

POSITION # 1.

There are two positions for the cutting knife. For the first position, hold the knife in your right hand and place the first joint of your thumb (curved outwards) at the end of the handle by the blade on the lower inside ridge of the handle. Wrap the rest of your fingers around the handle. (Left handed carvers, like the author, simply reverse this process.) Your thumb and knuckles will rest on your work, guiding and supporting the blade as though it was a sixth digit. Think of the thumb, knuckle of the index finger, and the knife point as a tripod which rests on the wood at all times. Never try using the cutting knife without some part of your hand or a finger touching your work as a guide, or you will have no control. Your thumb should never leave the handle while cutting, as it might when peeling potatoes.

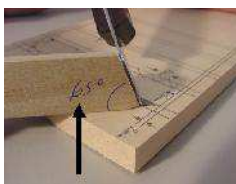
The second position is achieved by moving the thumb directly on top of the spine of the handle with the first knuckle of the thumb still next to the blade, not on it.

These two positions will give you the proper (and same) angle for carving in opposing directions. Held properly and consistently, your blade will always be in the wood at the correct angle.

The first position is used for all line cuts, both straight and curved. It is also used for the first and third cuts of small regular three-sided chips. When using the first position, turn your wrist away from your body. The second position is primarily used for the second cut of the same three-sided chips. It is much easier and you will have much more control if, when you are making line cuts or larger curved chips in the first position, to simply keep turning your work rather than keep changing positions.



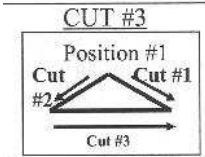
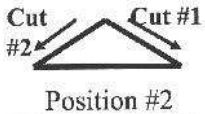
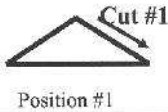
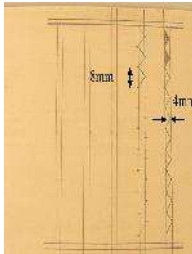
POSITION # 2.



The desired angle of cut is 65 degrees. It may help to visualize this if you make a yourself a small piece of wood with a 65 degree angle. As you carve, bring it close to the blade to verify the accuracy of your cutting angle. The natural angle of the blade is approximately 65 degrees if you are holding the knife properly. This angle is the desired one, because it catches light and shadow to show off your chips best. This angle also allows three sided chips to pop out.

These positions may seem awkward at first, but with practice they will become quite natural to you.

When carving, keep your elbow close to your body. This will give you added leverage and strength from your shoulder. Also, do all of your work in your lap (which means you get to sit down) unless your piece is too large to hold. To sit and work on a table or bench is to forfeit your leverage and strength.



You need to master the three-sided (triangular) chip. It is the basis of many chip carved patterns, and will let you get familiar with holding your knife properly.

Before you can start carving, you must prepare a practice board. Draw a series of parallel straight lines either 4 mm or 1/6" apart and then draw triangles either 8 mm or 1/3" wide.



For the first cut, hold the knife in position #1, and position the tip of the knife at the top of the chip. Raise the handle on the tripod formed by the knife tip, thumb, and knuckle of the index finger. Plunge the knife tip into the wood, cutting the next corner.

Rotate the board 90 degrees, hold the knife in position #2, verify the 65 degree angle of the blade and plunge the tip into the wood cutting to the next corner.

Without moving the board, change to position #1, place the tip at the end of the first cut, and while plunging the tip into the wood slide the tripod slightly to cut to the end of the second cut.

You should experience a great feeling of accomplishment when the three-sided chip pops out. Maybe not at first, but do not be discouraged, it will happen. The secret is practice, practice, and continue to practice.

One final word on holding the cutting knife that may prove helpful: After you have been carving a while, you may find the ridge your thumb rests on in the first position a bit uncomfortable. If so, simply round it off slightly by sanding at the point at which your thumb rests. You should be able to carve for hours without it ever bothering you.

Ideally, you should never go back over a cut once it is made. A single cut at the correct depth and angle should suffice. This will give your work a very clean and crisp appearance. If your angle is too shallow, you will not have the right depth for the contrast of light and shadow. If your angle is too deep, it will become difficult to get a clean, crisp cut. Remember, what you are trying to achieve is a good contrast between light and shadow. In order to help you do this, carve with a strong light, either natural or artificial. You will be able to determine the end result better as you work. Also, it will be less tiring for your eyes.