny circles to create a background using a black sketch pen. Use a ruler to judge placement so the pattern is fairly regular, like wallpaper.”

“Hand letter text in black above and under stamped scene. I typed the words first in a word processor using a Caslon Openface BT font sized to fit the card. Then I put the stamped panel over the printed text on a light box, allowing me to trace the text onto the card. Layer finished panel onto purple and then purplish blue card.”

Finished Size: 6 ½” x 6 ½”.
If you are not happy with your own letter drawing skills, you might trace lettering from other sources. Print out letters using the fonts on your home computer and trace them onto your card, using a light box so you can see the letters through the card layer. (The success of this approach can depend on the thickness and opacity of your surface.)

Tracing letters in this way can also be a way to train your hand to become better at creating letters without tracing! Remember when you were first learning to write letters in school and the teacher gave you lined paper and letters to trace? You can do something similar by tracing printed text.

You might also trace letters shapes created from stencils and die-cuts. Or trace stamped letters, arranging them to create new words. (This can be a nice way to add additional words to an otherwise stamped piece of text.)

Next: A page from one of our Sponsors.
OnyxXpressions

BBR = Beautiful Black Rubber unmounted art stamps

EZMount cling cushion

Custom name stamps

Acrylic blocks

Signo Uni-Ball white gel pens

CD Storage Panels

Kromekote 12pt Gloss Cardstock

== Stamp Artist: Bonnie Belk / Image: OA-7701 LotusCollage
Practice lettering and you’ll find yourself getting better at it. Remember in school when you wrote your name over and over again to create the perfect signature? Do something similar by playing around with writing greetings you might commonly use on a card: “Happy Birthday”, “Thinking of You”, etc. If you are including a poem or quote, take the time to write it out on scrap paper before committing it to your final project. A test run is also a good way to make sure of letter and line spacing.

Your computer’s word processor software comes loaded with different fonts (sometimes called “typefaces”) and there are many more to be found online, either free or for purchase. Print out text you want to use or the whole alphabet using a variety of fonts in the approximate size you think you might want to use for card lettering. Trace over their lines to get the feel of their strokes.

Examine letter details to see how they are formed, which parts are thick or thin, letter angle and whether they include the little detail bits (“serifs”) on each letter or not (“sans serif”). Try writing them on lined paper using a pencil to get the hang of the style.
Hand Lettering Inspirations

There are many talented hand lettering artists. I do not presume to call myself one of them, but I can be inspired by them and by looking at their work, a little of what they do can rub off on me. This can work for your too. It is a way to improve your lettering. The trick is to pay attention!

You’ll find interesting lettering everywhere: film and book titles, posters, logos and ads. Some types of art, particularly Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Modernism also include some wonderful lettering that can inspire you.

Take pictures of lettering that you like or do a quick sketch to remind yourself of what you liked about it. Save examples found on the internet to a file or on Pinterest or if you can or print them out to save in a hand lettering idea journal. Don’t slavishly copy what they’ve done. Instead, get ideas and use them to create your own hand lettering designs that say what you want.

Learn More: Hand lettering artist Sean McCab’s learning hand lettering photo tutorial is a helpful starting place. For inspiration, also see Leandro Senna’s Bob Dylan Subterranean Homesick Blues — A Hand Lettering Experience. This fun video shows off hand lettered cards of the lyrics as the song plays. There is also a blog post where you can view photos of each lyric card.

Julie Fei-Fan Balzer’s YouTube video for Sakura on Easy Lettering Techniques shows six letter styles created with a pencil, eraser and Sakura pens and markers. It combines hand lettering with doodles inside the letter shapes.

Also check out Joanne Fink’s Sakura YouTube video, Zenspirations Patterned Monograms. Joanne’s approach is more calligraphic, but also combines hand lettering with doodle patterns.

Next: Doodle and stamped artwork.
Shona Erlenborn's Art

Supplies: Stamps (Sparkle N Sprinkle), Super Adhesive Sheet & Cloud Nine Velvet Glitter (Sparkle N Sprinkle), Cardstock (white, white glossy), Stamping ink (StazOn black, Memento black), Watercolor crayons, Waterbrush, Spellbinders Labels Nine die-cut/embossing folder, Alcohol ink markers (Copic), Dimensional adhesive.

“Apply adhesive sheet to white cardstock, remove backing and apply glitter. Stamp friends text frame in black StazOn ink on top of glitter. Color with watercolor crayons and waterbrush.”

“Cut and emboss panel with labels die and embossing folder. Stamp daisy and flower around the edge of white glossy card base in black Memento ink. Color with Copic Markers. Attach image with dimensional adhesive.”

Finished Size: 4 ¼” x 5 ½”
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New: Quick Tips pdfs

What Are Quick Tips?

To some readers, the best part of VSN's original print issues was the “Quick Tips” section, full of the small tips, “oh wow!” ideas and inspirations that make a stamper’s life easier.

Two Ways to Read Quick Tips:

If you prefer the entire issue, you can purchase print or pdf VSN issues in the VSN Issues section of VSN’s Online Shopping Cart. But if your focus is strictly on Quick Tips rather than the longer articles in the issues and you want to read them online, try a “Quick Tips pdf”.

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Purchasing Quick Tips

Quick Tips pdf files can be purchased individually ($1.25 each) or in a bundle of six ($5.94 which is $0.99 each.) Purchase them in the Quick Tips pdfs section of VSN’s Online Shopping Cart.

Proceeds of Quick Tips sales go toward funding VSN’s website and future eArticles.
Supplies: Stamp (Owl: Stampabilities), Text (computer-generated), Cardstock (white, black, red, gold), Silver/black stripe specialty paper, Inks (watermark), Embossing powder (white), White Gelly Roll pen, Chalk (green), Paper Adhesive.

“Stamp image slightly off-center on black 6” x 4” cardstock in watermark ink. Heat emboss with white embossing powder.”

“Using Gelly Roll pen, draw slightly curved lines in back of owl to resemble three fir trees. Shade in with green chalk.”

“Print sentiment on computer, trim, mount to red cardstock, and attach to card. Mount to gold paper, and then to 6 5/8 x 4 3/4 card cut from specialty paper.”

Finished Size: 6 5/8” x 4 3/4.”
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Username: doodle0313
Password: letters0313

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