Writing a Megillah

Source Sheet of the Halakhah

January, 2022

What is a Megillah?

Esther 9:27-29

כז וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים ׀ עֲלֵיהֶם ׀ וְעַל־זַרְעָם וְעַל
כָּל־הַנִּלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבֹור לִהְיֹות עֹשִׂים
אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כִּכְתָבָם וְכִזְמַנָּם
בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה:
כח וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דֹּור
וָדֹור מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר
וָעִיר וִימֵי הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יַעַבְרוּ מִתֹּוךְ
הַיְּהוּדִים וְזִכְרָם לֹא־יָסוּף מִזַּרְעָם:

כט וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַת־אֲבִיחַיִל
וּמָרְדֳּכַי הַיְּהוּדִי אֶת־כָּל־תֹּקֶף לְקַיֵּם אֵת אִגֶּרֶת
הַפֻּרִים הַזֹּאת הַשֵּׁנִית:

27 the Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner of their writing and at the proper time each year.

28 Consequently, **these days are remembered and observed in every generation**: by every family, every province, and every city. And these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

29 **Then Queen Esther** daughter of Abihail **wrote a second letter of Purim** for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned one of Mordecai the Jew.

A Megillah is a scroll that contains the story of Queen Esther. Esther herself is accredited with writing the first Megillah (9:29). The telling of this story occurs every year (9:28) on the holiday of Purim (9:27). According to the story itself (above), the Jewish people have obligated themselves to sharing this story every year on the 14th of the Jewish month of Adar since its occurrence.

Do I need an actual Megillah to tell the story?

Mishnah Megillah 2:1

הַקּוֹרֵא אֶת הַמְּגִלָּה לְמַפְרֵעַ, לֹא יָצָא. קְרָאָהּ עַל פֶּה, קְרָאָהּ תַּרְגּוּם, בְּכָל לָשׁוֹן, לֹא יָצָא. אֲבָל קוֹרִין אוֹתָהּ לַלּוֹעֲזוֹת בְּלַעַז. וְהַלּוֹעֵז שֶׁשָּׁמַע אַשּׁוּרִית, יָצָא:

If one reads the Megillah out of order, one has not fulfilled their obligation. **One who reads it by heart**, reads it in a translation, or in any other language, **has not fulfilled their obligation**. But they may read it to those who do not understand Hebrew in a language other than Hebrew. One who doesn't understand Hebrew who heard it in Hebrew has fulfilled their obligation.

The Mishnah is clear that the Megillah should not be read by memory, and so a scroll is needed. The Mishnah prefers that the scroll is written in Hebrew but also permits special circumstances.

Talmud Bavli Masekhet Megillah 18a

קְרָאָהּ עַל פֶּה לֹא יָצָא וְכוּ'. מְנָלַן? אָמַר רָבָא: אָתְיָא זְכִירָה זְכִירָה, כְּתִיב הָכָא: "וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים", וּכְתִיב הָתָם: "כְּתֹב זֹאת זִכָּרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר". מָה לְהַלָּן — בְּסֵפֶר, אַף כָּאן — בְּסֵפֶר.

"If one read by heart they have not fulfilled their obligation, etc." (Mishnah 2:1)
From where do we [derive this]? Rava said: [This is] derived [from the word] 'remembrance'. It is written here [in the Megillah], "That these days should be remembered" (Esther 9:28), and it is written elsewhere [Amaleik's attack]: "And the Lord said to Moses: Write this for a memorial in the book" (Exodus 17:14). Just as there [Amaleik], [it is written] in a book, so too, here [the Megillah], [is written] in a book.

Both the story of Amaleik and Haman are similar in that these individuals tried and failed to destroy the Jewish people. In both circumstances, the Jews were told to remember the story so that it would be remembered. The Talmud compares these two stories to explain that to 'remember' the story really means to write down the story.

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 690:7

הקורא את המגילה על פה לא יצא ידי חובתו:

One who reads the Megillah by heart does not fulfill his obligation.

The Shulḥan Arukh does not pull any punches, and overtly prohibits the Megillah from being read by heart, and therefore must be read from a scroll.

Is the Megillah Scroll the same as a Torah Scroll?

