

Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series

**A SELF-STUDY  
COURSE IN GRASS  
SCRIPT**



SINOLINGUA BEIJING

Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series

# **A Self-Study Course in Grass Script**

Compiled and written by Huang Quanxin

**SINOLINGUA  
BEIJING**

责任编辑 单 瑛  
封面设计 朱 丹 黄全信

图书在版编目 ( CIP ) 数据

草书自学教程 / 黄全信编著. - 北京: 华语教学出版社, 1997. 3  
(中国书法自学丛书) ISBN 7-80052-454-X  
I. 草... II. 黄... III. 汉字 - 草书 - 自学参考资料 IV. J292.11  
中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 ( 97 ) 第 00818 号

中国书法自学丛书—草书自学教程

黄全信 编著

\*

©华语教学出版社

华语教学出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄路 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

春雷印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

1997 年 ( 16 开 ) 第一版

(汉英)

ISBN 7-80052-454-X / H · 546 (外)

03500

9 - CE - 3191P

First Edition 1997

ISBN 7-80052-454-X

Copyright 1997 by Sinolingua

Published by Sinolingua

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Beijing 100037, China

Printed by Chunlei Printing House

Distributed by China International

Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, P.O. Box 399

Beijing 100044, China

*Printed in the People's Republic of China*

## Foreword

Chinese calligraphy, the core of the Oriental arts, reflects the temperament of the Chinese nation. The black and white, dots and lines are an expression of the spirits and images of Nature, reflecting a calligrapher's feelings and knowledge. Calligraphy's profound artistic essence lies in the combination of feeling and rationale, form and spirit, rich structure and vivid rhythm – a perfect balance between the form and the ideological content expressed in a character. Though devoid of color, calligraphy is variously colored as painting; and without sound, it contains melodies just like music.

Chinese calligraphy has a long history, ranging from the keeping of records by tying knots before Cang Jie invented writing, to the characters on earthenware discovered at Dawenkou and inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th-11th century BC). Like a long running river, Chinese calligraphy has evolved during thousands of years, characterized by simplicity and unsophistication in the Shang and Zhou dynasties (c. 16th century-221 BC), splendor in the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC-AD 220), graceful bearing in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420), magnificence in the Sui and Tang dynasties (581-907), radiating vigor in the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368), prosperity in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911) and grandeur in the current era.

Chinese characters fall into the following styles: regular, running, grass, official and seal scripts. Seal scripts may be divided into large and small characters; official scripts, into Qin and Han styles; grass characters, into *Zhang* (cursive official), *Jin* (modern) and *Kuang* (wild) scripts; and regular characters, into Wei and Tang scripts. Chinese calligraphy not only reflects the character of individual calligrapher, but also presents the styles and flavors of different regions and eras.

China has always regarded calligraphy as the quintessence of Chinese culture and a national treasure as well. Calligraphy is a required course at school and every educated person must study calligraphy.

The art of Chinese calligraphy is unprecedentedly prosperous now. Various kinds of calligraphy model books have been published; however, it is hard to find one which can scientifically instruct people in learning calligraphy. An old saying goes: "If one owns the best book, one may obtain medium-level knowledge; and if one has a medium-level book, one may only absorb low-level knowledge." Anyone who wishes to have a good command of Chinese calligraphy must have a good teacher and a good book. At the present time when it is hard to find a good teacher, good teaching materials are even more important.

To meet the demands of the people who are interested in Chinese calligraphy, Professor Huang Quanxin has compiled the *Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series* in six books: *A Self-Study Course in Regular Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Wei Stone Inscriptions*, *A Self-Study Course in Running Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Grass Script*, *A Self-Study Course in Official Script*, and *A Self-Study Course in Seal Script*. Each book consists of the following chapters: A Brief Introduction, Techniques, Strokes, Radicals, Structure, The Art of Composition, Creation, Copying, and Appreciation, which should help beginners learn the rudiments, and other learners improve their calligraphy techniques.

With standard model characters, systematic theories for self-study, illustration and texts, the *Chinese Calligraphy Teach-Yourself Series* is well formatted, informative and interesting. Student may appreciate Chinese calligraphy while practicing the models in the books to improve their accomplishments and techniques. We sincerely wish they are of help with the study of Chinese calligraphy.

