The existence of a scribal profession is first recorded at the end of the First Dynasty (c. 2900 BC). People educated in the art of writing held a position of status in Ancient Egypt. They worked at the court, and they did not have to pay tax, do manual labour or join the military.

Scribal training was primarily designed to prepare them for work in administration. They learned to write Hieratic and the cursive (handwritten) hieroglyphic script. For monumental writing, the scribe was often accompanied by painters and artisans who decorated the carved hieroglyphs.

A surviving fragment of a letter, found in the village of Deir el-Medina, the site that has yielded the most examples of literacy and written Egyptian culture, details the basic supplies central to a professional scribe’s work — papyrus, a palette with ink, and a writing board:

"... hurry to the storehouse of Nefery and bring the papyrus which is there, along with the small scribal palette and have them brought to me. And open the small chest which has been placed in the [...] of the gateway and get the documents, and attach them to the writing tablet ..."

Examples of these basic supplies are on display in this exhibition.