

Desiderata Flex Pen User Manual

Quick Start Notes: READ ME!

Purpose. I designed this pen to be a writing instrument:

- Capable of giving outstanding flex performance
- Adaptable to a wide range of writing¹ styles
- Cheaper than vintage pens or other modern flex pen incarnations *of comparable performance*
- That works. Every time.

What you can expect.

- These pens were meant to work out of the box with no user modification. They can't support modification. I wrote this manual for a reason. This is the worst-case scenario of a user getting one of my pens: They open the box, ignore the instructions, fill the pen, push it too fast, too hard, too soon, and get unsatisfactory results, then they say "this pen didn't work out of the box, I'd better—put it through the paces that I would a xxxxxx's pen", and then they spend hours doing all kinds of fancy adjustments and modifications, where they put the pen into every other conceivable configuration EXCEPT the one in which the pen arrived, and get nowhere. Then I get an exasperated email where they're all but ready to give up on the pen, and I have to ask the embarrassing question of "did you read the manual first?"
- While this pen uses fountain pen ink **only**², and will theoretically accept any ink, every ink will not give identical performance. Assuming good pen hygiene, it is a fact that some inks *will* allow more flex without railroading than others. For a few notes on customer usage, please see the FAQ on the company website.
- An unclean nib, *especially between the tines* is the number one cause of poor flow and railroading. A different ink and a clean nib goes a long way.
- The internal parts of these pens are necessarily machined to very close tolerances. Be careful with your adjustments. 1/32" matters.

Tuning. This pen is **not** a typical, modern fountain pen. It is a writing *instrument* capable of holding flexible, steel dip nibs as well as stainless, firm nibs. Again, ink choice matters. Having good paper matters. Think of this pen like a musical instrument—you have to work *with* the instrument for best results. Every piece of music won't sound good on every piano with every pianist.

Once you get it, or when its time to be serviced, you need to learn how to tune it for optimum performance; *To fulfill its purpose*, it needs to be cleaned/tuned on a regular schedule dictated by its use and level of daily care. Flush it at the end of the night with water and air dry, and you should be good for a while.

Handling. Being a pen capable of flexing, and flexing easily, ink demands on the nib can be high, and to accommodate them, this pen was designed with a hand-cut feed capable of delivering enough ink to keep the pen from running dry or "railroading". Thus, this is a "wet fountain pen", as opposed to a dry one. Though all fountain pens are "controlled leaks"—utensils whereby capillary action draws ink from a reservoir to a writing substrate in a constant manner—some pens allow more ink to be drawn from the reservoir than others, and though not usually a problem, a wet pen is, *de facto*, more apt to leak ink than a dry one. This pen is not fragile, but it's also not like a ballpoint pen that one can abuse with impunity.

¹ This pen was designed to accommodate the majority of flex pen users, who do primarily writing (94%), not drawing (6%). Artists have used this pen to great success, but it required experimentation and practice to find the best combination of ink choice and drawing speed to suit their personal styles.

² You can use dip inks such as india ink, but it'll be a fun 6 minute ride before it clogs.

I carry one around with me in my pocket every day. I keep the nib (point) up when it's in my pocket, and I keep it capped. When it's on my desk and being unused, I cap it so if it falls off, I won't damage the nib or make a mess.

Use good sense with a pen like this. I love a good flex pen, but when I'm working in my workshop, I don't need flex. Board room? Yes. Busy restaurant kitchen? Probably not. Job interview? Maybe. Taking boring lecture notes? Probably.

Assembly/Tuning Instructions

(Estimated time before you can write with it: 5-45 minutes.)

Helpful tools: ruler, scissors, a table to work on with strong light, a couple clean soft cloths (microfiber if you have it, but not essential), clean hands, a cotton tipped applicator (Q-tip), water, silicone grease (optional).

These instructions apply to pens that come with sacs. If you have an eyedropper-filling pen such as the Sleek (one where you just pour ink directly into a reservoir), you will skip the steps mentioning sacs.

