

POINTED NIBS, NOT JUST FOR COPPERPLATE

BY CORINNA TAYLOR

Hunt 22



Esterbrook 357



Gillott 303



Leonardt Principal



Brause Steno



Brause 66EF



Nikko G



Tachikawa G



Zebra G



Hunt 512



Leonardt 30



Even if you don't do Copperplate or Spencerian, pointed nibs are an important addition to your tool kit. They are useful for touching up edges; outlining drawn letters such as Versals; and adding the "whiskers" to retouched Gothic engrossing text; as well as drawing filigrees, vine stems, and the like.

They can be used to create a wide variety of letterforms, including Copperplate or Engrosser's Script, Spencerian, and monoline scripts. Mike Kecseg masterfully writes – with pointed nibs – Italic, Gothic and other scripts normally associated with a broad edge pen.

The pointed nib creates thicks and thins by the amount of pressure applied. The degree of flexibility varies enormously, from almost rigid to the extreme flexibility needed for dramatic shades and flourishes. Buy a sampler pack or a range of individual nibs, explore the different types, and find what you like.

Alas, the days when pen manufacturers were making nibs of exceptional quality and ideally suited for pointed pen scripts are mostly past. No-longer-made nibs (or those no-longer-made-so-well) are called vintage nibs. Of the vintage nibs, the best include Gillott Principality, Gillott 303, Spencerian #1, Hunt 22 and Esterbrook 357. (Gillott 303 and Hunt 22 nibs are still made. While good nibs, they are not as good as their Vintage versions.) When these "dream nibs" are found, they command a high price. However, there are many other good vintage nibs out there at reasonable prices. Unknown nibs can be surprisingly good, and there are hundreds of old brands to try.

The selection of suitable modern nibs is much smaller. Leonardt Principal, Brause Steno, and Brause 66EF are among the good ones. Perhaps the best currently-manufactured nibs are the Japanese "G Pens" made for drawing manga, a style of Japanese comics. The G nibs are a bit more

expensive than most other nibs, but are far more durable, are more resistant to the corrosive effects of iron gall inks, and have excellent workmanship and quality control. The least flexible is the Nikko G, which is stiff enough for monoline work if you have a light hand, but still flexible enough for the delicate shades of Spencerian lowercase. Tachikawa G is somewhat more flexible. The Zebra G is the most flexible, is able to make dramatic shades, and is more finely pointed than the other G pen nibs.

Closely related to the regular pointed nibs are the ball-pointed, also called dome-, pellet-, spoon-, or shell-pointed. These have the little ball at the tip like fountain pen nibs. They are generally easier to handle than the pointed pens and less likely to catch in the paper. Unless you need the extremely fine nib of a pointed pen, these can be ideal for casual scripts, outlining, and similar tasks. The flexibility varies. Hunt 512 is quite stiff, while Leonardt 30 is as flexible as the best nibs for Copperplate.

Pointed pens are seldom as durable as broad edge pens and generally can't be sharpened, although a light touch of fine, oil-free steel wool may extend their useful life a bit. Broad shades are especially hard on them, and a single dramatic heavy stroke can wreck a nib. If you can see space between the tines, the nib is dead. If a pointed nib is worn out (no longer sharp), it can be reborn as a broad edge pen with a quick snip of a diagonal flush cutter (a kind of wire snips) and a few strokes on a fine hard Arkansas stone. ☞

Terminology can be a little confusing. These little pieces of metal that insert into a penholder are pointed pen nibs. They are sometimes called pen points. Pointed Pen is the term often used to describe the writing, as in "pointed pen script," or the writing tool (nib & holder), "a pointed pen was used."