

Demo Tips

from the “*World of Woodturners*” website

www.thewows.com

The following are the actual responses to a question on techniques and ideas for woodturning demonstrations. – Herman de Vries

Pam Reilly - Mar 3, 2004

I just joined (finally) a local woodturning club last month and they want me to give a demo on making a box. All you experts out there - do you have any tips on how to do this? I've never done it before. I have a handout - basically the how-to that I posted here, but are there any special tricks or tips that would help? Thanks in advance

Chris Wright - Mar 3, 2004

Pam, here are some of the things that I have learned:

Find out how long the demo time window is and determine if you can turn a piece start to finish in that time. If not, prepare things ahead of time, like roughing out the blanks, spigots, etc. This way you can talk about them, but not waste time on the basics and get down to business.

Talk ALOT. Make sure your audience knows what you are doing, how and why. My biggest mistake in my first demo was going through steps that I knew and understood without making sure everyone else did. Not to mention, the entire audience may not be able to see every move. If you are cutting away from them, the camera, etc. Make sure you are narrating what's going on "behind the scenes".

Bring examples of your work to the demo. You usually don't have time to go through you're full finishing processes, so this way they can see the final product. Also, some turners enjoy your work so much that they may want to purchase something. Not common for us newer folks, but you never know.

Find out what kind of lathe you'll be working on and make adjustments accordingly. Example, if you do a lot of work on a chuck, but your chuck won't fit their lathe and they don't have a chuck, you'll have to determine how to mount and such.

Sharpen all the tools you plan to use the night before. Not having to grind during a demo makes it go faster and cuts down on the noise level (especially for videos).

Pass things around as you finish them. If you turn one part first and don't need it for the second part for a few minutes, pass it around while you turn the second part. This will give the audience a chance to physically process what you have just done and it will stick in their minds a bit better.

Last but not least, be prepared for questions, comments and jests. Being new to the club, you might not get as many hecklers, but in my lively group, there is inevitably someone who has to

poke fun at something. Heck, even Michael Hosaluk got a few jests thrown his way when he demo'd last weekend.

Hope this helps. Chris

Chris Wright - Mar 3, 2004

I forgot to say, congrats on joining a club! You'll have a great time and it will definitely help you in your turning journey. Which club did you join?

Stephen Salter - Mar 3, 2004

Choose a simple form that you're familiar with and won't be too hard for newer turners to duplicate and use whatever wood you find most workable. Good luck.

Martin Groneng - Mar 3, 2004

Make sure you bring a piece of cloth or such, to put on the table under your pieces. I never put my pieces on any working surface, as you know for sure that the pieces will get scuffed. I ALWAYS wipe my hands on my pants or shirt to ensure they are "clean" before I pick up ANY piece, even my own. I always make a point of telling the viewers to respect the/any work on display. Never set up near the coffee and donuts!

Make good use of whiteboard/blackboard/flip charts to sketch/draw what you are saying!

Wally Dickerman - Mar 3, 2004

Pam, lots of good advice so far. I'd add one thought. Make sure that there is a table set up for you next to the lathe. Lay out all of your tools and whatever else you'll be using. Watching the demonstrator bending down digging in a tool bag isn't interesting, and the audience wants to see what you have. One of the demos that I do, I call "Tips from 60 years of woodturning". I bring lots of props, shop made tools, etc., and that requires a fairly large table.

Tell us about your demo.....what do you plan to do. This may be the start of something big. Maybe we'll see you demoing at Provo or AAW in a couple of years!

Barbara Gill - Mar 3, 2004

I never have done a turning demo but I have watched a lot plus I used to be a teacher. Chris touched on a suggestion that I will take a little further. You might want to have examples of the different stages of the box. You can mount the piece, refine or execute enough to give the information and then pass around. That way as Chris pointed out you will be able to spend the most time on the most difficult and interesting part of making a box, fitting and finish turning. Another interesting part of the demo might be examples of wood selection and grain/figure orientation with pre roughed examples.

Pam Reilly - Mar 3, 2004 Edit |

Wow, lots of really great info, everyone. Thank you so much. I have a lot to think about and work on, not the least of which is how to keep my hands from shaking while working :-)))

Chris, I joined the Zumbro Valley Woodturners in SE Minnesota. It's an AAW chapter. It's small right now, maybe 30-35 people.