For a visual parts list, and other pictures that might help you get going with your new pen, please visit:

<http://www.pinterest.com/desideratap/troubleshooting/>

1. Cut ink sac to the correct length from the closed, round end. You need it to be as long as possible without bumping into the back of the barrel when the section is fully screwed in.
2. Grease the end of the section a little (if desired) and slide the sac over the smooth end of the section. (Grease the threads if using an eyedropper-filler such as the Sleek.)
3. Holding the section (threaded part up) with both thumbs and middle fingers, slowly work the ink sac down onto the base of the section with your index fingernails.
4. Make sure the sac is straight on the section, and not coming off at an angle.
5. Ensure that the nib is clean:
 - a. The nib you received with the pen had the protective wax removed, but ensuring you have a clean nib is essential. Rinse it off with your choice of solvents (plain water is a viable solvent, as is acetone) to remove finger oils or any surface discoloration, and dry and buff it (including the inside of the nib tines) with a soft cloth.
 - b. Take the cotton-tipped applicator (Q tip) and soak one end of it in your mouth until it's saturated with clean saliva. Holding the nib with your left hand between your thumb, middle and ring fingers, bend the left tine back (in the direction it would flex) so that you can see the inside edge of the tine. Rub the entire length of the tine several times with the Q tip. Switch hands, repeat the process with your other hand and the other tine. After you're done, the tines may want to lay on top of one another. Pop the tines back in place by gently flicking the tip with the Q tip. Using the clean cloth, wipe any cotton fibers out of the nib tines.
6. **Tuning. *This is where many problems of user error occur.* Please read the entire section.** Place the nib on the feed so that the ink channel is situated directly underneath the slit, and insert the nib/feed into the section making sure that END OF THE INK CHANNEL (the rectangular groove that comes to an end at the round part of the feed) is at or just beyond (~1/32") the tip-most end of the **vent hole** of the nib. You'll need a strong light for this.
 - a. **Zebra G, Nemosine, Pilot or Goulet nibs.** You have to push the nib/feed to the point of snugness. This will require something between a firm push to a *very slight amount* of brute force. A thick cloth or thick piece of rubber can help to protect your fingers. The tip of the nib usually protrudes from the section **about 20-24.5mm or less, but if the pen was shipped to you already assembled/tested, measure it first and use that distance for the future.** If you have the nib/feed in and it bleeds from the neck (the joint between the nib/feed and the section):
 - i. Make sure the nib and feed are aligned properly.
 - ii. Push the nib/feed in a little more—a little less than 1mm at a time—and try again.

- iii. Rub a little silicone grease around the nib/feed and reinsert. That will make it harder for ink to escape, but this is a last resort. Usually, pushing the assembly further in does the trick.
 - b. ***If you're having trouble getting the tines to close***, after each adjustment, flick the tines slightly with your fingernail to ensure they're truly at rest. Sometimes the tines can overlap slightly, or get caught up on something, and appear unable to close. This is more of an issue with the Gillott 303 than the Zebra G.
7. Once you have the nib and feed inserted, fill the assembly.

Filling instructions for pens with sacs

You need bottled ink! If you need additional help, please watch the YouTube video on "Filling and Tuning a Desiderata Flex Pen".