Mishnah Megillah 3:1

בְּנֵי הָעִיר שֶׁמָּכְרוּ רְחוֹבָהּ שֶׁל עִיר, לוֹקְחִין בְּדָמָיו בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת. בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת, לוֹקְחִין תֵּבָה. תֵּבָה, לוֹקְחִין מִטְפָּחוֹת. מִטְפָּחוֹת, לוֹקְחִין סְפָרִים. סְפָרִים, לוֹקְחִין תּוֹרָה. אֲבָל אִם מָכְרוּ תּוֹרָה, לֹא יִקְחוּ סְפָרִים. סְפָרִים, לֹא יִקְחוּ מִטְפָּחוֹת. מִטְפָּחוֹת, לֹא יִקְחוּ תֵּבָה. תֵּבָה, לֹא יִקְחוּ בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת. בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת, לֹא יִקְחוּ אֶת הָרְחוֹב. וְכֵן בְּמוֹתְרֵיהֶן. אֵין מוֹכְרִין אֶת שֶׁל רַבִּים לַיָּחִיד, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמּוֹרִידִין אוֹתוֹ מִקְּדֻשָּׁתוֹ, דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי יְהוּדָה. אָמְרוּ לוֹ, אִם כֵּן אַף לֹא מֵעִיר גְּדוֹלָה לְעִיר קְטַנָּה:

Townspeople who sold the town square, they may buy with the proceeds a synagogue. [If they sold] a synagogue, they may buy with the proceeds an ark. [If they sold] an ark they may buy covers [for scrolls]. [If they sold] covers, they may buy scrolls [of the Tanakh]. **[If they sold] scrolls they may buy a Torah. But if they sold a Torah they may <u>not buy</u> with the proceeds scrolls [of the Tanakh]**. If [they sold] scrolls they may not buy covers. If [they sold] covers they may not buy an ark. If [they sold] an ark they may not buy a synagogue. If [they sold] a synagogue they may not buy a town square. The same applies to any money left over. **They may not sell [something] belonging to a community because this lowers its sanctity, the words of Rabbi Meir.** They said to him: if so, it should not be allowed to sell from a larger town to a smaller one.

The Mishnah explains the hierarchy of holiness by way explaining what you can purchase using the proceeds from a ritual object. One can sell items of lower sanctity to buy something of higher sanctity but not the other way around. From here we learn that Torah is held to a higher level of sanctity than any of the other books of TaNaKh - which includes Megillat Esther, even though Esther is held to a higher standard than the remaining books of the prophets or writings.

Talmud Bavli Masekhet Megillah 18b

תָּנוּ רַבָּנַן: הִשְׁמִיט בָּהּ סוֹפֵר אוֹתִיּוֹת אוֹ פְּסוּקִין וּקְרָאָן הַקּוֹרֵא כְּמְתוּרְגְּמָן הַמְתַרְגֵּם — יָצָא.

The Sages taught: **If the scribe** [who wrote the Megillah] **omitted letters or verses, and the reader read** [these missing items] **as a translator** [would do] **when translating, he has fulfilled** his obligation.

The Talmud explains that a Megillah is still a valid Megillah, even if it is missing letters or entire verses. Even though one is not permitted to read the entire Megillah by heart, one is permitted to fill in the missing spots that the scribe forgot to write in. In this way, the Megillah scroll is much more lenient than a Torah Scroll which would be invalidated if even a single letter was missing or illegible.

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 690:3

צריך לקרותה כולה ומתוך הכתב ואם קראה על פה לא יצא וצריך שתהא כתובה כולה לפניו לכתחלה אבל בדיעבד אם השמיט הסופר באמצעה תיבות אפי' עד חציה וקראם הקורא על פה יצא:

You need to read the Megillah entirely and from a scroll; and if you read it by heart you do not fulfill your obligation. You need to have the whole scroll in front of you in the first place, **but if the Sofer left out in the middle some letters even until half of it and you read it, then the one who read it by heart fulfills his obligation.**

הגה: אבל אם השמיט תחילתה או סופה אפי' מיעוטא לא יצא [ר"ן] ואפי' באמצע' דוקא דלא השמיט ענין שלם [ב"י בשם א"ח]

RAMA: even if [the scribe] left out letters from the beginning or the end, even if he left out just a little, one does not fulfill one's obligation. And even in the middle, specifically, where an entire topic is not left out.