Editor  
October 1994

## About the Author

Huang Quanxin is a senior teacher of fine arts in the Middle School Attached to Beijing Normal University and a member of the Chinese Calligraphers' Association. In his childhood, he took up the study of calligraphy and paintings, and read a large number of poems. His father was a student of Kang Youwei (a famous reformist in the late Qing Dynasty). For many years, he has lived in Liulichang (an ancient cultural street in Beijing), taken many famous calligraphers, scholars and experts as his teachers, and immersed himself untiringly among calligraphy and painting. When he was a middle-school student, he won first place in a calligraphy contest. Later many more works won awards at important calligraphy competitions and have been exhibited at home and abroad. In addition, he has inscribed the titles of many newspapers and magazines. He is named as an eminent person of the contemporary era by the Calligraphy Association of Wang Xizhi's hometown, included in the book *Famous Calligraphers in Beijing* by the Beijing Calligraphers' Association, as well as in *A Dictionary of Chinese Artists of the Present Age* and *Who's Who in the World*.

Huang Quanxin is also a member of the Chinese Society for Fine Arts Education and a standing council member of the district society. In his youth, he compiled teaching materials for the fine arts, painted color picture-story books, and created hanging paintings, which were named by the State Education Commission as excellent works. He visited Taiwan as a member of the artists delegation from mainland China and held a one-man calligraphy show in Japan. Many of his calligraphy works and paintings have been sent by the government officials to foreign guests as gifts, enjoying a high reputation both at home and abroad. Hence he is included in the book *Famous Chinese Painters*.

Huang Quanxin has served as teacher for thirty years, with students from all over the country and some in foreign countries. Quite a number of his students came out top at many domestic and international calligraphy and paintings competitions.

Huang Quanxin founded the first parents' school in Beijing and has served as head of the National Excellent Parents' School for many years. He is a consultant of Beijing primary and middle-school education, a former host of an education program of Beijing Broadcasting Station, one of the compilers of the teaching materials and courses of the Beijing Parents' School, a member of the Beijing Research Association of Family Education and a council member of the district research association. He is also interested in various aspects of Chinese traditional culture and arts, and serves as a council member of the Association for Developing Beijing and Kunqu Operas.

Huang Quanxin has devoted his spare time to the study of calligraphy, paintings and other Chinese traditional culture and arts as well as to the education of arts. Up to now more than thirty of his books have been published, including *Grand View of China's Auspiciousness Series*, *The Series of Authentic Characters of Fu (fortune), Lu (emoluments), Shou (longevity) and Xi (happiness) by Famous Calligraphers of Past Dynasties*, *Modern Inscriptions*, *A Copybook of Ancient Chinese Poems*, *An Intense Course for Practical Fountain Pen Handwriting*, and *Elementary Handwriting for Young People*. In addition he has been a designer for many books. Huang Quanxin, who enjoys a high reputation in China and abroad, is included in the *Directory of Eminent Literary Personnel of China* by the Research Institute of Literature of the China Academy of Social Sciences.

# Contents

<b>Chapter I Grass Script</b> .....	1
1. Origin and Development.....	1
2. <i>Zhang</i> Grass Script.....	2
3. <i>Jin</i> Grass Script.....	3
4. <i>Kuang</i> Grass Script.....	4
<b>Chapter II Techniques of Writing</b> .....	5
1. Sitting Position.....	5
2. Standing Position.....	6
3. Holding the Brush.....	7
4. Movement of the Brush.....	8
<b>Chapter III Strokes</b> .....	9
1. Basic Strokes.....	9
2. Complex Strokes.....	10
3. The Changes of Strokes.....	11
4. Order of Strokes.....	19
<b>Chapter IV Radical</b> .....	27
1. Character's Head.....	27
2. Character's Bottom.....	30
3. Left Component.....	32
4. Right Component.....	38
5. Character's Frame.....	41
6. Similar Components.....	42
<b>Chapter V Structure</b> .....	46
1. Structural Form.....	46
2. The Law of the Structure.....	50
3. Characteristics of the Structure.....	59
4. Changes in the Structure.....	68
<b>Chapter VI Tracing and Copying</b> .....	75
1. Four-square Frame.....	75
2. Diagonal-marked Frame.....	84
3. Nine-square Frame.....	92
4. Two-square Frame.....	100
<b>Chapter VII The Art of Composition</b> .....	109
1. Various Forms of Scrolls.....	109
2. Text.....	111
3. Inscriptions.....	113

