

# STENOGRAPHY AND TACHYGRAPHY

**ΣΤΕΝΌΣ** = *narrow, tight, concise, compact ...*

**ΤΑΧΌΣ** = *fast, swift, speedy...*

**ΓΡΑΦΗ** = *spelling, writing...*

**STENOGRAPHY – John Willis – 1602**

**TACHYGRAPHY – Thomas Shelton – 1641**



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# STENOGRAPHY AND TACHYGRAPHY

By: Waldir Cury

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The art of writing swiftly through abbreviated signs was called, along its history, by many names.

In the beginning, in the first century B.C., shorthand was known as "Notae", a Latin plural word, meaning "notes, abbreviations" – and by extension: "abbreviated writing".

The "Notae" were used officially for the first time at the Roman Senate, in 63 B.C., to write down the speeches and debates of senators.

The stenographer received the name of "notary" (notarius) that is, the one who wrote through "notes", "abbreviations". Subsequently, the word "notary" no longer meant "stenographer" and started to have the meaning we know today: "a person responsible for the preparation of public documents; notary public".



Johannes Trithemius

In the 15th century, when the German Benedictine monk Johannes Trithemius (the Trithemius) rediscovered "the shorthand of the Romans" he added an adjective to

the "Notae", calling them "Notae Tironianae" that is, "Tironian Notes" or "Tironian Abbreviations".

The term "tironian" comes from "Tiro", referring to Marcus Tullius Tiro who was the inventor of the first organized shorthand system.

With the decline of the Roman Empire, the "Notae" also began to fall into disuse and, in the 11th century, it disappeared completely from the public life.

Then, in the 16th century, the art of shorthand came back to life in England.

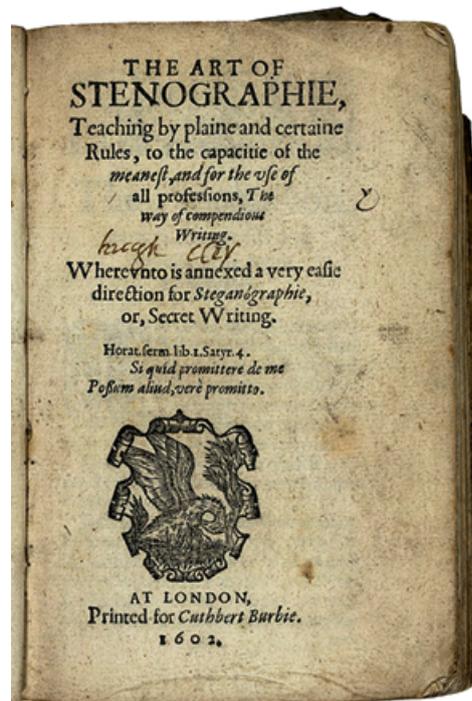
The establishment of parliaments and courts of justice, as well as the political, religious, literary and philosophical discussions activated the need for a graphical tool to collect and forever register the effervescent oral expression of life regarding the new Society.

Hence, a number of shorthand systems started to be devised and published under different names.

The rebirth of shorthand started in 1588, when Timothy Bright, a doctor and Anglican priest, launched a shorthand system with the title: "Characterie, an art of short swift and secret writing by characters".

There are two very interesting facts associated with "Characterie". It was a system widely used for "secret writing", defining, so to speak, what the author wanted to establish when writing the title of his work: "...secret writing by characters...".

And yet, according to some scholars, Timothy Bright's shorthand system seems to have been used to "hack" Shakespeare's plays, at a time when there was still no "copyright". Stenographers would attend the Shakespeare's plays, write the dialog in shorthand surreptitiously, and then reproduce the text and sell it.



In 1602, the bachelor in theology, John Willis, published in London a system of abbreviated writing with the original title: "The Art of Stenographie ...". For the first time, in the secular history of shorthand, the term "Stenography" was used. John Willis resorted to the Greek prefix "Stenos" (short, narrow, tight, concise, abbreviated) to express the content of his work: "The Art of Concise Writing..."

After John Willis, many other shorthand systems were invented and published under different names: Brachygraphie, Swift Writing, Short Writing, etc.

