

# Old German Handwriting

Karynne Moses •mosesgenealogy@gmail.com•mosesgen.com

**Fraktur**- the German print. It is uniform, but there are subtle nuances to look out for to ensure success in reading Fraktur. This would be seen in newspaper articles, printed books, headings of church records, and civil registration records. There are also several variations of the Fraktur font. Two examples are shown below:

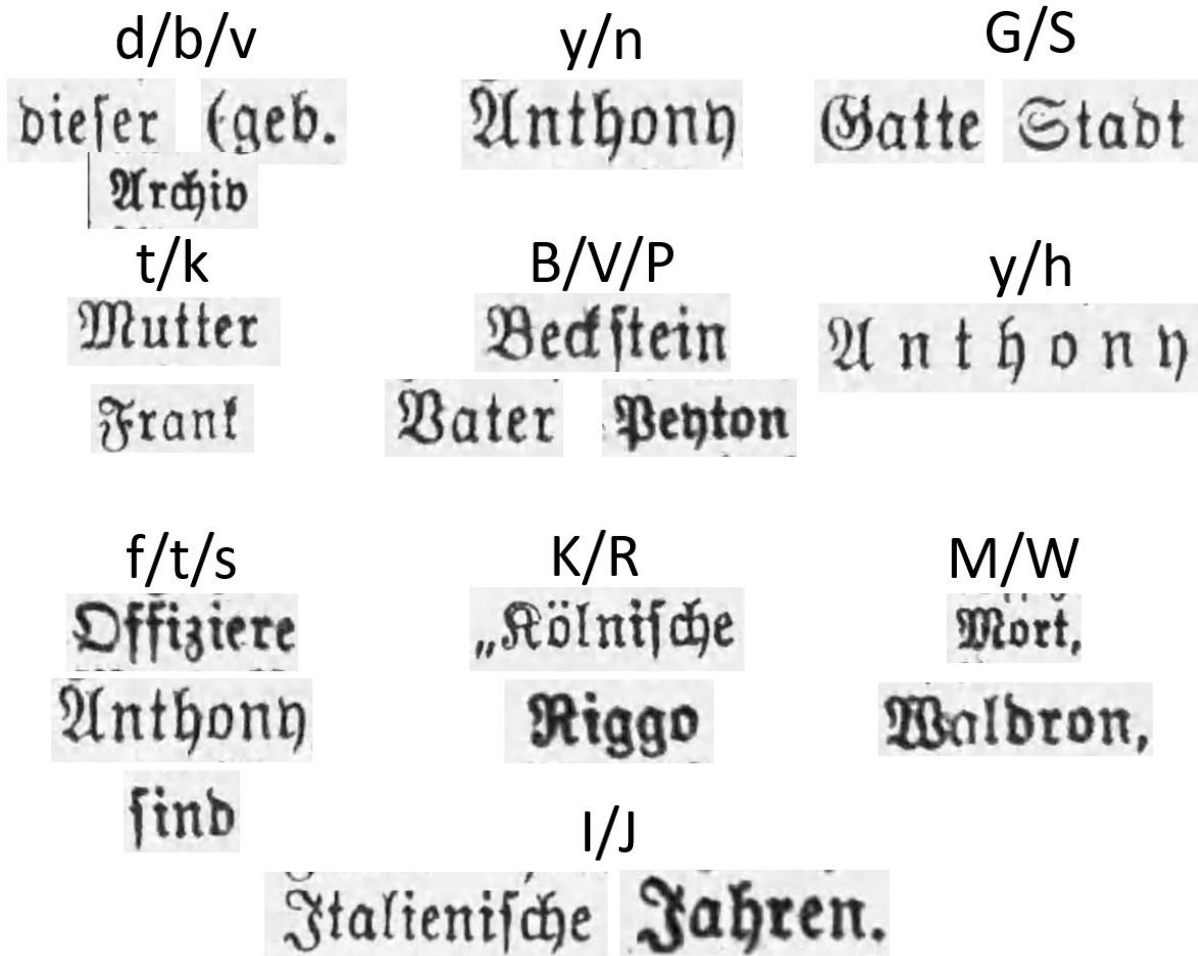
## Breitkopf Fraktur

A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	F f	G g	H h
I i	J j	K k	L l	M m	N n	O o	P p
Q q	R r	S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	X x
Y y	Z z	Ä ä	Ö ö	Ü ü	ch	ck	tz
ß	ſſ	ſ	s	ſt	fl	ff	ſi
ß	ss	beginning & middle s	final s	si	fl	ff	si

