

# SPEEDBALL OBLIQUE NIB HOLDERS

Some Tips for Making Them More Useful

Don King – January 2013

There are a number of oblique pen holders listed in both of the predominant calligraphy supply catalogs (Paper & Ink Arts and John Neal, Bookseller) and they all have characteristics and features to recommend them. The least-costly of the group is the black plastic Speedball holder which goes for about two bucks, its next-lowest priced competitor being about \$13 and going up to around \$40.

I specify the Speedball for my beginning students, since my interest is in making their introduction as economical as possible. It can be used as-is with acceptable results, but it can be made better and I have been using them quite regularly for a long time in their modified form. Here are a few “flaws” and some things that can be done to correct them.

--- The piece that the nib fits into is separate from the staff itself; it slips into a hole in the end of the staff, and can just as easily slip out. A drop of good all-purpose glue (I like Gorilla Glue) will solve that problem. Just pull out the piece, add a drop of glue and push it back in place.

--- The holder is designed to fit “standard” nib bases, and the common wisdom is that certain nibs won’t fit it (like, for example, the Brause EF66, which is smaller.) Many of these will fit if you’ll use a pair of side cutters to firmly grip the bottom edge of the base of the nib, after starting it into the holder with your fingers, and use it to push the nib far enough into the holder that the fit is very solid. I haven’t found any other tool that will provide the grip necessary to accomplish this. You can acquire side-cutters, also called wire cutters, at any hardware store for \$4-5. Ask for a 5” pair, smaller than regular ones.

--- The “grip” portion of the holder is slick, hard and a little thin. I remedy this by using a can of Plasti-Dip (there are probably other brands too) to build up a larger and more comfortable tool. Plasti-Dip is meant to be used to add cushioned handles to tools like pliers and screwdrivers and comes in several colors. Tie a string to an old nib inserted into the penholder; Holding the string, dip the pen right up to the base of the nib into the Plasti-Dip; Allow some of the excess liquid plastic to drip off the tip, then hang the holder up by the string to dry. One dipping will add about 1/16” of diameter to the shaft – You can repeat as many times as you wish to achieve a diameter that fits your hand. Use a sharp Xacto knife to trim off any excess plastic from around the base of the nib. Also, try cutting some of the length off of a few of these holders (before dipping) to make “stubby” versions, which are convenient for carrying to workshops, etc.

Enjoy your “cheap” nib holders, and spend your savings on something fun!