blink

 By [Heidi Adkisson](#)

Stakeholder interviews, user research, user testing—all are integral to our approach on a Blink design engagement—and all require superior note-taking skills. Enter the Livescribe Smartpen. I've found the Smartpen to be an invaluable tool for note taking of all kinds, but particularly for note taking during research.

The Smartpen provides two functions that can be used together or separately: it records audio and it captures hand-written notes digitally. When using both functions together the written notes and recorded audio work together. For example, if I write a note "doesn't understand sidebar" I can use the pen to listen to the audio the pen was capturing at that particular point. The advantage is that I can focus on taking more keyword-type notes without the fear that I won't understand the reference later.

The pen has required some adjustments to my note-taking habits. First, the pen is relatively thick. Over a day of research that can lead more quickly to hand fatigue. Second, I had been more inclined to take notes some time after a participant made a comment I wanted to capture. I've found it works best to keep my notes brief (again, focusing on keywords) and take notes more closely to when the participant is speaking.

The pen requires that you use specially-gridded paper, but I was surprised to find this is reasonably priced—and you can also print your own paper using a laser printer.

Everyone has their own note-taking style—and some may prefer taking notes on a laptop or tablet—but I generally take hand-written notes because I feel they can be less distracting to the participant. With the Smartpen I can focus more easily on the moment with participants and feel confident that I'm capturing everything I need to.

Livescribe Smartpen: https://us.livescribe.com/