

Calligraphy CRUSH Her

MAGAZINE

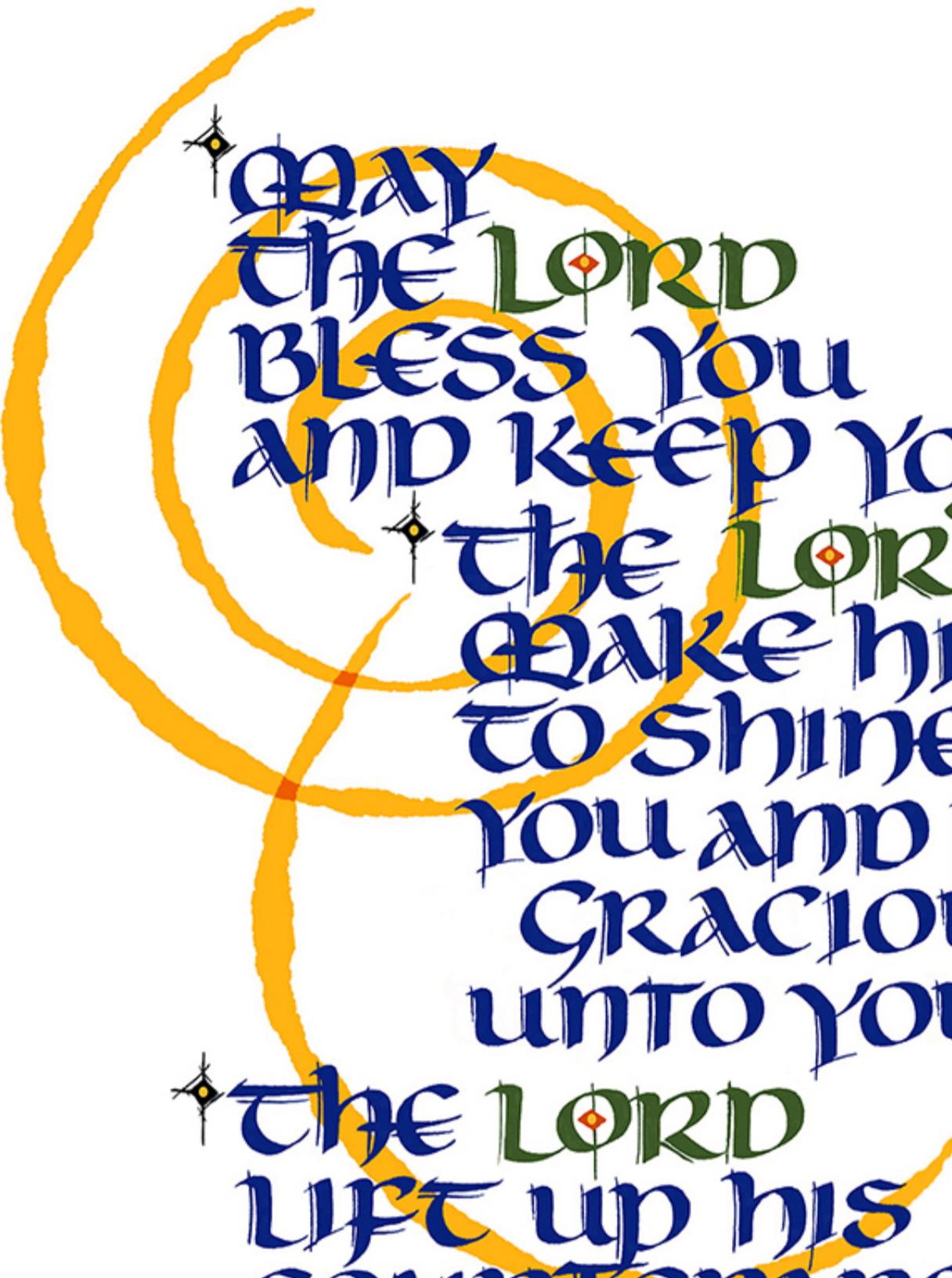
THE
Calligraphy
Study GUIDE

Calligraphy Camp

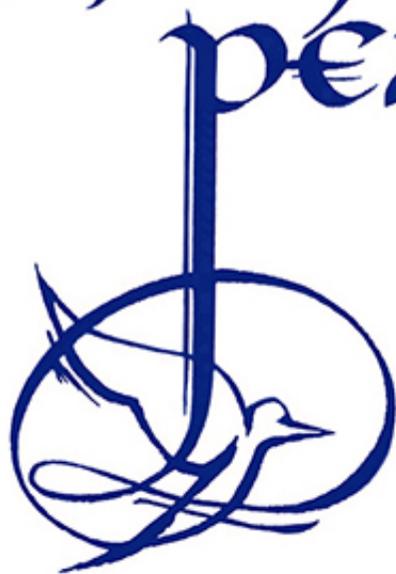
with John Stevens

On Apprenticeship

with Ed Fong



✦ MAY
THE LORD
BLESS YOU
AND KEEP YOU;
✦ THE LORD
MAKE HIS FACE
TO SHINE UPON
YOU AND BE
GRACIOUS
UNTO YOU;
✦ THE LORD
LIFT UP HIS
COUNTENANCE
UPON YOU,
✦ AND GIVE YOU
PEACE.



THE ART OF *Correcting Mistakes*

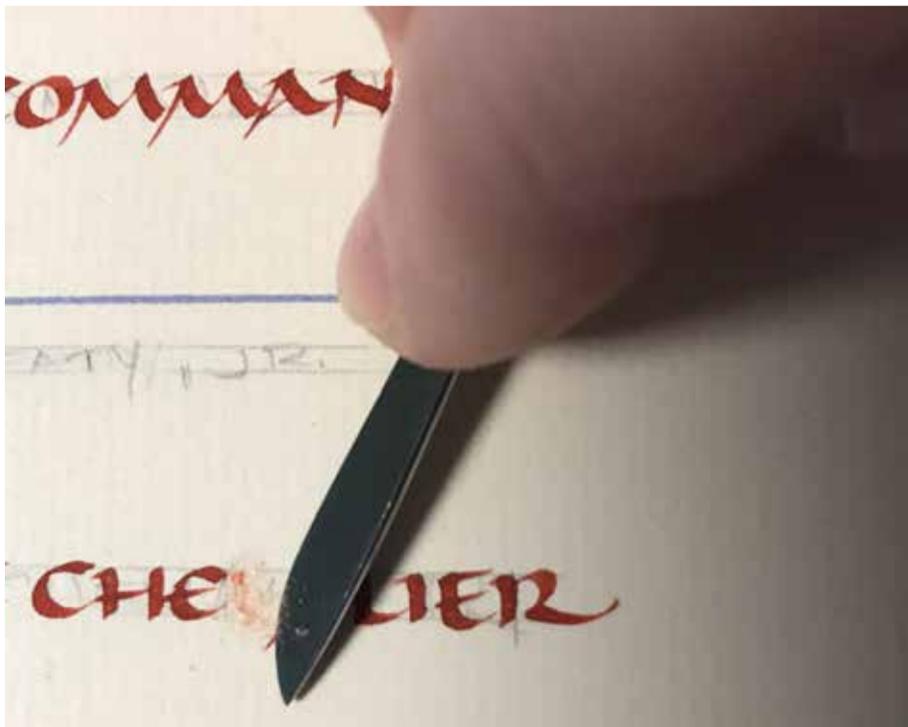
by Tamara Stoneburner

Many calligraphers view the making of a mistake in one's lettering and art work as a bane and the devil in the details. Some even attribute this to our own calligraphic demon, Titivillus. Oh, the gnashing of teeth, cursing, and gnattering at the eleventh hour when faced with figuring out what to do.

I, however, tend to embrace mistakes for what they are: human, inevitable, and an opportunity for learning a particular skill—that of correcting them. And, as we all know, how one handles a mistake can either lead to an ultimate do-over or to a level of mastery in understanding the paper, the ink, and your tools.

I believe it's almost more important to learn how to correct your mistakes than even striving for perfection in your lettering. It's about having grace under fire. It's about saving your work and time.

And we calligraphers have tried the gamut of correctional methods from electric erasers,



eraser shields, bleach, water, paper inlays, crude and harried scrape-outs

with a razor blade, and obvious paint-overs.

