Museum of Woodworking Tools

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A Guide to Honing and Sharpening

Moving the Blade on the Stone

You should ***not*** move the blade along the stone until you can get the bevel to "click down" properly. With that mastered, th next step is moving the chisels back and forth on the stone while still keeping the bevel in constant contact with the stone

Hint: At first, try stopping at the end of each stoke to check the solidity o the down holding pressure on the bevel. The bevel should "click" against the stone. As your hold-down technique becomes consistent, you can progress to continuous back and forth strokes.

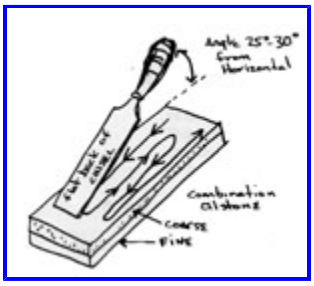
Click on the picture to enlarge

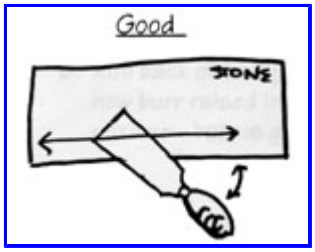
To move along stone: keep arms firm; sway with body from left to right. - Move chisel along stone back and forth over whole length, in a long "W" pattern that will cover entire surface of stone.

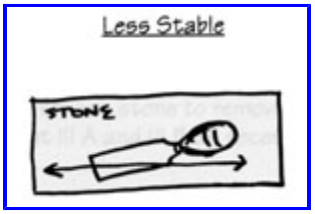
Stance is a very important. If you try to move your arms, it will be harder to maintain pressure on the bevel and keep the bevel flat on the stone. However, i you sway your body and keep your arms firmly against your sides as your body moves, your arms will naturally follow and you will be able to move the chise easily without the bevel teetering on the stone.

Move the chisel back and forth over the entire length and width of the stone, tracing out a series of "W" patterns over the length of the stone. As shown in the pictures, the chisel is held at a diagonal angle to the stone This sideways position with the chisel held diagonally (Ex. A) will prove more stable than the strict, CHISEL-LINED-UP-WITH-THE-STONE position shown in (Ex. B).

The "W" Pattern Example A Example B







This back and forth "W" motion, with your body leading your hands so that the bevel will naturally stay flat on the stone, is the main action of all sharpening. Practice this motion carefully and slowly and it will become second nature. Use the entire length and width of the stone: that's what it there for. (For waterstones, this last point is very important as it evens out wear considerably.)

A Figure 8 motion, which is often recommended in old woodworking textbooks, has several drawbacks. The curve at the beginning and end of a stroke throws you out of solid contact with the stone's straight surface, and requires a more complex muscular response to maintain equilibrium - especially with thin bladed, i.e., narrow beveled, plane irons. Furthermore, it does tend to induce a curved edge on any tool, since pressure and metal removed are more concentrated at the bevel's corner with the swerve of each pass.

Note: The Figure8 style of honing is necessary in the honing of curved blades.