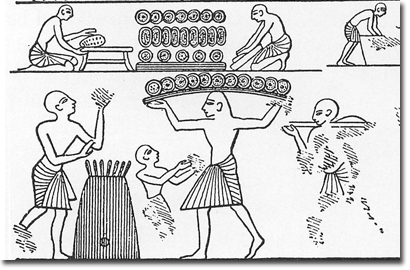
**Education**

**Introduction**

Learning in Ancient Egypt was not so much to progress the civilization, as this culture was satisfied with remaining constant in all elements in life, but a way to live. In other words, how an Ancient Egyptian lived depended on what he or she knew: the more learned a person was, the higher up he was on the social ladder and to a certain extent, the better his quality of life. Learning was the difference between rich and poor.

Similar to modern times, informal education in Ancient Egypt began in the home: common and royal parents, both mother and father, taught their children the basics of functioning in the real world; educational and ethical principles; views and ideas about life, religion, and work; moral attitudes; correct behavior towards others and supernatural beings; folk rituals; and manners. Additionally, children could help their parents around the house in gathering and winnowing corn, tending to poultry and cattle, or assisting in fishing and boatmen activities such as making nets or preparing fish.



Bakery workers making animal and spiral shaped bread. Notice the young man (perhaps an apprentice) helping the adults. From the tomb of Rameses III in the Valley of the Kings - Dynasty XX.

On the other hand, the mother had little to do with her child's education other than to get them into a school if one was available (and it was because of this for which children gave their mothers great honor), sending them off with a nice basket lunch of two or three bread cakes and two jars of beer; if they were of high rank, though peasant boys had some opportunity; or if their child showed promise. Children of common birth spent their first few years of life with their mother, learning how to take care of themselves and their personal space.

Unlike the mother, the father was in charge of his children's--more specifically, his son's--education. If a father did not have a son, the family might adopt a boy to ensure that he would inherit the family property, be there to provide funerary attentions on his parents when they died, and most importantly keep the family business going by following the father's profession.



The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, the epitome of hereditary careers, where the trade of the father becomes that of the son. In this case, the prince becomes king after his father dies. From the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings.

Generally speaking, Ancient Egyptian education beyond the home was essentially vocational, training for a variety of trades and crafts. In this way, continuity, craft secrets, and special advantages, if any, were preserved within a family specializing in a particular trade. Evidence has shown that at the end of the Middle Kingdom and during the Ramesside Period, there developed vocational "dynasties," where jobs such as vizier and supreme priest of Amun were passed on from father to son. The son was his father's assistant in priestly matters.

A commoner's son's education was not had in a school because formal education was too expensive, but wherever the father worked--at home or otherwise. After four or five years of age, boys would learn the trade of and be apprentice to their fathers where they learned specific skills, tricks of the trade, and techniques of craftsmanship. Illustrations on tomb and temple walls show children working as apprentices of lesser trades: one might find a boy handing a leg of meat to a butcher, another may exemplify a boy helping smooth out a ceramic vessel, and still another might show a boy playing among adult musicians. However, illustrations of children working as apprentices to craftsmen of ceramics, faience, metalwork, sculpture, and painting are very rare.

On rare occasions, if the commoner child was fortunate enough to live in a town that provided a school and if the family had the means to pay for his education, then that child could attend that school, which mostly likely provided a basic education only. Dreaming big was not limited to royal children; some children from the poorer classes might have dreamed of going to scribal school to become a scribe. Despite this deviation, such a trade was aimed mainly at children from the higher classes; it was more typical for a peasant child to follow in his father's footsteps. For example, a farmer's son learned those skills needed to work on the farm and received little or no formal education, becoming his father's apprentice around fourteen years old.

If a child was of royal background, its first years of life until the age of four or five would consist of a similar process of that of a common child: mom would teach him or her basics to function both in and out of the home. When this basic education was exhausted, the child would enter formal education at home with a tutor rather than with his father and/or at a Memphis or Theban temple (a sort of boarding school), overlooked by a priest or scribe who would teach them any combination of the following subjects: astronomy, ethics, literature, manners, mathematics, moral values, science, and writing. Students also engaged in the following extracurricular activities: archery, hunting, swimming, and wrestling.

Education for girls was limiting--specifically girls of common background: they could pursue the trade of their mothers, which consisted of household duties as well as any other profession she held outside the house, which might be a professional weaver, mourner, dancer, acrobat, musician, or singer; a clothing or perfume maker; a gardener; a servant or nanny in a nobleman's household; a seller of trinkets or of pottery; or even overseeing farm work (when the husband was away). Another profession held by women that daughters could also follow was that of priestess, but only noblewomen were allowed this opportunity. Despite the lack of career and schooling opportunities for royal girls and according to one account, they could learn to read and write and could be taught to manage the estate. Some might have also been medically trained and those who were apprentice weavers might have been sent to be taught and assessed by a master of the trade, typically a colleague, who had to reimburse the family if the girl did not pass the test.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Higher Education**

A boy the age of nine or ten--according to one account, sixteen--could further his studies, which might have included any combination of the following subjects, from which he might choose a few in which to specialize: accounting, astronomy, engineering, geography, history, languages, literature, math, medicine, religion, or surveying. Students with little means wanting to pursue higher education might try to find a benefactor to help him pay for his education. Generally speaking, higher education was obtained through the process of work, acquiring new skills through working and developing the skills he already possessed.

Although there was no such thing as a university in Ancient Egypt, there was a building at Akhetaten that was dedicated to educating priests of the new religion. It had by no means the same functions as a modern university, where students choose a major or minor area of study, complete required courses, graduate, and then find a job related to their degree.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**The Student Body**

The educational experience consisted mainly of boys and men, with few girls and women in attendance.

