

Quill pens

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Quill pens were common ink-writing instruments in medieval times. They appeared around 700 A.D. and eventually replaced reed pens. At that time five outer left wing feathers of birds were used to produce quill pens. As a matter of fact, the left wing was favored because the feathers curved outward and away when used by a right-handed writer. The most popular were those quill pens made of goose feathers. They were inexpensive and reliable. Swan feathers were extra and, as a result, rarer and more expensive. In course of time the feathers of the eagle, owl, crow, hawk and turkey came into use. Though the quill pen was gradually replaced by dip pens, fountain pens and ballpoint pens that we all know, it is still in use as a great calligraphy instrument nowadays. It provides sharp and fine strokes and flexibility that can't be matched by many other pens. At present various breeds of birds can be used to supply different quills, including duck, goose, swan and pheasant. In fact the quill pen can be quite easily cut with one's own hands. It is recommended to immerse the tip into boiling water for a few seconds before cutting, as it gives the quill the consistency of a finger nail. The matter within it is cleaned out. The bid is cut by making two diagonal cuts coming to an apex at the point. Then the cut of about 10mm. is made along the center of the point. Finally, the width of the nib is cut. The principle is very simple: the shaft of the quill pen acts as an ink reservoir and ink flows to the bid by capillary action.

If the feather is long the overall length of the ready-made pen can be cut down to a manageable size. Although we can see full length pheasant quills on manuscripts it was certainly more common for a cut down version to be used. Also the plume is stripped quite often (unlike what we see in the movies). Though you can have your quill plumed.

Writing with a quill pen requires slowness and patience. The amount of ink necessarily to complete only three letters at a time is generally used in the process of writing. It is recommended to use a separate quill for a different ink color.

Thus cutting quills of different birds and writing with them can be an amazing challenge for true pen collectors.