In addition to the handout, I had already planned on bringing stages of a box, along with my finial board - I make a bunch of finials, put them in predrilled holes in a length of 1x1", and that way I have a nice display to select the best finial for the box. I won't be doing finishing, but since I had so many questions about my finish at the first meeting I went to, I plan to discuss it and show what micromesh is.

Thanks again for the help. The meeting is the last Thursday of the month, so I have lots of time to prepare (and get really nervous!!).

Jamie Donaldson - Mar 3, 2004

Pam- as an old Army trained instructor and drill sergeant, assume they know nothing- take nothing for granted. And the only dumb question is the one they didn't ask! Be totally familiar with the equipment- don't let them talk you into demonstrating on a Bowlmonster 36! That's an OVWG inside story I will never live down!

Eugen Schlaak - Mar 3, 2004

... and whatever you do, make sure everybody hears you even the folks in the back row. If they do not hear you they will start their own conversation. Portable Microphone systems are very reasonable to rent.

If somebody asks you a question, let's say from the front row or when not everybody heard that question, by all means repeat the question so everybody knows as to what you are answering to ... and that also gives you a few seconds to think about the answer you will give.

It has been said before ... no dead time, like looking for tools, when you give your presentation That is the worst mistake many demonstrators make and if this happens talk about the subject on hand while you are looking.

Most of the other important items have already been suggested by the previous posters and I think there was an article in the American Woodturner about the subject of presentations

Good luck

Keith Bundy - Mar 3, 2004

Chris suggested having your tools sharp. I would add to that, bring extra tools if you have them. That way if you happen to hit the chuck or drive center or even drop a tool [it's happened to me before] you've got another tool ready to go and you don't have to re-sharpen during the demo. Practice your demo in your shop. Talk while you are doing just as you will at the real thing. This will help remember everything and it will also help in making sure you can get everything in the time allotted. Your husband will also find it very funny when he walks in to find you talking to yourself. I know my wife did. Good luck k and let us know how it went. I think you'll find easier than you expect.

Robert Gulley - Mar 4, 2004

Pam, All of the above advice is wonderful! I am teaching my first woodturning class next week at a local Woodcraft, and I have picked up some great advice as well. Thanks for posting the question. Three things I have learned as a college professor may be of help:

1) You are the expert in this situation. You may not feel like it, but you are. The people are there to listen to you, and they want you to do well; they are rooting for you!

2) Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" to something you don't know, but without a lengthy explanation or apology. Just say "that's a good question and I will try to find out the answer for you." You don't have to know everything about everything!

Finally, 3) be careful not to let too many questions distract you from your main purpose for being there - to demo a skill. You may feel you are helping the person who asks a long, involved question, but the rest of the group will get bored. Offer to talk with the person after the demo, during a break, whatever.

Good luck!

Steve Worcester - Mar 4, 2004

Engage the audience. Talk to all of them, scanning the crowd. I agree with taking lots of extra tools. I usually have about 2-4 pre-sharpened gouges of the size I use for the demo.

Draw up visual aids if that would help. Keep a white board with good markers close and if there is a camera person, I always introduce myself to them and tell them up front that I will want them to zoom into certain places and I instruct them through those parts. The only ones who can really see usually are the people in the front row. Most of the others see through the cameras.

Jim Gott - Mar 4, 2004

Pam, As far as your hands shaking, remember that they invited you to show them how you make boxes. That makes YOU the TEACHER. It's not like an audition where they're judging you. They've obviously seen your wonderful boxes and want to know how you make them, so the respect is already there. That should give you the confidence you need.

Since this is your first, it might be a good idea to do a couple of dry runs with friends so you can get a rhythm and know how long it takes. It also helps to write down an outline to keep you on track. I've seen first time demonstrators at the AAW symposium do this. Your handout is a good idea. Use that as a demo guideline so they can follow what you're doing.

Just remember that they think enough of you to ask you to share your secrets with them. That compliment should give you the confidence you need to stop shaking.

