Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions

What is a good brand of bowl gouge to buy?

I don't think I can single out just one brand since there are many that are 'good' brands. The size, shape and style offered by most of the manufacturers should give you more than you need to pick from. My suggestion is to buy good value, i.e. a brand that provides the answer to your needs now at a fair price. There are many established brands that have proven themselves over time, but don't overlook the newcomers and startups. Avoid those companies that are racing to the bottom based solely on price. Over time, you will likely own many bowl gouges based on your type and size of turnings. You may also want to have the same size and style with different grinds based on the functionality you need from the tool.

You'll find that different sizes and different lengths are in order based on what and the size of your turning. Be aware that, with so many quality brands currently in the marketplace with a host of different tool steels, you may wind up with many different manufacturers' products. There is no need to always select the same maker for all your tools or a particular steel unless there is a special reason. While the bulk of my tools are from one maker based on my early satisfaction and the availability from my local supplier, I have never had any reservations about buying a different brand provided it solved my needs and was good value.

One of the best pieces of advice I can give you is don't succumb to just buying the cheapest one (or brand) that you can find. Your tools will be there for you for your turning lifetime and then live on with a new owner. Figure the amortisation of your tools over the many years you'll use them and then recoup about 50% of the cost providing you treat them properly.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KURT HERTZOG

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1 Different gullet shapes and your chosen grind will perform different tasks. Ultimately, you'll have several (many?) bowl gouges 2 Here are a few of my many bowl gouges. The different sizes, shapes, and grinds do the different tasks well

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3 Whether you have an overhead dust extraction system or not, using proper PPE up close and personal is a wise idea

You often talk about PPE in the shop. Is an overhead dust collection system PPE? Should I be buying one for my shop?

I have two overhead dust collectors in my main shop. One is located right at the tailstock end of my most-used lathe and the other is immediately overhead of my large bandsaw. There are several caveats to overhead dust collectors. First, they filter shop air after you have been breathing it. They certainly help reduce your exposure to airborne dust particles but remember they are not preventing your exposure. Always helpful, but from a PPE perspective a bit too late. All the overhead dust collectors I'm familiar with have an outer filter that is much like a furnace filter. While differently shaped, it is a pleated filter of a certain particle filtration size that captures the 'boulders'. Behind that filter is a finer billowing-type filter that collects the finer airborne particles as the air is drawn through the unit. The second issue is that, to be effective, both filters need to be maintained. I find that tying a length of lightweight string to the outlet air mesh helps me know when the filters need attention. With strong airflow, the string flows out straight.

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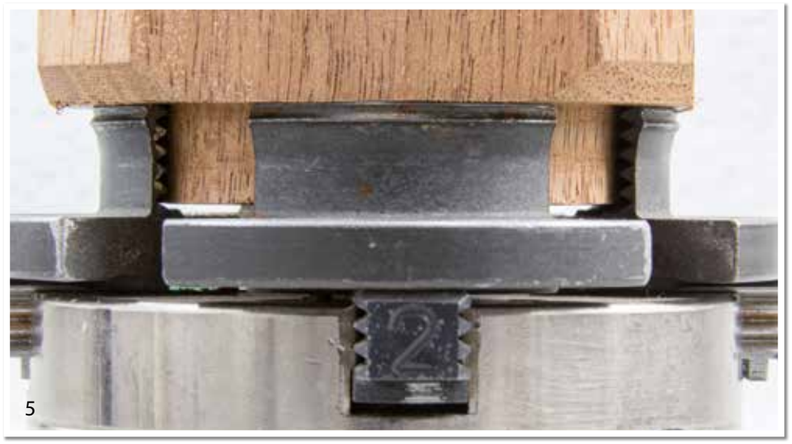
I'm new to turning and am trying to understand how to decide whether to use a tenon or a mortise on a bowl. Are there any rules on which to use?

I'd like to expand your term of mortise to include any expansion gripping of a blank whether a bowl or other turning. I am not aware of any special rules regarding which to use when your turning offers a choice, other than perhaps some common sense. Either technique will work if properly implemented. That said, you may opt for one or the other based on some design and process techniques you are planning.

My first question when picking one or the other is will the outer wall of my mortise provide sufficient strength for the needs of the rest of my turning? If the wall will be too thin or a whacky (read potentially fragile) grain orientation, I avoid that method, although whacky grain orientation can also cause problems with a tenon.

My suggestion is to pick one or the other based on what your final design will be. If you intend on having a foot on your bowl, a tenon lends itself nicely. Upon completion of the inner surface of your bowl, you can reverse mount your bowl to remove any jaw marks and properly shape and finish the bowl's foot. You can also do this with a mortise mounting technique, but that lends itself to a hollowed-out foot design. Many newcomers to turning use a mortise technique and only clean up the jaw marks. The result usually indicates a newcomer and, in my opinion, leaves a clunky turning.

As time and skills progress, most use the mortise less. For more in-depth information on workholding methods and best practices, refer to my series in *WT238* through *250*. The column in *WT242* focuses on chucking using tenons.



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4 Some different examples of clamping and expanding grip features for the students. Properly done, both can work safely 5 My 'go-to' mounting method is clamping down on a tenon. Notice the referencing on the cut shoulder and the clearance underneath

I ruin too many blanks using a barrel trimmer. Can you help with brand selection and the best way to use one?

