

# **Behind the Nib - by Lou Metcalf**

Installment #3

## **Selecting a fountain pen**

Not a week goes by that someone doesn't ask me how to pick out a fountain pen. The request is much like asking me to pick out a suit for them. I can do it, but in order to steer someone in the right direction, there are a few key questions that need to be answered.

The first question that comes to my mind is "What kind of pen do you use now?"

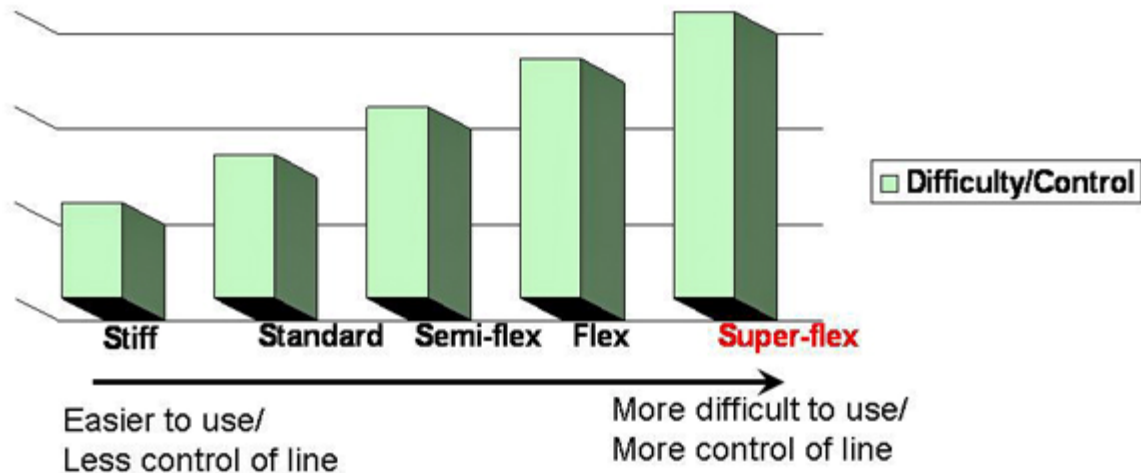
If you use a ballpoint pen exclusively, then I recommend a fairly stiff nib. Why? Because ballpoint inks require that the ink be pressed onto the paper and ground in, much like crayons. Treating a flexible nib in such a manner will reduce the nib to rubble in just a few minutes.

If you use a roller ball pen, I need to delve into your writing habits a little further. Do you press firmly when you write, as though you were writing through multiple copies? Then I still recommend a fairly stiff nib and for the same reason as above. If you write more lightly and fluidly, a semi-flex or flexible nib will feel good to start.

If you use a fountain pen regularly and are comfortable with the concept of flowing ink onto the paper, you will usually want a more flexible nib, either a flex or even a super-flex. Why? Because the added flexibility in the nib will give you the ability to create multiple lines widths, thereby personalizing your writing in an endless number of ways.

In general, the more flex in a nib, the more difficult it can be to master and control, BUT, the more variation you can put into your style, as is visually represented in the following chart.

## Fountain Pen Nib Flexibility and Usage Chart



Another consideration is the size of pen. Defining pens as large medium and small is extremely imprecise and can only give a buyer a ballpark idea of what to look for. There is a slightly more scientific approach which can be employed. This method is the result of a long study I did with two doctors from the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases nearly three years ago. The table below is not to be reproduced without specific permission and attribution. (email me for permissions and requirements)

### Pen Size Guide

Pen sizing is an inexact science or maybe just an art. In any case, here are my recommendations based on my experience with many customers.

Measure loosely around your hand. The measurement should be taken just to the palm side of your knuckles and should not include your thumb.

If the measurement is less than 8 inches, you will likely find our slender styles feel best. If the measurement is 8-9½ inches, you will likely find the medium styles to feel best. Over 9½ inches and our large styles will probably feel best.

There's room for overlap here, and there is a lot to be said for personal taste. I have a customer who is a professional football player and writes with my slender pens all the time. Conversely, I have a lady customer who is 5' tall and barely 100 pounds who prefers the large pens!