1. Holding the section by the part covered with the clear ink sac with one hand, submerge the nib and the entire end of the section.
2. Squeeze the ink sac with the other hand, and release it, allowing the sac to fill with ink. Bubbles from the escaping air in the ink sac should bubble through the ink. Once you see that, you know you're going to fill the pen.
3. To fill entirely, upend the assembly, and smartly shake it downward or tap the side to move the ink to the very end of the ink sac.
4. Using a towel to collect small bubbles of ink still contained in the feed, squeeze the sac, and while holding it squeezed, re-submerge the assembly to draw up more ink. This may take practice.
5. Repeat the above steps as necessary, until the pen is as full as you want it to be.
6. Set the assembly down on a towel.
7. **PUT THE CAP BACK ON THE BOTTLE.**
8. Dry the leftover ink from the section/nib.
9. Screw the section into the barrel.
10. Gently rub little saliva onto the exposed back of the nib with a towel. This will help get the flow started.
11. *Test out the pen by doing some slow doodles and **light** flexing to get the flow going. Don't flex too hard too fast!* Though this pen was designed to work properly "out of the box", that doesn't mean "foolproof with perfect Quality Control". In my experience the few times a person has trouble getting the pen to write, it's usually an air bubble or related to one of the two parts of the pen I didn't design, the nib. Cleaning between the tines (Assembly step 5b) usually clears up the issue.
 - a. ***CHECK:** Make sure it doesn't bleed from the neck. After placing it point down against the paper, you can usually see the ink start to pool up behind the vent hole, and the ink start to fill the space in the tines all the way to the tip of the nib. If you can see ink there, but it won't write yet, try wetting the bottom side of the tip (on the side with the feed on it) with a little saliva. Sometimes that helps to get the capillary flow started. It may flow a little wet at the beginning, and that's normal. Use a cloth to absorb any ink that may leak out. Check the back of the nib for any huge pools of ink forming. As necessary, go through the steps of tuning if the pen doesn't write properly yet. The key is for the pen to write properly without leaking, regardless of the nib/feed/sections appearance. In all of my tests, these pens can work smoothly once tuned properly with a clean nib and the right ink.*

Filling instructions for pens with eyedropper filling reservoirs

You need bottled ink! If you need additional help, please watch the YouTube video on "Filling and Tuning a Desiderata Flex Pen".

1. Grease the threads connecting the section to the ink reservoir with silicone grease. (NOT petroleum jelly)

2. Using your favorite method, pour some ink through the section back into the ink bottle so that the whole feed is saturated with ink. This will speed the time it takes for ink to get from the reservoir to the nib.
3. Pour some ink into the reservoir.
4. Screw the section onto the reservoir.
5. Assemble the pen (if applicable)
6. Go to step 11 from the “Filling instructions for pens with sacs” section.

(OPTIONAL) My own procedure for beginning use:

1. Once it's ready to be used, I wipe the tip of the nib with a clean cloth to make sure I didn't accidentally sully the nib without realizing it.
2. Lick the tip. Saliva starts capillary action exceedingly well, and your nib NEEDS capillary action.
3. Ensure the paper I'm about to use is clean, and doesn't have hand oils all over it. These are great pens, but they're not miracle workers; oils inhibit capillary action.
4. Hold the pen up to a strong light and ensure there's no gap between the tines. A gap there can cause this pen to turn into a nightmare. If there is, reseal the nib a hair or two further away from the end of the feed.
5. After filling, I give it a moment to get flow started. If there aren't any air bubbles in the way, you can actually see the ink begin to flow inside the Zebra G vent hole. Once it does, it will work. Seeing that level will also enable you to gauge how fast the ink flow is keeping up with your use, and, by getting used to the visible ink levels indicated there, you can avoid railroading. Eyedropper fillers such as the Sleek are much more susceptible to poor initial flow due to air bubbles getting trapped in the reservoir than the pens that are filled with sacs. That's due to the nature of adding ink *then* upending the pen as opposed to simply drawing ink up through the pen through the nib. I'm working on a solution. With a firm nib, initial flow is pretty good, but with a flex nib, you may have to just put the pen aside for a while for the air bubbles to come out. Also, consider experimenting with different ink choices.
6. Get a paper towel handy, and shake it downward to get a little splatter. If the thing runs dry when you first filled it, try shaking it. Most likely you'll get nothing (which tells you there's an air bubble in there) or you'll get a few drops, and then you're back in business. It may take a few tries of shaking, tapping or setting it aside to get the air out, but eventually your pen will settle in, air bubbles will be gone, and it will perform nicely for you.