אבל ביותר מחציה אפי' הן כתובות אלא שהן מטושטשות ואין רישומן ניכר פסולה:

However, **if more than half** [was missing, or] even if the letters were written but they were unclear and their writing was not recognizable, **it is invalid**.

The Shulḥan Arukh extends the leniency and says that up to 50% of the Megillah is actually permitted to be missing or incorrect for the Megillah to be a valid Megillah. The Rama is slightly more stringent saying the errors or omissions must occur in the middle of the Megillah, not the beginning or end, and the omission must not be an entire section of the narrative.

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:8

We do not read in public in a Megillah that is written between the writings [as part of a TaNakh], and if one did read from it, one has not fulfilled [their obligation], unless it is larger than the rest of the pages, or it is smaller, in order that there is a difference. But, an individual can read from this, even if it is not smaller or larger and fulfill their obligation but only if it is written on parchment like a Sefer Torah.

אין קורין בצבור במגילה הכתובה בין הכתובים ואם קרא לא יצא אלא אם כן היתה יתירה על שאר היריעו' או חסרה כדי שיהא לה היכר אבל היחיד קורא בה ואפילו אינה חסירה או יתירה ויוצא בה ידי חובתו ודוקא כשהיא כתיבה בגליון כספר תורה:

The Megillah should be a separate, independent scroll - much like a Torah. In this way it holds a higher status than the other books of prophets or writings, which are permitted to be read from a complete TaNaKh (ex. The Haftarah). However, if the particular TaNaKh in question highlights the book of Esther as being distinct, or it is written on parchment, then it is permitted to be used to fulfill the mitzvah of reading from a Megillah. In this way the Megillah holds a lower status than Torah which must absolutely be on its own as a distinct scroll for ritual use.

What are the basic requirements for a Megillah?

Mishnah Megillah 2:2

If it was written with arsenic, with red chalk, with gum or with sulfate of copper, or on paper or on scratch paper, he has not fulfilled his obligation , unless it is written in Ashurit [Hebrew with special script] on parchment and in ink.

הָיְתָה כְּתוּבָה בַּסַּם, וּבַסִּקְרָא, וּבַקּוֹמוֹס וּבַגְּוִנְגְּוִנְתּוֹם, עַל הַנְּיָר וְעַל הַדִּפְתְּרָא, לֹא יָצָא, עַד שֶׁתְּהֵא כְּתוּבָה אַשּׁוּרִית עַל הַסֵּפֶר וּבַדְּיוֹ:

The basic fundamental requires of a kosher Megillah match those of a Torah. Namely, that it must be written on parchment, in Hebrew (in the same font as the Torah), and with ink.

Talmud Bavli Masekhet Megillah 18b

עַד שֶׁתְּהֵא כְּתוּבָה אַשּׁוּרִית, דִּכְתִיב: "כִּכְתָבָם וְכִזְמַנָּם".

"unless [the Megillah] is written in Ashurit" (Megillah 2:2). As it is written:"According to their writing and according to their time" (Esther 9:27).

The phrase "according to their writing" is interpreted to mean that one should always write the Megillah in the same way that Esther wrote the Megillah. Since Esther would have written it in Hebrew, so too should the Megillah always be written in Hebrew.

"עַל הַסֵּפֶר וּבִדְיוֹ וְכוּ'". מְנָלַן? אַתְיָא "כְּתִיבָה" "כְּתִיבָה". כְּתִיב הָכָא: "וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה", וּכְתִיב הָתָם: "וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם בָּרוּךְ מִפִּיו יִקְרָא אֵלַי אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַאֲנִי כֹּותֵב עַל הַסֵּפֶר בַּדְיוֹ".

"on parchment and in ink, etc." (Mishnah 2:2) From where do we [derive this]? [It is] derived [from the words] 'writing' [and] 'writing'. It is written here [Megillah] in "Then Esther the queen [...] wrote" (Esther 9:29), and it is written there [Jeremiah]: "Then Baruch answered them: He pronounced all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink on the parchment" (Jeremiah 36:18).

The Talmud compares two examples from TaNaKh where someone "wrote" down the story. In the book of Jeremiah, it says explicitly that he "wrote with ink on parchment". It only says in the story of Esther that she "wrote". However, since both verses use the verb "wrote", the Talmud asserts that when someone "writes", it means that they do so on parchment with ink. Therefore the Megillah must always be written on parchment with ink.

