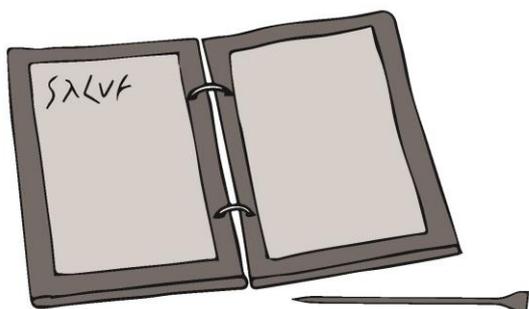


# WRITE LIKE A ROMAN

Different jobs called for different kinds of writing in the Roman world. Here are the three most common:

## Tablets

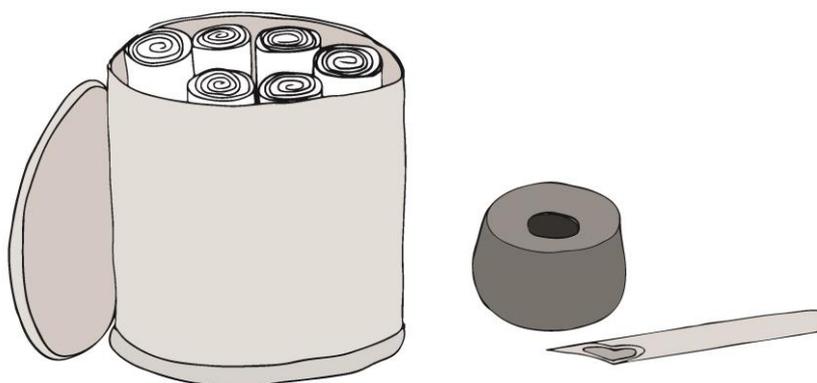


### Crafty Idea

Try making one for yourself. You can find instructions on the AshLI worksheet *Make a Roman Wax-tablet*.

A wax-tablet was a wooden frame filled with a thin layer of beeswax. Sometimes several tablets were tied together like a book. A pointed instrument called a *stylus*, made of metal, wood or animal bone, was used to scratch letters into the wax. The stylus also had a flat end which could be used to erase the letters. If someone wanted to re-use the tablet for a different message, they could melt the wax to make a new, smooth surface. Wax-tablets were used by people of all ages, including school children, and were the most common way for Romans to make notes and send messages.

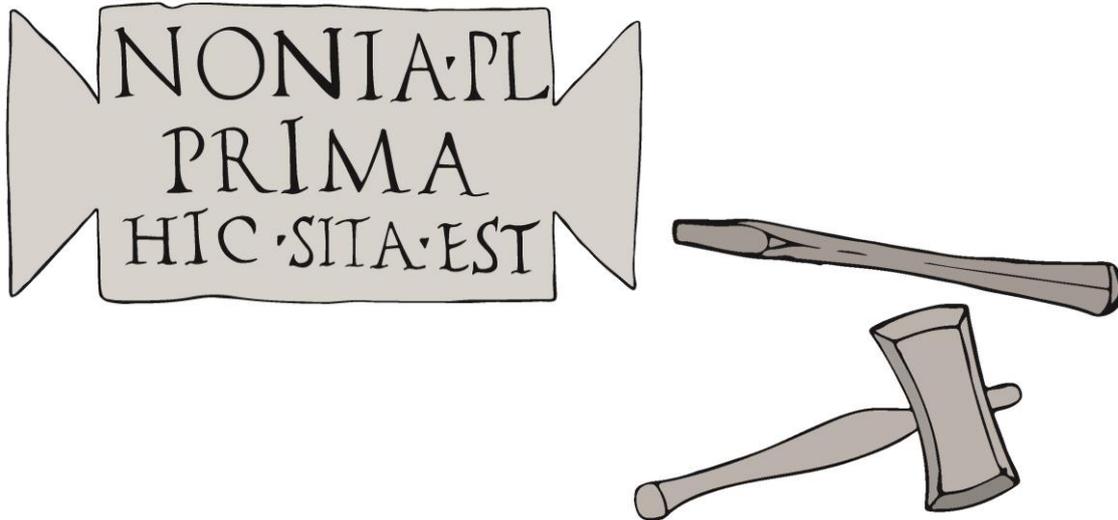
## Scrolls



The Romans did not make paper from trees like we do. Instead, they made long sheets of *papyrus* from the stalks of the papyrus plant which grew by the Nile in Egypt. To write on it, they used a mixture of dark ingredients like soot, plant juices and cuttlefish ink, and wrote with a reed carved into a sharp nib. When the ink was dry, the long sheets of papyrus were rolled up to make scrolls.

