

The Letterforms: Initial Testing Proposal

**The
Europa
Reformation
Society**

Preface to the Initial Testing Proposal

What is presented here is the initial testing proposal, as such please be aware that the work on these pages may be subject to change in the future. Overall this is an experimental process and will require much input and updating to address issues and explore alternatives. As such please be patient and come with an open mind. Furthermore, please ensure that you are reading the latest version of this document available at *reformeuropa.net*. If any issues or suggestions are to be found or had regarding formatting, logic, linguistics, or otherwise please do not hesitate to reach out. Similarly, there is still much work to be done across a myriad of fields before these proposals can truly take to the public sphere, and for those interested we are always seeking contributors. The end goal is to maintain this testing proposal over the course of the next several years as the vision of The Letterforms is refined. During this time infrastructure and other facets behind the scenes will be built so that once the final proposal has crystallized it will truly be ready to be brought forth to the wider world.

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Intro

In our daily lives written language has become more vital than any other time in human history. Our writing systems are the evolution of works written by countless hands across untold generations. Each pair taking the ideas of the last and infusing their own life and inspiration. A living system with constant evolution, change, and invention. In many ways mirroring the journey of our spoken tongues. Even in the stagnated status quo (of English) we see rays of this wellspring of evolution shine ever through. The modern Latin Script is but the current iteration from this ancient lineage. A step along the path, yet not the destination. Just as our ancestors could never have predicted how Old-English transformed into Modern-English, we too know not where the future lies except in change. Furthermore, yet we know that our written language is broken and do naught to rectify, for fear of change. As such, should we not look forward in pursuit of real improvements than settle for that when we will organically twist and break the

language further? We must ask ourselves: is this the best man has to offer? The world which molded these ancient scripts was quite different from the one we find ourselves in today. Our technology and understanding of all facets of existence has reached far beyond our ancestors comprehension, and yet this tool so foundational to our lives has changed but so little. This tool that has taken us from the very depths amongst the beasts to the very stars themselves. As we return to the roots of language, armed with innumerable developments, new insights, and a desire to take written language ever forth, The Letterforms were forged. A new paradigm with not only the what but the why and the how. A chance to improve and make the world if ever a bit simpler and more logical for our kin and their kin forth. A bridge from which our shared European tongues can finally be united. The Letterforms stand at the crossroads of innovation and tradition as a step forward in written thought. An evolution just as the countless before.

The Letterforms are but one piece of a much grander work to reshape the foundations of western culture. Each piece challenging the various aspects which guide our lives to stand on their own merit instead of mere familiarity. As each is recast, inroads between them are laid taking that which individually stands as a step forward in its paradigm to be brought into a wider whole where through a shared foundation their subtle connections can build towards perfection. While new systems and paradigms are not always easy to learn, we hope that this more cohesive world they support draws even the most fervent opponents towards this multigenerational dream. For a future simpler and ever better than that which was left to us.

Language, Dialects & Writing

We cannot imagine our reality without language. It is our oldest partner that has grown ever alongside us. It comes forth from the divine wellspring, refusing to be tamed by human intellect. Like all else real, it is imperfect and unquantifiable, yet utterly intrinsic to our experience of life. However from this immemorial lineage, written language is far younger and rooted in human imagination and inspiration, guided by countless minds and hands. Writing is not a static box that has fully captured human thought, but is as a painting trying to capture a piece of the unfathomable essence of existence. It is but a bridge between thought and form.

Throughout its history, writing has taken many forms and approaches from each of the various peoples to meet their needs and the constraints of their environments. Whether that be the Hieroglyphs of Ancient Egypt, Runes of the Germanic Tribes, Ogham of the Celtic Isles, the Ancient Greek Scripts, or the Modern Cyrillic and Latin Alphabets. Their forms

driven to straight lines from carved letters or the flowing playfulness of pens and brushes.

In the grand scheme however, written language is only so useful as others are able to understand it. Thus it needs a common foundation from which to be judged as correct (like spoken language itself), and thus to be standardized (whether by the speakers native intuition or by formal institutions). With unified spellings, grammar, and punctuation it allows for a much larger audience and unified pool of content than with each small dialect to stand as their own. This furthermore, guides these groups towards a shared identity. Typically these standards are guided by academics and then ratified in social class. Yet standards cannot be static as language itself is not. While conscious effort of the upper stratas of a society can guide a language, there too will be much organic change that cannot be planned for. Should the evolution of a language not be recorded in its written form, the speakers themselves over time will slowly bring the writing itself more inline with the basest of implementations. As such it is important that written language has, through forms of central authority (whether that be governmental or academic), mechanisms to follow, conservatively, the language of the populace and the shifts it experiences. For written standards are neither fact nor the language itself but merely a guide of its style.