Talmud Bavli Masekhet Megillah 16b

"דִּבְרֵי שָׁלוֹם וֶאֱמֶת". אָמַר רַבִּי תַּנְחוּם, וְאָמְרִי לַהּ אָמַר רַבִּי אַסִּי: מְלַמֵּד שֶׁצְּרִיכָה שִׂרְטוּט כַּאֲמִיתָּה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה.

"Words of peace and truth (**אמת**)" (Esther 9:30), Rabbi Tanḥum said, and some say [that] Rabbi Asi said: This teaches that [the Megillah parchment] requires scoring like the 'truth' (**אמיתה**) of the Torah .

The Talmud brings in an additional requirement of the parchment, which is not listed in the Mishnah. The parchment also needs to be scored - i.e. have straight lines draws on it with a razor blade to direct the scribe in how to write the verses straight and even (like on lined paper today). This teaching plays on the word 'truth', as Rashi explains: the "truth of Torah" is that it requires scoring.

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:1

One may only write a Megillah in ink on parchment (גויל) or parchment (קלף), like a Torah. And if one writes it in gall-nut extract or sulfate of copper* (קנקנתום) it is kosher. If one wrote it using other types of dyes it is invalid. And it needs to be scored like the Torah itself, and the skin of it does not need to be made in its name [with the intention of it being used as a Megillah] and there are those who say that it does need to be made in its name.

אין כותבין המגילה אלא בדיו על הגויל או על הקלף כספר תורה ואם כתבה במי עפצים וקנקנתום כשרה כתבה בשאר מיני צבעונים פסולה וצריכה שירטוט כתורה עצמה ואין העור שלה צריך לעבד לשמה ויש אומרים שצריך עיבוד לשמה:

The Shulḥan Arukh confirms that the Megillah requires ink on parchment. It goes one step further to suggest that black ink must be used, and no other types of dyes / colors, although it does provide two exceptions of "gall-nut extract" and "sulfate of copper" (קנקנתום). Oddly, this is a direct contradiction from the Mishnah which explicitly prohibits "sulfate of copper" (קנקנתום). This leniency is pulled from the Mishneh Torah, but it is unclear from where the Mishneh Torah derives this leniency.

The Shulḥan Arukh also confirms the additional detail from the Talmud that the parchment itself must be scored. It also brings in a debate as to whether or not the parchment needs to be made from the outset with the intention of being turned into a Megillah or not - although this argument is outside the scope of the scribe's work, and moves into the realm of the parchment maker, so we won't explore it here.

Additional Requirements: Stitching the parchment

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:5-7

אם תפרה בחוטי פשתן פסולה:

5 If it [the Megillah] was sown with linen thread it is invalid.

אם הטיל בה ג׳ חוטי גידים כשרה ובלבד שיהיו משולשות ומפני שיש בו פירושים שונים צריך לצאת ידי כולם ויעשה שלשה תפירו׳ בראשה ושלשה בסופה ושלשה באמצעיתה ותפירה אחת בחלק הרביעי מצד זה ותפירה אחת בחלק הרביעי שמצד האחר:

6 If it is attached with three threads of sinew, it is valid, as long as the stitches are in three parts. Since there are different interpretations, according to everyone, it needs three stitches at the top, and three at the end, and three in the middle, and one stitch in the fourth section on one side, and another stitch in the fourth section on the other side.

הגה: ואם אין לו גידין יותר מוטב לתפור הנשאר בחוטי פשתן מלהניחו בלא תפירה [הגהות מיימוני פ"ב וכל בו] אבל אם יש לו גידין יתפור כולה בגידין והתפירה תהיה מבחוץ ולא מבפנים [רבינו ירוחם נ"י ח"ד וב"י בשם א"ח]:

Rama: If there is no more sinew, it is better to stitch the remaining with threads of flax than to leave it unattached. But, if there is enough sinew, one should stitch all of it with sinew. The stitches should be on the outside, and not on the inside.

צריך להניח שיור בראש היריעה ובסופה כשתופרה יחד ובמשהו סגי:

7 There needs to be space placed at the top [above the stitching] when it is attached and at the end [below the stitching]. Any amount is sufficient.

