ULTIMATE GRAFFITI GUIDE BOOK
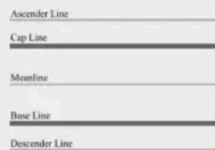
Part 1 - Fundamentals

Jon Grim

CHAPTERS

INTRODUCTION

Feeling stuck and lost with your graffiti sucks! Maybe you're new to graffiti and you just messed up a tag outside, perhaps you're struggling to get a tag you're happy with, or maybe you just want to improve, and you don't know how. We've all been there and while most people take decades to learn the basics of graffiti, you're going to learn that and much more with this book. Tags are the foundation for all forms of graffiti and for that reason we'll cover each of graffiti's fundamentals using tags as the teaching tool. This approach lets you learn each fundamental in the easiest context while also teaching you how to tag.

Learning to tag is essential and will make learning all other forms of graffiti much easier as this information will carry over to throwies and pieces. Since this book works to establish many of graffiti's fundamentals, it's no exaggeration when I say this book will cover information regarding graffiti that has never been discussed anywhere, not in other books, magazines, or videos online. It should be stated before we move forward that the fundamentals of any art form create a domino effect on all other fundamentals. For that reason, as we talk about one fundamental, we will inevitably talk about how other fundamentals are being affected. Keep this in mind as we progress through the book, it helps to understand the relationship between the topics.

Learning the Lettering Chart
Your First Steps to Learning Graffiti

Check out this diagram—this simple chart dictates just about everything in our letters. In your everyday handwriting, uppercase letters (also known as majuscules) are written from the cap line to the baseline, with lowercase letters (also known as minuscules) normally written from the mean line to the baseline. A few letters may reach into the ascender or descender's space, for example, the lowercase "d" reaching into the ascender,
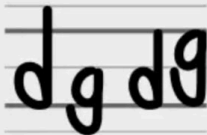
Ascender Line

Cap Line

Meanline

Base Line

Descender Line

This lettering chart is our foundation to learning all forms of graffiti. Always keep this in the back of your mind.

with the lowercase "*g*" reaching into the descender's area. In graffiti, however, all lowercase letters are treated as uppercase letters to help fill negative space, and to help the lowercase letters gain more weight. This means lowercase letters like "*g*" and "*d*" would be written from the cap line to the baseline instead.

You can instantly see the difference once we do the same letters but treat them as uppercase. Two-story letters (or letters with two counters) such as "B" normally will have one counter from cap line to the mean line, with the second counter existing within the x-height (baseline to mean line).

The way graffiti uses this chart just about defines all of graffiti's fundamentals. Many new artists mistakes can be fixed by using the chart more effectivly.

In graffiti both the ascender and descender spaces are reserved for other details, such as underlines, halos, crowns, quotation marks, or in the case of throwies and pieces, drop shadows, 3D, extensions, and other exterior details such as chips. This isn't to say that all the previously mentioned details never exist within the cap height, they certainly can, but they commonly dip into the ascenders and descenders areas. Once we understand this lettering chart, we can begin placing lines down to write letters, but we won't be writing letters in the conventional sense. We need to be introduced to the anatomy of letters, an anatomy that all letters use, even graffiti.

1

LETTER STRUCTURE & LETTER ANATOMY

Letter Structure & Letter Anatomy
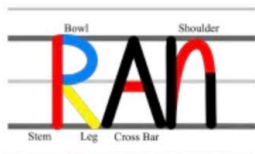
You're missing out if you've ever looked at a letter and saw only the letter and nothing more! Each letter, and number, has an anatomy that makes up its structure and it's our job as graffiti artists to understand these different parts. While some of these definitions will be the same as their definitions in other letter-based art forms, some definitions have changed based on how graffiti uses them (find more definitions in the glossary located at the back of the book). Let's go over a few of the more important parts of letter anatomy.

Stem: Main stroke of a letter that is normally vertical where all parts of the structure connect back to.

I'd like to add that the first line of a "V", "W", or "A" are also stems. A stem acts as the source of most letters; this is where other pieces of structures will normally connect back to, or where they will originate out of. Most branching segments will either start or connect back at the cap line, mean line, or baseline section of the stem.

When writing letters like *"R"*, for example, it's important to make sure your stem is long enough for the bowl and leg to connect back to the stem with room enough to spare. The extra room on the lower half of the stem will create the bottom left of the *"R"*. Normally, having a nice balanced stem gives you the best chance to balance the rest of your letter with a strong, confident structure.

Tail: A descending stroke that is often curved and decorative.

Tails are the descenders of the *"j"*, *"g"*, *"p"* and *"q"*. However, because graffiti treats all letters as uppercase, the sections of these letters that would normally descend, are now above the baseline, while letters such as *"Q"* still have their tail dip under the baseline. This term also refers to the majuscule versions of *"J"*.

Bowl: Elliptical or rounded form that creates the main stroke of a letter while creating a closed counter.

The bowl is responsible for creating some of the most important parts of many letters and due to its size, the bowl typically comes with a ton of weight. Try your best to keep the bowl neatly rounded, and proportional to the stem, and be sure if the bowl starts at the top, then connect the other end to the center of the stem. If the bowl originates from the center, then be sure to connect the end of the bowl to the bottom of the stem. The reason it's important to connect at these points is so we ensure our counters have enough negative space to exist, as well as to ensure the letter is proportional. These closed counters will define and build our letter structure; they are just as important as the lines you draw.

Crossbars: Horizontal stroke that makes up a part of a letter structure, typically connecting two stems or two parts of a letter.

Cross Stroke: Horizontal stroke that typically overlaps the stem.

A sloppy bowl is a sure fire way to ruin an otherwise good letter. Double check your bowls to ensure a nice clean shape.

Normally in other letter-based art forms these two terms are distinctly different from one another; however, in graffiti these are used interchangeably. It's common for graffiti to manipulate structures to some degree, and these changes can make the difference between crossbars and crossstrokes almost nonexistent, so for the rest of the book we will use crossbars to refer to both.

Another very important part of a structure is our crossbars and these are great for adding stability given their horizontal nature, but the crossbar tends to be very dependent on the other lines of a letter's structure. How the other lines of a letter are laid out oftentimes change how the crossbar looks and functions. The angle of each diagonal line comes together to allow the "A's" crossbar to fit comfortably between the diagonal lines. When these three lines come together like this, they create enough room not only for each line to be seen clearly, but they create two defining negative spaces: one in the center that defines the upper half structure, and one below that establishes the lower portions of the "A".

If the diagonal lines came together at a more acute angle, then the crossbar would be forced to shrink. This would also eliminate most of, if not all, the negative space in the center of the "A" but this also means you'd lose weight and letter structure. We can see this example shown with the nearly nonexistent cross bar on the center "A". On the other hand, if we connect the diagonals at a wider angle, then we force the crossbar to stretch much further out, and this could add lots of excess weight. Another feature of the crossbar is its weight in relation to how thick they are. Crossbars normally hang over negative space, and as a result they tend to be thinner in not only fonts but in graffiti as well. However, for tags

this isn't always possible or practical given the uniform nib width. Having a thinner crossbar helps to lower their weight to compensate for the weight they gained from hanging over negative space. No matter what you do to the crossbar, you want to maintain balance in the letter while not eliminating too much negative space, and most importantly, you want to give the crossbar enough space to exist.

Shoulder: A curved stroke spawning from the stem.

The shoulder of a letter is where we often see graffiti artists struggle. Typically, new graffiti artists haven't practiced line and shape all too much, and because of this, we can see sloppy line work when they transition from one line to the shoulder.

A clean shoulder is your entry point into subsequent lines, so try to get a nice, controlled arch that leads into whatever line follows. Graffiti puts a high priority not only on structure but on NSM and flow so if you rush your shoulder, you're setting yourself up for a rough time. Say you're writing a lowercase "*M*", and your shoulder is not only sloppy, but comes out at a bad angle. Due to this, the next line could be forced into an angle that overlaps another structure,

or maybe it simply creates too much negative space. Not only could this negative space prevent flow through line uniformity/similarity, but the last line of the "*M*" won't even have uniformity with the previous lines from the same structure.

As you can see, our bad shoulder has a negative effect on the line marked in red. In such simple tags you might think this is a non-issue, but if left unchecked this becomes very problematic as you progress. Such an easy mistake makes your structure look sloppy when you're first starting out, so instead, focus on a clean shoulder. When you do, you'll notice it's much easier to approach a consistent angle for following lines, and your tag will look cleaner as a result.

Counters: Negative space enclosed or open, created by the structure of a letter.

Your open and closed counters both serve a similar role, and while they may not be letter structure, they are just as important. Their purpose is to define the insides of our letters, and as a result, they indirectly define structure. Our goal is to make sure that the negative space within a letter is properly established, meaning the counter has the appropriate space to define structure without distorting it.

If your counters have too much negative space, that implies that the letter must be larger to create the excess space and means your letter likely has structure and weight issues as well. The same applies the other way around as well for letters having too little negative space.

Strokes: Lines used to create the structure of letters and numbers.

The key to these is how many lines make up each stroke, and how these lines connect to one another to create their distinct shapes.

Straight strokes are the simplest strokes of them all and contain the least style. Normally straight strokes are great for building structure.

The straight stroke is always one line normally used for stems and crossbars and despite the name, this stroke can bend slightly so long as the bend doesn't create a vertex.

Round strokes are comparable to straight strokes in their simplicity and utility.

The round stroke is also one line but it's circular, though it can take on more of an oval shape depending on the structure of the letter resulting in slightly straighter sides.

Angle strokes contain more style than the previous two strokes and are normally used for variants.

The angle stroke is two lines that join at an acute angle. We can see this on the bowl of the *"R"* and the top portion of the *"S"*.

Our square stroke is made from two to four lines that come together to make a general square shape. If two lines are used to make the square stroke, then they can't connect at an acute angle; otherwise, an angle stroke will be made. For this reason, two line square strokes connect at a 90-degree angle, or obtuse angle.

Lastly, the compound stroke is two lines, one rounded and one straight that creates a distinct iron shape.

An important note to make about these strokes is that the orientation of these can change, so we can have an angle stroke that stands upright or upside down, facing the left or the right and it would still be an angle stroke. The lines that make up each of these can also connect at different angles if needed.

Say, for example, we're using a three-line square stroke, we can connect one of the lines at a slight angle to help us manage weight, negative space, and any other fundamental we might need to account for.

Normally, it will take just one stroke to make a part of a letter's anatomy (letter segment), so for example, a straight stroke can make the stem, a round stroke might make the bowl of a *"R"*, while another straight stroke will make the leg. This focuses on major points of anatomy such as bowls, stems, crossbars, spines, arms and legs, rather than smaller parts of anatomy such as shoulders and tails, for example. The reason for this is that when larger parts of anatomy are made, the smaller parts are also made at the same time from the same stroke. Continuing, what about situations where a stroke makes multiple larger points of anatomy such as the letter *"E"*?

You might see the letter *"E"* and think, OK, well I can make the top crossbar, stem, and bottom crossbar with a single square stroke and certainly the end result looks like it's a square stroke. However, each part of the anatomy still has simpler strokes forming it. In this case each of those three are still being made by straight strokes even though the end result looks like a single square stroke.

This isn't the same as using a square stroke to make just the bowl of a letter since the bowl is the only large scale anatomy being created from the stroke. In this case, no single straight line in that square stroke can make that bowl alone, all three lines of the square stroke are needed to make the bowl.

Moving to some simple and straightforward letters like "X", this would just be two straight strokes at an angle, and O would be one round stroke. You can do this with any letter in any language, and this especially helps in other forms of graffiti where you can break letters into more manageable chunks. We'll use this knowledge we've gained so far to create our basic structures, also known as the skeleton hand. It's not nearly as cool or creepy as it sounds; it's called the basic structure/skeleton hand because it's the letters in their simplest form, the bare bones anatomy and that's it. You'll find a full list at the back of the book; we'll use this to learn, practice, and teach from. At this point our focus is to get pinpoint accuracy with these structures and as we go through the book learning new fundamentals, we'll have to juggle properly doing those, while keeping the basic structures correct. Here're some things to keep in mind as we move forward. As we begin learning graffiti there are three things that we should strive for to achieve the clean and nice letters we're looking for.

The first thing to keep an eye on is our lines; we need clean, neat lines for our letters. If our lines are sloppy, shacky, wavey, or sporadic then our letters will look just as sloppy. Even if the tag is otherwise well done, sloppy lines will degrade the tag. The next big consideration is how we draw and write our shapes. Having clean shapes means we can write any letter nice and neat without having inconsistencies, and this will give us better letter structures overall. Lastly, we never want to rush what we write. Many new graffiti artists have this idea in their head that they need to do their tags at the speed of light, but I can assure you, if you slow it down to a consistent pace then you'll see your quality improve. As you practice your two elements of art, line, and shape, you'll become confident enough to have a nice consistent pace when writing. This refined approach allows you to be more accurate and cleaner with all of your strokes, and as a result, your letters. With all that information it would be understandable to think, "How is this any different from print, this isn't graffiti."

2

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRAFFITI & OTHER LETTER- BASED ART FORMS

Difference Between Graffiti & Other Letter-Based Art Forms

When we look at graffiti, in its basic form, it might look like any other print lettering but there are tons of drastic differences. As discussed in our book about style, all art forms have what is known as a fundamental set: a list of basics that govern, define, and categorize the art form, and these fundamentals are placed in a hierarchy. While most of the time, art forms have different fundamental sets, some art forms have a few overlaps, such as graffiti with other letter-based art forms.

- *Letter structure*
- *Negative space management (NSM)*
- *Flow*
- *Letter/name weight (LNW)*
- *Letter/name positioning (LNP)*

These are graffiti's fundamentals that define it from other art forms, and at the top of its hierarchy, we have letter structure, with negative space management and flow being the second and third in the hierarchy. Don't get me wrong, the other fundamentals are certainly important; otherwise, they wouldn't be part of the fundamental set. However, letter structure is by far the most important. So sure, graffiti and basic print might have many similarities, but they have key fundamental differences that define each as separate art forms. Similar to how cursive is often confused for calligraphy due to some similarities, but they are two very different art forms.

cursive *calligraphy*

Cursive prioritizes the flow of momentum while not lifting your pen to create letters. Calligraphy unifies its letters with uniformity and allows you to lift your tool. Calligraphy will put a huge emphasis on different basic strokes used to create all letters. An additional emphasis is also put on the nib angle and/or pressure and pen widths, while cursive doesn't prioritize those nearly as much or at all. Graffiti uses many of those same topics, but graffiti uses them to a much lesser extent, and in different ways.

IONEコⲔ */nunoʃ*

Strokes show this difference well, since graffiti has strokes, but not only are the strokes different, calligraphy has much stricter rules for its strokes. These strokes separate graffiti from basic print as well, since print puts no emphasis on these, while graffiti is defined by these strokes. The strokes alone separate basic structures from variant structures, and define base structures from more advanced graffiti as a result. Some parts of letters are also treated very differently from one art form to another, for example, serifs, a topic we'll cover at length deeper in the book.

OE Œ Another topic worth bringing to light is ligatures. In typography, ligatures are two or more letters that become one symbol for the purpose of eliminating problematic fundamentals. Whereas typography doesn't often connect letters, connecting letters is extremely common in graffiti. When letters in graffiti connect, they don't become one single character. While this may not seem like a big deal, this has huge effects on how you'll handle and even manipulate the fundamentals, especially since each letter retains all of its anatomy.

Where graffiti takes a lot of its inspiration from calligraphy is in the skeleton hand. The skeleton hand's purpose is to allow calligraphers to learn the fundamentals needed to perform all other styles of lettering. Skeleton hands are simple structures made with a fine-pointed nib that creates the bones of the letters. Graffiti takes this skeleton hand and simplifies it even more, reducing most letters to just the essential lines needed to create each character; this is also known as the basic structures. Every letter has one basic structure per majuscule and minuscule; think of the uppercase and lowercase "A", for example. This is graffiti's skeleton hand equivalent, and it serves the same purpose of allowing new graffiti artists to learn the fundamentals so that they can progress in their tags and graffiti in general. With the strokes and lettering chart taught earlier, you can now create any letter in its skeleton form.

EeIi

Now that we've taken our first steps to learn graffiti and how it's different than other lettering arts, we can continue to the fundamentals themselves. Using the skeleton hand, we'll cover the rest of graffiti's basics so you can learn the science of each fundamental, starting with negative space management.
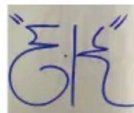
3

NEGATIVE SPACE MANAGEMENT

Negative Space Management

OTAN OTAN

L ook at these two tags and compare their negative space. Note how one tag's spacing is inconsistent and the other looks more uniform. Negative space is truly the unsung hero of good graffiti. Negative space management is all about the empty area within a letter, as well as the space around the name as a whole. Our goal with NSM is to balance this empty area to keep the letters defined, and two of the most common issues to consider are too much or too little space.

CARE

FISH

The Care and Fish tags are more examples of bad negative space. Care's *"R"* becomes distorted from the lack of negative space and becomes a *"B"*. While the Fish tag looks disjointed and lacks flow due to and excess of negative space.

Without negative space our letter wouldn't exist; it would be one huge blob of ink. Oven's handstyle on the left is great, but his *"N"* lacks negative space and as a result he's destroyed that letter. On the other hand, too much negative space and our letters will look weak and won't flow together as one single name. This tag from Ebok on the right has perfectly fine letters, but the amount of negative space around each letter makes the *"E"* and *"K"* appear lanky and weak.

Something as simple as not completing a structure can destroy your letter, all because of a little extra negative space. Rushing to write a lowercase *"A"* might cause us to leave just a bit too much space at the top, effectively turning this letter into a *"U"*.

a u

If we're not careful about how we write the letter *"R"*, we might connect the leg to the bottom of the stem, turning it into a *"B"*. What's really at work here is a failure to represent the counter of the letter properly, and as a result, the structure is destroyed. However, while these are two common and very simple examples, this can happen to any letter. In many cases lacking, or including too much negative space, or misrepresenting a counter of either category can simply break the letter's structure to the point where it's not any letter at all. If you struggle with these issues in tags, they only become more amplified with throwies and pieces.

In tags, this can be fixed with some clean and neat writing using an appropriately sized nib to make sure the negative space within your letters isn't distorting your structure. However, issues with negative space are often much more subtle than that. Let's begin breaking down the science of this fundamental.

B

GRIM

Negative space management is going to begin with the amount of space you allocate to your work, called our "total space," (outlined with a bold red line) and how you divide that space among the different letters like we did with the faded red lines.

Assuming you're keeping to the skeleton hand, the total amount of vertical space for your work is going to be determined by the cap line. More stylized works might determine the vertical space using the descender and/or ascender lines.

The horizontal space of the tag should be proportional to the vertical space you've established as well as how many letters you have in your name. Your mean line will be used to split the cap height in half, while the space for your ascender and descender should be roughly half the size of your x-height.

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Don't obsess over measuring to be exact, you can eyeball the sizes and approximate, this is especially true of the acender and decender space. Even in the example you'll notice the space for the ascender and decender is a little more than half the space of our x-height. Our goal for doing this isn't to be exact, it's to prevent us from making drastic mistakes.
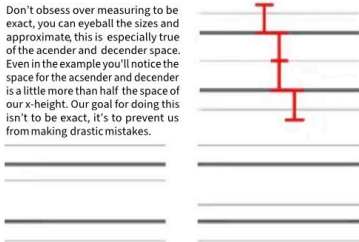
When looking at the space between your baseline and mean line, and the space between the cap line and mean line, if you have more space in one area it takes space away from the opposite area. In other words, a larger x-height means your letters will be compressed above the mean line. While this could be used for some great-looking letters, it doesn't help us much when learning.

Imagine you're practicing your skeleton hand and you notice the handstyle is too short. To fix this, look at your cap line, mean line, and baseline. Is there more space between your baseline and mean line, or is there more space in your mean line to cap line? Make sure both have the same amount of space by adjusting your mean line; this will help you if you've been compressing the higher or lower section of your letters. Compressing the x-height means we're going to have heavy top letters with much more negative space and lots of weight. This also means we'll have less negative space at the bottom.

Another side effect is we'll also have less balance since the smaller space in the x-height will struggle to carry everythin g above it with its less developed structures. Some letters' base structures can handle this better than others, while other letters struggle more with this balance.

The **"R"** and **"I"** are great examples of how compression can affect letters differently. The **"I"** will have no noticeable effects since its lower half is a perfectly straight and horizontal line. **"R"** on the other hand now has its bowl connecting much lower on the stem, and the leg has less room to extend outward resulting in a structure with lots of weight at the top.

On the opposite side of the coin, moving the mean line upward to add more space at the bottom gives us sturdy letters. However, we end up with little weight at the tops, which can make many two-story letters that prioritize their tops look weak. This wakening effect can become worse if the letter has an open counter in the base of its structure, since the open counter base leaves more room for negative space.

One of the more defining characteristics in two-story letters tends to be in the top half, so minimizing that is why some letters gain that weaker aesthetic, for example, **"K"**, **"R"**, **"P"**, and many **"E"** variant structures. This added space at the bottoms means there is less structure to hold the letter up, and less

letter structure development in general, amplifying that weakening effect. This fundamental's influence can be subtle, so if you're still consistently having issues with weaker structures, then one of the following is likely to blame.
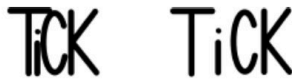
Normally a structure looks weak when the amount of negative space in and around the letter is comparable to the positive space of the structure itself and in some cases even the neighboring letters. Basic structure minuscule **"I"** is the weakest letter in the alphabet, and it shows this point well when done with a thin nib and slightly bad letter positioning. In the example, we can see how the amount of space the letter **"I"** takes up is far less than the amount of negative space around it.

The negative space around the letter *"I"* is partially created by the letter to the left and to the right of the letter *"I."* Depending on how you execute each of these letters, the negative space in this area will change, and as a result, your letter will be more, or possibly less supported by the other letters around it. If you've managed the space well, then your letters will support one another and strengthen one another. If you didn't manage the space well, then the letters won't support one another, and you risk a letter potentially looking weaker because of that.

Creating a weak letter can also happen if you make a letter that is disproportionally taller since you'll add more space in and around the letter when you do this. This is a similar issue to one we covered a little earlier, but the difference here is we're not compressing any section of the letter, but rather changing its proportion in relation to the other letters. If you don't fill up this negative space with effective structure and tight positioning, then your letter will look flimsy.

If both the top and lower sections of your lettering chart have the same space yet your letters are still too small like our Delta tag here, then your cap height isn't tall enough, so we need to move the cap line higher.

A simple fix like this will allow us to create the tag at a larger size since we'll have more room. This also works the other way around with larger letters. If you have letters you find to be too tall, then shrink your cap height, and keep the mean line center and you'll be set to go.

When forming your tag, try to always keep in mind that our letter structures should line up with certain parts of our chart, for example, the center of your letters lining up around the mean line. Doing this will keep letters nice and proportional so that you don't end up with letters that are too small or too large among other letters. Understanding this is important because it means that our letters and negative space will change depending on how we use our lettering chart.

By the time we've finished our name, we'll end up with some of our total space left over around the outside of our name. Out of all of this excess space, the most important is the pockets created by the outermost edge of our letters. These pockets, also referred to as cups or valleys, are created when your graffiti has a dip between two parts that reach further out. Valleys do not include closed or open counters, nor do these include deeper space between two letters. While all counters are made from the skeleton of a letter itself, valleys are made from only the outermost edge of your graffiti, including exterior details, and valleys do not change the shape of the structure.

Every name has natural valleys in certain areas and lacks valleys in other areas. When you look at the base structure handstyle, you should see some natural valleys that occur in your name. In your skeleton hand or your base structure tags, no valley will be an issue unless you make a mistake with another fundamental. This makes fixing basic issues with valleys easy since all you have to do is correct whatever fundamental caused the problem, and this holds true no matter how advanced the graffiti becomes. We began the chapter with an example of this using Care and Fish; where the letters were positioned slightly too far from one another as well as slightly too close, both resulting in issues with valleys. Where we see this become problematic and more common is when you begin to stylize letters even just a little and it's here where valleys become great warning signs to help you make corrections.

Say, for example, you do a nice *"E"* you're proud of, but you finish the rest of the name and realize there is an issue with the valley by the *"E"*. As you take a closer look, you realize your *"E"* extends a little too far at the bottom left, creating a valley at the top left with the letter before, and bottom right with the letter after. The valleys served as a warning that there was a structural and positioning issue causing the negative space issue.

Valleys can be great tools for various fundamentals to use so let them show! There's no need to get rid of every valley you come by. These are especially good for pieces.

If you ever have issues with negative space, then comparing the natural valleys to the ones in your graffiti can be a useful place to start identifying what might have gone wrong.

Maybe your letter structure eats into a pocket too much resulting in a lack of negative space or perhaps you positioned a letter too far, creating a large valley that diminished flow. Keep in mind, this tactic won't account for closed counters. Now not all valleys are bad; you'll have to examine each on a case-by-case basis and see if they diminish a fundamental in any way. This is where flow comes into the picture because flow depends largely on the negative space around our letters.

4

FLOW

Flow

Introduction

Flow is a strange fundamental in graffiti since it's simultaneously the hardest and the easiest fundamental of them all. Just about every new graffiti artist asks me one of two questions: one being "What is flow?" and the other being "My name doesn't flow; how do I flow my name/letters?" First, let's nail down what exactly flow is since this is a question I get asked frequently. Flow in graffiti can either describe how cohesive different letters are, or it can also refer to the implied direction of motion throughout the letters. These two definitions can be broken up into three major categories of flow: the first being line uniformity/similarity, the second being letter uniformity/similarity, and the third category being momentum flow. What makes flow so unique is the fact that when creating any base structure graffiti, all letters, and numbers, flow automatically by way of the first two categories without the artist having to do anything at all, and that is true of all languages. This has huge implications because we have to work directly with the other basics to get the fundamentals to be correct, where with flow, it starts off correctly and we have to work to maintain it. It's here where new graffiti artists struggle as they're more focused on style, resulting in errors with other fundamentals that destroy those. If you want to flow, make sure your other fundamentals are correct and your name will flow automatically from there.

Allow me to pause and drill that last point home for new graffiti artists as this might be one of the more common pain points for people. In short, all base structure letters and numbers flow automatically unless you make a mistake with the other fundamentals. Please keep this in mind as we continue through the chapter as flow won't be an issue in simple base structure graffiti. However, I'd like to keep the examples simple to make the lessons clear and easy to follow. Let's contextualize this by explaining the first two major categories of flow starting with line as well as letter uniformity and similarity.

Line/Letter Uniformity / Similarities Concept

The basic premise for how line uniformity/similarity (line U/S) works is that the more similar or uniform two lines are, the more cohesive they appear. Letter uniformity focuses on unifying the larger motifs of letters, such as your bowls, stems, serifs, and even extensions. By including repeating elements from one letter to the next, we can increase how much those letters will flow.

In our first example you'll see three lines, two being perfectly uniform lines, and the third being similar to the first two. This demonstrates the basic concept of line uniformity while the next example of the *"E"*, *"R"* shows this very thing in practice. The vertical lines of our *"E"* are uniform with the vertical stem of our *"R"*. Lastly our *"R"*, *"B"*, *"A"* example shows how these three letters all have a triangular top. Our *"R"* and *"B"* share uniform angle bowls, while our *"A"* uses an angle top that is similar to the first two letters.


The key difference between flow with letters and lines is that line-based flow is proximity based, and letter-based flow isn't. While this is true for all forms of graffiti, it's hardly an issue for tags since tags normally don't have vast amounts of positive space within the letters that separate their lines in the way that throwies or pieces do. Line-based flow is only effective when you pair many lines together since individually their impact is low or even near nonexistent. Letter-based flow on the other hand has a larger impact with far fewer uses due to the size of the cohesive elements. While these differences between line and letter-based flow may be huge, due to the fact lines are used to make letters, these two different methods are often seen as two sides of the same coin. Both are essential parts of flow and graffiti; in fact, it's fair to say, these two methods are the only necessary methods of flow, whereas momentum flow is completely optional.

Let's take a deeper look into the unique aspects of the first two methods of flow to learn more, and we'll circle back to momentum flow once we've reviewed all of the other fundamentals.

