TECHNOLOGY

How To Learn Shorthand Writing In English

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795582978229122

Introduction

In a fast-paced world where every second counts, the ability to capture spoken words at lightning speed is a superpower. Whether you are a journalist covering a live press conference, a student trying to keep up with a rapid lecturer, or a professional taking meeting notes, shorthand writing in English can transform the way you work. But where do you start? Learning shorthand may seem daunting, but with the right approach, it is entirely achievable. This article will guide you through the essential steps on **how to learn shorthand writing in English**, covering the major systems, practical techniques, and strategies to build speed and accuracy. By the end, you will have a clear roadmap to master this valuable skill.

What Is Shorthand Writing?

Shorthand is a system of rapid writing that uses symbols, abbreviations, or strokes to represent sounds, words, or phrases. Unlike longhand writing, which spells out every letter, shorthand condenses language into a compact form. The goal is to write as fast as a person speaks—typically around 100 to 150 words per minute. There are several popular shorthand systems for English, each with its own set of rules and symbols. Understanding these systems is the first step in your journey on **how to learn shorthand writing in English** effectively.

Why Learn Shorthand? The Tangible Benefits

Before diving into the how, it helps to understand the why. Shorthand offers numerous advantages that go beyond simple note-taking:

- Increased speed: Shorthand can be three to five times faster than regular writing, allowing you to capture information in real time.
- Improved listening skills: You learn to filter and summarize spoken language instantly, boosting comprehension.
- Enhanced memory: Writing by hand in shorthand reinforces retention compared to typing.
- Professional edge: Skills in stenography or speed writing are valuable in court reporting, journalism, transcription, and executive assistance.
- Discipline: Mastering shorthand requires focus and practice, which builds mental agility.

Knowing these benefits will keep you motivated as you embark on learning **shorthand writing in English**.

Choosing the Right Shorthand System

Not all shorthand is created equal. The system you choose will shape your learning experience. Here are the

three most common English shorthand systems:

Pitman Shorthand

Invented by Sir Isaac Pitman in 1837, this is one of the oldest and most widely used systems. It is phonetic—symbols represent sounds, not letters. Pitman uses thick and thin strokes to indicate voiced and unvoiced consonants, and dots and dashes for vowels. It is precise but requires careful attention to line thickness and shading. If you aim for very high speeds (over 200 wpm), Pitman is a strong choice. However, the learning curve is steeper.

Gregg Shorthand

Developed by John Robert Gregg in 1888, this system is cursive and based on elliptical figures. It is also phonetic, but it avoids the thick/thin distinction by using length and position. Gregg is generally considered easier to learn for beginners because the symbols flow more naturally from the pen. It is popular in the United States and Canada. Many modern self-study materials focus on Gregg shorthand.

Teeline Shorthand

Teeline is a newer system, created in 1968 by James Hill. It is based on the alphabet, not phonetics, and simplifies letters by removing unnecessary strokes. Teeline is widely taught in journalism schools because it is easier to learn and reach reasonable speeds (80–120 wpm) in a shorter time. If you need a practical, quick solution for note-taking, Teeline might be your best bet.

Which should you choose? If you plan to become a professional stenographer or court reporter, Pitman or Gregg provide higher speed ceilings. For everyday use or journalism, Teeline is more accessible. Research each system briefly, pick one, and commit—changing mid-way will only slow you down. This decision is crucial in **how to learn shorthand writing in English** efficiently.

Essential Equipment and Resources

To start learning, you need minimal gear:

- A good pen: A fine-pointed pen that glides smoothly is ideal. For Pitman, a flexible nib might help with shading.
- Notebook: Use a lined or unlined notebook with stiff covers. Many shorthand learners prefer spiral-bound books for easy turning.
- Textbook or online course: Pick one dedicated to your chosen system. Popular options include "Gregg Shorthand Manual Simplified" or "Teeline Gold: The Course Book."
- Dictation resources: Use apps, YouTube videos, or online audio tracks at varying speeds.
- Practice partner or timer: To build speed, you will need timed dictation sessions.

Having the right tools from the start makes **learning shorthand writing in English** a smoother experience.

Step-by-Step Plan to Learn Shorthand

Now let’s break down the actual learning process into actionable steps. Follow this sequence consistently.

1. Master the Basic Symbols and Rules

Begin by memorizing the core symbols of your chosen system. For example, in Gregg shorthand, you learn the consonants first (e.g., k, g, r, l) and the vowels as small circles or hooks. In Pitman, you learn the consonant strokes and the vowel dots. Spend your first week just recognizing and writing these symbols repeatedly. Write them slowly and accurately; do not rush. Use flashcards or write lines in your notebook. Accuracy is more important than speed at this stage.

