Sharpen a Scraper...

Turn a hook and watch the shavings fly

By Andy Rae

When smoothing wood, I reach for a rectangle of steel called a card scraper. Despite its humble appearance, a card scraper is remarkably versatile at refining surfaces. It will remove hardened glue, smooth and level difficult woods and exposed joints, and smooth a finish. Its small size makes it more maneuverable than a plane for reaching into tight spots, so you can preserve your supply of sandpaper. A scraper does it better, faster and without annoying dust.

Scrapers come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, including curved and profiled. Some can be used in specially designed planes and scraper holders. But my daily scraper is the card scraper, either thin (0.020-0.025”) or thick (0.30-.0.040”) depending on the job at hand. Thinner scrapers excel at delicate work, where light cuts and
Scrapers require sharpening to work properly, and I’ll show you how this can be done with a few basic tools. You’ll need a mill file, a block of wood, medium and fine honing stones, and a round burnisher (a length of polished, hardened steel). For rough work, such as removing cured glue or cleaning grimy wood, a few strokes on a file will prepare you for scraping. For finer work, you’ll want to polish the edges to a mirror shine and then burnish four small hooked edges.

Smoothing figured wood is the perfect scraper assignment because planing the workpiece can cause tearout.

Removing hardened glue and other rough work is best done with a scraper that’s simply filed square—no honing or burnishing required.

Leveling between coats enables you to remove drips and other surface irregularities in order to build a beautiful multi-coat finish.

Pre-assembly smoothing is a scraper’s specialty on drawer sides and other parts that won’t be easily accessible as a project nears completion.
Getting edges straight and square is the first step

On new or old scrapers, I use a file to establish straight and square edges and to remove any nicks or old burrs. Next, I hone the faces and edges on a 1200-grit waterstone using a simple kerfed block of wood. Then I create a mirror shine by polishing the same surfaces on an 8000-grit stone (similar-grade oilstones work, too), again using the block of wood. Total filing and honing time: About four minutes.

**File it square.** Lay a 10" mill file against a stop, hold the scraper on edge and as square to the file as you can. Then draw the scraper towards you with four or five strokes. Stop when the edge reflects tiny file marks and a uniform shiny gray color from end to end.

**Smooth the face.** Hone both faces along all each long edge on a 1200-grit stone until the sheen is even. Use a wood block as shown to exert even pressure while moving the steel back and forth. Lighten your pressure on the last few strokes, and check the face: You should see an even, dull-gray strip about $\frac{1}{2}$" wide along the face.

**Hone the edge.** A flat, square block with a vertical kerf makes an effective holding tool for honing the edge (see drawing). Slip the scraper into the kerf, and press down while rubbing the block back and forth about six times. Move the block over the entire stone to prevent grooving.

**Ready for burnishing.** Look for a mirror sheen about $\frac{1}{4}$" wide along each long edge.
Burnishing creates a tiny hook you can detect with your finger

The tiny arc of steel on a scraper’s edge, called the hook, is what does all the shaving. Don’t try to maximize the size of the hook—a smaller hook will provide the best performance and a longer-lasting edge. The two steps shown here shouldn’t take more than about 20 seconds, then you’re ready to scrape! When the hook dulls, you can restore the hook once or twice by re-burnishing. When you can only produce dust rather than tiny shavings, it’s time to resharpen.

**Burnish flat.** A good burnisher has a polished, mirror-bright finish. Rub a little oil on the rod, and keep it flat on the scraper and slightly angled, as shown. Press downward while pushing or pulling to coax the small burr outward and to consolidate the edge.

**Pull the hook.** Hold the scraper slightly off the edge of a work surface, and angle the burnisher 1° to 3°. Using light pressure, give the edge just two or three strokes to form the hook. Pull towards you in an upward sweeping motion, letting the burnisher move off one corner; then push to the opposite corner.

**Tip**

If one edge shaves and the opposite edge doesn’t, chances are the edge wasn’t square before polishing. Make sure the honing block’s kerf is dead-square to the bottom of the block.
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