

Tutorial

Reading Handwriting

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Tips for Reading Handwriting

Approaching old and unfamiliar handwriting can always be intimidating at first. Although you're sure you've clicked the right language, you might still find the text indecipherable. This tutorial will help brush you up on your palaeography skills, and with more and more practice, you will soon become an expert reader and decipherer! We assure you that overcoming the challenge is well worth it, almost just like having learnt a new language!

Here are some things you can do when struggling to read a certain word:

- **Put the word into context** – read around the word, and see if you can make sense of what it might be according to its surroundings.
- **Compare the tricky letters with other letters written in the item** – perhaps the author has an unusual way of writing an S or a D, and

you've seen it written in the paragraph before. Use this to help you decode the text.

- **Separate the known letters with the unknown letters** and guess what the unknown ones might possibly be. It helps to write the word possibilities on paper or on a separate document.
- **Let other transcribers know if you see a common nuance in the handwriting style.** For example, if the author writes their X like a SC, write a comment in the item's Comment and Questions chat, so you can help other transcribers who might also be struggling.
- **Names of locations and people, and unusual colloquial and military terms** are sometimes the hardest to understand. A great tip is to check back to the story description (or find it on [Europeana 1914-1918](#)), and see if your guess matches something significant in the description. A quick internet search of your guess can also help verify whether the name or term is correct and appropriate. You could additionally seek out a glossary of military abbreviations and acronyms.
- **Take a break from the word** – move on from the difficult word to the rest of the text, and as you go along, it might become clearer.
- **If the word still doesn't make sense, highlight your guess using the Unclear tool or mark the section with the Missing tool**  , so the next transcriber can continue to decode the document.

For further help, have a look at some of our [sample transcriptions](#) to get a hang of the written texts on the website and to see how they are transcribed in various languages.



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Transcribe Europeana 1914-1918 is a crowdsourcing initiative for the transcription of digital material from the First World War compiled by [Europeana 1914-1918](#). With your help, we can create a vast and fully digital record of personal documents from the collection.

Join us in uncovering the stories hidden within.

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