

# Introduction to Pens: Fountain Pens, Calligraphy Pens and Nibs



*A good pen feels good in your hand. It makes you want to write, draw and doodle. The best way to select a pen is to try it and see how you like it. If it feels good and fits your style, go for it!*

*Let's compare calligraphy and fountain pens, rollerball and ballpoint pens, and describe a few specialty pens. Each pen type has its purpose, benefits, and drawbacks. Here is a quick reference.*

## Fountain Pens vs Calligraphy Pens

### Fountain Pens

These pens belong to a family of the finest writing implements. They are still presented as gifts to graduates or retirees of law, industry and commerce. Fountain pens may be considered a mark of sophistication. They are also the tools of choice for artists, illustrators, cartoonists, poets and others.

Only the style of nib distinguishes between a fountain pen and a calligraphy pen. The nib, or writing tip, is the point that delivers the ink to the paper. Both fountain and calligraphy pens rely on capillary action, rather than friction, to write. Capillary action is the intermolecular attractive force or surface tension that causes water molecules to follow molecule-by-molecule out of fountain and calligraphy nibs. As a result, both styles of pens effortlessly glide over the page and give handwriting a unique character.

Pen nibs can be divided into two main types: pointed and broad. The pointed nib is usually associated with a fountain pen. Fountain pen ink is thin and flows quite freely through a pointed nib. Little effort is required to put ink onto paper. However, the pen must be held at a suitable and constant angle for writing.

The nib determines smoothness and flexibility. Nibs are made from different materials such as steel, rhodium, and gold. It is craftsmanship that determines the quality and durability of the nib. Nibs come in various sizes: EF (extra-fine), F (fine), M (medium), and B (bold). A medium nib is common for most handwriting. If you write small perhaps a fine nib would be preferable. Use a flourish in your signature when signing important contracts? A bolder nib may suit your needs. Thick and thin strokes are achieved by varying the pressure you put on the nib. How you write is a part of the criteria for selecting a nib.

Part of the fun of using a fountain pen is knowing that these pens are a piece of history.

[Ravens March Fountain Pen](#) is a blog written by Dirck de Lint from Regina SK. It has many tips about using and caring for fountain pens.



.08 Calligraphy Nib  
1.4 Calligraphy Nib  
1.8 Calligraphy Nib



## Calligraphy Pens

Calligraphy pens are a special class of fountain pen. The broader, flat edge is the older of the two nib types. It creates marks varying in thickness. Calligraphy pens are primarily used for art projects and stylized penmanship. The pen is usually held at a constant angle, different scripts requiring different nib angles. Thick and thin strokes are created by varying the direction of the stroke. Nib sizes are generally considered to be small, medium or large as measured in millimeters. For expressive journaling, several sizes of nibs are useful.

The Online series has three sizes of tips .08 (small), 1.4 (medium) and 1.8 (large).



## Ballpoint vs Rollerball

### Ballpoint pens

The common ballpoint generally writes a thinner line and requires more pressure for writing than a rollerball, because you need to roll the ball to dispense the ink. The ballpoint uses a viscous ink that dries instantly on paper without smudging. For this reason, and their affordability, ballpoint pens are popular for school and office work. Ballpoints are needed for writing on carbon copies as other pens should not be used with the required force. However, because of the ink's formula, it is thicker and stickier, and the ball is not very responsive. The pen may skip or feel scratchy. Also, the ink can dry up in the reservoir, hence very cheap ballpoint pens can stop working even though they appear full of ink.

### Rollerballs

These pens glide smoothly and quickly across the page. The ink feels juicier. Rollerballs use a process that puts a greater amount of liquid ink onto the paper than a ballpoint, generally 3-4 times the amount. This is why your rollerball writes more smoothly and the line is so vivid and alive. Rollerballs are wonderfully responsive. The water-soluble inks are ideal for loose sketching and drawing. The ink may be moved with a wet brush to create a fully realized pen-and-ink wash. With some paper types, rollerballs may cause issues such as bleed-through, feathering and smudging. Always test your paper.



Faber Castell Loom Rollerball and da Vinci Maestro brush; a lovely pairing.



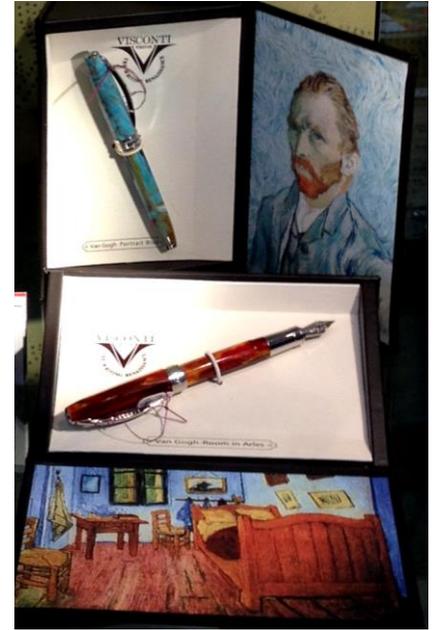
Rollerball refills are larger than those of ballpoint pens. Each brand has its own refills.

