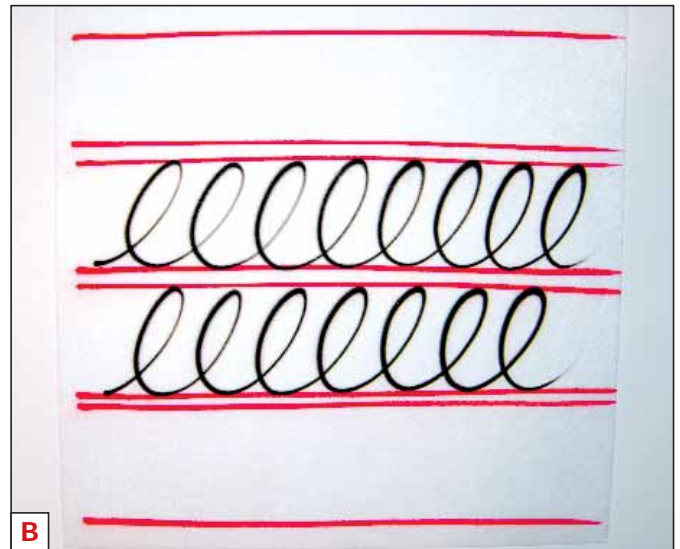
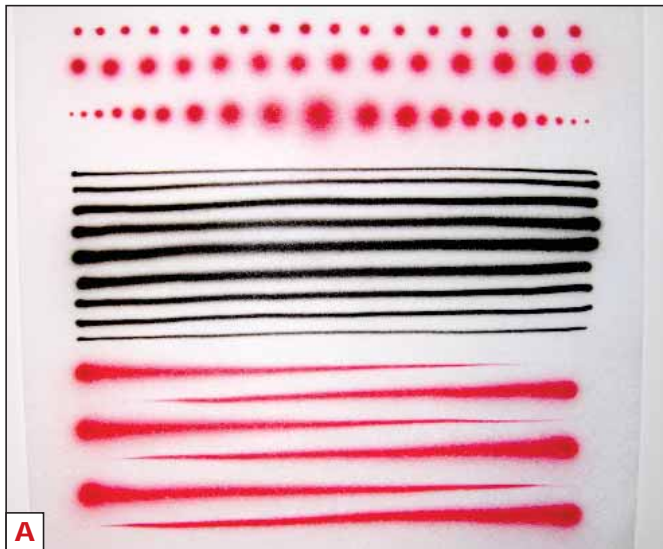


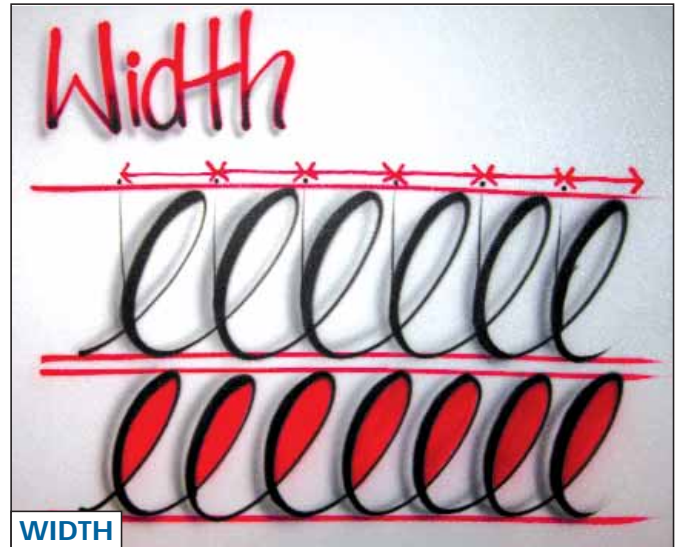
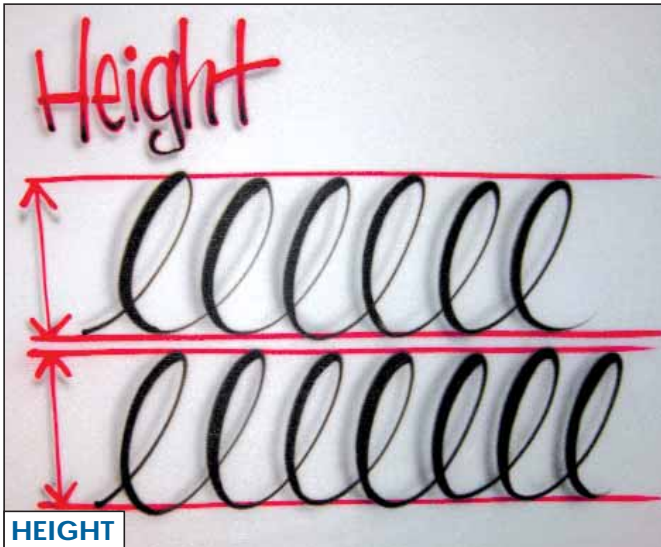
LEARNING THE ABC'S OF