Yet, to truly understand writing we must recognize that language is phonemic not phonetic. Phonemes are the basic units of a language. They are what can, minimally, be changed between words to change their meaning. In American English an example would be d and t as in deer & tear (as in crying) in which we see that with differed

first phonemes the meaning changes entirely. Often different phonemes will directly correspond to different sounds, like with the previous example, but not always. Sometimes different sounds will be mapped to the same phoneme, and thus be perceived identically in meaning even if the speaker can hear the differences sonically. An example in American English would be the *d* phoneme. The *d* of ladder is pronounced differently than the *d* of dog,

deer	/diɹ/
tear	/tiɹ/
ladder	/læɹə/
dog	/dɑg/

Example 1. The difference between phoneme and sound in American English

however if one sound is used in place of the other the meaning remains the same. These two different sounds are thus of the same phoneme, which could not be said of *d* and *t*. In reality these lines can often be quite blurred, one directional, and varied. This becomes abundantly clear when we think of the countless dialects in a language, each with their varied pronunciations and yet they are all still intelligible. Thus when languages are said to have phonetic spelling what is truly meant is phonemic spelling, albeit the distinction is subtle.

Looking around the world it remains consistent that regardless of the script (or script type), written language has always remained connected to spoken language. The difference being how the information is exactly abstracted and what additional information, (may) be given. Of what is vital to be communicated, what is optional,

and what unimportant. These lines drawn by each culture and tongue with a given script. Even logographic scripts, like Chinese, still often have their characters connected through pronunciation (although certainly quite differently than alphabets).

While there have been pursuits to capture the imperceptible nuance of spoken language in written form, such as the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), this tends to be of little use as a writing system for the transmission of ideas. Written language has always remained a balancing act between the spoken word, the idea itself, and the convenience of both the writer and the reader. While certainly the IPA captures the what of is spoken, and therefore the idea itself, it is extremely inconvenient to use and encodes much unneeded information. Most notably adding distinctions between equivalent phonemes, which also makes understanding very dependent on dialect.

One of the issues under the current scripts is that as they get adapted into each language they are not done so in a consistent manner. Often every language, due to the limited letters, chooses their own way to represent rather common sounds. Whether that's using their own letters (æ & ä), or their own di/trigraphs (sh, sch, tj, kj, sj). Certainly history and politics have played a role in why orthographies look the way they do, yet there is no reason that these common sounds are not represented in the same universal manner as other "basic letters" (like t, d, & s). The benefit of having a shared script across languages and nations is that there is this, somewhat, shared phonetic/phonemic connection so that while one may be unable to understand the words themselves they can, to an extent, read the language. This also allows for the

connections in meaning across languages to be apparent. This shared script thus provides a base amongst the cultures, languages, and peoples that then bolsters understanding and prosperity amongst one another.

Stepping back to language as a whole, the impact of dialects on language cannot be understated. Dialects are inseparable from language. Everyone bears a dialect, even if that is the “standard” dialect of a language. We know that all dialects are not equivalent and can vary quite largely. Whether that be from slight pronunciation differences to large sound changes and from subtle slang to quite distinct vocabulary they often form a language continuum with the ends representing the extremes. Thus some dialects will be closer to one’s own and easier to understand than others. As these sounds shift they eventually step past the line of subtle variation to entirely different phonemes. When enough phonemes are changed (even as the sounds themselves can still be quite similar) the dialect becomes viewed as another tongue entirely. The diffusion of language and the birth of dialects are very much symptom of life itself and thus we must continue to learn alongside them rather than fight back.

Dialects thus mark the step along the path of the evolution of language. Nearly all European Languages stem from one common tongue long ago. The various dialects grew to languages their own which formed the foundations of the language families of today which then through many generations into the various languages we all speak. Just as the line between green and yellow cannot be perfectly drawn so too cannot the line of the evolution of one species into its successor and thus a dialect into a language its own. These are continual

processes with infinite nuance given labels by man to try and cleanly define what cannot be truly separated. As such the demarcation between dialects and language can be quite difficult to draw, especially given the multidimensional nature of the spread of language. Should Norwegian be considered a single language when the dialects are so distinct and often unintelligible? Or (even more drastically) should Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish be considered the same language but varied dialects? These are questions we seek not to answer here with their quite philosophical implications, but instead merely invite thought. Conventional wisdom is that a language is but a dialect with an army and navy...of course till it one day becomes so distinct it can be naught but its own.

In defining written standards for a language, a dialect must be chosen to base it upon. Normally being either a medial dialect (most understood), the capital’s dialect (most exposure), or a synthetic neutral dialect (when there is no other balance). In all cases this means that some dialects will not be exactly transcribed in the written language. Yet the generally minor differences are more than acceptable for the trade off of easy communication. When looked upon at a larger scale there are two tendencies: one is of a single standard encompassing the whole community of speakers, and the other is for there to be multiple standards matching national (and sometimes regional) dialects. As was said before, in having dialects brought together to a single written standard there can be a marked increase in the number of people it represents. This is why smaller nations, or languages of a single nation, traditionally tend towards maintaining, or following, a single standard. This allows their often smaller populations to stand united. However for

large multinational languages (often with each nation and having its own family of distinct dialects) it makes sense for them to each bear their own standard. The risk of the large dialect groups fracturing into their own language is a non-issue as the population is more than capable of supporting a language its own. In establishing their own manner of writing they can then further solidify their identity, and bring the written standard closer to that of the spoken tongue itself. Reading amongst these other large dialects will then parallel quite well to speaking. The more similar the dialects, and thus the easier it is to understand a speaker of the dialect, the easier it will be to read. And conversely, the more difficult it is to understand the spoken tongue so to will it be of the written one. While it may be dreamed to speak in one's regional tongue solely, language is only so useful as there is someone to communicate with. Certainly, in modern times there have been large revival efforts for various regional languages and dialects, but time will yet tell which of these shall be successful. Much of this hinging on larger questions regarding how many speakers of a language a truly need there be for a people to both maintain their own identity and way of life lived solely in their native tongue.