In these three sections, the Shulḥan Arukh lays out the stitching pattern for connecting the multiple pieces of parchment which will comprise the Megillah. The thread used must be animal sinew, but according to the Rama, if necessary the thread can be flax. There must be 3 stitches total, but ideally there would be 9 (3 top, 3 middle, 3 bottom) with an additional stitch at the top and bottom. The stitches should also be on the outside, not the inside, and it cannot be stitched at the very top or very bottom.

Additional Requirements: Writing Haman's Children

Talmud Bavli Masekhet Megillah 16b

"וְאֵת פַּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא וְגוֹ' עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי הָמָן". אָמַר רַב אַדָּא דְּמִן יָפוֹ: "עֲשֶׂרֶת בְּנֵי הָמָן" וַ"עֲשֶׂרֶת" צָרִיךְ לְמֵמְרִינְהוּ בִּנְשִׁימָה אַחַת, מַאי טַעְמָא — כּוּלְּהוּ בַּהֲדֵי הֲדָדֵי נְפַקוּ נִשְׁמָתַייהוּ. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: וָיו דְּ"וַיְזָתָא" צָרִיךְ לְמִימְתְּחַהּ בְּזִקְיָפָא כְּמוּרְדְיָא דְּלִבְרוּת. מַאי טַעְמָא — כּוּלְּהוּ בְּחַד זִקְיָפָא אִזְדַּקִיפוּ.

"And Parshandatha etc... the ten sons of Haman" (Esther 9:6–10). Rav Adda from Jaffa said: [the phrase] 'the ten sons of Haman' [and the word] "ten" must be said in one breath. What is the reason? their souls all departed together. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: [The letter] 'vav' in the name "Vay'zata" must be elongated as a pole, like a steering oar of a ship. What is the reason for this? they were all hanged on one pole.

In the section of the Megillah which lists the 10 sons of Haman, the Talmud teaches that they were all hanged on one pole. To symbolize this, the Megillah alters the last instance of the Hebrew letter 'vav' which appears in the 10th name "Vay'zata" (ויזתא). Instead of being the same size as a normal 'vav', it is made larger which makes it appear like a pole.

אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בַּר פָּפָּא, דָּרַשׁ רַבִּי שֵׁילָא אִישׁ כְּפַר תְּמַרְתָּא: כָּל הַשִּׁירוֹת כּוּלָּן נִכְתָּבוֹת אָרִיחַ עַל גַּבֵּי לְבֵינָה וּלְבֵינָה עַל גַּבֵּי אָרִיחַ, חוּץ מִשִּׁירָה זוֹ וּמַלְכֵי כְנַעַן, שֶׁאָרִיחַ עַל גַּבֵּי אָרִיחַ וּלְבֵינָה עַל גַּבֵּי לְבֵינָה. מַאי טַעְמָא — שֶׁלֹּא תְּהֵא תְּקוּמָה לְמַפַּלְתָּן.

Rabbi Ḥanina bar Pappa said [that] Rabbi Sheila, a man of the village of T'marta, interpreted [a verse] homiletically: All of the songs [in the TaNaKh] are written as a half brick arranged upon a whole brick and a whole brick arranged upon a half brick, except for this song [Haman's sons], and [the song of] the kings of Canaan. [These are] a half brick arranged upon a half brick and a whole brick arranged upon a whole brick. What is the reason? So that they should never rise from their downfall.

Normally songs/poems that appear in the Torah have the structure of words on top of spaces and spaces on top of words (image A below). However, the section about Haman's sons should be written in two very narrow columns (image B below) - with words on words and spaces on spaces in the middle. This makes the text look like two unstable pillars which would fall if built so unevenly like this.