Most of the time, we resign, perhaps prematurely, and usually resort to doing the entire piece over. I've done this; you've done this; and I'm telling you now it's not always necessary.

Time and frustration can be saved by learning the art of properly scraping out a mistake and overwriting the correction.

This requires the correct tools, a fair amount of patience, and a light pressure when scraping. You do not gouge out a mistake ever. You scrape it out gently from the surface of the paper, trying not to raise the tooth of the paper too much.

ALLOW THE MISTAKE TO DRY

It begins with doing the counterintuitive: allowing the mistake to completely dry before even attempting to correct it.

If you introduce correction while the mistake is still wet, further smudging will occur and the paper surface becomes compromised. The tooth of the paper becomes soft and raised, which can introduce holes being rubbed or scraped through the paper... considered the point of no return.

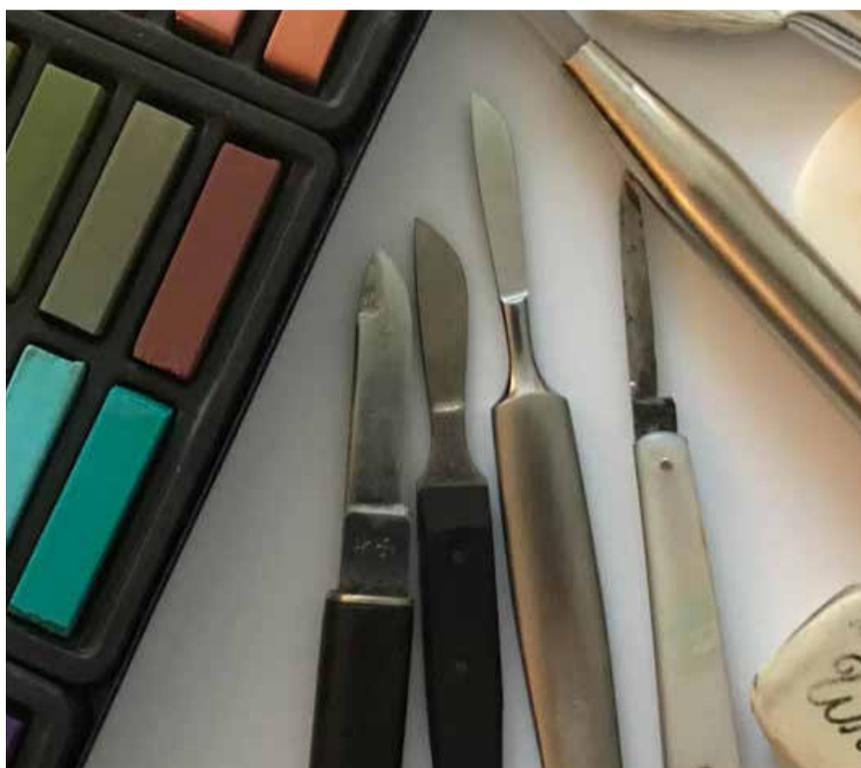
USE A CURVED BLADE

The second thing to keep in mind is that you use a curved blade when scraping. If you use



a straight razor blade, you run the risk of using the entire edge of the blade (scraping out more than you wanted) or accidentally using the corners, which can create gouge marks or deep dings into the paper.

A curved blade allows you to touch down onto the paper surface at one tangential point. It's more precise with a softer approach. You can find many sources online that sell scalpels and other curved blades. Keywords to use when searching are "scalpels," "fleams," "curved blades," "scrapers," "erasers," and "medical/surgical blades."



NOTE: Contemporary scalpels can sometimes be too sharp for what you're doing.

I tend to collect vintage scalpels and scrapers, also called erasers. They often have formed rosewood or ebony handles that fit comfortably and can be found either single- or double-side bladed. They're sharp at the right amount and usually do not need further sharpening.

My go-to "eraser" is a J. Rodgers & Sons of Sheffield, England scraper from the reign of King George. I've used it for fifteen years and have never needed to amend or sharpen it. Most of the time, you can acquire an antique scraper from Ebay or Etsy for \$35-\$75.

There are many brands ranging from the English Rodgers & Sons to American types of Miller Bros. and E. Faber (Civil War era). Also look for the stainless steel scalpel kits from 1980s Poland; they are really smooth and finely formed with delicate and smaller blades (often less expensive as well).

