Hieroglyphs

Hieroglyphs are written in rows or columns and can be read from left to right or from right to left. You can distinguish the direction in which the text is to be read because the human or animal figures always face towards the beginning of the line. Also the upper symbols are read before lower.

1. There are twenty-four alphabet signs each one representing a single sound. The Egyptians did not include vowels E, U or V in their writing although these sounds were present in the spoken language. (nither did they have a letter for X). For example, Sobek is the name of the crocodile god but the Egyptians would have written it ‘Sbk’.

It is possible to write a whole word using only symbols from the ancient Egyptian alphabet. For example the Fourth Dynasty pharaoh, Khufu, wrote his name in this way.
2. **Syllabic signs** represent a combination of two or three letter sounds. Such as in English ‘buy’ and ‘pie’ or in ancient Egyptian ‘Sha’ and ‘Ka’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabic Symbols</th>
<th>English Words</th>
<th>Hieroglyphs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHA</td>
<td>pool with flowers</td>
<td>Say mes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>three fox skins</td>
<td>Say mes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN</td>
<td>game board</td>
<td>Say men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>hoe or canal</td>
<td>Say mer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPR</td>
<td>dung beetle</td>
<td>Say kheper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>duck</td>
<td>Say soo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KA</td>
<td>raised arms</td>
<td>Say ank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulture</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is possible to write the English word ‘THANKS’ (right) with a combination of alphabet and syllabic signs. Note the three strokes - this is the sign for a plural. (this is a determinative sign)

3. **Determinative signs** - Some hieroglyphs work like road signs for example when we see the road sign showing a car with skidmarks we know it means there is a slippery road ahead.

Determinative signs are pictures of objects that helps the reader understand the meaning of a word. Written words did not represent all of the sounds of spoken words. For instance the word ‘boat’ was expressed in hieroglyphs as ”dpt” (it might have been pronounced ‘depet’), but
Depet is also a person’s name. To prevent the reader from mistaking it for another word, the writer included a picture of a boat to clarify the word’s meaning.

If a word expressed an abstract idea, such as “happy,” a picture of a sealed papyrus scroll was included to show that the meaning of the word could be expressed in writing but not pictorially.

4. Word signs are pictures of objects used as the words for those objects. Each word sign is followed by an upright stroke to indicate that the word is complete in one sign. For example, if there wasn’t enough space to write “boat” in hieroglyphs, the ancient writer just used the picture of a boat followed by an upright stroke to indicate that the sign should be read as ”boat.”
A list of the ancient Egyptian words used in the program with their English translations.
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There is a basic description of hieroglyphic writing. And for a bit of fun you can send a friend their name as an eCard using the hieroglyphic translator. There are also images of hieroglyphs you can use in your own projects. Learn about Egyptian numerals and test your knowledge with some mathematical problems set out using the ancient numbers.

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