

Tips to Reduce Sanding

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1. Preparing for the project:

- Check tool rest for any nicks – file smooth, sand lightly and apply a light coat of paste wax – the smoother the tool rest supporting surface, the smoother the cut
- Remove all sharp corners on the bottom of square edged tools – lightly pass across the grinder to chamfer those edges that come in contact with the tool rest – tool steel is harder than tool rest steel and can cause nicks in the tool rest you just refined
- Sand the steel on your tools with 150-220 grit to provide a really smooth surface
- Sharpen gouges and then hone to a razor edge. Alternative to honing is to use a leather strop or make a strop from bass wood
- Grind the heel off gouges to reduce burnishing
- Sharpen scrapers by first honing top edge flat before grinding to put the burr on – a scraping burr lasts only about 15-20 seconds so sharpen often – the same applies for gouges when used to sheer scrape – they dull more quickly.
- Sharpen skews on the grinder and then hone to a razor edge
- I use an 80 grit grinder for shaping tools and sharpening for rough turning only – I use a 180 grit diamond wheel to put sharp edge on finishing tools but then take them to my Tormek leather strop or a homemade basswood hone or hand held honing stone to make them razor sharp.

2. Turning the project

- Turn as fast as is safe and comfortable for level of ability – the faster the speed the smoother the cut – or actually the slower the rate of tool feed results in smoother cuts, but usually it's easier to speed up the lathe.
- Concentrate on riding the bevel and focus on the “horizon” of the project for smooth/consistent cuts
- Use cutting tools to slice the wood instead of scrapers where possible
- Cut with a grain supported cut (most often referred to as “cutting downhill” which is perfectly clear on spindles but is somewhat misleading on bowls which have alternating side/face grain as the wood turns. On the outside of bowls a smoother cut is made by going “uphill” or from the bottom to the top)
- Some tear out can be fixed by spraying soapy water or oil on end grain – if use oil be sure it's compatible with the finish you expect to put on
- Clean up “ridge” cuts by re-cutting with focus on steady solid consistent tool work or use a negative rake scraper or regular scraper on edge to gently remove them

3. Hiding the blemishes (or the dang thing just won't go smooth)

- Use your imagination: for example: burn lines, texture, chatter, pierce, pyrography, dye, carve, decorative beads/coves, etc.
- Sand into submission, throw it away, or give to someone you don't like

And the best tip: always use quality wood