So, once the mistake has dried, you **approach it with the blade at an almost flat angle** (not quite parallel to the paper surface). Don't approach with the blade perpendicular to the paper; this results in a much deeper and rougher scrape.

ONE DIRECTION ONLY, PLEASE

You can use either a push or pull scrape as long as you **scrape in one direction** at a time as you rotate the paper to fully scrape out the area. You do not want to "scrub" scrape, back and forth across the mistake. This is a sure-fire way of scraping right through the paper.

You want to scrape slowly and ever so slightly across the surface. The goal is not to scrape into the paper, no. Rather, you want to **skim across the surface**, just lifting out the ink without disturbing too much the paper's tooth. "Flight of a dragonfly – breath of an angel," I often say when demonstrating this technique.

DON'T LEAVE INK GHOSTS

Completely scrape out the mistake; do not leave any ink "ghosts" or residue... scrape only down to a pure paper surface. You can lightly use a White Pearl rubber eraser (or Black Factis eraser if correcting on dark papers) to remove any noticeable residue.

Don't panic. This result will look pretty horrible at this point and you'll wonder why you wasted your time. But there's more that you will do in this process of correction.

CALM DOWN THE PAPER

The next step is going to be the most important before you overwrite the correction. This step is that of “**calming down the paper**,” so to speak.

It's the process of burnishing down the paper's agitated and raised tooth with either a bone folder or agate dogtooth burnisher (in an absolute pinch, you can use the back of a spoon).

Never burnish directly onto the paper! This will leave indentations and a sort of ‘shine’ to the paper that will remain obvious and is difficult to recover from. Always use a buffer sheet of paper (like glassine) between the art piece and your burnisher. Always. Are you reading? Always.

As with the scraper, your burnisher edge should approach the paper at a nearly flat angle, not on edge. Use a firm, uni-directional pressure.

CORRECTING MISTAKES ON HIGHLY-TEXTURED PAPERS

I will digress at this point and talk about correcting mistakes on highly-textured and dark papers. Yes, you can do this entire corrective method on these kinds of papers.

Yes, it will require an even lighter pressure when scraping and overwriting the mistake. There is an additional step you'll need to do before overwriting.

Many times when scraping these “problem” papers, you're left with an area that is lighter than the rest of the paper and with a more agitated texture. **You must repair and match the color.**

I do this by applying **chalk pastel dust with a brush**. Sometimes I scrape several pastel colors onto a separate paper, then mix to the desired final color before I apply with a brush to the affected area.

After this, you'll need to burnish a lot. Why use pastels rather than paint? Pastels are dry and

allow for adding a matte quality and slightly gritty texture that is similar to the paper being used. If you use paint, it introduces wetness that might buckle the affected area and would dry and “sit” on the surface, having a completely smoother texture and perhaps be shinier than the paper being used. Not ideal.

GET READY TO OVERWRITE

Finally, when you are satisfied that you've burnished to a reasonable writing surface smoothness and you cannot see the paper's agitated fibers, you are now ready to overwrite.

Some people treat the area with **gum sandarac** to prevent the ink from feathering out. I only use this on papers that have a slick or smoother-than-usual surface (papers with a tremendous amount of sizing).

I usually do not use gum sandarac as a personal habit because I feel that this can re-agitate the paper's fibers; you'd have to repeat the process of burnishing.

Brush-load your nib with whatever ink you are using. Keep the nib relatively “dry;” do not overload it. When lettering, use a lighter-than-usual pressure. The goal is to skate over the surface without grinding into the paper. You want as little disturbance as possible.

Let the area dry completely. If you feel the need, you can burnish over the area one final time.

Voilà. You've accomplished a result that is relatively smooth and virtually undetectable of any mistake having occurred.

KEEP NOTES ON HOW YOU DID IT

I'll leave you with this final advice: practice both making and correcting mistakes on various papers. Write down your notes and observations. This type of journaling becomes a remarkable reference for later. 

STEPS TO ERROR CORRECTION



Tools for scraping mistakes



Yikes! I misspelled "Chevalier."