## The Body Style

Pen bodies can be made from several types of material, including steel, silver, gold, celluloid, plastic, and wood, to name a few. The material used to make the pen's body affects its weight and comfort. If you are not used to writing with a fountain pen, you may prefer a model that is lightweight to avoid hand strain. Instead of wood or metal, you could pick one made of rubber or plastic. As you get used to writing with a fountain pen, you might wish to move on to a heftier model.

The width of the barrel of the fountain pen is also important. People with smaller hands typically feel more comfortable with a narrow pen. However, a medium- to large-width fountain pen may actually reduce hand strain. Come to The Paint Spot, where you can try a few models before choosing one that feels right to the touch.

Visconti Pens are inspired by Van Gogh's paintings.  
These pens are at The Paint Spot.



## Cartridges, Converters and Ink

Unlike disposable pens that are thrown away, all our new pens allow continuous use through refills. The refills are generally specific to pen styles and brands. Cartridges are the easiest way to refill a fountain pen. The disposable cartridge is pierced in the pen and can be discarded when empty. Clever artists can refill these disposable cartridges with new ink by using a syringe.

The other option is to use an ink converter. These are refillable cartridges. A plunger mechanism is dialed up to draw ink in. Many fountain pens are cartridge/converter fountain pens, which means you can choose either. This capability allows users the option to use a larger range of inks and to switch back to cartridges for travel or when they are short of time.

Fountain pen ink comes in elegant bottles and a range of colours. By mixing two or more colours together, an unlimited range of custom colours is possible. Make sure to choose inks that are water soluble and suitable to your pens.

Refilling need not be messy. Cartridges and converters make it very easy. Lamy ink bottles dispense their own little tissues for tidying up.



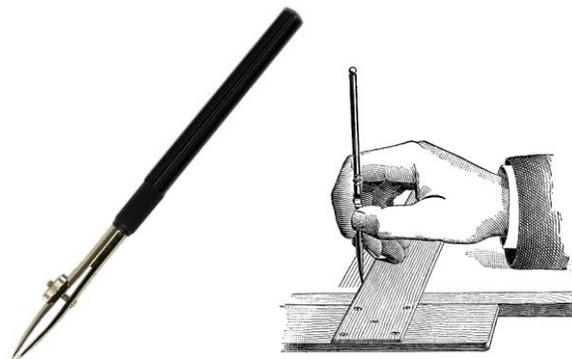
### Converter Tips

Twist the dial end to ensure your piston is all the way down. Submerge the open end into the bottle of ink. Twist the converter and watch as the ink is drawn up.



## Other Traditional Pens

A **ruling pen** is an instrument for drawing with ink or with other drawing fluids. A ruling pen contains ink in a slot between two flexible metal jaws, which are tapered to a point. It enables precise rendering of the thinnest lines.<sup>[1]</sup> The line width can be adjusted by an adjustment screw connecting the jaws.<sup>[2]</sup> The adjustment screw can optionally have a number dial. Originally used for technical drawings in engineering and cartography together with straight rulers and French curves, it is today used for specific purposes, such as picture framing or calligraphy.<sup>[1]</sup>



A **stylus** is a needlelike tool used in engraving and incising; *stylus* also refers to an ancient writing instrument used to inscribe clay or wax tablets. Its shape is usually a narrow, elongated staff, similar to a ballpoint pen. Many styluses are heavily curved to be held more easily.

A computer accessory used to assist in navigating or providing more precision when using touchscreens is also a stylus. Another widely used writing tool is the stylus for blind users in conjunction with the slate for punching out the dots in Braille.<sup>[3]</sup>



A **technical pen** is a specialized instrument used by an engineer, architect, or drafter to make lines of constant width for architectural, engineering, or technical drawings. A "rapidograph" pen is a trademarked name for one type of technical pen. Technical pens use either a refillable ink reservoir (isograph version) or a replaceable ink cartridge. In the 1960s, the pen's design evolved to feature tubes of ink that were filled with a Pasteur pipette or from the narrow spout on a special bottle of ink. This made ink flow more reliable. Extra maintenance and cleaning is required for these pens as the permanent and water-proof nature of the ink may dry and clog the pen. These pens must be frequently and carefully cleaned to remove all ink from the tubing; otherwise, the ink can set and become unremovable. A full set of pens has the following nib sizes: 0.13, 0.18, 0.25, 0.35, 0.5, 0.7, 1.0, 1.4, and 2.0 mm, which correspond to the line widths.



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