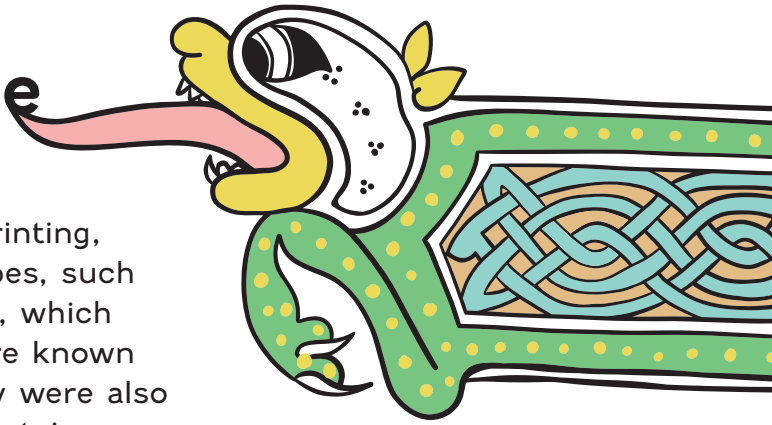


# Insular Majuscule

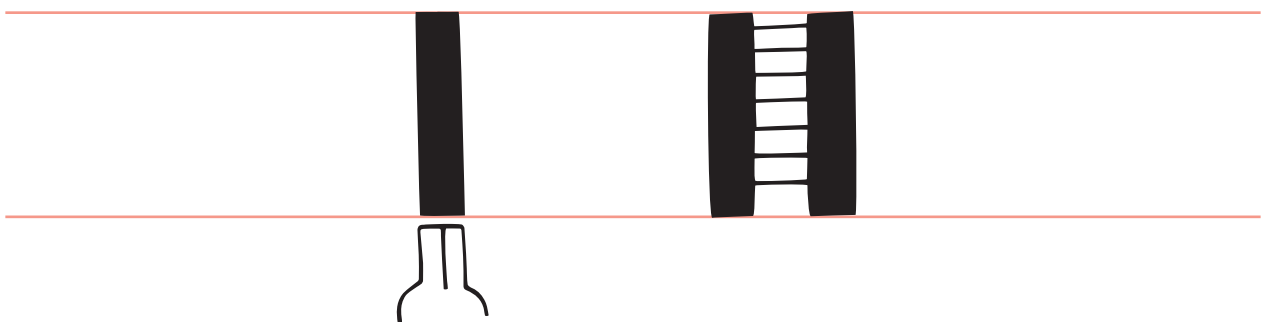


In early medieval Ireland, there was no printing, so every book was written by hand. Scribes, such as monks and nuns, created these books, which are called **manuscripts**. Many of these are known as **illuminated manuscripts** because they were also decorated. Most of these books would contain prayers, psalms and gospels from the bible. Scribes took a lot of time to carefully write out all the letters and words in these books. The style of writing that was used in these books is called **insular majuscule**.

## The Pen

The first step in learning how to write insular majuscule is to use the right pen. In early medieval Ireland, scribes would have used a quill, made from a feather from a bird, such as a swan or a goose. Today, we use special pens, called calligraphy pens. These have a broad, flat nib. With the practice lines on the other side of this sheet, a pen with a two millimetre-wide nib is recommended.

The second step is how to hold your pen. For insular majuscule, you need to hold your pen, so that the flat of the nib is parallel to the writing lines. When you hold the pen like this, as you create a vertical line, the line is thick, and as you create a horizontal line, the line is thin. Remember, always hold the pen parallel to the writing line, as the pen will do the work for you.



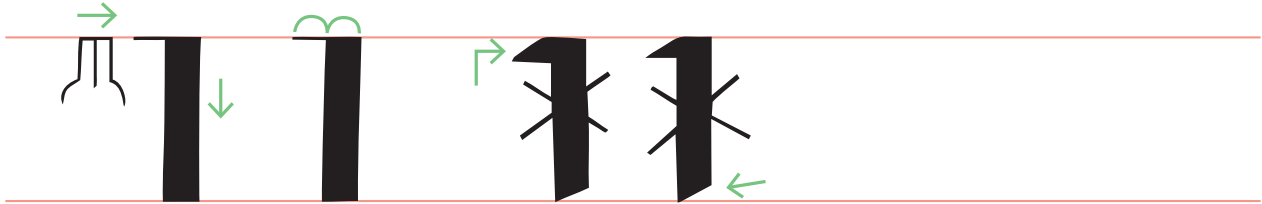
## The Letters

Learning how to write in insular majuscule takes a lot of time and practice. One of the key tricks to learn is how to create the letter 'I' and the letter 'O'. 'I' is known as the 'father' of the alphabet, and 'O' is known as the 'mother'. Both of these letters are used to create most of the other letters of the alphabet.



## The Letter 'I'

The letter 'I' is created by placing the pen on the top line, moving it to the right, and then bringing it straight down.



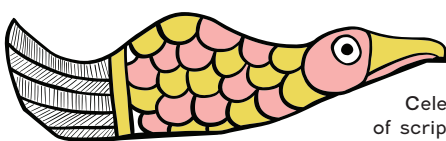
Use the space below to practice creating the letter 'I'.



## The Letter 'O'.

The letter 'O' is created in two parts using two strokes of the pen. Place the pen on the top of the line, and then bring the pen down towards the left, in a semicircular motion. To create the second stroke, place the pen back to where you started, and bring the pen down towards the right, in a semicircular motion.

Use the space below to practice creating the letter 'O'.



Celebrate the magic of manuscripts by learning the ancient skills of script and decoration that once brought sacred texts to life. These worksheets are adapted from *The Irish art of calligraphy* by Timothy O'Neill published by the Royal Irish Academy. Produced for the exhibition by the National Museum of Ireland: 'Words on the Wave: Ireland and St Gallen in Early Medieval Europe'. This is a project of:

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