

## Adjusting Your Premium Oblique Penholder

by Dr. Joseph M. Vitolo©

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There are several styles of oblique penholders available on the market. Some of them have set or glued flanges, while others have non-fixed (i.e. not glued) flanges that can be removed with care such as the premium quality (Figure 1) Del Tysdal's Zanerian Style oblique penholder and the Century Oblique penholders in regular and 5/8<sup>th</sup> diameter. This article will address how to set the angle and stabilize the flange on these types of holders.

**Figure 1** The Tysdal Zanerian Style Oblique Penholder

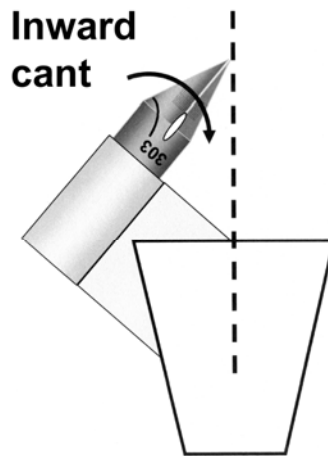


First, allow me to clarify the term ‘removable flange’. This simply means that the metal flange is not glued or permanently fixed to the pen staff. It does not mean that the flange should be removed regularly since doing so could loosen its fit or damage the pen staff itself. Occasionally, a holder like the Tysdal Zanerian Oblique has its flange tightly seated by friction. It is not necessary to stabilize it any further unless it loosens up; however, it will be necessary to adjust the nib angles for proper writing.

I need to mention a quick word about inserting the nib (pen point) into the flange of a new Tysdal or Century oblique for the first time. Occasionally, the manufacturing process used to produce the metal flange leaves metal burrs on the inside edge of the flange that accepts the nib. This can make it next to impossible to insert a nib into the new holder. To correct this carefully remove the flange from the pen staff, gently spread the metal open a small amount and scrape the forward edge of the flange with a sharp X-Acto blade to deburr it. While the flange assembly on both the Tysdal and Century oblique penholders fits a very wide variety of commonly used nibs, it does not fit all nibs right out of the box. For example, a vintage Spencerian No. 1 nib will require bending the flange to accommodate the pronounced curvature of that nib. That is a topic that is beyond the scope of this article.

A good starting point as an adjustment for your nib/flange assembly to have a slight inward cant with the tip of the nib slightly elevated (Figures 2 and 3B, respectively). The purposes behind these adjustments are two-fold. The inward cant of the nib (Figure 2) permits both left and right nib tines to sit flush to the paper when writing. This should accommodate most modern pen grips.

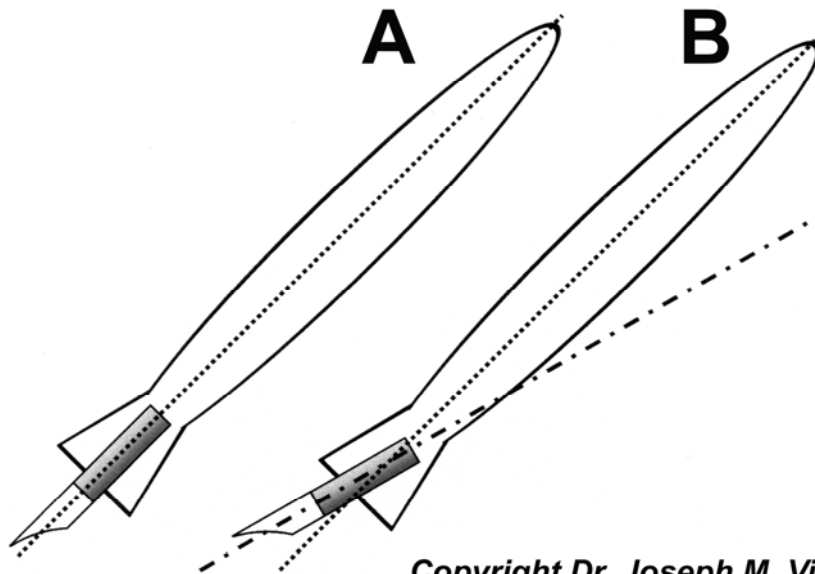
**Figure 2** Inward nib cant and tip alignment



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The angle of the nib relative to the long axis of the pen staff is also important (Figure 3, A and B). If the nib-to-paper angle is too steep relative to the paper (Figure 3A) this could result in a 'scratchy' nib while writing. Applying a slight upward angle of the nib/flange assembly (Figure 3B) decreases the angle of the nib relative to the paper's surface to facilitate writing. Note that the upward cant of the nib in Figure 3B results in a less steep nib-paper angle than that shown in Figure 3A. These are highly individual preferences but the information in this article represents a good starting point.

