

**Heart of the Brush**  
**An Online East Asian Calligraphy Workshop**  
**Taught by Kazuaki Tanahashi**

**Lesson One: Welcome and Basic Strokes**

**KAZ:** Welcome to the online workshop, “Heart of the Brush.” My name is Kazuaki Tanahashi. I will be your calligraphy instructor. You don’t need to have any previous experience of calligraphy or know any East-Asian language, such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese. It takes years of practice to be a good calligrapher, but at this workshop, you can experience a beginning and, at the same time, an advanced study of East Asian calligraphy. And you can enjoy drawing lines!

First, I will explain the materials you need and show you some basic, standard brush movements. Then at each session, we’ll make a close study of a sample from an ancient Chinese masterpiece. After that, I will ask two calligraphy friends of mine to draw beginner’s lines. These friends will represent some of you who are just starting. Close to the end of each session, I will ask other calligraphy friends to talk about their own experience of studying East Asian calligraphy, as people living in the West. Finally, I will give you homework. Shall we begin?

You can start with a minimum set of materials and tools. You’re going to need a brush, ink, an ink container and paper, along with table space and a chair. Regular, letter-sized or A5 computer paper works very well. You might also get a paperweight<sup>02:00</sup> to put at the top or bottom of your page.

To prepare the brush, gently soften the bristle with your fingers. Squeeze the bristle all the way to its base; dip the bristle fully into the ink, until the base is soft and wet. Remove extra ink by pressing the edge of the ink container while pulling the brush straight, then rotate the brush and pull it straight to remove more ink. Repeat this motion over ten times, so the bristle becomes straight and pointed with the appropriate amount of ink.

When holding the brush, keep it fairly straight up. Make an effort to avoid leaning it toward you like a pen. Hold the shaft between your middle and ring fingers and place your thumb about one third of the way from the bottom. Keep the wrists straight so the thumb line is horizontal.

To move the brush, keep your elbow away from the table, a few inches from your torso. Move the brush side to side, toward and away from your body, and up and down using your entire arm. Do not manipulate the brush with your fingers or rotate the brush while drawing. If you are left handed, move the paper a few inches to the left so you can see the tip of the brush. Still, keep the paper at the right angle. All the brush movements, including the directions of the brush, are the same as those of right-handers.

Now, let’s start drawing ideographs. First, we’ll learn two basic horizontal strokes.

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**VOICEOVER:** Regular horizontal stroke.<sup>04:00</sup>

**KAZ:** This is the actual stroke. This shows how the brush moves.

**VOICEOVER:** Curved-up horizontal stroke.

**KAZ:** This is the actual stroke. This shows how the brush moves.<sup>06:00</sup>

Now we are ready to draw the ideograph “Two,” which consists of two types of strokes we have learned.

**VOICEOVER:** Two. Chinese: *èr*. Japanese: *ni, futatsu*. Korean: *i*. Vietnamese: *nhi*. Two, formal script. Artist: Zhi Yong.

(painting)

**VOICEOVER:** Stroke analysis.

**KAZ:** The horizontal stroke always goes from the left to the right, so that, actually, the brush comes in in the air from the other side. This happens all the time, always from the other side. The dots mean that the brush is moving in the air, and they’re making first touchdown, and this has a dewdrop shape.<sup>08:00</sup>

So it will be useful to practice many times. Not kind of straight down, but just in a diagonal way, but also the direction. Four-thirty direction, and then dewdrop, and then moving to another direction, slightly coming up and then another dewdrop here. So the brush movement is something like this and then going back. To do that, you need to move the tip of the brush away from you and then press down again. So you move the tip of the brush between the space and then draw apart. One, two, three. The second stroke is similar, except it’s a bit thinner, in a narrow way, but dewdrop shape, moving to another direction, coming down a little bit this way.

So we have done the standard, basic strokes, and this is a close study of an ancient masterpiece, so it’s different. The standard way is more like this: we are beginning, lift the brush, go down away from you,<sup>10:00</sup> rest the brush—not pulling to yourself, just rest the brush—go back.

