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A smarter way to write

Writing and revising written notes is undergoing a technological revolution, and the echo Smartpen is at the forefront of this.

Technology Editor Shaun Butcher reviews the product.

To describe the Smartpen as an electronic pen does not do the gadget justice; it's much more than that: it's a computer disguised as a pen.

I'm amazed at how easy it is to use, how aesthetically pleasing it is, and how much more there is discover.

The Livescribe Smartpen consist of a microphone which records audio, a speaker which plays it back, and an OLED screen which acts as a display; a 3.5mm headphone jack, a micro-USB connector, and a power button; a high-speed infrared camera capturing 70 images a second, 2-8GB of storage which allows 200-800 hours of recording time, and, last but in no way least, a ball point ink pen.

All this is crammed into a pen that is, although a little chunkier than a fountain pen, not uncomfortable to use.

It makes the whole process of writing and revising lecture notes so much easier.

You needn't struggle in your attempt to scribble everything down - you can simply click a word that you wrote and the recording will playback what was said at the corresponding time you put pen to paper.

You can create interactive PDF files which allow you to click and playback your lecture notes on the computer and you can sync them to the cloud allowing you to access your notes and audio anywhere! You can even download the Livescribe app allowing you access your documents on the

The screenshot shows a news article from The Courier Online. The article title is "A smarter way to write" by Shaun Butcher, posted on March 5, 2012. The article text is partially visible, starting with "Writing and revising written notes is undergoing a technological revolution, and the echo Smartpen is at the forefront of this. Technology Editor Shaun Butcher reviews the product." and "I'm amazed at how easy it is to use, how aesthetically pleasing it is, and how much more there is discover." The screenshot also shows a photo of the Livescribe Smartpen and a sidebar with various news items and a search bar.

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move.

What I find really amazing is that after you've plugged your pen into a laptop and transferred the data, your handwritten notes become searchable! This pen effectively indexes your notes.

You don't need to worry about your untidy handwriting either because it recognises different handwriting styles (I asked my housemates to write using the pen), and it even recognises symbols.

You can save particular notes into particular folders and although you might have to spend a little time configuring everything on first use, you can just drag and drop and it does the organisation for you (near enough).

Apps are everywhere these days and the Smartpen even has an app store.

The pen comes with a piano app, and a translator demo app.

The piano works great but it is simply a gimmick designed, perhaps, to show off how responsive the pen actually is.

If so, it does exactly that.

The translator app is where the pen shines.

As I was only able to test the demo, I could only translate a few words.

Nonetheless, I simply chose a language (my choice was between Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Swedish), wrote a word in English and the pen translated it - the pen spoke the word and displayed it on the screen.

You can also buy an app that turns your handwritten notes into text! It is clear that this pen could be very useful.

I am amazed.

However, there are some drawbacks to using the pen.

The price of the thing itself starts at around £80 for a 2GB pen, so it may be difficult to justify spending that much on an 'electronic pen'.

The pen uses ink and you therefore have the same issue you get with other pens: you will need to by replacement nibs.

Furthermore, the pen relies on special dotted paper and the price of stocking up for a three year university course will not be cheap! You can print your own but you'll need to have a high quality printer, a lot of ink, and you still need to buy paper! Having said that, when you consider how extremely useful this pen can become, you will be able to accept that this is a great piece of kit that will no doubt be beneficial to most students.

I have to admit, after my initial test I started using the old fashioned pen and paper once again and stopped using the Smartpen, but after discovering more features, and how useful this will be when revision starts, I've used it during every lecture since.

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