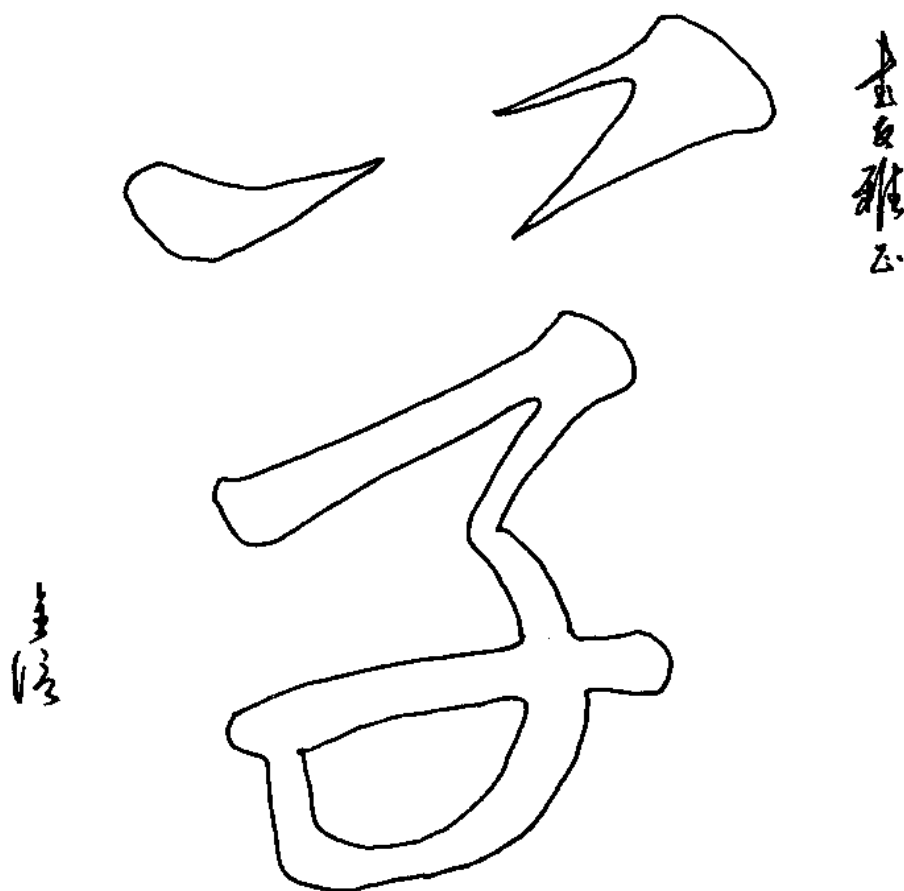
4. Seals.....	115
<b>Chapter VIII Creation.....</b>	<b>118</b>
1. Making a Plan Before Writing.....	118
2. The First Character Leads the Whole Text.....	120
3. A Coherent Whole.....	122
4. A Poetic Composition.....	124
<b>Chapter IX Appreciation.....</b>	<b>126</b>



