

Pen Making Tips From Wally

Turn pens at high speeds, 2500 RPM or higher. Surface speed won't be high on such a small diameter turnings.

Stop the lathe and hand sand lengthwise between grits to remove sanding scratches.

Use white silicone carbide rather than black sandpaper on wood. I use Finkat in 400 and 600. I get it at Craft Supplies. The black sandpaper can leave a black residue in the pores of the wood, which will affect the finish of light colored wood. The wet/dry black sandpaper works well on plastic pen blanks.

When sanding acrylics, use water as a lubricant

When using Corian for pens, use the Beall system Tripoli and White diamond buffing wheels to polish.

If using porous wood, wet sand by putting a few drops of med CA on 180 or 220 sandpaper. The slurry will fill the pores. Sand back to the wood after the CA is cured. This really improves the final finish.

When using transparent or semi-transparent acrylic for pens, the brass tube will show through. To avoid this, after the blank is drilled, paint the inside. Depending on the color of the blank, I use dead black or light grey paint and apply it with a Q-tip.

Very soft woods such as buckeye burl, and other soft burls should be stabilized. After the blank has been turned, and before the fine sandpaper grits have been used, apply a soaking coat of thin CA glue.

Micro-mesh can be damaged by heat. Sand at no more than 1500 RPM. and keep it moving. Micro-mesh will last for a long time if it's washed occasionally with soap and water.

When using CA glue (Cyanoacrylate or Hot Stuff) as a finish, apply it at about 1200 RPM. Apply 2 or 3 drops of glue to a paper towel which has been folded several times. Then, applying a little pressure, move the folded towel back and forth rapidly to generate heat until the glue dries. Do not use an accelerator until after the final coat.

When using friction polish as a finish, run the lathe at high speed, and apply pressure with a folded lint free cloth. As the name implies, friction polish is cured by friction heat. For best results, a sealer should be applied before using friction polish. Most sanding sealers work well. After sanding to 320, I use a couple of coats of med. CA glue as a sealer and as part of the finish. This is followed by lightly sanding with 400, 600 and 1500. I then sand with Micro Mesh to 12,000. Give the CA glue at least a couple of hours to cure before applying additional finish. Finally, I apply a friction polish, followed by a coat of Renaissance wax. Some pen turners apply several coats of CA as the only finish.

The finish on most wood pens takes a beating during long time use. It would be hard to find a tougher, more durable finish than CA glue. For the same reason, most experienced pen turners don't use the lowest priced kits, which have plating that shows wear in a very short time.