

History and Facts of the Quill Pen

The first writing instruments were made by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia almost 5,000 years ago and have evolved over time. Among the many writing tools used is the quill pen, which has lasted centuries and is still used today by calligraphy artists and antiquity seekers. Following is a bit of history and "tips" about them.

A Brief History of the Quill Pen

The quill pen was used around the sixth century A.D. at the beginning of the Middle Ages. A reed pen, also known as the cane pen, was used for writing on papyrus sometime around the start of the Middle Ages, 800 B.C- 400 A.D. Archaeologists have also found reed pens in sites from Egypt, many of which were thinner than typical cane pens and were used for carving hieroglyphics or used with ink for writing on papyrus.

The biggest difference between reed pens and quill pens was their materials. Reed pens were made from undamaged and carved reed or bamboo around eight inches long. Being skilled at making reed pens was also especially important for scribes because of the low durability of the pen. Reeds were stiffer but did not retain a sharp point for as long as the quill, making quill pens a much-needed improvement. A quill pen retains its shape well, rarely requires sharpening and can last until there is not much of the quill pen. Many calligraphers prefer them for their sharp stroke.

*Aan, Bbn, Ccm, Ddi, Did, Eem,
Ffm, Ggn, Hhi, Jim, Jjmi, Kkn,
Lli, Mm, Mn, Nni, Nnr, Oom,
Ppp, Qqm, Rrr, Sssi, Ttn, Uun,
Vvn, Ww, Xxn, Yyn, Zzi, Zzn.*

Five Facts about the Quill Pen

1 ~ The best feathers for quills are swan and goose feathers

The type of feather matters. Goose feathers are preferred over duck feathers and other bird feathers because they are larger and stronger. Swan feathers are ideal because they are larger birds than geese, but swans are scarcer than geese. Eagle feathers, used in colonial days, are forbidden by law to be collected, although the law allows Native Americans to wear, use, inherit, or even give feathers to other Native Americans

2 ~ Another name for “quill” is calamus

Not only can the word quill or calamus be used to describe the feather itself, but also refers to the long narrow shaft of the plume.

3 ~ The quill pen was used to write the Declaration of Independence

The Mayflower Compact and Magna Carta also were written with quill pens.

4 ~ The strongest quills were obtained from living birds

During the birds' new growth period in the spring, their feathers were especially ideal for writing. The second and third outer wing feathers were most ideal too.

5 ~ Crow quills make the thinnest lines

Smaller bird makes a smaller quill. Crows have durable but small feathers, making them ideal for thin strokes.

Sources:

[Writing Instruments – Visual Dictionary Online](#)

[Quill Feather – Britannica](#)

[The Writing Instrument \(The Reed and Quill\) and Ink – Dartmouth](#)

[Reed Pen – Wikipedia](#)

[Using Eagle feathers](#)

[Facts and History of the Quill Pen](#)