Line Uniformity/Similarity

As stated earlier, lines that are similar can flow with one another since they share a sense of cohesion. This means a vertical line can flow with a diagonal, but not a horizontal line. A horizontal can also flow with a diagonal; however, the horizontal will contrast with the vertical line.
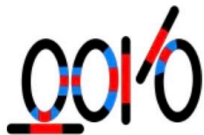
Circular lines are unique b ecause their rounded edge will have at least one point that is uniform or similar to another line that's close enough beside it. Having a versatile edge that is compatible with any direction of lines means a circle could flow with a vertical line, just as easily as it could flow with a diagonal, horizontal line, or another rounded line. You can see this in the example where the red section of the "O" is uniform with our straight line, and the blue is similar to our straight line, and even the rounded edges of the "O's" both flow as well.

On top of that, for two lines to have U/S, they need to be close enough to o ne another; otherwise, new lines and shapes will break the pattern, causing the eye to register the next few shapes, or wander to other areas before reaching the second uniform or similar line. When this happens, you can break the flow of the name, and since tags are not as elaborate as most other art forms, such as an oil-painted landscape, you can't afford to break that flow all too much since you don't have time to rebuild that flow. This is something even throwies and pieces struggle to rebound from, though it is possible.

Our first example shows that even though the " B" and the "F" both lean in the same direction, they're too far for line U/S to flow. Luckily for us, they do flow from letter uniformity since both letters have the same lean. The "E's", however, are just enough in range to flow from line uniformity, and they'll have letter uniformity. Once we position the "E's" with the same lean as the "B", then suddenly the di agonals from the "E's" will link the line uniformity from the "B" all the way over to the "F".

So what counts as "too far for two lines to flow"? Remember earlier when we briefly mentioned how you can split your total space into equal sections for each letter? Well, no matter the angle of your line, you have roughly half the width of a letter to add a line that flows. Any distance greater than that and your line won't flow. Say we have two letters, "N, E," and the "N" has a nice vertical line. Our "E" only has one opportunity on the left to create line U/S. If the stem doesn't flow, then the "E" has nothing on the right side to make a similar line with and therefore both letters will lose a bit of flow. Not to mention, by the time we get to the right of the "E", we're already too far for the line's uniformity to be effective. By leaning a letter, we can help a line reach within range of another letter so that they can flow, similar to our "E's" in the BEEF tag. For horizontal lines, this works in much the same way, but now you have verticality to consider. A line at the baseline won't flow with a horizontal at the cap line, so you'll need to link them with a uniform or similar line at the mean line. While skeleton hands might start off with correct flow, our job is to maintain that flow, and this is how we do so. On that note, you don't have to obsess over making every possible line flow, but taking advantage of this can allow you to boost the flow in your work.

As you can see once we add a hint of style while ignoring line U/S, then flow gets destroyed. This same premise is also to blame for some letters being hard to work with, while other letters seem very easy to work with. Letters like "N" and "H" allow for easy flow since they flow with themselves but not all letters

are like this. Some letters have little to no structure on one of the two sides, while others are just average with nothing making flow easier or harder.

An unexpected effect of line un iformity is that this method of flow also tends to affect your letter positioning by influencing the angle at which you write

The top left of the second "E" reaches into the right zone of the first "E". This puts each stem in range to flow with line U/S.

the letter and as a result, this affects your negative space as well. You might notice, if we don't use uniform lines to write our letters, then not only do we diminish flow, but we risk creating too much negative space in some areas, or we risk losing too much negative space in other areas.

Looking at Snow Goons tag here from Enort we can see he positions and leans letters in such a way to maximize line uniformity/similarity. Each letter leans in just the right way to ensure a consistent flow from beginning to end. Line uniformity is necessary for all forms of graffiti since it acts as the glue figuratively speaking that holds your word together, but what happens if you want to change the direction of your flow midway through the name?

Transition Your Flow

Eventually when using line uniformity and similarity, you'll have to change the direction of your flow. Transitioning flow is something you'll find yourself doing in basic throwies and pieces, as well as slightly stylized tags. You might need to do this for any number of reasons, but one common need for this is when you have a name where one side has plenty of straight vertical lines and the other side has plenty of horizontal lines.

A name like this might make using similar lines hard. Using a basic structure tag to show the concept, we can see the red line of the *"E"* is horizontal so it will contrast our vertical left side of our *"V"*. One solution would be to include a new diagonal line that acts as the halfway point between the two lines we want to flow. By adding this small diagonal serif to the *"E"* to begin transitioning our flow.


When we do this, we allow the horizontal line (red) to flow with our new diagonal line (blue) since they're similar. From there, our vertical line (yellow) will also flow with the diagonal line since they are also similar to one another. Because this diagonal line acts as a bridge between our starting and ending lines, the vertical (yellow) and horizontal (red) will now link together and flow with one another indirectly. Though that explanation works as a simplified breakdown, I think it's worth explaining this a little more in depth. We can look at the science behind what's happening so that you can understand the formula itself, allowing you to apply this to all forms of graffiti.

To transition, we'll start by figuring out our starting line, and ending flow lines. In this case our starting point is a horizontal marked with an *"S"*, and we want to transition to a vertical marked with an *"E"*. We'd then imagine these two lines connected, and we'd see if their an gle is an acute, 90-degree, or obtuse angle, and when these lines join, they make a 90-degree angle. From there, we'll find the halfway line, known as the bisector.

For the sake of knowledge, let's learn how to find the bisector properly, though it's OK to eyeball this measurement. Once we have our angle, we'd place a compass on point *"A"* where each line meets, and we'd draw a line connecting our starting and ending flow lines and we'd mark them with points *"B"* and *"C"*.
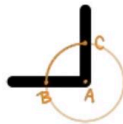
From here, widen your compass and draw a circle around **"B"** and **"C"**. Mark the point where these circles overlap as **"D"**, then draw a line from **"A"** to **"D"**. That right there is your bisector. Doing this for our 90-degree angle, the halfway point would be 45 degrees. This means we'd draw our line to transition flow (our linking line) in a diagonal direction traveling at around 45 degrees. Once again, I stress, this does not at all have to be exact. We just need to be within that approximate range; otherwise, the linking line will be too uniform with the starting or ending line and not similar enough to the other. Now, obtuse and acute angles work a little differently.

If the starting and ending flow lines came together and made an acute angle, assuming they're close enough, these lines wouldn't need to be linked to one another because they'd already be similar, and therefore they'd flow. You can still include a linking line if you want to, but this would be more applicable in throwies and pieces where you have not only the room, but the excess lines to do so. This wouldn't be practical or necessary in a tag, not to mention the effects would be negligible in most cases. The only possible reason they wouldn't flow is if they're too far from one another, so in a case like this, linking lines would only be used for the purpose of bridging the distance between the two flow lines.

Starting and ending flow lines that make an obtuse angle would need multiple linking lines to transition flow. With obtuse angles, we'd still find exactly where the bisector is for our starting and ending lines (marked in blue). This is our first linking line that will help us find our next two linking lines.

Next, take your starting line and match it up with the first bisector, totally ignore the ending line at this point. Find the center between the starting line and the first bisector and draw your second bisector (marked in red). This new angle will show us our second linking line.

Lastly, we have to locate our third linking line. All we're going to do here is repeat what we just did. Take your first bisector and match it up with the ending line this time and approximate the center between the two. This will tell you the angle your last linking line has to travel to link your flow. By the end we should have five lines, those being our starting line, the three linking lines marked in red, blue and orange, followed by the end line. I should point out, all of this is unnecessary on any base structure tag since they all flow automatically. Slightly stylized tags are where transitioning your flow becomes relevant in tags. Basic throwies and pieces do however use this, even for basic letters, and that's why it's necessary to learn. Hand styles in general also have a harder time using this due to the lack of excess lines, while throwies and pieces don't struggle with this nearly as much since there's more room for additional lines.

Letter Uniformity Similarity

Letter uniformity is not proximity based, and while flow of this type also applies to throwies and pieces much more, handstyles still make use of this.

Say, for example, you have a round circular bowl on two letters, one on the left side of the name, and one on the right. Those two bowls are similar and therefore they create unison within the tag, a sense of familiarity.

However, if you change one of these bowls to be triangular but you keep the other rounded, you've destroyed that sense of cohesion, and they no longer resemble one another. Seeing as letter uniformity happens on a larger scale, its impact is also larger and as a result, the two similar features don't need to be close at all for them to flow. However, this works both ways, and because they're larger, more noticeable and have more of an impact, if you don't repeat the element then it can detract lots of flow. For this reason, you do want to have repeating elements in your work.

Look at this tag, for example; here we can see we added tons of style to certain letters that we didn't repeat elsewhere and as a result the tag looks chaotic, with no real sense of direction. Just about every other form of art uses repetition to avoid this very issue; however, that doesn't mean you can't mix things up here and there. We'll learn more about how this works later in the book. Even when dealing with names that have letters with little in common, it's still easy to use letter U/S.

Take the name Omak, for instance, the *"O"* has little in common with any of the sharper-angle letters as far as letter U/S is concerned. Knowing this, if you wanted to make the *"O"* have more in common with the other letters then you might use a lowercase *"A"* and/or *"M"*. Doing this starts each letter off with structures that resemble one another so this lays down a good foundation of letter U/S. There's an issue though, as at this point, our *"O"* now flows with the *"A"* and *"M"* (marked in blue), but the *"K"* suddenly lacks the same resemblance. This leaves the *"K"* feeling like the *"O"* did at the start. So how do we fix this? Well one solution is

to link the letter U/S from another letter, in this case our *"A"*, to the *"K"*. To do this, we'll add a serif to the top of the *"A"* and add one to the *"K"* (marked in red).

Something as simple as this will tie the *"K's"* flow into all of the other letters by linking the *"K"* to the *"A"*. Since the *"A"* shares letter U/S with the other letters, the *"A"* will bridge the gap between the *"K"* and all of the other letters in the name. Since this version of flow isn't proximity based, you don't need many of these uniform features to link one letter to the rest of the name, and normally one is enough to do the trick. Even though we're demonstrating this on a base structure tag, linking flow still works all the same in advanced works too.

Letter uniformity is important to tie all the letters together as one whole word, once again reinforcing how both line and letter U/S act as the glue that holds letters together. As for momentum flow, we'll cover this in the style sections of the book as this is not only more advanced but also completely optional within graffiti. With all of that in mind, remember, we only positively and negatively affect the flow itself by messing with other fundamentals, rather than directly influencing the flow itself. All of the fundamentals have to come together correctly for the skeleton hand to flow automatically, and if any fundamental is off then the tag won't flow. Seeing as the basic skeleton hand's structure is essentially the basic print font you'd see on your computer screen, this holds true for fonts as well.

As you can see, this font flows just fine in the first example, but if we separate the letters or we begin to move the letters in different positions then suddenly this basic font no longer flows. These letters have the spacing that two words would have. If there's one thing to take away from this example, know this: If you're having an issue with flow, then the issue isn't flow; you've messed up one of the other fundamentals, likely from adding too much style. Adding too much style is by far the most common reason graffiti artists in general end up having issues with flow. If flow's been an issue, work out the other fundamentals and you'll find your flow increases in quality. I've intentionally repeated this multiple times because it's one of the most asked questions from new artists and one of the simplest solutions that goes overlooked.

5

VISUAL WEIGHT & LETTER/NAME WEIGHT

Visual Weight and Letter/Name Weight

Have you ever written your tag name and thought, "Why is my tag so lopsided and disproportionate?" Letter and name weight was likely the problem. No matter what you draw, all images have visual weight, and this includes tags. How we decide to balance the letters and the word is known as letter/name weight. The weight of each individual letter will come together and create the weight of our word. In the most basic sense, you'll manipulate the weight of your tag by changing the size, position, and orientation of the letter. These are the most impactful ways to manipulate weight in your handstyles and normally this is all you'll have to worry about as you start out.

When using the lettering chart, your letters will naturally be the same height. Your focus should be to make sure your letters stand upright and occupy the same space horizontally. We can see an example of this with the name CROW, where each letter occupies roughly the same horizontal space even when overlapping slightly. If you can do this consistently without the lettering chart, then your graffiti will be balanced. As you begin working on other forms of graffiti, many other properties of weight, such as detail and color, will become more and more important. Though on the surface this topic is simple and easy, quickly the topic of weight shows itself to be an iceberg of depth and information that you'll have to learn. Both visual weight that we see in all forms of art and letter name weight in graffiti are intertwined with one another. If you want full control over these topics, then we must understand what visual weight is and what contributes to visual weight.

Visual weight is not only how heavy your subject matter in an image appears but also how much attention that subject attracts. There is a lot to get into so let's define each factor in visual weight, then we'll define each in the context of graffiti, and explain how each one relates to our letters.

Properties of Visual Weight

Size

Larger subjects appear to have more weight than smaller elements. A common lesson taught in art is as the big dot little dot that shows this example simplistically. Since the big dot is larger, it has more visual weight and therefore appears heavier and grabs more attention than the little dot.


This simple concept carries over to more complex drawings; for example, if we draw a car, we all know that it must be pretty heavy, and if we draw an ant, well, we assume the ant i s pretty light. These assumptions can be made based on our real-world knowledge of these objects but what happens if suddenly we draw the ant the same size as the car, or perhaps much larger than the car?

Well now we have to assume that either the car is really tiny and we're zoomed in close to make the ant look larger, or we have to assume that our bug is massive and as a result it's far heavier than the car. While both size and our real-world knowledge can imply weight, the context of the image as a whole can affect weight as well.

Position
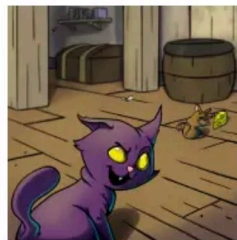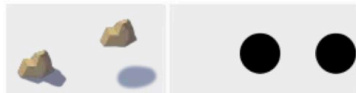
Subjects higher in elevation have more weight than objects lower down as shown with the rocks example. While, objects closer to the center, or around the focal point, have less weight than objects further from the center or further away from the focal point, as depicted with the two dots. This might seem counterintuitive since a clear focal point has the most visual weight in a piece of art and while that is true, the objects around the focal point aren't the focus. When you take an object and place it further from the clear focal point, this new object begins to distract from the focal point as it pulls attention away. Lastly, subjects positioned closer in the foreground have more weight than objects in the background. For example, the cat is much more likely to grab attention than the mouse, or the two flies in the background.

Orientation

People's minds naturally want to apply gravity to subjects in an image and orientation has plenty to do with this. This expectation of gravity creates anticipation, and this anticipation adds weight no matter what you draw. Subjects in the horizontal position have the least amount of weight as they appear more grounded and stable. They're not at risk of falling anywhere and therefore there is no anticipation. Subjects standing in the upright position have a medium amount of weight as they look stable but have the potential to fall over.

Subjects in a diagonal position have the most weight since they appear in motion, either falling or rising between the vertical or horizontal position.

Shape Weight

Regular shapes, such as squares, circles, and triangles, have more weight than organic shapes as their mass is more ambiguous.

Contrast

Contrast is the process of using various subjects near one another to emphasize their differences. An easy example would be these shaded squares where a white square on a black background has much more contrast than a gray square on the same black background. This same concept can be seen with warm and cool colors as well as high saturation and low saturation.

While contrast is often seen in relation to the properties of color, contrast can also apply to edges. An artist can easily contrast more straight and angular edges with rounder, softer edges, or even lost edges. In the example you'll see a round edge, a harsh edge and even a soft edge.

Each of these contrasts with the other. Areas with higher amounts of contrast will have more weight than areas with less contrast.

Texture (Detail)

Objects with lots of texture/detail have more visual weight than objects with less. Naturally our eyes will be attracted to areas with a higher density of details so adding more densely packed sections in a piece of art can help attract more attention than less densely packed areas. This can be seen in the painting I made where the lips and water have lots of detail, yet the hair and forehead have almost no details at all.

Color

Color has three properties, value (how light or dark is the color), hue (the color itself), and saturation (how intense the color is).

Darker values have more weight than lighter values. Warmer colors have more visual weight than cooler colors. The more saturated a color is, the more visual weight it will have, while the duller a color is the less weight it will have.

The concept of elevation translates directly into graffiti, where letters that are higher up off the baseline have lots more visual weight than letters that are on the baseline.

Since the baseline acts as our ground, letters that dip under the baseline risk adding weight as well as they appear to drag the letter and/or name down. Defining anatomy points such as a bowl, for instance, have more weight when they're higher up, and less weight when they're lower on the letter. If you make the higher feature too high up with nothing supporting it underneath, then it risks knocking your letter off balance. Features that exist within the x-height act more as a support system to hold the letter up. This doesn't mean you should have tiny upper features and huge lower features.

When you're just learning, our goal with position is to have all the letters at the same height. This should be easy enough to do if you're following your lettering chart and if you're keeping the letters close to one another. If you're doing these things, then you won't have any issues with letters straying far from the center of your graffiti.

A really strange contributor to visual weight is how close your image is to the edge of the page. This isn't normally a problem for tags as much as it's a problem for all other forms of graffiti but the closer to the edge you get, the more aware people become of the edge of your surface.
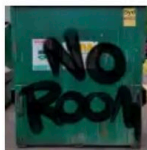
If a writer is doing tags on a wall this will hardly be relevant as seen in Ciske's tag; however, avoid bumping into the edge of whatever you're tagging to ensure your work stays clean or you risk squeezing your letters.

This does affect other forms of graffiti like throwies and pieces more since they're larger and reach the edges of any surface with ease. We've all seen those pieces and throwies that get cut off because they h it the bottom of the wall where the wall meets the floor. The human eye naturally notices this, and it catches our attention instantly. Bumping the edges can't always be avoided on walls, but if you're working in books on a nice image then you'll want to keep this in mind.

If we imagine that gravity is being applied to our art at all times, then everything we create wants to fall toward the ground, or in the case of graffiti, it wants to fall to the baseline. In work that uses descenders, then your work wants to fall to the bottom of your total space. This means position can create anticipation, and as a result, this anticipation can build visual weight.

Position as far as letter name weight is concerned, it pretty much settles itself if you're practicing your base structures but even then, some letters cause several issues, like "T" and "L", for example. Letters such as these naturally like to push other letters away with their huge crossbars.

For the letter "L" and other letters like it with a lower structure that creates lots of negative space above, you can position them slightly into the descender. Having the "L" dip a little into the descender helps to prevent the "L" from pushing the next letter as much.

This small change can give you the space you need to gently slide the following letter a little closer without blocking the structure and as a result this can help minimize the negative space above the "L" even if only slightly. Letters such as "T", "J", and other letters like these, have the opposite issue where they have lots of structure at the top that creates negative space from just below the cap line to the baseline.

These tend to be more problematic since their negative space is below the structure, meaning this space creates anticipation and adds weight. The upside is these problematic horizontal lines are normally attached to a vertical line that helps stabilize and ground the letter.

For this reason, we have a few solutions; we can either position the top of the letter slightly higher while still having the bottom touch the baseline. Adding even more negative space under the horizontal line might seem counterintuitive, but doing this gives you just enough room for the next letter to slide slightly clo ser or just a tad under to hold the weight of whatever is above it while filling negative space.

If you're not careful when raising the horizontal line higher, the added negative space could cascade into tons of other issues so be sure to keep an eye on your other fundamentals. While experienced graffiti artists might be able to put that negative space to use, less experienced artists will struggle with weight, as well as NSM, LNP, and they'll struggle to flow their name as a result.
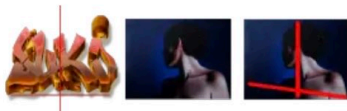
You have to be careful though, if a letter happens to dip into the descender a little too much, then you risk instantly throwing the name weight off. When something like this happens on your first or last letter, this descending letter almost seems to drag the rest of the name down with it. This can make the lower letter seem much heavier, even though in theory it should appear more grounded as it's lower than all of the other letters. The reason this happens is that the fi rst and last letters are further away from the center of your tag so more weight is applied to them, and this amplified weight can counteract the grounded effect that lessens weight. Also, contrast might be a contributing factor for the added weight if the letter that's dipping into the descender is much lower than the otherwise higher-up letters.

This doesn't have much of an effect on smaller names or words that have three or fewer letters, but this becomes much more impactful as the name gets longer.

Lowering letters like "J" and "T" doesn't help as now you're increasing your total space and creating more negative space overal.

The reason subjects look heavier the further away from the center they travel is because our image works as a seesaw with our image split down the center. As we travel further from the center, our art adds weight, and the imaginary seesaw gets lower on that side. The closer to the center our art is, the less its weight affects the seesaw movement. What's interesting is if you have a letter like "L", that pushes other letters further, then the letter being pushed away could add weight to the side of the name it's on. In this scenario, the "L" is not only adding weight due to the negative space above its crossbar, but it's forcing the letter after it to add weight since it's moved away from the center.

Graffiti tends to be a very centralized art form so the center of your tag name will be the center of this imaginary seesaw. This also allows us to group the letters with a left and right side of the name to help us plot our weight and other fundamentals as you'll come to learn later in the book. An unexpected effect of position weight is that it can apply to tags placed inside our throwies, pieces, and even just a tag on a wall.

Tags positioned inside of your throwie, and piece will grab more attention if they're higher up, rather than if they're lower down. This is one reason why you might have had second thoughts about where you placed your crew's name or hand style within your throwie or piece. This same thinking applies to walls and other surfaces to a lesser extent.

Sure, a tag at eye level on a wall might be easier to see than a tag ten, twenty, or thirty feet up, but the higher tag tends to captivate people more. As graffiti artists we're all captivated by the nice rooftop spot, or water tower spot. Partly because people wonder how the handstyle was put there, but also because it demands more visual weight.

Once we notice graffiti that high up it becomes the one we focus on the most more times than not. Now if you're a writer, don't read this and think, "Oh I have to tag the top of everything, books, signs, etcetera, so it grabs more attention," that's unnecessary. On that small of a scale the effects would be negligible at best. Instead keep this information in the back of your mind and if at any point you feel like your graffiti looks strange in its location, then bring this information to mind, and consider moving the graffiti.

Letter Weight – Orientation

Letters in the upright position have their standard weight. This standard weight is determined more so from the space they occupy. Letters leaning left have more weight than letters standing upright. Letters leaning to the right have the most weight. Right-leaning letters have

additional weight because they travel in the direction we read; this could change for vertical tags, and any language read in another direction. One of the easiest and most common ways of manipulating letters in graffiti is to change their orientation, normally by keeping the letter upright or leaning a letter left or right. Doing this lets the graffiti artist control how they fill negative space, how they manage line uniformity/similarity, and how they distribute weight. If we think back to the example of the three lines, leaning a letter more to the left or right creates more weight than if you had drawn the same letter standing upright. Letters with a wider structure at their base appear more horizontal, like *"H"* or *"M"*. These tend to feel more grounded and can be harder to knock off balance. On the other hand, letters like *"V"*, *"P"*, *"F"*, *"5"* or *"O"* are much easier to knock over since they either have a rounded, unstable bottom or wider upper bodies with a thinner, more vertical lower body.

With rounded bottom letters, the trick is to balance the center of gravity to ensure it will stand upright. You don't have to be exact with the center of gravity either, so if you're new, don't obsess over getting the center of gravity perfect. So long as you're close, your letter will be fine. With top-heavy letters like *"P"*, standing the letter upright works perfectly fine for balance, but leaning the letter to the left can help make balance a little easier when exploring this fundamental.

The reason this works is that the weight on letters like *"F"*, *"P"* is predominantly on the right-hand side, so leaning letters like this to the left will counterbalance the heavy right side.

Some artists attempt to add style to letters like *"R"* or *"K"*, and they shorten the leg of the letter. Doing this turns the R and other letters like it into top-heavy letters and as a result, all of the same weight issues and solutions apply. The issue with shortening the leg is the fact that when you stand it up straight, it no longer keeps balance since the leg still adds additional weight that wants to pull the letter down in that direction. For this reason, you'll normally see graffiti artists who shorten the leg, lean the letter to the left or they balance it by having another letter hold it up as the letter falls to the right (shown with the *"RS"* example). Now most of the letters in our alphabet have a right bias to their structure and weight, but this isn't the case for all letter structures and numbers, including structures from different languages.

Sometimes you'll run into a letter with a left-side bias to its structures; minuscule *"g"*, *"J"*, *"d"* or variant structure *"a"* are just a few examples of this. Since most of the weight of these letters is left of the stem, leaning it further in that direction can easily make it look as if the letter is getting knocked off balance.

However, leaning a letter like this to the right will not only create excessive negative space between itself and the letter before, it will also hurt flow if your other letters lean to the left since line uniformity will be harder to achieve for most letters due

to opposing leans. The upside to these letters is that most of these left-bias letters have a straight right side from their stem.

Assuming you don't apply a drastic lean, the straighter right side makes them extremely easy to flow with the letter that comes after them. Line uniformity/similarity pretty much creates itself here with little to no effort.

Letter Weight – Shape

Letters are made from regular shapes and have more weight than any additional details with ambiguous shapes as the volume of the ambiguous shape is not clearly or easily defined. Letters with more square shapes have plenty of weight due to the space they occupy. Letters with rounded shapes, especially at the bottom, tend to have their weight due to anticipation. A wider shape at the base makes letters appear more stable, while a thinner shape at the base gives a letter the potential for instability.

Since our letters use regular shapes to build the letter's structure, each base structure will have comparable weights to one another. This means, when practicing your skeleton hand and other base structures, you don't have to worry much about shapes affecting your weight, even when having a rounded letter like "O", next to a triangular letter like "A". So long as everything is proportional, the difference in shape weight will remain fundamentally correct.

However, each base structure will have a general shape, and as a result, a standard weight. Understanding these general shapes can help us to get an idea of how heavy a structure will be, and how that weight is distributed.

Different letter segments will create different shapes and these shapes can vary in weight. These collective shapes will give us the general shape of the letter. Our general shapes are going to be square, circle, triangle, and figuring out what category a structure falls into is easy and straightforward. First and foremost, the general shape can be determined simply by looking at the shape of the letter. An "O" will clearly be round, an "H" has an apparent square shape as does an "E", and the letter "V" resembles a triangle. However, some letters are less clear, so to determine their shape we have to use a different method. By drawing a square around our letter, we can examine how the structure fits within the square. Depending on how the letter interacts with the cap line and the baseline, this will tell us the general shape. We're looking to see how many times the letter comes in contact with the baseline and cap line, as well as how large these points of contact are. Contact points are going to work as indications of how wide the top and bottom of the letter are; for this reason a single large contact point that extends to the left and right of the square we drew will also indicate a larger bottom or top.

If the letter reaches out toward the top and bottom left and right sides, then the general shape is square. Often this results in the letter making two points of contact at the cap line and two at the baseline, and it's possible to have a letter like "R" that creates only one large point of contact on one side, in this case the cap line. Since this larger point of contact extends to the left and right side of the red square we drew, it equates to a square general shape.

Despite having a rounded bottom, much of the "U's" basic structure is meant to contact the baseline. Factor in the verticality of the left and right sides, and its two points of contact at the cap line, and we end up learning the "U" has a square general shape.

Triangle-shaped letters will have either one large contact point followed by a smaller contact point on the opposite side, or they'll have two smaller points on one side, with a single contact point on the opposite side.

Rounded letters will have one point of contact at the cap and baselines, with one directly above the other and at least one rounded side. Since rounded letters are balanced by their center of gravity, you'll end up having their points of contact being directly opposite one another. You'll notice I included lowercase "A" in the example, yet it has three points of contact that are no different than what a triangular-shaped letter might have.

Focusing just on the natural color without changing their saturation or value, red is the heaviest color of all the natural colors, and despite being a warm color, yellow is the lightest. The reason for this is that yellow has the lightest natural value of any color, and lighter values have less weight. Knowing this, you might think purple should be the heaviest since it has the lowest natural value of any color, the issue is purple isn't as intense as red, nor is it as warm as red. The visual weight of these can change depending on how you adjust the three properties of color.

These are the different principles of visual weight that all forms use. No matter what we draw, even something as simple as a line has some level of visual weight to it. The question now becomes how these same concepts apply to graffiti and what would these same definitions look like when applied to graffiti?

Graffiti's Letter/Name Weight

Letter Weight – Size

Larger letters weigh more than smaller letters. Letters that take up more positive space also weigh more than letters that take up less positive space. Generally speaking, lowercase letters weigh less than uppercase letters, and have more negative space. This thinking remains true even if we write the same letter twice with one smaller than the other, despite being the same, the larger one will have more visual weight.