Scribes, students, and professionals were typically male and aged five to ten years old. If a woman was described as a scribed, she was the mistress' beautician/make-up artist and not a recorder of official documents, inventory, and the like.

Despite the lack of women in this field of study, there is evidence that women of high social status could indeed read and/or write, educated to support their nobility. Messages written on ostraca and text written on tomb walls in Deir el-Medina suggest this. A letter dated to Dynasty 19 and written by a father to his son advises that the latter visit and have the daughter of Khonsumose write a letter to him. From other letters written on ostraca one learns that women wrote to other women, concerning feminine issues; therefore it was unlikely that a male scribe wrote these letters for women. Tomb paintings evince that royal women possessed scribal equipment: a palette, ink, reed pen, and papyrus roll.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Discipline**

School teachers--that is priests, scribes, and persons learned in a particular subject--employed corporal punishment (a rod to the back) when a student became unruly, did not listen or do his work properly, talked, worked slowly, was lazy, or engaged in other disrespectful and careless activities. The Ancient Egyptians believed that a child's ears were on his back; he listened when he was beaten. Beatings in Egypt were a common disciplinary practice: floggings were a part of a peasant's life, overseers hit their servants, police suspects, and tax collectors tax delinquents. This mind set came as a result of their process of taming animals: if an animal can be tamed and put into its place by beating it, then the same can be achieved if one beats a student. Another, less harsh, disciplinary tactic was for the teacher to remind student-scribes that the hard work they were doing to become a scribe was worth every minute of sitting crossed legged on the floor, at the teacher's feet, and bent over a school slate--this compared to working as a coppersmith, stone mason, soldier, farmer, or gardener. Ironically, the Ancient Egyptian word for "teacher," those who carried out punishment, was also the word for "to punish" or "discipline." Who better to punish than a person whose profession means that action?

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Curriculum and Subjects**

The typical school day, according to one Middle Kingdom source, took up most of the day, starting from early morning to noon.

Sons of kings followed a schooling agenda that prepared them for their future on the throne. Princes studied under a tutor, most likely a priest or a scribe, and studied the following subjects: reading, writing, math, astronomy, architecture, and other arts and sciences. When his preliminary studies were exhausted, the prince became apprentice to an army officer as training for future campaigning, studying in company with sons of noblemen and foreign princes come to Egypt to be educated. After this, the prince accompanied his father on campaigns and hunting excursions to acquire experience.

If one was not destined to be king, one followed a slightly different schooling agenda, with undertones similar to a prince's education. Although education was limited to children from the higher echelons of society, sons of peasant farmers with great ambition might have the opportunity to go to school, especially if there was a school in town or if the local nomarch or vizier thought the child was a promising candidate for the rigorous training he would receive in school.

The profession a child was going to pursue indicated what subject(s) he would follow, which included scribal studies--reading, writing, literature, and math--as a foundation. Children learned math if they were going to be tax collectors; math and engineering if engineers of the home civil service; math, astronomy, geography, and surveying if an architect; foreign languages and history if a scribe or future official of the diplomatic services; religion, magic, anatomy, and botany if a doctor; law if a lawyer; account-keeping if an accountant; and magic and religion if a priest.

Much was learned by rote--memorization, repetition, and recitations. All subjects, namely writing, calculating, and accounting, were acquired through practical and individual application. In this way, students would not only become well educated persons, but also come to appreciate their culture and its values in the process.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

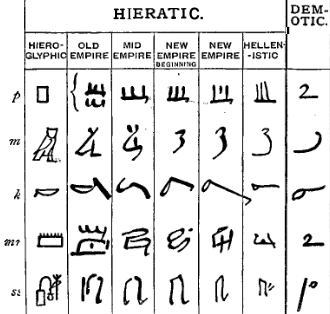
***Reading and Writing***

Approximately one per cent of Ancient Egyptians could read and write. Royal children at four years old, especially those who were studying to be scribes, began learning to read and write basic hieroglyphic signs (there are well over 700 glyphs), words, and phrases. Boys not studying to be scribes might also follow this subject, starting at the same age, possibly even as late as seven years old.

One tool used to teach young scribes the Egyptian language and script was a simple text entitled *Kemit* or *Kemyt*. In English it means "summary," "what is complete or completed," or "completion," and it was a standard text used as early as and possibly even earlier than the Eleventh or Twelfth Dynasty. What made *Kemyt* so popular for usage in teaching young scribes the hieratic script was not the content, as banal as it was, but that its simplicity; it was simple to understand, hard to forget, and easy to teach. It might have even been a scribe's first primer. Copies of texts from this "primer" were written vertically, as opposed to horizontally from right to left like copied text from the New Kingdom, which indicates that *Kemyt* was a rather old fashioned yet traditional "school book."

To support the tenacity of this ancient "primer," consider the chaotic time of Akhenaten, where traditional elements of religion, art, and architecture were turned upside down. Ostraca found at Akhetaten (Tel el-Amarna) have hieratic written on them, text copied from *Kemyt*! Here it seems not all tradition was kicked to the curb.

After mastering the basic signs and depending on the student-scribe's maturity level and readiness (students at this stage were probably in their teens) it was on to verb conjugations, pronoun placement, and subject-verb agreement in number and gender. Next on the list, and in addition to understanding and applying arithmetic, teachers taught their students hieratic, a second style of writing used for every day record keeping. Royal children learned hieratic by writing their exercises on limestone and/or on ostraca. Students learned also a third style of writing: demotic, which was used for composing religious, scientific, and magical works. At this stage, students were also introduced to and were expected to learn the literary language, vocabulary linked to it, and the system of transcribing foreign (i.e. Asiatic) pronouns because they might be employed under the king, who sent letters to foreign rulers. If the student-scribe was expected to complete primary studies and then further his education, he might begin to study composition, taught by the wisest and most learned scholars.