The key language of reform, not merely since this is written in it, is English. English because it is the current common tongue (Lingua Franca) and because its written form has drifted so far from its spoken form. English reformation will inevitably bring an official split between the written dialects of North American dialects and elsewhere. While this may at first glance appear troublesome, it truly will only further existing trends for foreign language learners and also lead to new enterprises of transcribing written material

between the standards. Foreigners will, as they do now, have to chose which dialect to focus their studies. As has recent trends continued it likely the American one shall continue as the more popular choice. More broadly though, the sentiments of any such reform are likely to universally unpopular in the short term, however extremely positive in the long term.

Throughout modern history there have already been several attempted and proposed reforms of the English Language, each to a varying level of success. Yet none have truly caught on to create a strong movement to supplant the existing paradigms. Some have been mere reforms, or updates, to the Latin Alphabet changing it to meet the needs of English (adding diacritics and changing spellings), while others have been more ambitious choosing to pursue an entirely new script (Shavian, Deseret).

While there are many factors that go into successful reforms, not least of all strong central support (whether academic, governmental, or from the public), one of the largest hurdles has always remained the lack of content. Just as a person requires constant input to learn a language, so too do people need constant content to internalize the new scripts and spellings. In the past the process of transcribing new content was very labor and time intensive, yet now in the digital age swaths of content can be brought into a new script with the waving of a cursor allowing this previously immense hurdle to be but an afterthought and the path forward for future reforms clear.

As languages are brought finally to phonetic (phonemic) spelling, there are often several concerns that are easily addressed. The first of which is the worry of homophones affecting readability. While it certainly is useful, like distinguishing

knight from *night*, this is an artificial differentiation as they remain indistinguishable in spoken language. Yet knowing which meaning is meant provides little trouble in everyday life. Certainly in bringing the two spellings together some ambiguity is introduced but it is nothing that either context, or slight effort on the author's part, cannot address or conversely could be utilized to their artistic license. Occasionally the loss of the historical roots of word in its spelling is also brought up. However, this connection has only ever been of use in linguistic study and does naught but be detraction to the common man, muddying pronunciation rules and native intuition of how words are read. The connections of linguistic lineage will remain clear and studied regardless of the final spelling for everyday life, and thus the focus on the common man should remain paramount.

Writing in the modern age needs to represent and support the common man. As reform looms on the horizon, understanding both how we interact with written language and its current shortcomings will be key to improving the scripts of the future. In the next section, The Letterforms are analyzed in their entirety, especially focusing on the various choices behind their design.

The Letterforms

The Letterforms stand at the forefront of written language, inspired from our ancient scripts, but with a vision ever forward and the aspiration to carry us beyond. It is of no doubt that reimagining the foundations of writing is a massively daunting path, with countless twists and turns. Yet this is not a foray into ideas untouched, but a distillation of the best of each existing paradigm into a single complete form. Standing upon the shoulders of the innumerable generations, we can alas, with clear vision, see the way forth. Bringing along the countless lessons we have since learned in our various scripts and their evolutions. The word Letterforms is in part way inspired from the North-Germanic Bokstav (bookstaves). Letterforms capture the essence of what an alphabet is: a compilation of the various forms letters take. Written as a single word as is done in the Germanic tradition and as a proper noun should be, capitalized.

It is doubtful that few people would question that English, and certain other

European languages, are due for a complete spelling reform. A re-evaluation to bring them more inline with their spoken forms. Yet this could be done under the Latin Alphabet, and thus begs the bigger question of why should there be a new script? The most notable reason is that it facilitates the representation of a far wider range of sounds (phonemes). While certainly diacritics are used by various languages within the Latin Script to represent more sounds, and thus could be adapted to say English, the number of sounds overall in the language would still require new letters regardless. By starting anew the letters can bear a much more intentional relationship between their sound and form than the Latin Script could ever dream of. Furthermore, in bringing new forms to the letters a larger visual variety amongst them can be built to help with reading and recognition. Within this intentionality, it also allows the gap between the various European Languages to be bridged. Thus ensuring every language uses the same letters for the same sounds, which would be impossible under the Latin Script. All under which, bringing the bonus of supporting spelling reforms as it prevents knee jerk responses and thus allows old habits to remain while also allowing for the new spellings to be approached with open hearts and minds.

Overall, The Letterforms' design and ideology is guided by the following nine principles, each explored in the following pages.

