

Do you dread using the skew? Well I did too, it always wanted to catch and I never got the pretty shavings and smooth finished cuts. Here are some pointers to help you understand the sharpening and handling or what I like to call the "presentation to the wood."

1] Never assume any turning tools are factory ground for optimum results, they are machine ground to the basic shape. Every tool must be touched up or "refined".

2] The inside edge or "short edge" should be rounded over, this can be done on a grinder or belt sander. Leave the outer or "long edge" square. Safety note: Never use the side of a grinding wheel. It can cause stress and possible breakage.

3] The cutting edge should have a slight radius, this will make shearing easier and helps prevent the toe and heel from catching.

4] I like to use a 120 grit 8" grinding wheel, always keep it clean and square with a wheel dresser. A 6" wheel will grind a tighter radius, the 8" is preferred.

5] Examine the edge under bright light, it's very important to have ONE bevel across the width of the skew. Look straight on at the cutting edge, if there is any "glint" showing it is not sharp yet, back to the grinder, using light pressure.

6] Using a stone with lube or diamond hone, keep the tool stationary and the hone tight against the cutting edge and the back edge of the bevel. You should see the steel being honed at both points. This prevents rocking and a round cutting edge. Hone both sides.

7] Check for sharpness by trying to shave your thumbnail or slicing paper, Do not use the skew as a scraper [horizontally] this will dull it immediately, picture pulling a chisel across the width of a board, holding it vertically, it's the same thing.

8] Think of the skew as a plane with a long handle on it

9] Skews come many sizes, I prefer the flat 1/4"x 3/4" for general use. The oval sectioned skews are hard to sharpen as they tend to "rock" on the grinder and I do not recommend them. Remember One bevel ... this rubs during the cut. VERY IMPORTANT!

10] The tool rest must be perfectly smooth and free of nicks, use a file or orbital sander to clean it up. Using a candle, wax it. I prefer the round tool rest since the tool rolls smoothly in all directions. Lift the tool rest a bit higher when using the skew, keeping it about 1/4" from the wood. Remember you are trying to "plane" now.

11] Practice shearing cuts, chuck up a green tree limb about 3"-4" in dia., maple or birch work great. Rough the bark off with a roughing gouge or a round nose scraper.

12] When turning towards the tailstock the toe or point of the skew is towards the headstock. When turning towards the headstock, flip it over. Move your whole body.

13] Start by presenting the tool to the wood beyond the cutting edge. now very slowly pull the skew back a bit until shavings start coming off the center on the bevel. This is what we call the "sweet spot".. Practice going both directions and trying to maintain this sweet spot. Notice that the bevel on the bottom side is rubbing the wood. this is serving as your "depth gauge" just as the sole on a plane does. Rubbing the bevel also applies to gouges. To take a deeper cut, simply lift the handle. Always turn "downhill", or towards center. Picture sharpening a pencil with a jackknife.. up-hill tears the wood.

14] Beads are rolled one side at a time, practice by making cuts with a parting tool about 1" apart, now make a pencil mark in the center. Shear the corner off first then try to roll one side, do not remove the pencil mark. This gets tricky since the tool is lifted and twisted at the same time. Keep the bevel rubbing through out. When the skew is lifted and twisted all the way over the cutting edge will be vertical. This is where rounding over the inner edge really helps. (step2) Note: it's easier to roll beads with a spindle gouge with a fingernail grind. Compare the two for yourself.

15] Never Ever use a skew or roughing gouge on bowls where the edge can catch the end grain. Use gouges for turning bowls, which allows the bevel to rub.

16] Shoulder cuts are made by standing the skew on the straight edge and holding the handle horizontally. The face of the bevel rubs the wood as you push forward.

Now, go chuck up some wood and practice, practice, practice! You will not master this in a weekend but hopefully you'll understand the skew better and enjoy it!