Evolution of Ancient Egyptian writing, hieratic and demotic. An illustration from *the Encyclopaedia Biblica*, circa 1903.

For teenage student-scribes, they had to compose letters to their teachers, a correspondence exercise that measured how well a scribe imparted wisdom and how good his epistolary style was. In addition, these student-scribes continued to copy and recopy text from the classic literature of the Middle Kingdom, namely from *the Satire of Trades*, written during the First Intermediate Period (a step up from *Kemyt*), which was written in what is called Middle Egyptian, a text developed during the Middle Kingdom (Old Kingdom hieroglyphic text was called Ancient Egyptian and New Kingdom text was called Classical Egyptian), and was the classical stage of the Egyptian language. It was the favored writing form from which to copy and recopy texts and to teach scribes because it was developed during a time when literature was at its best and it offered students a stable basis of training. The language in it was more advanced than that in *Kemyt*, therefore it was better suited for students who were further in their scribal studies.

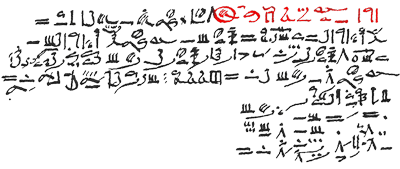
In addition to *Kemyt* and *the Satire of Trades*, other well known compositions--or "school books," better known as*sbayt* or "instructions"--from which student-scribes copied were the following: *the Story of Sinuhe*, *the Instruction of Ammenemes I to His Son Sesostris*; what is called Papyrus Lansing, and *the Miscellanies* (see "[text books](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_supplies)" for more information). In writing exercises from the above documents, student-scribes learned grammar, vocabulary, and the significance of being a scribe, how lowly and vile other professions were compared to his: the smith slaves at his furnace, his fingers like crocodile claws; the stone mason toils under the sun, his loins and limbs numbed by the years; the soldier carries his provisions on his back like a donkey; the farmer wields the hoe and cares for horses, engaging in physical labor and paying taxes; the gardener carries a pole across his shoulders, a great blister on his neck filled with puss; the waterman is plagued by gnats and mosquitoes, the stench of the canals chokes him; the weaver is made unable to breath by squatting all day, barely seeing daylight; the reed-cutter works his fingers to the bone, his back bare and his eyes dulled. In addition to learning the above mentioned, these texts helped form a scribe's character.

It must be noted that, in copying old texts, scribes were learning only to recognize and write symbols, words, and phrases, and the significance of the text they were copying, rather than learning the meaning of the words, and a standard form of syntax (grammar or sentence structure) or lexicon (vocabulary). In other words, unlike the French who have their Academie Française, there was no attempt to preserve the Ancient Egyptian language, no final definitive text. This explains to a certain extent the reason for there being different ways of writing one word or phrase for each manuscript; these texts were at the mercy of the scribes who wrote them.

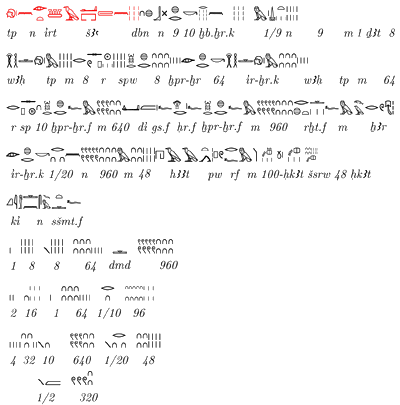
[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Mathematics***

The itinerary for learning math did not have students studying mathematical theory, but practical math which had students finding practical solutions to real world problems. In other words, problems of everyday life were solved through math rather than solved for their own sake. Such problems and their solutions can be found outlined in Papyrus Rhind, a mathematical text copied from an earlier document written in 1850 B.C.E. and penned by the scribe Ahmes around 1650 B.C.E. It contains math tables and over 80 math problems and their solutions.

[](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/images/img_papyrus_rhind_hieratic_large.png)

Papyrus Rhind, mathematical problem R41, written in hieratic from a 1929 publication - *The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus: Free Translation and Commentary with Selected Photographs, Translations, Transliterations and Literal Translations, vol. II*. Click the image to enlarge.

[](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/images/img_papyrus_rhind_hieroglyphs_large.png)

Papyrus Rhind, mathematical problem R41, rewritten in hieroglyphs and transliterated by Arnold Buffum Chace from a 1929 publication - *The Rhind Mathematical Papyrus: Free Translation and Commentary with Selected Photographs, Translations, Transliterations and Literal Translations, vol. II*. Click the image to enlarge.

In Ancient Egypt, numbers were based on ten, much like modern mathematics, where its differences lies in zero, a number for which the Egyptians did not have any symbol, as having something stand for nothing was not useful to them. Just as we moderns would add a 0 at the end of a number to make another power of ten (1, 10, 100,..., 10,000,000) the Egyptians would create another symbol to represent another power of ten: a hash mark represented 1s, an arch 10s, a swirl mark 100s, a flower 1,000s, a finger 10,000s, a tadpole 100,000s, a seated figure praising 1,000,000s, and the *shen* symbol 10,000,000s.

Adding was simply the piling up of numbers. If ever there happened to be more than ten of the same symbol (say, ten flower symbols), the Egyptian would replace that with a single symbol for the next higher power (say, one finger symbol).

Multiplication was simple as well. Take for example 8 x 23. First, the Egyptian mathematician created two columns: the first column started always with "1" and the second column started with a multiplicand (from the example, either 8 or 23--our Egyptian will use 8). Next, the Egyptian represented his chosen multiplicand (8) in binary, doubling the starting numbers for each column repeatedly so that he would have the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Column 1 | Column 2 |
| 1\*  2\*  4\*  8  16\* | 8#  16#  32#  64  128# |

Having completed that step, the Egyptian then noted which numbers from the first column added to 23 (the other multiplicand), which are indicated with asterisks (\*). When added (1+2+4+16) they equal 23. Then, the Egyptian added the corresponding numbers in the second column--indicated with pounds (#)--to solve the problem: (8+16+32+128=184).