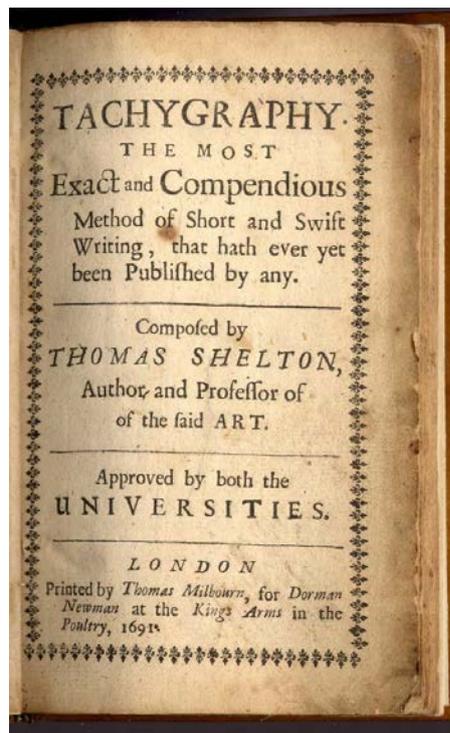


In 1641, Thomas Shelton published his work under the title "Tachygraphy: The most Exact and Compendious Method of Short and Swift Writing, that hath ever yet been published by any".

No author had hitherto used the term "tachygraphy". Thomas Shelton himself had already released, as of 1626, other editions of his book, without mentioning the term "tachygraphy".

Only after the 1641 edition, Thomas Shelton started using the Greek prefix "tachy" (fast, swift), to make the graphic system designed by him very clear: to be a "Tachy-(ortho)graphy", a "fast (ortho)graphy"!

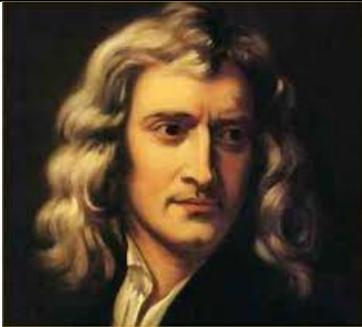
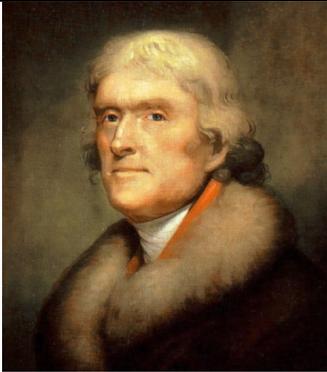
Regarding the prefix "tachy", it is worth mentioning the well-known use in the word: "tachycardia" - "fast heart".



Thomas Shelton's shorthand system was a success and had several editions. Between 1626 and 1710 there were at least 22 editions.

An adaptation to Thomas Shelton's system was translated into Latin in 1660, with the title "Tachy-graphia, sive exactissima et compendiosissima breviter scribendi methodus".

Shelton's system was learned and used by Isaac Newton,  
by Samuel Pepys in his famous "Diary",  
and by the American President Thomas Jefferson.

		
Isaac Newton	Samuel Pepys	Thomas Jefferson

A noteworthy fact is that, nowadays, both in England and in other English-speaking countries, the term "tachygraphy" is no longer used. The terms "stenography" (often abbreviated to "steno") and "shorthand" prevail, the latter being the most commonly used. The common writing, in contrast, is called "longhand".

Countries that use the Cyrillic alphabet, like Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, etc., use the term Стенография (stenography) (pronunciation: (s/teno/grá/fia).

Furthermore, the words "stenography" and "tachygraphy" that were created by John Willis (in 1602) and Thomas Shelton (in 1641), eventually had a wide use in Neo-Latin languages, such as Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French. Italians use the term "stenografia"; the French, "sténographie"; Spaniards, "taquigrafia" and "estenografia".

In Brazil, like the Spaniards, we use both words: "estenografia" and "taquigrafia" (stenography and tachygraphy).

A few years ago, in Brazil, a distinction was made between stenography and tachygraphy. A stenographer was the one who could write at a speed of up to 80 words per minute. And a tachygrapher (therefore having a higher level) was the one who had a speed over 80 words per minute. This distinction was made because there was the "stenotypist", a professional who was widely used in business companies as well as in

other branches of professional activities. In general, the function of a stenotypist was to write down letters dictated by a company executive in shorthand and this did not require the person to have great speed.

The tachygraphers, being faster and more proficient, worked in the Legislative and Judiciary bodies, writing speeches and debates in shorthand.

There were authors who proposed the term “stenotachygraphy”. They based themselves on the need to better define the concepts. According to these authors, “tachygraphy” means, as per the etymology, “fast writing”. Well, anyone can “write quickly” even when using the “longhand”/orthography too. On the other hand, “stenography”, “writing made by signs” does not necessarily imply quickness. This is why authors such as the Catalan Delfí Dalmau, in his book entitled “International Shorthand” (1963) and Dr. Nelson de Sousa Oliveira (Bahia, Brazil – 1930), proposed the term “stenotachygraphy”. It is worth mentioning that, in 1875, August Lehmann (from Berlin) had already proposed this term “Stenotachygraphie”. So, as you can see, it is not actually a “new term”.

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