

It is written: why France holds to analysing handwriting

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The write stuff: French President Emmanuel Macron signs the Golden Book at Slovakia's presidential palace Tuesday.

Caroline de la Tournelle says her ability to decipher handwriting has

influenced whether hundreds of people got jobs, helped police track death threats and even saved a child that was being abused.

Graphology remains a controversial topic, and has fallen out of favor in recent years—even in France, where it was widely used in the 20th century to gain psychological insights into individuals, especially for job applications.

But in the right hands, practitioners and their clients say it can be a useful tool.

"When I look at a piece of writing, I have to enter into it, it takes time. Some are warm, welcoming; others are harsher, more reserved," said Paris-based de la Tournelle, who has more than a decade in the profession.

"Pressure is always the first thing I look at," she said, running her fingers softly over an example. "How hard they pressed, how the writing moves, how it is organized... it all has meaning."

Not long ago, it was common in France for job applicants to undergo handwriting evaluations. Though largely replaced by psychometric tests, some firms have recently returned to graphology.

"I tried other things, but they were no good. Graphology finds the main characteristics of a person—not everything but a lot," said Marc Foujols, manager of a Paris real estate firm.

'Impressive'

Christophe Dherbecourt, who has 25 years in human resources at a communications firm in the French capital, said it allows him to ask candidates "the right questions".

Twice his firm rejected an applicant when handwriting analysis by de la Tournelle supported suspicions that they would be difficult employees.

"Of course, you can have graphologists who say any old rubbish, but she captures people well," Dherbecourt said.

"It's impressive what you can pull out. I had it done when I was hired here—they showed me the results and I felt it was 80 percent right."

Studies have debunked claims by leading exponents of graphology in the past, and it has attracted fraudsters and charlatans over the years.

But Tracey Trussell, of the British Institute of Graphologists, said "don't diss it until you've tried it".

"It's like a plumber—it's only as good as the person doing it," she said.

"People say it's not a science, but year one of our training is all about measuring and assessing on a scientific basis."

'Crazy stories'

"Our writing comes from the heart, from our cardiac movement, through the [nervous system](#) and to the end of our fingers and through the pen," said de la Tournelle.

"We are full of nuance, but three things never change"—how emotional and energetic we are, and how much we rely on outside stimuli to act.

Other aspects of the profession are beyond dispute, and of use to the police.

De la Tournelle began her career in the small town of Brive in southwest

France and worked with local cops to match handwriting samples.

She helped find the culprits behind [death threats](#), messages written with lipstick on mirrors, marker pens on office walls and even scratched into a car door.

"Crazy stories of greed, revenge, hate. Life can be like that in a small village," she said.

She also interprets drawings, including for children, and this gave rise to her most shocking case, when a woman brought in her three-year-old granddaughter.

"Everything bad was in there—very angled, everything purple, everything bunched on the right..." said de la Tournelle.

She conferred with her graphology teacher and they brought in a court-appointed psychologist who found the child was being abused by her mother. The psychologist now comes to her for other family cases.

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