Maintenance

Staining. Though it can stain a different color with a strong ink, the silicone sac included with your pen will not melt or become damaged through holding any ink. I have used Noodler's Inks including Baystate Blue, Private Reserve inks, and several fountain pen friendly iron gall inks in these sacs, and the sac was fine.

If you disassemble the pen and rinse it, once the water is 100% clear, you can be sure the remaining color in the sac is purely discoloration of the sac and not ink residue. If you just like the sac to be clear, rinse it out with bleach water and a cotton swab, and you should be fine.

Cleaning. The best way to clean a pen thoroughly is to take it apart and wash the parts in soapy water. Be sure to rinse all trace soap off the nib before reinsertion. If you just want a periodic rinse to make sure everything is flowing smoothly, just pour a glass of water, and discharge/fill the pen into it a few times.

Nib replacement. If you purchased this pen for use with a disposable dip nib, such as the Zebra G, remember that these nibs are disposable, and were never designed for permanent use. For the *longest possible* nib life, you must remove and clean the nib after every use. That said, if you just dried the nib tip at the end of the day, you're still in better shape than you would be if you never cleaned it. One customer simply taps it, nib up, a few times to drain the ink out of the nib, and thoroughly wipes the tip of it dry with a cloth. At the time of this writing, he's had his for about 3 months, and his nib still works great. Another

option is to simply flush it with water at the end of the day, dry off the nib tip and let the pen dry out. I switch inks a lot, and that's what I do.

The dip nibs with which my pens are compatible were chosen for their price, durability, availability, and/or their performance. They will wear out eventually. If you keep the nib in your pen continuously, without cleaning, the wear and degradation manifests, gradually, as a loss of the finer aspects of the nib's highest performance; scratchiness, poor flex, bad hairlines, etc.

Handling and general care.

- For wooden pens, just wipe the wood clean if it gets dirty. No waxes or polishes are necessary. Try to avoid getting ink on the wood! It's sealed and most ink spills aren't a problem, but be careful; all it takes is one drop of ink in the right place and the wood is that color forever.
- Only tighten the cap to the point of gentle snugness. Ratcheting the cap down with all your might can damage the wood.
- Since wood was once alive, in the final product, there is sometimes evidence of its past life; worm holes, chips, color inconsistencies, spalting, etc. are all part of the experience of having a solid wooden pen. This is normal.

Troubleshooting

For pictures that can help you get going with your new pen, please visit:

<http://www.pinterest.com/desideratap/troubleshooting/>

Railroading/Intermittent flow. If your pen railroads, and it's not because of alignment, there are a few possible reasons:

1. Are the tines in perfect contact with the paper? Is the nib worn or dirty? Clean it or replace it. Adjust writing angle.
2. Is the nib clean? Between the tines, too? Refer to assembly step 5b.
3. The paper is oily, and causes the line to run out at the same general region. Get some clean paper.
4. The pen is running low on ink. Refill it. Flex pens can use a lot of ink.
5. If this happens when you first start using the nib, make sure:
 - a. The nib, feed and section are all spotlessly clean
 - b. The ink channel isn't blocked, pointing in the wrong direction, or otherwise in the wrong orientation. Air bubbles can be a menace here. See "OPTIONAL my own procedure for beginning use", step 5 and 6.
6. Are you flexing like flex is going out of style? If so, I understand your excitement, but unlike Apple³, I haven't yet succeeded in building a product with actual working magical parts yet, so there are limits. Experiment with different inks and adjust your writing style to accommodate it. This is not a fountain pen, this is a writing *instrument*. And like musical instruments, you have to work *with* the instrument for best results—every piece of music won't sound good on every piano with every pianist.