Martin Groneng - Mar 4, 2004

A further comment along Jim's thread. I like to use a magnet to attach my "song sheet" to the headstock of the lathe as I'm turning, so it is handy and readily available for reference. I like to set my process/sheet (a hand-out with marginal notes for myself) up in numbered "steps" with corresponding numbers on the pieces being "passed around" so the audience can readily refer to the handout. I like to have up to about 8 or 10 pieces (sometimes 2 sets depending on size of

audience) turned to different stages/steps in the process, so that as you do the turning of the steps, the audience can see what is happening by looking at the piece being passed around with a mental recollection of what the last step was from the previous piece passed around. Just pick the "wheat from the chaff" here, Pam. There are some very good words of help here and I will definitely make a copy for further reference for myself too. Thanks, ALL. Marty

Pam Reilly - Mar 4, 2004

Thanks again for all the great tips and advice. You guys are the best! Jamie - you'll have to tell us that story sometime. It sounds like a good one. Eugen - you bring up a great point I'll have to work on. I'm pretty soft-spoken, so I'm going to have to work on projecting my voice a little.

Keith - perfect point. I have the habit (a bad one) of working too close to the chuck and have dinged my jaws and taken a chunk out of my tool more than once. I just bought a duplicate gouge to reduce trips to the grinder.

Unfortunately, while there is a camera, I don't have a chalkboard or easel, so I'll have to wing it in that area. The whole idea of giving a demo is a little intimidating - I haven't been doing this long enough to be anywhere near thought of as an "expert", plus, I'm the only girl in the group and am younger than most of them. It's hard to think that I have anything to teach them. But, that's my hang-up and I'll get over it.

These are all wonderful responses and I thank you all so much for your help. What'll help a lot is while I'm doing the demo, I'll hear all your "voices" in my head - the tips, the encouragement and support. Thanks again.

Julie Heryet - Mar 4, 2004

Good luck to you Pam. Also, do remember to enjoy yourself, quivering hands an' all

Pam Reilly - Mar 4, 2004

Thanks, Julie. I'm looking forward to it. I really think it will be fun

Darrell Feltmate - Mar 5, 2004

Pam , You have some great advice here. May I give some thoughts as you remember this is free advice and worth every penny :-) Coming from some years as a teacher and minister, I find that the audience wants you to do well. They have a particular desire for the demonstration and that is to see and hear what you do, in your case how you turn a box. Just do it and do it clearly and concisely.

How? First tell the group what you will do, do it and then tell them what you have done. Most clubs have a definite time frame for a demo that is a lot shorter than a box would take to turn. Decide what you feel they would like to hear about your boxes that make them unique; form, finials, finish, or other. Have the box ready to go to this point and enough visual aids to show what comes before or after.

If possible, get set up before hand so that there is no dead time for the demo. Have sharp tools and extras if possible to prevent dead time while turning. I carry several extra tips for Oland tools

so I can just slip one out and the next in. If you normally wear a face mask, use safety glasses for the demo to keep your voice from being muffled. Keep talking. If people hear clearly what you are doing they will think they saw it and if they can see it they will think they see it clearer.

Practice before you go. Several times. Out loud. If you are not used to public speaking, remember that you will speak faster than you think when in front of an audience. Speak sloooowly and clearly. Take as many notes as you need and have them memorized. You do not want to have to read but you do not want to forget what to say.

Above all have fun. Turning is fun partly because we share. Turners like to see and hear about turning. If you attach that finial or hollow that lid or whatever, the club will be happy and have you do another. You will enjoy sharing and so will the others. Turners love to see someone succeed. Make a mistake? Great! Proves you are a turner.

Good luck. God bless. Have fun.

Steve Hansen - Mar 5, 2004

Pam, Be well practised at the item(s) you are making. For the demo, allocate at least double the normal time it takes to perform anything. "screw ups", unfortunately, will happen from time to time. Be ready to handle these. Use them as an opportunity to explain the potential pitfall AND how to avoid them. Never show frustration with how things are progressing - be positive - and never make excuses for things that go awry. Having said those things, I am sure you won't have any trouble and the best thing about doing demos is knowing that everybody in your audience is pulling for you.

Have fun!

Joe Fleming - Mar 5, 2004

Pam,, Another idea for any demo, but especially for boxes. Take one of your better boxes and cut it in half like Raffan suggests. When I did my box demo, I cut my "best" box in half to pass around. It showed the joint, the wall thicknesses, lid thickness, etc. I still have that box sitting on a shelf for show and tell. Joe

Jude Kingery - Mar 5, 2004

Pam, you've plenty of good advice here, I'll only add one thing - far as hands shaking - all you have to do on that is remember that you direct your attention. If I asked you to think about that noise outside, you'd become aware of it, if I asked you to think about what you've got to get from the store later, it'd flash through your mind. Once you take attention off yourself (thoughts like, oh man, my hand's shaking, I hope I do ok) and put it on your work, the audience (this is cool, I love turning this project, that was a really good question he asked) your tension will automatically dissipate. Promise. I teach crisis intervention skills for crime victim assistance - once you get outside yourself and focus on the other person's needs - in your case the audience - that tension really does evaporate. You're going to do great!!!

