

BOOK REVIEW

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A Review of *The Art and Science of Handwriting*

REFERENCE: Sassoon, Rosemary, *The Art and Science of Handwriting*, Intellect, Oxford, 1993, 192 pp.

American readers are unlikely to be acquainted with the writings of Rosemary Sassoon; fortunately, this oversight can be corrected with the publication of her new book. *The Art and Science of Handwriting* is a compilation of previously published articles supplemented by connecting commentary. While this book should excite the interest of examiners of questioned documents, it will have limited value to other practitioners in the forensic sciences, except perhaps, those concerned with their children's handwriting progress.

Although not a forensic document examiner by profession, the author shares an attribute of many early handwriting experts, a basic understanding of the handwriting process, coupled with practical personal experience as a professional scribe and teacher. This book establishes that Rosemary Sassoon, if not a forensic expert, assuredly is a handwriting expert. Additionally, the reader will appreciate the author as one who thoroughly enjoys her profession and has genuine empathy for the troubled writers, she has sought to assist.

This book is described as a collection of the author's papers and writings published over the last ten years. The book is divided into two parts reflecting her interests in both the artistic and scientific aspects of handwriting. This well written text, smoothly integrates the subject matter of the author's various published efforts into an enjoyable and interesting account of progress in understanding and explaining many complexities of today's handwriting. In addition to providing the reader with insightful observations, the book raises issues which should provide useful areas of exploration for other researchers.

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Part 1, begins with an account of the author's introduction to formal handwriting and proceeds to describe her efforts to assist individuals with handwriting problems. It continues with a detailed and well illustrated exploration of penholds, handwriting variations, children's signatures and concludes with the account of the author's investigations, observations and conclusions regarding "writer's cramp." In the course of this presentation, previous rules for a writer's body and paper positions as well as the "correct" manner of holding a writing instrument are challenged and replaced by more pragmatic approaches that focus on the ultimate purposes of handwriting, while addressing the anatomical variations and physical limitations of writers. Examiners of questioned writings should be intrigued by the implications of the author's comments on individuality and the influence of teachers' handwritings on those of their students. Equally provocative, are her observations on children's signatures as contrasted to their extended writings. Personal letter forms and the effects variations in writing speed have also merited the author's attention.

Part 2, while designed to relate the author's work in schools and hospitals, and the implications of those efforts on curriculum planning, also contains additional materials which should be of interest to questioned document examiners. The topic of unreadable handwriting and its relationship to personal variations is explored and the process by which pen lifts are caused by the inability of the writer to meet the demands of continuous cursive handwriting is revealed. The author's fascination with calligraphy and appreciation for its various uses is evidenced in the conclusion of this offering.

While the text is not extensively referenced, those sources provided will provide the reader with access to additional related subject material, including previous publications by the author. A comprehensive and useful index is included.

This book, reasonable priced in today's market, is certainly a "good read" and will provide a valuable addition to the libraries of all with interest in handwriting.