

## The Much Maligned Skew (Steve Schwartz)

I love the skew! Of course like most of you I started out struggling with it and eventually used it only as a scraper. I changed my mind after watching the Alan Lacer videos and demos by Dug Campbell of the Richmond Woodturners club.

With more user-friendly tools available to us why bother with the skew? I use the skew to save time, create very sharp detail and reduce or eliminate sanding! It's like you can have your cake and eat it too!

The skew is used for three entirely different types of cuts: peeling, planning and shoulder. First is the peeling cut which reduces a spindle turning to round stock faster than any other tool and you will never get a catch. Second is the planning cut which leaves the wood smooth as a babies butt. Third is the shoulder cut.

The peeling cut is the easiest. Just set your tool rest high, lay the tool flat on the tool rest with the cutting edge parallel to the bed and make a series of cuts high on the wood removing 1/4 - 1/2 inch wide sections until round. As you push the tool into the wood it peels off the wood like unrolling a paper lollypop stick. This leaves you with a cylinder with a rough finish. Most turners now use a spindle gouge to do most of the shaping.

The planning cut is for leaving a finished cut. You are removing very little wood with each pass but it leaves a finish that has no tear out so you can start sanding with 220 or finer grit to touch up minor details that you feel but often can't see. Besides nearly eliminating sanding you can cut very sharp intersections and crisp details, which would be nearly impossible with most gouges. Since there is so little sanding the details stay crisp and sharp. The problem with the planning cut is the tendency to get a "catch" which sends the skew backward across your work piece. The most common cause of a catch is that you inadvertently have lifted the tool so that you are not riding the bevel and the unsupported edge cuts too deep and kicks back.

A secondary reason is that you have moved the cutting surface of the skew to above its center and it tips back and catches. You always cut with the leading edge or just above it. Surprisingly it doesn't matter if you use the heel or long point. In fact it doesn't matter how wide or thick your tool is either. I watched Dug Campbell cut with a hatchet, his point being that as long as the tool is sharp you can cut. My four helpful tips would be get your skew very sharp, concentrate on taking very light cuts of about 1/64", move the tool across the wood very slowly and never back up (lift and start again).

Third is the shoulder cut where you use the skew, long point down, to shave off wood perpendicular to the lathe bed. This will leave your end grain with no tear out or scuffing so again there is no need to sand.

Using the skew is best learned from watching someone with experience or on club videos. If anyone has questions you think I can help with send me an email at [graphicsstudio@cox.net](mailto:graphicsstudio@cox.net) and include a phone number if you want me to call.