# Chapter I Grass Script

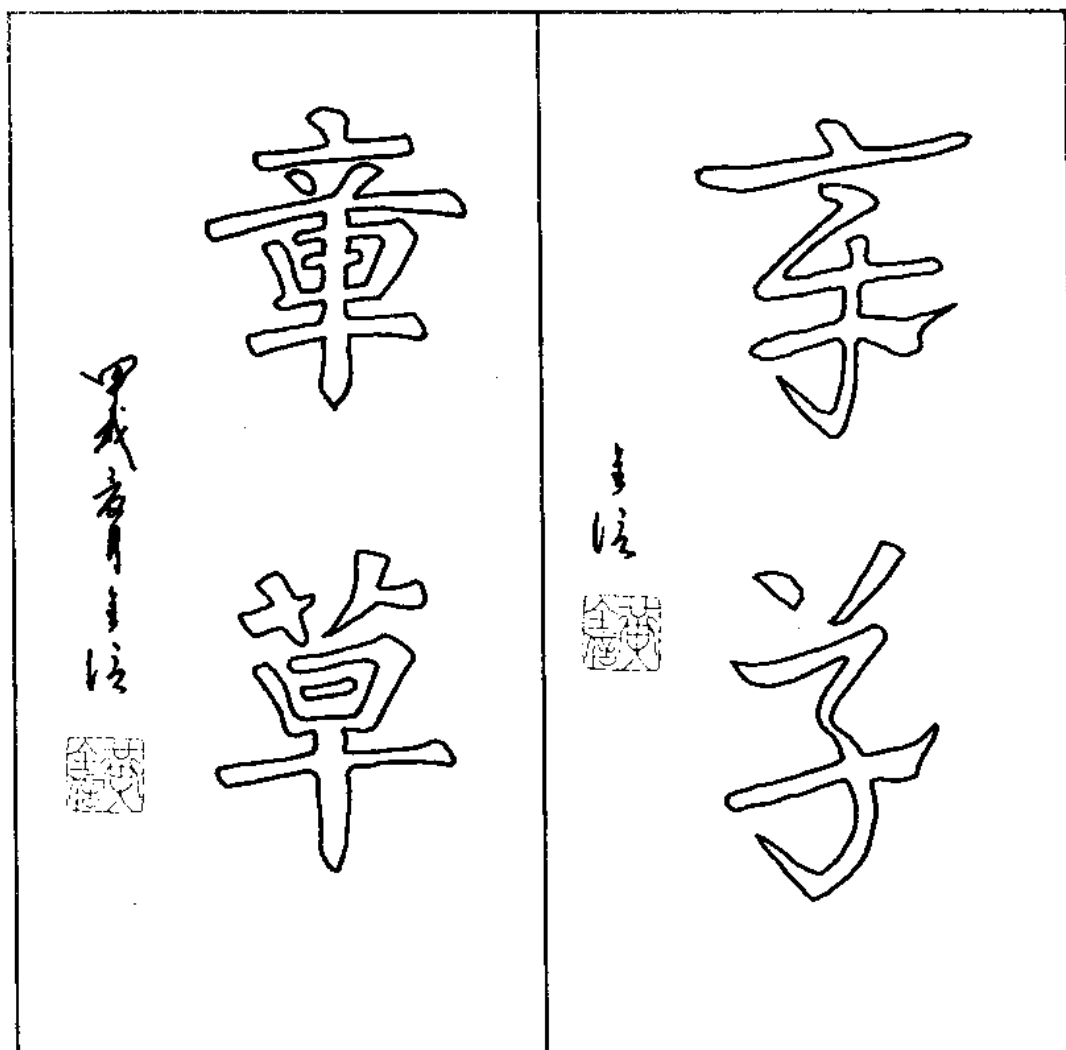
## 1. Origin and Development

Xu Shen, a famous ancient calligrapher, once said, "When the Han Dynasty was founded, grass script was flourishing." Grass script refers to characters in Chinese calligraphy which are written swiftly with strokes flowing together. Grass character script was found on the bamboo slips of the Qin and Han dynasties. In the Han Dynasty, *Zhang* grass script was formally developed as a cursively written official script. Later there appeared *Jin* (modern) grass script and *Kuang* (wild) grass script. A Song of Grass Script says: "To become a sage of grass script is the most difficult, as the strokes are either like dancing dragons or snakes."



