# How to Write Gallifreyan

by Loren Sherman

What is Gallifreyan?

Gallifreyan is a fictional language used by the Time Lords of Gallifrey, from the British television program *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* and the concept of a circular language called Gallifreyan are © the BBC, but this alphabet was created by Loren Sherman and is free for anyone to use! To learn more, visit shermansplanet.com/gallifreyan.
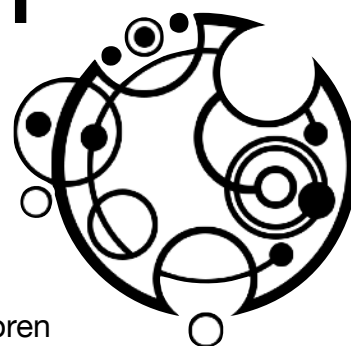
"Gallifreyan" in Gallifreyan

There are many kinds of Gallifreyan. All of them are made by fans, and I suggest you check them out too. This guide deals with "Circular" or "Sherman's" Gallifreyan. To clarify, this is not technically a language - it's just an alphabet or cipher with which you can write English and similar languages.

Letters

		•	••	•:•	::	I	II	III
Ω	B	■	CH	D	ND	G	H	F
Q	J	PH	K	L	C	N	P	M
⌢	T	WH	SH	R	NT	V	W	S
θ	TH	GH	Y	Z	Q	QU	X	NG

Letters are inside or on a **word circle**. Words are read **counter-clockwise from the bottom.**

Consonants are defined by their *shape* (Ω Q ⌢ θ) and how many *dots* or *lines* they have.

Vowels can always be written on their own. But if they come right after a consonant, they can be "attached" to it. Here is each vowel, both on its own and with each shape:

*A*bajatatha   *E*bejetethe   *I*bijitithi   *O*bojototho   *U*bujututhu
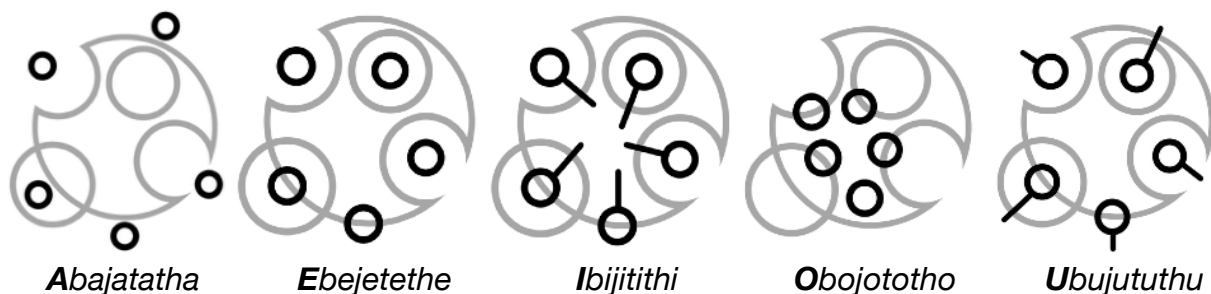
Words

Let's construct a simple example word, step-by-step. The word is **BOW**.

1. Divide the word into parts. The O in *bow* is a vowel that comes right after a consonant, so it can be combined with the B. This results in 2 parts: **BO** and **W**.

2. Here are individual letters. B is a ⌂ with no dots or lines; O attaches to it. W is a ⌒ with two lines.

3. Now we can combine them. The first letter of a word does not have to be exactly at the bottom, but it does have to be the first letter when reading counterclockwise from the bottom.

4. This is technically a legible word already, but we probably want to extend the lines. There are many ways to do so. Just remember: **only the endpoints of lines count.** If a line *crosses* a letter, it is ignored. Here are four valid ways to write *bow:*