Image B

Haman's sons - two narrow columns

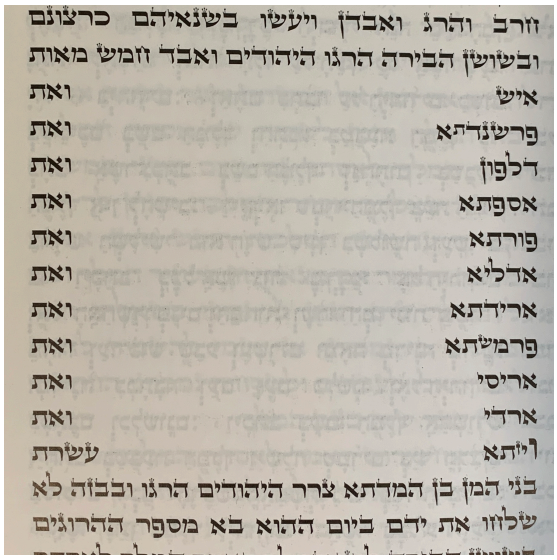
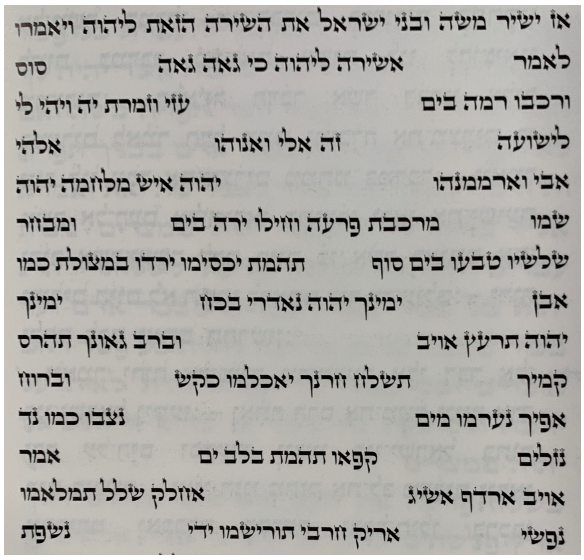


Image A

"Song of the Sea" - a stable arrangement



Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:3-4

3 The ten children of Haman need to be written properly, and not like the rest of the songs that have a space above writing, rather the space should rest between what is written (i.e. word space word). And of it is not done so, it is invalid.

עשרת בני המן צריך לכתבם כשירה ולא כשאר שירו' שחלק על גבי כתב אלא מניח חלק בין כתב לכתב ואם לא עשה כן פסולה:

4 [Referring to the section about Haman's sons] One needs to lengthen the "vav" in the word "ויזתא". And one needs to write "איש" at the beginning of the page and "ואת" at the end.

צריך להאריך בוא"ו דויזתא [בכתיבתה וי"א בקריאתה] [ר"ן בשם הרא"ש ומהרי"ל וב"י בשם א"ח] וצריך לכתוב איש בראש דפא ואת בסופה:

The Shulḥan Arukh confirms both the design of the two columns and the enlarged 'vav' in the name "Vay'zata", but also adds one additional detail. At the beginning of the section referring to Haman's sons, the word "איש" should begin the column on the right, and the word "ואת" should begin the column on the left. (See image B above).

Additional Requirements: Writing the letters

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:2

היתה כתובה על הנייר או על עור שאינו מעובד או שכתבה עכו"ם או אפיקורוס פסולה ודינה כספר תורה לענין היקף גויל וחטוטרות חתי"ן ותליית ההי"ן וקופי"ן וכל גופות האותיו' בצורתן ובחסרו' ויתרו':

If it was written on paper or on unprocessed skin or was written by an idolator or a heretic it is invalid. And the law is like that of a Sefer Torah on the subject of the parchment surrounding [each letter], the humps of the "ח", the gaps in "ח", and "ח", & all the shapes of the letters and the lacking or excessive letters.

הגה: גם צריך לכתבה מן הכתב (ר"ן) ולהוציא כל תיבה מפיו קודם שיכתבנה כמו בספר תורה [מהרי"ק] ועושין כל פרשיותיה סתומות ואם עשאן פתוחות פסולה [הגהות מיימוני פ"ב ופסקי מהרא"י סי' צ"ג] ובדיעבד אין ליפסול מגילה משום חסירות ויתרות דלא גרע מהשמיט בה הסופר אותיות דכשרה [הגהות מיימוני פ"ב וא"ז] [כמו שנתבאר סי' תר"ץ סעיף ג']

Rama: Also it needs to be written from one which has been written and [the scribe must] speak aloud every letter before it's written down like with a Sefer Torah. All of the sections must be closed and if any are left open it is invalid. After the fact a Megillah is not rendered invalid if the scribe left out some letters in which case it is valid.