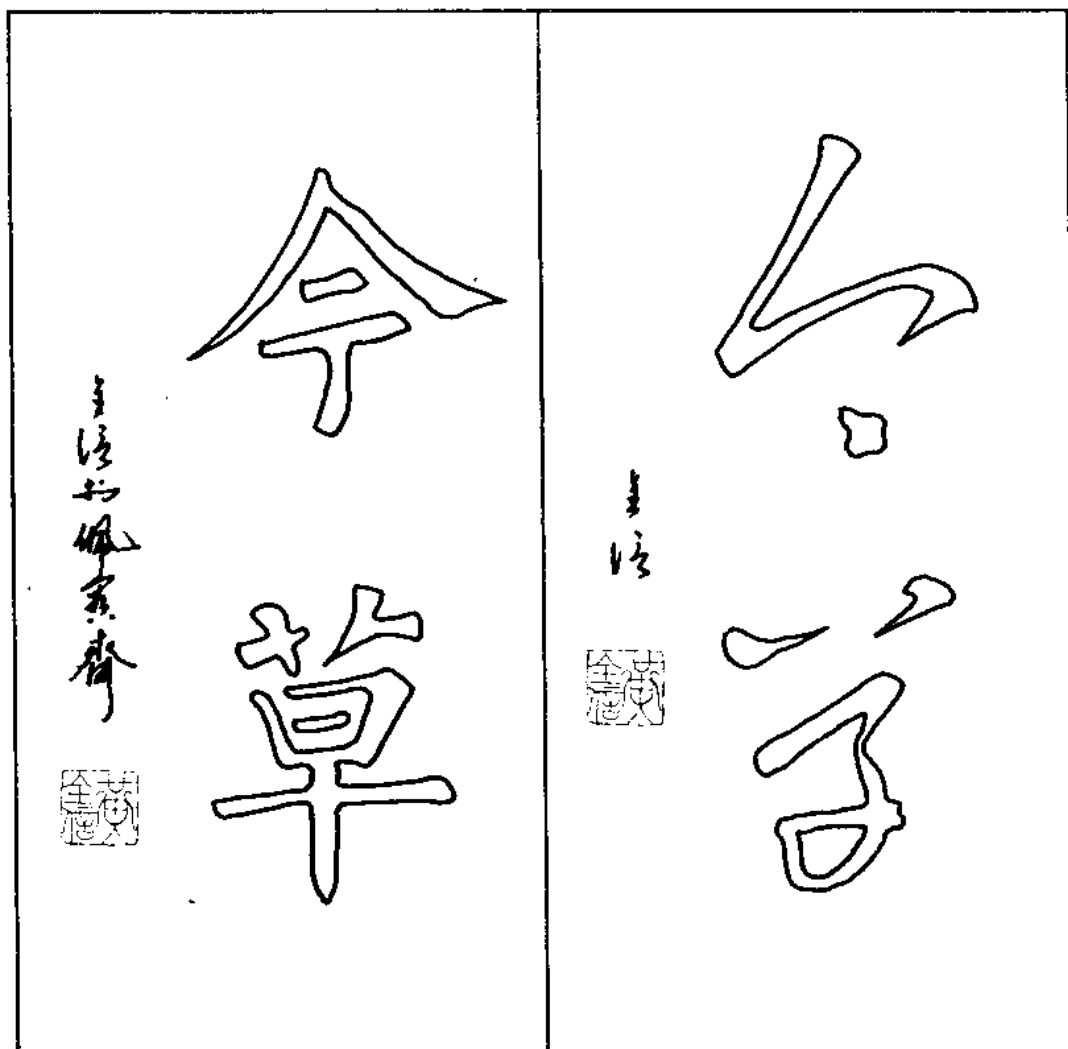
## 2. Zhang Grass Script

*Zhang* grass script, also known as ancient grass script, evolved from swiftly written official script in the Qin Dynasty. Born together with official script, *Zhang* grass script is an offshoot of official script, being the “shorthand” form of it. *Zhang* grass script has a simple structure, tending to link separate strokes into one, showing the writing techniques of both seal and official scripts and retaining the rising strokes of official script. Grass script characters are horizontal, most of them not connected to each other. The form of *Zhang* grass script is both legible and illegible. Legend has it that *Zhang* grass script was created by Shi You of the Han Dynasty, but some said that it was founded by Du Du of the Han when he wrote petitions to the emperor.



### 3. Jin Grass Script

*Jin* grass script, a swiftly written regular script, gradually evolved from *Zhang* grass script. In the late Han Dynasty, Zhang Zhi created more cursive and illegible *Zhang* grass script by getting rid of the traces of official script, replacing the flat, square characters with oblong ones, linking strokes together, and characters with each other, and simplifying radicals. Zhang Zhi was given the esteemed name of "Sage of Grass Script." In general, now grass character script refers to *Jin* grass script. As *Jin* grass script evolved from *Zhang* grass script, and *Kuang* grass script developed on the basis of *Jin* grass script, anyone who wants to learn grass script must start with the study of *Jin* grass script.



#### 4. Kuang Grass Script

Zhang Zhi of the Han Dynasty is the first grass script calligrapher as well as the founder of *Kuang* grass script. In the Tang Dynasty, great calligraphers Zhang Xu and Huai Su further developed *Jin* grass script, which became more bold, unrestrained and illegible. Hence the name Crazy Zhang and Mad Su. Their calligraphy works were known as *Kuang* grass script. With various shapes and linked strokes, *Kuang* grass script is usually written at one go, showing distinct rhythm and strong spirit. *Kuang* grass script is also known as “bigger grass script”; and *Jin* grass script, “lesser grass script.”



