

Old German Handwriting

1.1.1 Kurrent-script

Everybody's handwriting is different. Moreover, the handwriting used in modern Austria has evolved such that even born-and-bred Austrians can have difficulty reading old letters written in their own language. This table shows how upper- and lower-case letters of the alphabet used to be written around 1865 in German *Kurrent-script*, variations and developments of which were used for handwriting during our period of interest.

a	ä	ö	j	ÿ	s	ß
b	ß	ß	k	ß	t	ß
c	ç	ç	l	ß	u	ü
d	ð	ð	m	ß	v	ñ
e	ñ	ñ	n	ñ	w	ñ
f	ff	ff	o	ö	x	ß
g	g	g	p	ÿ	y	ÿ
h	ß	ß	q	ç	z	ß
i	í	í	r	ñ	tz	í

ä ö ÿ ñ ü ñ ñ

ß ß ß ff ff ß

The second-last line shows the umlauts ä, ö, ü and the corresponding capital letters Ae, Oe, Ue; the last line shows the ligatures ch, ck, th, sch, sz and st.

The main points to watch out for are:

- the lower-case 'e', which looks extremely like our 'n'.
- the lower-case 'c', which has very little curve to it.
- the 'h' and 'H', both of which have loops below the line.
- the lower-case 'i' is (rarely) found like 'ñ'.

- the lower-case ‘n’, which looks more like our cursive ‘r’.
- the lower-case ‘r’, which has an extra piece compared with our cursive ‘r’.
- the lower-case ‘u’, which often has a curved mark above it to distinguish it from ‘n’.
- the lower-case ‘x’, which looks nothing like an ‘x’.
- a straight line over an n or m means the consonant is repeated.

Most importantly, the lower-case ‘s’ usually has a tail, especially when used in conjunction with another ‘s’ or another consonant. Care is needed to distinguish it from a lower-case ‘f’. A double ‘s’ will often have the first one similar to an English cursive ‘s’, and the second one with a tail.

The written upper-case letters are nearly always more elaborate than their modern counterparts - with more squiggles and paradiddles - and can be quite difficult to identify.

Because everybody’s handwriting is different, these “rules” can only go so far. The trick is that there will always be some identifiable words, which assist working out how that particular writer shapes individual letters, and this will help in decoding key words.

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Kurrentschrift contains much more information, including an account of the history of this script. See also <https://www.univie.ac.at/gonline/htdocs/upload/File/import/2543.pdf> and <http://www.kurrent-lernen-muecke.de/>

1.1.2 Numbers

The numbers are to modern eyes even more confusing. This table is often followed; but variations are found, as well as straightforward bad writing.

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16

2 can also look like \mathfrak{A} or \mathfrak{a} which is very similar to the Schwa character, Unicode +018F.



The 1 can be found with a very long upstroke, almost like a V upside-down.

The “crossed 7” is rare.