

The Lamy Safari: A Basic User's Guide

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Everything you need to know about this sleek modern take on a tried and true design.



Introduction

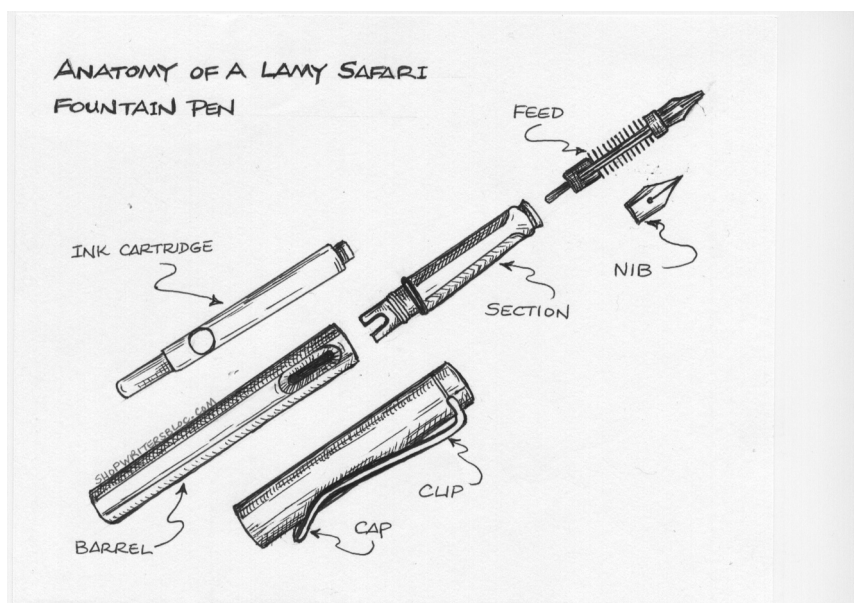
So, you've finally walked away from the world of disposable, ugly, afterthought ballpoint pens and decided to take the plunge into the world of fountain pens. You might have your first fountain pen in front of you right now, wondering just how you're supposed to use this thing, or you might be sitting on the fence of gel pens and disposable fountain pens, looking before you leap into the inky abyss. In either case, you're in the right place.

The question does have to be asked though, why fountain pens? To that I ask why do anything unconventional? Why watch TV when you can simply wait for your next biologically programmed action? Fountain pens are a hobby, just like collecting anything from rocks to fossils. The primary difference is that these pens fulfill an action already necessary for many people: writing. Instead of using a ballpoint provided, why not use a pen that's stylish and confident? Using a fountain pen sends a message: you're intelligent enough to keep track of your tools and confident enough to use them. There are also more options for personalization, with countless colors of inks to choose from, from vibrant

blues to invisible ink. Additionally, ergonomics on most fountain pens are far more effective than their mass-produced ballpoint counterparts, particularly the cheap ones that come from bulk packs.

In today's increasingly impersonal, digital world, there seems to be an increasing nostalgia for the times when these pens were the only option for writing. I believe the wider fountain pen community is part of the wider collective response to the statistical feeling of modernity. With fountain pens, there is a certain stability. It's something clearly made for the individual, and as you write with it the nib flexes and bends in a certain way, influenced by your particular handwriting. To me, it is a powerful symbol of individualism and creativity, a reaffirmation of the self. Every single ballpoint pen is the exact same, but your nib adapts to your handwriting and works for you.

This guide has been written with the LAMY Safari in mind, as well as pens using a similar manual of arms such as the LAMY AL-star and Vista. These pens in particular convey a modern take on the fountain pen using German engineering.



Now, with that out of the way, let's explore how this modern take on a reliable platform operates. There are two ways the Lamy Safari can be filled:

1. Disposable T10 cartridges

2. Z-series converters

Both have advantages and, as a new owner, you will soon become accustomed to. Therefore, this guide will include the operation of both, and a brief guide to inks for new fountain pen owners.

Part 1: Loading a pen with cartridges



Option 1: Loading a cartridge in a dry pen

Most beginner's pens come with ink cartridges inside. The Lamy Safari typically ships with one of their proprietary T10 cartridges loose inside. Simply unscrew the cap, remove the cardboard band preventing the top and bottom parts of the pen from fully tightening, and screw the two halves together tightly. The ink channel's feed should break the seal on the top half of the cartridge, allowing ink to flow forth.