# Chapter II Techniques of Writing

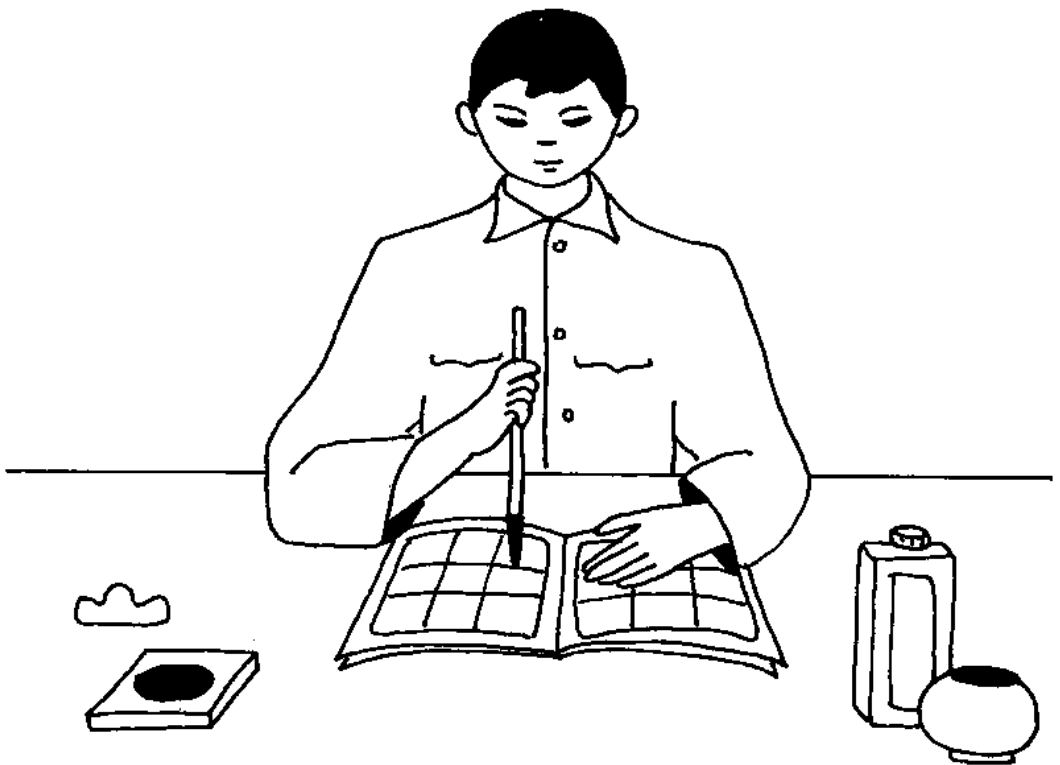
## 1. Sitting Position

The head: One should hold the head straight, inclined slightly forward, look at the copybook and keep the mind peaceful.

The body: One should sit straight, keep the shoulders level and the waist stiff, and should not touch the table edge with the chest.

The arms: One should relax one's arms, the left hand resting on the paper and the right hand holding the brush.

The feet: One should rest one's feet parallel on the floor, the legs relaxed and the body stable.



## 2. Standing Position

One should stand to write big characters, with a suspended wrist.

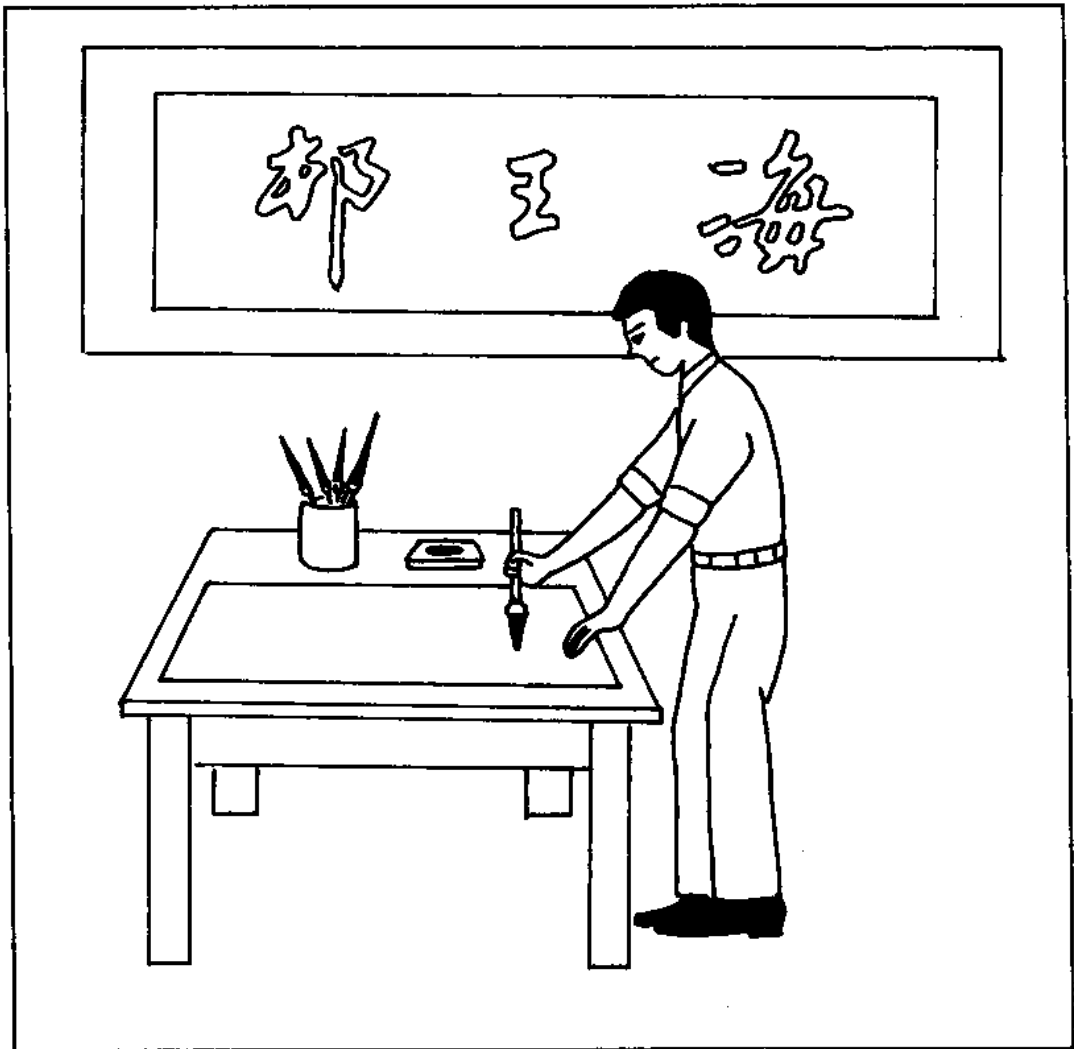
Requirements for one who stands to write:

Hold the head straight, incline the body slightly forward, look at the copybook and keep the mind peaceful.

Hold the brush with the right hand, place the left hand on the table, and suspend the elbow while writing characters to freely express one's feeling.

Place the right foot slightly forward and the left foot slightly back, and rest the soles flat on the floor with the center of gravity on the right foot.

Write characters with the strength from the waist and the roots of the feet to make every stroke penetrate the paper.



### 3. Holding the Brush

The key points for holding the brush: fingers are solid, palm relaxed, the wrist parallel and the palm vertical.

The techniques of writing in terms of five fingers: pushing down, pressing, hooking, squaring and supporting.

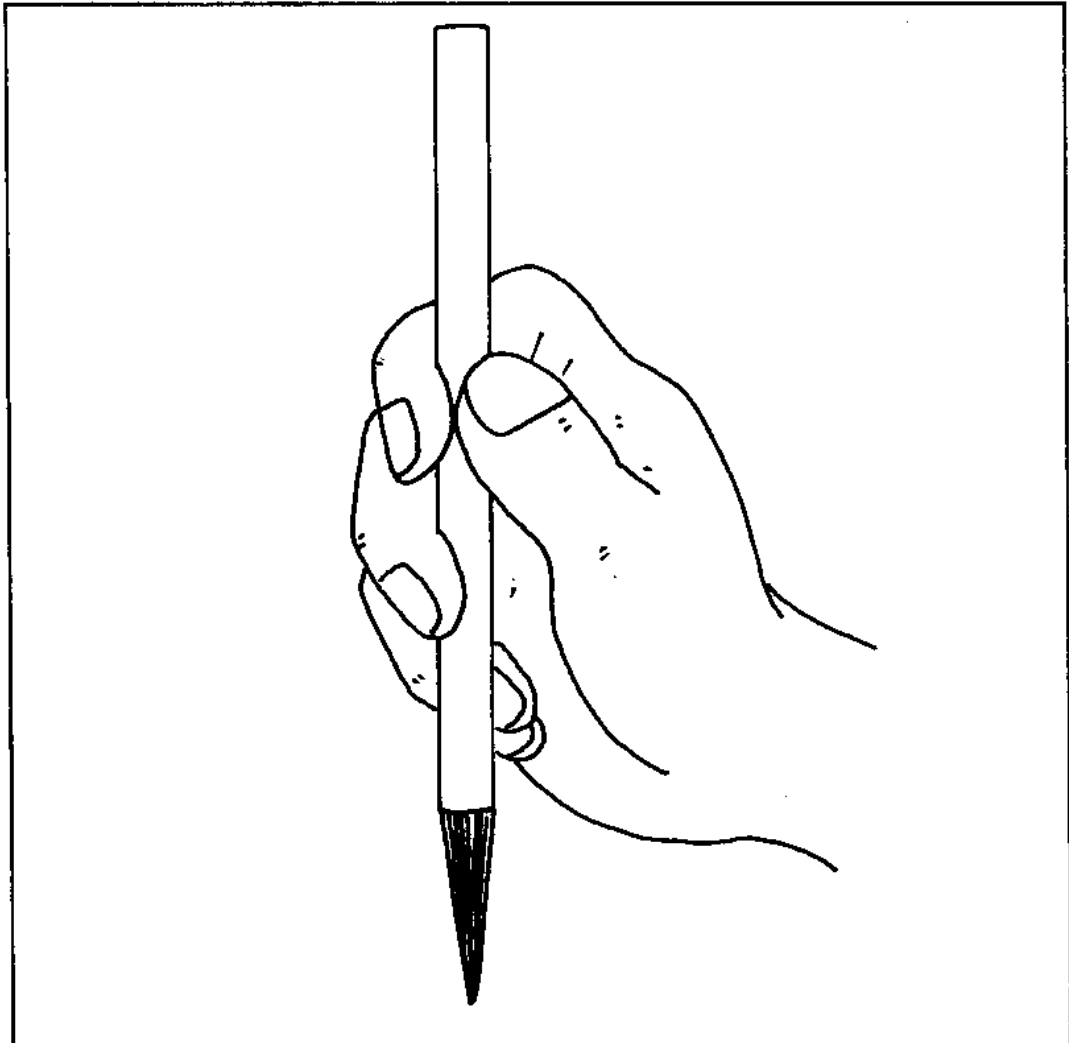
Pushing down: the thumb pushes the brush from inside to outside.