Keep in mind the size you draw something can imply how heavy it is in relation to the other elements around it and this stays true from one letter to the next in the context of the word you're writing in graffiti. This means if we're writing the name Grim, for example, and all your letters are the same size except for the *"R"* being abnormally large, your *"R"* will make your other letters look tiny, and the other letters will also make the *"R"* look even bigger. All of this even applies to the thickness of your lines for the letter as well, so be sure to keep the line width constant. If you have one letter bolder than the others, then it too will have more weight even if it's the same height and width as the other letters.

These concepts and ideas also work for all letters in the alphabet, each one has its own weight.

An issue many new graffiti artists have is keeping the letters the same height and width. A great way to practice keeping the letters a uniform size is to use our grid from earlier. On this grid, mark off sections for each letter you'd like to write; so if we're writing my name *"Grim"*, we would mark four equal sections to ensure each letter occupies the same amount of space.

From here, all we have to do is write our name within the cap height, while making sure the center of our letters lands roughly around the mean line. If done correctly, all of your letters should be well proportioned to each other. Just be sure to place them close enough to one another so the word comes together nicely. Sectioning off equal segments works great for anyone who's severely struggling to get a consistent letter size, but I recommend also practicing without the grid since this method is meant to act as training wheels until you get used to keeping a uniform size.

Letter Weight – Position

Letters positioned higher have more visual weight than letters resting on the baseline. Letters that dip into the descender begin to have more weight the deeper they reach into the descender if the other letters all rest on the baseline. Letters further from the center of graffiti have more weight. In more technical works, letters in the foreground have more weight than letters further back.

When it comes to position, handstyles don't often deal with depth, but elevation, now that's going to be important.

Keep in mind what we mention ed at the start of this topic: observe the letter first before doing anything else. This method is only to help determine a general shape that might not be clear.

While letters with different general shapes will have comparable weights, their weights won't be the same as they'll change based on the letter, and the shapes used. We can change a single letter's weight and shape by choosing different variant

structures. Variants use different shapes to create their letter segments, so some variant structures will keep the general shape of the basic structure counterpart, while other variant structures will take on new general shapes entirely. Knowing a letter's base shape and weight will help us understand how changes to the letter will affect its weight. For example, *"I"* is one of the heaviest letters in the alphabet, whereas *"O"* is far lighter than the letter *"I"*. Because the *"I"* has a square general shape, it will likely remain stable so its weight will react less to any small changes we make to it. However, lighter letters, especially those with a general circle shape, will have a much larger reaction in weight to the same small changes.

Letter Weight – Contrast

Contrasting areas have more weight than areas that are similar. Contrast builds interest and demands attention as a result. Letters can contrast in size, weight, color, saturation, value, width, NSM, shape and many more ways.

Hand styles can make lots of use of contrast in interesting ways that may not seem obvious at first glance. Even without adding style, we can use different base structures to include contrasting shapes in our tag. This provides a more dynamic tag that can look pretty nice without having to do anything more with it. At the very least, adding contrasting structures before adding style will give you a nice jumping-off point. What's great about this is no matter the base structure you use, your tag will always flow so this level of contrast is free.

A common issue for new artists is duplicated letters due to their lack of contrast is baked into every name, even names with double letters such as Rook. Despite the *"R"* and *"K"* being similar, we also have a double *"O"* to deal with. Even though Rook seems to have little contrast, the truth of the matter is a name like this allows for even more contrast.

You can handle this in one of several ways; one way is to lean into the letter uniformity the double letters provide. Making both letters identical can give you a massive jump start in flow so instead of starting with a 10/10 in flow you'd have excess amounts of flow.

Having more flow than necessary lets you add greater amounts of contrast in other areas without flow being affected as much because the double letters compensate with their overwhelming letter uniformity. As you can see, the Rook tag still flows just fine despite the *"R"* and *"K"* being vastly different, causing contrast between the letters.

The other method we can use is to have the duplicated letters feature small differences from one another, and instead use line U/S to maximize flow between all the letters to compensate while incorporating whatever letter uniformity you can for added flow. Any differences from one double letter to the other will have a magnified effect on contrast and flow since they're expected to look the same, meaning any tiny changes between them will have huge effects on weight. An easy way to think of this would be, small changes to duplicated letters cost lots of flow, and larger changes cost a ton of flow and have lots more weight and contrast as a result. If you choose to make each one contrast too much, then you risk destroying flow altogether.

This same thinking applies to letters that are similar to one another as well. If you have, for example, *"R"* and *"K"*, but you use different legs on each, then these two letters will have more weight and cost more flow as a result. The question now becomes, why would you sacrifice some of your flow, wouldn't that break your flow? For this we will have to look at something a bit more stylish to really see the idea pushed a bit.


Changing things up in your graffiti can add intrigue to you r name, it can make your letters stand out at the expense of a little bit of flow. For the more advanced graffiti artist, variety can even allow for many stylistic opportunities that you would have missed out on if everything was uniform. Look at how Guigas has an *"S"* that is much larger than all of his letters, including his *"G"*.

Despite how much the **"S"** might contrast, everything in his tag still flows amazingly well. So as for breaking your flow, the short answer is yes, doing something like this can break your flow if you're careless. Since the base structures start off with 10/10 flow, you can sacrifice a fair amount before your flow dips into the negatives. If you add a reasonable amount of variety to your graffiti, and by the time you're done, you still have a positive amount of flow, then you're fine. With that said, don't feel pressured to force contrast in your graffiti, each letter in a name is bound to have certain differences that give you some contrast without you doing anything.

Contrast isn't limited to just your letters and their structures either. The topic of contrast simply refers to the difference between two things. If you're looking to add variety to your work, then experiment with contrasting various fundamentals to see how you like the results; really with contrast, your imagination is the limit.

Letter Weight – Texture (Detail)
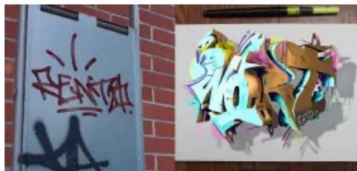
Details in handstyles include closely packed letters that create a lack of negative space, and also include exterior details, extensions and letter distortions. In throwies and pieces, details also include any interior details, drop shadow and 3D.

Texture might not seem like it applies to tags, or graffiti as a whole, but texture in art are often made by using detail to give the illusion of texture. We can see this in the image on the right, and it's far more common to see this in pieces. For this reason, the texture is detail, even though not all details are texture. Sure we may not paint cracks or rough surfaces on our tags, but different additions such as quotation marks, punctuation marks, underlines, halos, serifs and extensions that are on and around their letters are all different details.

As mentioned earlier, areas more densely packed with subjects can also be seen as being more detailed. How does this relate to our graffiti? Well, the closer your letters are to one another, the more detailed that area will look and as a result the more visual weight that area will have. By recreating Rento's tag, we can move the **"EN"** closer to one another and you'll begin to see how those areas seem to attract more attention than they used to, and the overlapping areas look busier as well. We can even apply to the most basic of tags that don't seem to have any detail at all. When we position two letters closer, as shown in the example, our eye tends to focus on that area. However, when we allow large gaps between letters, our eye jumps from one letter to another and might even wander around the name much more. Where we see handstyles really take more advantage of this property of weight is with their exterior details.

Plenty of graffiti artists will put quotation marks on their tag, and these tend to be very balanced as the quotes are applied to both the left and right side of the name. Underlines also tend to be balanced so long as they remain horizontal and extend an equal amount on both the left and right half of the name.


Underlines also affect your LNW as well, either holding the weight making the name seem more balanced or adding weight to make the name seem heavier and potentially off balance. The reason this happens is that once we add an underline for our tag, the underline acts as a floor that our letters want to fall onto. The amount of negative space between the underline and the tag itself will dictate whether the underline supports the weight, or whether it adds weight to the tag. If you have lots of negative space built up between the two, then the negative space will create anticipation for the letters to fall down to the underline; in this case the underline would create weight. On the other hand, if the letters touch, or if they're slightly above the underline, then the underline will support the weight of the name. This is one example of a detail adding tons of weight to an image.

CROP!

Punctuation marks such as exclamation points are common in tags and can help add just a tiny bit of weight to the side you place them. Since vertical lines don't have much weight, you can try and write an exclamation point at a slight angle, or you can use a more curved line to give the exclamation point more weight.

Extra exterior details like stars are often added to both sides as they tend to balance a name well. However, if they're added to just one side of the name such as in Zego's tag then the star, or comparable detail, will add weight to the side it's on. In Zego's handstyle, he's placed the star within his letter, and this goes a long way to minimize the total weight the star adds, but understand, the star is still adding lots of weight. Later in the book we'll talk about how this works, but Zego's done a great job at making the *"O"* pop with a hint of style using detail, rather than changing a letter to do the same.
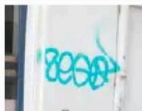
No matter the detail being added, your details must have a reason to exist. As mentioned earlier, in other forms of art, details are often the element of art texture, so they serve an instant purpose, but in graffiti, our details need to add to the fundamentals. If you're just adding details and these additions don't solve a problem or serve a purpose, then they're likely to be detrimental to another fundamental and as a result, they should be removed from your graffiti.

Letter Weight – Color

This works exactly as it does in visual weight with no change at all. Color plays a larger role in throwies and pieces than it does in handstyles.

Normally color plays a massive role in visual weight, but tags are normally one color. Sure, you can make a multicolored tag with various techniques, and sure you can create multiple tags with different colors on one image like Murdoch here, but these aren't the standard and are not something you typically see. In more practical applications, a tag's color weight will be contextualized by the color of the image, or surface the handstyle is on.

Both of these will come together to determine how impactful the tag's color weight is. Just because you use a heavy color, does not mean your tag will pop out; your color, value and saturation have to contrast whatever surface your tag is on.

For example, if you have an orange surface like brick, you probably don't want to have a red tag since the handstyle will be harder to see. Despite red being the heaviest color, its weight does little to make it pop since the contrast just isn't there. In this scenario, it would be better to use something that contrasts in one of the three properties of color; a cool color, for example, even though it has a lighter weight. Since handstyles don't use saturation and value nearly as intricately as many other art forms, it's easy to avoid issues with your tag clashing with differing saturations and values.
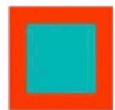
However, when adding tags to a piece you've done, or to any surface, you might want to be sure the saturation and value of the color you pick are not too similar to your surface; otherwise, the two might clash as demonstrated. This isn't to say that you can't do a blue tag on a blue surface, you certainly can, you just have to make sure the colors contrast with value and saturation.

As you move to other forms of graffiti, you'll use color to make certain areas of your letters pop more than other areas or any number of different effects. All of these factors come together to create letter name weight. As a bit of a side note, I'd like to say, if you struggle with color then I recommend studying color theory outside the context of graffiti. Learning color theory from artists/art forms that are more well informed than graffiti will give you all the information you need to master colors.

6

LETTER/NAME POSITIONING

Letter/Name Positioning

etter/name positioning is all about how graffiti artists organize each letter in relation to one another and as a result, the position of the name as a whole. Individual letters can be positioned closer or further from one another, higher or lower, and even leaned to the left or right. Names can be straight across, at an angle, arched, or even written vertically.

In its most practical application, letters in graffiti tend to be positioned closely together, either close enough for a sliver of negative space, or slightly overlapping with one another. When studying calligraphy, you learn that minuscules can be spaced by drawing a line down the stems of the letters, then spacing these lines roughly equal parts away from one another. Capital letters on the other hand are spaced closer or further to one another to keep a relatively uniform amount of negative space between each letter.

Two vertical lines would be placed closely, while a straight edge, next to a rounded edge, would be placed closer together. This even applies to straighter edges of a letter that are more suggestive such as our "E's" right side. Two rounded letters such as our two "O's" will be placed closer than any other letter combinations. Letter combinations such as "L, A" are best placed with the bottoms close to one another. However, with two diagonal lines such as "A,V" and "V, T", allow for a decent space between each letter. This increases readability and keeps the letters' structure from getting too close resulting in letters that are harder to distinguish.

All of this isn't specific to calligraphy though, you can actually observe this by typing out these letter combinations on your computer and you'll see the capital letters are typically spaced this way depending on the font. This spacing helps with readability, while working to keep each letter tethered to one another to create a word.

We couldn't get away with spacing our letters in graffiti the way calligraphy spaces its lowercase letters. Since graffiti treats letters as uppercase, if we spaced our letters equidistant to one another then we wouldn't be accounting for the huge variety of differently shaped valleys and other negative spaces that our letters can create, resulting in drastic overlaps and valleys. This would not only hurt flow, but it would also throw off the letter and name weight.

For this reason, graffiti is normally spaced in a similar way to how calligraphers space capital letters with the key difference being, graffiti takes this a step further and moves the letters closer together. Letters that are closer together have a much easier time flowing with one another. Normally, positioning in this way allows room for slight overlaps of letters, but be careful, if you overlap too much then you risk destroying the letter structure of one or all layered letters.

When two objects overlap, the one on top will obscure the object behind it, in this case, the *"D"*. In the example on the left, we still have a good view of the farthest object. However, if we nudge the second object over so that it overlaps more, we see less of the one underneath. This can continue until the one in front either completely eclipses what's behind it, or until it eclipses just a section.

Remember, whatever we do is two-dimensional, meaning all of your letters are flat so people can't walk around your letter to see what's out of view. If you overlap to the point where you have a full or partial eclipse, then that covered area effectively doesn't exist in the viewer's mind. Blocking off letters to this extent can either eliminate whole sections of structure, or it can make parts of your letter look detached from the letter itself.

You can see this in our example; the bottom of the "R" has been completely blocked from view due to the overlap. This completely breaks the letter as a result. Our "A" shows a different issue that has a similar outcome. In this example, we can't see where the crossbar connects to the diagonal line (marked in red), and as a result the lower diagonal portion (marked in blue) becomes segmented from the rest of the letter.

In minor offenses or in more simplistic works, segmenting may not destroy a structure, but it certainly doesn't help since you diminish structure. With more drastic cases and in more stylized works, segmenting can eradicate all the letter's fundamentals and potentially the whole name.

A solution to both issues would be to not overlap all the way, leave even just a sliver of positive space from the letter being covered. This positive space will act as a bridge to prevent breaking your letter.

While this is very effective in throwies and pieces, tags have a more subtle benefit from this. Since the ink or paint is more opaque in our tag, we may not be able to see this sliver or space left over, so how are we benefiting from doing this? What makes this work for tags is the idea of suggested lines.

Showing a sliver of negative space has the same effect.
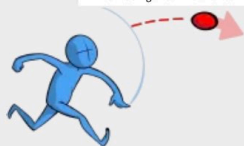
The human brain is amazing at finding the trajectory of objects and projecting where something should go. So, when we write our names, and we overlap two letters, for example, an "O,E", the viewer can figure out the structure for a letter's blocked area.

Our mind will notice the direction of the strokes, and continue to project their path to see the missing area. Once we have that information, we can connect the visible parts of each letter. Projecting lines becomes harder to do the more stylized the letters become and the more drastic the overlap. This brings us to the topic of key points or critical areas that each letter has.

All letters have key points either in their structure or in areas in the negative space around their structure. Normally these areas won't be an issue at all until you eclipse a structure. Critical points are always intersections, and the top, bottom, and sides of rounded edges. Critical points are also located in the opening of counters, for example the top of "K" separating the arm and stem, or the right of a "C". However, some exceptions occur where a critical point might include a whole letter segment, such as the lower crossbar of uppercase "I". When covered, areas such as these can make the letter hard to distinguish from other letters, such as "K", or "R". These areas (key points) are integral to the letters' structure and when segmented or eclipsed, your structures will either be distorted or destroyed. For some letters like "O", these key points end up being anywhere on its positive space as the letter is one continuous shape. However, because we write left to right, we prioritize the left and right sides of these rounded letters as they are at higher risk of being obscured.

Given the letter's simplicity, you may get away with covering one side, but in more stylized works if you segment the "O" into two parts then you've likely destroyed the letter. Other letters might only have one or two, while some others have more. Avoiding issues here is as simple as not eclipsing those particular sections. If you do eclipse these sections then you need to compensate for this lack of structure in some way, be it through contrast, weight, or some other method of your choosing.

Critical points located in negative space distort letters when they're covered, oftentimes making it hard to differentiate one letter from another.

If we cover the opening of a *"C"* then the *"C"* can't be differentiated from an *"O"*. If you'd rather not destroy your letter over something simple, then the solution is similar to our last problem. Simply leave a sliver of space so the viewer can see the open counter's entrance on the letter. Even after we've carefully avoided eclipsing, segmenting, or covering critical points, we also have to think about how much of a letter we can cover before we break it. Whenever you overlap a letter, you take away weight and structure and normally this isn't much of a problem. However, if you overlap too many times, or you have a single overlap that is too large, then you risk covering too high of a percentage of the letter.

We can see the effect of obscuring too much of a letter if we position our *"G"* too far over the *"A"*. The same thing happens with the *"IN"* combo as well. With positioning being the issue, we've caused negative side effects in texture, weight, flow, and negative space. Let's look at an example of two different letters collectively covering a single letter too much.

In cases like these, we have one letter being overlapped by both the letter before and after it. Take the name RISE, and look at how both the *"R"* and the *"S"* overlap the *"I"*. Even though neither letter covers critical points, and they don't cover all too much individually, collectively they cover too much of the *"I"*. This almost makes the letter seem as if it's hiding behind the other letters and as a result, the *"I"* becomes distorted even though its structure is intact. Novice and intermediate graffiti artists should be careful, if they've overlapped a letter once, then it's safest to avoid overlapping that same letter a second time to prevent your lines from becoming an indistinguishable mass of positive space.

You can see this very often in both the Sage and TBone handstyle shown here where the letters are placed right on top of one another. The letters can still be made out so we know the structure is present, but the letters are too close, and destort one another as a result. While critical points certainly affect all forms of graffiti, where we see this most often is in pieces since their complexity often leads to more key points being obscured. That said, both throwies and pieces can handle such overlaps more easily because each letter has more positive space to sacrifice, so while it might be more common, it's also easy to fix. A fair bit of overlapping your letters comes down to your writing tool and the size of the tag as a whole and this is where an artist must consider their nib.

7

NIB WIDTHS

Nib Widths

Have you ever made a tag you're really happy with, then you go to do it again using a different tool or size and think, "Well that looks like crap; why doesn't it look as good as it did before?" Well, the width of your nib is likely to blame for this. While graffiti doesn't put a huge emphasis on nib width as a fundamental, it still plays a big role in our work.

Once we put each of these three handstyles side by side, the effect the nib has becomes apparent. The first tag has an appropriate nib for the size of the handstyle, while the second tag has a fine-point nib that allows for much more negative space inside and around each letter. The thinner nib also makes the structures thinner, meaning the structures risk looking weaker at this size since they're overpowered by the negative space and lack weight of their own. Lastly, the tag could struggle to flow since each letter has slightly more space than it would have if done with a more proportional nib.

You have one or two ways to fix an issue like this, the first being, you can simply scale the tag down so the size of the handstyle is proportional to the nib, and the second solution is to use a different nib entirely. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the last tag used a nib that was too large for the tag's size. This results in the letters losing too much negative space causing the letter structures to be destroyed. Normally we see this when the artist did their tag on a surface that was too small for the nib. Realizing they messed up, they're forced to crunch their letters down if they want to fit the whole name.

Cramping each letter right on top of one another only furthers the destruction of the letter's structure. Since letter structure is at the top of graffiti's hierarchy, the handstyle is already ruined at this point, but in addition to this, the clustered letters add too much weight to whatever side the cluster is on, and that creates an imbalance with letter and name weight. Assuming you're doing your letters with enough room, to fix this you can either enlarge the tag and space the letters slightly to give each letter room to develop its structure, or, like before, you can use a more appropriate nib

This would be a more fitting size for our thinner nib. Try your tag out at different sizes, and observe the results. It's always important to observe, think of questions or issues, study, develop concepts and hypothesize, test, then observe again.

if the surface is smaller. You wouldn't think nib width is much of an issue, but I can't tell you how often I see small tags done with massive markers. This even extends to murals and throwies where the artist is painting a small area and they simply don't have the right caps for the job, or maybe they have a huge surface to cover and they're using skinny caps. Try to practice your tag at different sizes with different nib widths to see how your handstyle looks. The shape of your nib can also greatly affect the look of your letters as well. Familiarize yourself with what looks good and what doesn't, some tags simply don't look good with certain nibs.

Hand styles designed for a chisel tip might require the angle of the nib to enhance flow, define the structure and add letter weight. Doing the same tag with a rounded nib would take away all of those qualities and simply won't look the same.

On the other hand sometimes, you'll find your tag looks great no matter the shape of the nib. Opel's tag is a perfect example of how some tags look good regardless. Part of the reason for this is the tag is kept simple, with minimal stylistic changes. The shape of his nib also isn't being used all too much for any fundamental so the nib's shape becomes optional.

The same thinking applies to creating tags with flairs. Flairs are a great way to add some pop to your letters. Flairs provide an easy way to take even the simplest letters and make them a bit more stylistic without doing much.

Adding these carelessly can look a bit silly though, and like anything in art, you should give some thought to where and how you add these. Let's break down what exactly happens to a line, and a letter when we add a flair. For startes, each line we make with our can is a solid hard-edge line, a flair turns this into a softer edge line. Softer edges have less weight so you might instantly think, "OK, flairs decrease the weight of a letter" but the opposite happens. As we flair, our line becomes larger, wider, and takes up more space. This increase in weight should be accounted for when coming up with your tag.

One great advantage to flairs is they make overlapping a little easier to pull off since the flair itself is not opaque. Having a more transparent quality to the line allows us to see whatever line is under or above the flair. We can see this in the Suki tag where some overlapping lines can be seen easily. Depending on your tag, this could allow you to mitigate the negative effects of drastic overlaps since you won't lose as much structure with a total or partial eclipse. Keep in mind though, the increasing size of flairs means you may not have room for your tag in certain areas. If you're inexperienced and you attempt flairs without first thinking of how much room you have, you'll run into the same issue we spoke about earlier where you cramp your letters due to lack of space. Amateurs getting into flairs should use them sparingly to decrease the number of variables they have to juggle. As you become more experienced, you'll gain enough knowledge of not only your tools but your handstyles to know what tags are appropriate for the tool you're using.

8

BASIC STRUCTURES VS VARIANT STRUCTURES

Basic Structures VS Variant Structures

Basic Structure   *Variant Structure*

Till now we've predominantly talked about basic structures but, there's a second category of letter structure, those being variant structures. Variant structures are alternate versions of letters in graffiti that are made using different combinations of basic strokes. Despite variants using different strokes, the stem from the basic structure will remain in the variant counterparts since the stem is the source of the letter. For this to not be the case, the letter needs to take on a new structure (varient majiscule *"E's"* are an example of this). Now basic structures often use additional straight strokes for other letter segments so the structure remains in simplest form / lowest style. For this reason, variant structures will often replace these additional straight strokes with other strokes. Typically speaking, the basic structure also acts as a blueprint for the variant structures to build from. This means no matter the shape of the new stroke, the letter's anatomy is still represented and the letter will keep its integrity.

The biggest difference between both categories is the sheer number of variants when compared to basic structures. When looking at variants, we find that a single letter can have upward of twenty variants, whereas basic structures have only one for its uppercase and lowercase versions. Some letters have an enormous number of variant structures such as *"E"*, *"S"*, and *"G"*, while others such as *"O"* and capital *"H"* have absolutely no variant structures at all. You can find a full list of variant structures toward the end of the book.

Both basic and variants come together to make up the category called base structures. Base structures are simply any structure within the basic or variant category, and they will be your starting letter before adding style or letter distortions as you'd see in more advanced graffiti. Seeing as basic structures are the simplest form of each letter, variants naturally have slightly more style than their basic structure counterparts.

Snok's beautiful tag uses a variant *"K"* to end the name off. Variant structures are common in graffiti and are a universal tool any graffiti artist can use to add style.

Now the tricky part is that not just any alternate version of a letter is classified as a variant structure even if the structure in question is made using a combination of various basic strokes. To be classified as a variant structure, the letter needs to be made using only the basic strokes while also maintaining the letter's integrity. In addition, the letter must remain under the style threshold of base structures so that all variants and basic structures flow naturally with one another in hand styles and pieces unlike the third *"S"*. These two categories keep the integrity of the letters intact where even the most basic of throwies naturally alter the letters to fit within the category of throwies. If the combined strokes result in a structure that hinders or diminishes any of the fundamentals, especially if flow is affected, then its style threshold is too high and would not be a variant structure. Its for this reason, that many structures created from combining strokes still don't classify as variant structures.

These styles vary widely in shape, and this changes everything about them such as structure, size, weight, negative space, and flow. Variant structures can allow the artist to pick the variant that best suits their needs. Each name has its pros and cons, and while all basic structures can work out the cons just fine, some variant structures have an easier time handling some of these issues. Another great attribute is their ability to jump-start any fundamental you'd like to since some structures have certain qualities that lend themselves to certain fundamentals. Taking advantage of this can allow you to take a name with lots of natural weight and go all into that aspect by using variants that double down on weight. You can also help certain fundamentals that your name naturally struggles with.

Many new graffiti artists struggle with weight, so say you have the name CYBER, and you find the left side of your name tends to have a bit too much weight. It wouldn't be a crazy idea to keep the *"C"* and *"Y"* as basic structures, and instead, use a variant *"E"* and/or *"R"* with more weight to the right side.

The natural weight of each variant can help balance the name even before messing with any property of weight in a conventional way, and before adding style. A simple change like this could give you a great jumping-off point for a new tag that you can tweak until it's to your liking. Since variant structures are still just base structures, this means they still flow automatically provided all the basics are correct. We can see this in action with the name RIB, where we use a pointed bowl for the *"R"* and a rounder bowl on the *"B"* and both will still flow. Will those two letters flow as much as they would have if you made both bowls uniform? No, but it will still flow just fine.
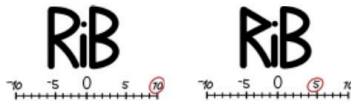
I think a great way to imagine this would be to think of the level of flow being placed on a number line. As an example, uniform bowls would give us a value of 10 for those letters, while different bowls would give us a 5. Having a 5 is still in the positive portion of the number line indicating it's correct and fundamentally sound, even though it's less than 10.

Keeping that in mind, if you're having flow issues to begin with, and you choose to forgo that letter uniformity then you might break the flow of the name as a result. In that instance, your flow would be in the negative, and this would have been caused by other fundamental issues as we learned earlier in the book. Variants increase the number of variables you have to consider with the fundamentals, such as contrast, and this can be much harder for those who haven't learned the basics. It's for this reason we covered basic structures and all the fundamentals first and saved this chapter for later. Despite variants containing a little more style, they still abide by all the same fundamentals we laid out earlier. This higher style is simply the letters' natural state rather than a proper exaggeration of the fundamentals.

Serifs in Variant Structures

When looking at variant structures, you may notice some seem to have serifs, while some don't. Because of this, all serifs fall into one of two categories, those being, letter structure (marked in red), and the other being an extension (marked in blue), more specifically compressed extensions. This topic is a bit of a gray area since all serifs are an extra stroke, however despite this, structure-based serifs help complete a letter.

As you'll come to learn, serifs in the letter structure category abide by some of the extension's anatomy and formula, while serifs in the structure category also abide by a few letter structure fundamentals. No matter the category, serifs as a topic follow a few general rules.

- All serifs are an additional stroke to the letter (even when made from strokes, as a simpler version of the letter exists).
- Serifs connect to the structure in the same way letter structures connect.
- Serifs also only appear on the terminal of strokes.

The question now becomes, what determines if a serif is categorized as letter structure or if the serif is an extension? Our answer comes from the understanding that all base structures in graffiti are made from the basic strokes we covered at the start of the book. Here's a refresher so you don't have to go back through the book to find them.

If the serif is created from the use of a square, angle, or compound stroke while completing a letter segment, then the serif falls into the letter structure category. However, if the serif was not created from one of those strokes while making a letter segment, then it's classified as an extension.

