

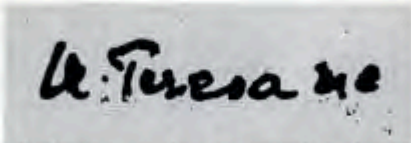
autograph **D**ETEKTIVE

How You Can Recognize a Stamped or Printed Signature

by Max Rambod

How can an autograph not be a forgery, look exactly like a real signature, yet not be 'authentic'? Welcome to the world of stamped and printed signatures. Let us see if there are some ways for you, the collector, to identify these stamped and printed signatures. First, we will look at how stamps and printed signatures can be identified, and then turn to a few examples of celebrities and presidents who have used such artificial signatures extensively and examine what uses they have put them to and what special features may give them away.

Stamped and printed signatures are a serious problem for some collectors because, unlike secretarial signatures and forgeries, they are replicas of genuine signatures and show all of the signer's usual idiosyncrasies. There are, of course, none of the warning signs such as tremor and stop and start that would alarm us of a possible forgery, but here again there are clues that you can detect if you know what to look for. Printed and stamped signatures have several characteristics that distinguish them from actual signatures.



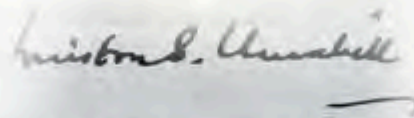
M. Teresa

Example S1 - Stamped signature of Mother Theresa

To illustrate this point, write your name with a pen and look for the following features:

First, you will notice that when you turn the paper over and run your finger across the back, you will probably be able to feel the impression left by the pen, especially if you wrote against a soft surface which allowed the pen to sink into the paper a little — this is most true of ball point pens and fountain pens, but more difficult to detect with a Sharpie. However, printed and stamped signatures usually do not have this distinctive impression which can be felt from the back of the paper.

Second, if you examine your own handwritten signature carefully, you may notice that there is a thin indentation in the center of a wider ink line, especially if you used a fountain pen. You will not see this in a stamped or printed signature.



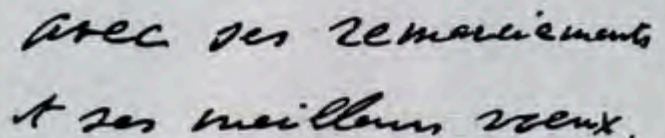
Winston S. Churchill

Example P1 - Printed signature of Winston Churchill

Third, when you look closely at the places where lines in your signature cross other lines — such as where the cross bar of a 't' intersects the vertical line, you may notice that these intersection points are darker, as the pen has written over the same part of the paper twice. You can actually see one line go over the other. Since stamped and printed signatures are put on in one simple impression, they do not show any "cross over" as real writing does. The intersection point is not darker and you cannot see one line go over another.

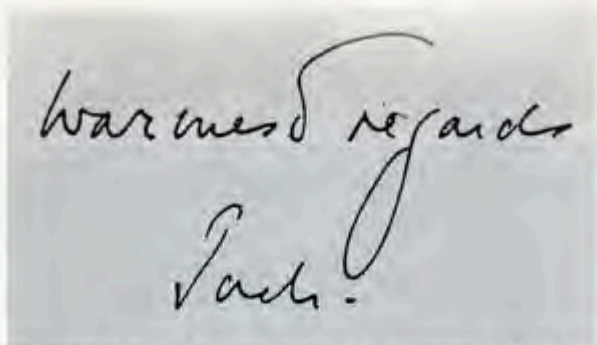
Fourth, your handwritten signature in ink will show the ink being "dragged" on the paper. You can see the effect of the steel dragging the ink. In a stamp signature you have no drag, no central hairline, no nib marks. You will often see that stamp signatures have air spots. Air bubbles are an important characteristic to look for in stamps. Real handwriting does not have air spots. Using a 30X magnifying glass you can almost always see some air bubbles in printed signatures. The bubbles will look like small white spots with no ink. Take any

GÉNÉRAL DE GAULLE



Avec ses remerciements
à ses meilleurs vœux.

