

Care of Gouge Chip Carving Tools

Given the proper care and avoiding accidents, your tools should seldom need sharpening. I have three tools that have not been sharpened for 3 years. I dropped the fourth tool and it is now in its 2nd year.

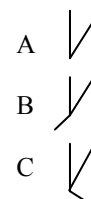
Checklist of proper tool care

- Do not drop tools. **Wrap the shaft with tape.**
- Do not lay tools on a surface. **Use a container which precludes tip contact with other tools.**
- Use proper tool position for vertical cuts. **Avoid undercutting which bends the tool edge.**
- **Check tools each day** before you start carving. Make a cut, cross grain, in a scrap soft wood. The edges should be clean. If not, use the hone procedure.
- **Hone frequently and properly.**

What is honing? Honing is smoothing an edge - but in our context it means **straightening the edge**. I define **dry honing** as **not using an abrasive, only a wood surface**.

Why do I need to hone?

- The edge of the tool should look like (view A) in a microscope.
- When you undercut, the edge tends to bend toward the concave side. (view B)
- When you vertical cut and pry out the gouge, the edge bends to the convex side (view C)



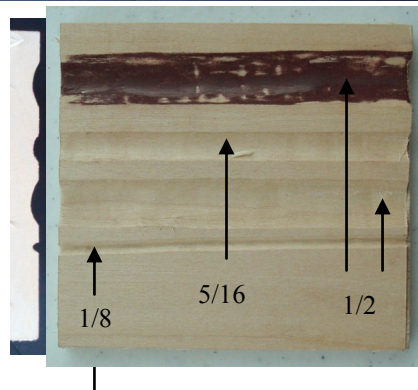
The **correction for View B** is to **pull** the concave side along the top of a dowel.

The **correction for View C** is to **pull** the convex side along a flat board or “trench”.

Dry honing tools for the **concave side** of the tool are dowels. 6 inch lengths are best. Three dowel sizes (1/2”, 5/16”, 1/8”) are required. Abrasive can be rubbed on one end.



Dry honing for the **convex side** can be accomplished on a piece of wood (basswood is easiest to cut) as shown on the right. Cuts are made across the board to establish the profile for each tool. As shown at the top of the board, abrasive (e.g. jewelers rouge) can be rubbed into the profile.



Why dry honing rather than abrasive honing?

Dry honing bends the edge back into shape without removing any metal material from the edge. There will be times when you must remove some material to bring back a straight edge. That is the purpose of the abrasive.

Why do I have a chip in my gouge tool edge?

- A very common reason is you **dropped your gouge on a hard surface**.
- A very common reason is **undercutting**. Honing can decrease this effect.
- **Failure to hone**. Even if you have not undercut, the edge will tend to bend over time. I dry hone at least every 50 cuts.
- Many of the current **thin ply woods** will “wreck” a gouge in one to five cuts. Either the adhesive under 1st ply or the material in the 2nd ply contains material which is harder than the tool steel.

If my tools need to be sharpened what do I do?

- Ask a sharpening person to sharpen the tool “for sculpting in maple”. End must be flat.
- If you bought the tool from me, call me 417-866-0053.