Not as simple to the Egyptians was division. Take for example the following word problem: I go down 3 times; 1/3 of me, 1/5 of me is added to me; return I, filled am I. Who am I? It sounds confusing, but seems to be asking for the sum of 3, 1/3, and 1/5. Let us take a simpler problem such as 43 divided by 8. The Egyptian math wiz would make his two columns again: the first he starts with "1" and the second with the divisor (8). Next, the Egyptian would double each column until he reached the dividend (43), so that his columns would at this point look like the following:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Column 1 | Column 2 |
| 1  2  4 | 8  16  32 |

32 doubled is 62, far surpassing 43, so our Egyptian stops at 32. Then, the Egyptian would start over and halve the two starting numbers (in column 1, it would be 1; in column 2, 8) until he reached 1 in the second column. Now his columns look thus:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Column 1 | Column 2 |
| 1  2  3    1/2  1/4  1/8 | 8\*  16  32\*    4  2\*  1\* |

Now, the Egyptian notes which numbers in column 2 add to the dividend (43), indicated by asterisks (\*), and then notes the corresponding numbers in column 1, which will give him his answer to 43 divided by 8 = ?: (1 + 4 + 1/4 + 1/8). The way our Egyptian would write his answer would be thus: 5 + 1/4 + 1/8. The reason he did this rather than write 5 and 3/8 is he was limited to using unit fractions--fractions with the form of 1/n--and did not know how to add fractions to get an answer where the numerator was something other than one (with the exception of 2/3, which the Egyptian knew). Another example: where moderns would say five loaves of bread divided among three people would give each person 5/3 of a loaf, an Egyptian mathematician would calculate that each man would receive an equal quantity of 1/3, 1/5, and 1/15 of a loaf. In hieroglyphs, the Egyptian mathematician would represent a fraction like 1/300 with the symbol for "mouth" or the letter "r" as the numerator and three swirls or three "100" symbols as the denominator.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Institutions**

Every home in ancient times was a school of sorts, where children of both common and royal background learned life skills and family values from their parents.

*The Maxims of Ani* is the earliest informal education a very very young child of nobal standing receives and chronicles advice the scribe Ani gives his son. In this document, the word given for "school" is translated as "room" or "department of teaching," terms that describe a pre-kindergarten-like institution and have appeared in use as early as the Middle Kingdom during the Tenth Dynasty.

Most royal chancelleries, military headquarters, provincial administrative centers, principle offices of state, and temples ran their own schools for royal children only, training promising candidates in a combination of the following: practices and procedures of the individual offices and theological dogma, liturgical practices, and temple estate management.

Less formal schools for dance were located at Memphis, which was a professional training center for acrobats and dancers.

Evidence from the Old and Middle Kingdoms has shown that early scribal schools were attached to the royal court, where princes of the king, children of nobles, and even a few children from the poorer classes trained to be scribes. During the New Kingdom the most popular educational institutions were located in several places: at the back of Per-Rameses, known as the mortuary temple of Rameses II or the Ramesseum; in the Temple of Mut at Karnak, according to one inscription on the statue of the scribe Bekenkhons; in Medinet Habu, known as the mortuary temple of Rameses III; at "the Residence" of the King near el-Lisht, where there was a scribal school; and possibly even at the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina in Western Thebes.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Libraries or Scriptoria***

The most notable characteristics of an area that contained a library were the following: tomb or temple walls were made with niches and/or the building's ceilings were painted with astronomical symbols and signs. The best evidence of such appears at the Temple of Rameses II at the Ramesseum, the Temple of Eduf, the Temple of Philae, and the Temple of Seti I at Abydos.

In essence there were two kinds of libraries: the private kind and those found in towns. Private libraries housed a collection of papyri which could include magio-religious scrolls, which were kept in jars or boxes in a person's home or in their tomb. Thebes has produced the best evidence of private libraries.

Town libraries were probably more frequent in Egypt, given the evidence. One such library can be found at Deir el-Medina in Thebes, which dates to the New Kingdom. Archaeologists have found evidence mostly in refuse heaps which comprise of copied texts written mostly on paprus. At Kahun, archaeologists discovered archival and educational texts, which date to the Middle Kingdom. Other evidence of town libraries and scriptoria show that they were attached to temples and served to house priestly texts, especially those in Tebtunis and in the Fayoum. "Books" written and housed here consisted of literary, religious, and scientific documents. An example of such a library is in a small chapel at the Temple of Edfu. Titles of "books" appear on the walls like a sort of ancient card catalogue.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***House of Life***

The House of Life or *per ankh* was a complex of buildings where religious texts were copied and stored. They acted as libraries, scriptoria, or higher teaching institutions. Most large towns like Tell el-Amarna, Edfu, and Abydos had a *per ankh* and were typically connected with temple schools or with the royal palace. Houses of Life were usually associated with the temple library, but not always. "Books" found in Houses of Life that were connected to a temple library had great significance: the ancients believed that they could renew life and provide sustenance for continuing life.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Mission Statement**

Yet another similarity between Ancient Egypt and the western world is the point of education, both informal and formal: to shape youngsters into moral and respectful persons who will be able to function in the real world.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**Certification**

In order to become a teacher of informal education in Ancient Egypt, one had to have had children; at least this was one way to be teacher-like. Any parent, both in modern and ancient times, is a type of teacher. On the other hand, to become a "professional educator"--a term not used in ancient times--one had to have been a priest or a scribe with experience in his--emphasis on "his"--field. In other words, a priest or a scribe did not have to take certification tests or college courses in order to teach students. He just had to have experience in his field in order to evince the credentials needed for the job.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**School Supplies**

Schoolchildren were equipped mostly with scribal materials such as a palette; a rectangular board made of plain or gilded wood or ivory, complete with two holes at top for black (soot or hematite and gum) and red (ochre and gum) ink and a long and narrow niche at the palette's center to hold writing utensils; and writing instruments, otherwise known as reed "pens," which were made with ends that needed to be chewed in order for it to work link a paint brush.



