Sharpening takes some knocks because some turners see it as a task or chore to be endured and not as a skill—just like turning—that will take time to learn. The good news is that sharpening is closely related to the skill of woodturning.

At one time every conceivable woodworker learned sharpening skills as part of their activity—whether it be sharpening saw blades, axes, spokeshaves, chisels, or plane irons. Today however, few cabinet or furnituremakers sharpen circular or bandsaw blades, planer and joiner knives, router bits or shaper cutters—either these are throwaways or cutting tools sent to specialty shops. Even the other domain where sharpening was essential to learn—that of carving—has often been replaced by spinning bits and cutters that require no sharpening, just replacement. Alas, the poor woodturner still must learn to sharpen. However, there are numerous benefits from learning this skill.

Here's how sharpening skills mimic woodturning: You take a turning tool and place it on a tool rest, it meets a round object approaching the edge, and you manipulate the cutting edge. Sounds like what we do as turners, right? Learn the skill to sharpen and you are learning turning—and vice versa.

If sharpening frustrates you, you may need to adopt a tried and true learning strategy: a progression from simple and relatively easy activities to something difficult and more complex. If you think about it, this is how most skills are acquired. If you take up playing the fiddle, you don't start with the Brahm's violin concerto as your first task. You probably start with playing notes, then scales, *Yankee Doodle*, and finally progress in difficulty at the rate of your learning. The same path that works for learning math, cooking, computers, golf, drawing, driving, and sailing holds true of sharpening turning tools.

The good news to all of this is that learning those simple tasks first has several benefits: Most of those tasks are also foundational—not just easy—and will be the basis for learning the more difficult maneuvers.

I wonder how many folks have quit woodturning over the years because they either could not sharpen the tools or found they spent more time sanding than turning? So, if you are early on in your career as a turner or you are still frustrated about this sharpening thing, join me and try this progressive order of learning to sharpening your tools.

To begin with, you can't shape and sharpen your tools by hand.

Working with dull tools is like trying to drive your car with flat tires— it just isn't very satisfying.

We can certainly hone the tools by hand—but honing only keeps a sharp tool sharp or regains a small loss of keenness on a cutting-type turning tool.

No, power equipment is the order of the day for a host of reasons, not the least of which is the type of tool steels used today. Most turning tools currently being sold are not just higher heat-working steels but also higher wear-resistant steels. Your grandpappy's Arkansas oil stone is going to have a tough go on a Glaser V-15 tool or on most of the English, Canadian, and Australian tools now on the market. And the fact that too many tools need major reshaping from their new condition, we will need some power assistance to do the job.

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