1. Accommodate the written needs of all European languages
2. Every letter represents but one phoneme. No phonemes are composed of multi-letter combinations
3. All letters should be drawn with a single stroke
4. All letters should be distinct. No mirroring, nor pure rotations

5. Letter height is based on voicing and type
6. Letters should be rooted in existing visual forms, while maintaining a distinctive edge
7. Letter should be extensible through diacritics
8. Overall maintain consistency and visually appeal
9. Support the duodecimal system

As mentioned, The Letterforms are not an entirely ungrounded paradigm but a distilling and reforging of the best ideas and implementations into a single tradition. The Latin, Cyrillic, and Greek Alphabets being the largest inspirations. Continuing in their tradition, The Letterforms are a phonemic alphabet. This is as alphabets handle the complex phonologies and grammars of European tongues well. It is written in left to right, as writing direction is naught but a cultural norm stemming from the conveniences of ancient writers. In general writing systems can be imagined to fulfill two similar, yet different goals. The first is to represent the sounds (phonemes) of a language, representing the what of the language. The other is to represent additional information, whether that be tone, pacing, or context which hints to the why. The first part is represented by the letters themselves, while the latter by the punctuation.

Looking to the first design principle: The Letterforms are constructed so that they can meet the needs for all European Languages. It is important to have a shared script amongst the tongues so that, like much else between the cultures, there is a shared foundation from which the various similar cultures can build alongside and strengthen one another. The biggest part of this, is ensuring that there enough letters to represent the numerous phonemes

across all the languages. While in general it is impractical to have a unique letter for every single phoneme, especially as many exist in only a select few languages, instead by building a wide base which can be easily extended the various needs can easily be fulfilled.

At this point, this may leave some with the question of why should not this script be extended to support all the languages of the world. While the idea is in many ways laudable in spirit, it is also guided under false pretenses. The languages of the world are vast and distinct in phonology and grammar. If these various distinct needs were to be pursued the simplicity and universality of The Letterforms would be lost. The European languages are able to stand under a single script as they all, even those of differed origin like Basque & the Uralics, are quite similar conceptually, phonetically, and culturally. Albeit, even within this limited scope the variance amongst the languages is still immense. Furthermore we can imagine these natively formed scripts as the soul of a language, and thus a culture, given form. While it will appear hypocritical to say that in using a new script a piece of culture is lost and yet promote a new script, but if we understand The Letterforms to be but an evolution (improvement) of our currents scripts the changes become much more subtle.

Stepping to the second design principle: each letter is to represent but one phoneme and each phoneme represented but by one letter. Certainly many scripts utilize combinations of letters to represent individual sounds (such as sh in English), however this does not align with man's natural intuition nor the cadence of these words. Furthermore, in the Latin Scripts often some of these existing letters will also pull double duty so as to represent

multiple sounds depending on context. Even though there may already exist others letters that exactly represents its sound (like *c* being redundant with *s* and *k*). Having each phoneme as a single letter brings much simplification in both reading and writing. This also draws the visual length of a word to then to be quite representative of its spoken length. While this does draw back the flexibility of the writing, by not easily allowing novel phonemes to be written, this can be mitigated to an extent with diacritics.

Being a phonemic alphabet it is also important that the spelling of words accurately matches the spoken form. While not present in all languages, some such as English, will often have words that have multiple pronunciations depending on stress. Like the(e) (/ði/) and the (/ðə/). When such words are transcribed they should be done so in their stressed form as this is normally the more distinct of the two.

The extension of phonemes covered can best be illustrated when comparing the vowel representations. Presented in Figure 1 is the vowel space of the IPA, which covers most generally the various possible vowels man can make. This can then be contrasted to the vowel spaces of The Letterforms and The Estonian Latin Alphabet. Estonian was presented over English as it is the language which has the most orthographically distinct vowels in the Latin Script, having 9 different mono phonemic vowels. While American English has around 10, but only 5 letters. The Letterforms match the possible vowel space much better, save for the very bottom of which there are no languages which need to differentiate more than two values. The benefits of these extra letters can be easily seen when looking at Table 2 which shows a list of words in American

English whose only differing phoneme is the central vowel sound, with diphthongs also included.