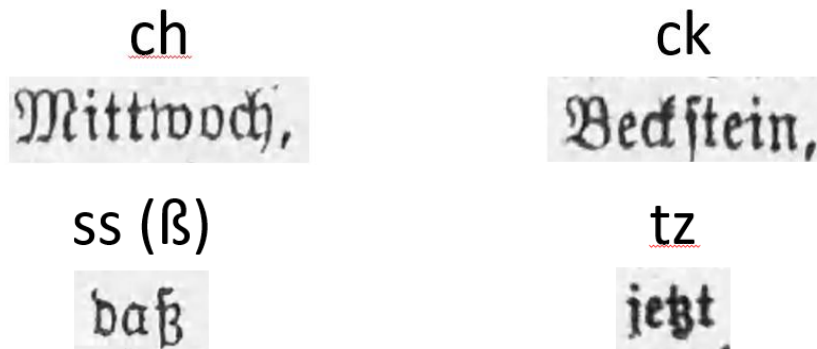
## Breitkopf Fraktur

A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	F f	G g	H h
I i	J j	K k	L l	M m	N n	O o	P p
Q q	R r	S s	T t	U u	V v	W w	X x
Y y	Z z	Ä ä	Ö ö	Ü ü	ch	ck	tz
ß	ſſ	ſ	s	ſt	fl	ff	ſi
ß	ss	beginning & middle s	final s	si	fl	ff	si

There are several **easily-confused characters** in the Fraktur font. Examples of some are shown below:



Here are the **attached letters**:





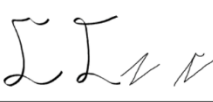
















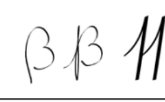

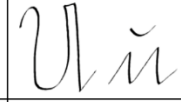






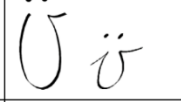

Samples from p. 1, *Der Buffalo Demokrat*, Buffalo, Erie, New York, Year 79, Nr. 57, 27 January 1916, p. 1, digital image, *Newspapers* ([https://www.newspapers.com/image/975780949/?match=1&clipping\\_id=new](https://www.newspapers.com/image/975780949/?match=1&clipping_id=new) : accessed 20 March 2025).

**Tips:**

- Before reading a paragraph in Fraktur, study the sample alphabets, so you know which letters might trip you up. That way, when something doesn't make sense in the translation app, you know which letters may have gotten mixed up!
- Look for surrounding words to decipher difficult letters.

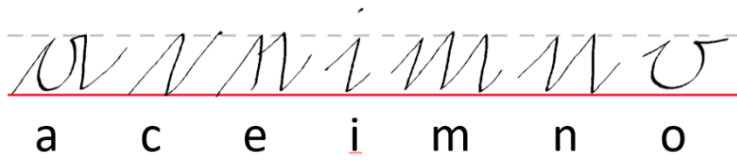
**Old German Handwriting** – There were several changes to the handwriting over time, and each individual had their own style or lack thereof. It can be quite difficult to decipher, but these resources will help you to have success!

**Old German Script**

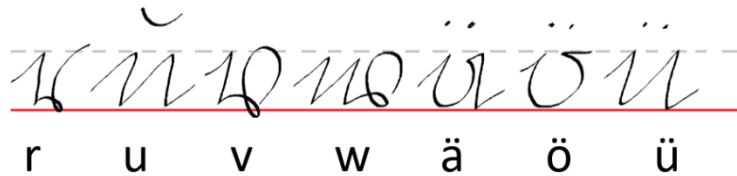
					
A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	F f
					
G g	H h	I i	J j	K k	L l
					
M m	N n	O o	P p	Q q	R r
					
S s	ß ss	T t	U u	V v	W w
					
X x	Y y	Z z	Ä ä	Ö ö	Ü ü

**Letter Groupings** are essential when you can't tell what a letter is. You can narrow it down by imagining the word written on "kindergarten paper." Depending on the location of the letters in respect to the midline, baseline, and topline, you can narrow it down.