Straight strokes are excluded since all extension-based serifs are made this way, while round strokes never naturally make a serif in the alphabet. Now to be clear, all serifs, no matter the category, are just an extra stroke. This means in many cases a structure-based serif can be removed and the letter will still function, while other times the serif is necessary to develop the structure.

Since the basic structure "A" doesn't naturally have a cross bar at the top, we can replace the original round stroke, with a square stroke.

Letters that have this occur effectively create two versions of the variant (one with and without the serif). We'll see this most commonly with square strokes since we can choose to use a 2-, 3-, or 4-sided stroke and as a result, lines can be excluded resulting in a missing structure-serif. This concept holds true no matter how advanced the style of graffiti becomes. Understanding serifs and strokes can help you break down advanced and stylized work, making it easier to read.

Adding style to any piece of art is a balancing act of all the fundamentals, and only those who know the fundamentals can fully control style. Using a variant structure will start you off with just a bit more style then using it's basic structure counter part. Adding even a small serif that classifies as an extension can be an easy way to add style to your work, while something like letter distortion would be a much more drastic example of style. Don't let the ease-of-use fool you though, if you've yet to learn the basics then serifs could easily throw off any or all fundamentals. With a little practice you'll quickly find that serifs become a powerful and easy-to-use tool in your arsenal. Now that we've covered all of graffiti's fundamentals, let's get into some concepts, practices, and even stylistic topics, starting with letter groupings.

9

LETTER GROUPINGS

Letter Groupings

Letter grouping is a system where you break down a name/tag into smaller groups that contain a maximum of three letters or a minimum of at least a single letter. Letters within a group work together to create the overall weight of that group. These groups split the name into a left, right side, and if there are enough letters, you'll have a center as well. Think of these groupings as a method for organizing and distributing weight throughout the name and our job will be to balance the left, middle and right with one another. How we balance them is completely up to the artist, but newer artists might want to keep each group with comparable weights. That's the basic gist of letter groupings, and in its simplest applications, you'll only consider letters within a group. However, as a graffiti artist becomes more advanced, all details such as extensions, exterior details, even drop shadow, and 3D in throwies and pieces will fit inside of and function within the letter groupings. Normally graffiti has anywhere from three to seven letters in a name. Names with more or fewer letters are possible, but you don't need this system for a two-letter name or less. Longer names will just end up having multiple groups on their left, middle and right sides. Let's take a second to show the possible groupings for names with three through seven letters.

Three-letter names – Dot = 1,1,1, = D, O, T

Four-letter names – Suki = 2,2 or 1, 2, 1 - SU, KI - S, UK, I

Five-letter names – Encor = 2, 1, 2, or 1, 3, 1 - EN, C, OR - E, NCO, R

Six-letter names – DR. Grim = 3, 3 or 2, 2, 2 - DRG, RIM - DR, GR, IM

Seven-letter names – Abysmal = 2, 3, 2 or 3, 1, 3, - AB, YSM, AL - ABY, S, MAL

All of these examples can have each letter and group contain equal weight; for amateurs this should be the goal. Most graffiti is done this way. Advanced artists can play with this concept to pull out interesting styles that can have a huge impact on your work.

One of the benefits of groupings is the ability to check for any negative fundamentals. For instance, we can combine this topic with your seesaw to easily pick out what sections of your name might be a little too heavy or too light. You might have a four-letter name and think to yourself, "The weight looks off." Draw a seesaw through the name and see where you went wrong. Instantly, you'll see what letter grouping specifically caused the problem,

in this case it's the left grouping. Once you have that information, you can make the changes needed. While there's an infinite number of ways to fix this, we're going to reposition the name to give it less of a slant, and instead of making the left side smaller, we'll add exterior details to hold the right side up. This shows how you might use groupings to fix and solve an issue, but what about using groupings earlier in our process?

Where the power of letter groupings really shines when we utilize it before we write anything. If you pick your grouping at the start, then you might want to use heavier structures for some areas, and naturally lighter base structures for other areas. This lets us plan exactly how we'd like to distribute the weight, and this allows us to even plan the positioning of our letters. Let's start off simple, using a three-letter name to demonstrate the general concept we'll be using for all other groupings.

While three-letter names only have one group per side (left, middle, right), the middle letter is very versatile. It may come as no surprise, but we can simply have each letter in the group have the same weight relatively speaking and this is demonstrated in our first Awe tag.

Our second tag does something a little different though. Here we see the *"W"* increase in size so that it's much larger than both the *"A"* and *"E"*. Doing this is going to make the *"W"* the focal point, and since it's in the center of the name this will anchor down the other two letters and help carry their weight. This can also be done the other way around where the *"W"* would have less weight than the other letters as well.

What's interesting about any letter combo with a center group is the center's ability to have a bias to one side. In this example, our *"W"* has most of its structure on the left side, and because of this, the *"E"* has to be slightly larger to compensate for the *"W's"* left bias.

When using a four-letter name, we'd have to decide what our letter formation is; are you working in a 2, 2 or a 1, 2, 1 grouping? If we're working on a 2, 2 grouping, then you can simply balance the two sides with one another like our Spar here where each letter contains comparable weight. If you're comfortable with the fundamentals, you can balance as we did with the Hogs tag where we consider extra details within their respective groups. In this example, the extension on the *"H"* and the exterior detail of the *"O"* are included on the left grouping. While the underline dips into the left side, most of its weight exists on the right side so we'd consider that part of the right letter group.

If you're working on a 1, 2, 1 then you might dedicate most of your weight to the center two letters and these will work more as an anchor for the name, similar to what we saw in our example earlier. The goal here would be to make sure the center has the most weight, while the first and last letters have less weight even if only slightly. Alternatively, you can dedicate most of the weight to the outermost letters, with the two in the center having less weight. As you get better, you can exaggerate the difference in weight more and more. Four-letter names handle weight easily since the first and last letters are still close to the center, meaning they don't have much added weight from being far from the center and this gives us a little more freedom to adjust weight as we see fit.

Five-letter names will tend to have very heavy first and last letters due to their distance from the center. If you happen to play into this as we did, then you can take advantage of this added weight easily. Our *"D"*, for example, is pretty thin-looking and on its own it's rather weak as far as weight. However, because it's further away from the center, it looks heavier than it otherwise should.

Couple that with the fact that it's the only letter with an angled bottom and leaning, and suddenly we've added lots more weight to an otherwise light letter. The second letter on the left, and the second to last letter both play the role of supporting and managing the center letters' shortcomings (if any). In this tag we opted to make our center group the lightest letter and when you do this, the lighter letter could inadvertently become the focal point due to contrast. This can help add some weight back to the letter but be careful as we don't want to add too much; otherwise, that defeats the purpose of the formation. Now because we're all human you'll inevitably mess up here and there and turn this into the focal point and that's OK, just move on to the next tag.

As with all formations, we can flip all of this on its head and still do the 2, 1, 2 but this time we can have the outer groupings smaller, with the center grouping larger. In this case, your left and right groupings (especially the first and last letters) might have to be significantly lighter to counteract the added weight from being away from the center. How you make this happen is up to you; remember, weight isn't just about size. The center group will hold all of the other letters in place and act as your anchor point so be sure to make it nice and strong, with a good amount of weight.

When using a 1, 3, 1 grouping you gain access to a unique advantage that not many names have especially if you don't have a letter that's easy to pop at the ends of the name. Grouping in this way allows the artist to not only focus on letters in the center that might be more stylistic (depending on your name), but also offers ridiculous amounts of stability for the whole tag. This stability can very easily take unstable letters on the left or right grouping and make them seem more stable than they actually are. Contrast is what allows for this to happen. Look at our "C" in the Camer tag and you'll see that even though it has a round bottom, it still looks stable. Remember, weight is all about attention, and since all of our focus is on the center letters, it minimizes how much we focus on the "anticipation" of the "C". However, because the "C" is notably smaller than the center grouping, this contrast adds weight back to the "C" without knocking the figurative seesaw off balance. Assuming your name allows it, the 1, 3, 1 is extremely powerful with symmetry. The center letter in the middle group will be your major point of symmetry. Without your second and fourth letters being the same or similar, you can still achieve a sense of symmetry by making your second and fourth letters have plenty of flow with one another.

Say we're using a 2, 2, 2 on a six-letter name, while we could keep all groups equal, we might want to make the center group weigh more. Since the center has the same number of letters as the other groups, we can't depend on an additional letter to add weight to the center the same way we did in the past examples. Also, since the center group is in the middle of our seesaw, it has less visual weight than the first and last groups. Considering all of that, if we want to use the center group to anchor the name then we can resort to any of the properties of weight to accomplish this. Any changes we make to the center group's weight will have to be impactful enough to not only compensate for the lack of weight a center group naturally has, but also must be impactful enough to outweigh the first and last group. You could still increase or decrease the weight of the first and last groups, but most of your image weight would be focused on the center letters for this example. So long as we don't destroy any fundamentals in the process then the center group will become the anchor.

It's also possible to have a 2, 2, 2 where you can intentionally skew the weight of a group, and compensate with other elements such as extensions, or exterior details. This can be done for any grouping and all names. While this system focuses on the distribution of weight, it can affect every aspect of your graffiti. The information you gather from groupings will let you know if you need to adjust the positioning, structure, or some other fundamental to correct or optimize the basics.

This system is by no means required, but it can help to plan out your graffiti, and it can help make mistakes easier to spot. Not only that, but for anyone who's still getting a handle on the basics, they can use this method to help break the name down into smaller, more manageable sections. Basic applications arent all this is good for, advanced artists can use this to help them with varios advanced techniques such as the ones we spoke of, and it can also help build up momentum for flow.

10

MOMENTUM FLOW

Momentum Flow

Let me start by saying momentum flow is completely optional in graffiti, and it's almost exclusively used in handstyles that are either stylized to allow for momentum, such as our Biped tag, one-liners, or any graffiti that takes inspiration from cursive, such as my signature. Momentum flow in throwies and pieces is rare, so rare that I've only ever seen less than five graffiti artists intentionally, consistently, and correctly use momentum flow in throwies and pieces while maintaining all of graffiti's fundamentals. What exactly is momentum flow though? Well, this form of flow is the act of keeping a smooth, consistent motion through your graffiti that ties one letter to another in one fluid motion as you write, similar to cursive. Simply having your letters connect isn't enough; your lines need to transition smoothly from one letter to another. Secondly, momentum flow can also refer to the suggested flow of energy through your image, be it a tag, throwie or piece, and this one in particular is the more rare method of the two. Letters in this method don't need to connect at all, instead using line uniformity/similarity to carry momentum through the whole name.

In much the same way you might have a dynamic pose drawing based on movement, in graffiti, momentum flow would be equivalent to that. In the case of cursive, they have plenty of rounded, softer edge structures that can easily lead into one another making the first method easy. Basic calligraphy has a set of strokes that also flow seamlessly into one another, making it easy to tether letters together. Graffiti doesn't have either of these baked into its fundamentals.

The second method forces all your fundamentals to revolve around this concept, and the tag as a whole, even the direction, and all other fundamentals will work together to project the flow of motion. The issue with this method is the artist has to use lines to build up momentum through the lines and letters, then direct that momentum through the whole name. Since we're only dealing with a few letters in most cases, we don't have lots or room,

or enough subject matter to help build the momentum. In most other art forms, building momentum is not only common, but almost fundamental, and it's easy to do. What makes momentum so easy in other art forms is the sheer number of tools, space, and time you have to build momentum with.
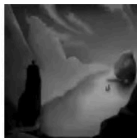
Just to demonstrate how easy this is for other art forms, you can see with a simple character we've generated momentum using gestures. In our landscape sketch we once again kept everything very simple with little detail and yet we managed to build momentum without much effort. A cartoonist has gesture, pose, expression, anatomy, and the environment to help swell the momentum, then push it through the image even more so than our sketches. Comic book artists might enlist the whole environment to emphasize the momentum of the action scene. You might even imagine a superhero, launching their whole body into a huge impactful punch with a much more dynamic pose and camera angle. That's all movement, and momentum. In graffiti, we just have our letters, and our name more times than not. We don't often have the benefit of an environment or characters, and even if the other forms of graffiti might, we still have to infuse that momentum through the letters structure. The influence of momentum flow dictates all of graffiti's fundamentals and can easily break graffiti's basics. Breaking the momentum of the name is also all too easy. All it takes is one simple vertex in a bad spot, or a line that doesn't aid our momentum to get rid of all your hard work. This means we're fighting an uphill battle to even begin building momentum to begin with. We often are forced to exaggerate many if not all of the fundamentals just to generate our momentum, meaning this method is often very stylized when done in tags and this is more so the case with throwies and pieces. As you've probably gathered by now, unlike the other two categories of flow, this version is not automatic, if we want momentum flow then we'll have to work to get it. We can achieve the first method of momentum flow by using what is called a connecting line.

Method One – Connecting Lines

In tags, we can tether letters together by using a connecting line such as a hairpin curve, a loop or simply going directly from one letter into another. Now these connecting lines are extensions since they aren't part of the base structure, and they're not letter distortions. If you remember the formula of extensions then you know we must flow out of the origin, have a reason for the travel distance and flow at the destination. The question becomes, because extensions are useless by nature and need a reason to exist, wh at is the reason to connect two letters with lines such as these? The point of using connecting lines is to increase any of the three categories of flow by keeping the letters close in proximity while potentially maintaining momentum. As is with any stylistic flair, you're bound to influence other fundamentals as well but achieving a sense of flow and cohesiveness is at the core of connecting letters. Cursive takes advantage of this by using structures that seamlessly flow into one another and because of this, flow from the origin and at the destination is natural. So natural in fact that the extension hardly seems to exist at all. Our base structures aren't nearly as subtle with these lines so we might end up with our final stroke ending on the top, bottom, left, middle or right side of the letter.

*   *Ending On the Right*

If we're ending a letter on the right-hand side, then we can use a connecting line to directly connect the two letters with little issue. This is the best-case scenario because you don't have to worry about the connecting line overlapping with any structure, and it has the shortest travel distance. In some instances, especially in more stylized work, if the artist ends a letter at the bottom right, and the next letter begins its line at the cap line, the artist might use a hairpin to shoot a line from the baseline to the cap line and then begin the next letter. This maintains the flow of your pen but does little for the second method of momentum in most cases, unless the next letter happens to be vertical. The same is true when finishing a letter at the top, then going to the baseline.

What's great about these two situations is these almost never obscure structure if you have enough negative space or if you hide the connecting line, and they're easy to flow. Our challenge will come from our nib width, and NSM. If you don't have enough room then it's easy to confuse the connecting line for being letter structure such as a stem when it's this tall and vertical. This is an issue often seen in one-liners like Philly handstyles. The reason for this is b ecause the connecting line is the same width as the structure, so if you're using a can or any tool that lets you change nib width then you'd make sure to contrast the structures' width against the connecting line.

- *Ending On the Left and Center*

If we're ending the letter on the left side, then a rounded connecting line can allow a graffiti artist to change directions to the right for the next letter. You'll have to be careful when using connecting lines on the left as you'll be forced to pass by letter structure. Artists who overlook this often will distort or destroy structure by overlapping structure with the connecting line. We can see this in Sage's handstyle where he ends the "G" on the lower left, then backtracks through the lowercase "E", and continues through the uppercase variant "E". His connecting line may not make the letters completely illegible, but they do distort structure, and if he attempts to make more stylized work, then this will surely become more problematic.

Letters with tight negative space have a higher risk of obscuring letter structure with the connecting line. On the other hand, a skilled graffiti artist can use these closely packed lines to hide the connecting line, allowing them to double back easily. Letters with more negative space have a lower chance of their structures being obscured, but the travel distance becomes more visible. Connecting lines starting on the left of a letter also have the largest travel distance, so you can imagine, having more of this elongated travel distance visible could be problematic. You can certainly still hide a portion or all of this part of your extension by tracing over existing lines. Experienced artists often do just that, but it is still worth pointing out. Another solution is to use line uniformity/similarity to make the travel distance flow, so the extension won't detract from the fundamentals. Ending in the center has all the properties of the left connecting line, but these are easier to handle in just about every aspect since their travel distance is shorter.

As you become more skilled, you'll be able to make your connecting lines more stylized and still have them function just fine. No matter your connecting line, just remember, it's harder to use one that has a travel distance comparable to a letter's size. It's also harder to use a connecting line that crosses over letters. We're connecting these letters to keep a certain level of cohesion, but if your connecting line travels large distances then the stroke begins to appear weaker and weaker as it serves its purpose less and less. Once you've connected your letters, you'll need to have a consistent speed through the tag to ensure you keep momentum. Any paint/ink build-up from pausing or restarting a line risks destroying your momentum. Now don't think that you need to use momentum flow when connecting, you don't. Using the first method of momentum in tags is pretty easy, however, so if you're confident in your fundamentals then give it a try and see how you like it. The second method is where things get fun and interesting.

Method Two – Infused

Method two has a hyperfocus on line uniformity/similarity and LNP to build the momentum. What makes momentum flow unique in graffiti is the fact that it's related to the topic of movement, how we direct a viewer's eye when they look at our work. Seeing as we read left to right, the viewer's eye

will naturally travel in this direction. If you did graffiti in a different language that reads in a different direction, then the momentum would travel in that direction. This gives us initial momentum that we can build off. Normally in graffiti this momentum is instantly snuffed out of the letters, so momentum never builds to begin with. Another related topic that helps build momentum is image weight. Earlier we talked about how the topic of visual weight has plenty to do with how people's minds naturally apply gravity to an image. This expectation of gravity creates anticipation, and this anticipation adds weight no matter what you draw. What's great about this is we can take this anticipation and drag our lines around to build momentum.

In regard to how we'll use graffiti's fundamentals, our letter's structure will be made using lines that are similar and/or uniform to one another. Then, we'll take our letters and position them in a way that allows the lines to lead into one another while we also maintain all of graffiti's fundamentals. Because structures oftentimes don't align enough for momentum, we'll have to adjust the LNP to avoid breaking

letters. This means in some cases, you might have to place letters higher or lower, tilt them much more left or right, or overlap. Doing this allows the flow of energy to jump from one line to another so it can travel through the whole name. Combining visual weight, and the direction people read, we find that our baseline and cap lines end up being one of our most powerful tools to build momentum. For example, by tilting our baseline down so the right side is lower, we can emphasize the momentum and multiply its effectiveness.

One issue we'll run into is when it comes time to change the direction of momentum. A line with plenty of momentum can easily lose it all with a sharp turn or a vertex. Like a car making a sharp turn or instantly stopping at eighty miles per hour, our momentum will shoot off course and we'll lose it.

Dissipating momentum isn't bad in certain instances but it's not what we're looking for right now. When changing direction, you'll have to transition your line uniformity/similarity carefully to a new direction to not lose the flow of motion. This can be incredibly taxing on a handstyle as you don't often have enough lines to transition flow gradually enough. Because of this, rounder hairpin curves are normally used to redirect momentum in tags. Larger hairpin curves are especially great at this. Using a simple line, we can easily demonstrate this. If we build up momentum with a nice curved line, then add a sharp angle, then that angle can destroy momentum, but if we add a simple hairpin curve, then we can keep some if not most of that momentum going.

Once you've carried momentum through your whole name, you have one of two options. You can either loop the momentum back into the name, or you can eject it from the name and let it dissipate. When looping momentum, you can have it loop back through the name in the opposite direction similar to a figure eight or loop back to the start like a circle. Looping tends to be much harder since you have to redirect the flow in a way that keeps momentum intact, without destroying graffiti's basics. On that note, stylized tags have an easier time of looping than throwies or pieces.

As for dispersing momentum, this responsibility typically falls onto the last letter. Normally graffiti artists don't realize they've built momentum in the first place and as a result they ignore this step entirely. Typically, this results in the flow simply being dissipated through one of the lines from structure or an abrupt stop without the artist realizing. However, if you want to disperse the energy in a smoother manner then we have a few options. You can convert this built-up energy into an extension of some kind. This is a great way to make a letter pop while concluding flow. The extension is also totally up to you and your imagination, so long as it maintains the momentum through the travel distance.

Another simpler solution is to smoothly eject it from your letters. One way we can do this is by simply extending the line carrying flow so the flow can dissipate away. Letters that extend outward like "R", "K", and "E" have an easier time doing this as they naturally kick outward.

The momentum can also flow in the opposite direction if you loop it effectivly, however having momentum travel in one direction is plenty good.

You've Never Practiced If You Do This!

The concept & problem of practice

Have you been practicing your graffiti with little to no results at all? Progress seems to take ages, and even then, it's not always clear how to get better. For most graffiti artists, practicing comes down to them repeatedly doing the same stylized tag over and over again thinking they'll improve. Unfortunately, unguided practice is by far the worst method to getting better.

Doing this is the same as trying to hit a bullseye ten meters out blindfolded in a pitch-black field. It is possible, but it's unlikely because you aren't getting any feedback from your mistakes. This is why it takes most graffiti artists take decades to make the tiniest bits of progress to reach an amateur or average level. If we want any hope of getting better, our goal must be to gain both skill and knowledge! Both are essential for an artist to be considered intermediate, let alone professional or a master in any art field.

Any amateur artists who add style to their "practice" have never practiced. To practice effectively, we have to break down, analyze and learn the basic formula of the fundamentals for the topic we're learning. Adding style gets in the way of this since the definition of style is "the exaggeration of the fundamentals." If we're exaggerating the fundamentals, then we can't possibly be practicing the basic formula for whatever it is we're practicing. This means practice should never, at any point, have style in it since adding style to practice stops you from learning the basics. The only artists capable of adding style to practice and still learning properly are artists who've learned the basics. These artists have enough skill and knowledge to perceive the fundamentals clearly through the visual white noise that is style.

From this point onward, separate your practice from your playful drawings. Be very clear when you sit down to do one or the other and make sure you keep the two separate. When drawing for entertainment, relax and enjoy yourself. Draw whatever you'd like, however you'd like, and don't concern yourself with the results. Your only focus here is to have fun, that's it. Your fun drawings could be stick figures if that makes you happy, but whatever they are, have yourself a good time. Once you're good and ready to make progress, it's time to work and get down to practice.

How to Practice Properly

Knowing what and how to practice is just about where every aspiring graffiti artist gets lost and for that reason, I want to spend a lot of time in this chapter sharing different practices you can engage in. To ensure you receive professional standard practices I've invited not only another graffiti artist but a professional comic artist to help share their practices they used to achieve their professional skill level in essential art skills. Some of these are fairly simple and straightforward with a focus on graffiti's basics, while others will focus on the other pillars of art. The secret most professionals in other forms of art understand is, a smarter artist is a better artist, and this is why all of our practice will focus on the three pillars of art.

Elements of art: Fundamentals are universal to all art forms and consist of line, shape, form, value, space, color, and texture. While seemingly simple, this is where most of the artist's skill knowledge and progress come from.

Art form-specific fundamentals: List of basics that make up and define the art form. For graffiti this will be letter structure, NSM, LNW, LNP, and flow.

Technique: The tools you use and how you use them and the overall method used to create the art. This can even include planning process and other more conceptual views and ideas .

Our studies will fuel our knowledge and act as a foundation for our practice. When it comes time for us to put pencil to paper, we will practice the topics we studied. This book covers all of the topics you'd need to study for graffiti's art form-specific fundamentals; however, no art form is confined to just the second pillar. You'll also need to study all of the elements of art as well, and you'll have to study any techniques that are relevant to the mediums you use. Tags specifically will focus on line and shape. If you can't draw clean, controlled lines you're going to find lines, and as a result, tags harder than they need to be. These two topics will have you drawing clean and neat-looking tags in no time. With that in mind, let's go over a few basic line practices starting with our guest artists.

An example of this can be seen in Weak's tag here. Rounded letters such as *"S"* and *"O"* can also disperse momentum by having the momentum run through and out of the rounded line on the right side of the letter or any side for that matter. As you explore style and momentum flow, keep in mind the fundamentals you're actively exaggerating for the effect versus the fundamentals that are being affected. Taking note of these can help you to prevent issues during your process. Should something go wrong, then this will also help you figure out what exactly happened as well, making corrections easy. Using momentum flow as an example, we can see how each fundamental reacts to us changing letter structure and LNP for the sake of flow.

Here we've built a tiny bit of momentum in the *"S"*, and instantly dispursed it out of the side, into the *"A"*, then ejected it out of the tag. This is what we commonly see in graffiti.

Fundamentals Affected

- *Letter structure is at high risk of being distorted and broken from line uniformity/similarity.*

- *Letter structure is at high risk of distortion from extensions, NSM and LNP.*

- *LNW is at high risk of being unbalanced, and needs to be compensated for, or planned around.*

- *NSM is at high risk of building valleys due to LNP.*

While more issues might appear, this demonstrates how the fundamentals influence one another. I suspect, after reading this book, many amazing graffiti artists will begin exploring this concept and I'm thrilled to see what people will make using this concept not often seen in graffiti.

With all of this information we've covered it might seem like there's an overwhelming amount of topics to practice, but in all honesty, practice is very straightforward and simple. So what do we practice and how?

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YOU'VE NEVER PRACTICED IF YOU DO THIS

Guest Artist's Guides and Tips

For this book, I wanted to invite a couple of other high-caliber, professional artists to help teach some lessons, and share some practices they've learned over the years. Learning from multiple credible, qualified sources is a great way to gain knowledge, so our first guest artist will be Bob Quinn, an incredible professional comic book artist and he'll be giving us some great basic line studies we can use, along with some sound general art advice everyone should follow, so without further ado, here's what Bob has to say.

Bob Quinn Line Practice and Tips

There are as many reasons that a person pursues art as there are people. Perhaps they saw someone conjure something out of thin air using only a pencil and paper that they could not wrap their heads around. Maybe it's the feeling of having just drawn something awesome, standing back and going, hell yeah, I made that. Maybe it is the quiet, meditative moments between the beginning of a piece and the reveal of the final product that quiet a restless mind they find appealing.

More than anything though, all artists feel, at some level, that there is something inside themselves they feel that if they could create, draw, paint, or in some way manifest they might know themselves better as well as how they fit into this world. While putting a finished piece together feels great, the life of an artist is not about the final pieces you create, but the journey you take through your entire life from your first piece to your last – the twists and turns of style, the understanding of shape and form, the way you interpret the world around you. Your mindset needs to be focused on this journey, and not necessarily on the results. Every finished piece is just another step on this odyssey, but you can take smaller ones as well. Those small steps are called practice. There are a number of useful l exercises that I have employed in order to help gain confidence and muscle memory that might serve you as well. While I'm a comic book artist by trade, I'm certain the following will help anyone. First get a sketchbook. Here's mine.

See those pens? Get some of those too. Microns are fine, Pitt pens are fine. Just a simple felt-tipped drawing pen.
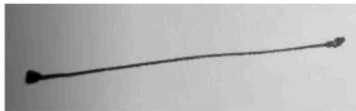
Now find a blank page and on it, starting at the top, draw two dots—one on the left side of the paper and one about a quarter of the way across the page. Using your shoulder, with one single confident stroke, draw a line connecting those two dots. Try this with each joint, try this practice with your fingers, wrist, and elbow as well. Each of these offers a different range of motion and lets you have an easier time controlling lines. For example, making longer lines is easier with your shoulder and/or elbow, while smaller lines are easier with your fingers and wrist. As you get better, you'll be able to combine each of these joints with a single stroke allowing you to adapt and adjust your stroke for a line.

Avoid petting your lines, or sloppy lines, and if it looks like any of these do it again. Once you can do this consistently, try drawing directly over that line. Then do it again and again and again and again. If it looks like this broom here om the right, that's no good. You want one single consistent-looking line. Like this.

Awesome, now do that over again, this time with the dots halfway across the page. Again with them all the way across the page. Connect the dots with single, strong, confident lines, then draw over them. This is all about building confidence and muscle memory so that when you want to put a line somewhere it's the exact line you want. Now try curves. Try circles, fill pages with these little exercises. Does it look cool? No. Can you show off to your friend? Unless they're dorks, no. However, when you start drawing, YOU will feel the difference, the confidence, that comes with knowing the line you draw is the line you want when you want it.

OK, good. Now that you can put lines where you want them, think about what you love drawing, what you're good at. Letters, people, buildings, objects, cats, whatever. Forget all of that. What do you SUCK at drawing? Hands? Feet? Cars? Go get a bunch of pictures of cars or feet or whatever. Sit down, open that sketchbook back up and start filling pages with drawings of the things you suck at. For graffiti, you'd practice the letters you suck at, and you'd draw them in their basic form. Maybe you're thinking, "But I want to do stuff with style, and drawing things from pictures is lame, there's no imagination there." Stop it. That's lazy.

