

KNIFE GRASPS featured in the film "The Spoon, the Bowl and the Knife" a documentary about Wille Sundqvist

Control, strength, and safety produce long smooth cuts that are characteristic of professionally cut surfaces. Always let the knife slide in the wood from the base of the blade near the handle out towards the tip, or vice versa. If you press the knife through the wood without this slicing motion, you will undoubtedly be less effective.

It is safe to carve towards the body if the grip is secured with different stopping points or "seat belts", to make sure you have a safe stop when knife releases from the wood. You should immediately know if a grasp is dangerous. Adjust your positions and carving angles until you know where the stop is. Then carving feels safe. Lock body joints as much as possible for better control and strength. Increasing points of support results in more energy going into the actual cutting.

In these descriptions, "standard grip" refers to holding the knife with the blade exiting the palm on the same side as the thumb; "reverse grip" refers to holding the knife with the blade exiting the palm on the side opposite the thumb. A "four finger" grip means that the thumb does not wrap around the knife handle, but remains on the same side of the handle as the fingers. When it comes to the orientation of the cutting edge, "facing away from you" refers to the direction of the edge when holding the knife in front of you at arm's length. The thumb muscles refers to the thicker portion below the thumb.

1. POWER GRASP

Hold the knife as close to the blade as you can, using a standard grip with the cutting edge facing away from you. Skew the knife a little, with the tip angled slightly back toward your body. Lift your shoulder and get power from your back as you drive the knife with a STRAIGHT arm, slicing from the base of the blade toward the tip. You also can use the POWER GRASP with your blank resting against a chopping block. This is a powerful grip for removing a lot of material.



2a. PULL GRASP

Hold the workpiece at the far end and support it against your chest. Using a four-finger standard grip, hold the knife with the cutting edge facing toward your body. Skew the knife a little, with the tip angled slightly away from your body. Pull the knife toward your body, slicing from the base of the blade toward the tip as you squeeze the bevel down into the wood – this provides good support and a good finish. The stop and safety are achieved by locking the elbow of the knife hand against the body while the wrist remains stiff. The thumb rests on top of the handle and the blade tip is directed obliquely from the body. The four-finger grip allows the thumb muscles to hit the body before the knife breaks free of the wood.



2b. GUIDED-PULL GRASP

This refinement of the PULL GRASP involves steering the back of the blade with fingers of the opposing hand. Position the opposing hand so that its fingers can push on the back of the blade, or the fingers of the knife hand. This provides extra power when making precise cuts, and makes it easy to control the direction of the blade and the design.



3a. SLICING GRASP

Grab the knife in a reverse grip with your palm facing up and the cutting edge facing away from you. Skew the blade slightly by angling the tip toward your body, and slide the knife forward as you cut. Let the heel of your knife hand's palm support the back of the knife, and squeeze the forearm of the knife hand against your body as you cut.



3b. SLICING-ARC GRASP

Hold the knife in the same way as you would for the SLICING GRASP, but cut by turning the knife away from you in a semicircle, using the wrist of the knife hand.



4a. SCISSOR GRASP

Hold the knife using a standard grip, with your palm facing up and the cutting edge facing toward you. Bring your hands close together, inwards a little, and squeeze them up against your chest. Pull your shoulders back with your back muscles – "open up" - forcing your arms apart as you execute a slicing cut, from the base of the blade toward the tip. This is a strong grip. If you press your knife hand tightly to your body it's possible to make a short stop when knife releases from the wood.



4b. SCISSOR GRASP with THUMB PUSH

This grasp is a combination of the SCISSOR GRASP and the THUMB-PUSH GRASP. Follow the instructions for the SCISSOR GRASP, but in this case press the thumb of the opposing hand against the back of the knife blade to control the blade for extra power. This is a safe, controlled grip.



5. SQUEEZE GRASP

The same basic position as the PULL GRASP – a reverse grip with the cutting edge facing toward you. For this grasp, hold the knife tightly, and rest the wrist of the knife hand against the blank. Make the cut sideways toward your body by squeezing the knife hand. Press the upper arm of your knife hand against your body for a stop and safety.



6. THUMB PUSH GRASP

Hold the knife using a standard grip with the cutting edge facing away from your body. Use the thumb of your opposing hand to steer the cut by pushing against the back of the blade. This motion pushes the knife outward so that the cut comes alongside the thumb as a pivot point. Allow your elbows to work from the outside in towards to the body as you cut. Be sure to make a slicing cut, from the base of the blade toward the tip. This grasp provides controlled fine cuts and can result in smooth finish surfaces.



7. ELBOW GRASP

Hold the knife close to the blade, using a standard grip with the cutting edge facing away from you. Carve in a downward direction, pushing your elbow forward in one smooth motion while slicing from the base of the blade to the tip. The bevel is pressed down into the wood and will support the cut. This is one of the most common grasps.



8A. THUMB-PULL GRASP

Hold the knife using a standard grip with the cutting edge facing toward you. Make sure the thumb of knife hand is off to the side or hidden behind the end of the blank so you do not cut yourself. Skew the knife with the tip aimed slightly away from you. Make the cut by pushing with your thumb while squeezing the knife hand straight toward you - like peeling potatoes.



8B. THUMB-SKEW GRASP

Hold the knife using a standard grip with the cutting edge facing toward you. Skew the blade at a 45 degree angle to the blank, and also angle it 45 degrees away from you. Push on the blank with your thumb while pulling your knife hand toward your body, slicing from the base of the blade toward the tip. Support the blade against the bevel and do not change the angles. When you cut on the bias the total edge angle is lowered and this makes it easier to penetrate the wood. This grasp is particularly a benefit when carving in end grain which is much more difficult to cut. Skewing is also a fast and efficient way to remove sharp edges.



9. CAN OPENER GRASP

This grasp is based on the leverage and torque of a tin can opener, though upside down! The thumb may be likened to the hook on the opener that attaches to the can chime. Hold the knife gripped with between all four fingers with the cutting edge facing toward you. Hold the blank at the far end and support it against your stomach. Clamp the thumb of the knife hand on top of the blank at a 90 degree angle. Press down with your thumb while using your wrist followed by your elbow to rotate the blade upward in a circular motion, making a skew cut from the tip of the blade toward the base. Repeat the motion as you advance the blade, and your thumb, toward you along the blank. At the end of each cutting stroke, the index finger of your knife hand will hit the bottom of the blank, stopping the motion of the blade and (if done properly) preventing you from cutting your thumb.



10. SLICING JAB GRASP

This is a dangerous grasp for anyone who is not an experienced carver! Hold the knife using a reverse grip, palm up, with the cutting edge facing away from you and the tip pointed toward your stomach. Make the cut by pulling the forearm of the knife hand towards your stomach in a smooth motion and determined stroke, slicing from the tip of the blade toward the base. The stop is created by the wrist of the carving hand making contact with the blank at the end of the stroke.



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