

Getting the Most from Sawdust Sessions

We have been doing our current format for sawdust sessions for quite a while now. The program has grown. New turners are getting the help they need. Club members are developing new skills. Friendships are being made. It is nice that we get to see each other outside of the monthly meetings.

To keep the sawdust sessions successful, and to help members get the most out of the session, here are some helpful suggestions and guidelines for sawdust sessions.

Set Goals

To really benefit from the Club's monthly Sawdust Sessions, preparation is important. Turners who have no idea what they want to accomplish each month are less likely to improve their turning than those who have a goal in mind. Know what you want to turn: are you working on tool handles? Pens? Bowls? Or, know what you want to practice: do you need to brush up on your sharpening skills? Have you recently purchased a new tool and want help making it work? Once you make these decisions, you should take additional steps to prepare.

Get Ready

If you know what you want to accomplish, you can gather the proper tools, select your wood blanks, and have your equipment ready to go on Sunday morning. But: what if you simply don't know what you need? Get in touch with one of the regular Sunday mentors – Darcy Tataryn, Jim Devorss, Larry Curry, Mark Vickery, Walt Thies, Brian Skaar or Jeff Zens – and ask questions. Mentors are all willing to assist club members get ready, so plan to take advantage of their availability and experience. What if you don't have any wood? There is a limited supply of stock on hand at Darcy's shop, but it might not be suitable for the project you're considering (see below for more on this topic). If you don't have your own wood, you'll need to be flexible in your project selection. Signing up for the Wood Gatherers group is a superb way to increase your inventory, as is touching base with Randy Nichols, who has plenty of stock on hand for the club.

Some projects, like pens, bottle stoppers, pizza cutters, etc. can require significant advance preparation and specialty tools such as mandrels. It would be a good idea to call Darcy ahead of the session to help determine if what you need will be available.

Check in with a Mentor

When you get to Darcy's shop, please check in with a mentor. Discuss what you want to do. Have your tools available. The mentor will most likely want to look at the tools you have on hand, and if they aren't sharp, will either direct you to the proper grinder or help you get sharp edges. Having sharp tools is essential, for your own satisfaction and for the safety of everyone else in the shop. Dull tools require unnecessary pressure on the workpiece and are more likely to result in the workpiece separating from the lathe. Of course, if you're already proficient at sharpening, this step should be completed at home, before you leave for the Sawdust Session.

Once the tools are ready to go, the mentor will get you set up on the most appropriate lathe for your project. Please don't grab the first lathe you see, or your "favorite," without talking to a mentor first.

Be Curious and Open

During the Sawdust Session, you should expect mentors to check in with you several times. If we see or hear something that might signal a problem, we'll step over to see what you're working on. Mentors attend the sessions to help, so please be willing to accept it. Remember that we are guests, and most sessions are

crowded. Mentors will be concerned for safety of everyone present, and for the care and preservation of the lathes, tools and other equipment in the shop. If your turning techniques might result in injury to you or others, or damage to the equipment, mentors are expected to offer assistance. Please be open to these suggestions – they are offered entirely in the spirit of helping participants improve and learn.

Be Respectful

The club is extremely fortunate to have access to a great shop each month, and it's really important to remember that almost every tool in the shop is personal property, not the Club's. Here are a few "rules of the road" on this subject:

- Tools in the black tool cabinets are not for Sawdust Session users. Exceptions can be made by asking Darcy, Marc or Jeff, who will look at the work, and determine if one of Darcy's personal tools is required. Using a tool from Darcy's chest is generally meant to demonstrate how a particular tool or tool type might help the project in question. The goal would be to encourage the club member to consider purchasing a similar tool for their long-term benefit. Participants should not expect to be equipped from the tool cabinets month after month.
- There are four sets of club tools available in the shop, and these are provided for club member use. As you progress as a turner, you should begin to acquire your own tools. If club tools get dull, let one of the mentors know and they will either show you how to sharpen, or get the edge restored for you.
- Some tools need to be sharpened on white or grey wheels, while others can be sharpened on the metal CBN wheels on Darcy's grinders. If you don't know which is which, ask a mentor. Using the incorrect wheel can damage or destroy it.
- There is a specific shelf in the upper shop called the "Sharing Shelf" where free wood can be found. This wood is set aside for Sawdust Session participants. Wood in the lower shop, on other shelves, or anywhere else is not for club member use. If you need some specific wood and can't find it on the shelf check with Darcy.
- If you take wood from the "Sharing Shelf", please consider bringing some with you the next month to share with someone else. Thank you to all who donate regularly. Some beautiful pieces have been made from those pieces.
- Consumables. The club does not currently store items such as glue, sandpaper, finishes etc. at Darcy's shop. Please consider bringing a supply of what you need. If you don't know what you need or do not have what you need, please ask.
- Power tools. Please ask before using other power tools such as table saws, bandsaws, mitre saws etc.

Wrapping Up

For many of us, time at the lathe is not as plentiful as we would like, and we need to make the most of the time we have. Some of us have heard the phrase "Plan your work, then work your plan," and it's certainly appropriate for Sawdust Sessions. If you have a good idea what you want to achieve, you can be better prepared with tools, workpieces and questions, and your lathe time will be productive. Preparation coupled with an understanding that we are all guests in Darcy's shop will result in safe, productive Sundays.