Scribal tools as represented in hieroglyphic form (Y3): an ink palette, a bowl, and reed pen. (Please contact me to use this image.)

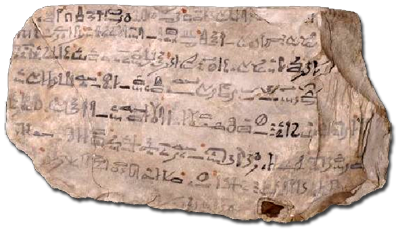
Palettes were under the protection of Thoth, patron deity of scribes and knowledge. The bowl in which students dipped their reed pens was often inscribed with a reminder that users should offer a libation in honor of Imhotep, a deified sage during Ptolemaic times and vizier and master builder of King Djoser.

If they had one, school children used a "pencil box-" like container to hold their reed brushes when they weren't using them. A typical reed holder was composed of a long, narrow, and hollowed out cylinder, capped with a papyrus bud. A schoolchild might also possess a kind of eraser/smoother, a scrapper made of ultra fine sandstone, which was meant to restore an impermeable surface after rubbing out one's mistakes. There was also a special "eraser" for use on ostraca: it consisted of a sponge fastened to some string.

Rather than papyrus, which was far too expensive to squander frivolously, the writing surfaces on which students and practicing scribes wrote their exercises based on copied text or teacher dictations were usually made of sycamore, covered with plaster or clay. Their function was similar to old-fashioned school slates and were meant to be reused; all students had to do was wipe it clean with an "eraser." Some examples have survived from ancient times and measure up to 21.125 in (53 cm) by 15.250 in (38 cm), and suggest that, after repeated use, the surfaces became saturated with writing on top of writing, creating a palimpsest. That would have been easily fixed, however: just paint on a new layer of plaster.

As mentioned earlier, ostraca were extensively used, if not more than "school slates" due to their being readily available and ready-made. Several writing surfaces could be described as an ostracon: potsherds (broken pieces of pottery) or flakes of discarded limestone quarried for tomb building. In addition to being easy to come by, ostraca were pre-made objects, where the surface was already smooth and ready to write on, not needing to be prepared like a "school slate," which had to be plastered first.

Typically, flakes of limestone, which were quarried mostly from Thebes for tomb building, were used throughout dynastic Egypt; whereas potsherds were used more often during the Christian Period. The best evidence of ostraca that archaeologists have found were discovered in a rubbish heap near the workmen's village at Deir el-Medina, a location built to house those who worked on the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. These included notes to friends, teachers, and employers; shopping lists; accounts of local disputes; and in particular, copies of famous texts, written by student-scribes. Even though the text written on ostraca is in hieratic, one can easily tell the difference from the last in this list (copied texts) from the others (notes, lists, etc), as the script is far more immaculate on ostraca used by student-scribes than the overly cursive writing of the workaday texts of the others.



Ostracon, inscribed with the last lines of *the Tale of Sinuhe*, marked with red dots to indicate verse lines. Penned by a 19th Dynasty apprentice-scribe.

Even though the majority of ostraca found have been discovered at Thebes, Memphis and Tel el-Amarna have provided scholars with their own batch of evidence, with the vast majority dating to the New Kingdom. One reason Thebes seems to have been the best area to find such material is it was the location from where workmen quarried limestone. In addition, Thebes was conditionally more favorable in preserving such artifacts--less so in the case of Memphis.

Scribes, usually aged twelve to fourteen, wrote their lessons--copied texts and correspondence exercises--in copybooks, which were a sort of ancient spiral notebook. Contained on the recto of the copybook's short pages made of papyrus were a few long lines, the upper portion of the page reserved for the teacher's corrections and, in the right-hand side, the date the exercise was composed, which took up three pages as the daily task prescribed. On the verso of these papyrus rolls were notes taken by the scribe, for his benefit only; the recto being what the teacher saw. A scribe's notes might consist of the following: pictures of lions and oxen, sample writings of various forms, mathematical sums, or drafts of business letters, all of which illustrate the practical work scribes did for the department.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Textbooks***

***The Tale of Sinuhe***: Describes how a Middle Kingdom palace functioned, which was categorized three-fold: the royal family and her servants lived in the Nursery, banquets were held in the Pillared Hall, and business was conducted in the Audience Hall.

In the story, the royal guard Sinuhe chronicles a tale of death which includes murder and sabotage in a Middle Egyptian palace. He flees Egypt thinking his life is in danger after having overheard that King Amenemhet was murdered and that the local governors lusted after power once they had a taste of it. On his way to sanctuary, a leader of a tribe of nomads promised to keep him safe--he was true to his word and more: Sinuhe became a wealthy and an important man. However, Sinuhe became homesick after having stayed away from Egypt for so long, safe under the tribe leader's care. He wished to be buried in his homeland so much he wrote his request and sent it to Amenemhet's successor, Senwosret, who agreed that he should return. On his return, Senwosret did the same for Sinuhe that the tribe leader had done and more: he gave him food, drink, clothing, and a pyramid, in which Sinuhe would later be interred. Both he and Egypt herself were in favor of the king, having united Sinuhe with Egypt and Egypt with itself after Amenemhet's death.

In telling this story to students, teachers taught that Egypt was the finest country in the known world.