Lettering



MANY OF YOU HAVE SEEN MY WORK OVER THE years in the hallowed pages of *Airbrush Action* and their DVD collection. I get great response especially for my custom work. However, through all of the accolades (and believe me, they're numerous, baby), what I remain most proud of is my common library of lettering. And, believe it or not, many of my T-shirt brethren feel the same way. Although lettering may appear simplistic and boring to do, it's actually the most challenging and profitable aspect of my business. It's with this enlightened sense of what really matters that I chose *The Airbrushed T-Shirt Bible of What To Know To Letter Properly* (or "TATBWTKTLP"). >>

To really understand this lettering approach, we need to know what makes lettering successful. Of course we'll get to the different fonts and how to execute them, but what I'm referring to are the nuts and bolts of forming those letters. We've all seen artists lettering that we look at and go, "Wow, that kicks butt!" For me, my early inspirations came from Terry Hill and Don Ashwood of "Hot Air" fame, Tim Mitchell (from the earlier T-shirt editorial in *Airbrush Action*), and many of the extremely talented artists that I've worked with over the years (Scott Parkin, Marco Salazar, Cliff Cox, Chard Carper, and my bro EJ, to name a few). All of these influences are largely



responsible for my current lettering style and approach to airbrushing.

What I believe makes my particular lettering style successful (success isn't only measured by one's ability to sell shirts with lettering on them) is that I take a very measured and disciplined approach to my work. I know of many artists that rely on mood and express it as: "You know man, just feel it and let your soul flow." That's not me. Typically, artists like these also work in a non-art-related capacity while they wait for their aura to align with Venus. The working artists I know, however, are able to articulate their methods and duplicate them with precision over and over.

First and foremost, the basics must be

angle, and thick-and-thins, knowledge of font/type styles, and application (how the heck do we put it all together?!). To master each component requires hours upon hours of work, so let's make a deal. In exchange for this great, money-making information, you're expected to put in the necessary practice time. Agreed? OK, good.

Let's take a look at our first component: line quality. To obtain the kind of excellence we seek, here are a few drills to get us going. Whenever I hire a new artist, I always focus on script lettering first (or cursive for all you lay-persons). Script really is the foundation for all other lettering styles. "Why?" you ask. Well, I believe that script requires a consummate ability for

Hill's basic training). This exercise transitions you from basic line work into lettering. This is called the "e" stroke (for obvious reasons). Here's where we begin to break down that first component. We start by making some line parameters. (Picture B)

These lines are important because they make our mistakes abundantly clear. By the end of these drills, you should be able to self-correct and have the ability to do a drill and understand what went wrong and what's required to fix it. Establishing these parameters is the initial step.

Now, let's go ahead and airbrush a few lines of "e" strokes. Your goal here is consistency, of course, and following are the criteria by which you will judge your work:

Height:

It's important that your letter height be repeated consistently, so you must keep your strokes/line work inside the guidelines. This may not be as easy as you'd expect. Another essential factor when doing this drill is maintaining the proper tempo of movement; not too fast or too slow. Although everybody's tempo is slightly different, it's still quite similar. A steady tempo translates into consistent lettering. Check out how the tops and bottoms of my "e's" all fall within the pre-set parameters. Do this exercise until you can cover the entire front and back of a shirt with little or no mistakes.

Width:

This element has to do with a couple of things. The first is the actual width of the

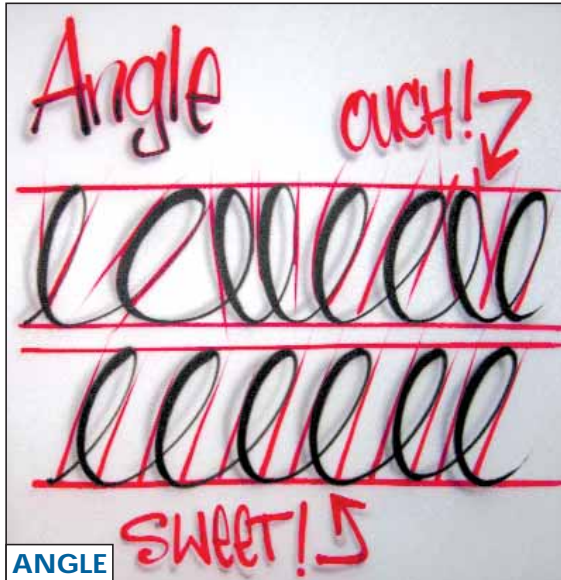
WHAT I BELIEVE MAKES MY PARTICULAR LETTERING STYLE SUCCESSFUL (SUCCESS ISN'T ONLY MEASURED BY ONE'S ABILITY TO SELL SHIRTS WITH LETTERING ON THEM) IS THAT I TAKE A VERY MEASURED AND DISCIPLINED APPROACH TO MY WORK.

mastered. Terry Hill has spent a career emphasizing the fundamentals and I'm right there with him. You all know what I'm talking about: those pesky dot exercises, tedious line drills, and last, but certainly not least, the dreaded dagger stroke. (Picture A)

The basics are vital in helping us establish solid prowess in producing consistent line quality for height, width,

brush control and letter formation, and if you can conquer it, the rest will easily fall into place. "What are these magical drills?" you ask. Let's take a look.

