

Best Practices #052: Planning and Presenting a Useful Woodturning Demonstration
Heading: Meetings and Demonstrations
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There are several important steps that can help you plan and present a better woodturning demonstration. Knowing how to pre-plan, develop, and deliver a demonstration properly will help you be a more effective presenter. Ways that I have found to successfully accomplish each of these steps are described below.

STEP I – PRE-PLAN FOR THE DEMONSTRATION

In planning for a demonstration you should consider *time*, *scope*, and *equipment*.

A. Time: When you are asked to conduct a demonstration, it is important to find out how much time is allocated. Keep in mind that the introduction, the demonstration itself, and a planned question and answer period need to fit into the allotted time. In general, most clubs allow up to 90 minutes for a single demonstration, which is roughly the time allotted for demos at national AAW symposiums.

Attendees will probably ask questions during the demonstration itself, as well as at the end. Although questions may interrupt the flow of the demonstration, they do show that the audience is interested; they can also let you know where clarifications are needed.

However, questions may take up too much time during the demonstration and cause you to be rushed or unable to finish. It is good to include formal question-and-answer time at the end of your presentation and let the audience know they can defer most of their questions until that time.

B. Scope: Once you know the time frame for the demonstration, decide how much information can realistically be included within the allotted time. A typical demonstration includes a discussion of tools, woods, design considerations, surface treatments, finishing techniques, and sources of materials, as well as demonstrations of techniques, skills and project steps.

When doing a short demonstration, you need to be selective as to which of the above to emphasize and demonstrate thoroughly. Less important elements can be abbreviated, left out, or included only in a handout. When making these selections, keep in mind the focus of the demonstration. Ask yourself what the most important ideas and skills you want the attendees to go away with are, and focus on these.

C. Equipment: It is essential to identify and ensure in advance that all of the equipment you need for the demonstration will be available and in working order. Also make sure that your accessories, such as the chuck you may be using, will fit on the lathe.

STEP II – DEVELOP THE DEMONSTRATION

Now you are ready to develop your demonstration. Consider each of the following and decide how you will include them in your demonstration.

A. Preparing the blank

- 1. Choose the wood:** Determine the appropriate type and size of the wood needed for the turning being demonstrated.
- 2. Mount the wood:** Decide the method you will use to mount the wood. At times this will be determined by the type of turning you will be demonstrating.
- 3. Prepare the wood:** To prevent taking time away from the demonstration itself, wood blanks should be prepared in advance as much as possible prior to the demonstration. In fact, it is a good idea to pre-prepare several example pieces of important steps in the turning process.
- 4. Rough shape the blank:** In order not to use up critical time, rough shape as much of the blank as possible prior to the demonstration. You can also shape the blank on a band saw beforehand. This shortens the time needed to true the blank and, thus does not take time away from the demonstration itself.
- 5. True up the blank:** Once the blank is mounted on the lathe, it will need to be trued up. The questions to ask yourself are: Can the blank be trued up beforehand? Is it necessary to the demonstration?

B. Organizing steps

- 1. List and practice the turning steps:** List each of the steps needed to complete the project you are demonstrating; then actually work through them on the lathe to be sure that you have not left out one or more steps. It can be very helpful to write the steps down as you go through the process of actually turning the piece.
- 2. Decide type of finish to use:** The final considerations revolve around how the turning is to be finished, i.e. textured, beaded, sanded, etc. Is sanding important to the demonstration? Since sanding is not recommended due to health considerations, how will this affect the finish? You may want to consider having a piece pre-sanded if demonstrating finishing techniques is important.
- 3. Select essential steps:** Once all the steps are identified you may need to eliminate or abbreviate some steps. If there are time constraints, differentiate those steps that are a “must see” from those that are only a “nice to see.” If time does not allow for all the steps to be demonstrated, prepare blanks with the “nice to see” steps already completed. These decisions should be made while keeping in mind the focus of the demonstration.

4. Sequence the turning steps: It is important to sequence the turning steps to be demonstrated in a logical order. This will make it much easier for the attendees to follow along.

5. Identify and complete steps in advance: Have examples of key steps completed. This technique will not only save you valuable time for the demonstration, but if passed around to the attendees, will enable them to see what that particular step looks like.

6. Identify examples of the turning: By displaying different versions of the completed turning being demonstrated, the audience will be able to see a variety of design options.

C. Identify Accessories and Materials

1. Identify the tools and accessories: Make a list of the tools and all the accessories that you will need to complete the turning. If tools or accessories you use are not commonly available, it is helpful to identify their source.

2. Identify sources of materials: In addition to sources of tools and accessories it is important to list sources of materials such as dyes, paints, veneers, etc. Attendees will appreciate knowing how to acquire these materials.

3. Prepare backup materials: Backup material may be pre-prepared at various stages so that the demonstration can resume at any stage. I have had turnings break, but having replacements ready, has allowed me to continue with minimum delay.

