

Handwriting: Living with kanji makes readers very sensitive to minor variations in a kanji's appearance. If someone writes a kanji incorrectly, the default assumptions are: (a) the writer has some loosening neural circuitry; (b) the variation is a result of bizarre educational policies when the writer was a child; (c) the writer is another one of those willfully ignorant or adamantly perverse types. This includes stroke order, connectedness, stroke endings, stroke direction, stroke angling, etc. It may feel awkward at first to try to get it 'right,' but it will be worth the effort in the long run.

The following errors are common (also note differences between typeface and handwriting):

何 ≠ 向 ≠ 伺 ≠ 同、人 ≠ 入 ≠ 八、見 ≠ 貝、兄 ≠ 只  
ん ≠ く ≠ て ≠ こ、い ≠ り、あ ≠ お、う ≠ ろ、etc.  
also, the tops of the following are not the same: 学、堂

The basic stroke types:

点 (てん 〇) = a short stroke

六、主、立、空、永 = down to right, very slightly lifting brush back to left  
小、太、丸、虫 = down to right, often with slight clockwise bend, hard stop  
点、上、豆、戸 = straight right, hard stop

横線 (よこせん 〇) = a left-to-right stroke

二、三、五、土、表

縦線 (たてせん 〇) = a straight-down, top-to-bottom stroke

本、下、外 = hard stop  
千、中 = trailing end  
水、事 = straight down, lifted (hane) up towards the left at the end  
note: "straight down" means vertical, really, vertical, not tilted. Nobody tilts. Not even in manga.

折れ (おれ ㇿ) = a 'folded' or bent stroke (left-right-down)

口、日、目、鳥、馬

撥ね (はね ㇿ) = an overt 'lifting' of the brush in a new direction at the end of a stroke

事、寸、何 = straight down and pulled up to the left  
子、手、家、呼 = arced clockwise down and pulled up to left  
代、成、氏、民 = arced counterclockwise down to the right, then pulled up and off  
心、思、見、兄 = pulled down, then across to right, then pulled straight up and off

払い (はらい ㇿ) = allowing a stroke to trail off at an angle

冷、凍、江、汁 = bottom left toward upper right  
人、火、少、考 = top right to bottom left  
千、秋、行、形、白 = down to left  
月、川、用、周、斤 = down and slightly to left  
文、今、入、友 = down and to right  
足、走、近 = down and to the right, but levelling off

止め (とめ 〇) = hard stop (also see others above)

八、分、穴、父、貝 = usually slightly clockwise right-down, hard stop

Aesthetics: Good handwriting cannot conceal poor language skills, but it makes a good impression, and childish handwriting is difficult for anyone to take seriously. Handwriting quality is particularly noticeable in Japanese and Chinese, and is a point of pride for many people. And it looks nice.

Stroke order (書き順 : かきじゅん 〇), like it or not, determines the ultimate aesthetic of the kanji. Sometimes there are more than one acceptable stroke-orders for a kanji, but wrong is wrong, and *immediately* noticeable to an educated eye.

Speed: Slow down to write more quickly. To write faster, slow down. Pausing between strokes and characters is the major cause of slow handwriting, not slow brush speed. By slowing down to write more carefully, you can improve both the speed and appearance of your handwriting.

Fancy writing: There are many styles of calligraphy, each replete with long histories, multitudes of idiosyncracies, and often institutional structures of teaching, apprenticeship, certification, etc., requiring unbroken years of lessons and practice (just like learning a musical instrument or a martial art). It's up to you. But ordinary good handwriting is something everyone learns in grade school.