

# Capital Adventures with Lindley McDougall

Story and art by Donna Uncles

There are three things that must be emphasized:

1. Roman Capitals are much too important to be intimidating.
2. Every other calligraphic alphabet is informed by Roman Capitals.
3. When in Rome—visit Trajan's Column.

Roman Capitals have been around since the year 113 AD and perhaps there isn't much new to tell you about them. A somewhat random review then in the form of an abcdarium:

- A** An architectural letterform.
- B** Bowls of PBR meet vertical stroke at right angles.
- C** Cross E and H slightly above the centre.
- D** Dry nib? Use the last letter to "wet" nib rather than reloading the nib.
- E** Eight pen widths.
- F** Families of letters. Do you keep hearing about families of letters every time there is another calligraphy workshop? Here's the big family secret: proportion; how one letter relates to another—just like a family. There are big letters, bigger letters and biggest letters. Remember this, write it down or have it tattooed on your forearm. This is absolutely necessary in making Roman Capitals look right.  
IJ = simply skinny, much less than the 1/2 width letters  
BEFLPRS = 1/2 widths  
THANKUVXYZ = 2/3 – 4/5 widths  
OCGDQ = 9/10 – 10/10 widths  
M = 11/10 widths  
W = 12/10 widths  
(Refer to your cheat sheet bookmark enclosed in this newsletter.)
- G** Gouache. Lindley prefers using a brush to load the pen with gouache. It should be the consistency of heavy cream.
- H** Have a dump sheet that is the same kind of paper as your current project page. A different

paper surface will react to the ink differently.

- I** Inflate DOQUC—imagine a gentle breath of air on the inside edges of the curves keeping the arcs round and smooth. No saggy circles please.
- J** Jaw on the G starts halfway up.
- K** Keep pen angle at 30°.
- L** Lift onto the right edge of the nib to finish the J stroke. The corner of the nib can come in handy.
- M** Monoline is the best way to first practise Roman Caps—nothing gestural, carefully constructed.
- N** Numerals? Roman numerals—go figure.
- O** Opaque—control opacity better with gouache than ink.
- P** Pause at the beginning and end of each stroke for crisp corners and terminals.
- Q** Quit procrastinating. Take a Roman Caps workshop.
- R** Right angle is formed with the arms of the K.
- S** Serifs require lots of pen angle manipulation.
- T** Trajan's Column. Just in case I am not the last person to know what Trajan's Column is, here is Wikipedia's answer. (If you already know about Trajan, skip to U.)  
Trajan's Column is a monument in Rome raised in honour of the Roman emperor Trajan commemorating his victory in the Dacian Wars. Completed in 113, the freestanding column is most famous for its spiral bas relief. As calligraphers, our interest lies in the inscription at the base of the column:  
SENATVS•POPVLVSQVE•ROMANVS  
IMP•CAESARI•DIVI•NERVAE•F•NERVAE  
TRAIANO•AVG•GERM•DACICO•PONTIF  
MAXIMO•TRIB•POT•XVII•IMP•VI•COS•VI•P•P  
AD•DECLARANDVM•QVANTAE•ALTITVDINIS  
MONS•ET•LOCVS•TANT<IS•OPER>IBVS•SIT•EGESTVS
- There have been countless attempts to imitate this script over the centuries and this is the original exemplar for the Roman Capital letterforms we studied in class.

U Use coloured pencil for establishing lines and interlinear space on practise pages and even as a design element.

V Versals are exaggerated Roman Capitals, often used for title pages and chapter headings. They are drawn.

W Winchester versals are based on Roman Caps.

X X has a base that is slightly wider than the top—hmm, reminds me of someone.

Y You will never regret taking a Roman Caps workshop.

Z Zipping in a little something here that did not fit elsewhere: the space between words should be about a half space. Space between words equaling the O space is just way too big.

I waited much too long to take this class. I was told Roman Capitals are difficult. That is true but it is not a reason to shy away from them. We covered a lot of ground in this two-day workshop—now to practise, practise, practise. We welcome Lindley back from her adventures abroad with open arms and look forward to other opportunities to learn from her.

Monoline



Monoline Letters



Basic Roman Caps



Seriffed Roman Caps



Winchester Versals



To practise the rhythm of pressure at the beginning and end of each stroke, letters were drawn with a soft lead

pencil. Try this with a coloured pencil or white pencil crayon on black paper.

