

## Improving Your Shorthand

Do you remember in grammar school when we had to practice our penmanship attempting to write in cursive like those examples perched above the blackboard? We even received a grade on our report cards. Being a bit of a renegade, I never did come close to that classroom example, but continued practice certainly improved my delightful form of scribbling to something semi-legible.

Before FIG developed a method to record a gymnast's performance, the term 'shorthand' was reserved for secretaries and court stenographers. But as judging professionals, one of the most critical tools we utilize is shorthand. In effect, you are writing or scripting an entire gymnastic performance. Recording the performed elements and the ability to explain that evaluation anytime during or after the competition solely depends on that piece of scripted artwork on your paper.

We can all attest to the fact that every judge's script is unique in style, size, neatness, sloppiness, accuracy and direction. When we first learned shorthand, especially on bars, it often resembled a mix between an EKG and a toddler learning how to color inside the lines. Thankfully, we don't get graded on our shorthand except for self-evaluation. But with practice, it is possible to improve your shorthand and conquer the common goals of three routines-per-page, notating horizontally instead of drifting onto the table you're sitting at and actually scripting a Gienger without using a "G".

Since we do not have the luxury of scripting skills at a calligrapher's pace, speed and accuracy are of utmost importance. In the last newsletter, we discussed the concept of visual framing. Continuing with that theme, I would like to offer some useful visual exercises that can improve the speed, clarity and size of your shorthand.

### Visual Identification:

- Start by using the Code of Points and look at the artist's drawing of a wide variety of skills.
- Glance [not stare] at an element and work on instantly naming the element you glanced at.
- You can do this out loud or in your head. This process is similar to studying with flash cards.
- Make sure to look at elements that are much more difficult than what you are accustomed to judging.
- Perform this same visual identification exercise watching videos.

### Script Identification:

- Go back to the Code [or the Linda Chencinski element sheet when ready] and glance at the script for an element, immediately naming it. The key here is to glance at the script, not stare at it to improve your script recognition of elements at a rapid pace.

### Visual Scripting:

- The next stage is to actually watch a video or observe a gymnast working out and in your mind superimpose the script of the element performed directly above the gymnast. Initially it will be easier to use this technique on isolated skills before trying it with a sequence of elements or a complete routine.
- This is especially helpful for those skills you rarely see performed at most meets and prevents the 'what was that - I don't know that symbol - the gymnast just completed four more elements and my pen is still stuck on the page syndrome'.
- You can also practice this technique in your mind. Simply envision a gymnast performing a particular skill and at the same time superimpose the script. Gymnasts perform this technique when they do mental sets by closing their eyes and envisioning themselves performing a perfect routine. You are doing the same thing only envisioning the perfect script along with the skill.

### Accelerating Scripting Speed:

- Like grammar school, practice is the key.
- While you are having your morning tea or coffee, pick a number of elements that you often have trouble scripting. Start by looking at the paper, visualize the element and script it.

- Now, script that same element 10-15 times in a row across the paper. Remember to visualize the skill each time you script it and accelerate your speed as you move across the page. Also imagine you are writing on lined paper.
- Repeat this drill without looking down at the paper. Don't be discouraged if the first few attempts end up in your toast.
- Each repetition increases the visual identification/hand coordination process while also improving the speed and accuracy of your script.

**Keeping it Neat and Petite:**

- Using the acceleration exercise, choose some specific elements or combination of elements. Looking at your paper, script across the page in a significantly smaller size than you normally would.
- Repeat the process a number of times and reduce the size of your script a little bit each time until you find a comfort zone.
- Now repeat this exercise without looking down at your paper.
- The first time pretend your judging paper is only two inches high. The next attempt, reduce the height of your paper to one inch and third time down to ½ inch.
- The select few who can lower this to between ¼ inch and microscopic levels are scripting savants and should graciously accept this ability as a gift from God!

Hand/eye coordination is crucial for success in numerous sports. Just as the tennis player instantly reacts to a visual prompt [the ball] by switching from a forehand to a backhand return, we ultimately do the same thing while judging. We react to constant visual prompts, each triggering instant recognition of skills that yields a response from our hands in the form of script. The speed of our visual recognition ultimately determines the speed of our response. Repetition is the key to increasing the speed of the process.

The goal for every judge should be improved shorthand by using the visual identification skills they possess but seldom fully utilize. The end result will be the ability to script routines more accurately, rapidly and confidently.

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