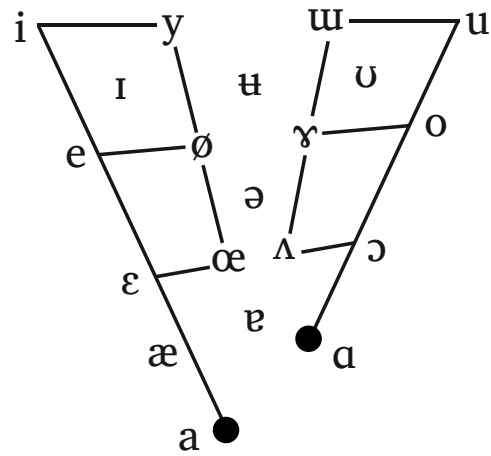


Figure 1. IPA Vowel Space

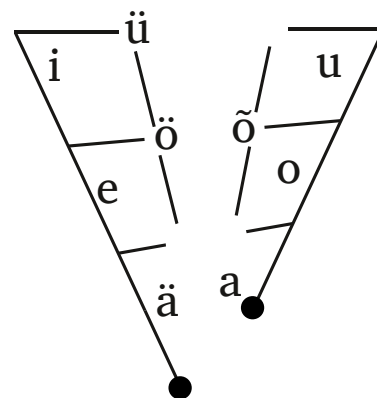


Figure 2. Estonian Latin Alphabet Vowel Space

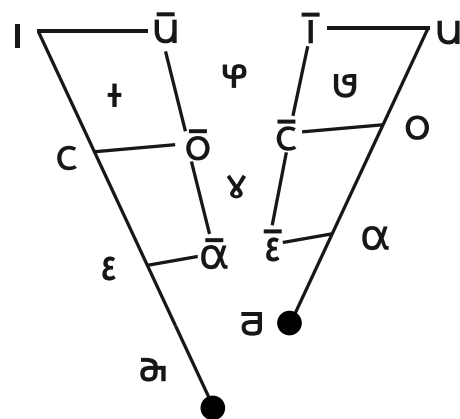


Figure 3. Letterform Vowel Space

Note: Vowels connected and at the same height are near variants that differ namely in rounding. With the right value being the rounded and the left the unrounded vowel.

lock	ΛαƷ	/lak/
lack	ΛαƷ	/læk/
look	ΛθƷ	/lʊk/
luke	ΛϕƷ	/lʉk/
luck	ΛʒƷ	/læk/
lick	Λ+Ʒ	/lik/
leak/leek	ΛlƷ	/lik/
like	ΛəϕƷ	/lajk/
lake	ΛcϕƷ	/lejk/
lurk	ΛrƷ	/lɜk/

Example 2. Comparison of the American English Latin Spellings with The Letterforms and IPA

Stepping away from phonology and towards the visual design of the letters is third design principle: all letters should be written with a single stroke. The visual design is of the foremost importance of any script as it is what truly separates a script as its own from others whom encompass the same sounds. It is what truly differentiates Latin from Cyrillic. In the Letterforms, by keeping every letter to a single stroke the letters are kept uncluttered and simple. Simple letters are clearer to the eye, thus easier to discern, and easier to write. Simplicity in design has been one of the hallmark for all European Scripts. While in The Letterforms some of the letters have features that will often have them written with two strokes they are designed insomuch that they can easily and cleanly be written with only one. This is setting aside diacritics which then could add another stroke. However, this just further shows the importance of maintaining single stroke letters so that even letters with diacritics are comprised of only two strokes.

Simplicity in design serves only so much as to promote the next principle: each letters should be visually distinct. Distinctiveness ensures each letter stands on its own and is not confused with another. This is best understood in the context of how the mind parses words. When words are found they are not sounded out or read letter by letter, instead by looking at the general shapes, lengths, and spacings an “imprint” of the word is pulled from our mental bank. As new words are encountered they are then slowly slowly parsed, and often sounded out, as the mental connection to an imprint is made. Again, words are differentiated by overall impressions and not so much the small individual components, hence why often spelling mistakes can be skimmed over as the mind filters past them. Thus to make words more differentiable its important to have more distinct letters that help them stand apart.

One effort to do so is ensuring that no letters are merely mirrored (like b & d) nor rotated (like b & q). This is evermore important in the modern era with the omnipresence of text, as it helps ensure that should text be mirrored or inverted its proper orientation can always be easily discerned. Furthermore, in guarding against less than optimal viewing conditions it also helps keep the letter shapes more distinct and thus combinations of letters more unique (notice the similarity of li & li). While some of the letters will be rooted in mirrored or rotated forms, as there are only so many simple shapes that can exist, they will then have additions or changes to make them visually unique. Another more subtle effort is to ensure that no letters are solely distinguished from the subtle curvature of a line. Meaning that if two letters are reduced to only straight lines they should remain distinct. While certainly the quality of a curved line is

useful and can bolster a letter's distinctiveness it should not be its sole identifier. Together these ensure that every letter has a truly unique feature and are not just differentiated by subtle nuance.

One of the more distinct features of the letters is their varied height. This ties into the next design principle: letter height being connected to the voicing or type of letter. This is a modern idea, originally inspired by Shavian Alphabet, which takes the randomly assigned heights of the letters and then builds regularity and meaning into them. Letter heights are important as they, like grammatical gender, allow for the large pool of letters to be quickly filtered down. Furthermore it also helps spread the encoding of information into various spots helping words to remain less visually cluttered, especially in the midline, and thus easier to read. In The Letterforms tall letters are unvoiced and deep letters are voiced. This reflects how voiced letters feel lower in a speaker's mouth (from the vocal cords) than their unvoiced counterpart. Central letters are either vowels or non-temporal consonants (those whose sound can be "held" indefinitely) since they are the center from which all words stem from. Semi-vowels (w and j/y) are both tall and deep, reflecting their place as truly neither a consonant nor vowel. Numbers are written as nearly the full size (same as semi-vowels) but are a little smaller so as not to reach the extremes which helps them be more distinguishable from letters and furthermore keeps them centered visually amongst the words. This consistency throughout, adds a further layer from which an intuition can be built of the letters and their values.

Knowing how beneficial varied letter height are, may make it seem intuitive to have a large variety of letter heights,

however this does not play well with reality. The distinguishability varied letter heights bring is not from letters being tall but from the height differences between them. As the nuance between the heights becomes smaller and smaller, as is often the case with small text, the distinctions between become indistinguishable. While certainly with large text the letters can visually support additional height gradients, in an effort of consistency The Letterforms are held to the lowest common denominator. Thus the letters were chosen to be of only three heights as only three to five being the most that can be visually distinguished with small lettering. This works especially well as diacritics are used in the script and thus with their addition it really makes the letters to be nearly five different heights.

