

KC Kendall's Notes on the Skew Chisel from Alan Lacer March 22, 2011

Much of what is covered here is also contained in the notes that Alan Lacer provided for the 2009 Symposium. His notes may be better!

- Peeling cut – use on stock 12” in length or less and 3” in diameter or less. Good way to remove a lot of material fast. Must rub the bevel. Put the long point against the part of the stock that you want to keep. Start with handle down low and slowly move up. Use the flat portion of the skew, and only a third of the blade.
- Planing cut – can chip out wood if not careful. If chipping happens, slow the feed (cutting) rate and increase the angle. Use the bottom third or bottom half of the tool to cut. Can do very long and narrow pieces with the planing cut.
- “Runback” happens when you lose the bevel and put the lower portion of the edge into the wood.
- “Dig in” happens when you cut with the top half of the blade which causes the blade to flip and dig in.
- Can put the lower point into the wood as the leading edge to do some peeling.
- Five different cuts with the skew based on the “vee” cut.
 - Vee cut: put long point down. Lift handle up and push point into wood. Good news – no tearing of end grain. Tip point on the corner and push in to make one side of the vee. Repeat for the other side. The point goes straight in and does all of the cutting. Only the point cuts. Rotate the chisel so that there is a small degree of separation between the rest of the blade and the surface of the cut to avoid kick back.
 - Make tiny beads. Make two push cuts about 1/8 of an inch apart. Use long point to round off slightly. Decide if bead will be flush or “proud”. If proud, use planing cut to remove stock so that bead sticks up. Use sand paper to remove the “dome” of the bead. Make a “shadowing” or undercut to highlight the bead with the point of the tool. Use these around the joint of a box, ends of an awl, or other places on spindles – even the bottom of a cove.
 - Shoulder cut - also called end grain facing cut. Use to cut across the end grain to make a right angle between the grain and the bevel. Start with the point. Don’t try to cut too much away at a time. Cant the blade away from the wood so that only the point cuts. Key issue is to watch the clearance angle, and keep it small but sufficient to avoid a kick back.
 - Pommel cut: when do a pommel you almost always do some sort of detail below the pommel because you cut into the cylinder at the bottom of the pommel. Always do the pommel first just in case you blow it. Carefully center the piece. Make a small vee cut at the corner by the tail stock to check if piece is centered. Adjust as needed then tighten tail stock. Make a jig to center multiple pieces by putting a brad into the center point, cut off the end of the brad, put the butt end onto a scrap piece of board and tack strips in two sides to define the corner. Then pull out the brad and put into the board. Can then press next piece down on the brad to define the center point.
 - Square shouldered pommel – make vee cut for entry. Draw two lines on one side of board – one where to start initial cuts, and second where you want to finish. Slowly make successive shoulder cuts with the long point down – skim each cut, too hard to do in one cut. Do successive planing cuts below the pommel down to the shoulder. Watch the line where the pommel intersects with the cylinder. The line becomes blacker and blacker as the pommel gets down to the full cylinder.
 - Rounded Pommel – do a square pommel first and then use the skew with the long point down. Do a couple of tentative light cuts to find the corners. Then use the point to do the rounded shape. This is “paint grade” meaning there is some damage to the wood – shadowing. For “finish grade”, set the point and then move the tool to do the cut in the middle of the bottom third of the skew.
 - Lamb’s tongue – it is essentially a cove and then a bead. Do the shoulder cut first. Then use a detail gouge. Skim a few times first, then do the entire cut in one motion.
 - Rolling cut – use a smaller skew – ½ to 5/8 inch wide. Hard to do with wider skew – greater chance of run back. Lay it out with vee cuts on either side with the long point. Then use the short point to roll the cut. Can use the long point, but need much more handle motion and there’s more risk of issues. Have to push back against the cut to hold the bevel. The motion is to lift the end of the tool, and twist and push thru the arc and move down the tool rest from side to side. Practice by starting the round cut, stopping, picking up the bead and continuing through. Try rolling a bead with one hand, and also by looking away. Do successive rolling cuts down the length of a piece of wood. With these cuts and when rolling a bead, rotate your hand at the beginning so that you end up with your hand in a comfortable position at the end where the cut is more difficult.
 - Parting off – just a series of vee cuts. Set the tool rest at an angle so the piece won’t hit it. Reduce pressure from the tail stock and slow down the lathe. Make series of vee cuts – smaller and smaller. Final cut – push against the “keeper” portion of the piece and leave a bit of the nub to sand down just in case there is any twisted grain. Always part off at the headstock. Skew is superior to the parting tool as the parting tool always leaves twisted grain.