

Section Two

ELEMENTS OF SPANISH HANDWRITING STYLE



Ending Letters

Letters at the end of words (and especially at the end of a line) sometimes have elaborate flourishes that you might think at first glance are separate letters, as in the name **Baltazar** below:

Baltazar

Certain ending letters present special problems. Most Spanish given names end in *a* or *o*. Handwritten *a*'s and *o*'s are easy to confuse. The only difference between them is the tail on the *a*'s. Some scribes may not have made the tail

distinct; others may have added flourishes to their *o*'s that could be mistaken for tails. Because the last letter of a person's given name may be the only indication of the person's sex, it is critical that you transcribe the letter accurately. Take your time, and compare the last letter of a name with letters you are sure of.

A similar situation exists with Spanish surnames. Many end in *z*. But *z*, *s*, and *c* were interchangeable, and, as noted above, *s* and *z* may resemble each other. Again, compare, compare, and then compare some more. If you still cannot determine what the letter is, make it an *s*.

Minims

The up-and-down strokes of letters are called *minims*. The letters *i*, *m*, *n*, *u*, *v*, and *w* are composed mostly of minims. When a word has two or more of these letters in a row, the letters can be hard to tell apart, as in the word *nueva* below:

nueva

Usually you can decipher the word from the context of the record. However, you may have to count the strokes, figure out all the possible letter combinations, and choose the most likely.

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1. *Trinidad*

2. *puse los stos oleos y Sagrada Xma.*

3. *M^a Rosario*



4. *D. Juan Bautista Valdes*

5. *Testigos Lorenzo Manriques*

Answers

1. Trinidad 2. puse los stos oleos y Sagrada Xma.
3. M^a Rosario 4. D. Juan Bautista Valdes 5. Testigos
Lorenzo Manriques

Linking Strokes

Some Spanish scribes joined letters differently from the way we do today. We usually join letters with a short, counterclockwise curve (). For example, we would write *ni* as *ni*. The linking strokes of some scribes, however, curve the opposite way (). These linking strokes can be particularly confusing when they link letters composed of minims. For example, some scribes wrote *ni* as *mi*. If you were not careful, you might mistake these two letters for the letter *m*.

Other scribes joined letters with very complete strokes that at first might seem to have the value of distinct letters. For instance, in the word **Juan** below, the letters *an* could be mistaken for *am*:

Juan

Some scribes joined letters in different places from what you might expect. For example, they may have joined *d*'s to their following letters at the top of the *d*, or they may have

joined *t*'s to their following letters at the cross stroke. Thus, they may have written *di* as *di* rather than *di*, or they may have written *tu* as *tu* rather than *tu*.

In modern handwriting, in the letters *ch*, the *c* is joined to the *h* at the bottom: *ch*. But in some records, especially those before 1700, the *c* is joined to the *h* at the top: *ch*. As you can see, the *h* in these combinations is often the secretary *h* described earlier.

We usually join *o*'s to letters with a short, horizontal stroke at the top of the *o*: *o*. Some scribes may have left out this stroke, as in the first example below. Others may have lowered the stroke to the point where it is hard to tell their *o*'s from *a*'s, as in the second example below:

Corre *Coma* dos *dos*

The Word "de"

Because the word *de* ("of" or "from") was used so frequently, many scribes wrote it in a kind of shorthand notation. Compare the various forms of *de* given below:

x x Ce r de x

Self-Evaluation

Transcribe the following words. Then check your answers.

1. *Con Nicolosa Pasquala*
2. *de este presente año*
3. *Pedro*
4. *martín rodriguez*
5. *Christina*
6. *de siete días de nacida*
7. *Da Anna Gertrudis Fernz*
8. *Baptisé puse olio y crisma*
9. *Ensietede maio*
10. *de pedro maldonado*

Answers

1. Con Nicolosa Pasquala
2. deste presente año
3. Pedro
4. martín rodriguez
5. Christina
6. de siete días de nacida
7. Da Anna Gertrudis Fernz
8. Baptisé puse olio y crisma
9. Ensietede maio
10. de pedro maldonado