

# Would you like to be a scribe?

Learn more about what it took to become an ancient Egyptian scribe and decide if you would like to train to become a scribe yourself

## Scribe Facts

### Who and how you became a scribe

- ▶ Only one out of every 100 ancient Egyptians could read and write
- ▶ It was expensive to go to scribe school, so only wealthy parents could afford to send their children
- ▶ Often children of scribes became scribes themselves
- ▶ Only boys could become scribes
- ▶ To learn to become a scribe you had to spend 12 years at a scribe school
- ▶ Being a scribe was a difficult as there were thousands of different hieroglyphs to learn

### What were the good things about becoming a scribe?

- ▶ They didn't have to pay any taxes
- ▶ They didn't have to join the army
- ▶ They didn't have to do any manual labour (building, farming)
- ▶ They always had a job (you could be unemployed even in ancient times)
- ▶ They had nice clothes and clean soft hands

### There were lots of jobs you could do as a trained scribe

- ▶ Writing letters for people
- ▶ Recording the harvests
- ▶ Looking after the money spent by the army
- ▶ Drawing up wills
- ▶ Writing holy scripts
- ▶ Writing poems and stories
- ▶ Working for the king
- ▶ Librarian
- ▶ Architect

**So have you decided to become a scribe and you have been sent to Scribe School?**

## What was it like at Scribe School?

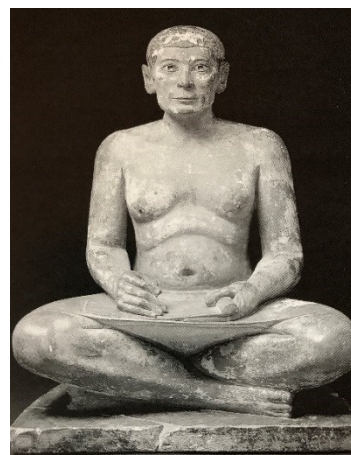
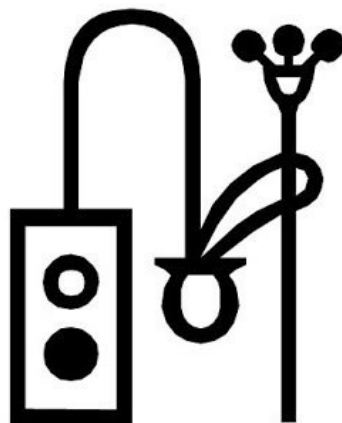
- ▶ **Your age** - 5 to 17
- ▶ **Your uniform** - Short white linen loincloth, teachers wore a knee-length one

### The Curriculum (what you would learn)

- ▶ How to make papyrus, reed pens, ink
- ▶ Hieroglyphs
- ▶ Religion and prayers
- ▶ Geography
- ▶ Music
- ▶ Science
- ▶ Architecture
- ▶ Law
- ▶ Language and reading
- ▶ Maths
- ▶ History
- ▶ Astronomy (study of the sky)
- ▶ Medicine and healthcare
- ▶ Arts and culture, including dance
- ▶ Spiritual power, magic and healing
- ▶ Technology (without electricity)

### Your day at Scribe School

- ▶ Start at dawn (when the sun comes up) and finish at dusk (when the sun goes down)
- ▶ No school holidays
- ▶ You live at school (like a boarding school)
- ▶ You have to go to lots of religious ceremonies at the temple
- ▶ You are probably beaten a lot, as teachers in ancient Egyptians thought this helped you to learn



Hieroglyph for Scribe, and the Statue of a Scribe  
from *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramid* (1999) by Krzysztof Grzymiski

**It's time for you to try out your skills and see if you can complete our Scribe School worksheet on the next two pages.**

# Scribe School



What does this message say? **R U CMG 4 T**

How about **L8R** and **XOXO**?

**L8R** is giving you the sound.

**XOXO** is giving you the meaning. Now let's try...

Any ideas?



Although some hieroglyphs mean exactly what the picture shows, very few words are actually written in this way. Instead hieroglyphic pictures-signs are used to give us the sound (and meaning) of the ancient Egyptian word.

The letters in our alphabet don't mean anything by themselves, they just give us a sound. Thinking about our own alphabet, do you know all the vowels? There are five of them.

Write your answer here






















Ancient Egyptians didn't use vowels, this makes it even harder to read their language. They took shortcuts and missed out letters in the same way we do today when using text speak.

Here are the 1-consonant signs that are the nearest to our alphabet in Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Without vowels some names no longer make sense.

Example: **SIMON** without vowels becomes **SMN**.

The Ancient Egyptians would substitute letters to make names sound correct. For **SIMON** we could use a **Y** so we end up with **SYMN**.

A	 Egyptian vulture	H	 Reed shelter in a field	Q	 Hill slope
B	 Foot	J	 Snake	R	 Mouth
C/K	 Basket with handle	L	 Lion	S	 Folded cloth
D	 Hand	M	 Owl	T	 Loaf
EE/I	 Flowering reed	N	 Water	W	 Quail chick
F	 Horned viper	O	 Lasso	Y	 Double flowering reed
G	 Stand for jar	P	 Stool	Z	 Bolt

Hieroglyphs created by Mark-Jan Nederhof, 2009.

Now try and write your first name using our letters but without the vowels. If it no longer sounds right, try to think of other letters you could use instead. Remember, no vowels allowed!

Now write your name using hieroglyph signs in the cartouche below