

The Pen Picker

Match the job to the right type of pen

THE JOB	BEST PEN	WHY IT WORKS
Everyday notes	Ballpoint or gel	Ballpoint is the dependable pick. Gel is smoother and darker.
Forms with carbon copies	Ballpoint	Firm pressure carries through every copy.
Left-handed writing	Ballpoint or quick-dry gel, fine tip	Thin, fast-drying lines smudge less under the hand.
Signing documents and cards	Gel or rollerball, medium tip	A dark, confident line with little pressure.
Glossy paper and receipts	Ballpoint	Oil-based ink grips slick surfaces where watery ink beads.
Thin paper and planners	Fine ballpoint or fineliner	Less ink on the page means less show-through.
Long writing sessions	Rollerball or gel	Ink flows freely, so your hand does less work.
Boxes, plastic and labels	Permanent marker	Made for surfaces a pen cannot mark.
Studying and marking up text	Highlighter	See-through color that keeps the words readable.
Phones and tablets	Stylus pen	A pen on one end and a touchscreen tip on the other.
Travel and flights	Ballpoint	Thick ink is the least likely to leak.
Event giveaways	Click ballpoint	No cap to lose, and it writes on almost anything.
A gift or a signing moment	Metal rollerball or pen set	Heavier in the hand and presented in a case.

Tip size guide

Extra fine

about 0.38 to 0.5 mm

Small handwriting, planners, detailed notes

Fine

about 0.5 to 0.7 mm

Everyday writing

Medium

about 1.0 mm

Signatures and forms

Bold

about 1.2 to 1.6 mm

Bold signatures, labels, cards

Sizes are typical ranges. Each pen maker measures a little differently.

Ink at a glance

Ballpoint	Thick oil-based ink	Dries fast, lasts long, needs a little pressure
Gel	Pigment in a water-based gel	Bold, vivid lines with a smooth feel
Rollerball	Thin water-based liquid ink	The smoothest glide, slower to dry
Felt tip and fineliner	Ink fed through a fiber tip	Crisp, even lines for labels and drawing
Fountain	Liquid ink fed through a metal nib	Expressive lines, best on good paper