    Note that these lines don't have to be straight, or end on any particular part of their letter. The only exceptions are the vowels I and U, which have lines that must point towards and away from the center of the word respectively. Also note the variations of the O above: it can "occlude" the B symbol, or be in its un-attached form.
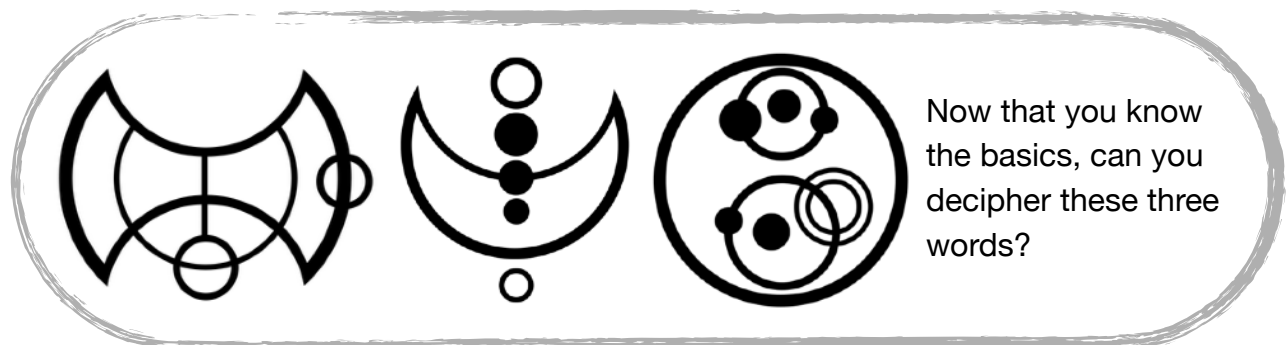
Now that you know the basics, can you decipher these three words?

They are, of course: *ties, are,* and *cool.* Note that the double O in *cool* is represented by a double circle. Also, in Gallifreyan, **one may choose to write C phonetically** (as either K or S depending on pronunciation), so the C in *cool* is written as a K here.

Sentences

Now that we have some words, let's combine them into a sentence. Like words, sentences are written counterclockwise from the bottom. Lines may span multiple words. Just make sure you're not accidentally changing a letter by ending another letter's line on it.

For compactness and visual appeal, many scribes use ⌒ shaped letters to interlock words with each other. This can make vowel attachment awkward; here, the I in "ties" has been un-attached from the T and is now on its own.
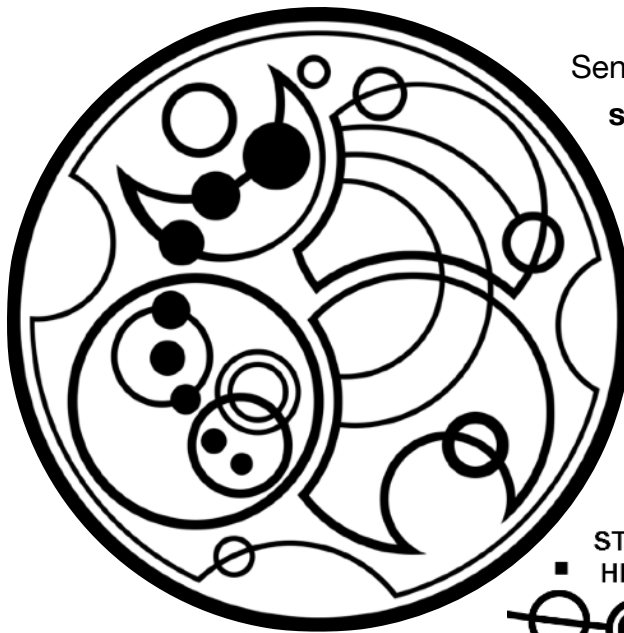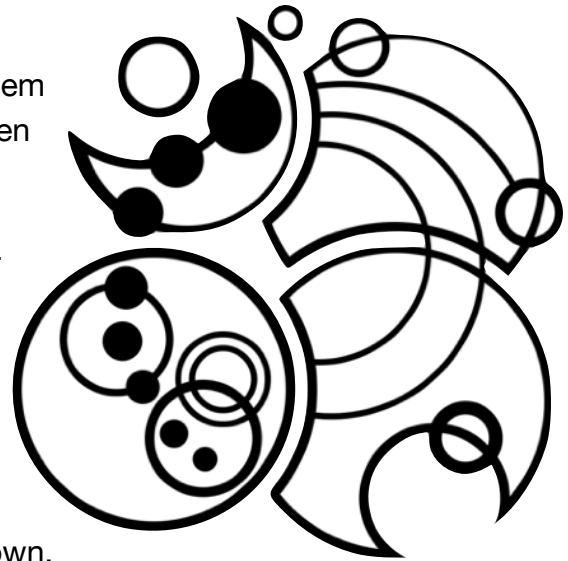
Sentences are usually surrounded by a **sentence circle**, with another circle just inside the sentence circle. This inner circle often has divots on it for purely aesthetic purposes.

