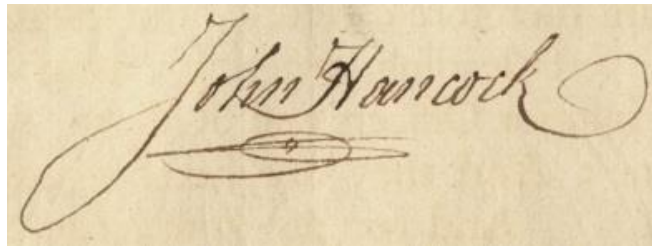


Design your signature

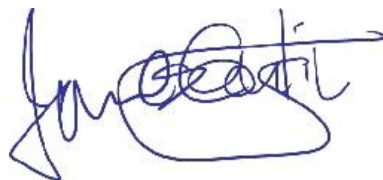
By Leslie Ann North

A signature is your public face in written form and represents your consent on a legal document. An autograph is a way to creatively put your written mark on popular social culture. A signature can develop naturally from regular handwriting while an autograph is sometimes a flamboyant caricature of handwriting or an artistic personal logo.

A signature on a document or letter can leave behind a lasting clue to the writer's public identity, just like John Hancock on the Declaration of Independence. Both a legal signature and an autograph can portray a message about the writer so it's important to intentionally design a signature to send a positive message.



Let me share a story of how handwriting and a signature affected me. I remember as a youth being surprised when I first saw a doctor's handwriting on a prescription. I couldn't read it. I had doubts whether or not the pharmacist would be able to read the writing also, and if instructions would be communicated correctly. It made me question the care I was receiving. I thought the writing was so sloppy that I wondered if the doctor might be careless as well. That was my first impression and it did not help me trust the doctor. This is an example of how a signature can affect the public perception of the writer.



A signature is similar to a company logo. A symbol or logo can express volumes of information in just one graphic. Simplicity in a logo infers clarity and trustworthiness. Here are some logos that illustrate what I mean about simplicity. Your signature should be designed with care just like a company logo.



Now let's look at the criteria of a *creative, balanced signature*, so you can design your own.

1. Design question: How many signatures do I need?

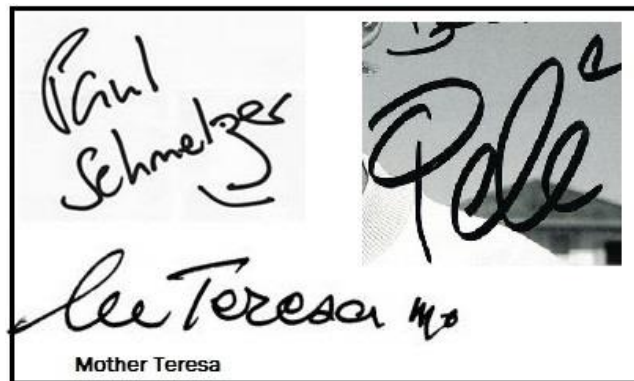
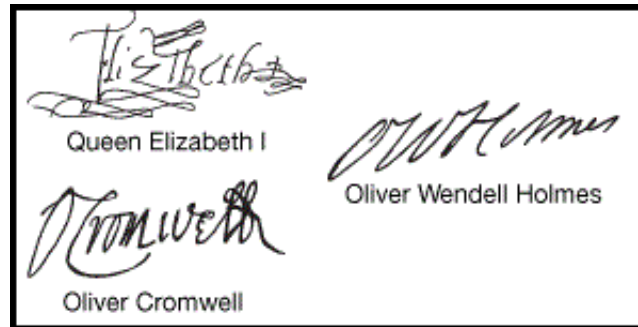
Every adult needs to define one legal signature. This is the signature on a driver's license, bank account, insurance forms and other legal documents. If a person signs many papers every day, she should develop a legal signature that is simple, quick, yet with some personal flair. This one signature should be given the most thought in designing.

Additionally, one who is a public figure or celebrity might want to develop an autograph that is different than the legal signature. It could have elements that are more colorful or striking than a legal signature, but still send the message of inner balance and harmony.

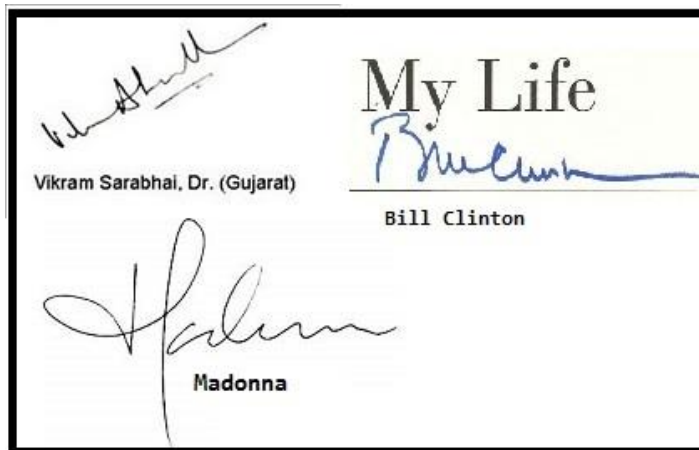
If your newly designed legal signature does not contain your full name, then it is appropriate to sign personal cards, letters, and children's school papers with another signature. This one should have your full name, signed clearly, yet creatively.