The best way to learn how to interpret something in your own way is to first understand it, and then filter it through your own imagination and experiences. If you're just making it up based on what you kind of remember it looking like, what you're drawing is kind of a lie. This is equally true for all art forms, even graffiti. The best way to improve your ability to interpret the world is to learn how it works. After a while you'll notice that you don't suck at drawing the things that used to give you trouble.

You're just as good at them as you are at the topics you had confidence in before. Now find the next thing you suck at drawing, and fill pages with it. Find every weakness you have as an artist and drill down on it until it's a strength. That's the journey. That's the job. Being able to manifest ANYTHING in your imagination the moment you want to see it. If you've gotten to the end of this and are like—who is this guy telling me to do all of this, none of this is fun, why should I listen to this?

Well, I'm a comic book illustrator working in the industry for around a decade. I've drawn Captain America, X-Men, Champions, Ms. Marvel, Red Sonja, The Spirit, and tons of others. I've had longevity because I've put in the hours and can quickly draw just about anything you want me to draw and I got here by learning the fundamentals. It's a skill that's served me well, and my hope is it'll serve you too.

Thanks for reading, now go put some reps in.

Josh Grafx Practice and Tips

Something I found to be one of the biggest helps to my graffiti was to learn the anatomy of letters like serifs, stems, bowls, baselines, so on and so forth. You don't need to know absolutely everything when you're just starting out, but you do need to know the basics of what you're drawing. This is going to help us recognize the limitations of these anatomy points when we begin messing with flow and other fundamentals. Once you begin adding a bit of style, and maintaining flow becomes more of a task, ask yourself, "What shapes can you use for each of these letter characteristics, and can you use the same/similar shape for a different characteristic?"

For example, the shape used for the bowl on a *"B"* can be used for the bowl of the *"S"*. Flow is all about letter uniformity. Not every part of every letter needs to flow but having similar shapes, lines and angles in your work increases their flow and makes them look better. An important skill that's worth building is the ability to spot similarities like this in your letters so that you can optimize your flow. For example, *"P, R, B, D"* all have a stem and a bowl.

"T, F, E, L" all have stems and bars. AHKNRWX all have two points of contact to the baseline. Each of these offers an opportunity to take advantage of letter uniformity, or the chance to mess with other fundamentals of your choosing. Once you get comfortable with these things similarities between letters, look for similarities that are less obvious. Sometimes looking at letters from different angles helps to see new similarities between completely different letters.

Looking for similarities like these between all letters, uppercase and lowercase, can help you solve creative problems and improve your letter knowledge. While this works for all forms of graffiti, I like this for throwies because they have less letter structure so the rules can be bent quite a lot to give the throwie more flow. It's why I love throwies so much!

Check out this "Skom" tag I did inside of the throwie, it shows this point well if you look at the "K" and "M". These are two totally different letters, but if we letter distort the M by turning the leg into two lines, then we can make that area flow with the arm and the leg of the "K". Use this for all forms of graffiti and you'll begin to find new and interesting ways to flow your work.

Line practice #1 Hatching and Cross Hatching

Keeping these teachings in mind, let's expand on Bob's line practices and try a few more line studies along with a couple of variations. Practicing lines is simple with a few different drills. Choose any length and an angle, and draw lines in that angle at that length, and do this using only your fingers, followed by your wrist, elbow, then shoulder. When this becomes second nature, try drawing all of the same lines with your line thickness changing throughout. Using your fingers will give you a smaller range of motion, while each subsequent joint gives you a larger range of motion for larger and larger lines. Our goal is to be able to use any joint at a moment's notice to have not only a full range of motion but also masterful control.

From here you can begin cross-hatching. This is an age-old technique and also a great way to practice your lines. Try to keep your lines of the same angle parallel to one another, then change angles and repeat the process. Experiment with how close your lines are, and line thickness for even more practice in control.

Line Practice #2 Obstacle Course – Smoother Round Lines

A variation of the previous practice from Bob is to draw lines and shapes around a page that will act as obstacles. Once we've placed those around, we can draw a smooth, consistent line from one end of the page to the other as we navigate our line around the obstacles without lifting our pencil. As you feel more comfortable doing this, try to shift what joints you're using and add more obstacles.

When using a drawing tool that allows for it, try varying your pressure to get thicker and thinner lines as you navigate around the page. This can help us not only gain control of our lines but also allow us to practice achieving smooth curved lines while training us to keep a steady, consistent speed.

Line Practice #3 Loose Grip – Loose Shapes

Hold your pencil further back and gently grip the pencil. Your grip should allow for a wiggle, while not allowing the pencil to drop. We want to loosen up without being sloppy. Draw different shapes using the different joints of your arm. Both stiff motions and loose motions have their uses, so get used to being both loose and stiff. We want to boost our speed while not sacrificing accuracy. This doesn't at all mean we're rushing our loose shapes; a nice, controlled pace is all we need. Transitioning between the two will only come naturally after you've practiced this a fair amount.

Many new artists ask me "how do i improve my tag, throwies and pieces." and more times than not, it's their shapes and lines. If you're new, spend more time practicing shapes and line, than you spend practicing your name.

Line/Value Practice #4 Value Scale – Control

For artists who struggle with pressure, try this study out. Draw a rectangle

and divide it into nine equal sections. Label each one with a number one through nine. Shade these sections going from lightest to darkest, where 1 is the lightest (roughly 10% gray), with each subsequent section getting darker and darker. By the end you should have a nice value scale. A value scale can help you learn how to shade, but for those who have no interest in shading, a value scale can help us control our pressure with professional accuracy.

Line Practice #5 Letter Proportions

Let's take all of these practices and begin using them for our letters. This one is straightforward and simple, but it's essential to refining your skills. Draw the chart we've been using throughout the book and be sure your chart is big enough for your nib width. Keep it proportional. Make sure your baseline and cap height are parallel to one another. Use each of graffiti's strokes going from baseline to cap line. Do your best to keep all of the strokes proportional to one another by having them touch the proper lines. Repeat this, but this time go from mean line to baseline, and repeat the practice a third time from mean line to cap line. This is a great way for new graffiti artists to practice their hand-eye coordination in making the shapes and lines needed to create any letters neatly. In addition to that, seeing as each of these strokes will make up a section of a letter, we're learning to position these letter sections properly. As you use these strokes, you can change your grip to a looser grip, or change the joint you're using to hone your control.

Distorting Shapes Practice

When distorting shapes be sure to keep the general shape present. We're not looking for abstract shapes here. Learning how to manipulate shapes will directly translate into distorting letters.

A topic absolutely every graffiti artist needs to practice is shapes since the cleaner your shapes are, the cleaner your letters will be. Luckily for us, many of our line practices help prepare us for drawing shapes. Begin your practice by drawing one set of your basic shapes. Draw them again, and this time squish these shapes and pull them to make them smaller, taller, skinny or fatter. Once you feel comfortable in your accuracy, combine the geometric shapes to create an organic shape. Once you have your shapes drawn, you

can outline each of them to simultaneously practice line and shape.

We talk more about forms in our perspective books and shading books; however, with that said, as we move to more advanced books we'll expand on much of this with form studies. For the uses of tags, a simple shape practice will work just perfectly. While lines and shapes might seem simple, and experienced graffiti artists might read this and think they're above these topics, I should let you know, the elements of art have enough information to learn to last you a lifetime. While it may be easy on the surface, it can get very in depth and can be a defining part of your style with enough practice. No matter how skilled, no artist alive is above practicing these topics.

Art Form-Specific Fundamentals Practice

Graffiti's fundamentals work in tandem to contextualize one another so using a full word helps to practice all the basics at once. Let's start by grabbing a piece of paper and writing down the list of graffiti's art form-specific fundamentals: letter structure, NSM, LNW, LNP, and flow. We'll use this to double-check our work. Feel free to use your tag name or any name you'd like but for this I'll use an unorthodox name with plenty of letters to demonstrate.

Begin by writing your skeleton hand by using the strokes we learned. Feel free to use capitals or lowercase, or even mix the two, just be sure to write it so that your letters properly fall onto the baseline, mean line and cap line, unlike the tag above. We should not be using the ascenders or descenders at this point. Now that you've done the skeleton hand it's time to look for any mistakes with the fundamentals. Picking these flaws out will let us know not only what we need to correct, but it will also show us what we need to practice and study more.

With your name written down, grab your list, and start with letter structure. Check each section of each letter, make sure the letter's anatomy is correct. Break the letter down piece by piece, ask yourself, are the stems on my letters nice and straight?

We wouldn't be doing this with the intent of style, but rather to reverse engineer the letter to gain a better understanding of its limitations. We're also attempting to see at what point the letter becomes accurately done for the skeleton hand and at what point the letter breaks.

Deconstructing Letters (Optional Practice)

Once you've learned the fundamentals, and you understand the information in this book, you can begin deconstructing letters. Doing this gives you a much deeper understanding of how the individual letter functions. Using a few common letters as an example, our goal will be to destroy the integrity of the letter itself. To do this, we can bend lines until they break, change the shape of lines, we can hyperextend, and we can connect lines in ways they normally don't.

We'll start with an *"N"*, one of my favorite examples of hyperextensions. If we continue to widen the angle the lines connect in, then eventually, the line will create too obtuse of an angle. Not only is the structure broken here, but due to the wider angle, we now have much more negative space. Each fundamental takes a turn for the worst due to this change. We can also try the other direction and continue pushing the line until it's a narrow, acute angle. This also breaks the *"N"* as just about all of the negative space and structure is gone from the last line.

We get to see this exact example in action with Oven's tag where the right side of his *"N"* connects at way too acute of an angle. Even though overall the tag is nice, having the tighter connection eliminates all negative space in the open counter of his *"N"*, resulting in a distorted structure.

What we learn from this is that the last lines range of motion exists somewhere between these two breaking points. This range of motion is approximately how far the line can move before breaking. Everything past this point is a hyperextension of the line. Each line of every letter has a range of motion, though not all are so problematic and therefore not all too relevant.

Connecting your lines in places they aren't meant to connect can help teach us why some sections of a letter are so important, and how proportions of certain sections work. Let's use *"B"* as an example here. If we take the bowl of the *"B"* and connect it under the mean line, then we limit the space for the second bowl. We can see how this structure change affects weight, negative space, so on and so forth.

Now this doesn't break the *"B"* though, so let's try and connect the bowls together without connecting to the center of the stem at all. We'll also only connect one bowl to the stem. Even here we haven't broken the structure; the integrity of the letter is still intact. This doesn't mean that a *"B"* done this way will work on every and any of your graffiti, but the letter isn't broken. Taking this one step further, we can separate the stem entirely from the bowls and here we've finally broken the letter. We effectively have a *"l"* or a *"1"* and *"3"*. What we learn here is that the letter *"B"* has a high base threshold of style, and can be greatly distorted before breaking.

You might also take an *"M"* and see how its lines connect. We can test this by connecting the second line of the M lower down the first line. This decreases weight, and letter structure, a little but it also adds lots of contrast to its right side.

How about the leg on the *"K"*, does the leg of the *"K"* kick out at too acute of an angle? Does my bowl on my *"B"* connect to the top of the stem? Are the shapes of my letters clean? Does the bowl on the *B* connect back to the center of the stem on the mean line on the *"B"*? Check the structure of each letter.

If any structure wasn't right, then that's OK, you'd at least know you have to practice accuracy in your letter structures. Give any letters you messed up another attempt until you can do them properly, and until you understand why and how it works.

Once you feel you can accurately write a letter then you might try your whole name again. Go down the list of each fundamental and check the quality. This time maybe you messed up LNP and your letters are rotated slightly and a bit too far apart. We can easily fix this by straightening the letter's position and identifying how much of that negative space was excess negative space, and how much of it is OK.

Once you have that information you can move the letters closer together until you've gotten rid of the excess space. On the other hand, if you think you don't have enough negative space between two letters then you can start by moving one of the letters slightly apart from the other. You'll quickly find the correct placement is somewhere between both extremes. A modest overlap is what we're looking for with our skeleton hand. Try the tag again and see if you can get the LNP correct.

By double-checking our structures and our LNP, we've indirectly also checked some of our NSM in areas such as our counters. Feel free to check your NSM again with more scrutiny. Here in this Skab tag, the letters are for the most part fine but to those who've read to this point, you might notice some slight NSM and LNP issues. The valley between the *"K"* and *"A"* is disproportionately large and we have a lack of negative space not only at the bottom of the *"SK"* combo, and the *"AB"* combo as well. We're looking for any pockets, closed and open counters that might be too big, or too small. As you spot them, make the changes you need.

From there we can evaluate the weight of our letters and name. Make sure each letter takes up comparable amounts of vertical and horizontal space. Be sure each letter fits within the cap height of our chart.

If you feel it's necessary, you can also draw your imaginary scale down the center of your name to be sure of the weight. Once you've made all the corrections to your name your flow will be correct as well.

Practicing all of these fundamentals with our lettering chart is easy and meant to work as training wheels. Once you're comfortable, take the chart away and try to get a proper skeleton hand without it. See if you can still spot all the same flaws without the chart to guide you. If you're struggling, then feel free to use the chart to see how your tag lines up.

Once you're used to it, you'd try to get an identical skeleton hand without using the chart.

Remember, your goal is to get your skeleton hand to look identical to a proper skeleton hand. The goal here is to be consistently correct. Now we are all human, we all make mistakes and even the best of the best would still have some silly errors here and there so don't be too hard on yourself. Over time this will become second nature to you. Any experienced graffiti artist reading this does this process without realizing it, and with enough practice you'll reach that point too.

Follow this process for each fundamental, and use the knowledge you've gained from this book to identify and fix any issues. Each time you find an error, rather than erasing the mistake, leave it and do the task over. This forces you to not only practice more, but you'll build muscle memory this way. You also are forced to contend with each mistake and think critically about how to fix your mistakes. Never allow yourself to just mindlessly write your letters.

It is crucial we do not allow ourselves to add style to our practice, especially if you're a novice because remember, you don't have style just yet. When practicing, even with basic things such as this, allow yourself to make mistakes, and learn to be OK with that. We all make mistakes, and that's the point, we're trying to refine our skills, we're not trying to be perfect.

Graffiti artists of all skill levels can benefit from deconstructing letters to learn their limits. Dismantling the letters for study is honestly an optional practice, but it is worth doing if you want a deeper understanding of letters. For us to deconstruct the letter, we first have to understand how the basic structure functions. From there, our goal will be to break each part of the letter or number we're studying. You might, for example, try shortening the stem, or try shrinking or enlarging the bowl to see its impact. This process can be done for all letters, all sections of a letter, and for all fundamentals in each of the pillars of art.

None of this breaks the *"M"* just yet, so how far down can we go before we break the letter? These are the questions you'd aim to answer.

Bending lines is an interesting one, because just about every line can be bent slightly with little issue. We're looking to see how bending different lines can affect certain fundamentals and letters and to see if these can break a letter. Also, we're sure to keep in mind how much negative space we need inside of our letters to bend our lines inward. Weirdly enough, it's rounded letters that struggle most with bending. Straighter lines have an easy time bending because they don't have to introduce all too much of a bend to turn left or right, and up or down in the case of horizontal lines. Rounded lines already have a set direction, so they need to introduce a much more drastic bend to achieve the same as the straight line's bend. This drastic influence often breaks rounded letters, though it can be done. In our demonstration we used *"A, B"* and *"C"* to show how different bends can affect letters. While the *"A"* and *"B"* don't break with the bend adding style, the same can't be said for the *"C"*.

These bends in rounded letters tend to also act more like a "dent" since the rounded letter still has to complete its original trajectory, or for the line to end in the same location it would have ended before the bend. This means our bent line has to return back to its initial trajectory in most cases to preserve structure. For example, if we're trying to bend the bowl of an *"R"*, we would begin our bowl at the top of the stem (marked with a red dot). Our goal is to get to the blue dot at the center of the stem. If we attempt to do this using a basic structure *"R"* with a round stroke bowl, once we introduce the bend our trajectory will change and the bowl won't connect.

In other words a rounded bowl *"R"* with a bend here won't work as it will break the structure. Let's try a variant structure *"R"* using a square stroke bowl.

By doing this we can bend any of the three lines on the square stroke and successfully arrive at our blue dot. What you'll quickly find by experimenting with bending lines is when you bend too much, you'll create a vertex, and this vertex means you'll have another line (another basic box for throwies and pieces).

It's common that these added boxes will just create letter distortions. Some letters such as *"O"* are more sensitive to distortion than other letters such as *"S"*. Other letters such as *"F"* can also have their base structures break much easier from these distortions unlike *"G"*, for example. As we hinted at earlier in this chapter with the letter *"B"*, some letters' base structures are more durable than others, and they begin with a higher style threshold than some other letters. The topic of style thresholds is something we'll explain in our advanced books. Till then, keep in mind these are just examples of how you'd go about deconstructing the fundamentals. Bending lines to test the range of motion can be done on all lines, all letters and numbers. Feel free to take this as far as you'd like to but don't at all feel pressured into doing this. For any advanced graffiti artists, if you've been wanting to develop your style or if you've been writing for decades and you feel stuck then in the next section will expand and break down some common ways of adding style and we'll teach how to develop and evolve your own styles.

12

**STYLE
WHAT IS IT
& HOW IT
WORKS**

Style
What is it & How it Works
Introduction

No matter the art form, style is just an exaggeration of the fun damentals, so if you skipped to this chapter in hopes to achieve style then you'll have robbed yourself of all the prerequisite information needed to use this chapter properly. In the following chapters and sections we'll spend plenty of time breaking down universal stylistic aesthetics in graffiti, teaching the formula of how extensions function, and we'll talk about how to develop personal style. However, none of this will do you any good if you haven't learned the information in the earlier chapters. Adding style in any art form means that you're engaging in a balancing act of the fundamentals, where stylistic choices present a give and take. Sacrifice a bit of one fundamental, for the stylization of another, raise one fundamental here, and lower another there, this is the back-and-forth that adding style gets us in. For this reason, all your fundamentals must be correct before adding style, that way you can make these trades within your work without destroying the underlying basics. In graffiti, the fundamentals we'll be exaggerating are the fundamentals taught in the earlier chapters, along with technique and the elements of art, two topics that are universal to all forms of art.

Now style does not need to come in the form of crazy-looking letters, or wild extensions coming out of every letter; style can simply be how you lean your letters, the height you place them, how tall, or small you make a letter. Style can be any number of simple changes made before you ever add letter distortions or extensions. Over the next few sections, we'll break down the science behind extensions, and other common stylistic aesthetics to help illustrate how style functions. I'd love to also take some time to go over some examples of style in people's work, but let's go into this understanding that there are infinite possibilities with style, so what we cover is only surface level and meant to act as examples. How you decide to balance and compensate for the fundamentals you're exaggerating is up to you.

Overlaps

Let's start with a simple topic that we partially explained earlier, overlapping. By now we're all too aware of the downsides of overlapping, but how exactly can we use overlapping to add style? As with any stylistic choice, we have to recognize the potential downsides, so we know what we have to compensate for, we know what to avoid, and we understand the limitations. Since overlapping decreases negative space resulting in decreased structure, we have to compensate for the lacking fundamental.

By using the information you've learned in the book you can compensate for these downsides in countless ways. Using different base structures, positioning letters differently, making the whole letter larger, and using a thinner nib width, are a few solutions but here we'll opt to make certain parts larger to enlarge closed and open counters. This additional space gives you a reason to fill negative space using letter positioning to overlap. Notice, even though we're overlapping the *"N"* onto the *"O"*, we still leave a slight negative space at the top left of the *"N"*. Allowing that slight bit of negative space to show through helps to keep the *"O"* from becoming segmented.

Keep in mind, the downside of this is the fact that we have to directly influence the structure to create more space for the overlaps. If this isn't done properly then you'll throw off not only the letter structure, but also the weight, and as a result your flow will be degraded as well. In this case, the *"O"* is larger than before and hangs lower into the descender space. Bad NSM, and LNP begin to take a toll on structure and flow since more of our lines touch one another in various places. You might find that your graffiti, just like the "#One" tag, has flaws but it's still legible.

Even though the structures themselves arent so distorted to the point of being completely broken, you can tell someth ing isn't right. Subtle mistakes such as these might not seem like much individually but compare both #One tags and you'll see how they add up.

One of the other solutions we mentioned was to use a thinner nib width and this is something Philly handstyles do pretty often. Since Philly handstyles are extremely stylized, they tend to have plenty of extra lines that aren't letter structure. For this reason, using a thinne r nib can help add negative space so these overlaps, and extra lines don't bunch together and destroy structure. We see this clearly in Asap's Philly handstyle where the letters allow for tons of negative space that allows for connecting lines and extensions to travel easily through the name. Now Asap's tag is heavily stylized, it is a Philly tag after all; yours doesn't have to be nearly as stylized as this. Looking at our Secho tag you can see the same concept at play. We're using a thinner nib width for letters of this size, especially the *"S"* and *"O"*, and this gives us plenty of room to overlap with. Combine th is with the tighter negative space and what you end up with is an overlapping name with good amounts of weight and room to spare.

Another one of our options is to change the position of the letters to change the location of the overlap. Some letter combos don't naturally overlap in the most convenient or optimal way and sometimes the overlap covers a key part of the structure, or the overlap simply doesn't flow as much as it could. Our *"E, R"* effectively becomes an *"E, B"* combo due to the *"E"* covering the lower negative space of the *"R"*.

Always keep key points in mind when overlapping. You want to avoid accidentally turning one letter into another, or destroying it in general.

Just like before, we still run into the weight issue, and these letters tend to struggle to overlap since they don't have much of their own structure or space to sacrifice. Depending on how thin your compression is, these letters can also easily get thrown off balance since they take on a more vertical form after being squeezed.

On that note, this can be used to your advantage, since now if we think back to how weight works, verticality can be stable, having medium weight, or unstable with heavy weight depending on your positioning. If you have a letter that you've made thinner than all the rest of your letters, then you can add more weight to it by leaning it to the side slightly. If the letter has a high natural weight, like we see with the letter "I", then you might want to keep it upright so as not to make it weigh too much.

Let's flip this topic to the other side of the coin and talk about stretching letters. If we take a letter and make it taller, we're not only adding weight, but we're adding lots of negative space around the descender and/or ascender height due to new valleys being made while also influencing the negative space within the counters.


Some letters also become more unstable as they gain height, for example, *"F"*, *"P"*, *"J"*, *"O"*, to name a few. Simply put, the taller that letters like this become, the more negative space establishes itself around the letter, at their base, and this creates instability. A few basic ways to support their base is to lean the stretched letter in a way that makes sense for your tag but also in a way that fills its own negative space. For example, leaning an *"F"* to the left.

If you don't want to add weight to the letter using a lean, then you can have a neighboring letter positioned so it gets close to, or o verlaps the base to hold the taller letter up. These are two basic solutions; play around with ideas and see what works best for you. Many letters don't suffer from this weak base though so don't think this is necessary for all letters. Taller letters are great for anchoring a name down, adding opportunities for line uniformity given their extended height, and they could even help since smaller letters can nestle up close to help lend strength.

The height also lets you take smaller letters and mess with their vertical positioning since now smaller letters can move very slightly along their height with little negative influence.
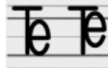
Now for the last option we have, stretching a letter outward. This is going to allow our letter to encompass a wider area; this has some serious drawbacks, and the payoff is more than worth it if you can handle the weight.

Stretching a letter outward can instantly add tons of weight to a letter, and it can turn unstable letters into letters with a sturdy base. This can be both good and bad depending on the extent to which you widen the letter and how much weight you need in a letter grouping.

Making the letter wide means you're likely going to have to counterbalance if the widened letter is anywhere but the center. Wide letters suffer from a similar issue to our tall letters where they can easily look weak depending on the same factors.

MINES **#One**

The difference here is, wider letters tend to have an abundance of negative space in their counters. Since the letter is fatter, it's going to encompass more negative space within its counters. This allows you to position other letters closer to the enlarged letters similar to o ur #One example earlier. This positioning and potential overlaps helps mitigate the negative space, and as a result offer the chance to boost flow. Without the overlap, you may run into flow issues on some letters because another drawback of stretching outward is the tendency to push neighboring letters away.

Do your best to recognize all affected fundamentals when making any changes to a letter so you can compensate for the downsides. If you allow the widened letter to push other letters away then you'll run into weight issues, negative space management, and flow issues, which were caused by bad positioning. These downsides are an example of the balancing act you'll take part in when adding style, so while you have a lot of downsides, you can still manage to make this function fine.

Exterior details

Exterior details are a great way to take a solid tag to the next level but i n the worst-case scenario, they can compound any mistakes you might have in your work. The most common use of exterior details is to compensate for lacking fundamentals. These fundamentals don't necessarily have to be wrong either, they just may not be as prevalent as some others.

EMAN

Say you have a tag where your flow works but it's by no means the focus of the tag. You can use exterior details to add some line uniformity with exterior details to help bump flow in quality. Here's tag shows this with the tiny horizontal lines on each side of the tag. These are placed right beside the horizontal crossbar of the *"H"* and the center of the *"E"*. Our other example show some quotation marks that use similar lines as the letters that neighbor them. This same thinking can apply to any of the fundamentals. Instead of propping up a lacking fundamental, exterior details are one of the most amazing at compounding the positive effects of a fundamental you've committed to.

If you've done a tag and you based all the fundamentals around having a slanted baseline then we can amplify this with exterior details. Go all-in on the weight on the lower side and put a heavy detail at the end. If you really want to add even more weight, then don't add a second uniform detail, and instead leave just one so that it stands out and contrasts. To do this, your tag has to have ample amounts of flow to sacrifice; otherwise, this single nonuniform detail will take away far too much flow. Any shapes at the end of the name, like stars, faces, or anything similar, can easily add lots of weight to that side and often require the tag to cater to the additional weight f rom the exterior detail. Two main contributors to this are the location of the detail being far from the center, and its contrast from not being a letter and being nonuniform. You'll need to adjust your name to accommodate this, especially if you only have one of these details on your handstyle. Normally exterior details this large aren't seen in simpler tags, but regardless, the effect on weight should be considered before adding something like this recklessly.

We see Opel pull a similar effect off beautifully. In Opel's tag, he has a star on the left of the top tag with a swirl in the *"O"*, and on the bottom tag he has a peace sign in the *"O"*. Each of these only happens one time on their respective tags and therefore there is no letter uniformity with those features resulting in those adding tons of weight.
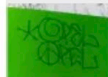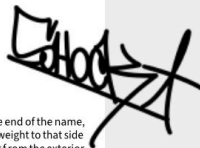
Opel does something really smart, and he makes the **"L"** extend far horizontally to increase its weight. If you've read that last sentence and thought, "OK sure but it's still not balanced" then congratulations, you've learned well. The trick here is these details are meant to make the name pop and really stand out! This is something you'll learn soon, but notice how none of these details hamper any other fundamentals. The name still has positive weight, still flows just fine, and overall, the fundamentals are sound. This is essential to allowing these one-off details.

Continuing on, details above the letters don't get affected by this nearly as much since the name holds the weight of those details. Don't get too carried away with adding too many or overzealous exterior details though; remember, these are still details after all, so they're useless by nature and need a reason to exist. Seeing as these aren't extensions, they don't have an anatomy that is uniform for each of them, so you can't depend on flow out of the origin or destination for exterior details. Meaning, you're really just working purely with graffiti's fundamentals here to make these function and give them purpose to exist. That isn't to say that exterior details aren't capable of flow, but rather it's not part of their anatomical makeup in the same way it is for extensions.

Some exterior details, like bubbles, go around the whole name so these don't often knock the name off balance since they encase the name. If the exterior detail shape itself is unbalanced, or if parts of the name extend past the exterior details, then you may lose balance. Whether or not this loss of balance is negative or not is something you'll analyze on a case-by-case basis by comparing each fundamental. It's a good idea to make sure your exterior details are proportional to the letters and name, make sure they flow if possible, and so on and so forth.

