

Using Visualization to Improve Your Shorthand

Do you remember in grammar school when we had to practice our penmanship attempting to write in cursive like those examples perched above the blackboard? We even received a grade on our report cards. Being a bit of a renegade, I never did come close to that classroom example, but continued practice certainly improved my delightful form of scribbling to something semi-legible.

Before FIG created a method to record a gymnast's performance, the term 'shorthand' was reserved for secretaries and court stenographers. Shorthand was developed internationally in the mid-late 70's as a tool to eliminate language barriers during conferences and inquiries. As judging professionals, one of the most critical and universal tools we utilize is shorthand. In effect, you are writing or scripting an entire gymnastic performance. Recording the performed elements and the ability to explain that evaluation anytime during or after the competition solely depends on that piece of scripted artwork on your paper.

We can all attest to the fact that every judge's script is unique in style, size, neatness, sloppiness, accuracy and direction. When we first learned shorthand, especially on bars, it often resembled a mix between an EKG and a toddler learning how to color inside the lines. Thankfully, we don't get graded on our shorthand except for self-evaluation. But with practice, it is possible to improve your shorthand and conquer the common goals of three routines-per-page, notating horizontally instead of drifting onto the table you're sitting at, and actually scripting a Gienger without using a 'G'. Since we do not have the luxury of scripting skills at a calligrapher's pace, speed and accuracy are of utmost importance.

To improve speed and accuracy, I use the concept of **Visual Framing**, and **Visual Identification**. I would like to offer some useful visual exercises that can improve the speed, clarity and size of your shorthand.

Visual Skill Identification:

- Start by using the Code of Points and look at the artist's drawing of a wide variety of skills.
- Glance [not stare] at an element and work on instantly naming the element you glanced at.
- You can do this out loud or in your head. This process is similar to studying with flash cards.
- Make sure to look at elements that are much more difficult than what you are accustomed to judging.
- Then, perform this same visual identification exercise watching videos.

Script Identification:

- Go back to the Code of Points [or the element charts when ready], and glance at the script for an element, immediately naming it. The key here is to glance at the script, not stare at it, to improve your script recognition of elements at a more rapid pace.

Visual Scripting: [Brevet Course Script Tape • STC]

- The next stage is to actually watch a video, or observe a gymnast working out, and in your mind superimpose the script of the element performed directly above the gymnast, or on the screen. Initially it will be easier to use this technique on isolated skills before trying it with a sequence of elements, or a complete routine.
- This is especially helpful for those skills you rarely see performed at most meets and prevents the, 'What was that? I don't know that symbol. Well, the gymnast just completed four more elements and you instantly

experience the dreaded, 'my pen is still stuck on the page syndrome'.

- You can also practice this technique in your mind. Simply envision a gymnast performing a particular skill and at the same time superimpose the script. Gymnasts perform this technique when they do mental sets by closing their eyes and envisioning themselves performing a perfect routine. You are doing the exact same thing only envisioning the perfect script along with the skill. As you feel comfortable using this technique, create your own routines, sequences and bonus connections.
- Learn new skills on each event, especially your least favorite event. Do not forget about Vaulting [Latvia judge story – early Brevet Exams]. It never hurts to try and script everything. In my case, it becomes a bit anal retentive, but it truly helps you specifically determine awarding connections on beam and floor.
- **Super Important:** Depending on the competition format, 'Always watch warm-ups', and if a gymnast performs a skill you are unfamiliar with, look it up, and try scripting it a few times to feel comfortable. This will eliminate the shock factor during the routine. Additionally, always be prepared for a level considerably above your expectations for the competition.

Accelerating Your Scripting Speed:

- Like grammar school, practice is the key.
- While you are having your morning tea or coffee, pick a number of elements that you often have trouble scripting. Start by looking at the paper, visualize the element, and then script it.
- Now, script that same element 10-15 times in a row across the paper.

Remember to visualize the skill each time you script it and accelerate your speed as you move across the page. Also imagine you are writing on lined paper.

- Repeat this drill without looking down at the paper. Don't be discouraged if the first few attempts end up in your toast.
- Each repetition increases the visual identification/hand coordination process while also improving the speed and accuracy of your script.

Keeping it Neat and Petite:

- Using the acceleration exercise, choose some specific elements or combination of elements. Looking at your paper, script across the page in a significantly smaller size than you normally would.
- Repeat this process several times, and reduce the size of your script a little bit each time until you find a comfort zone.
- Now repeat this exercise without looking down at your paper.
- The first time pretend your judging paper is only two inches high. The next attempt, reduce the height of your paper to one inch, and the third time down to ½ inch.
- Remember, the select few who can lower this to between ¼ inch and microscopic levels are scripting savants and should graciously accept this ability as a gift from God!

Helpful Analogies:

- Hand/eye coordination is crucial for success in numerous sports. Just as the tennis player instantly reacts to a visual prompt [the ball] by switching from a forehand to a backhand return, we ultimately do the same thing while judging. We react to constant visual prompts, each triggering instant recognition of skills that yields a response from our hands in the form of script. **'The speed of our visual recognition ultimately determines the speed of our response.** Repetition is the key to increasing the speed of the process.
- The goal for every judge should be improving shorthand by using the visual identification skills they possess but seldom fully utilize. The end result will be the ability to script routines more accurately, rapidly, and confidently.

Jim Bits: See Pdf Handout of Examples

- Helpful tips
- Scripting with minor execution errors [.05] at the same time - allows you to go back after each session, or after the meet, and know exactly what the deductions were taken for.
- Bundling multiple errors into [1] .05 deduction