So this is the standard way, and now our close study of the sample is slightly different. The beginning is fairly gentle. Still, you start with a dewdrop shape, subtle, and then move to another direction, do it slightly upward and slightly downward, and then another dewdrop back. This is a close study of the master sample. Remember to stay true to the form when you draw.

**VOICEOVER:** Kaz works with Bennie.

**KAZ:** Okay. I think if you would hold the brush more straight up like this and perhaps in between two fingers—the first two fingers away from you—and then the last two

fingers close to this. The pipe should be fairly close to the tips of the fingers and then the thumb could be about one-third from the bottom of the pipe. So I think this is good, and then you move the brush this way and maybe have your elbow a little bit lower. I think it's very good, yeah. So would you like to try doing a close study of the ideograph "Two"?<sup>12:00</sup>

You could go a little bit more slowly, and also, enter . . . make a dewdrop, kind of like this. Dewdrops are important; try to do it many times. Now, you try to cover up a little bit. Make the line a little bit wider and then shorter. Good. And then how about doing the second line. Narrower. Okay, that's good to begin with.

**VOICEOVER:** Phuong paints, round one.

(painting)

**VOICEOVER:** Kaz makes comments on Phuong's painting, round one.

**KAZ:** I think the proportion, the length, and then the distance between the lines are good. Both lines are going up<sup>14:00</sup> a little bit—that is good. This beginning is nice. The top part can curve up a little bit and then end with a dewdrop, like this. So it comes in like this and then you curve up a little bit and then dewdrop like this. And the second stroke is very good here and then curve down here and then a dewdrop this way. One, two, three. One, two, three. Please try this.

**VOICEOVER:** Phuong paints, round two.

(painting)

**VOICEOVER:** Kaz makes comments on Phuong's painting, round two.

**KAZ:** Okay. I think this is good, you know, the beginning dewdrop, here and here, ending, so both really good. A little bit more gentle way of kind of entering,<sup>16:00</sup> curve up and then do this and then don't pull. You may have pulled this a little bit, but when you press down, you just lift the brush and then come this so that this doesn't show, this kind of dog bone shape. And then you can kind of slide back, but maybe stay on this line.

**VOICEOVER:** Philosophy.

**KAZ:** In East Asian calligraphy, you need to focus each point; each part of the line, you need to focus. To focus well, you need to be relaxed. Smiling will help. Just kind of easy on your shoulders and just enjoy—enjoy the process of drawing a line. It's so wonderful that we are here, you are there, and then we are breathing, and then we are drawing lines. It's such a wonderful gift. So we could enjoy this gift at each moment. Relaxation is important. If you are so tense, try to smile and relax.<sup>18:00</sup>

**PERSON 1:** I do calligraphy for so many reasons.

**PERSON 2:** It really calms me down and helps me focus.

**PERSON 3:** I do calligraphy because it's fun.

**PERSON 4:** There's a sense of pleasure about it.

**PERSON 5:** I like the feel of the brush in my hand.

**PERSON 1:** It allows me to appreciate great beauty in every moment.

**PERSON 6:** Slowly, I got drawn in by the magic.

**PERSON 7:** Much to my surprise, I just fell in love with it.

**PERSON 8:** It's a good practice of cultivating courage in the face of non-readiness.

**PERSON 9:** It gives an avenue for a type of creative expression that I haven't found in any other type of medium.

**PERSON 2:** You really learn to play with a brush in a whole new way.

**PERSON 3:** How to compare it to anything, really?

**PERSON 4:** The practice of calligraphy becomes a way of living.

**PERSON 5:** Why not?

**KAZ:** For homework, practice making dewdrops. See if you can make one hundred dewdrops. Also, do a close study of the ideograph "Two." Try to make your work as close to the classical sample as you can. You can draw the character twice on a vertical sheet of paper. If you like, you can also draw the character "One," which is a bottom stroke of the character "Two," and you can add another, shorter line between the two strokes of the ideograph "Two" to make the character "Three."

This concludes the first session of the online course, "Heart of the Brush." I hope you have enjoyed your brushwork. See you soon.