***Directions for Attaining Knowledge into All Obscure Secrets***: Better known as Papyrus Rhind, a document containing geometric and arithmetic problems of daily Egyptian life, which was composed by the scribe Ahmes around 1650 B.C.E., who claimed that he copied it from an earlier document from 1860 B.C.E.

***The Teachings of Tuauf***: It is fair to say that this document is a tirade, where Tuauf declares the profession of scribe as being the best position an Egyptian can obtain, glorifying it and considering all other professions horrible. It was used as a teaching tool for scribes who would copy text from it, not only practicing writing the script, but also learning from the text to work hard in order to avoid becoming something other than a scribe.

***The Schoolboy Letters/Exercises or Model Compositions***: From the Ramesside Period came numerous papyri and ostraca--some passages having been preserved on the Anastasi Papyrus, the Sallier Papyrus, the Lansing Papyrus, and the Chester Beatty IV Papyrus--which contain on them copies of all the best examples from hymns, prayers, and the Instructions in Wisdom or Books of Instruction like *the Satire of Trades* and *the Instruction of Amenemhet I*; letters from pupils to their teachers; and business and legal documents. In copying from these, scribes learned moral concepts of the time and various forms of advice. These compositions encompass also three particular themes: a teacher's advice to his students, encouraging them to work hard and limit pleasure; the holding in high esteem the scribal profession over all other trades; and the respecting of teachers by students, wishing them good health and happiness.

Papyrus Anastasi I was a Memphite "textbook" from Dynasty XIX that served as a teaching tool in teaching students the geography of Asia and mathematical sums in a military context. In addition, it contains passages from *the Schoolboy Exercises/Model Compositions*, emphasizing giving teachers respect, following the scribal profession, and abstaining from extensive drinking and carousing. Papyrus Sallier emphasizes similar elements.

Other documents of this type include Papyrus Lansing, which was nothing but a book of *Model Compositions*, intended by the scribe who wrote it to be used by scribes in their learning. Papyrus Chester Beatty IV like the majority of*Wisdom Texts contains* in it praise for the scribal profession as well as the claim that a person can become immortal only through his writings, proving that not all Egyptians believed wholly in an Afterlife.

***Educational Treatises, Books of Instruction/Wisdom Texts/Instructions in Wisdom***: Like *the Tale of Sinhue*,*Books of Instruction*, also known as *the Wisdom Texts* or*Instructions in Wisdom* (there are seven complete and five partial texts in existence) were teaching tools in scribal schools. Those who composed such treatises--mostly senior officials and later copied by scribes--outlined in them in the form of verses passed down from father to son, were educational principles; fatherly and kingly advice to his son and successor, respectively, in order to ensure personal success in accordance with state and moral norms; the advantages of telling the truth and being fair, a socially desirable trait in all people; and rules to sustain order, morality, justice, wisdom, obedience, humanity, and restraint in everyday life. The following are *Books of Instruction*:

***The Satire of Trades***: Written during the First Intermediate Period, this *Book of Instruction* outlines the experiences of Khety, a man of humble origin, to his son Pepy. In it he describes other trades compared to that of the scribe, deeming them far less superior than the job of the scribe.

***The Instruction Compiled by the Noble and Royal Prince Hordjedef (or Hardedef) for His Son***: This is perhaps the earliest example of a *Book of Instruction*, composed possibly by Hordjedef himself, as he was later deemed a sage and probably had a cult ascribed to him. In this *Book of Instruction* Prince Hordjedef, son of King Khufu, advises his son, Au-ib-re, to follow wisely a life and career for the future.

***The Instruction of Ptah-hotep***: Probably the most well-known *Book of Instruction* is *the Instruction of Ptah-hotep*which was conserved on the Prisse Papyrus of the Middle Kingdom. Ptah-hotep was a vizier during Dynasty V and, in this document, he outlines thirty-seven maxims emphasizing obedience to one's parents, superiors, and elders; extols the virtues of cognition, good manners, humility, modesty, self-control, tact, and truthfulness; and deals with and provides guidance for fair dealing and speaking elegantly and effectively. The following are some examples of these maxims: one should speak only when he knows what he's talking about and make sure that what he says is profound and well-thought out; one should consider not only the wise man's advice, but also the poor man's, as pearls of wisdom can come from the most meek and humble servant; and boasting about one's knowledge is bad form, instead seek justice and not self-aggrandizement.

***The Instruction of Amenemope***: This *Book of Instruction*, composed during the Ramesside Era, reads much like the Old Testament Book of Proverbs in the Christian religion. In it are elements like the following: one must not covet one's neighbor's property or possessions, nor tamper with land boundaries; one should show love and kindness to his neighbor; one must not accept bribes to oppress others; one must not mock the disabled or mentally ill; and one is virtuous when one behaves justly to everyone. In this composition, material wealth and achievement are held in high regard, but they take a back seat to the possession of honesty, humbleness, correct and modest behavior in personal advancement, qualities of endurance, self-control, kindliness, silence over temper, individual humanity before the gods, and human imperfection. These are what made the ideal man during this time.

***The Instruction of Kagemni***: Set in Dynasty III, it was most likely composed during Dynasty VI. It is preserved on the Prisse Papyrus, which was composed during the Middle Kingdom. In this *Book of Instruction*, like the others, has as its antagonist a father, King Huni, who, with the help of his vizier, chronicles his wisdom and personal experiences, offering his children, namely the future vizier Kagemni, advice on how to follow a successful path in life.

***The Instruction of Any*** (pronounced 'Ah-knee'): Unlike the previous *Books of Instruction*, that of Any was written during the New Kingdom. Its content reflects social changes of the time, emphasizing middle- rather than upper-class values. However, it is still a document which outlines advice to the son, given by the father--in this case, the father is a minor official rather than the king. Concerning this, there is another difference between this *Book of Instruction* and the others: the father's advice is questioned by the son, something the latter would never have done in the other stories. The son eventually accepts his father's advice.

