

Handwriting of Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Barack Obama may speak volumes

Experts see telltale markings of personality in penmanship samples from the presidential candidates.

By Faye Fiore

Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

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WASHINGTON — Now that the presidential contest is looking ever more like a two-man race, the country can't help but marvel: John McCain, once a longshot, wouldn't lie down. Barack Obama, the new kid, charmed voters. And Hillary Rodham Clinton, an early favorite, has yet to surrender.

But Arlyn J. Imberman would say clues to the nomination fight were in plain sight, every time a candidate wrote a thank-you note, inscribed a memoir or autographed a pair of boxing gloves.

"Obama is very much his writing -- fluid, graceful. McCain's is angular and intense; he's a pit bull. And look at the perfectionism in Hillary's -- straight up, precise. She is persistent and is not going to give up until she absolutely has to," said Imberman, a court-certified graphologist based in New York.

Presidential signatures are trademarks that grace everything from historic documents to the souvenir M&M's boxes handed out on Air Force One. And history suggests penmanship can reflect personality.

Abraham Lincoln set 3 million slaves free with a signature that was as modest and unadorned as he was. Ronald Reagan -- the "great communicator" -- penned rounded letters that radiated warmth. Jimmy Carter etched an autograph that was aloof and cerebral. And Richard Nixon, who entered the White House with a big, bold R and N, left in deflated disgrace, his signature collapsing as well.

Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart's 1984 campaign suffered when it was revealed that he had changed his signature several times over the years. "Who is Gary Hart?" his rivals demanded.

"Our handwriting is uniquely ours; an imprint as singular as a fingerprint," Imberman asserted in a book she recently co-wrote, "Signature for Success" (in which, by the way, she concluded that Bill and Hillary Clinton have a gender role reversal going).

Assuming handwriting can't be any less reliable an indicator of character than eating waffles, drinking a boilermaker or holding forth on a bus called the Straight Talk Express, three court-certified graphologists gleaned the following by looking at writing samples from Obama, Clinton and McCain:

Despite the charges of elitism flying around, none of the 2008 presidential candidates is a snob. Equally encouraging, all of them appear intelligent and driven.

But two, the experts said, strive to remain opaque amid the public glare. Two are reluctant to embrace their family legacies. One lacks warmth, whereas another can talk to almost anyone. One is flexible, another controlled, the third a loose cannon.

The graphologists analyzed signatures and writing samples from the three candidates -- thank-you notes from

Clinton and Obama and book pages inscribed by McCain.

Despite vast policy differences, McCain and Obama have something in common signature-wise -- illegibility, which suggests a need for privacy or an aversion to transparency.

In McCain's case, that desire can be seen further in his H, which is not a loop, but an upward stroke overlapped by a downward one. "There is a lot about John McCain he doesn't wish to share openly," said Roger Rubin, a New York graphologist with three decades of experience.

"When you cover a stroke, it means you are hiding something," Rubin said.

Both men's signatures also reflect a desire to distance themselves from their fathers, the experts said.

Obama was 2 when his father left the family, and McCain's, a respected Navy admiral, was often absent. That shows up in the emphasis they give their first names -- symbols of their personal achievements rather than the legacies to which they were born. Look at the J in John and the B in Barack -- each larger than the M in McCain and the O in Obama.

Clinton's signature is readable, but lacks emotion and warmth -- the two Ls in Hillary are sticks rather than loops. The simplicity shows intellect and forcefulness. Her husband's signature, a bulbous, curvaceous scrawl, is rounder and more feminine. (Hence the gender-reversal thing.)

The body of one's writing can be revealing because, unlike the practiced brand of a signature, it is spontaneous and unconscious. Together they form a psychological snapshot, graphologists say.

Clinton's style is upright and controlled. The I's are dotted and the T's are crossed. "She can see both sides and would be good at sorting out conflicts," said Sheila Lowe, a Ventura graphologist and author of "Handwriting of the Famous and Infamous."

