

# SKEW CHISELS

## A beginner's guide to staying out of trouble

**Keep reminding yourself:** A skew is not a gouge.

A skew is mainly a spindle-turning tool, chiefly for cutting rather than scraping. It gets into corners for cuts that a gouge does not easily handle. It also has some uses in bowl-turning.

The big problem with the skew: It's unforgiving. A catch can lead to unwanted spiral thread-cutting! The major cause of that is that the wrong part of the cutting edge contacts the wood, twisting the tool off track.

→ The virtue of the skew: It can produce a beautiful finish, no sanding needed.

### What to do about it:

1. Get the tool sharp and in shape.

Edge:           Straight or **curved (slight)**.  
Cross-section: Rectangular or **oval**.  
Grind:           Hollow or **flat**.  
Grind angle:   **40** - 45 degrees  
(My personal preferences are shown in **bold type**.)

### Technique, general.

Vital: As with most turning, keep the bevel rubbing on the wood. Remember that the tool tends to go where the bevel is pointing.

Set the tool rest so that your cut is made a little higher than with a gouge.

Also vital: Be firm but gentle, i.e., hold the tool tightly against the tool rest and make gentle cuts. (It's not wise "dig in" the way you might with a gouge.)

Do virtually all the "steering" of the tool (assuming you're right-handed) with the right hand and wrist, leaving the left hand to brace the tool.

In making long cuts, traverse left or right with a "woodturner's sway," arms pretty much locked against the body, so that the tool stays at the needed angle.

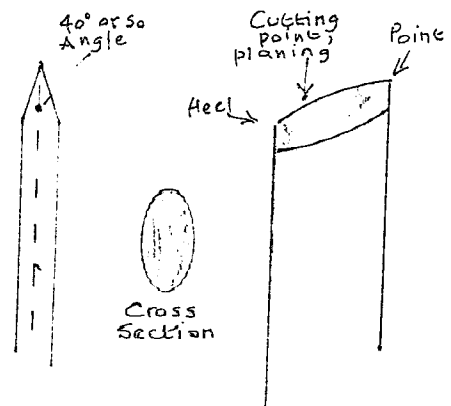
### The major cuts

(I've divided these under four headings. Others describing the same operations may use different names.)

#### Planing cut

The planing cut is made at a place on the skew's cutting edge, about two-thirds down from the point. (Do not let the cutting edge wander "north" of that point or you'll probably get a dig-in.) The blade is applied to the wood at an angle less than 45 degrees from perpendicular (see diagram).

## Notes



2.

## Major cuts (continued)

- (a) Set tool rest a little above center line (a bit higher than typical for a gouge).
- (b) If cut is a "true-up" of a cylinder, lay skew on wood at point you wish to start cut, rubbing bevel but not cutting.
- (c) With left hand, grip tool to rest, thumb or finger on top (whichever is comfortable), fingers grasping rest. (*Firm but gentle, remember.*)
- (d) With right hand, raise and turn handle until edge begins to cut at point about two-thirds down from top of edge.
- (e) Holding chisel firmly against rest, use the tool rest to "finger gauge" line of travel, swaying body to traverse the cut.

### V-cut

A lightly touched in V-cut may simply be used for decoration or, on a larger scale as the initial cut for a bead or ball (see below).

- (a) Approach with point, facing down. (Less chance of "threading.")
- (b) Keeping cutting edge vertical, push point into wood 1/8" or so.
- (c) Cut in a notch from each side.
- (d) Repeat as necessary, clearing any wood impeding a clear view until cut is completed.

### Bead (rounding) cut

To cut a bead or ball, make a V-cut as above, not too wide, to the deepest part of the incision. The rest of the cut for a small bead is usually easier if you use the heel of the blade (much like the planing cut above), allowing more visibility and keeping the rest of the edge out of trouble.

- (a) Using the point of the blade, make a V-cut at the deepest point of the bead.
- (b) Using the heel of the blade, slice in at about 30 degrees to approximate the bead.
- (c) Continue using the heel of the blade to refine the curve.
- (d) If needed, use the point to clean up the bead.

### Collet

A collet, a transition from a square stock to round (see diagram), is much like a V and bead cut, but calling for extra care at the outset to avoid breaking off the corner of the squared wood (see diagram).

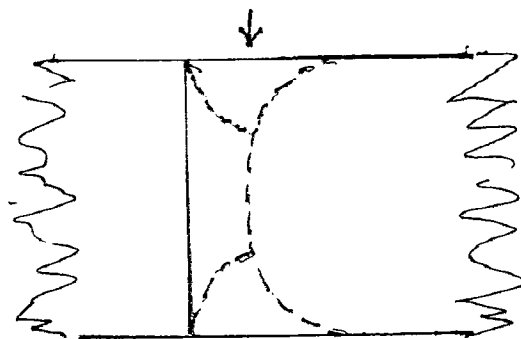
- (a) Make an initial V-cut 1/8" or a little deeper in the "waste wood" to the side of where the collet's final cut will be made.
- (b) Using the skew point, carefully "nibbling" the cut to the approximate shape and then round the cut to its final shape.

(You can cut a collet with a gouge if you prefer, but the point of a skew is a simpler and more delicate tool for working in a tight space.)

## Notes

### CUTTING A COLLET

Begin cut here



Final "nibbling" cuts