וצריכה עמוד בסופה וחלק בראשה כדי להקיפה בו ויש אומרים שצריכה תגין ויש אומרים שאינה צריכה:

And it needs an empty column at the end and the beginning must be aligned so as to surround it [with empty parchment], and there are those who say that it needs the crowns on the letters, and there are those who say that it does not need it.

הגה ונהגו לתייגה גם נהגו שלא לעשות לה עמוד כלל בסופה [מהרי"ל]:

Rama: there is a custom to add the crowns and there is a custom to not put [an empty] column at the end at all.

Here the Shulḥan Arukh and the Rama discuss the way the letters need to be written. They both agree that every letter should be written with the same script as the Torah. However, the Rama adds that the scribe needs to copy the Megillah from an existing Megillah. This point contradicts what is stated in the Talmud: Masekhet Megillah 18b which says that while a Torah has this requirement, the Megillah does not. Regardless, they also agree that the letters should not go to the very top of the column, and that there should be a blank column in the beginning and end of the Megillah. There is a disagreement as to whether or not the letters need the little crowns that are always present in a Torah Scroll.

The big question: What about vowels & tropes?

Shulḥan Arukh Orekh Ḥayim 691:9

A Megillah that has vowels, or if one wrote the blessings and poems on the first page, it has not been invalidated.

מגילה שהיא נקודה וכן אם כתב בה בדף הראשון ברכו' ופיוטים אינה נפסלת בכך:

While the language used seems to indicate a preference that a Megillah not have vowels or have the blessings written on the scroll itself, the Shulḥan Arukh is clear that such additions to a Megillah scroll are completely permissible.

Mishnah B'rurah 691:25

If it is voweled - and if there is nobody who knows how to read with cantillation by heart, then it is permissible to write into the Megillah the cantillation marks, and to bless upon it, and that vowels do not diminish it. And in any case, if there are no cantillation markings on the Megillah it is permissible to read without cantillation.

שהיא נקודה - ואי ליכא מי שיודע לקרות בטעמים בע"פ מותר לכתוב גם הטעמים במגילה ולברך עליה דלא גרע מניקוד ומ"מ אם אין הטעמים במגילה מותר לקרות בלא טעמים כמ"ש סס' קמ"ב:

The Mishnah B'rurah confirms the position of the Shulḥan Arukh, but does not share in the hesitation. It explains that adding vowels serves a very specific purpose - to provide the ability for more people in the community to be able to read from the Megillah. When someone needs the vowels, they should be written in. Furthermore, it assumes the existence of cantillation marks (tropes), and recommends that one who doesn't know it by heart and doesn't have the markings written to help might as well read the text without any chanting.

Mishnah B’rurah 691:26

Blessings [written on the first page] - ideally one would not write blessings on the Megillah

ברכות - ולכתחלה לא יכתוב ברכותיה בה:

Regarding the leniency of the Shulḥan Arukh to permit blessings to be written on the Megillah itself, the Mishnah B’rurah is clear that this is not ideal. It is important to note, that it does not make any such hesitations regarding vowels and tropes and those are seen as essential tools to help those who have not learned to read the Megillah without them.

P’ninei Halakhah 15:11

The Megillah should be read with its cantillation, but if no one knows how to read it with the cantillation, it may be read without the cantillation, be-di’avad (Sha’arei Teshuva 690:1).

קוראים את המגילה בטעמי המקרא, ובדיעבד כשאין מי שיודע לקרוא בטעמים, אפשר לקוראה בלא טעמים (שע”ת תרצ, א).

The P’ninei Halakhah expresses the preference that the Megillah be chanted. This would be at odds to any position which prefers the Megillah be written without vowels or trope if the general community does not know how to chant it without these tools. As a result, having a Megillah with tropes and vowels permits more people to be able to follow the P’ninei Halakhah’s preference that the Megillah be chanted.

Summary

A Kosher Megillat Esther must be written with the following requirements:

1. Written as a scroll / letter
2. Written on parchment
3. Written in ink
4. Parchment must be scored
5. Parchment is stitched using sinew or flax
6. Parchment has at least 3 stitches at each joint
7. Haman’s children are written in two narrow columns
8. The ‘vav’ in “Vay’zata” is larger
9. The font is the same as the Torah
10. It might need the special crowns on some letters
11. There is space all around the text
12. It may include vowels and/or tropes
13. The blessings should not be written on the scroll (but if they are it’s okay)