PS - I can relate to being the only girl in most of the lathe related workshops I've attended - we're pretty sparsely populated here, so it's mostly guys and the guys are great! Let us know how much fun you had!

Pam Reilly - Mar 5, 2004

I can't get over all the great advice you are all providing. It's fabulous. I'm printing all of this out so I have it at my fingertips to review over the next couple of weeks. Wonderful information. Thanks again!

Juergen Schleicher - Mar 5, 2004

Super thread and some great advice based on a lot of experience. I wish I could contribute but most of the bases have been covered with great insight and thought.

I think this thread is a candidate for the "File Cabinet", Juergen

Eugen Schlaak - Mar 5, 2004

This thread is worth some money... there are professionals who teach this subject for a fee.

You are a indeed a lucky girl and this site is the best since 'Sliced Cheese' ...Thanks for starting it, Herm!

One just has to ask!

Don Derry - Mar 6, 2004

I love making mistakes when I'm doing a demonstration. Everyone including me finds them very entertaining. I faint a certain amount of embarrassment and claim erroneously that it had never happened before, or that it was only the third time in my life that I had ever made a mistake. The truth is if it can go wrong it will go wrong during a demonstration so you may as well have fun with it.

Keep the world turning,

Harry Pye - Mar 7, 2004

Pam, you may find it better to hold on to hand-outs until the demo is over. This way your audience will be watching you and not looking at the hand-out.

Martin Groneng - Mar 7, 2004

If I'm attending a seminar, I want the hand-out "up front". It allows me to briefly follow the process as written, but more importantly, it allows me to make "very critical notes/sketches" during the demo, for future use. It's then ALL in one place. Also, many other attendees don't always bring paper to write on and this serves that purpose. I usually double space my hand-outs, for the simple reason that attendees have ample room for notes. If the presentation is sufficiently interesting, you will not encounter people not paying attention to the demo. Marty

Clay Foster - Mar 7, 2004

Pam, One thing that many will be grateful for is if you repeat any question from the audience before you answer it so that everyone can hear what was asked. If all they hear is your answer, they have to play Jeopardy and make up their own question. If the guy on the front row asks

what grit sandpaper you are using and all you say is "220," the guys in back don't know if you are talking about sandpaper, volts, or what time it is.

Mostly keep in mind you will be having a conversation about woodturning with your friends. Enjoy it.

You go, girl.

Pam Reilly - Mar 29, 2004

I just wanted to thank everyone once again for all your help and advice. I had my demo last Thursday and, all in all, I think it went pretty well. For the good stuff - I had a 5 page handout with pictures and detailed explanations; I had an outline that I taped to the headstock (thanks for that idea, Marty) to keep me on track, make sure I covered everything I wanted to, and time the passing around of example pieces; I practiced the demo about 8 times before actually doing it; everything was sharpened ahead of time and I brought extras where I had them; members of the audience had some good questions and there were good suggestions of alternative ways to do things. Not too bad. As for the downside: the demo went a bit quicker than I would have preferred; even with my outline, I missed passing out a set of examples I had prepared; even with the outline, there were a few things I missed discussing. There's not too much I would do differently. I think the only way to have it go better is to just do it more. In other words, since I am not one to do a lot of public speaking, the only way to get better at it is to do more of it. I think that's the only way that I'll be more comfortable and be able to focus more clearly on the task at hand. They video taped the demo, so I'll have to see if I can get my hands on that and see what else I did wrong :-)) Anyway, I thought I'd let you know how I made out and just say thanks once again for all the help and encouragement.

Dean Gartland - Mar 29, 2004

I knew it wouldn't be long before you would be putting out a video

Martin Groneng - Mar 29, 2004

Way to go, Pam. You have "jumped" or a better term, "turned" a major hurdle. It is not easy and it only becomes more fun when you do more demos. It is a great asset to have another turner to help keep things flowing and step in because they "know" what's happening and can be very helpful as needed. I always like to "fill in" a friend turner with what I have planned and give them one of my "song sheets" so they can be my second hands and eyes as things progress. Well done, Pam. We are proud of you. Marty