This inner circle also holds **punctuation**, such as the period in this example sentence. Here are some more punctuation marks:
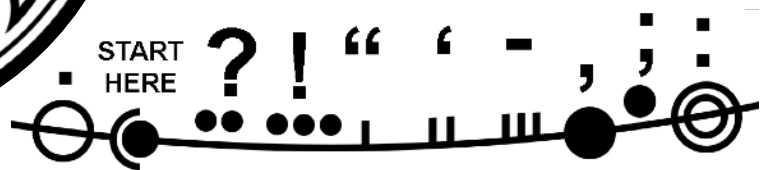
If an **apostrophe** is in the middle of a word, connect it from the punctuation circle to the word circle, between the relevant letters. For instance, this example says "don't blink." Note that the apostrophe connects to *don't* between the N and the T.

Spaces are usually implied by separating words, but can also be made by breaking the word circle, using the "▉" consonant, or any other way in which context makes it clear.
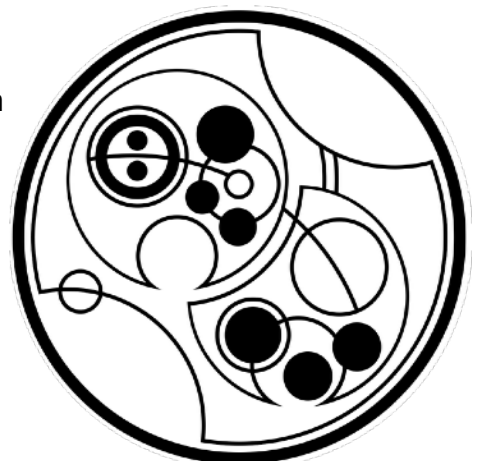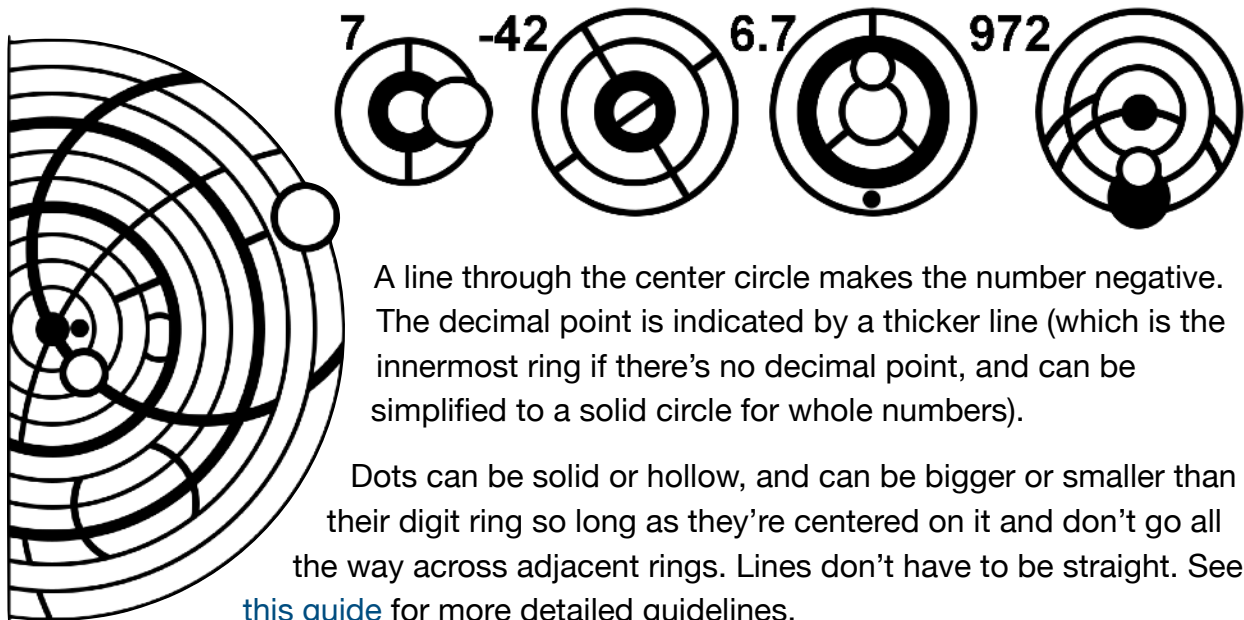
Multiple Sentences

