

Southern Turners Project Sheet

Letter Opener



This project explains how to make a simple and attractive letter opener. Ensure all safety equipment is used appropriately. The blank size is up to the individual, but to begin with, try a spindle blank of tight grained hardwood of approximately 25 mm square and 250 mm long. The project is an excellent one for improving/refining your use of a skew chisel though other tools can be used depending on your skill levels.



Accurately locate and mark the centres of both ends of your blank.



Mount between centres. I prefer step drive centre and a ring live centre.



Use a parting tool to form a groove approximately 10 mm from each end of the blank. Diameter is not important as long as the groove is down to round.



Use the skew chisel to reduce the blank to a cylinder. Note that the cut is occurring at the quarter point of the cutting edge as shown by the arrow.



Mark the length of the blade (from the tailstock end). In this case it is 130 mm.



Use a parting tool to define the transition point between the handle and the blade. In this case it is approximately 10 mm diameter.



Create a flowing curve for the transition as shown. Make sure the curve is continuous.



Taper the blade section from the high point of the transition to the tailstock end leaving an approximate diameter of six mm. This section does not require sanding as it will be worked on at a latter stage.



Use the skew (or other tool of your choice) to create one or two beads to define the end of the handle. You can use the short or the long point of the skew but care needs to be taken to present the skew at the right angle or a catch will occur.



Double bead transition completed. Note that the beads are intentionally different diameters, identical beads do not work in my opinion.



Shape the handle to your own design and sand the handle through the grits down to 400 grit. Hand sand the barrel of the handle along the grain using 400 grit to remove rotational lines.



Part off using the skew chisel working through small cuts toward the headstock. This method minimises torn grain and makes sanding the knob much easier.



Finish on the knob showing minimal torn grain – only a light rub with 400 grit was required to complete the handle.

Sorry about the quality of the photo – limited to two hands only is my only excuse



Use a linisher/belt sander to reduce one side of the blade to a flat. Take into account grain orientation to maximise strength. Take care to not damage the transition point by over sanding. Note that the sanding is being done on that section of the belt where there is virtually no gap between the edge of the belt and the edge of the linisher.



When satisfied with side one do the same on side two. Now start rotating the blade whilst sanding to develop the cutting edges of the blade. Hand sand along the grain of the blade to remove any ridges and 'fluffy' debris near the tip.



Finish with oil or lacquer of your choice.
(patent pending on the drying stand)



Your finished letter opener should look something like this.

This one is jarrah where the additional ones in the previous photo are red gum.