***The Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy***: The youngest *Book of Instruction* of the bunch is *the Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy*, a document from the Ptolemaic Period, which follows the experiences of a Heliopolitan priest of Re. His advice to his son is in the form of a story, relating how he was implicated in a plot to kill the king and was imprisoned for it. Having plenty of time to sift through his thoughts in prison, he composes for his son's advantage the wisdom he's gained from this experience.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

**T****he Professions**

***Scribes***

According to *the Satire of Trades*, scribal life was pleasurable: a scribe was superior, his skills were the most valuable in life and dead, he did not have to pay taxes, he escaped military drafts, and he could have the opportunity to rub shoulders with famous people or work for the king.

Scribes were many a person, not just a copyist or writer. For exampmle, he could be any of the following: a priest, a civil administrator, or a simple secretary; a composer of public letters, magical spells, and healing directions prescribed by doctors to patients; Pharaoh's manager; a tax collector; border patrol; an architectural designer; a recorder of births and deaths, great battles, business transactions, military secrets, temple documents, prayers, stories, or songs; or a keeper of archives. Being labeled a scribe was not limited to those educated in the field: high ranking officials and rulers tended to include in their titles the word "scribe," which was a mark of respectability, nobility, and education.

Most trades in Ancient Egypt were hierarchical, where future jobs of the son depended on the job of the father. However, just because an Egyptian boy's father was a scribe did not automatically mean that he would be one also. Scribal school was a tough business, requiring not only skill, but also hard work. If a boy showed promise in the field, did his work well, and listened to his teachers, he might become a professional scribe.

Because there were many careers a scribe could pursue once he got out into the real world the subjects he might study in scribal school could be any or all of the following: reading and writing (see above for more details); geography; astronomy; math and accounting; surveying; architecture; history; and maybe poetry, depending on Pharaoh's demands.

When the student-scribe completed his formal training, it was on to apprenticeship with a working scribe, which could last as long as 11 to 12 years.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Priests***

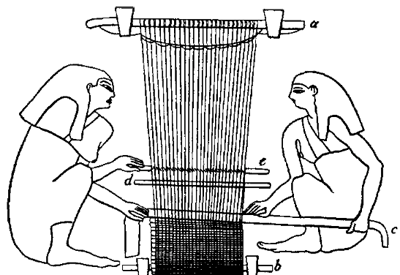
If a boy's father was a priest, he too would become a priest. In general, priesthood was a hereditary position rather than one appointed by the king. To be a priest, a boy had to become an apprentice to his father, learning while at his father's side priestly routines and daily rituals particular to a certain temple. Student-priests would learn to wake early, shave and wash carefully, enter appropriately the sanctuary of the temple, treat respectfully each god's statue housed in the temple, and give properly libations.

Even though the duration of priestly studies was not fixed, one high priest called Bekenkhonsu gives his scholastic agenda: at five, he went to school for eleven years; at sixteen he became a *wab* priest; and at fifty-nine, he became High Priest, holding that position for twenty-seven years.

Evidence has shown that there was a university (a very rare institution) located at Aketaten during the Amarna Period which was responsible for educating priests of the new religion, which had at its center of worship the Aten.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Weavers***



Women weaving, as depicted on a tomb at Beni Hassan. An illustration from*the Encyclopaedia Biblica*, a 1903 publication.

A weaver did not typically go to school; his or her "education" came from an apprenticeship with his father or her mother, starting their training near the age of five. By the time a child reached 15 years old, they would have already been working on their own for years. According to the writings of the Roman Period, girls training to be weavers or spinners studied and were tested on their skills by a master or colleague in the same trade. Reimbursement was due to the family if the girl did not pass her test.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Artists***

Documentary rather than graphical evidence has shown that students of art had to learn the conventions of representation, proportion, posture, and symbolism. Archaeologists have found potsherds at Deir el-Medina that ancient students of art used. On them are images that evince the student's attempt to artistically recreate the human and divine form. Practice pieces such as these have been dated as far back as the Old Kingdom, during Dynasty III.

In addition to an eye for design, artists, draftsmen, and sculptors had to know how to read and write hieroglyphs. It was their job to convert the written word into hieroglyphs on tomb and temple walls and on statues.

One of the first elements of art an artist in Ancient Egypt had to learn was the Sacred Ratio, otherwise known as the Divine Proportion or the Golden Ratio, a proportional measurement that occurs everywhere in nature particularly in plants, animals, and outer space. This number is called Phi (approximately equaling 1.618) and in the artistic word, ancient and modern. It is the measurement that helps to draw the human body: the Sacred Ratio of a person's arm is his shoulder to his elbow, his elbow to his fingertips; the Divine Proportion of a person's leg is her hip to her knee, her knee to her foot; the Golden Ratio of a person's finger is his first joint to his middle joint, his middle joint to his fingertip; and so on. Not only did art students use this measurement in drawing the human figure, which was done so using a grid, but also in making jewelry, writing hieroglyphs, building pyramids, and constructing buildings.



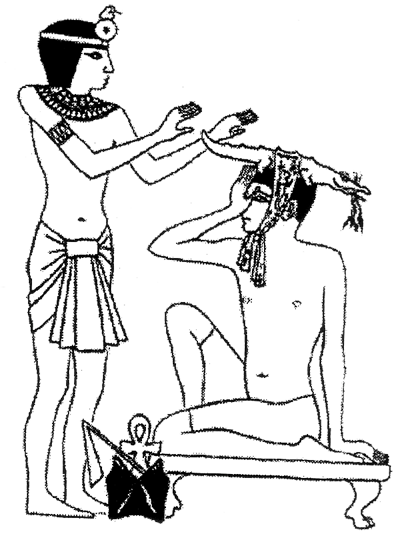
The Sacred Ratio in use on an ostracon, complete with grid lines. Found in a dump heap near Senenmut's tomb chapel.