Multiple sentences can also be chained together, often interlocking similarly to letters. Sentences can be chained together in any arrangement: circular, linear, even branching to represent the different possible timelines. After all, this *is* the language of the Time Lords.
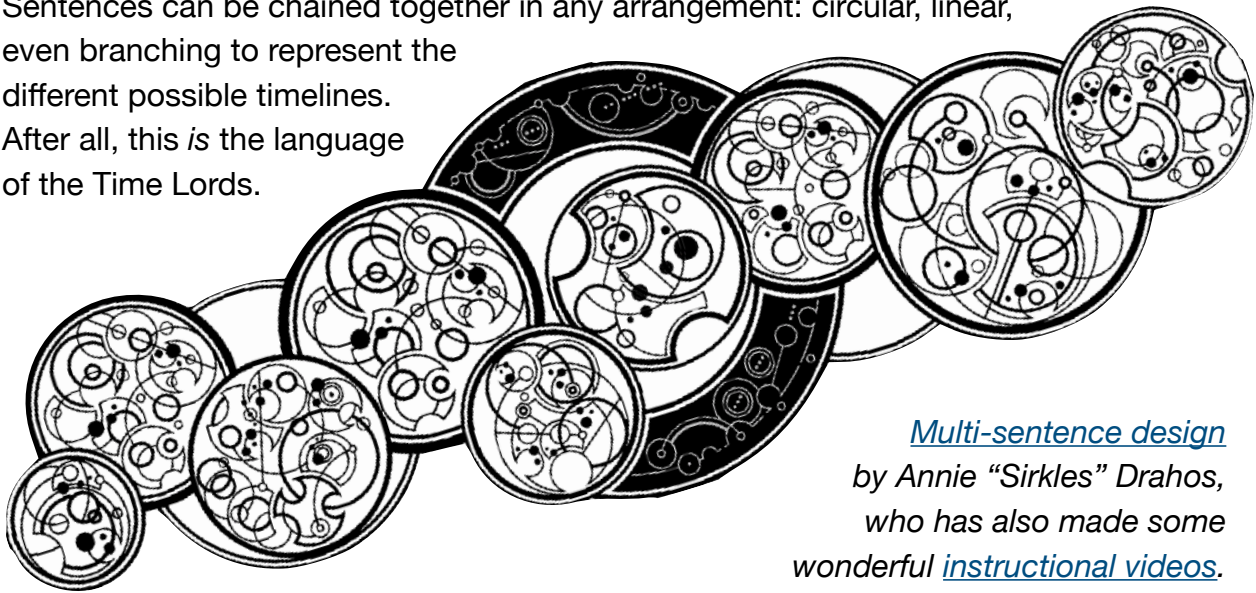
[Multi-sentence design](#)
by Annie "Sirkles" Drahos,
who has also made some
wonderful [instructional videos](#).

Numbers

Numbers are made of concentric rings, read **outer to inner**. Each ring is a digit. Each **line** in a ring adds 1 to the digit, and each **circle** adds 5 (so 1 circle + 2 lines = 7).

A line through the center circle makes the number negative. The decimal point is indicated by a thicker line (which is the innermost ring if there's no decimal point, and can be simplified to a solid circle for whole numbers).

Dots can be solid or hollow, and can be bigger or smaller than their digit ring so long as they're centered on it and don't go all the way across adjacent rings. Lines don't have to be straight. See [this guide](#) for more detailed guidelines.

Text "JELLY BABIES" to the number above to confirm that you translated it correctly.

Optional Techniques

You don't need to know these techniques to write Gallifreyan, but they may help you make your writing prettier or more compact, or help you read what others have written.