To ensure that varied letter height is maintained throughout The Letterforms, capitals letters are forgone entirely. This also has the side benefit of simplifying the script by reducing the number of letters overall by quite a bit. For those whom have not made the connection yet, many of the uppercase letters are entirely different shapes than lowercase ones in The Latin Script. This makes them truly just additional letters that merely bear the same phonetic value (see g & G). This is not to say that capital letters do not play useful roles in writing. However, the benefits capitals bring are addressed in other ways (which are described further on in the chapter). While overall these various design strategies in isolation can be the sole differentiators of various letters, when all combined together the letters truly become each their own.

The next principle is to: try and maintain letters rooted in historical forms, with a distinctive edge. By keeping the letters somewhat connected to existing letter

forms it allows for these modified forms to be easily learned and accepted. Yet, it is important that these letters come as their own form so that they will not be generally be confused for those of other scripts, especially as some of the familiar shapes will bear entirely new sounds.

Many European languages have unique sounds, or unique phonemes, that are essential. While new letters could be designed to represent them, it is far more clever to utilize diacritics to handle these exceptional needs. Thus leads to the next design principle: building extensibility through diacritics. Overall, The Letterforms have two types of diacritics: those above the letters, which modify what is being said, and those below letters, modifying how it is being said. The two diacritics found above letters are the shiftbar and the softdot. The softdot either palatalizes a given consonant, as is needed in Slavic languages, or can mark subtle variation, like Danish's *stød*. The shiftbar however is a bit more broad and shows that a given letter will instead represent a somewhat related phoneme, thus shifting the value of the letter. So for vowels this ends up playing out as umlauts, with the contrasting values even shifted the same. While for vowels which letter exactly should be shifted to represent a given sound could be argued the other way (having rounded/unrounded variants using the same base), the difference truly is but a matter of preference. Thus in the sake of consistency and custom the Germanic system is continued. For consonants however, the shifted sounds can be quite a bit more varied. With the shiftbar, it prevents another swath of 30 odd letters from having to be added to cover these more rare sounds. On the other side, the main diacritic underneath letters is the stressdot. This is used to mark the stress of a syllable, which is used by some

languages to distinguish various meanings of a word. The key of all of this is flexibility.

It should be noted that often reforms like to utilize diacritics, namely a bar, to signal long vowels. This does provide compact notation, however does not work well for The Letterforms. Instead long vowels are represented by writing a given vowel twice. This prevents double diacritics, which are difficult to parse and are muddy with the varied letter heights, as well as providing a nice visual width to accentuate them from their short counterparts. Diphthongs are similarly represented by two vowels next to one another. While unique letters for the sounds again are popular for limited reforms, it does not work well for large vowel inventories covering a swath of diphthongs (such as in Finnish). While combined ligatures could be made to keep the vowels visually close to a single character width, this would just further complicate the writing overall for little benefit, especially regarding the complexity of diphthongs with semi-vowels like in English. While not perfect as having the two letters next to one another gives additional width, it is the simplest and clearest solution.

Continuing to the next design principle: maintain a level of consistency and visual appeal throughout. Each letter through its subtle shapes and forms must feel as if they are but a part of a unified whole. That the letters share common visual tropes. That the lines bear similar weights and rhythms. While this is something quite difficult to quantify, we hope it is felt throughout the designs.

The final principle is to: support the duodecimal system. Duodecimal (base 12) is superior to the decimal (base 10) number system and hence why major parts of our

lives still rely on it. Whether that be the twelve months in a year, 60 ($12 \cdot 5$) seconds in a minute, 24 ($12 \cdot 2$) hours in a day, or something other. Thorough discussion of the duodecimal system will occur in future publications. While the current paradigm of Arabic Numerals works quite well, their forms invalidate multiple of the design principles guiding The Letterforms. So by bringing new forms to the numbers they can be brought to fit into the larger schemes of The Letterforms, remain unique against the Arabic Numerals (where confusing the two could be deadly), and most critically support the duodecimal system. It should be said that while the number 10 does take two strokes, thus going against one of the design principles, this shape is acceptable for both its simplicity and long historical connection with the value.

Here to follow is The Letterforms presented in their entirety, in their official order. The letters are presented alongside the general equivalent IPA values. Due note however for every letter the exact phoneme may vary somewhat from the listed phonetic value. While this is a complete list of the unique values in The Letterforms, nearly every language's adaptation will only contain a subset with their relevant letters. Softdot variants are not listed as they are seen as a modification of an existing sound not a unique letter itself.

With the advent of The Letterforms, this provides the perfect opportunity to re-examine the other more fundamental parts of the alphabet: the names of letters and the order they are in. Since the times of the ancient scripts the order has remained in a generally undisturbed continued lineage with but subtle tweaks. Most likely because a new order, one of actual benefit, is not obvious, and thus the status quo continued.