Pressing: the index finger presses the brush from outside to inside.

Hooking: the middle finger pulls the brush from outside on the left to inside on the right.

Squaring: the ring finger pushes the brush from inside on the right to outside on the left.

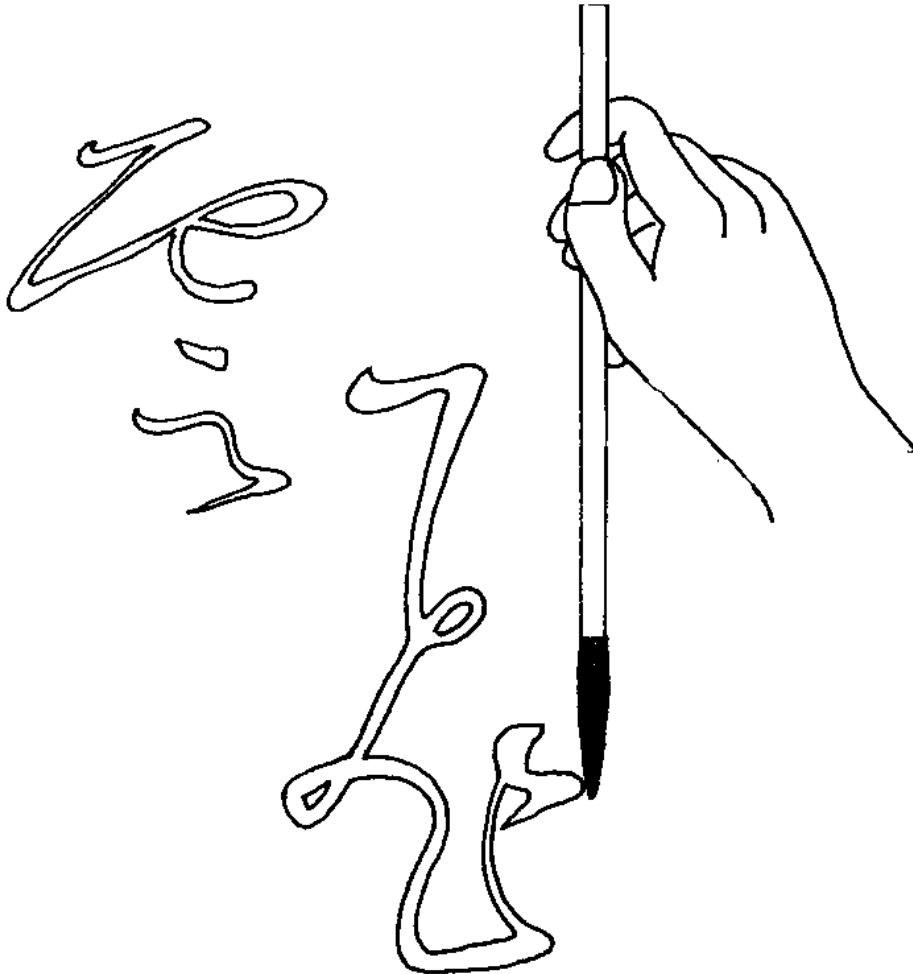
Supporting: the little finger gives auxiliary strength to the ring finger.



#### 4. Movement of the Brush

A saying goes: Moving the brush with the wrist. If the middle point of the brush is used in the movement of the brush, all strength will be concentrated on the writing brush and strokes will be full of spirit. One should use the contrary-point method to start a stroke; the middle-point method to move the brush on; and the hidden-point method, to close a stroke.

Grass script has the richest techniques of writing with the round middle-point method as the mainstay, plus various other methods, such as side-point, hidden-point, exposed-point, square, round, lifting and pressing. Characters of grass script are written swiftly at one go. With strokes echoing each other, the starting and closing of strokes in grass script are distinct, showing more imagination than methodology.





## Chapter III Strokes

The three key elements of calligraphy are: precise strokes, well-knit structure and vivid spirits.

The single movement of the brush is commonly known as one stroke. One who wants to write good calligraphy must learn to write strokes well.

### 1. Basic Strokes

Grass script has eight kinds of basic strokes: horizontal, vertical, left-falling, right-falling, hooking, rising and cornering strokes and dots.