Ink cartridges can be more convenient than other filling methods, as several can be kept on hand to swap out should a pen run dry, but they do come with serious trade-offs. It takes some time (sometimes up to an hour!) to ink up a dry pen with one. This is due to the viscous nature of the ink, it takes time for it to travel from the barrel of the pen to the nib. Once a pen has ink in the channel, however, this becomes less of an issue. To speed up the process, place the pen somewhere with the cap side down for a while to let gravity do the work. Check it intermittently to check if it's ready. Another trade-off is price. Before long,

Reloading cartridges

Once a cartridge is completely used up, you can insert another fresh one. To do this, simply unscrew the top and bottom portions of the pen, insert another cartridge using one of the methods discussed above. Due to the physics of the ink, it shouldn't take as long to be usable again, simply leave the pen upside down and test it intermittently until it works again.

Option 2: Loading a pen with a converter and bottled ink

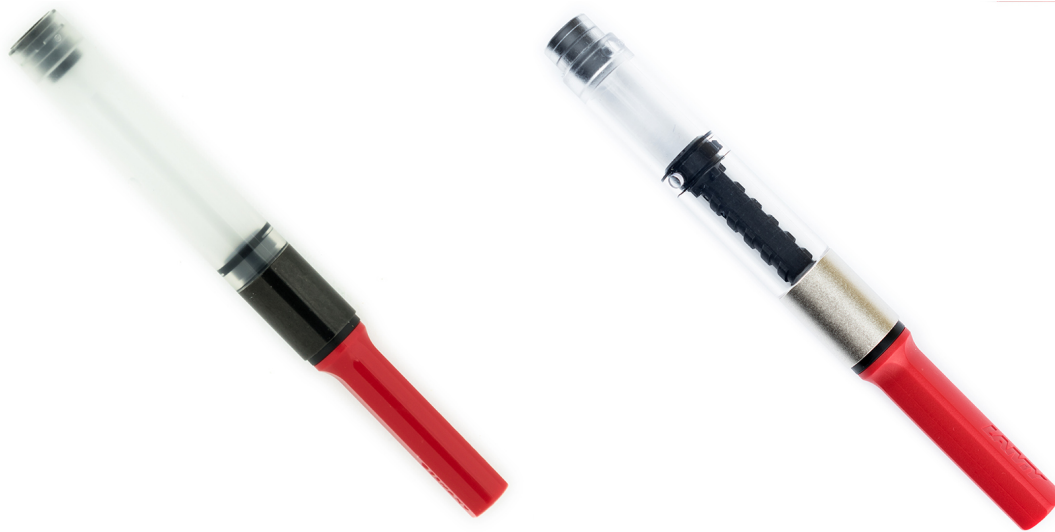
What is a converter? If you've used nothing but cartridges, your new best friend. Some pens, particularly Chinese-manufactured ones such as JinHao brand pens, come with converters inside. These gadgets "convert" your pen from a voracious cartridge carnivore to a docile, tame instrument that sips ink delicately from bottles. In less purple prose, the converter is a small piston-filling system that attaches to the pen. Higher-end fountain pens such as the Lamy 2000 feature built-in pistons, however these lower-end pens need to be "converted" before they use ink bottles.

LAMY converters are pricey at around \$5 per unit, but it is well worth it. Cartridges are not economically or ecologically sound for long. While the cartridges can be convenient at large events where you'll be doing a **lot** of writing, a converter is more practical to most users. While a cartridge will usually last a day or two of regular writing before needing to be replaced, a converter can practically last as long as there's ink to feed it. Ink bottles tend to last very long, especially if you rotate between a large collection of inks like I do. I still have my first bottle of ink from 2015 after days of daily writing, as I rotate between my growing collection of 12 inks.

Filling with a Converter

Most fountain pen converters are simple, simply place it over the feed snugly, then submerge the nib (the pointy part) in your ink of choice. My preferred method of filling is to leave a small amount of air (maybe $\frac{1}{4}$ of the converter) inside, then push it out into the bottle by twisting the top part of the converter. Twist it the opposite way to fill the ink. Dry the end of the pen with a paper towel. This process is similar across the board, but LAMY has a few tricks and specifics to their selection.

LAMY offers several converters for their pens. Currently, the Z28 is the standard for the LAMY Safari and its derivatives. Try to get your hands on the older Z24 if you can, I believe it offers more to beginners. The Z28 seems harder to twist in my opinion, and doesn't stop twisting when the converter is full like on the Z24. The primary visual difference between the two converters is the Z28 has a silver band while the Z24 has a black one.