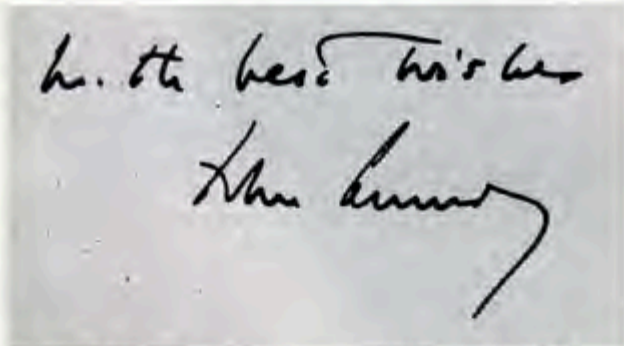
Example P2 - Printed card of General Charles de Gaulle



Example P3 - Printed inscription and signature of John Kennedy from a Christmas card

printed item like this very magazine you are now reading or your own letterhead and look at it with the magnifier and you will instantly see those air spots. Now compare this to something you just wrote and you will see that in the case of real handwriting there are no air spots.

Fifth, your handwritten signature is continuous and complete. The stamp signature, on the other hand, may not have had enough ink on it. When a stamp picks up ink, sometimes the ink is not evenly distributed across the entire stamp. On those spots where there was no ink, the signature has a blank spot, resulting in half a letter missing or some other missing part in the middle of the signature. Also, ink frequently accumulates where there should be no ink, like



Example P4 - Printed inscription and signature of John Kennedy from photo of the President

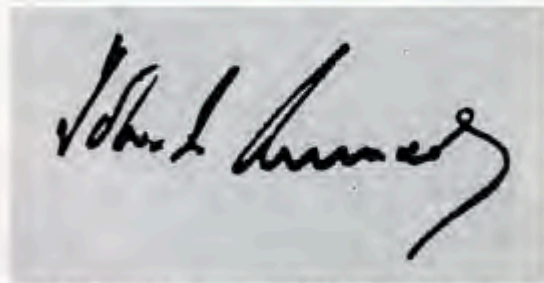
inside a small loop of an "e." Watch for these signs and, if there are too many filled up loops, look for other indications of a stamp.

Sixth, if you look at your own writing and concentrate on the line that forms a letter, you will see a dark line full of ink in the center. Another clue to identifying stamped signatures is that sometimes the center of a line that forms a letter will have less ink than the edges of that line. So you can see the letter formation because of the outside edge, but the inside of the line has no ink in it. That would not happen in real writing, but the stamp again may not have picked up enough ink.

Finally, sign your name a second time and compare it with your first signature. The two may be very similar, but they will not be identical no matter how hard you try. Since, like autopens, stamped and printed signatures are made from the same model, they are all identical. You will never be able

to sign exactly the same twice. Therefore, you can identify stamped and printed signatures by collecting sample signatures and comparing them. If you find two identical signatures, both have probably been produced using some artificial technique — a robot, a stamp, or printing.

Stamped and printed items are ordinarily not inscribed to a specific person. This is self-evident when you think about it: if you were a celebrity, why would you take the time to write a personal inscription to someone and then reach for a stamp instead of signing your name? Stamp signatures are also used for check signatures and for endorsements on the

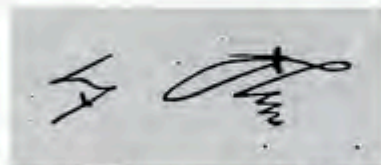


Example P5 - Printed signature of John Kennedy from a document.

back. Mother Theresa uses a stamp on most checks she endorses now (see example S1).

Printed signatures are sometimes found in books. Often the author's signature will be reproduced on the title page or beneath his photo on the facing page, and this becomes a pitfall for the collector who may be excited to have discovered an 'autographed' edition, only to have his hopes dashed later when he learns that the signature is printed.

Stamped and printed signatures have been used by celebrities from all fields: heads of state, scientists, Hollywood stars and directors, and astronauts have all employed them at times. Printed signatures are especially common when large numbers of similar documents are being prepared — for instance on Christmas cards, New Years greetings, and thank-you notes. Hollywood stars, who are of course, besieged by collectors requesting signed photos, sometimes have photos made with a printed signature, occasionally in two colors. For instance, a black and white printed photo might have a blue printed signature.

