

How to fill your fountain pen

by Anthony Turchetta aka Penchetta

You just finished making your first fountain pen only to look down and see some extra parts lying around. What are these for? I see this question arise pretty often on IAP. So here is a quick article on some of the in's & out's of filling a fountain pen.

Depending on what type of fountain pen kit you purchased, it will most likely come with just an ink cartridge. This cartridge is commonly referred to as a standard or international ink cartridge. They will fit quite a few different pens. If you have purchased a more expensive fountain pen kit, then you should have received an ink cartridge and a converter. Remember, you will only use one or the other in the pen.



First let's discuss the ink cartridge. To fire up your fountain pen, simply slide the cartridge in place into the front section of your pen. Make sure that the cartridge is square in the section, and then simply press down and the feed will puncture the cartridge. You may want to give the cartridge a little squeeze to help the ink get down to the tip. That's it! No fuss no mess. The cartridge is a quick, clean way to load your pen. Depending on your pen's design, most pens will accommodate a live cartridge, one that is punctured and in the pen, and a second one that fits on top of it in the pen body as a spare, if there is room, commonly referred to as a Piggyback.

Here are some other standard or international cartridges that will work in your pen:

- ❖ Private Reserve offers a variety of colors in ink cartridges, 12 to a pack.
- ❖ Pelikan also makes small & long cartridges in black, blue & blue/black.



Next is the converter. The converter acts like a pump that holds ink. You use this with bottled ink. Simply screw the piston until it is all the way at the bottom, dip your converter into a bottle of ink, then twist the end of the converter and suck up some ink. Wipe the converter clean when you remove it from the ink. You will use the converter in place of the ink cartridge. Just place the converter into the front section squarely and press down. Another way to fill with a converter is with the converter already seated into the front section, simply dip your nib into the ink bottle and then suck ink into the converter through the nib. When you pull your nib out of the bottle of ink, just wipe off the excess ink from the nib.

Some of the advantages to the converter are, it will usually hold more ink, you have many choices for different ink brands, and a multitude of ink colors to choose from. Remember, some inks work better than others with certain pens. Some may flow better, put down a wetter line, or not dry as quickly on the nib. Only by trial and error will you find what you and your pen like the best.

Here is a sample of some converters – from the bottom:

- ❖ These two are standard converters that may have come with your pen.
- ❖ Above them is a Schmidt converter. Note the better rubber seal on the end, supported with a metal ring. This is an upgrade over the standard kit converters.
- ❖ The top two are squeeze type converters, short & long. Instead of twisting a knob on your converter to suck ink, with these you squeeze the converter, and when you release it, the ink is drawn into the cavity.



Be prepared to have some ink remover on hand. This is not as clean as using a cartridge. I use a product called Ink Nix, to remove ink stains from my hands.

As long as we are on the subject of filling your fountain pen, I will touch base on some different filling methods and different mechanisms.

From the bottom:



- ❖ **This is a Visconti demonstrator, which shows an ink cartridge in place.**
- ❖ **Next is a Lamy Safari, which shows a converter in place.**

- ❖ Above that is a Pelikan, which is a twist piston fill. To fill this style of piston, screw the blind cap, which depresses the piston, stick the nib in a bottle of ink, then screw the blind cap closed, drawing the ink into the pen. Leave the nib in the ink well for a few extra seconds; wipe your nib clean and your ready to go.
- ❖ Last is a Stipula power piston fill. Pull the blind cap and the piston slides all the way towards the end of the pen. Place the nib into your ink well and in one push, slide the piston downwards. Leave the nib in the ink well for a few seconds and the ink cavity will fill. There are several variations of the power fill.

Still being made today are lever fill pens. This type of filling system has been around for a long time. Usually the pen body has a rubber bladder that is glued to the front section of the pen. A lever on the pen is pulled and the bladder is deflated. The nib is then placed into the ink well and the lever released, causing the bladder to fill. Many of you may have seen the old pens that were stored with ink left in the bladder and the ink has turned into a solid. These pens need to be disassembled and a new bladder installed and they can get a second life.



A few eyedropper pens are still made today. Here is a photo of a couple of eyedropper pens. You unscrew the front section from the pen, and with an eyedropper you fill the pen body with some ink. A rubber O-ring creates a good seal so the ink does not escape. Some models have an adjustment at the tail to adjust the pressure and close the valve to seal off ink travel. www.danitrio.com has a good diagram of an eyedropper pen.



There are some specialty filling tools available. The picture below shows two such tools. The long cylinder is a Visconti traveling Ink Pot. This is a handy way to fill your pen. Place ink in the pot with an eye dropper, place your nib into the front, a rubber gasket seals the front section not allowing ink to come out and also keeps ink off your front section, Then twist your converter to suck ink into it.

www.visconti.it has animations of various filling systems.

Next is Stipula's Netto System. This is one I use. The bottle holds your ink and you place your nib into the top of the Netto system. A rubber gasket creates a good seal and allows you to draw ink into your pen without a mess. Here is a link to Stipula, where you can see an animation of filling with this system.

<http://www.stipula.net/use.html>



Last, don't forget the old favorites, eye droppers & ink wells. Be careful! Collecting ink wells can be a whole other story !



I hope this has been of some value to new and existing fountain pen lovers. I find playing with different fountain pen filling systems and inks, is as enjoyable as writing with them.

PS. As fun as it is filling and using your pen, don't forget to flush out the feed and clean the nib every now and then to keep your pen's performance up to par.

Write on,

Penchetta

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