You haven't indicated what you have done to ruin your blanks. There may be other issues that are compounding those with your trimming process. I have used barrel trimmers for all my pen kits, except laser cut kits, for 20+ years without major issues. Two keys to success are sharp trimmer blades and proper speeds and feeds. Much of the difficulty that people have is trying to work with a dull trimmer.

They dull the trimmer by trimming off too much material too fast. Once dull, it is nearly impossible for the end user to sharpen it. The result is higher rpm and more downward force only accelerating the degradation of the cutting edges. I always suggest touching up the trimmer with a diamond hone well before it gets dull. It is far easier to keep any tool cutting edge sharp than sharpening it from a poor cutting condition. As far as brands go, I buy mine from one of the online pen kit suppliers. I get the inexpensive model of the four-face, non-carbide version.

Since nearly all the sellers' products seem close to identical, I am guessing but I think most of the sellers get their products from the same overseas source. The carbide-tipped offerings will obviously have a longer life than the lower-end pot metal versions, but I really like the results from the four-cutter trimmers. Some techniques to get better results would include the following. Keep the amount of wood or other material to be trimmed to a minimum. That requires the blanks to be very slightly longer than the tube rather than a large overhang of wood. Trimming off a 1⁄16in or 1⁄8in from each end will provide far longer trimmer sharpness life than trimming away excessive amounts of material.

If you can't cut and glue tubes to closer tolerances, cut excess stock away on your bandsaw before trimming. Your trimmer is designed to face the end of the wood flush with the tube and have that trimmed face be perpendicular to the axis of the tube. I find that using my trimmers in a drill press provides far better results than using a pistol drill. The ability to control the speeds and feeds with more resolution yields better results.

My avoidance of the two-winged carbide barrel trimmer is just a personal preference. I have had success with the four-bladed standard trimmer and use carbide cutting tools more for abrasive materials based on their durability rather than keenness. There may be others by now, but I do have and use the carbide barrel trimmers created by Woodpeckers. Pricey but exceptional quality and design. They have a two-cutter design that uses rotatable and replaceable carbide cutters along with interchangeable pilot sizes.

If you are curious about that trimmer, you can find a product review at http://www.kurthertzog.com/articles/ultra_shear_pen_mill.html. All of that said, there are alternatives to using a barrel trimmer. Many folks have success using a disc or belt sander as well as mounting sanding discs in a lathe. All will work, but since the goal is flush with the tube and, most importantly, perpendicular to the tube axis, piloting or guiding based on the tube I.D. will give the best results.


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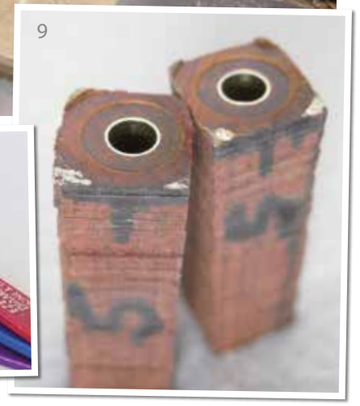
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6 Kept sharp and using the proper speeds and feeds will provide a fully functional barrel trimming. The key is sharp and allows it to cut 7 I almost always trim my blanks using a drill press. Better control of speeds and feeds. A pistol drill or lathe will also work 8 I recommend a set of diamond hones for every woodturner's kit. Versatile, low cost, and very useful for touching up nearly all cutting edges 9 One of the keys to long barrel trimmer life is minimising the amount of work it needs to do. Close blank sizing minimises trimming


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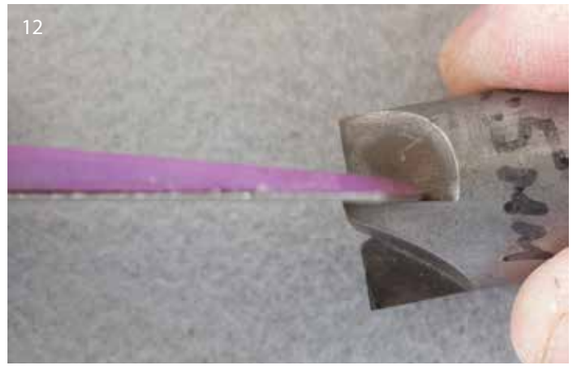
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10 Most barrel trimmers can be disassembled. I find it handy to mark the side with the correct Allen key size in magic marker 11 Never, never, never try to touch up an edge in this manner. It is impossible to stay in contact with the angle with the hone 12 Use the hone in contact and flat against the long face of the cutter edge. This will touch up the edge without ruining the coplanarity 13 Accept that barrel trimmers are 'perishable' tools. There comes a time when they can no longer be useful by touching them up. Now dispose of them

14 A new design recently created and sold by Woodpeckers. If you pop for the full monty, you get the cutter head and every conceivable pilot 15 The cutter head has two carbide cutters. Each is rotatable to provide a fresh edge as needed and replaceable when all faces are spent 16 By design, the cutter head cuts a wide swathe, eliminating the need for barrel trimmers of various diameters 17 The pilots are relieved near the very top, allowing for the cutter edge to extend over the brass tube. No brass creep under the cutter face