Lamy Z24 (left) and Z28 (right) converters

In either case, these converters have something that sets them apart from most competitors: a retention system. This prevents the converter from coming loose, as has happened to my Pilot Metropolitan to devastatingly blue results. You'll notice your LAMY has four small protrusions on the part of the grip (top part with the nib) that extends into the barrel (bottom part that contains ink view window). Look closely, and you can see where the narrow gaps close in further, allowing for the two small nubs on your converter to slot in. This keeps the converter from becoming loose in your pocket, so you don't go from wearing khakis to blue jeans. Simply pop your converter into place by guiding said nubs into the narrow spaces, and follow the usual instructions.

Special Note: If you haven't already, this is the part of fountain pen ownership where you will be given a distinct badge of honor. For the next 1-3 days after filling your pen, it's more than likely you'll be wearing your favorite ink on your hands. There have been very few times when I haven't gotten ink on my hands when filling my pens, and I honestly wouldn't trade it for the world. Just make sure to use gloves when filling if you're planning on going to an event that isn't as sentimental towards people wearing Rorschach Tests on their hands.

Part 3: A Brief Word on Paper

The kind of paper you write on can be just as important as the pen and ink you use, perhaps even more so. It doesn't matter what you write if the person reading it can't make out what it says. So yes, I really am going to give you some tips on paper, of all things.



An example of feathering, note the ink spreading into the pulp of the paper as it's absorbed

In all honesty this is something I do not put a lot of thought into myself until I actually have problems with it. Some types of paper don't mesh well with certain inks. When this occurs, it's typically in the form of feathering, which is when your writing comes out fuzzy and blurry, as the paper has absorbed the ink like a paper towel instead of allowing the ink to dry on top of it. Additionally it may also bleed through the paper onto the next page. This problem can be remedied by using higher quality paper or inks formulated to resist feathering, such as Noodler's X-feather.

Some brands of stationery to look for include:

- Rhodia
- Clairefontaine
- Tomoe River

- Midori

Part 4: Ink for Beginners

In this section, I've compiled a list of my recommendations for beginner fountain pen users in regard to inks. I have worked with good inks and not so good inks, so hopefully this section will help you avoid some of the mistakes I've made and still live with. A bottle of ink lasts a long time on your desk, especially when it's something you hate writing with.

Before we get to the good stuff, let me say right off the bat: **Only use FOUNTAIN PEN INK in your FOUNTAIN PEN.** I have a bottle of calligraphy ink on my test to this day, it's just a grey, watery mess in my fountain pens. This could've been easily avoided had I just looked up whether or not there's a difference. You don't buy gasoline for a diesel engine, don't buy calligraphy or India ink for your fountain pens.

Do not buy Noodler's Baystate Blue until you're ready. Seriously. It's acidic, just acidic enough to stain your pens permanently. You'll need to clean your pens with bleach to get it out. I know it looks extremely vibrant, it's the most blue blue to ever be blue, it's bluer than Eiffel 65, but it's also not a good first ink. Too bad it's also often recommended for purchase by pen websites.

Now, for my official list, these are the inks I love the most in my collection and recommend to all fountain pen users:

- Noodler's Black- A simple, inexpensive black ink in a large bottle. So waterproof the creators also proudly sell it as "Bulletproof black."



Noodler's Black



The Goulet Pen Company

- Pilot Iroshizuku tsuki-yo- Part of a series of inks named after natural Japanese beauty, tsuki-yo translates as “moonlight,” this subtle yet stunning ink adds an appealing teal color to your writing.



*Pilot Iroshizuku
Tsuki-yo*



The Goulet Pen Company

- Diamine Oxblood- For the bold and the cold. This less conventional red ink is a deep crimson color. Perfect for letters of love or warnings of horror, this is my go-to ink for February *and* October.



Diamine Oxblood



The Goulet Pen Company

- Lamy Blue- The exact same clinical blue ink that comes in Lamy's cartridges, just in an innovative bottle featuring built in blotting paper, meaning you can wipe the excess ink off your pen without needing a paper towel. Colors in this line tend to be slightly muted and geared towards a professional environment.



Lamy Blue



- Noodler's General of the Armies- An emerald green ink that is supposed to turn blue with use. Mine personally never does, but it's possible it's due to the dye inside settling at the bottom of the bottle. Regardless, both muted emerald green and union blue are beautiful to look at. I've gotten many compliments from using this ink.



- Noodler's X-Feather- A variant on Noodler's Black that I've switched to recently, I recommend this one to students in particular, as it will write on a variety of papers. As the name implies, it is designed to resist feathering on most papers. This includes the most common types of papers encountered in journals and notebooks. A note-taker's dream.