Papyrus was very expensive and could not be used more than once, so scrolls were kept for precious texts like plays, poetry and historical records. A Roman who wanted to keep his scroll collection safe would store it in a drum-shaped box called a *capsa*.

### Stone Inscriptions



The letters on wax-tablets and scrolls were small, and only one person could read them at a time. But if Romans wanted to write in letters big enough for *everyone* to see, they could hire a stonemason to carve an inscription. He would plan out the letters carefully before using a hammer and chisel to chip away at the stone. This took a long time, and the stone was often expensive, so inscriptions were used for important messages that the Romans wanted to share with other people, for example new laws, awards for soldiers, and tombstones.

### The Latin Alphabet

Although they shared many of the same letters as we use in English, the Romans did not have exactly the same alphabet as we do. They did not have the letters J, K, V, W, Y or Z, so used other letters to make those sounds.

On a carved inscription, the words always appear in CAPITAL LETTERS, making them easier to read. But when writing on a wax-tablet or scroll, the Romans used a style of handwriting called *Latin cursive* that can be very difficult to read. They also squeezed the words together without leaving any spaces or using full stops.

**Exercise 1: Writing on Tablets**

Using the key to help you, can you decipher this Roman handwriting?

a	λ
b	α
c	Ϸ
d	δ
e	f
f	F
g	Ϸ
h	h
i	l
l	L
m	M
n	N
o	O
p	Ϸ
q	q
r	T
s	Ϸ
t	τ
u	υ
x	x

a) ΗΕΛΛΟΙΛΜΕΑΚΛΕΘΜΑΤΕΥΣ

---

b) ΛΕΟΤΟΣΕΠΟΟΛΕΑΧΗΜΟΤΝΛΝΣ

---

c) ΛΙΤΑΚΕΩΚΕΤΕΤΣΟΝΑΤΑΒΛΕ

---

d) ΛΙΣΕΝΕΧΕΤΟΛΥΕΥΣ

---

e) ΗΕΙΣΟΟΑΛΕΜΑΤΗΣΒΟΥΤΕΛΑΜΝΟΤ

---

Now try turning these sentences into Latin cursive. Remember: **no spaces** and **no punctuation**!

f) Claudia is a Roman girl. She is ten.

---

g) She goes to the same school as Marcus.

---

h) At school, she learns Latin and uses a tablet.

---

i) At home, her mother teaches her to spin.

---

j) She also learns to run the house.

---



## Exercise 2: Writing on Scrolls

The words on scrolls were written in long columns. The reader held the scroll in both hands, unrolling new columns with the right, and rolling up old ones with the left.

- a) Here is part of a famous story that the Romans enjoyed and had borrowed from the Ancient Greeks. Can you read it?



### Crafty Idea A

Plan a short story in English, without using the letters J, K, V, W, Y or Z (not easy!)

Copy your story out onto a piece of paper in Latin cursive.

If you want your paper to look more like papyrus, try painting it with cold black coffee. It should look stripy. Make sure you let it dry completely before writing on it.

### Crafty Idea B

As a class, agree on a story that you would all like to tell, perhaps something from mythology or Roman history, or invent something of your own.

Divide the story into short episodes and share them between you.

Working individually or in pairs, plan how to tell your part of the story (without using the letters J, K, V, W, Y or Z!)

Copy your part of the story out onto a clean piece of paper in Latin cursive. Make sure you use your paper in *landscape*, with the long sides on the top and bottom.

When the whole class has finished, join the pieces of paper together to complete the story and roll it up to make a giant Roman scroll.

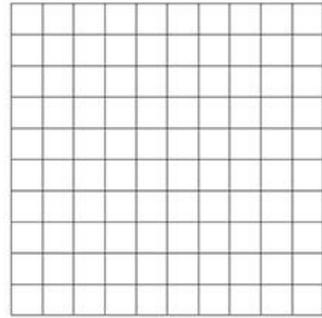
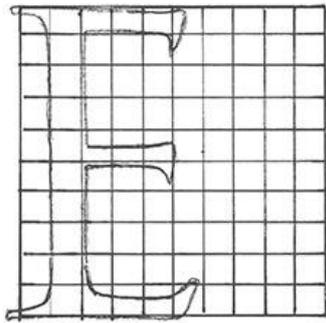
### Exercise 3: Writing on Stone

The letters used on Roman stone inscriptions look exactly like English capital letters, and are usually easy to read.

