a flat plane with the tool's cross-section to establish the cutting angle. This is a very important cut for removing the corners (roughing) on smaller length and diameter projects, rapidly removing waste material, or cutting tenons for preparing a block for a chuck.

5. Unstable with long point down. The tiny flat area along the top of the tool and behind the long point is insufficient for stability on a broad number of cuts with the long point down.

Embrace the traditional skew

Here are reasons why I like a traditional skew chisel made from rectangular steel. I prefer a heavyweight version of the traditional skew—at least 5/16" thick and preferably 3/8" thick.

1. The rectangular cross section makes this one of the very easiest of all turning tools to sharpen. For a straight grind, set the angle of the grinder's rest, place the cutting edge 90 degrees to the face of the wheel (or parallel to the grinder's axis), and sharpen. No jig is required. For the curved edged skew, I add a pivoting action to follow the tool's shape.

2. The increased heft of a thicker skew aids in heavy cuts and in working denser hardwoods. This translates into more power, less force is required to hold the tool on the rest, and ribbing or chatter work is reduced.

3. A cut I use on almost every project is the peeling cut. This is performed by using a portion of the edge (not the entire long cutting edge) much like a veneer peeler working on a log: It is not a scraping cut nor is it a finishing cut. It is using the skew much like a large parting tool—but with a wider cut, more support and much more control than a regular parting tool. It is particularly effective in removing corners on woods that are "chippy" like red oak or cocobolo. It works far better on those woods than using a planing approach as it virtually eliminates the riving action associated with the planing cut.

4. Because many of the cuts (shoulder, Vee, pommel, saucer, and parting cuts) are often done with the long point down, the tool rest bears most of the tool's weight. Thus, increased weight is not generally a problem.

5. The rectangular cross-section of the tool makes for a more consistent action when rolling a convex shape (beads, balls, egg form). The cut often begins just below the center line of the tool and finalizes with the long cutting edge in a vertical position. The consistent cross section allows for a smooth pivoting action that little changes the relationship of the resting point to the cutting edge—even when cutting at different sections of the edge.

6. Here's how to achieve the oval skew's primary aim—a tool that maneuvers easily along the rest—but without the tradeoffs. (A growing number of skews are sold with this profile.) Round the short point (or heel) side of the skew all the way back to the ferrule, and soften or chamfer the corners behind the long point (or toe) back to the ferrule. I find this is most easily done with a belt sander or grinder--and must only be done once in the life of the tool.