Consecutive consonants of the same shape can be stacked, just like double letters. When doing so, the letters are read in order of increasing thickness. For instance, in the word *strength*, the S, T, and R are all the same shape, so they can be written as a triple ⌢ with a thin S, medium T, and thick R. Same goes for NG and TH. On the top left is *strength* with all the letters separate; on the right, they're stacked.
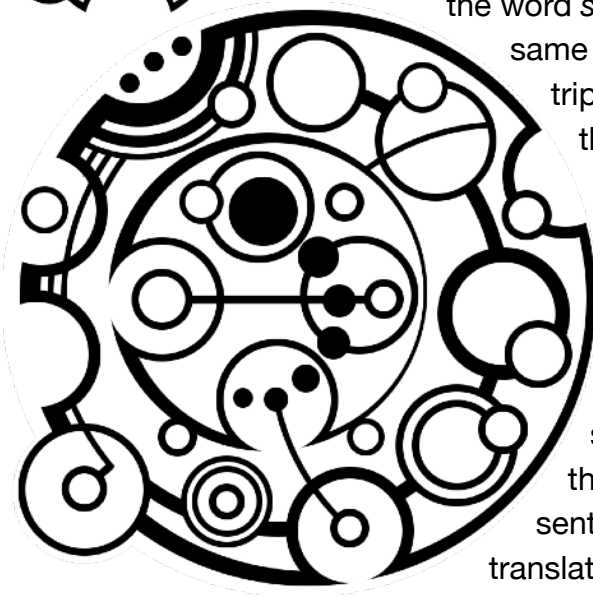
**Long words and sentences can spiral inwards.** If a word has a lot of letters, or a sentence has a lot of words, you can write a smaller word/sentence circle in the center of the existing one. These nested words and sentences are read outer to inner. See if you can translate the very long word to the left!

Drawing a line across a vowel **moves its position** to *before* the prior letter. This can be used to insert a vowel in between the letters of a multi-letter consonant or several stacked consonants. In this example, what would otherwise say *nto* has been turned into *not* by adding a line across the O. Multiple lines on a vowel can shift it multiple times, allowing multiple vowels to be attached to one consonant.

The optional **START HERE** symbol lets readers know where to begin, which can be useful when writing on something that can be turned different ways. The direction of reading is indicated by the filled dot's position. This symbol can be used in words, sentences, or paragraphs.
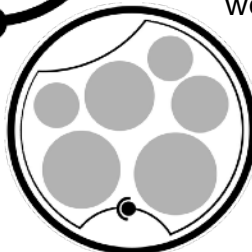
In this symbol's absence, the first sentence of a paragraph is often the bottom one, and is sometimes indicated with a different line weight.
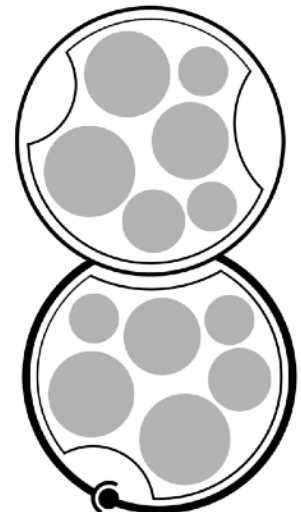
Overlapping Words

As mentioned before, words can "interlock" using ⌒-shaped consonants, such as in the **leftmost** example above, which says *word wordt*. The **center** example is a little bit ambiguous, but is also generally considered to be the same as the example on the left. If you want to write two overlapping words without implying an extra ⌒ consonant, leave a gap between the two words, such as the example on the **right**.

Special Characters and Diacritics

Umlauts (like the ü in *müde* here) are written as two short dashes intersecting the vowel (or the consonant to which the vowel is attached). **Acute accent** marks such as é are written similarly, except with one dash. **Grave accents** (è) have three dashes.

The Scandinavian **å** is just like the standard a, except it is written as two interlocking circles instead of one. Same goes for **ø / o**, and **æ / e**.

Ñ is written like N, but its line has a divot where it connects to the circle.

ß is written as an ordinary double S.

A **circumflex** ˆ over a vowel is written by adding an incomplete circle inside the vowel; a **caron** ˘ is written by adding two incomplete circles.

An **ampersand** can be written as an E with a line through it, usually attached to its own little word circle.

The █ consonant is a "blank" or "filler" symbol that can serve a variety of purposes. Some scribes indicate the @ character by attaching an A to it.

A Note on Context

Gallifreyan is intentionally a very open-ended system designed to allow artistic expression. It's okay to bend or even break the rules in this guide if doing so makes sense in context. Ultimately, the only thing that makes a work of gallifreyan "correct" is whether or not people can understand it.
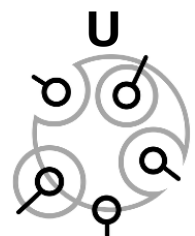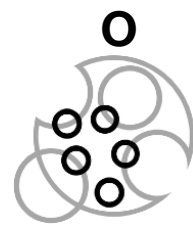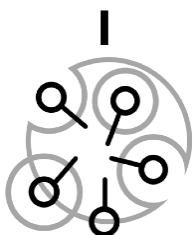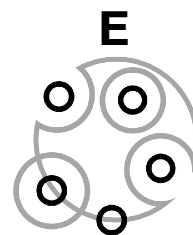
Translation Challenge