Another form of measurement a student-artist or a professional used was the cubit--the distance between the elbow and the fingertips, which is then divided into six palms (the measurement of "palms" consisted of the distance between one's first finger knuckle and one's pinky knuckle). Using these forms of measurement, artists made grid lines to draw perfectly proportioned figures.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

***Doctors***

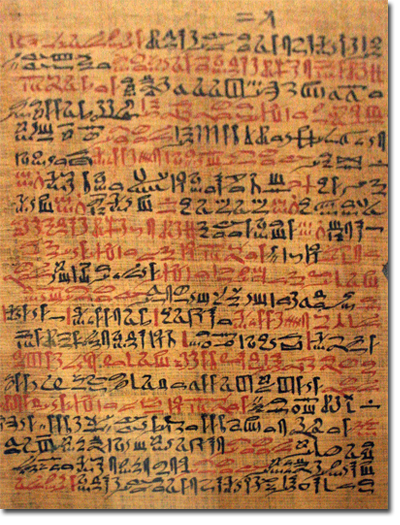
If an Egyptian man practiced medicine, his son would also practice the profession, this line of work having many real world opportunities: doctor; *wabau*, a ritually pure priest of Sekhmet; general practitioner called *swnw*; *sau*, who practiced magic and medicine; physician; gynecologist; pediatrician; dentist; dermatologist; nurse; masseur; bandager; midwife; and the most unusual, bug or vermin exterminator. In addition, medical students learned the subject of medicine by reading documents composed by previous doctors--what scholars call "prescription-books", which might include the following: observations in human and animal anatomy; experimental notes in surgery and pharmacy; best uses of splints, bandages, and compresses; a list of medical and anatomical terms; details of pharmaceutical treatments such as oral medicines, fumigation, drugs, and ointments made from minerals, animals, and vegetables; entries devoted to fertility and pregnancy tests, contraceptive measures, the treatment of womens' ailments, and childbirth problems; appropriate hymns, prayers, and spells to say with the application of a particular treatment; or notes on trepanning and circumcision.



From a medical papyrus, a doctor prescribes to a patient therapy for a migraine: bandaging to the head a clay crocodile with herbs stuffed into its mouth.

In the early practices in medical studies, students of medicine learned the therapeutic effects of medicinal plants, which could also serve as anesthetics. Their studies were typically had at home rather than in a special school--the first pharmacological-medical schools, if you will. As the Ancient Egyptians grew more interested in the field, students could attend lectures in temples or in what was called *per ankh* (House of Life), where medical and pharmaceutical students studied under a priest-doctor who had experience in the field. There were other specialty schools at Heliopolis and at Sais, the latter was a location particularly for the training of midwives. Royal palaces, specifically at Heliopolis and Memphis, were sometimes equipped with their own *per ankh*, where the children of the royal family and of high ranking officials studied this and other subjects, especially magic and religion, two subjects at the center of Ancient Egyptian medicine. Another subject in which students of medicine had to excel was botany, as knowing which plants worked best to cure a particular ailment was part of the profession. Knowledge also of any disease could be the foundation of a cure.

Perhaps the area that best shows the advancements in this field of study over time is the processes of mummification, which showed that the Ancient Egyptians were versed in the study of the human body, both dead and alive. However, the complete anatomy of the human was not their forte, having not understood to the fullest extent the functions of minor organs; aside from what was extracted during mummification, they knew very little. For example, Egyptians considered the brain as vestigial, whereas the heart was the seat of everything--of knowledge in particular. Students learned about "vessels," which corresponds to what we moderns call veins and arteries. According to their teachings, which are extensively outlined in the Ebers Papyrus, a patient's "vessels" could clog, burn, stiffen, itch, or weaken, but they could not be treated directly with medicine, so the doctor had to use ointments. They learned also that "vessels" carried water, air, and waste, beginning their course at the heart and terminating at various parts of the body. The heart was the "beginning of all the members" and wherever the doctor placed his hands, he would meet the heart. How a medical student would eventually treat a patient, especially one with neuralgic or rheumatic problems, depended on this theory of "vessels."



Papyrus Ebers, column 38 (notice the "page number" at the top), circa 1550 B.C.E.

In addition to learning botany and anatomy, the medical student had to be versed in magic and religion, two subjects that are conducive to medicine--student were, after all, taught by priest-doctors. The Ancient Egyptians saw these priest-doctors as having great power, knowing secrets in magic and having the ability to commune with the gods, especially with Thoth, a doctor's guide, god of scribes, and inventor of healing formulas. Other deities with which a priest-doctor communed were Hathor and Taweret, aides in childbirth; Isis, protectress of the liver and, in the form of Hathor, inventor of most healing remedies; Sekhmet, destroyer and bringer of epidemics, the latter element a trait of her consort, Seth, both having to be pacified to avoid those elements of their personalities; Horus and Amun, curers of eye diseases; and many other deities.

[Back to top](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#top)

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Last Updated: December 5, 2009

* [Introduction](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_intro)
* [Higher Education](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_higher_ed)
* [The Student Body](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_student_body)
* [Discipline](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_discipline)
* [Curriculum/Subjects](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_curriculum)
* [Institutions](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_institutions)
* [Mission Statement](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_mission)
* [Certification](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_certification)
* [School Supplies](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_supplies)
* [The Professions](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html#education_professions)
* [Home](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/default.html)
* [Education](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/education.html)
* [Fashion](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/fashion.html)
* [Philosophy](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/philosophy.html)
* [Recreation](http://www.egyptology.escholar.info/recreation.html)
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