Yet finally, here with The Letterforms, this chaotic ordering is brought to heel based on pronunciation. The letters are laid out in such a way so that movement is minimized and similarly articulated sounds lay next to one another and thus can be read in a rather smooth continuous stream from the front of the mouth to the rear. While this does make the differences phonetically between the letters far more nuanced in their order, it should matter little as the order is truly only used for organization. The order begins with vowels, starting with schwa (the most neutral vowel), as they are the nucleus of syllables and thus the roots of spoken language.

The other piece is the letter names. The naming of letters is an ancient tradition that was lost in the translation among scripts between cultures. Every letter is given two names, an informal (or common) name and a formal name. The informal one is the vowel as a pure sound or the consonant paired with a vowel that fits into a given language's phonology. These are minimal names that have existed in all languages and are the common basis for spelling words, and what we often think nowadays as the names of letters. These names may change a notable bit, depending on the language, so as that they better reflect the sound of the letter and that voiced/unvoiced pairs are more distinct from one another. The formal names are simple, short, common words that embody a literal thing or concept that begins, and ideally ends, with a given sound. These provide a far more robust pronunciation that also serve as a shared fallback should listening conditions or dialects be challenging. The formal names are grounded with things and concepts over the names of people as this is much more universal and consistent across the generations. Additionally, the formal

names were chosen so that similar (letter) sounds would have quite distinct words. Again, it should be noted that a given language's phonology will highly influence what is possible in the letter names. The revitalization of these formal letternames will also open new opportunities to artists paving the way for modern rune poems, worded playfulness, and new divinatory traditions. It should be said however, before misguided mystics tally forth, that the formal word choices are not and cannot be a summation to some divine whole. Every language has a specific phonology that changes across the generations. Thus the letters of a language now will not be the letters of a language in the future, nor has it been that of the past. Meaning, the formal words of a language will always vary from time to time and thus can never cover some "divine" whole. The choices for these formal names stem from a large range of areas so as to better represent the totality of life.

Returning to the topic of capital letters, they play quite useful roles that without which must now be fulfilled otherwise, namely: bringing emphasis, showing proper nouns, bringing distinctiveness to new sentences, and conveying tone (excitement/anger or sarcasm). For emphasis, there already exist a variety of options barely counting underlines, italics, and bolding so another is not needed. Proper nouns are addressed through namedots. These are placed before a proper noun, and also at the end of a proper noun sequence, ensuring that it is not mistaken. Namedots are required for proper nouns just as capitalization was. Distinctiveness of new sentences, and thus ideas, is linked with the "new period" of The Letterforms. Called the doubledot, as it is literally two dots, one after another. This is highly related to the "new comma" aka the singledot or just the dot. This connection

this quite accurately maps to how we interpret periods and commas being the difference in the length of pause, now also represented visually. Furthermore, the double dot is quite distinctive to the eyes and thus allows for new sentences to stand out amongst the various letters. Finally, tone bears another more notable shift. The Letterforms get an additional punctuation mark: the sarcasm mark. Sarcasm has been the most sought after tone that the Latin Script never received. Countless people have tried various techniques through the ages to try and convey it, but none fit quite so well, especially as word choice alone cannot convey it. This new mark fits well into the design among the existing question and exclamation marks, fulfilling a much needed gap. The curved s like nature of the mark matches quite well for both the new and old letter s as well as the back and forth nature of a sarcastic tone (at least in English). Another piece is the existence of flipped tone marks. While utilizing a sole tone mark at the end of a sentence conveys the tone to an extent, often these tones, when conveyed to a stronger degree would be carried throughout the sentence. As such, flipped tone marks can now be optionally added to the beginning of a sentence, pairing with the closing marks to convey a stronger form of a given tone. So a sentence with a sole question mark at the end would only be read as with the upward glide at the very end (in English), but a sentence with the beginning mark as well would carry the glide throughout.

Continuing with punctuation, many of these changes have been brought to bear a more balanced script and draw visual attention to what truly is important. Firstly, quotation marks have had their opening form lowered to the descender area to both help visually distinguish the opening and closing marks as well as to

scripts continue to be used in a plethora of non-digital domains and thus their consideration is worth thought. Thus to build a full writing system that can meet all of the possible needs, effort has gone forth into building The Letterforms, or variants thereof, to fit into various mediums while still retaining the original vision as is possible. The Letterforms overall were originally built for the pen in writing script. With the cursive variant liberties in the shape, and thus readability, are needed to truly bring it to form. However, much consideration was still had in keeping true to the original vision. The variant presented here is written with but straight lines, as they would be with pixel-art, segment displays, or carvings. This serves both as a further verification of the earlier principle, of ensuring the letters are distinguishable from more than subtle line curvatures, and a guide for how the letters should be represented in such contexts.

This is not to say digital representations fall to the wayside, it's quite the contrary. Digital representations make up most of the efforts in bringing these scripts to life and thus to the masses. Much of the difficulty lies in that the existent digital systems need entirely new paradigms for anything other than the Latin Script to function as a first class citizen. Building systems that truly support The Letterforms will require deep and complex dives tearing into most all of the fundamental technologies that are used globally. This is not a feasible pursuit unless the script reaches a critical mass for adoption. As such many of the digital tools, like fonts, utilize rather stopgap measures to balance convenience with correctness. As such things may appear incorrectly, be unimplemented, or just unconsidered, but will one day alas be made right.