Can you decipher this quote?
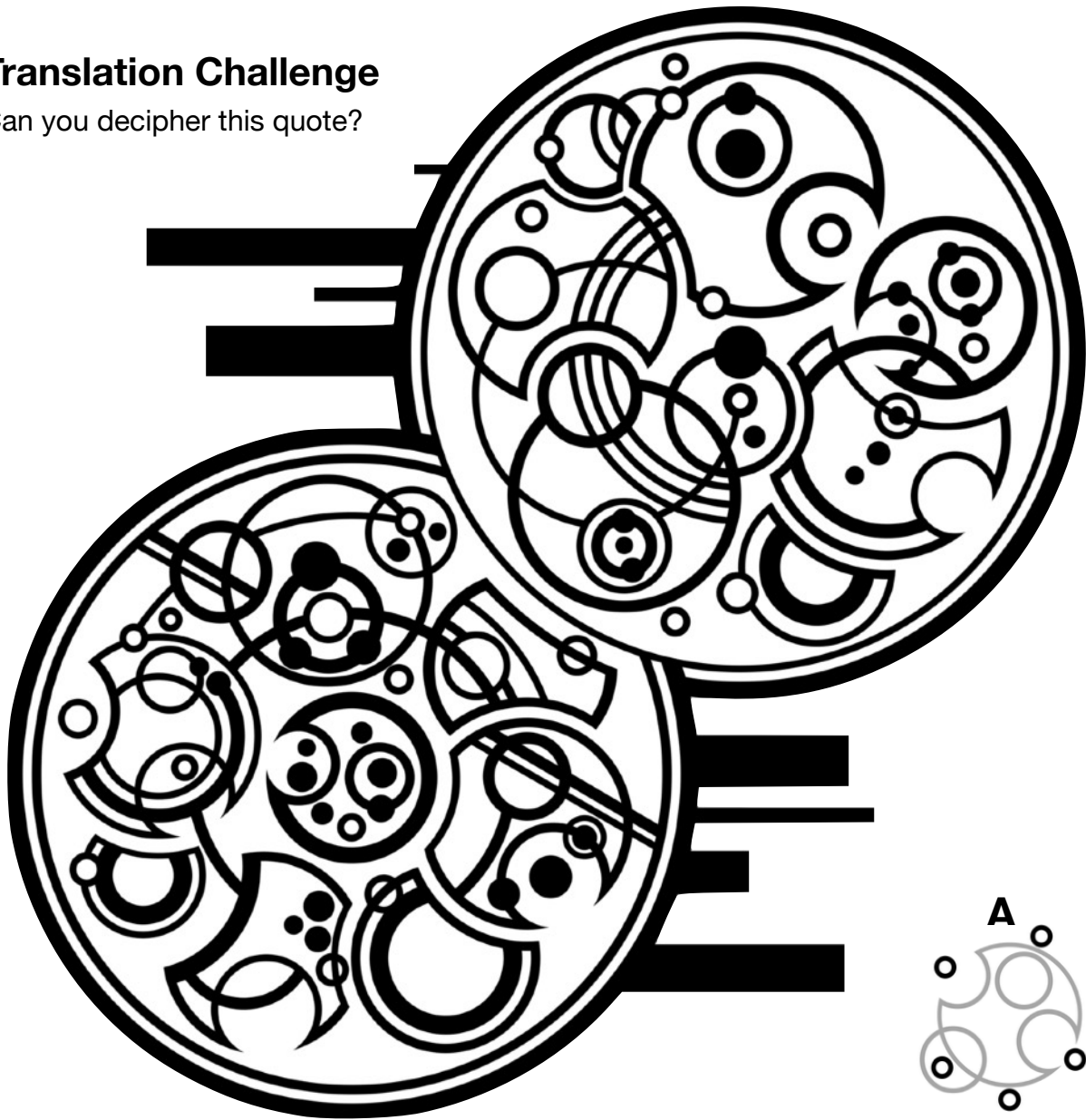
Here's the translation key again, for convenience.