**Figure 3** Upward nib angle and the nib-to-paper angle

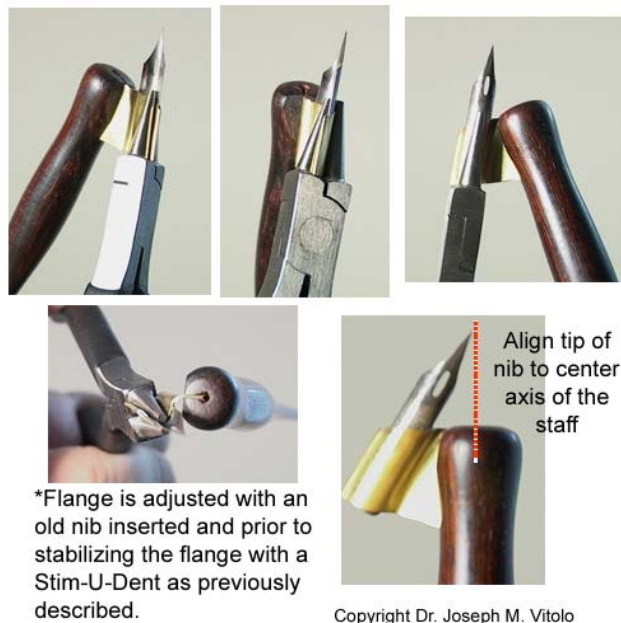


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The adjustments described in the paragraph above are essential if your nib is to travel smoothly over your paper. A common complaint among pointed pen novices is, ‘My nib constantly sticks, or catches in the paper when I write!’ While there can be many reasons for such a problem, including a bad nib, bent nib, etc. an improperly adjusted penholder is the cause more often than not.

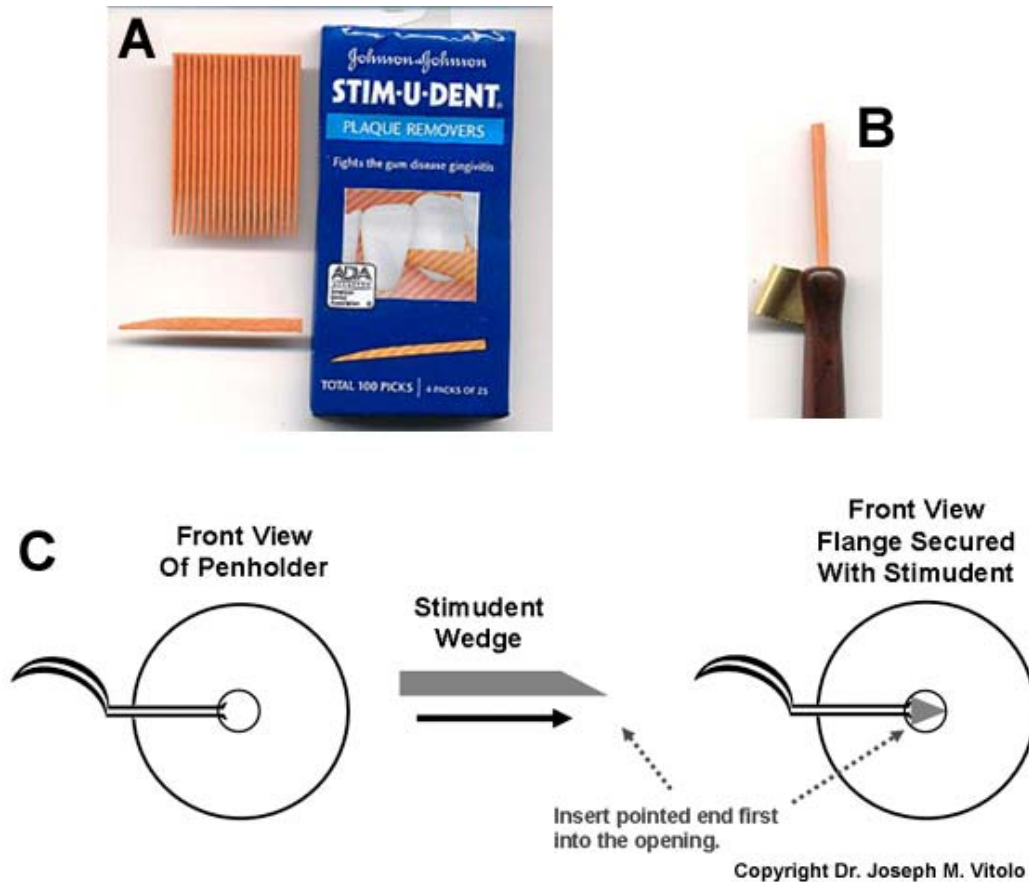
The procedure that I am about to describe can also be accomplished by using your fingers instead of the pliers. To my hand the pliers offer greater control. Figure 4, shows how I use a smooth round beak pliers to adjust the flange angle of my oblique penholder. The pliers will not damage the metal flange since they have no teeth. I approach the flange as shown from the back side. Notice how the beaks fit snugly into the flange concavity. I make the adjustment with an old nib inserted into the flange. I should also point out that I have not stabilized the flange at this point since the adjustment can loosen it. Use the pliers to gently bend the flange so the nib is positioned upwards and inwards as indicated in Figures 2 and 3. Be very careful since too much force could fracture the wood. Once adjusted the flange angle can then stabilize the flange using a Stim-U-Dent.