Recklessly adding exterior details will destroy your work fast, not only because each one will influence the fundamentals of the name, but more importantly, if you add too many then they can overpower the name. Say you have a simple handstyle, you may not want to add lots of crazy details around the tag because then those extra additions will get more attention than the tag itself: the tag almost becomes secondary to them. This is a mistake many new graffiti artists fall into with their handstyles, they'll do tons of unnecessary

extra details in hopes of coming up with something more stylized and as a result, they'll destroy their fundamentals such as letter and name weight. Adding these extra bits to a tag does not make the tag good or enhance it in any way if the letters themselves are poorly done.

Tapering

Tapering is when a line changes in width, going from thicker to thinner or vice versa. This is easier to do with broader markers and cans since you have a wider range of width. Before you go ahead and start tapering every line, understand when a line changes width in t his way, you shift the weight that line has, and its negative space.

Also, as the line changes in size, the outer edge of the line changes angles as well, meaning this could impact your flow depending on how much you taper. Most importantly this drastically changes how the structure of a letter looks, so you'll want to be careful how you taper a line. None of those effects are inherently bad; rather, they're qualities you'll want to keep in mind so that you can either take advantage of them or you can avoid their influence.

What's great about graffiti is any stroke of any letter can taper pretty easily, unlike some other letter-based art forms. All of those effects, combined with the ability to taper our line in any way, give a graffiti artist lots of control and versatility with their letters.

Say you need a subtle way to add negative space to a letter, why not taper very slightly to narrow the letter a bit. If you find one of your structures is weak and needs a bit more presence with its structure, you could taper a line to embolden your structure slightly. A novice who's comfortable with the fundamentals and just getting into style should make these changes sparingly so as to not destroy the fundamentals.

More experienced graffiti artists on the other hand might find themselves very easily tapering just about all of their lines. What makes this simple technique so great is that we can use it and influence just a small amount, or we can use it to much greater effect and have it dictate just about everything. Remember though, these are still lines and strokes, so all the previous fundamentals still apply here. If you taper on one letter, you'll likely want to taper again for the sake of consistency, especially if you're going with a simpler look.

Vertical Tags

One stylistic change seen often in graffiti is vertical tags. These are great for those thin areas where a normal tag just wouldn't fit too easily. Using your base structures, flow won't be an issue even in a vertical format, but once you stylize your letters in this vertical position, you'll lose most of your flow. Our biggest concern is to rebuild that lost flow. The first step to this is understanding how tall each letter will be and how wide each will be. It helps to keep these measurements as uniform as possible between all letters, and the advantage is you don't have to worry about one letter pushing another too far away. Due to the verticality of the name, line uniformity will take a bit of a decline since we won't have as many lines coming near one another. This means that we must take advantage of the lines that do come close so that we can capitalize on the few opportunities we have for line uniformity/similarity. Next, we absolutely need to have letter uniformity since this will have to compensate for the lack of line uniformity.

If you can handle it, momentum flow is a very powerful tool for the vertical tag. Since the eye will naturally want to travel down with gravity, the potential momentum is incredible. At the end of the day, momentum flow isn't necessary to make a vertical tag function but for those advanced enough to use it, give it a try. Weight shouldn't be as much of an issue here as your lower letters will do a great job holding the higher letters up, so if you find you're having a weight issue, then your problem likely is letter structure or negative space management.

Extension Introduction

Anatomy & Formula

In graffiti, extensions are simply any part of a letter that branches from the structure but is not part of the base structure or the structure itself. These can be split into two categories: compressed extensions and extensions, which we'll refer to as conventional extensions for the sake of not confusing the two. The difference between the two is how they use the anatomy of an extension.

All extensions are made of three parts: the origin (marked in red), the travel distance (marked in blue), and the destination (marked in yellow); a beginning, middle, and end if you will. Both types of extensions have all three parts, but where we see the biggest difference is in the travel distance.

Compressed extensions are exactly what they sound like: these extensions are smaller, stay close to the body of the structure, and have a short travel distance. The dominant section of compressed extensions is their origin and destination, often resulting in both being close in proximity.

Conventional extensions have a larger travel distance than compressed extensions, which can extend long spaces. In conventional extensions, the dominant anatomy is their travel distance, resulting in a presence larger than both the origin and destination, with the origin and destination being separated by more positive space. The positive space of our extensions total length is marked in red. In many cases, extensions in this family can have a visual weight that rivals the letters in the name, but this isn't always the case and isn't by any means necessary. It's important to understand that extensions are a detail you can add to your graffiti but there's a catch, a catch you should be all too familiar with by now. Details are useless by nature, so now the question becomes, how do we give our extensions value, how do we make our extensions enhance the fundamentals? We do that by following the formula of extensions, a simple formula that ensures an extension augments your work.
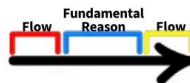
This is the formula of extensions and normally, the origin will determine the general direction in which the extension goes. From there, the travel distance can go wherever it likes, but it should accomplish some fundamental reason.

Afterward, the destination will conclude whatever objective the travel distance set out to accomplish by flowing at the destination and even sometimes aiding the travel distance to accomplish its goal. For example, an extension might end with an arrow, helping to add weight while also flowing with neighboring lines through line or letter U/S.

An extension of any kind, serif or otherwise, that has all three of these properties is guaranteed to work, but you don't by any means need all three. You can still have a successful extension with just one of these properties, but the fewer properties you have the harder it is for the extension to be fundamentally correct, and the higher your chances become of it hurting the fundamentals. This is where we have to bring serifs back into the conversation because no matter the category of serif, all still follow this formula and have the anatomy of an extension. The benefit here is that structure-based serifs almost automatically achieve all three properties of an extension.

Compressed Extensions

Compressed extensions of any kind tend to be the easiest extensions to work with in all forms of graffiti. One aspect that makes them easier is their smaller travel distance, which might be surprising since this part of compressed extensions has the lowest presence. Our smaller travel distance means the extension almost never gets the chance to extend far enough to distort many fundamentals in a huge way. While its impact is noticeable, it's not so over the top that you'll destroy your graffiti from its influence so long as you're careful. This smaller travel distance also almost always gives you a fundamental reason to include the compressed extension with letter uniformity, letter/name weight, or even negative space management. That's not all the benefits we get from a smaller travel distance though, we also have its impact on the destination to consider.

Seeing as the travel distance is so small, our destination will inevitably be close enough in proximity to the letter it originates from to give us line uniformity/similarity. In our example, we marked the terminal of the letter itself in yellow, while the terminal of the serif is marked in red. Our blue lines show the edges of our serif and the letters that flow with each other.

Our yellow lines on the other hand flow with their respective red lines, and the red lines also flow with their neighboring red lines. All of this could be used to boost flow, but compressed extensions are a great way to link line uniformity/similarity throughout your work. All these factors come together to create an extension that easily fulfills two out of the three properties of an extension. With the travel distance and destination taken care of in such a way that has little to no drawbacks and huge benefits, you oftentimes don't have to flow out of the origin to make these work. All of this is amplified more in other forms of graffiti.

Conventional Extensions

Conventional extensions on the other hand are much more demanding in how you handle them since these can drastically impact the fundamentals. If you're new to conventional extensions or if you're having issues with using them, then our goal is to make sure all three parts of our extension are working properly. In tags, it's easy enough to get conventional extensions to flow out of the origin since extensions tend to be connected directly to a stroke. Should you find that an extension directly connected at a stroke/serif doesn't flow at the origin then your issue is likely a fundamental flaw in the letter itself rather than the extension.

Let's say by some off chance you do find an issue with flow in the origin of your extension then you'd have to reconsider the placement and/or direction of the extension so you can optimize its flow. We have plenty of ways to make the origin of the extension flow. For one, we can use a hairpin curve or any rounded line to keep the motion leading into the extension smooth to continue the flow of motion. Another method is to use line uniformity and similarity with either the terminal itself, or any neighboring lines around the origin. Travel distance is where we see plenty of new graffiti artists get lost. Someone who's new to the art form is likely to throw an extension over vast distances for little to no reason.

An example of this can be seen in the tag Maxed submitted. On his letter "D", he takes the bottom of the letter and shoots it over to the left. Though this line acts and looks like an underline, instead of going under the other letters for an underline, it first cuts through the other letters' structure.
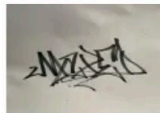
Once it's done that, only then does it just barely reach under the letters. When we look at the extension with all of that in mind, it travels a great distance and never accomplishes its goal of effectively underlining the tag.

Any reasoning for the extension they do find is completely undermined by how many fundamental flaws the extension created on its path to its destination. The larger an extension is, the more important the reason needs to be for the travel distance. If you ignore the influence of the extension, then you run the high risk of destroying many if not all of those fundamentals for each letter. You want to consider things such as "Do I have a better way to accomplish this?" or "Does this help more than hurt my graffiti?" Simply having a reason isn't enough. Your reason has to not only be beneficial, but it can't have an overall negative impact on your graffiti.

All of that being said, there are two scenarios where locating the terminal of our letter, the serif, and/or the origin of the extension can be made difficult due to the extension's style. Make no mistake, in both scenarios, the terminal of our letter, the serif (in the case of scenario two), and the origin of the extension all still exist. Having the ability to identify the different parts of a letter's anatomy

can help us spot and fix mistakes in our work and also allows us to apply the formula of extensions properly. Let's use the letter "K" to demonstrate; in our first scenario the letter's structure transitions directly into the extension. This smooth transition hides the terminal of the letter structure, and it also hides the origin of the extension. With our knowledge of letter structure and the anatomy of extensions we can easily see that the structure could end at the baseline (marked with red), and everything following that would be an extension. To be clear though, do understand that the letter's end will be contextualized by your tag as a whole. It's entirely possible that your terminal can be a little deeper into the descender or even past the descender especially if your other letters have set a precedent for that. Once you've located the terminal of the structure, then you'll have also located the origin of the extension as well.

When dealing with letters that end before the baseline such as "S", the process stays the same. We would observe our "S", and we'd see approximately where the structure should end to locate the terminal of the stroke, and the origin of the extension. No matter the letter, or the style being used, our process never changes. Even if the letter is leaning, or if the structure is stretched out longer, or whatever stylistic changes are happening, this still works.

All we have to do is apply this to the context of the style being used. This exact process works for serifs as well.

Figuring out the second scenario isn't much different; the one change here is the addition of the serif. Remember, a serif is always an extra stroke added to the terminal of our structure. This means that finding the terminal of our structure, and the origin of the serif, is simple since there will always be a vertex where the two meet. We marked the terminal of the structure in red and circled the vertex in red. Now our job is to find the end of our serif, and the start of the extension, and the process to do this is similar to our first scenario. You'll want to look at the length of the other serifs in your name, and that will tell us the general size of your serif since they should all be proportional. In the case where you don't have other serifs, or you have an abnormally large letter like our "K" here, then the serif will be proportional to the size of the letter. Once you've determined the serif's end, you'll have found the start of the extension (marked in yellow). Remember, serifs are all technically compressed extensions, so you'll never find yourself with a large serif. While this information helps flow in advanced tags as you'll be able to accurately apply the formula of extensions, it's not something to overthink or obsess about. Where we really see this process shine is when we use it with throwies and pieces. Also, keep in mind, not all conventional extensions need to span a whole name or even a whole letter, some can be just a bit larger than compressed extensions. Locating these pointson smaller conventional extensions may seem more confusing since the extension isn't noticeably large, but all of the same principles apply to these. Seeing as these conventional extensions aren't so extreme, their influence on letters and the name is easier to manage.

Letters That Pop

Have you ever come across a tag with a letter at the beginning or end and that letter just absolutely explodes with style! The letter itself doesnt even need all too much style, but the letter will add something to finish the tag off with a bang.

These are some of my favorite things to see in tags and we're going to learn how exactly this works. The idea behind these is to either start your name

off with a bang or end your name off with a strong finish by using a large and often extended part of a letter to make it "pop."

To get our letter to pop we're going to focus on achieving a high contrast in style and/or weight with our letter. Having either of these will increase its letter weight. Raising the weight through style or actual letter weight can be done by playing with whatever fundamental we'd like.

The goal is to make it clear to everyone that we want this letter to stand out against the other letters like we saw in Opel's tag earlier. While all letters can do this, some letters have an easier time than others. Any structure that naturally wants to extend outward such as *"E", "S", "K", "M"* will have an easier time pulling this off.

If you have a letter such as *"O", "P", "U", "D"* that doesn't naturally want to extend, then you'll have to exaggerate fundamentals of your choosing (typically weight using size) or you might consider adding an extension or letter distortion to the letter that you'll use to extend outward.

Regardless, we can take the structure that wants to extend, such as the back of an *"S"*, or the leg of our *"R"*, and we can create a heavy extension. This can really be anything you want, you just want to make sure the rest of the tag accounts for the extension when creating your handstyle. Kicking the *"R"* out at the end could allow us to stretch the leg far outward and add a sizable extension that maybe shoots back up, or shoots under the name. A letter like *"O"* might have its size doubled or tripled. It should be noted, this could be done at any point in the name, but the closer to the center we get, the less weight the letters have, and therefore we have to do much more to get the letter to pop. Depending on the letter this could be easy, but most letters struggle to pull this off. That's why this is normally done on the first or last letters since they have the most weight as they're further from the center. Now that we understand the science of how extensions function, how does this apply to serifs?

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SERIFS FORM & FUNCTION

Serifs Form & Function

By now you're aware that serifs fit into two categories, and while we spoke about the structure category, we didn't talk much about the extension category. Since extensions are extra parts added to a letter, you have a little more liberty with what you can do when it comes to extension-based serifs since they aren't bound by many of the limitations that letters have.

While structure-based serifs (marked in red) can only appear in a few specific areas, extension-based serifs (marked in blue) can be placed at the terminal of any stroke you'd like. Extension-based serifs also have the ability to be placed on the end of structure-based ones. Another great advantage to extension-based serifs is that you can choose to extend them and distort them much more easily as long as the changes don't damage the fundamentals.

Now that doesn't mean you should go crazy with these serifs, the last thing you want to do is get overzealous. Klem's tag here is by no means a bad handstyle and he's certainly no amateur, but turn your attention to the extension-based serif at the end of the *"M"*. This extension based serif doesn't really flow uniformity-wise or flow at the destination.

In addition, it also doesn't have much of a fundamental reason for its travel distance. A common issue is the inexperienced graffiti artist does too much with the serif, turning it into an arrow, an underline, or some other wild extension that doesn't function at all. Surely, all of those things are possible to do well, though you'd have a lot of fundamentals to juggle to pull it off in a way that doesn't diminish the fundamentals. A serif of any kind still needs to also abide by the extension formula to function properly. Before the addition of any large-scale stylistic changes, extension-based serifs are compressed extensions, and these tend to work easily, but if you choose to extend these types of serifs over a large distance then you'll turn them into a conventional extension.

Normally serifs of either category have absolutely no issue finding flow at the origin through line uniformity/similarity since they're at the terminal of the stroke. When it comes to travel distance, structure-based serifs serve the instant fundamental purpose to exist, that being letter structure. Extension-based serifs don't share this privilege. Instead, these will depend more on flow and other fundamental reasonings to exist since they aren't part of the structure itself. By now you're aware that compressed extensions of any kind almost never struggle with travel distance and that doesn't change here with extension-based serifs. Even though extension-based serifs can't always get away with using the fundamental structure as its reasoning. Filling negative space with points, or for the sake of flow, are two common reasons for travel distance but it's hardly the only reason that people use them.

When using a thin or rounded nib, flow at the destination of your extensions and serifs can often become less of a factor. This is because your nib may not have enough positive space within the destination for line uniformity to play a role in the serif or extension itself. You can see in the Dot tag, when we zoom in on the red circle, the terminal of the *"T"* and the *"O"* should have flow boosted from line U/S but the line is too small to be much of a factor. In addition, since these are rounded, they'll only create line U/S as a small point on each terminal (marked in yellow).

This means, even in the case where we used a much larger rounded line, having our terminals flow with line uniformity specifically does little to help us. This same scenario would be much more useful in throwies and pieces where rounded edges such as these encompas much more space. With that said, rounded-edge serifs still do a great job flowing in all other ways including momentum.

Earlier we saw how using a broader line such as a chisel tip, your strokes will create angles that are easily defined, and as a result line uniformity/ similarity will play a huge role in our flow of extensions. In this case, flow at the destination is almost guaranteed, assuming your letter positioning is properly done in your tag and assuming the angle of your nib is consistent. When doing extensions in other forms of graffiti where you have more positive space, the flow in your extension will come from both line and letter uniformity.

14

LETTER
DISTORTIONS

Letter Distortions

Letter distortions are when you add or subtract basic boxes/lines to a letter's base structure. This added or subtracted line is a modification of one of the five strokes. In our example you'll see we subtracted a line from the *"N"*, we added lines to both the *"R"* and the *"L"*, and the tag from Rento shows an *"O"* with added lines. These added lines are not the basic strokes we learned earlier such as square or angle stroke, but rather just additional straight or curved lines. Some basic structures don't have the ability to subtract structure, and can only add structure, like *"O"*, *"C"*, *"S"*, to name a few.

Adding Lines

When adding lines for a distortion, we have two options to choose from. Starting with the most obvious option, you can add a new line, for example, the lines of *"W"* and *"B"* marked in red. In this instance, all parts of the natural structure are still present, and the added line helps to share the responsibility of defining or completing a letter segment. Interestingly, this type of added structure can be the hardest to use since the added line tends to result in an extension rather than a letter distortion.

To avoid this outcome, both the added line and whatever structure it's aiding need to share notable amounts of responsibility to build the respective letter segment. For example, the *"B"* has two stems, each playing an important part in performing the role of a stem. The *"W"* on the other hand has its left-most box shortened. The added line completes this left side, raising it back to the cap line.

If the added line wasn't there at the top left, then the *"W"* would run into many fundamental issues such as negative space and weight problems.

While an artist can work around those problems without the new line, this offers another option for the artist to take. If one of the added lines clearly defines more structure than the other, then the lesser will become an extension since it won't be necessary. In practice this is done by either segmenting the natural structure then adding a line to complete the segment *"W"*, or this is done by having an added line that parallels the responsibility of the natural structure to augment that segment *"B"*.

Our second method of adding distortions is to bend the basic box/line until you create a vertex that turns one line into two. When adding lines/basic boxes to a structure you run a few risks. We touched on one of these earlier, that being the addition might end up being just an extension, and therefore it has a different anatomy and different properties that it abides by. Finding that balance between both added and natural structure can be very difficult even for the most experienced graffiti artist. Both snapping a line/box or simply adding a whole new piece of structure, can easily diminish letter structure. This may seem ironic since we're literally adding more structure, but the reason we can potentially lose structure is that the more we distort our letter, the less our letter resembles the base structure. While adding structure certainly falls victim to this as well, adding structure is more guilty of this. You can only subtract so much before you're left with nothing, whereas it's easy to get carried away adding.

One danger often seen in wild style pieces or heavily stylized tags is adding far too many new boxes, especially by snapping. In the past I've seen new graffiti artists take a three-line/box letter and turn it into a ten-line letter by snapping any line they could and adding even more. Aside from this you can expect the added structure to influence all of graffiti's fundamentals, most notably, structure and weight.

Subtracting Lines

To subtract, we can fuse two boxes together, or we can exclude a line entirely, but this is less common due to breaking structures. Letters *"J"* and capital *"I"* are examples of getting rid of lines since they can remove their top crossbars and keep the integrity of the letter.

We can do this very thing to a less intrusive degree by cutting a line down only partially rather than fully eliminating it. Not all letters can do this, but you may have seen some artists cut off the lower left or upper stem of an *"R"*. Any time you subtract in this way you're going to lose out on tons of structure and can easily destroy the letter.

To counter this the artist must establish the structure by either heavily exaggerating other key features, or by suggesting the missing portion using other parts of your image. This suggested portion can be anything, but whatever you make it, it needs to successfully fill the role of the missing structure while also not destroying the other fundamentals. In the first example we got rid of just about all of the bottom left leg of the *"R"*. To compensate for this we added a serif to the *"E"* that shoots upward. With a little letter positioning, we can move the *"R"* close so the *"E's"* serif suggests the structure of the *"R's"* leg. In the second example, we have a little of the *"R's"* leg showing, and this time we greatly enlarged the bowl of the *"R"* to help add weight. How you balance this will largely depend on the context of the name. Given the massive negative drawbacks of subtracting in this way, while possible in all forms of graffiti, it is most commonly done in pieces. Pieces offer many secondary elements such as exterior details, elaborate extensions, 3D, and much more to help compensate for the drawbacks.

The easiest and most common method of subtracting is to fuse two lines together. This is the opposite of snapping, so we'd do this by writing one smooth, rounded line with no vertex being made where the two lines would have connected. When using this method, it's possible to eliminate a basic box/line without eliminating any structure.

For example, the letter *"L"* requires two lines, but when fusing the lines, we can write the letter using one line, instead of two, while also maintaining both the stem and crossbar of its structure. This wouldn't be the same as using a stroke to make a variant structure. A stroke will create one letter segment, where letter distorting in this way will start with a base structure and fuse two letter segments together.

Subtracting structure just about always begins with the basic structure. The reason is basic structures begin in their simplest or lowest style threshold form. If we subtract from a variant, then we oftentimes end up creating a different stroke that simplifies the letter and therefore transforms the variant back into a basic structure, or a simpler variant structure. The downside to subtracting from the basic structure is that we risk destroying the letter with our distortion since the basic structure already begins in its simplest lowest style threshold form. Take the variant structure *"R"* with an angle stroke bowl, for example. Subtracting one line from the bowl destroys the letter and makes it a *"K"*. On the other hand, if we fuse the two boxes, we just end up with a round stroke.

Lastly, we can combine both, adding and subtracting structure in a single letter. For example, we could fuse two lines to subtract, then add a new line to redevelop the line that was taken away. Normally this results in a double structure (a single letter that contains two versions of itself or two versions of a single anatomy/segment).

Combining any methods of distortion in a single letter can be a great way for an artist to use one method, such as adding, to compensate for the drawbacks of an alternate method.

As you might imagine, there certainly are drawbacks to consider such as flow, weight, and style thresholds, but the extent of the drawbacks will vary depending on the implementation. Most heavily stylized works do use most forms of distortions throughout the name, so don't think that you have to stick to just a single method for a whole tag. Letter distortions add tons of style and can provide an artist with opportunities to focus on and experiment with any fundamental they choose. Letter distorting an *"E"* might allow you to position the letter a little easier against another letter. The distorted section could also create a new line that provides an angle for flow. This trend of influencing the fundamentals happens for each of graffiti's basics, but there's a catch. It's easy to break a letter by adding too many new lines to a structure, or taking away too many lines. In addition, key points of letters are often much harder to letter distort. As you distort a letter, you begin to lose structure as it's becoming less and less like its base structure with each distortion. For your letter to maintain its integrity after letter distortions, your letter must be fundamentally correct before you begin stylizing otherwise any distortion will break the letter.

Done properly, all distorted letters can be reverted into a base structure, either basic or variant. If the distorted letter can't be broken down into a base structure, then the letter is fundamentally incorrect.

Earlier, we spoke about how you can suggest structure after subtracting structure. Every so often in graffiti we'll see artists use a symbol or character to represent a whole letter. In instances like these, the character or symbol will follow the fundamentals of its respective art form. That is to say that if an artist uses a character to represent a letter then that character will follow anatomy, gesture, pose, and expression, for example. All of these previously mentioned fundamentals will often still acknowledge the fundamentals of

graffiti by treating some of graffiti's fundamentals as guidelines and limiters. For instance, a character might still fit within the cap height, or even within the space of the ascender and descender space.

Maybe the artist decides to make sure the character doesn't throw off the weight of the name by using the same weight of the average letter for the character themselves. Doing this keeps the character from dismantling the foundation that holds the graffiti together, but this also allows the character or other symbol many liberties. Keep in mind though, removing a whole letter and replacing it with anything else is just about the most drastic distortion an artist can execute since you've removed a whole letter structure, the most important of graffiti's fundamental. This could easily destroy all of your fundamentals if you're not careful. For this reason, we often see people replace letters like *"O"*, with a face or a star. Often this guarantees that the symbol, especially character, will become the focus, so you'll want to adjust your other letters around that motif. You'll see we did this in our Geppetto tag, replacing the *"O"* with a simple puppet's face. During this tag, the *"O"* dips into our space just above and below baseline and cap lines, adding lots of weight to the right-hand side due to its size. We adjusted the size of both *"T's"* to be not only more condensed, but more hidden as to avoid excess space and as a result weight. Stylizing the *"G"* and making the first *"E"* larger helps to add a little weight to the left, but the focus should still be on the right as that's where our character is.

Now it's at point we have to address the elephant in the room when it comes to characters specifically. Let me be direct and say, there is no such thing as graffiti characters. Artforms and subgenres are determined by their fundametnal set and how they use those in conjunction with the elements of art. Graffiti has it's own fundamentals that we covered in earlier chapters, and characters have their own fundamentals that dont at all include letters. If you replace a letter with a character, combine a character into a letter, or simply have a character beside your letters, none of those would change the artform, you'd still have graffiti, with a character. While there's plenty more that goes into this topic, we'll be covering how artforms function in our style book. Now that we understand letter destortions, we can begin talkin about false variants, an important yet simple topic.

15

FALSE VARIANTS

False Variants

Remember when discussing variant structures we learned that not all different versions of a letter classify as variant structures due not using basic strokes, or exceeding a style threshold (even with basic strokes) of base structures? When we add a new line to the base structure of a letter, this new line could result in creating one of those non-variant structures, false variants if you will, for example, our *"A"*, *"N"* or *"S"*. Letters such as these might seem simple with little more style than the average print font, but false variants don't flow universally with all other base structures in tags and straight letters like normal variants do. False variants are largely made up of structures that are made using the basic strokes, but contain just a bit too much style to where they don't have universal flow. This could be for a number of reasons such as having a stroke alter the letter segment to a point where it loses the integrity of the letter segment.

Let's turn our attention to the "E", and you'll notice the red and blue crossbar can look like an angle stroke or even a serif in some instances. Put simply, no matter how short or long we make the red line, by the time we get to the blue line, the "E's" structure is already complete so this couldn't be an angle stroke. Our only option is to treat the crossbar as a letter distortion of our straight stroke or to treat the blue line as a serif. Many letters have this occur with different lines in their base structures and when using different strokes, so keep an eye out as you test different letters.

Next up we have the added line that makes false structures. I wanted to talk about this one next because ultimately this isn't much different than the previous scenario.

Here, the added line attempts to act as a new stem for the letter and if this doesn't end up as an extension then it might lead to creating a false variant. A few related factors prevent these from being a real variant, the first being, our letter segment is either already complete or the letter as a whole is already complete, therefore making the new line unnecessary. In addition, there are too many strokes attempting to make the letter segment. This is particularly an issue with letters that have low amounts of style in their basic form such as *"O"*, *"H"*, *"V"*. Given these letters' simplicity, they react to even small amounts of style very drastically. For this reason, most of those letters don't have variant structures because even adding a basic stroke has massive effects on how those letters respond to each fundamental.

Subtracting structure is an easy one to explain when talking about false variants. Letters have a limited amount of structure you can erase before you no longer have a letter. Getting rid of structure tends to have a larger impact on all fundamentals and along with that, a greater influence of style/risk of mistakes. More importantly, remember that basic structures are the letter in its simplest form or lowest style, using only the necessary lines/letter segments required to create the structure. If we start eliminating those lines then we're taking away critical lines and segments that most letters can't afford to lose. While our *"E"* isnt so distorted that it's unreadable, it certainly has far too much style to be a variant structure.

16

FIND & EVOLVE YOUR STYLE

Find & Evolve Your Style

Now that we've explained a few common styles, let's talk about how to craft and evolve your own style. Throughout this chapter, keep in mind, no matter an artist's skill level, all progress happens in the fundamentals. Even fine art masters such as Da Vinci understood this, graffiti is no different. An advanced artist will still have to study the fundamentals to continue progressing, no artist is ever above that. However, in addition to this, you can begin looking at your work and decide how you'd like to alter your style. This comes down to you first of all recognizing what fundamentals your style currently revolves around. If you're unsure, then grab a sheet of paper and write down all three pillars of art.