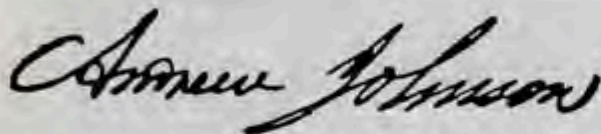


Example P6 - Printed signature of Adolf Hitler from a card expressing thanks for good wishes at Christmas

Among the heads of state who are known to have frequently used one of these techniques are Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, John Kennedy, Hitler and Andrew Johnson. The first four often used printed messages and signatures, sometimes of very high quality, which makes it harder to recognize. Churchill, for example, sometimes

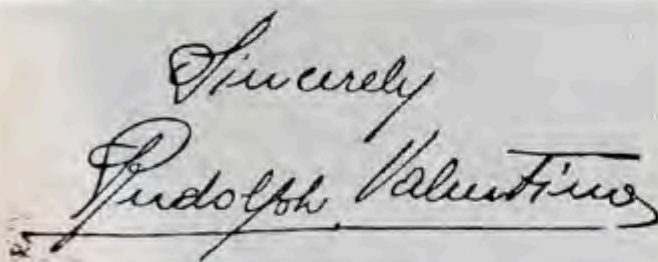
sent printed thank-you notes that appear to be entirely in his own hand (see example P1). One clue that could alert you to be suspicious of one of Churchill's thank-you notes is the impersonal wording: "Thank you so much for your kind message. It gave me much pleasure. Winston Churchill." An all-purpose note such as this could be sent to dozens or even hundreds of well-wishers. The key is that there is no salutation. Churchill's colleague in World War II, General de Gaulle of France, sent similar printed notes: "With my thanks and best wishes, Charles de Gaulle" (see example P2).

President Kennedy knew that one way to win votes was to give his communications a personal touch. Although you might think that a Christmas card would be the most likely to have some little personal message, this is not always the case. President Kennedy's Christmas cards were often imprinted



Example S2 - Stamped signature of President Andrew Johnson

"Warmest regards, Jack" (see example P3). Kennedy also had photos printed with facsimiles of his signature on them (see example P4), as well as documents (see example P5). Not all Christmas cards or presidential signed documents of Kennedy were printed and that is what makes the real ones rare and desirable. Kennedy and Hitler probably are not frequently grouped together but, like the U.S. President, Hitler frequently sent notes at Christmas with a printed signature (see example P6). Some military documents also have Hitler's printed signature.



Example S3 - Stamped signature of Rudolph Valentino

So far we have dealt only with printed signatures of political figures, but some political figures and presidents employed stamps too. Andrew Johnson was actually the first president to use a stamp. At the time he took office, Johnson injured his hand, making writing difficult. Consequently, he ordered a steel stamp with a replica of his signature. The majority of the military commissions and other routine documents issued by Johnson bear this stamped signature (see example S2).

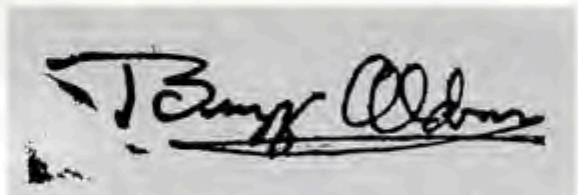
Hollywood stars and directors frequently use stamps

and printed signatures to satisfy the enormous demand of collectors for items which have been "touched by greatness" in the form of an autograph signature. Celebrities who are



Example S4 - Stamped signature in white ink of Alfred Hitchcock

known to have used stamped signatures extensively include Rudolph Valentino, who used several different stamps (see example S3), making life even more difficult for us — but now you are armed with some knowledge of what to look for. Alfred Hitchcock is another example I see over and over. The large 11"x14" photo portrait of Hitchcock's half profile head shot, with black background and a huge white stamp signature (see example S4) is always being offered to me at Max Rambod Autographs. It may be because Hitchcock used white ink that he fooled so many otherwise careful buyers.



Example S5 - Stamped signature of astronaut Buzz Aldrin

The second man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin, has a stamp signature (see example S5) that he uses extensively, in addition to his many autopen examples. You can see in this example that the stamp has smudged a triangle of ink in the lower left corner below the signature, clearly giving away the stamp. But the good thing about stamps is that once you have detected one, if you see that one again, it will always be the same exact pattern, just like autopens.

As you can see, printed and stamped signatures are not as difficult a problem as you might have thought, but one has to always be on guard against them. Unless you have a sample of that specific facsimile in your files, you cannot tell a stamp or printed signature if you are looking at a copy or a fax. That is why I never finalize a purchase until I am looking at the original item itself. Remember, always examine all signatures attentively, even if they seem all right at first glance.

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