Clinton reduces things to their simplest form, Rubin said. "She goes easily to the core of a subject. But she can be impolitic and impatient with people who don't get it," he said.

A thank-you note written by Obama after his win in Iowa reflects intelligence, Rubin asserted, but with emotion and a capacity for conversation. The letters connect fluidly without interruption; words end with lines that reach out. "That's why the guy can stand up on a podium and talk extemporaneously. It reflects in his writing -- the ability to think many thoughts ahead," Rubin said.

Whereas Clinton's writing is disciplined, Obama's is flexible. (Her universal health insurance plan is mandatory; his is optional.) His more limber style suggests a desire to deal with different people. (He favors open dialogue with America's enemies; she doesn't.)

By contrast, McCain's writing is disconnected, forceful and intense. The letters change direction unexpectedly -- fitting for a loose cannon, the Republican Party maverick who bucked the establishment. "The writing leans to the right. But he does it in his own way. He doesn't do what is expected," Rubin noted.

The H in John stands tall, a sign of pride, idealism and ambition. "He pushes very hard to get what he wants," Imberman said. "Look at the comma: It's a slash. There is his temper."

So if the experts are right, Clinton really is smart and tough and stays until the last dog dies, Obama is an engaging bridge-builder, and McCain takes charge, and does it his way.

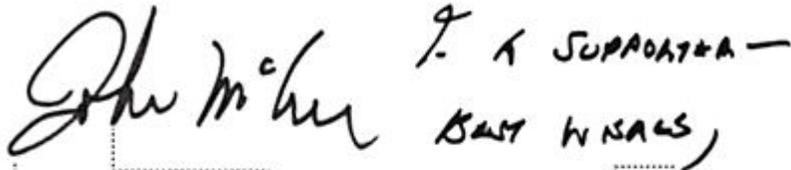
Case closed? Hardly: "Handwriting tells a lot of important things, but it doesn't tell everything," Lowe cautioned. "People are too complex."

What's in a signature?

They are what they write? Maybe, according to handwriting experts who have examined the scrawls of the presidential candidates in search of meaningful clues:

Sen. John McCain

His writing reflects his "maverick" political status as well as a sense of pride; he is intense yet private.

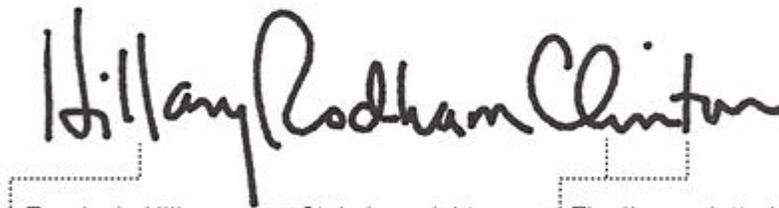


The image shows the handwritten signature "John McCain" in cursive. To the right of the signature, there is a vertical line of text: "I A SUPAOKTA -" and "BAY W SAS,". Dotted lines connect specific parts of the signature to three bullet points below.

- First-name letters change direction, indicating he will go his own way
- The tall H shows pride, ambition; overlap of upward/downward strokes suggests a need for privacy
- Slashing comma reveals a possible temper

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton

Her signature indicates that she is controlled, smart and forceful, and doesn't suffer fools.



The image shows the handwritten signature "Hillary Rodham Clinton" in a cursive style. Dotted lines connect specific parts of the signature to three bullet points below.

- Two Ls in Hillary are simple sticks rather than loops, projecting efficiency
- Style is upright, but has no emotional pull
- The I's are dotted and Ts crossed, showing discipline

Sen. Barack Obama

A flexible, limber, smooth style indicates he deals with different people and situations well.



The image shows the handwritten signature "Barack Obama" in a cursive style. Dotted lines connect specific parts of the signature to two bullet points below.

- Overall style implies emotion and a conversational capacity
- The B cutting through the O signifies more weight given to personal achievements than to family legacy

Sources: Graphologists Roger Rubin and Sheila Lowe

LORENA INIGUEZ *Los Angeles Times*