The next section covers The Letterforms'

adoption into American English. This serves both as a valid proposal in which to improve the English Language, as well as a benchmark from which future reforms can use as reference. Every language will require great effort and careful consideration to bring a proposal forth that is not a translation of the words here in this document but takes the ideas forth into the framework of a language's culture. Each proposal not serving as an end for this new written language, but as a beginning. A commitment to the future as it must be guided to follow, albeit conservatively, the trends of the spoken tongue.

Overall, the vision of The Letterforms is quite ambitious, and even more so for languages without phonetic spelling. Whilst overall the changes may feel immense, they are best experienced in their totality and can be quite quickly picked up if one truly immerses themselves. In the end we hope that The Letterforms and the ideal they strive to pursue is reached, if even slightly imperfectly, as a step ever forth.

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The Letterforms handwritten in: print, straight-lines, and cursive

American English Proposal

This proposal covers bringing American English into The Letterforms. Whilst called American English, it truly is focused on the English of the Americas not just the United States. In general the dialects which make up the continent can be both quite similar and quite distinct. Thus overall the language and spellings will reflect that towards a central dialect with a strong leaning towards English from the United States due to the population differences. English's convoluted spelling is brought into The Letterforms through not just a one to one transliteration with these new letters but also an entire overhaul of the spelling. Do note all reforms continue on from the basic punctuation outlined in The Letterform section above.

One of the larger pieces in this effort is in re-germanization of English orthography so that it sits more inline with her sister tongues. Additionally, many quality of life changes have been made to better improve clarity and consistency. Part of this is with the reinforcement of the agglutination of

words. While this does exist in English, mainly for older words, this is now the expectation rather than the exception. Words are combined when they describe a single concept or thing compared to merely a description (f.ex. coffee table vs coffeetable, where the first implies a table of coffee while the latter a specific type of table).

Plurals and possessions have been filled out to match pronunciation result in five endings: -z (standard ending), -iz (word ends in s or z), -dz (word ends with a d), -s (word ends with a k), and -ts (word ends with a t). Its of note that there is no difference between the endings of plurals and possession, for as the apostrophe in this context has been removed so the suffix would merely be added to the end. Similarly, the apostrophe for contractions has also been removed entirely. Abbreviations are now marked with an old style period just at the end, and endings are added after that period. Abbreviations based on Latin have been removed (like e.g. & i.e.) and, for those specifically, as well as (ex.) should be replaced with f.ex. (for example) which matches the native speakers word choice for such situations. The only exception to this is etc. which has fully situated itself into the public consciousness.

Overall however, the grammar and punctuation remains largely the same. With generally, the words have merely been respelled to follow the trends of the spoken language. A full transliteration dictionary of all the new word spellings, compared to the old, can be found online (reformeuropa.net).

Listed are the Letterforms of American English. This is a subset of the overall Letterforms to only encompass the sounds found in the language. Additionally, this

The American English Letterforms

Letter	IPA	Common Name	Formal Name	
ʌ	/ə/	ʌʌ	ʌḥ	oat
o	/o/	oo	oḥ	old
ə	/a/	əə	əḥ	art
ə	/æ/	əə	əḥ	ash
c	/e/	cc	cḥ	elk
t	/i/	tt	tḥ	ill
i	/i/	ii	iḥ	eve
ʋ	/tʃ/	ʋʋ	ʋḥ	goose
u	/u/	uu	uḥ	fool
ʊ	/ʊ/	ʊʊ	ʊḥ	book

Letter	IPA	Common Name	Formal Name	
m	/m/	mi	MCYN	man
n	/n/	ni	NYN	noon
ñ	/ŋ/	iñ	Yñ	king
p	/p/	Pi	Pal	pot
ḅ	/b/	ḅi	ḅiḥ	beer
l	/t/	li	lḥ	tide
ḁ	/d/	ḁi	ḁḥ	day
ʎ	/k/	ʎi	ʎi	key
ɣ	/g/	ɣi	ɣḥ	gift
ʼ	/ʀ/	iʼ	ḅʼN	button
ʀ	/ts/	iʀ	Yḁʀ	cats
ʒ	/dz/	iʒ	ʌCYNʒ	lands
ʎ	/tʃ/	ʎi	ʎḥ	church
ʝ	/dʒ/	ʝi	ʝḥ	judge
ʒ	/s/	ʒi	ʒiḥ	stone
ʒ	/z/	ʒi	ʒiḥ	zero
ḡ	/ʃ/	iḡ	ḡḥ	shine
ɥ	/ʒ/	ɥi	tʌʋɥtN	illusion
ʀ	/f/	ʀi	ʀḥ	fire
ʀ	/v/	ʀi	ʀḁ	valley
ʀ	/θ/	ʀi	ʀoɣN	thorn
ʀ	/ð/	ʀi	ʀḥ	weather
ʀ	/h/	ʀi	ʀḁ	hill
ʀ	/ɹ/, /ə-/	ʀi	ʀḥ	rain
ʀ	/j/	ʀi	ʀiḥ	year
ʀ	/w/	ʀi	ʀḥ	wealth
ʀ	/l/, /ʌ/	ʀi	ʌḥ	lake