Pooling of ink behind the nib. If your pen starts to create a big pool of ink behind the nib that looks like its in danger of blobbing out, don't panic, just take a clean napkin and wick away the ink behind the nib. Most likely, the pen is either mostly empty and there are air bubbles in the section interrupting the flow, or the air behind the ink is expanding from heat. Try filling it completely full first. This pen is designed with modern materials using old technology, and this feed has a "vintage" design where the occasionally pooling ink is held to the CLEAN nib through surface tension alone. You need this generous ink flow for flexing "to the max" (approximately 3 mm) without railroading. This is normal. Scary, but normal.

³ The original advertisement for the first generation Apple iPad billed it as "magical." This is a fact.

When I shake the pen, ink shoots out. Don't shake a fountain pen! A fountain pen is a controlled leak, and shaking—what amounts to an ink-filled container with a hole in it—is gambling at best and lunacy at worst. Play it safe, and try not to drop it or jostle it.

Blurting out ink when flexing. For what it's worth, in my tests, this problem is usually solved by adjusting the placement of the nib/feed in the section, if that doesn't help, email me with your problem, and I'll see if we can't work it out. Put "Felonious Monk" in the subject line.

Stuck nib? First, try soaking the section in warm water for a while to loosen things, and then, using a strip of thick rubber (inner tube, thick rubber band, anything you can think of) to get a better grip on the nib and feed and, holding the section with your other hand, *twist* to get the nib/feed out. Or, pull off the sac/ink reservoir, and get something to get behind the feed/section to push it out—A paintbrush handle, bamboo skewer, drill blank—whatever you have that can make disassembly a "pushing" game, rather than a "pulling" one. Anything you can do to *push* or *twist* the nib/feed out is better than straight squeezing and pulling. That's a losing battle.

I have a sample vial, and I want to fill it with this pen, but there isn't enough ink there. My next design will make problems like this a thing of the past. More on that to come. But for the moment, you can pull the nib/feed out, and pour (or use a transfer syringe) the contents of the sample directly into the section, filling the sac directly, then replace the nib/feed.

Scratchiness. You were sent a pen with a clean, new nib. If you're using high quality, smooth paper, and the pen is set up correctly, and you're still getting scratchiness, I need to talk with you and see how you're using it. Most often, this is one of two types of user error:

- If your pen holding position and writing style is the problem, I can 'point' (!) you in the right direction to improve your experience.
- If you're used to iridium tipped, gold nibs that have been tuned by a nibmeister, *and* you've never used a dip nib before, I can give you a pep talk about trying new things. Email me.

Blurting out ink often/continuously/bleeding. If you're having trouble with your pen blurting out ink a lot/often, make sure the pen is full, and check again. If it doesn't blurt ink from the outset (in the first 2 minutes or so), once it's full, it shouldn't blurt while in use. If it does, send me an email with subject: "Felonious Monk".

If it does bleed ink early on, try pushing the nib/feed further into the section. Pull out the ruler. For a Zebra G, if the nib tip is more than an inch out from the section, push harder. The joint will be snug (and hard to remove by accident) but if the nib/feed won't go any further into the section with reasonable force, and the pen is filled, and it still won't stop bleeding ink, and all other issues have been addressed, you may have a defective nib/feed. Send me an email with subject: "Felonious Monk".

Final thoughts: All that matters is that the pen works, not how the parts look when they're seated together. If you have it set up so that the flow is how you like it, and it runs smoothly, but to your eyes, the tines look wonky, or the feed looks awkward, or the nib/feed aren't as far and snug into the section as you think they should be, that doesn't matter. The key is to test it out and tune the apparatus so that it works smoothly for you. Then, have fun. If you have further problems, have a look at the Desiderata Pen Company Pinterest "Troubleshooting" page. I'll have YouTube videos coming soon on any issues that may arise.

If you store your unused pens upright, thus keeping ink from being in constant contact with the nib, and dry off the tip and the contact between the tines, or flush and dry it nightly, you can literally go as long as you want between cleaning or changing the nib or the setup.