- *Elements of art: line, shape, form, value, space, color, texture*

- *Art form-specific fundamentals: letter structure, NSM, LNW, LNP, flow*

- *Technique: any techniques you consistently use such as flairs, how you use chisel tips, and different methods of blending, and so on.*

From here, see what fundamentals your work exaggerates more, and what fundamentals your work exaggerates less. In handstyles specifically, you may not see any, or many, results for fundamentals that the art form itself (in this case handstyles) doesn't prioritize or use. Elements such as form and value may not play a role in something like tags, keep this in mind when analyzing art of any kind. Regardless, when looking at fundamentally correct work, we can go down the list to break down any style in any art form.

Looking at the tag from Guigas, we can see his style focuses more on exaggerating LNW with his larger *"G"*, *"S"*. Due to the large size, he's positioned these letters lower than the others in the tag so the *"G"* and *"S"* have slight LNP exaggeration but nothing too stylistic. When looking at all the other letters, he tends to also go for a tighter LNP and NSM; however, this spacing is typical of graffiti so LNP and NSM wouldn't be one of the fundamentals that he's exaggerating. He does, however, have go the extra mile to ensure excess amounts of flow. This flow comes in the form

of tons of line uniformity, as well as four key letter uniformity points, those being the square top *"G"* and *"S"*, and the swirl on the second *"G"* and *"S"*. As if that wasn't enough flow, he uses the smaller letters that aren't as much of a focal point to focus momentum flow through the flow of motion. He uses base structures for just about all his letters; even so, they are still stylized, especially the *"S"*. For this reason, structure would also be a bit of a priority. You would continue this process for all three pillars of art to gain a fundamental understanding of your style. Along the way you'll find fundamentals that are used but not stylized, such as lines in the previous tag, then you'll find fundamentals that simply aren't present such as "forms" in just about all tags. When an art form's default state excludes an element of art, the element of art generally isn't present in that art form, but it becomes optional to include. Texture in tags is a great example of this, where most tags don't feature texture, but they could if the artist wanted to. All art form-specific fundamentals should be present, but many techniques are optional.

Once you understand that, you have a choice to make; you can either continue to progress that style, or you can create a new style. To progress a current style, you'd take the fundamentals your style focuses on, learn more about those topics, then test and experiment with new ways to affect and use those fundamentals. As you evolve the fundamentals that you're exaggerating, you can choose to keep the lesser fundamentals the same, or you can choose to begin working on some of those as well. Changing the lesser fundamentals, or the incorporation of them, will normally change the whole look of your style since you're now exaggerating new fundamentals that weren't being utilized before.

Remember, style is not something any artist in any form of art is born with innately. Style is something you craft over years using your understanding of the fundamentals. If you dont know the basics, you wont be able to craft a first style not to mention a second.

To begin crafting a whole new style, you'd acknowledge the basics currently being focused on within your work, and you'd do one of two things. Our first method is to find new fundamental ways to manipulate those fundamentals. Let's say you normally like to exaggerate LNP with heavy amounts of overlaps; instead, try to exaggerate LNP by altering how high or low letters are, the tilt of the letters, or angle of your name. You're still exaggerating the same fundamental you're used to, but now you're altering it in a way you're not used to. When doing this, you're bound to run into new fundamental flaw, new problems you'll have to overcome and this is perfect, we're looking for this exact scenario. When we're faced with new mistakes, and new errors, we're forced to find new fundamental solutions. These new solutions will manifest into our new style. Going back to our past example of trying new LNP, let's say we positioned our letters higher and/or lower, and now we've created problematic valleys. Our job would be to find a way to fix these valleys, so maybe we add some LNW to one or more letters to help fill the space. Another option would be to use different structures, or assuming you can handle it, you could add some letter distortions to help the structure reach into those valleys. Keep in mind, these are only examples, you can do this for any and all of the fundamentals in any of the three pillars of art so the only limit is your imagination.

The second method of crafting a new style is far more straightforward. Like before, we'll want to have a clear understanding of our style and the fundamentals we exaggerated to get to our style. Instead, this time we're going to avoid exaggerating those same fundamentals and instead we'll exaggerate any other fundamentals. Feel free to start off easy and pick one or two fundamentals to stop exaggerating, and one or two new ones to replace them with. An aggressive approach to changing your style is harder for many artists, even experienced artists, but it has the largest impact on your work.

17

BREAKING LETTERS

Breaking Letters

Look at your tags, you more than likely h ave broken structures if you're new to graffiti! Most new graffiti artists have a tag full of broken letters so let's learn what causes letters to break. There are a few different ways a letter can break, and all these different causes are a result of bad fundamentals. Letters can break for the following reasons:

- *Lines/boxes don't connect/al ign properly.*

- *Hyperextended boxes/lines.*

- *The structure is obscured or not present.*

- *There are too many distortions.*

- *Key areas have been blocked, segmented, distorted.*

- *Not enough negative space.*

Once a letter is broken, the chances of your whole name breaking along with it rise exponentially. On the other hand, in some cases, a letter can break to the point where it's nonexistent and yet the name could still be kept intact. Mind you, this is not something to strive for, and this is by no means a good result. This is important to know so you can more accurately analyze issues in graffiti.

GRiM

If your graffiti is kept simple enough, and you have a broken letter for any reason, then readers may still be able to read the whole name, including the broken letter. Using GRIM as an example, if I were to break the *"R"*, then the name is likely to still read as Grim. Whoever is looking at this would replace the broken letter with every letter in the alphabet in a matter of seconds and conclude that the missing letter has to be an *"R"* based on the *"G"*, *"I"*, and *"M"*. In some advanced and heavily stylized works an artist might replace a

letter, oftentimes *"O"*, *"A"*, *"I"*, with a character, or a symbol to suggest the letter. In these cases, you'll use the same context to piece the name together. The difference here is the letter is not meant to exist and would be planned around. When doing this, replacing the letter completely is considered the most extensive of distortions since in many cases your distortion results in a whole other art form (for example, a cartoon character). However, you can break the name if you don't perform the symbol or character correctly. Therefore, the symbol or c haracter doesn't need to follow graffiti's art form-specific fundamentals for the most part, though it should still flow, have a sense of cohesion, purpose or reason, and respect graffiti's fundamentals. That is to say, the symbol shouldn't destroy the fundamentals of other letters while also functioning within graffiti's style threshold.

18

COMMON MISTAKES

Common Mistakes

I'm sure you'll agree we've all been guilty of certain common mistakes in graffiti, mistakes just about every graffiti artist and writer makes. In this chapter I want to take a second to point out some of these mistakes so newer graffiti artists know exactly what hurdles they might face as they progress. We'll use examples submitted to us from the graffiti community to shed light on these topics and show in practice how they negatively affect your work.

- *Adding too much around the tag (exterior detail).*

- *Biting and copying help learning.*

- *Some letters slanted and some straight in a way that results in clashing flow.*

- *Forced connecting letters/one-liners.*

- *Using style in every letter, and related to that is lack of consistency between letters and prioritizing style over basics.*

- *Forcing flow when it's automatic (explained in flow chapter).*

- *Crowns.*

Starting at the top of the list with adding too much style, we have a tag here from Enort where he's added plenty of exterior details around the handstyle. If we isolated any of these details, alone none of them would be wrong. The issue is more so the effect they have on other fundamentals such as weight. Looking at the tag, the **"E"** is the largest letter by a long shot, and the **"N"** has a decent bit of weight to it as well. The **"RT"** combo on the other hand doesn't have nearly as much weight as the left side.

Now, factor in the underline with the heavy left side, the quotation marks and the arrow suspended in midair with nothing under it and what you have is a heavy left side that wasn't planned for. This results in the tag looking weak due to some structures lacking weight. Before we move on though, notice the large gaps between each letter. While this causes many other flaws, I want to focus on how this hurts weight. Since the letters are positioned so far from one another, letter groupings can't effectively or easily help carry the weight of other letters in their group. In addition to that, the enlarged valleys allow for some letters to appear as if they're suspended in air, drifting off, or about to fall over. The *"E"*, *"N"*, *"O"* are all examples of this.

Next up, copying, also referred to as biting, is rampant in graffiti. Plenty of graffiti artists credit all of their progress to biting, saying things such as, "You get inspiration from others' work, slap it onto your work, and change it to make it your own." All this results in is the artist spending the next few decades continuously doing this, relying on other people's work to fuel their innovations, and leaves them unable to control style, and leaves them just as knowledgeable or in some cases less knowledgeable than when they started. Why is this the case when copying can actually be a really great learning tool? As stated earlier, graffiti doesn't have many credible sources, and this book is the first time many of these concepts have been talked about.

Therefore, when graffiti artists copy, they're not thinking of the science behind why or how certain stylistic choices affected the fundamentals. Rather, they simply bite what they like, slap it on their work without ever thinking why or how that detail works. Worse yet, plenty of times people copy details that aren't correct to begin with and this leads to practiced bad habits. To make matters even worse, if they happen to copy something that is correct, then they copy it and use it in the wrong way. Copying correct parts of peoples' work is the equivalent of taking a math test, and seeing your friend has 2 + 2 = 4, and you copy their answer despite your equation being something totally different. In other words, you've copied an artist's correct answer, and you placed it on the wrong problems. Remember, sometimes it's not the style itself that's incorrect, but instead it's the implementation that's the problem. So how do we copy correctly to get better?

Fine art does this amazingly through master studies. A master study is when you sit and recreate a master's work and all the while you're critically analyzing all three pillars of art, or, if you're choosing to take a more focused approach then you might study just a few fundamentals. Some artists take this a step further and instead of recreating an exact copy, they recreate the general style while focusing on the fundamentals. Graffiti artists can do the exact same thing, the issue is, to do this you have to first know of the fundamentals so you can study them.

Without knowing what the fundamentals are you won't be able to do a proper master study and this brings us right back to the start of this conversation where copying became rampant.

Now to be clear, a full on master study would be more appropriate for pieces, and not nearly as necessary for hand styles. However, any artist can still learn plenty from other peoples tags by breaking down the fundamentals in the handstyle.

Let's continue on with letters that don't flow, normally from the letters leaning in ways that clash. An example of this could be seen in Sly's handstyle here where his baseline has a serious lean to it. On top of that, he sits the *"S"* on the baseline but since the baseline is slanted, the *"S"* takes on the same slant that forces the *"S"* to lean to the left. From there he takes the *"L"* and forces it to lean hard to the right-hand side. Now that we have at least two letters to compare, we can see how any opportunity he might have had to flow the top of the *"S"* with the *"L"* was lost due to the positioning. Even though the bottom of the *"S"* does flow with the *"L"*, it's not enough to compensate for the lack of flow everywhere else in the tag. Once we get to the *"Y"* the style changes, and the *"Y"* doesn't share the lean of the *"L"* so any hope of flow has been lost at this point.

Both artists Gawks and Here27 do great work with leaning letters and line uniformity/similarity.

We can easily change this by repositioning the overlapping letters by moving any of the letters up or down, and even changing the amount they overlap. Doing this allows us to keep the key structures integrity, and/or find a better location to flow. Regardless of your reasonings, make sure to plan and work around the weight and negative space this creates.

Squash and Stretch

An effective way to bring your graffiti to life is to give your letters a variety of different sizes! This is an extremely effective way to add style but if you're not careful you could end up with a mess on your hands, so we're going to talk about the potential obstacles this presents and how to handle them. Really, we only have a few options to skew size: we can squash the letters inward to make them thinner, or shorter, and we can stretch the letters outward to make them wider or taller.

Remember in our weight chapter, we briefly mentioned how you can create equally sized sections for each letter to exist within to help ensure weight? When we squeeze or pull our letters, we're more so talking about changing the size of the letter's allocated zone it can encompass. Each of these comes with its own obstacles to overcome so let's go over some of them.

Squashing a letter to make it shorter will create negative space under and/ or above the letter. Since the letter is shorter, it's going to lose out on letter weight, and we'll even lose negative space within any counters of the letter since the counters will be smaller due to the letter's size.

These are the initial effects of our actions, but the side effect is now we may cause a flow issue due to the enlarged negative space surrounding the letter, and we're going to have a letter positioning issue as well. Our goal should be to use our knowledge of the fundamentals to balance the shortened letter, fill the space if needed, and create flow within the shrunk letter. If you think back to the weight chapters, you'll remember that letters higher up have more weight due to anticipation, and you'll remember that letters can hold one another's weight as well.

Knowing this, one of the infinite solutions we can use is to raise our "A" letter higher to counter its lack of weight. Then, using the neighboring letter, we can either lean the letter to fill space and hold the raised letter, or we could also simply move the neighboring letter closer to overlap, or we can do both at once. Doing this compensates for the shortcomings of a shrunken letter, not to mention the added bonus of additional flow from line uniformity of the diagonal line from the "C" serif leading into the "A" serif. When done correctly, it can become an effective stylistic tool.

Mane does this in his tag where he compressed the "E" and the "N" somewhat. Notice how the "E" isn't as small as the "A" and "N" and instead it reaches as far down as the "M"; this creates a valley under the "A" and "N" that Mane notices and fills with an exterior detail. The exterior detail helps not only to fill the space but also to lighten the load of the "A" and "N".

However, if we squish the letter at its sides, suddenly we don't have to worry about negative space directly above and below the letter since our letter will still reach the cap line and baseline. Instead, we have to worry about losing letter structure from a lack of negative space in the counters or having a weak letter structure due to the thinner compression.

Here27 takes a very simple approach to the handstyle, opting for base structures with very parallel lines. Though you don't have to be uniform with your lines, what's important to note is that he's still able to realize large amounts of flow despite his letters being further apart.

With spacing this large, flow was really only possible by using uniform leans on the letters so that the lines could be uniform too. In the case of Gawks, I thought his tag made for a perfect example since it features transitional flow, a feat we mentioned could be harder in tags due to fewer lines to transition with. Knowing his name, he understands he wants to begin with a slight left lean and he wants to transition to a right lean part way through the tag. He looks at the tools he has and decides the *"W"* is the perfect place to change the lean. Not only does the W provide two opposing leans naturally with its left and right sides, but the *"W"* happens to be in the middle of his name! With this, he can easily swap from the left lean to th e right and maintain flow through the whole tag. Understand, you don't need a symmetrical name, you don't need a *"W"*, or an *"M"*, and you don't need anything other than practice with any name to be able to transition. All names are capable of transitioning flow though some might be easier than others. The point being, the more you study your name, the more you'll understand its strengths and weaknesses and the better you'll become at working with those qualities.

Connecting letters can be easy but that doesn't mean that you have to connect, or even that you should connect whenever given the chance. An issue often seen in newer artists' work and even some intermediate artists' work is when they force letters to connect for little to no reason. This can end up having the reverse effect of decreasing flow, and it can make two connecting letters look as if they don't mesh with the other letters that don't connect. In the case of TBone's tag, he has great letters, but forcing them to connect only creates unnecessary linework that only serves to clutter, decrease negative space, distort structure and decrease letter uniformity resulting in negative amounts of flow. Notice how the *"T"* is really sharp then suddenly, at the top right, it curves to lead into the *"B's"* bowl. The *"B"* then takes on an extremely rounded structure, and despite using an angle top variant for the *"B"*, the top is still rounded due to the prominent hairpin curve that helps make the bowl.

This *"B"* then fails to connect to the *"O"* so the *"O"* starts a whole new line that curves and is followed by a sharp *"N"*. Aside from the n early nonexistent *"E"*, all of the letters are individually great if they were in different tags, but together there is no sense of cohesion. Separating the letters and giving each of them room to establish their structures would go a long way to help this tag.

Look at the tags submitted by Weak and Guidas. Starting with Weak, each letter connects to another, creating what is known in graffiti as a one-liner (a tag done in one line). Each connecting line is for the most part hidden, and his structures are well established even though his positioning is really tight. This is a prime example of how to successfully connect your letters, by having them connect in a way where no fundamental is being destroyed due to the connection. Certainly, Weak could have written each letter separately from each other and the letters would have looked exactly the same, but connecting them provides a smooth, faster execution of the tag while also boosting flow. Flow benefits not only from the tight positioning for line uniformity/similarity but also from small bursts of the first method of momentum flow, particularly in the rounded areas.

Guigas on the other hand also connects many of his letters to one another but notice how not all of them connect. An important skill for connecting your lines is to be able to distinguish when it's necessary to conn ect and when it's not. This is a skill Guigas has, he connects when it benefits his tag, there's no unnecessary connections creating convoluted line orders. That's really a hidden culprit of this topic, line order. When forcing connections, it can be easy to take over complicated paths as you're writing. These unnecessarily complicated paths change the order in which you write your lines, and this changes structure along with every other fundamental. Guigas doesn't fall into this trap, no line is wasted.

Notice, when he doesn't connect, for example, his *"S"*, he still manages to flow just fine using line and letter uniformity and similarity.

Style can be a lot of fun to work with, but it's often not needed in every single letter. You've seen before how Guigas was able to have tons of style in a tag while focusing most of his style on the first and last letters. Adding style to every letter in a tag can easily cause a cascade of issues. Each letter in its base structure begins with a certain level of style, and each letter has a different sensitivity to how it reacts to style. For example, some letters like *"X"* and a variant *"E"* begin with a large amount of style, and therefore small stylistic changes don't have huge impacts on the letter. However, with a variant structure *"A"*, or base structure *"D"*, these letters don't have much base style and small changes to the letters can drastically impact the amount of style they have. When we look at the tag by Maxed, we see how adding style to every letter may not always be the best idea.

Looking at the handstyle we quickly find ourselves rapidly jumping from low amounts of style to high amounts of style and as a result none of the letters fit together. Being base and variant structures, you'd expect them all to flow, but instead the difference in style from one letter to the next breaks the flow. Now remember, style can be more than just structure, its size, position and every other fundamental. Just like our past example in this chapter, each letter would work fine in separate tags, but together they lose their flow. Without considering what and how fundamentals are being affected by the stylistic changes, an artist can't keep the fundamentals intact. In other words, all of the fundamentals fall apart if you're not careful when adding style to each letter. Keep in mind, we're not saying you shouldn't or that it's impossible to add style to each letter. Rather, we're saying that when you do add style to each letter, be very aware of what your style is doing to the basics so you can ensure your work remains fundamentally sound.

Take the tag from Rento as an example. We end up seeing a very similar scenario to the Maxed tag, what's different here though is Rento considers the effect of each letter being stylized. He's careful to look at the similarities each letter has and tries to style each letter to capitalize on these similarities. His *"EN"* and *"T"* are all naturally sharp and straight letters while the *"O"* is round and the *"R"* has both round and sharp/straight lines. Knowing this, he decides to change the *"R"* to a variant square bowl *"R"* to reflect the angular nature of the *"E"*, *"N"*, *"T"*. The *"E"* gets a small serif to add more verticality to the right side that helps flow with the *"N"*. Not much happens on the *"N"*, but the *"T"* not only has a lean to it , but this lean helps the top of the *"T"* to flow with the bottom line of the *"E"* through line uniformity. Not only that, this slant also helps to flow with the top of the *"O"* as well. The top right serif of the *"T"* then slants down to flow with the diagonal angle of the *"O"*. Rento's *"O"* has lots of style added to it, but since he stylized the other letters and he went so far out of his way to make the *"O"* flow that his letters still flow with one another.

Now something seen all too often in graffiti is the use of crowns by new graffiti artists. Crowns in graffiti represent a title that is passed down and earned by writers and earning the title of king is no easy task. Understand, illegal graffiti is 100 percent about giving and getting respect, and writers in the community hold one another to this truth. Most writers will write their whole life and never come close to becoming king. To be a king you must get your name up more than most if not all other writers in the area, and you have to maintain a leading presence in these areas for an extended period of time. Not only that, but your skills also have to be at a certain level to even be considered a king.

Even though amateurs who get up a lot might get respect from a few people, you'll still need the skills to maintain your presence. The issue really comes down to, if you're a toy who gets up a lot and presents as a king, then you'll have to compete against other toys as well as experienced writers.

Since this hypothetical toy king is still new, the other amateurs are stiff competition for the toy king, but none of them are worthy of the title either. When two toys go over one another, all onlookers no matter their experience will see this as equal competition. However, if an experienced, seasoned writer were to be crossed out by a toy, no seasoned writer would look at that as equal competition; even onlooking amateurs would see this and know the toy is out of line.

If anything, the toy would be seen as disrespectful by experienced writers, and the amateur would be looked down on and wouldn't be taken seriously. This is why skill is necessary to maintain the title because your skill determines how others perceive your challengers, and you only gain the title if others perceive you to be worthy of it. If others don't feel you're worthy of the title, then you're no king at all. All of this means the following:

The title of king, and crowns, are reserved exclusively for writers (people who do graffiti illegally) meaning that doing legal walls and/or having a large social media following will not make you a king/queen.

- *If you do graffiti in a small town then being a king means little to nothing as there's no competition, likely no kings to pass the title down, and no credible community to see if you're fit enough for the title.*

- *Amateurs (even in big cities) can't be a king due to lack of skill and lack of time in graffiti.*

Putting a crown on your work when it's undeserved not only loses you respect among those who you're attempting to impress with the crown, but also is a sign of disrespect. Only because I know that many new graffiti artists get seduced by the allure of graffiti and they let it consume their entire life. Remember, you don't have to do graffiti illegally. Enjoy the art form legally if you'd like, but any experienced, mature-minded writer will tell you doing this art form illegally is not at all worth it. Anyone who says otherwise doesn't have your best interests at heart. Those who do it illegally understand every writer gets caught at some point if you do it long enough; there's no avoiding it no matter how good you think you are.

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ROADMAP OF PROGRESSION

Roadmap of Progression

Like anything in life, it takes time to become better and, in that time, you'll have plenty of ups and downs. There will be stretches of time where your progress skyrockets, then you'll have long stretches of time where it seems you're not making any progress at all. In this chapter I want to explain what you can expect as you go through the different phases of your art journey. Normally, beginners in just about anything see lots of rapid progress so long as they have two things: first is good information about the fundamentals, and two, discipline to practice that information. The reason this progress is so rapid is because mistakes from an amateur are overarching, and very general mistakes. Say, for example, they wanted to begin doing graffiti and they write the letter "W," they may mess up and have shaky lines, they may not adhere to the structure propely. These mistakes aren't small, so when they fix these, the improvement is a stark upgrade that's clear to see. However, as you continue, you'll have learned and fixed these overreaching issues, and as a result your mistakes will become much smaller and harder to notice to the inexperienced eye.

It's at this point that many artists (even professionals and masters) begin to feel like they've plateaued, and they may even become confused as to what needs to be done to get better. One of a few things could be causing this plateau, and one of these is not only a good thing, but it's necessary. The first reason plateaus happen is that the artist hasn't been taking in new, credible information. If you're not actively studying good quality information then your knowledge and progress will stagnate, and in my twenty years of teaching, this is by far the most common issue for most graffiti artists. The second cause for plateaus is when you've taken in plenty of new, quality information, and your mind needs time n ot only to break the information down to understand it, but you need time to practice that information to learn how to apply it. Without this plateau you'll likely forget all that new information, and you won't be able to use most of it. This period acts as a loading screen so your skill and knowledge can catch up and make sense of the information. Both plateau periods are commonly mistaken for "artist's block," but despite the fact I named my company after that, artist's block doesn't exist. No artist with a professional skill and knowledge level ever suffers from artist's block, and this is because they continuously learn, then practice that new information, and they know enough about the fundamentals to generate quality images consistently. Any artist who thinks they suffer from this either lacks knowledge of the fundamentals, hasn't enough skill, or they're lazy. Inspiration is a luxury, motivation is a privilege; don't focus on these two, they're excuses for procrastination.

If you manage to draw even when you aren't motivated, you'll notice you quickly become much better than you otherwise would have been. Doing this also gets you back into the loop of progression. Once this plateau period has ended, you'll continue this cycle for the rest of your art career. It really is just a constant circle going from progress > plateau (understanding the new information) > progress, and so on. The only things that can break this cycle are if you stop practicing or if you stop learning new information. Building your skill in your sketchbooks is a great place to practice, but expect a dip in quality when switching to any other specialty medium. Let me explain. In art we have typical mediums such as pencil, pen, markers. These tools don't require you to learn new muscle memory or learn how they function. They have a relatively lower bar to entry since there is a sense of familiarity with them. However, specialty mediums either require you to build a whole new muscle memory, or you have to learn tons about the medium to know how it functions. Spray paint, watercolors and oil paints are great examples of specialty mediums. If you learned every single lesson in this book, and you mastered all of it, then you decided to use a specialty medium you've never used, you're going to make some simple errors you otherwise wouldn't have. Let's imagine we resurrected Leonardo Da Vinci and we put a spray can in his hand; his lines may not be straight, he might not be able to blend convincingly. Maybe his can control isn't the cleanest and he's not able to paint refined, expertly executed anatomy. Clearly a master such as Da Vinci knows these fundamentals, but the lack of practice with the specialty medium lowers the quality of his work, and the same will happen to all artists when they begin with a new specialty medium.

I should also note, this downgrade doesn't mean they're bad artists, they still have all the same knowledge and skills to be a professional after all. They simply just haven't learned that medium. While masters and pro-level artists are still affected by this, the downgrade is minimized since they can lean on their knowledge and skills in the first two pillars. Now if you're intermediate, this downgrade will hit you harder since your knowledge and skill can't compensate as much for the lack of technique with the specialty medium. If you're an amateur, this downgrade may not be all too noticeable since all of your mistakes are still overarching, and all of those mistakes are more important than the issues with technique.

Examine your work. Are you new to art, graffiti as well as the medium? If so then study all of the three pillars of art, including techniques for the me dium you're using. Are you experienced in graffiti, you know the basics, but you're new to the medium? If so, then study more about the medium and practice fundamentals in the first two pillars (elements of art and form-specific fundamentals) to help yourself get acclimated to the new medium. For example, an experienced artist using a new medium might practice forms,

Closing Chat

Now that we've reviewed the basic science of how graffiti works, let me start by thanking all of you who've not only picked up this book, but those of you who invested your time to read it. To those who submitted their work to the book, I give a special thanks, as your graffiti helped immensely in teaching many of these topics. As you continue your graffiti journey, always remember, no matter how advanced, all progress happens in the fundamentals. If you're just starting in graffiti, you now have all the information you need to reach a professional skill and knowledge level. I've laid out the comprehensive guide and the full science of how graffiti's fundamentals work, all you need to do now is study and practice and you'll realize your full potential in graffiti. With that said, graffiti is still a young art form with plenty of room to grow and much to discover. Keep a refined focus on the fundamentals to uncover more of what graffiti has to offer, so you can push the art form forward. Our next books will expand on these very fundamentals to teach the science behind throwies and pieces, and a fourth separate book will explain the science of style in all art forms (this includes graffiti). My hope in writing this book was to help more people than I ever could through classes and individual critiques. Over twenty years of graffiti and teaching, I've helped thousands of artists, but there were always plenty more I couldn't respond to due to only having so many hours in the day. Now with this resource available, anyone can get the best and most credible information they need right here in this book. If you'd like to share your progress with me, always feel free to reach out and share pictures. I love seeing your work, and even though I can't always respond to all of you, I do try and take an hour or so each day to connect with as many people as I can. At the end of the day it all comes down to practice, study and patience, and with that you now have all the tools you need to get started with graffiti.
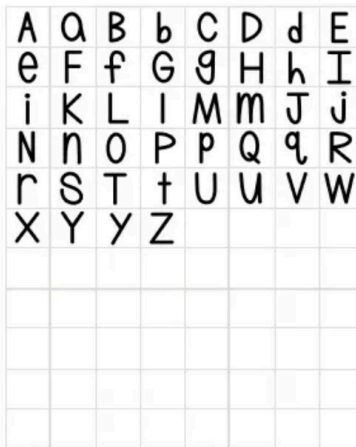
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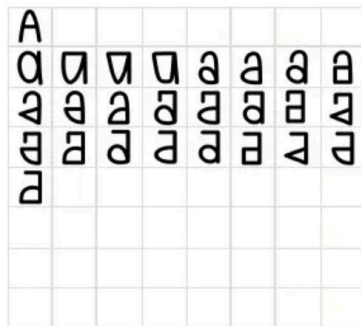
BASE STRUCTURES BASIC/VARIANT
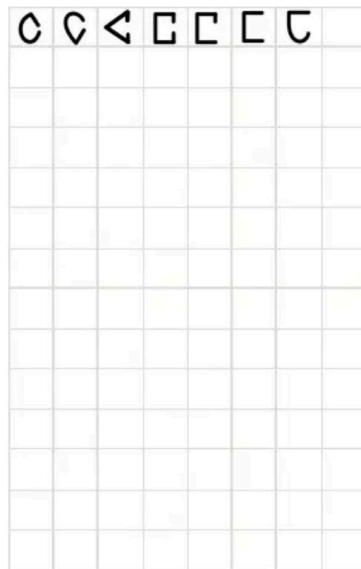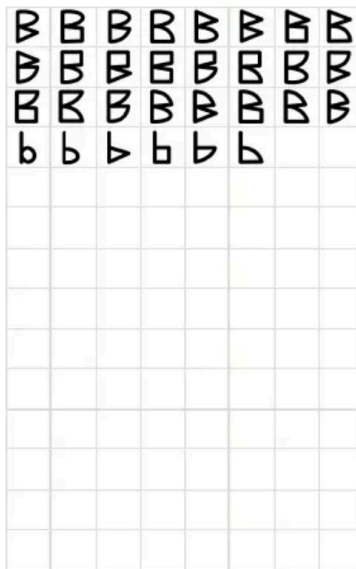
Basic Structure / Skeleton Hand

These are the structures you'll practice and use as a new graffiti artist. Study and practice the information in this book using these letters and if you can learn and master these, then you can move on to variant structures.

