

# Ancient Egypt

## Hieroglyphics

*Papyrus of Ani* from the Bridgeman Art Library  
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Back to [Ancient Egypt for Kids](#) The Ancient Egyptians used picture words to write called hieroglyphics. It is a very old form of writing that they starting using as early as 3000 B.C. Hieroglyphics was a very complicated way of writing involving 1000s of symbols. Some of the symbols represented sounds, like our letters, and other's represented entire words.

### More about Hieroglyphics

Hieroglyphics was different from how we write in many ways:

- It could be written in almost any direction; left to right, right to left, or top to bottom. The reader would figure out which way to read it by the direction of the symbols.
- They didn't use any punctuation.
- One of the goals in writing hieroglyphics was that the writing would look like art and be beautiful to look at.
- A single picture symbol could stand for a whole word, called an ideogram, or a sound, called a phonogram. For example, a picture of an eye could mean the word "eye" or the letter "I".

### Scribes

Since writing in hieroglyphics was so complicated, it took years of education and practice to be able to do it. The people who trained to write were called scribes. They would start training at a very young age of six or seven.

Being a scribe was a good job in Ancient Egypt. Scribes didn't have to pay taxes or enter the army. They were very highly thought of and only the children of the wealthy got the opportunity to train as scribes.

### Papyrus

The Ancient Egyptians often wrote on tablets or walls, but they also wrote on a type of paper called papyrus. Papyrus paper was made from a tall reed like plant called Papyrus. The Egyptians would use strips of the inner stem of the plant to make the paper. They would make two layers of strips; one horizontal and the other vertical. Then they would cover it in a linen cloth and apply pressure with a

mallet or stones. The strips would bind together over time making a single flat sheet to write on.

## **Rosetta Stone**



**The Rosetta Stone**

In 1799 a French soldier found a special stone in the city of Rosetta. This stone had the same message written in both hieroglyphics and Greek. This was important because it helped to translate what the hieroglyphics said and could be used to help translate other hieroglyphics as well.

## **Fun Facts about Egyptian Hieroglyphics**

- Sometimes scribes used a faster short form of hieroglyphics on papyrus called hieratic.
- When the Greeks took over Egypt, many scribes had to learn Greek as well.
- A very famous scribe was Imhotep. He became high priest of the sun god, designed the first pyramid, and was later turned into a god.
- Most of the Ancient Egyptians could not read or write.