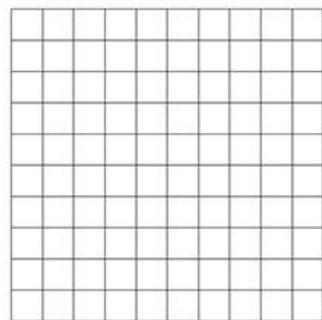
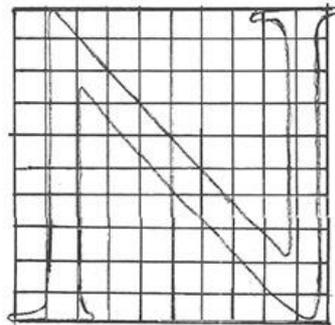
A B C D E F G H I L M N O P Q R S T V X

But the letters can take a long time to write. Try copying these Roman letters, using the grids to help you.

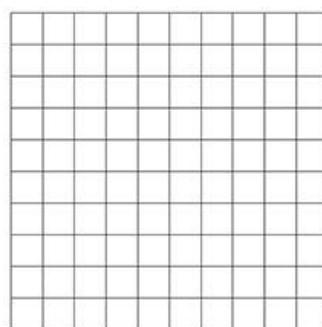
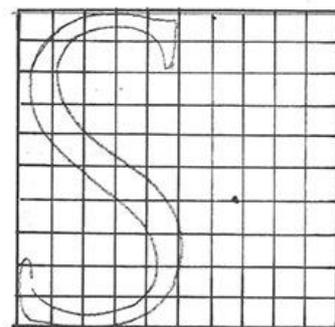
E



N



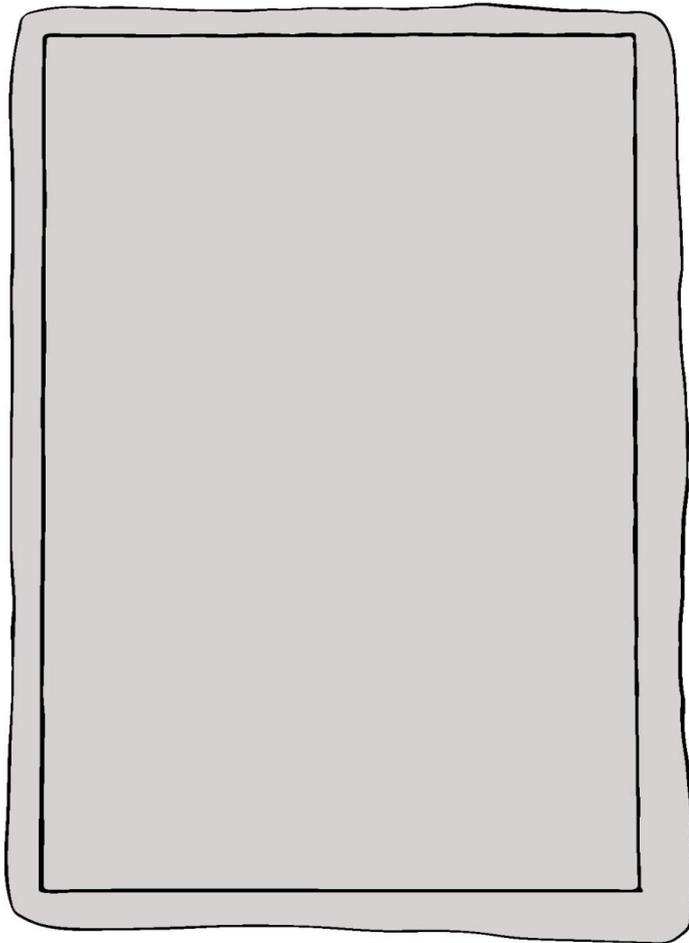
S



Before starting to carve the stone, the stonemason planned his work very carefully. He drew lines on the stone and decided where each word should go. He wanted his text to be *centred* and had to make sure that all the words would fit without being broken up or squashed. Unlike Latin cursive, letters on inscriptions could have spaces or dots (called *interpuncts*) to separate each word.

Try arranging this text inside the stone.

THE • PEOPLE • OF • ROME • HONOUR • THE • EMPEROR



#### Crafty Idea

Inscriptions were often used to congratulate someone for their good deeds or bravery.

Design your own message of congratulation for someone you know. Write it out in neat Roman capitals and stick the paper onto a piece of stiff card.

Do as the Romans did, and hang up your message for everyone to see.