D. Provide Handouts: See [Best Practices # 053](#) for additional handouts Info.

1. Prepare a handout: A good handout is important to the success of a demonstration because it will help the attendees better understand the steps involved in completing the turning and serve as a guide to take home with them. You should know approximately how many will attend so you have enough handouts for everyone. A handout should include the following elements.

- Title: should be descriptive
- Introduction: statement about the turning and an overview of the demonstration itself
- Design considerations: a short explanation about the turning's design
- Wood: should include wood used, recommended or not recommended, if appropriate
- Tools: should also include accessories
- Materials: this includes such things as dyes, paints, etc.
- Steps: logical steps from start to finish
- Measurements: these are particularly helpful to new turners

- Illustrations: should include both pictures and drawings
- Sources of materials: include name, address, web site, and phone number
- Suggestions for further study: if appropriate, it can be very helpful

(Remember to carefully proofread your handout and be sure to double-check all measurements and illustrations. “Beta test” the handout to make sure it is useful and correct. Use the handout yourself to complete the turning; or, ideally have another turner try to use it.)

STEP III – DELIVER THE DEMONSTRATION

The following tips will help you to deliver your demonstration effectively.

Many clubs now have video and audio capabilities to enhance demos. If that is the case, the demonstrator should ensure that he / she uses the equipment to both the demonstrator’s and audience advantage. Make sure the camera angles are set so that people can view close-ups of what is happening is important. And, familiarizing yourself with the audio setup can ensure that people in the back row can hear.

Most clubs provide a cameraperson to operate the video equipment – and often to record the demo. It is worth a few minutes in advance with the camera operator to coordinate where and how the cameras will be used, placement of monitors, etc.

A. Preparation

- 1. Lay out tools:** Lay out all tools to be used in the demonstration including accessories, and materials. This makes it easier for you to access your tools while demonstrating and enables the attendees to view the tools and materials.
- 2. Display work:** Display samples of the work to be turned for attendees to view. I have found this to be greatly appreciated.
- 3. Check out the lathe:** Familiarize yourself with the lathe, making sure the lathe and accessories are working properly can prevent problems during your demonstration. Check that your accessories fit the lathe being used in the demonstration.
- 4. Prepare the camera operator:** Explain the demonstration to the camera operator, and discuss the best camera angles for various aspects of the demonstration.
- 5. Distribute handouts:** While distributing handouts for the demonstration, explain their purpose and content.

B. Demonstration

1. Introduction: After setting up and distributing the handouts, introduce yourself and your work, and explain the instructional intent and focus of the demonstration.

2. Establish rapport: Recognize the varied backgrounds and experiences represented by the attendees and explain the rationale of the turning techniques used. This is a sign of respect for the audience and helps establish rapport with the attendees.

3. Explain steps: As each of the steps are demonstrated, explain what you are doing and, most importantly, why you are doing it. If using a particular tool or technique, point it out and explain it.

4. Answer questions: Acknowledge all questions and try to answer them as completely and efficiently as possible. If needed, repeat questions so everyone can hear them. You should try to answer questions as completely as possible, but if they are taking too much time from the demonstration, let the attendee know that questions are valued and you will address them at the end of the demonstration. If your technique is questioned, do not be defensive, but rather recognize that there may be other ways of doing a particular technique.

5. Speak to the audience: When turning around to pick up a tool or writing, don't continue to talk with your back to the audience. Facing the audience when speaking makes it easier for the audience to hear and understand.

6. Don't wander off topic: Keep personal stories short and relevant to the demonstration. Humor is generally appreciated, unless it interferes with the demonstration.

7. Feedback: Check with the attendees from time to time to make sure they understand what you are doing. It is also useful to check, from time to time, to find out how well the audience can see the demonstration. Try to establish a comfortable climate, so that the attendees feel free to make comments or ask questions.

C. Teaching Tips

1. Share your tools: Woodturners like to see and touch tools, materials, and various stages of the work being turned. This is a good way to engage the attendees.

2. Health and safety considerations: Out of consideration for the attendee's health you should do little or no sanding. You should always model safe turning behavior.

3. Use visual aids: The use of a white board or slides can help illustrate various aspects of your turning. However, limit the use of slides to those most relevant to what you are demonstrating. The use of a lot of slides can be boring.

4. Use notes: You should feel comfortable using notes that contain the sequence of turning steps and key points you want to convey.

5. Rehearse: Practice your demo by yourself or with a few fellow turners so that your delivery is confident and so that you make sure that your timing allows you to finish the demo on time.

6. Relax and enjoy yourself: Have a great demonstration and most importantly, have fun! If you have put time and thought into planning and pre-planning your demonstration, the presentation itself will be much less stressful, and you should be able to relax and enjoy yourself.

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