2. Learn Common Brief Forms and Abbreviations

Every shorthand system has a set of brief forms—short symbols for common words (e.g., "the," "and," "for," "to"). These are the shortcuts that dramatically increase speed. For instance, in Gregg, "the" is simply a tick mark. In Teeline, "and" is "n". Memorize 20–30 brief forms each week. Practice incorporating them into simple sentences. This step is often overlooked by beginners, but it is the cornerstone of **how to learn shorthand writing in English** quickly.

3. Practice Blending and Joining Strokes

Shorthand is not just writing isolated symbols; you must join them fluidly. Start with two-letter combinations, then three-letter words. Write simple words like "cat," "dog," "run" in shorthand. Gradually increase to short phrases like "how are you" or "I am going." Focus on maintaining consistent shapes and proportions. This phase builds muscle memory.

4. Use Drills and Repetition

Repetition is the mother of skill. Set aside 15–30 minutes daily for drills. Write the same list of words or sentences multiple times. Try writing a passage from a book in both longhand and shorthand to compare speed. Use a timer and aim to complete a fixed number of symbols or words within a certain time. This builds automaticity.

5. Move to Dictation Practice

Once you can write simple sentences comfortably, start dictation. Begin with slow speeds—around 30–40 words per minute (wpm). Many online resources offer dictation at multiple speeds. Write along, then check your shorthand against the original. Identify any missed symbols or wrong forms. Gradually increase the speed by 5 wpm each week. This is where real progress happens in **shorthand writing in English**.

6. Focus on Reading Back Your Shorthand

An often-forgotten skill is reading your own shorthand. After writing a dictation, try to read it back without referring to the original. If you cannot read it, you wrote incorrectly. Practice reading aloud from shorthand passages—this reinforces the link between symbol and sound. Aim to be able to read at least as fast as you write.

7. Build Speed Gradually

Speed does not come overnight. Use progressive overload: increase dictation speed slowly. Track your words per minute each week. Common milestones are 60 wpm (basic proficiency), 80 wpm (good for most notes), and 120+ wpm (professional level). Use a metronome or specialized dictation apps. Also, practice writing for longer durations—10 minutes, then 15, then 20—to build endurance.

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Learning shorthand is not without difficulties. Here are typical hurdles and solutions:

- Confusion between similar symbols: Spend extra time on pairs that look alike (e.g., Gregg's "p" and "b"). Write them side by side repeatedly.
- Losing momentum: When you miss a word, do not stop. Skip it and continue. You can fill in gaps later.
- Plateau in speed: Try varying dictation content—different accents, speeds, topics. Or practice writing with your non-dominant hand for a few minutes to reset focus.
- Forgetting brief forms: Create a cheat sheet and review it daily. Use mnemonics to remember tricky ones.

Patience and consistency are the keys to overcome these obstacles while **learning shorthand writing in English**.

Tips for Effective Practice

To maximize your learning, follow these best practices:

1. Set a daily habit: Even 10 minutes every day is better than 2 hours once a week.
2. Write by hand, not on a computer: Shorthand is a physical skill; the tactile feedback is essential.
3. Join a community: Online forums, Facebook groups, or local shorthand clubs offer support and dictation partners.
4. Use real-world content: Take shorthand notes from podcasts, lectures, or TED talks. This makes practice relevant.
5. Review and revise: Every Sunday, revisit material from the previous week to reinforce memory.
6. Stay positive: Progress may feel slow initially, but each week you will notice improvement. Celebrate small wins.

How Long Does It Take to Learn Shorthand?

The timeframe depends on your dedication and system choice. With consistent daily practice (30–60 minutes), you can expect:

- Basic fluency (40–60 wpm): 3–6 months.
- Intermediate (80 wpm): 6–12 months.
- Advanced (100+ wpm): 1–2 years.

Remember, the goal is not perfection but functional speed. Even at 50–60 wpm, you can take faster notes than most people write longhand. The key is to keep progressing steadily in your journey of **how to learn shorthand writing in English**.

Conclusion

Learning shorthand writing in English is a rewarding skill that can boost your productivity, sharpen your listening, and open doors to specialized careers. By choosing the right system, mastering the basics, practicing daily, and gradually increasing your speed, you can become proficient in months rather than years. Start today—pick up a pen, open a beginner textbook, and write your first symbol. The path from slow, careful strokes to rapid, instinctive writing is one of patience and persistence. Embrace the process, and soon you will be capturing ideas at the speed of thought.

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