Beginning the push scrape with a curved blade



After the complete scraping



Burnishing with paper on top



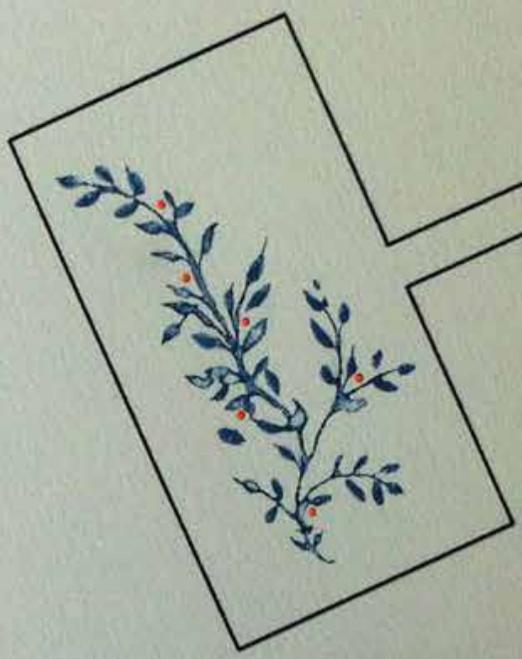
Overwrite and final result

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JOCELYN W
daughter of Daniel Harney &

nds in marriage under the care of
Meeting of Washington, D.C.
Religious Society of Friends,
promising to each other heart to heart,
with Divine assistance,
to be loving and faithful
as long as they both shall live.

As confirmation of these declarations,
they signed their names:



trembling
whose hand
neath his trembling, that
t more mindful of his trembling?
to stand naked in the wind and to me
reathing, but to free the breath from
from the river of silence, shall you
ched the mountain top, then you
in your limbs, then sha

TAMARA
STONEBURNER

PAPERS, GOUACHE, & TINY WRITING

PRINTMAKING PAPERS

Tamara recommends printmaking papers for fine calligraphy artwork. These papers have a lovely surface to write on, and the sizing allows gouache, watercolors, and inks to be absorbed without feathering or bleeding:

- ◆ Stonehenge (her favorite)
- ◆ Fabriano Ingres (sounds like “ain’-guh”)
- ◆ Canson Mi-tientes
- ◆ Arches BK Rives

ADVANTAGES OF GOUACHE

Tamara uses gouache almost all the time for writing family trees, poems, and marriage certificates. She rarely uses bottled inks since they might contain shellac, which can corrode metal nibs.

Gouache is an opaque watercolor that doesn't absorb into paper, but tends to sit on top of the paper. This allows gouache to be scraped from paper easier than watercolors or bottled inks when you have to correct a mistake. Watercolors and dye-based inks will sink into the paper fibers.

Tamara mixes her gouache thicker than most calligraphers do for broad pen work. She mixes about ¼ inch of gouache with one pipette of distilled water to make the consistency of melted butter. For pointed pen work, she adds a little more water to the gouache.

She doesn't add gum arabic to gouache unless she is writing on a slick surface. Too much gum arabic can hinder the flow and make it hard to keep colors mixed.

Tip for smoother flowing gouache: Mix several gouache colors together rather than just using one color only. For instance, if you want a navy blue color, instead of just using Indigo Blue, mix a little Prussian Blue or other blue into the Indigo Blue.

COLOR WASHES

Michael Clark taught Tamara this tip for painting washes with watercolors, gouache, or walnut ink:

Use rubbing alcohol rather than water to dilute the paint or ink. The alcohol won't buckle the paper's surface and you'll get a much more even wash. You can then powder over the wash lightly with gum sandarac or use a low odor spray fixative before writing on it.

NOTE: If you are using spray fixative, make sure to **spray the entire piece evenly**. As the piece ages, you don't want different areas reacting differently to light and atmosphere than the un-sprayed parts.

TIPS FOR TINY WRITING

For tiny writing (1/8" or less), Tamara likes to grind ink using stick inks to write on watercolor papers. Sheila Waters recommends using watercolors or stick ink rather than gouache for tiny writing, as well as preparing the paper with gum sandarac before lettering.

Best practice is to not load the nib with a lot of ink for tiny writing. Brushing ink on the nib with a paint brush will give you better control over how much ink is on the nib. You may have to load the nib more often using a brush, but the reward is crisper lines.