First, I'll assume that you've done all the work to achieve a flawless dot, line, and dagger stroke; you know, the building blocks for all T-shirt airbrushing (feel free to refer to previous issues and review all of Terry



letters. If we divide the “e” strokes, they should all be evenly spaced from one another. There shouldn’t be any stretching or squishing together of the strokes. Width also has to do with the bodies of our letters, referring to the space inside our letters. This could also be considered weight, whereas they all appear to weigh the same if they were filled with sand or water. The volume would be the same. Here, you can see the bodies of the letters filled in and that they all look the same.

Angle:

This little gem may take a while. Let’s consider that our height and width are flawless. You can still mess it up simply by making the angles of the line work inconsistent. Let me demonstrate (*top portion*). Not good. Now, let’s take a look at a properly executed “e” stroke. (*bottom half*) Notice how the angle is not too severe or slight. The angle will actually direct the reader along the message on the shirt. I’m not sure what degree we’re looking at here, but to me it seems right in the middle (maybe 30- to 40-degrees). Also notice that these angles are consistent to itself and all of the other angles. It’s not enough to have your letters be singularly competent; they have to interact successfully with all of the other letters.

Thicks-and-Thins:

This is the last component and perhaps

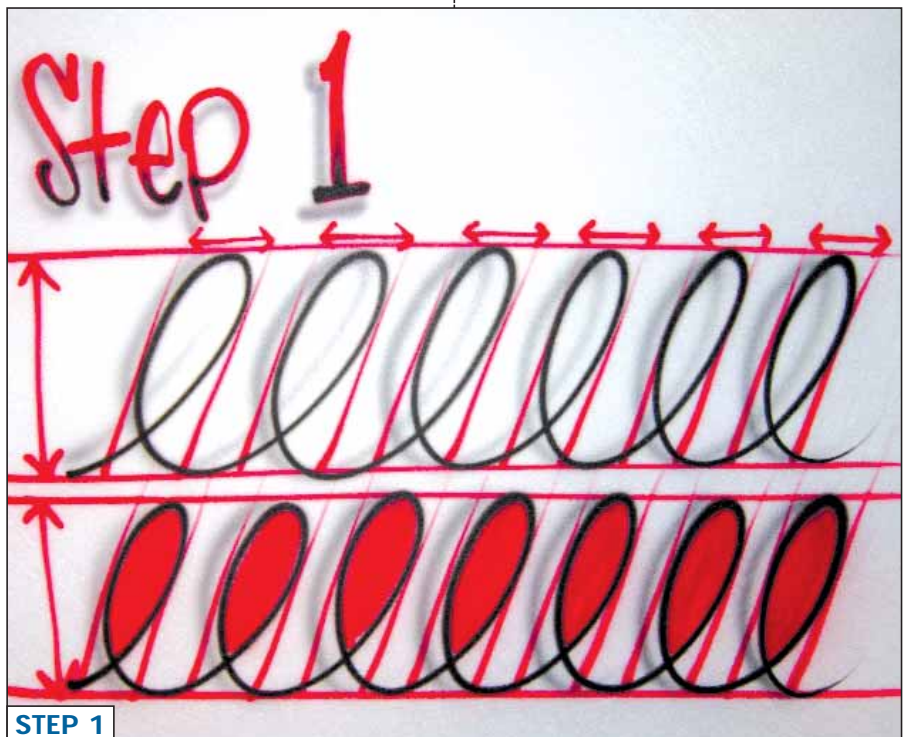
the most difficult. Again, let’s say that up to this point all of our elements are consistent to themselves and to each other. If you throw your thick-and-thins out of whack, it all falls apart. Allow me to demonstrate (*top portion*). Yuck. Now, let’s take a look at a successful attempt (*bottom half*). Sweet!