**Figure 4** Adjusting the flange before fixation



To stabilize a new flange I recommend using the Stim-U-Dent dental toothpick from Johnson and Johnson (Figure 5A). This particular toothpick is made of a very soft orange wood and available from most stores. However, caution is need. Anytime you insert something into the center of a piece of wood the possibility of fracture must be considered. Factors like strength of the wood, grain, etc. can influence resistance to the wood to splitting. Since the Stim-U-Dent wood is very soft, the likelihood of cracking the wooden staff is reduced.

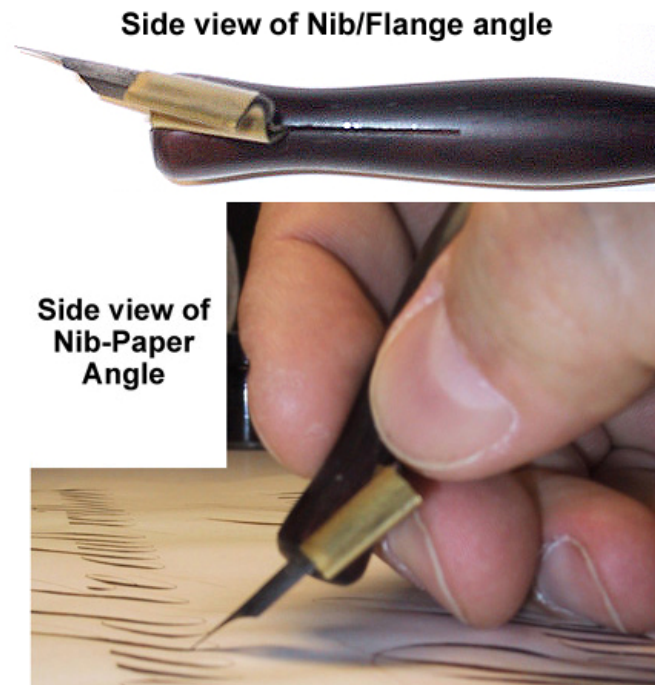
**Figure 5** Stabilizing the removable flange



Simply seat the adjusted flange all the way into the holder. Next insert the Stim-U-Dent into the hole as shown (Figure 5B) placing the base of the wedge towards the flange (Figure 5 B and C). Use a moderate amount of finger force. Remember the wood is soft and will compress easily. The amount of wood to insert is simply enough to stabilize the flange, no more. Break off the excess Stim-U-Dent flush with the pen staff. That is all there is to it! This procedure will not permanently fix the flange since the wood is extremely soft. The flange can be removed by applying some pressure to the base of the flange. In fact, this procedure will have to be repeated from time to time as the flange may loosen up.

Insert your good nib into the flange and be sure to align the tip with the long axis of the pen staff as shown by the dotted line in Figure 2 and 4. You can now use your holder. The adjusted penholder is shown in my hand in Figure 6.

**Figure 6** The properly adjusted oblique penholder in use



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**Bio:**

Dr. Vitolo is the owner/webmaster for both Zanerian.com and The Ornamental Penmanship Group on Yahoo. He spends most of his spare time studying and promoting the history, art and techniques of ornamental penmanship. A specialist Engrosser's script and an active member of The International Association of Master Penmen, Engrossers and Teachers of Handwriting (IAMPETH) he has written numerous articles on penmanship/script and lectures extensively around the country on topics ranging from science to penmanship. Dr. Vitolo holds two doctorates: one in Dentistry and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. He is currently the director of Advanced Training in General Dentistry at Marquette University Dental School in Milwaukee, WI.

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