

Ballpoint vs. Rollerball

The Mechanics

You're familiar with ballpoint pens, but may not know the differences between ballpoints and rollerballs. As the name implies, a ballpoint distributes ink from a reservoir across a metal ball in the tip of the pen to the paper. A rollerball uses the same mechanics of ink distribution, however, the main difference is the ink inside the reservoir.

Ballpoint Advantages

Ballpoints have a viscous oil based ink that does not evaporate easily, but dries quickly on paper. This ink innovation was an improvement over leaky fountain pens that were messy to fill and easily smeared on the page. Ballpoints didn't require caps to prevent evaporation, which cut the cost of manufacturing down. Twist or click mechanisms retract or extend the writing tip to further protect from ink stains on fabric pockets or purse linings. The ink's ability to dry almost instantaneously eliminates smudging concerns to the relief of left-handers worldwide.

Ballpoint Disadvantages

One drawback of ballpoints is a less fluid writing experience. Ballpoints require more pressure to move the thicker ink across the ball leading to hand fatigue and poor penmanship. Another disadvantage is lesser quality inks can become gummy making the ball skip or lock.

Rollerball Advantages

Rollerballs provide the convenience of a sealed ink reservoir and ease of ball ink distribution, but with a more fluid writing experience than a ballpoint. Rollerballs use a liquid ink like fountain pens and require caps to prevent evaporation. The liquid ink lays down 3-4 times more ink than a ballpoint leading to a bolder, more colorful line. Because the ink is thinner, the ball rolls more easily under a lighter touch and feels very smooth as it glides across the paper. A distinct advantage for those with arthritis. A rollerball comes closer to the feel of a fountain pen without the mess or maintenance.

Rollerball Disadvantages

The drawbacks include higher manufacturing prices due to the requirement of a cap, higher refill costs because more ink is used and the higher possibility of smudging.

Modern Advancements

Before you start tossing your ballpoints in favor of rollerballs, try some of the new inks available for Parker style refills. My hands down favorite is Parker gel refills. The smooth flowing ink takes a major step toward closing the gap between ballpoints and rollerballs. They are available in a variety of colors in fine or medium tip. Another note worthy innovation is the Schmidt 9000 refill for Parker style replacements. This is a very smooth flowing ink that dries very quickly on paper reducing the chance of smudging. Perfect for lefties!!