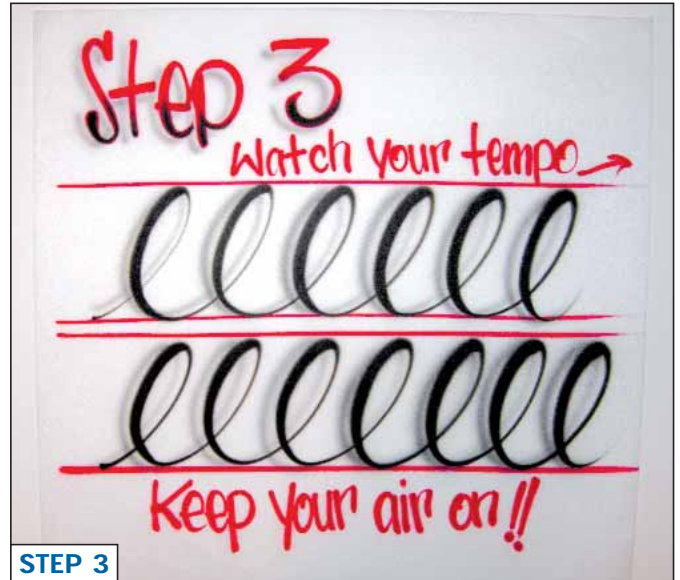
Your goal in this exercise is to be able to do one long, smooth, and uninterrupted “e” stroke with flawless height, width, angle, and thicks-and-thins. But, you ask, just how

are we supposed to get to that point? Let’s break it down into three easy steps.

Step 1

Focus only on the first three consistencies: height, width, and angle. This is what I like to refer to as “Hey, that’ll do.” In other words, I stress to my beginners that legibility is always paramount to style. You may have all the flair in the world, but if the customer can’t read it, they won’t buy it. Notice that all of our rules of consistency are being followed.





Step 2

Here, we take it further and build off of what we already have. Let's do another row just as in Step One, but with the addition of thicks-and-thins. This may seem a bit confusing, so here's a very useful and simple script lettering rule: the down stroke is always thick. So, here's the initial step without the line variation (*top*). Now, start at the top of the first "e" and do a thick stroke connecting it to the bottom of the letter. To break it down even further, I also like to teach a little exercise, the Pinwheel, for beginners who are learning to master the dagger stroke (*the bottom*).

This exercise can really help you when trying to connect the thicker part of the "e" stroke with the thin bottom line. Notice how that stroke will integrate itself into our "e" stroke exercise.

Step 3

The last step in our "e" stroke exercise incorporates the knowledge in one fluid motion. That's right. You are finally there. Everything all at once and perfect to boot! Let's roll!

Notice as you move along your "e" stroke, completing it with effortless precision, how your body and the airbrush get into a rhythm that you can feel and hear. The sound of the air coming out as your airbrush gets closer to the surface on the bottom part of our thin "e" stroke is unmistakable. The feeling of your wrist and

elbows locked into place while your finger rolls over the trigger is poetry in motion, baby! Here you can see a few lines of our "e" stroke accomplished in one motion.

All right, now that we've mastered the "e" stroke and all its components, let's see how this all translates to our script lettering.

Well, let's get the obvious out of the way. You've already learned the script "e" (and "l" if you elongate that "e" a little). So you've got two out of the 26 letters done. But how do those consistencies and exercises fit into the rest of the alphabet? Well, let's take a look.





The Alphabet

Let me start by performing an entire alphabet, and then we'll break it down. Here, you can see every letter of my script alphabet. I've also included some letters that may have a few variations to them so you can kind of pick and choose which you like best. You can also peruse any book or go online and find several samples of script lettering to decide which one is best for you. For now, let's assume that my script is the best in the universe and we're all going to use it. By the way, just repeatedly doing an entire connected alphabet is a great exercise unto itself. It will help you master the letters and our exercises. But for now, let's start from the beginning. How are we going to transition from the "e" stroke into all of the letters? Here's the breakdown:

Let's start again with some guidelines. Remember, with these guidelines we can see exactly where we're falling short and what we need to work on. We're going to add a third line, however, (Step 4) to compensate for having upper- and lower-case letters ("CAPITALS and smalls" for you guys with a hangover). Now I know that not every letter will fall within all the lines but, like I said, they're there to guide and self-correct. Let's take a look at a few names to see what I mean.

I know what you're thinking. "Holy cow, Kent, that was too easy!" Well, if you're not thinking that let's do a step-by-step just like our "e" stroke. In fact, it's the exact same principles as that breakdown.

Step 4

Again, focus only on the first three elements of being consistent (height, width and angle).

Step 5

Take the first step and add the thick line. What's that rule boys and girls? "Down is thick!"

Step 6

Make it all happen in one seamless, crazy,

perfect name. I know. It's that simple.

Now it's on to the fun stuff: super cool, edge-of-your-seat, blockbuster fonts and the colors that bring them to life! Since I know that you're going to do plenty of practicing, I'll wait until the next installment to bring the pain! You're just gonna have to wait. And by the way, I have a font that I've been using for the past year that I can guarantee will get you the added sales and street cred you crave. BWAAAA! ❖