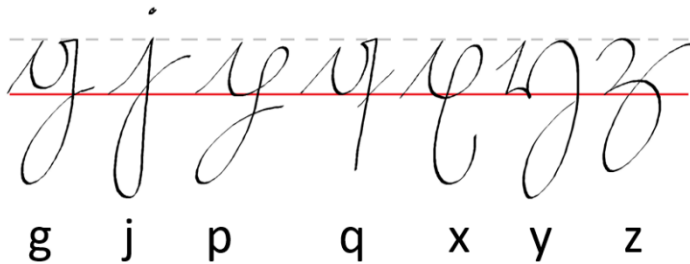
### Baseline to Midline



Exceptions: Sometimes the loop at the end of “v” and “w” may extend much higher than the other letters in this grouping.

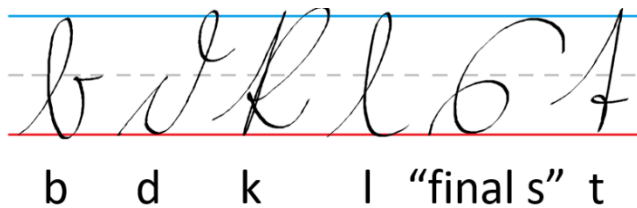


### Below Baseline



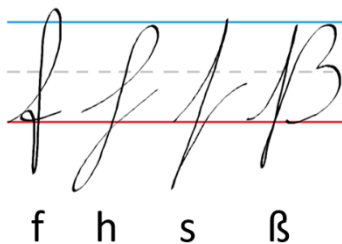
Note: “q” is very rare in German.

### Baseline to Topline



Note: The letter “k” has many drastic variations, so if something looks completely out of place, it could be a “k.”


### Below Baseline to Topline




Note: These letters sometimes interfere with the words below them, so if something just doesn’t add up, check if one of these letters is crossing over what you’re trying to read. Then, “think away” the extra lines.

**Special Letters-** Some letters don't like to play by the rules. Others have several variations.



beginning or middle of a word



end of a word, including middle of a compound word



double s

S-zet







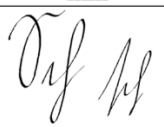
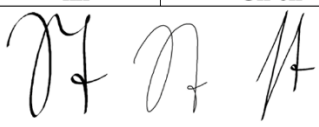



*trin* *lymbfren* *lynnn* *Großvater*

s- There are three main variations of "s," four if you count the double s. "s" is written differently, depending on where it is found in a word.










u- Lowercase "u" is identical to lowercase "n," except it has a distinct swoosh above it called the "u – loop." Use this to distinguish between the two. It can be especially helpful in words that have several baseline-to-midline letters in a row.

**Attached Letters-** Some Letters are always attached. In the "sch" combination, "c" may not be visible, but it should always be added when translating the word. Double "m" and "n" can be shown as two separate letters or just one with a horizontal line above it.

					
mm	nn	Ch ch	Ck	ck	tz
					
Sch sch	St st		fl	ff	schl

**Capital Letters** do not like to play by the rules and are often found with several variations.

Ä  
Ö  
Ü  
ä  
ö  
ü  
y

**Umlauts** are another way to help you distinguish baseline-to-midline letters from each other, because there are only three regularly umlauted letters: ä, ö, and ü. An umlaut can also be written out as "ae," "oe," or "ue." As an exception, "y" will also sometimes have an umlaut.

### Additional Resources

- Gutzwiller, Hellmut. Die Entwicklung der Schrift in der Neuzeit. (n.p.: Böhlau Verlag, 1992, republished online, Archiv für Diplomatik, Vol.38, No. JG, January 2019).

## Old German Handwriting Handout by Karynne Moses

- Minert, Roger P. Deciphering Handwriting in German Documents 2nd Edition (Provo, Utah: GRT Publications, 2013).
- Schober, Katherine. Tips and Tricks of Deciphering German Handwriting. (n.p.: Katherine Schober, 2018).
- Smith, Kenneth L. German Church Books: Beyond the Basics (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1989), 171-97.
- Thode, Ernest. German-English Genealogical Dictionary. Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992. (FHL book 433.21 T352g 1992.)
- Family Search Wiki [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Genealogy](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Genealogy)
- Family Search Wiki - German Handwriting [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany\\_Handwriting](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Germany_Handwriting)
- Sütterlin Handwriting <http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Sutterlin.htm>  
<http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Lese/Kanzlei1.htm>
- German handwritten and Fraktur script generator <http://www.deutsche-handschrift.de/adsschreiben.php#schriftfeld>
- FamilySearch Community – German Group <https://community.familysearch.org/en/group/88-germany-research>
- Fraktur Generator – <https://www.waldenfont.com/GutenbergPress.asp>
- Facebook – German Handwriting <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1454015278205406>