		•	••	•••	⸬	—	=	☰
♋	B	■	CH	D	ND	G	H	F
⟊	J	PH	K	L	C	N	P	M
⌒	T	WH	SH	R	NT	V	W	S
⊖	TH	GH	Y	Z	Q	QU	X	NG

A

E   I

O   U
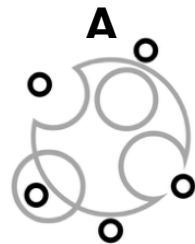
Styles

The more you write, the more you'll discover your own unique style. Here are some styles from the wonderful Gallifreyan community:

Symbolic Penguin

Annie "Sirkles" Drahos

u/ThinkingMacaco

Just Gallifreyan Things

Mightyfrong
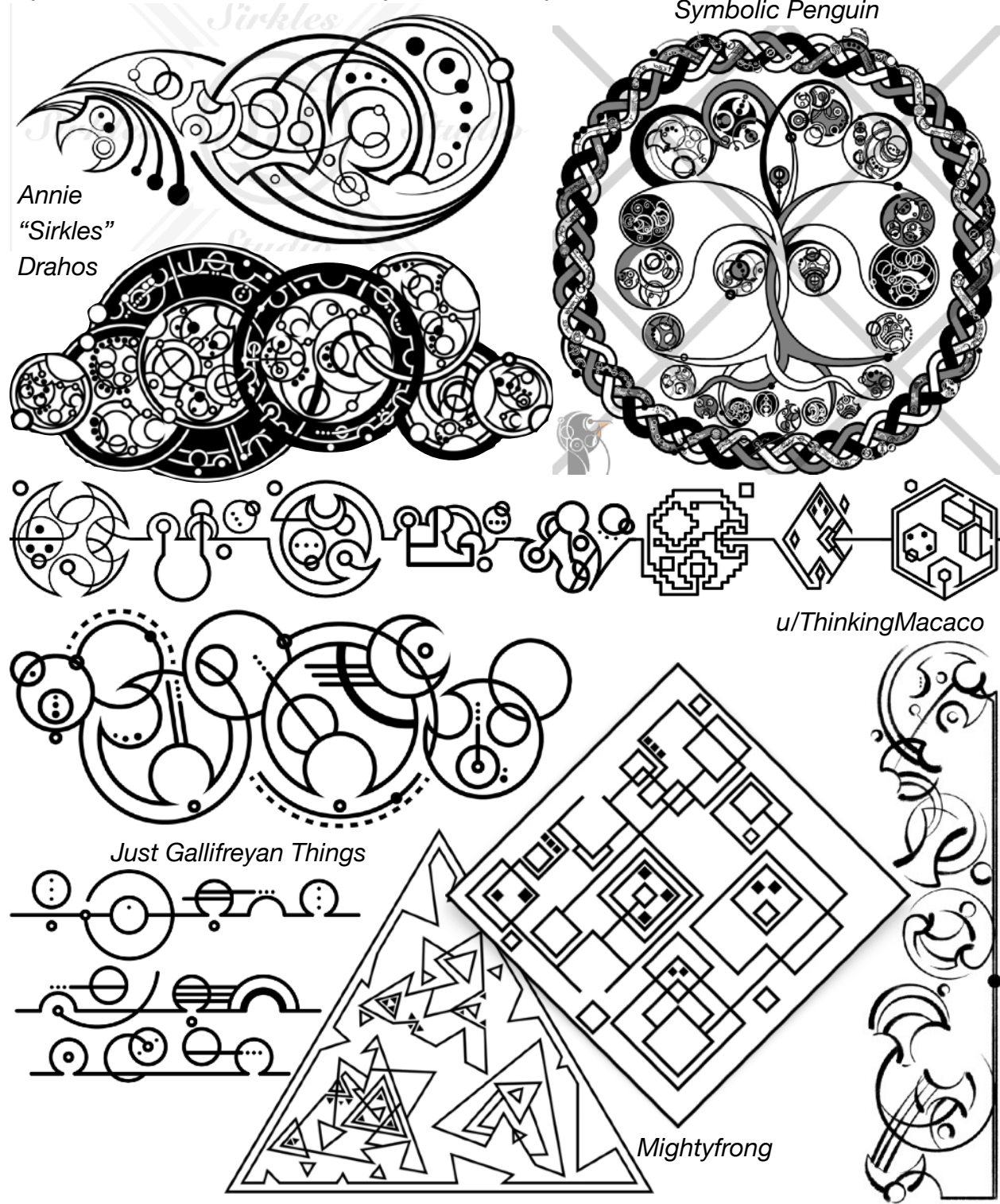
Thanks for reading! If you have questions, email lorenzosherman@gmail.com.