2. Design questions: What shapes and design lines are good for my signature?

In general, the shapes found in handwriting are angles, curves, and threads. Angles portray activity, aggression, assertiveness, power, and vitality. Curves illustrate kindness, acceptance, generosity, compliance, sympathy, and humor. These examples show signatures with angles and those with rounded curvy forms.



Thready forms are not taught in school, but develop in adulthood through impatience, laziness, or the desire for speed. Illegible handwriting might be made up of thready forms. It is a way to avoid commitment and hide the writer's true thoughts and feelings. Here are examples of thready signatures.



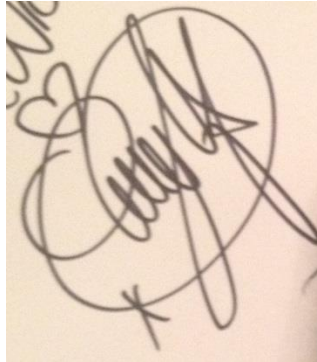
3. Design question: How big should my signature be?

Two elements to consider are the size of the letters in relation to each other and the size of the signature itself in relation to other handwriting.

If using capital and small letters in a signature, the letters should look proportional to each other. Just like we all learned in school, the capital letters should be written a tiny bit more than double the size of the small letters, but again, not too much bigger. Extremely large capital letters in a signature indicates that the writer's public persona is a huge, ego- driven mask but inside the writer feels small and insignificant. It becomes difficult to keep up those false appearances. This is Michael Jackson's autograph.

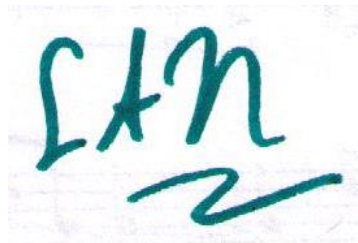


Developing a “larger than life” celebrity autograph is fine, but be moderate. Similar to overly large capital letters, an excessively flamboyant signature is a message that the writer doesn’t hold herself with respect. She is grasping for public approval and demanding the spotlight. It sends a message that the celebrity is working too hard for status since the inner purpose, talent, drive, or self-confidence is lacking. Here is an example of a pretentious showy autograph:



For those who sign many documents daily and want to develop a simplified signature, play with using just initials, a single name, or a shortened combination. This simplified version should be written the same size as other writing, so it’s easy and quick.

If using only initials in your signature, it is better to use capital letters because this depicts competence and capability. The letters should be balanced but not necessarily the same size.



The second element to consider is the size of the signature in comparison to the regular writing. Signatures should be at least the same size as the routine handwriting, or a little bit larger. This shows an open attitude and a willingness to put oneself in the public arena.

4. Design question: Should my signature match my handwriting?

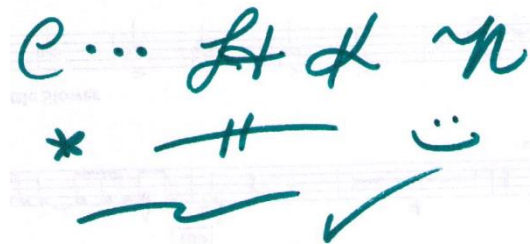
A signature that looks just like your handwriting sends a certain message as does a signature that looks vastly different. Either choice is fine and here’s the meaning:

If a signature looks similar, this indicates a person whose behavior in public is the same as in private. For some it is advantageous that both business and personal life are an open book, warts, flaws and all. It inspires trust and connection when others see this integrity between handwriting and signature. Simplify letters if needed in your signature, but keep the same size and strokes.

If a signature or autograph is totally different, it means that the writer desires his public life to be separate and distinct from his private life. For celebrities or public figures, this privacy is healthy and sometimes very necessary. This is one case where you might consciously choose a signature that is illegible, but watch that it's not too messy. Thready forms can help create this hidden, cryptic signature if that's what you design intentionally.

5. Design question: How can I express creativity in my signature?

Embellishments are the creative strokes. Loops, connections, waves, lines, dots, curlicues, graphics, hooks, and slashes are all considered embellishments.



To design appropriate embellishments, look at the lines and structure of the letters, examine the shape of the signature as a whole and see it artistically. Play around with many different embellishments, but settle on **one or two** for your legal signature. Be moderate. Use no decoration that is too big, too gaudy, or too difficult. An autograph for a card or personal letter could have a few more embellishments, but not too many. Keep it functional yet pleasing. Here are examples of moderate embellishments.



Another design I recommend for everyone is an underscore. This shows leadership ability and individualism. Guidelines for the underscore are to make it a single line, straight or gently curved. Avoid a dot, circle, curlicue, many slashes or hard- angles. The line should not extend too much past the letters and it should not cross or cut through the name.

Here's a few NO-NO's for embellishments in your signature:

Avoid a stroke that covers the top of your name.