A Q B b C D d E
e F f G g H h I
i K L I M m J j
N n O P P Q q R
r S T t U U V W
X Y y Z

Variant Structures

When demonstrating different variants we will not be showing letters that have no variants such as *"O"*, and false variants wont be included either. Once you've learned graffiti's fundamentals using basic structures, learn graffiti's fundamentals using variants. Variants will introduce new challenges, and more variables with the fundamentals, these new obstacles will cause new issues in your work. This will give you the opportunity to apply the same lessons in the book to more difficult structures, and if you've learned the science of the fundamentals we taught, then you'll handle these letters just fine. If you struggle, then go back to the chapter of the fundamental you're struggling with to practice and study a bit more. You dont have to learn and use, each of these, because similar to math, if you've learned the fundamentals/formula, then you'll know how to use all of them.

Remember, you can remove structure serifs from square strokes, and you can even add extension based serifs to structure based serifs. However, you can not add structure based serifs to extension based serifs.

B B B B B B B B
B B B B B B B B
B B B B B B B B
b b b b b

C C < C C C C

The angle back "C" needs the serifs to be a variant structure. The square "C" can detach both serifs, or we can detach the bottom serif while mainting its variant status. Detatching the top, while keeping the bottom makes the structure closer to a "G", rather than the original "C".

value, and lines and such to get familiar with that medium. Doing this will ensure you're comfortable enough with the medium to express all of your skill and knowledge in that domain.

Now most graffiti artists who've existed until now have practiced predominantly by trial and error, meaning most if not all of their progress came from line, shape, letter structure and technique. Fundamentals such as line and shape tend to progress the fastest no matter the art form simply due to the fact that we have to use lines and shapes to draw most things. Even if you never study these topics a day in your life, all artists will inevitably make tiny bits of progress in these topics. Techniques on the other hand, whether it's using pens, markers, or spray paint, are what graffiti artists tend to focus on. Technique alone won't make someone a good or bad artist, but it can certainly make good art look better. However, having all of your progress hinge on just these few fundamentals will cause you to miss out on reaching your full potential. Due to the lack of information about graffiti, and the loose nature of their practice, they more so gain an intuition for all other fundamentals within the three pillars of art. This leaves plenty of room for practiced bad habits and misinformation to slow down the learning process by years or decades. In my experience I've found if you keep it simple, and practice the fundamentals, then you can expect to reach a professional skill level within three to five years rather than the one to four decades it normally takes graffiti artists. It's worth making note that how much you practice can change this.

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CLOSING CHAT
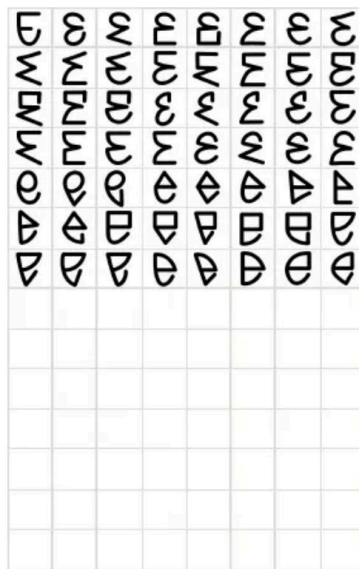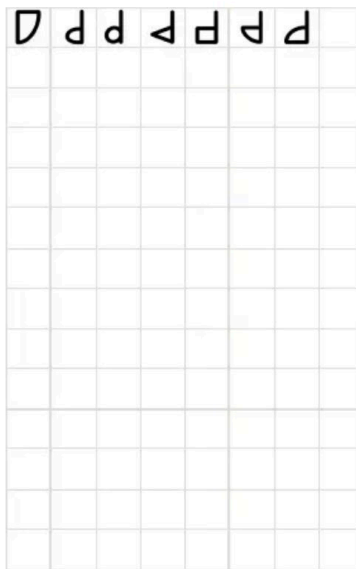
Many "*E*" structures are very common in graffiti, and even easy to use but dont clasify as variants. While the ones shown above are only an example, feel free to try these, and others, in your work as well.

F F F F

All of these are variants of the lowercase "F", as the miniscule has a rounded top portion that directly connects to the stem with no vertex. This allows us to create the top and stem with new strokes. However, becasue miniscule and majiscule "F" are almost the same structure, these variants can work for uppercase "F".

G G G G G G G G
G G G G G G G G
G G G G G G G G
G G G G
g g g g g g g g
g g g g g g g g
g g g g g g g g
g g g
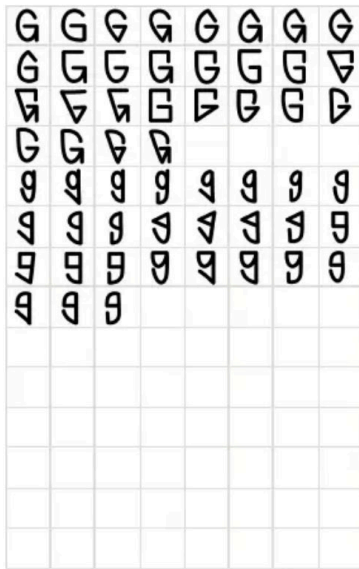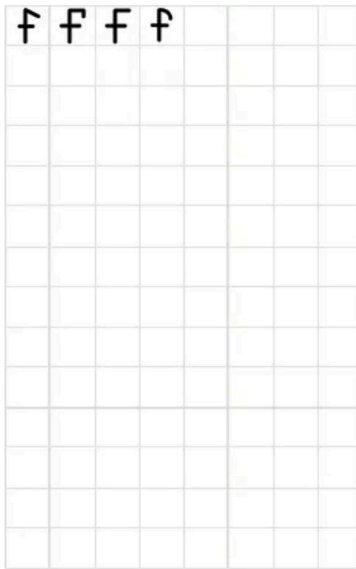
Unlike the lowercase "*N*", the right side of "*H*" has to reach the mean line. This makes certain strokes less viable to use since they dont have the space to develop their shape. This is why miniscule "*H*" doesnt have the same variants as "*N*".

h h h h h

J J J
j j j

K K K R R R R R
R R R R R R R

M M
m m m m m

N N N N
n n n n n

P P P P P
P P P P P
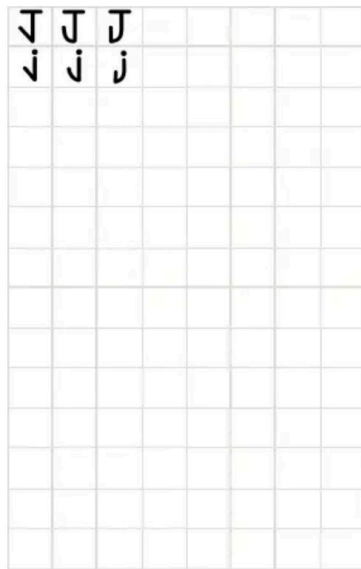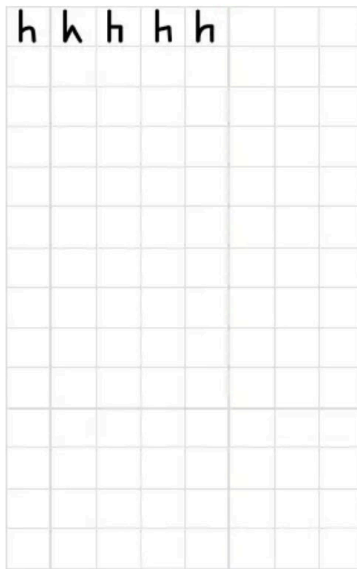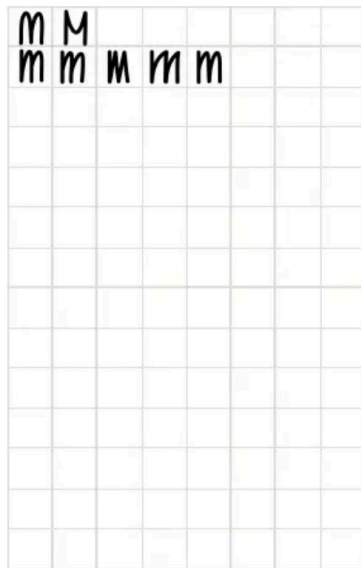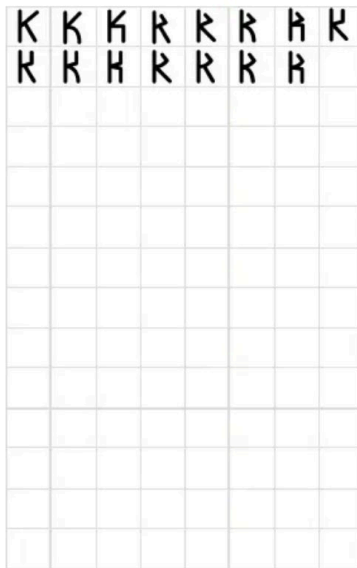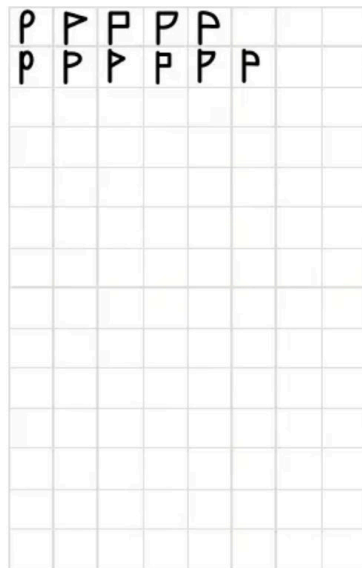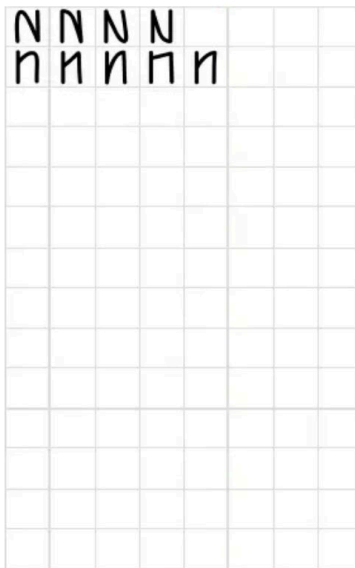
Similar to what we saw with "F", the "P's" variants can be interchanged between the upper and lower case versions.

You'll notice a lack of square bottoms here. Square strokes tend to add tons of weight, and space. This is especially the case for "Q" where the left side is already building weight and space.

q q q q q q q q
q q q q q q q q
q q q q q q q q
q q q q q q q

R R R R R R R R
R R R R R R R R
R R R
r r r r r r r
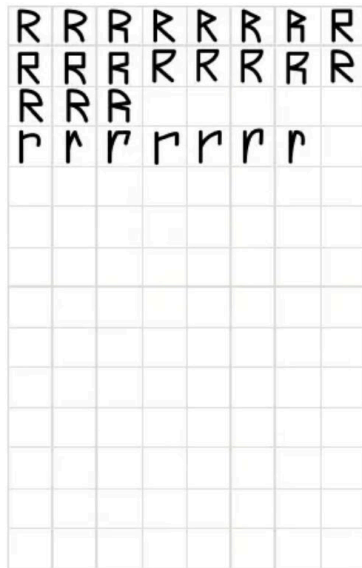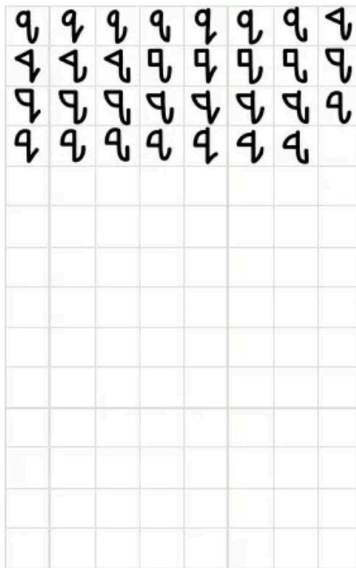
Like *"E"*, there are a ton of structures that are common yet not variants. However, many of these come with plenty of style, and as a result, plenty of contrast. Also, keep in mind, many of the square top variants need the serif to prevent them from turning into a *"S"*
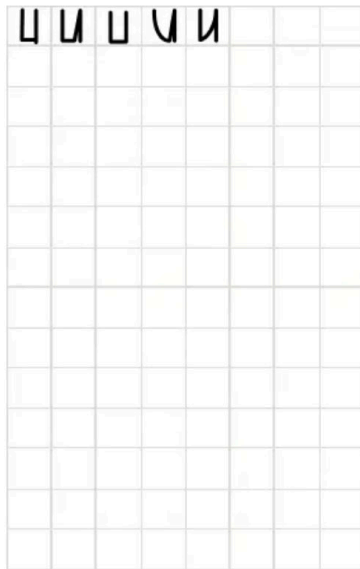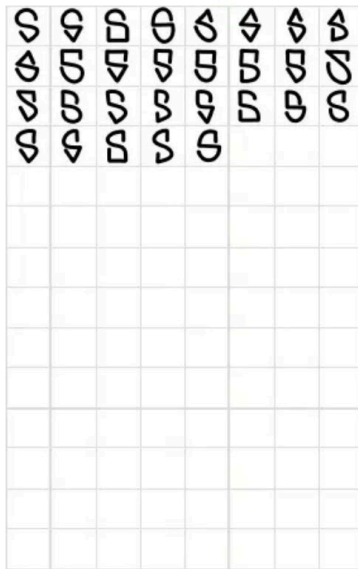
The letter *"W"* has a higher base style than "M" so even though they're similar, the *"M"* has different variants.

W W W

Y Y
Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y
Y Y Y Y Y Y Y Y
Y Y Y
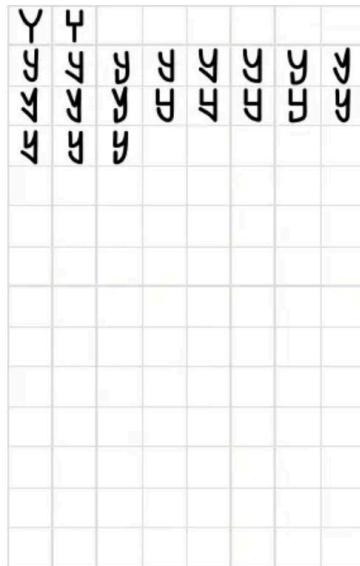
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GLOSSARY & CREDITS

Glossary

1. Straight stroke: A line with little to no bend used in graffiti to define and create base structure.

2. Round stroke: A curved line used in graffiti to define and create base structures.

3. Angle stroke: A combination of two lines coming together at an acute angle used to define and create base structures.

4. Style threshold: Used to describe either the range a particular fundamental/art form can change before exiting the general, specific, or personal style. Can also refer to the acceptable range of style for a particular subject matter/image in the context of other elements in the same piece of work. Example: A piece (subcategory) can only be so simple before it becomes a straight letter, and it can only be so advanced before it becomes a wild style. This range is a piece's style threshold.

5. Basestyle / Natural Style: Refers to the starting amount of style a base structure has before the artist exaggerates and fundamentals.

6. Square stroke: A combination of 2–4 lines that come together in a square line shape used to define and create base structures.

7. Compound stroke: A combination of one straight and one curved line used to define and create base structures.

8. Key structure: The main body of the letter consists only of the essential anatomy. Normally refers to all base structures but can include higher style threshold non-variants' structural makeup.

9. Key point / critical area / critical point: Sections of a letter crucial to defining the letter's structure. When obscured or eliminated the letter falls apart.

10. Nib width: Refers to the size of your writing tool.

11. Suggested structure: Indicating a letter's structure without showing the normal structure.

12. Suggested line: Refers to the ability to define the direction of a covered area by looking at its trajectory before it was obscured.

13. Total space: Entire allocated space your graffiti fits within.

14. Positive space: Area that is occupied.

15. Negative space: Empty area that is not occupied.

16. Valley/cup/pocket: Negative space created by the outermost edge of your graffiti.

17. Basic structure / skeleton hand: A category of letters in their simplest form / lowest style threshold.

18. Base structure: Category of letters made using only the basic strokes, consisting of basic and variant structures.

19. Variant structure: Alternate versions of the basic structures made using different basic strokes.

20. False/fake variants: Letters that appear to be base structures but function on too high of a style threshold and don't use the standard strokes, typically due to containing an extension-based serif.

21. Elements of art: Fundamental components essential for the creation of all art. Line shape, form, value, space, color, texture.

22. Art form-specific fundamentals / fundamental set: A list of axes that govern, define and categorize a particular form of art.

23. Technique: A method used to create or perform an artistic task such as the tools you use and how you use them.

24. Three pillars of art: Categories of fundamentals that allow for all arts existence. Consists of elements of art, art form-specific fundamentals, and techniques.

25. Vertex: Point where two lines meet.

26. Bisector: Line that divides an angle into two equal parts.

27. Connecting line: an extension used to connect two letters.

28. Practice: The process of studying, analyzing and learning the basic science and formula behind the fundamentals.

29. Exterior detail: Additional elements that typically aren't attached to the graffiti.

30. Extension: Additional parts attached to the structure that are not necessary to create the base structure.

31. Extension (conventional extension): Larger additional parts added to graffiti whose main anatomy is its travel distance.

32. Compressed extension: Smaller additional parts to graffiti whose main anatomy is their origin and destination resulting in little travel distance.

33. Origin: Beginning anatomy of an extension.

34. Travel distance: A section of an extension's anatomy between the origin and destination.

35. Destination: The ending area of an extension. This includes things such as arrows or other details added at the end of extensions.

36. King: A renowned title given only to those who do graffiti illegally, control a large area for a prolonged time and also have enough skill and experience to earn the title.

37. Get up/Getting up: Putting your tag name around illegally.

38. Toy: Amateur graffiti artist who lacks skill, knowledge of the history of graffiti, lacks respect, or any combination of the three.

39. Writer: A person who does graffiti illegally.

40. Graffiti artist: A person who does graffiti.

41. Philly handstyle: A regional form of graffiti.

42. Tag/handstyle: A graffiti artist's signature.

43. Throwie / throw up: A category of graffiti typically featuring larger, fatter, rounded letters used as a quick method to get a name on a surface in a way that is easy to spot yet completed in a timely manner.

44. Piece (category): One of the three major forms of graffiti that allow for more detail and style.

45. *Piece (subcategory): One of the three forms of pieces that allows for letter distortions while remaining legible and under the style threshold of wild styles.*

46. *Straight letter (subcategory): The simplest form of pieces (category) whose structures remain as base structures and function under the style threshold of pieces (subcategory).*

47. *Wild style (subcategory): The most advanced form of pieces (category) that functions above the style threshold of pieces (subcategory) with no limit to the amount of style that can be added.*

48. *Negative space management: The fundamental responsible for organization and control of all empty areas in and around graffiti. This includes closed and open counters, valleys, kerning, and total space.*

49. *Letter name weight: The fundamental responsibility for balancing the attention of different components in graffiti.*

50. *Letter name positioning: The fundamental responsible for how one positions the different characters of graffiti and the word as a whole.*

51. *Letter structure: The anatomy of graffiti.*

52. *Flow: Refers to the cohesiveness of your graffiti.*

53. *Momentum flow: The illusion of movement through your letters.*

54. *Line uniformity/similarity: A method of flow where flow is achieved by making different strokes and elements more alike to create cohesiveness.*

55. *Letter uniformity/similarity: A method of flow where flow is achieved by making larger anatomical motifs of graffiti more alike to create cohesiveness.*

56. *Basic boxes: Refers to each individual line and part of a letter's structure. Most often used to refer to pieces and throwies.*

57. *Breaking letter: Destroying graffiti's fundamentals, normally through adding style.*

58. *Hyperextension: Bending or connecting a basic box/line outside its range of motion.*

59. *Range of motion: The distance a line/box of structure can rotate on its axis before breaking.*

60. *Letter distortion: A method of adding style by adding or subtracting basic boxes/lines.*

61. *Two-story letter: A letter with two counters on top of one another, such as "B" or lowercase "a."*

62. *Starting/ending flow line: Two strokes that are used to initiate linking lines.*

63. *Linking line: A stroke used to bridge the gap of flow between a starting and ending flow line.*

64. *General letter shape: Refers to the overall shape of a letter's anatomy. Square, triangle or circle.*

65. *Point of contact: A method used to help determine a letter's general shape.*

66. *Letter groupings: A method of organizing your name to pan out fundamentals in a more methodical manner.*

67. *Visual weight: Refers to the amount of attention an element within a piece of art attracts attention.*

68. *Biting: To copy or steal other's art.*

69. *Typical mediums: Tools that predominantly use muscle memory and techniques familiar to the average person, even those who have little to no artistic skill or experience. Example: pencils, pens, markers, colored pencils.*

70. *Specialty mediums: Tools that require the artist to learn a whole new set of skills through new muscle memory, learn how the tool functions or both. Example, spray paint, oil paint, watercolor.*

71. *Color: An element of art made from hue saturation and value.*

72. *Hue: Refers to the pure color or wavelength within the visual spectrum.*

73. *Saturation: Refers to the intensity or purity of the color.*

74. *Value: Refers to how much white or black (how light or dark) a color is.*

75. Taper: The transition from thick to thin.

76. Extension formula: The process that allows extensions in graffiti to function as a detail without diminishing fundamentals. Flow at the origin, fundamental reason for travel distance, flow at the destination.

77. Extension anatomy: The different sections that act as a beginning, middle and end, and make up all the details of this kind. Origin, travel distance, destination.

78. Origin: The start of an extension normally determines the initial direction of the extension.

79. Travel distance: The middle of an extension.

80. Destination: The end of an extension. Normally concludes the objective of the extension.

81. Double structures: A method of letter distortion where one single letter contains multiple versions of a single letter segment, or results in a single letter that combines two structures. Example, double structure "I" where the tittle is added, but the top crossbar is removed, or an R with both a two-box leg and a one-box leg where neither is an extension.

82. Master study: The process of reproducing a piece of work while studying how the artist used each fundamental of the three pillars.

83. Anchor letter: A heavier character used as a focal point that helps balance and carry the weight of the name.

84. Uppercase (majuscules): Larger, taller version of a letter that typically weighs more than the lowercase letters.

85. Ascender height: Space between the cap line and the ascender line reserved for extra details.

86. Ascender line: Imaginary border that defines the uppermost limit of your letters.

87. Baseline: Line on which all letters rest.

88. Mean line: The center border between the cap line and baseline.

89. X-height: The space between the baseline and mean line.

90. Cap height: The space from the baseline to the cap line.

91. Cap line: A border where the tops of capital letters will reach.

92. Descender height: Space between the baseline and the descender line reserved for extra details.

93. Descender line: The lowest border your letters will reach.

94. Lowercase (minuscules): A typically smaller version of a letter.

95. Segment: The process of detaching parts of letter structure. Normally done unintentionally and often breaks the letter.

96. Style: The exaggeration of the fundamentals.

97. Letter anatomy/segment: Different structural pieces that come together to create an individual letter.

Letter anatomy definitions

98. Ascender: Vertical stroke that extends past the x-height.

99. Bowl: Elliptical or rounded form that creates the main stroke of a letter while creating a closed counter.

100. Counters: Negative space enclosed or otherwise, created by the structure of a letter. Counters can be closed, such as the letter D, O, or open, such as the letter C and G.

101. Crossbar: Horizontal stroke that makes up a part of a letter structure, typically connecting two stems or two parts of a letter.

102. Cross stroke: Horizontal stroke that typically overlaps the stem.

103. Descender: Part of a letter that goes below the baseline.

104. Finial: Curved ending of a letter.

105. Shoulder: A curved stroke spawning from the stem.
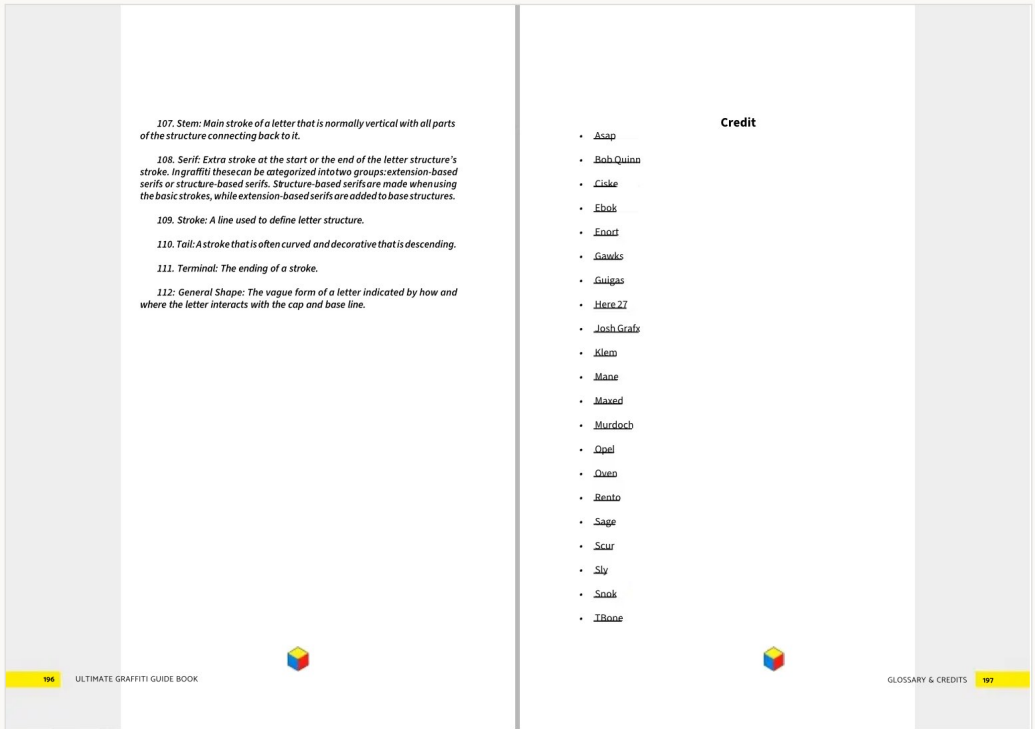
106. Spine: Main curved stroke of a letter.

107. *Stem: Main stroke of a letter that is normally vertical with all parts of the structure connecting back to it.*

108. *Serif: Extra stroke at the start or the end of the letter structure's stroke. In graffiti these can be categorized into two groups: extension-based serifs or structure-based serifs. Structure-based serifs are made when using the basic strokes, while extension-based serifs are added to base structures.*

109. *Stroke: A line used to define letter structure.*

110. *Tail: A stroke that is often curved and decorative that is descending.*

111. *Terminal: The ending of a stroke.*

112: *General Shape: The vague form of a letter indicated by how and where the letter interacts with the cap and base line.*

Credit

- Asap
- Bob Quinn
- Ciske
- Ebok
- Enort
- Gawks
- Guigas
- Here 27
- Josh Grafx
- Klem
- Mane
- Maxed
- Murdoch
- Opel
- Oven
- Rento
- Sage
- Scur
- Sly
- Snok
- TBone

- [Weak 74](#)
- [Zego](#)