Avoid a shape in a signature that makes an X, unless your name actually contains an X.

Avoid crossing or slashing into other letters.

Avoid encircling your name.

Avoid muddy or smudgy strokes.

Avoid lines or strokes that cross backwards or that move and stay backwards to the left.

Here are a few signatures following most of the criteria for a great design.



6. What legal issues do I need to consider when I change my signature?

I am not a lawyer and thus not qualified to give detailed legal instructions about a signature, but these are the basics for the average person in the United States: A legal signature is what is on a driver's license. The signature on bank records should match the driver's license ideally, so when it's time to renew the driver's license, evaluate whether a change in the legal signature is desired.

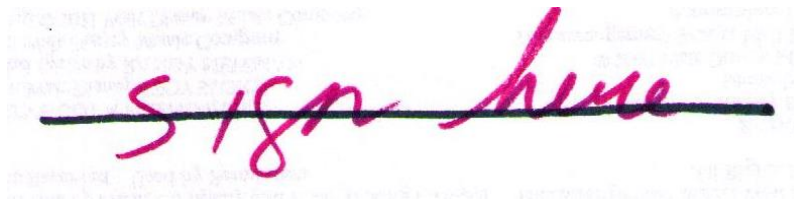
Before changing the signature on legal documents, practice it over and over until it flows naturally.

Contact your bank in person to change your signature on accounts. Add the new signature to legal documents around your house like a will or insurance documents, so personal papers are up to date.

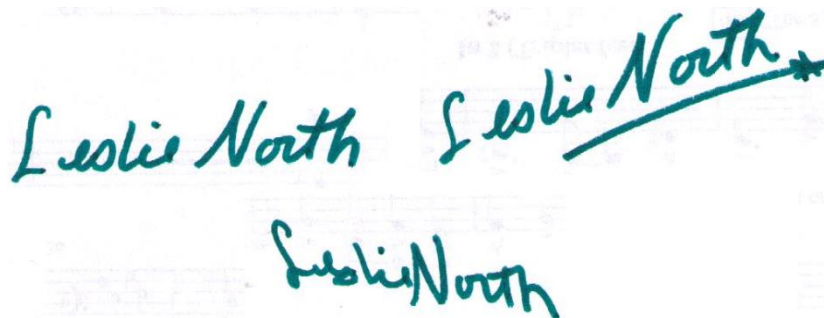
7. Any other details about signing my name?

After you have designed your signature there are some other details to be aware when signing your name:

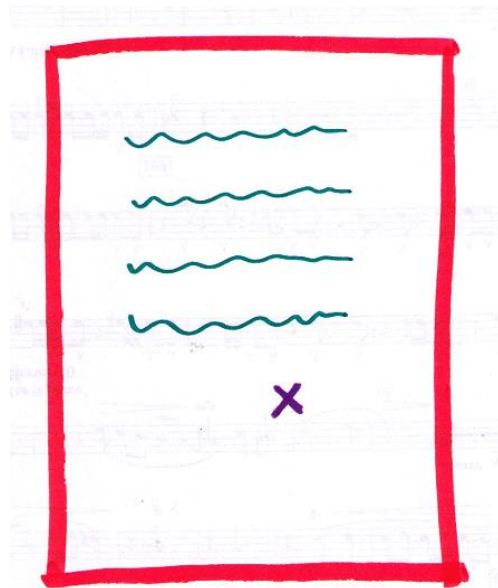
When a signature line is provided, choose either to stay right on the line or sign a little above. When the writer stays on the line, this indicates willingness to conform; to go along and be part of a team. It is a good choice. Signing above the line indicates the writer is willing to go out and blaze a new trail but not always go along with the team. This is also an acceptable choice. Choose the one that fits your natural personality. Do not, however sign below the signature line or have the line cross through the name as in this example.



When a signature has a slight upward direction, it indicates optimism and a positive outlook for the future. However, it might make some uncomfortable to have the document look askew, so signing straight is also fine. Choose what feels appropriate. Do not, however, sign in a downward direction or with an uneven baseline. This shows instability and possible sadness or weakness.



If no signature line is provided, such as on a personal letter or school paper, choose to sign at the bottom of the content a little to the right of the center of the page. This shows the writer's willingness and confidence to move into the future. Do not, however, sign too far to the left or too far to the right on the page. Here is an example of where to sign on a letter.



8. When and how often should I design a new signature?

Some cultures and religions around the world give children and adults a new name when they have achieved some important conquest, or reached a significant milestone. These occasions are likewise an appropriate time to consciously invent a new signature.

When a woman gets married and takes her husband's name, she has the opportunity to choose a new signature, but it could be done more often than just once in adulthood. Some other occasions to design a new signature are: after a marriage, divorce, death, significant spiritual transformation, exceptional academic achievement, critical career change, moving to a totally new area, finding oneself in the limelight or as a new public figure.

Varying a personal signature too often as an adult indicates instability or confusion, but adjusting every decade or so is not unreasonable. It is a way to identify to the public change and growth.