

5. Sharpening the Knife

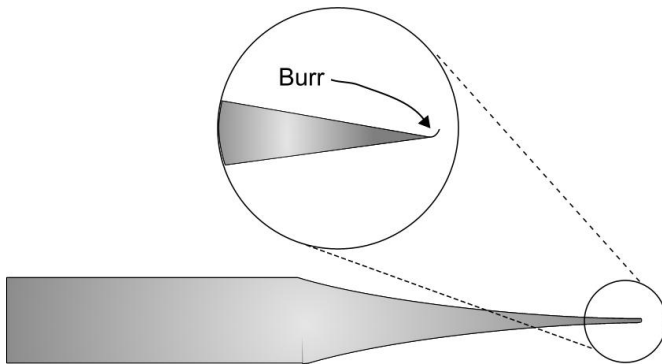


Fig. 3: Courtesy of www.northcoastknives.com

What follows is the three-step process I use when sharpening a double hollow ground or razor style knife. This type of knife works best by maintaining a small burr (see *Fig. 3*) to help grab the cane when scraping. Depending on whether you are sharpening right handed or left handed, the burr must always be felt on the side of the blade that is facing away from your body when scraping.

The burr forms a tiny j-like hook that grabs the cane when scraping. A good burr will let the knife do the work and means you will not have to press down hard on the reed when scraping to remove cane. If you find yourself pressing harder and harder, it means it is time to sharpen your knife and reset the burr.

Please adhere to the following guidelines when sharpening:

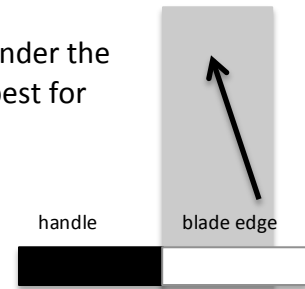
1. Always complete the **three steps** in the same order each time you sharpen your knife.
2. Be very mindful of the **angles**. Do your best to keep them consistent!
3. Be very mindful of the amount of **pressure** on each stroke. Even pressure throughout each stroke is essential, otherwise you will end up with a knife in which the blade is worn unevenly.
 - Lifting the blade off the stone too early will cause the end of the blade to wear down more quickly.
 - Pressing down harder in the middle of your stroke will take too much metal off the middle of the blade, causing it to look bowed.

Please follow the appropriate instructions for the hand in which you hold the reed knife to scrape. Right-handed sharpening instructions are on p. 13 followed by left-handed sharpening instructions on p. 15.

LEFT HANDED SHARPENING INSTRUCTIONS

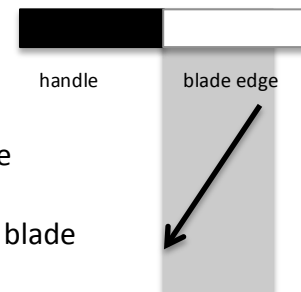
Step One: This stroke curls the burr fully up so that it may be removed from the knife with Step Two.

- Set the stone perpendicular to your table. Place something under the stone so that it does not move. (Rubber drawer liners work best for this.)
- Rest your knife at the bottom of the stone so that the blade edge is facing away from you and your handle is on the left side of the stone. Your handle should be butted up against the side of the stone so that the tip of your knife is hanging over the right side of the stone.
- Set the blade edge at a 30-40° angle.
- Use the fingers of your right hand to hold the top of your knife blade near the end of the knife blade (not the sharp edge). Doing so will help you keep the angle consistent throughout the knife stroke.
- Keeping the 30-40° angle and using even pressure**, draw the blade (leading with the handle) across and up the stone towards the top left corner of the stone like you are making the first line of an “X.” This motion will allow you to sharpen the entire length of the blade.



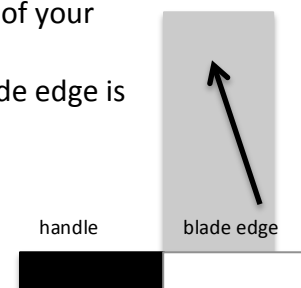
Step Two: This stroke removes the burr you created in Step One and gives you a “fresh surface” to create a new burr.

- Turn the knife over so that the blade’s edge is now facing towards you.
- Rest the blade **FLAT** in the top of the stone with the top of the knife handle butted against the left hand side of the stone as in Step One.
- Press the fingers of your right hand on the flat part of the blade near the tip (avoid the sharp edge).
- Using light pressure from your left hand, gently draw the knife towards you by pulling the handle towards the bottom left corner of the stone, finishing the “X” you started in Step One. Make sure to keep the sharp edge flat against the stone as you draw it across the stone, which will remove the burr from the entire length of the blade.



Step Three: This is the finishing stroke that resets the sharpness of your knife by setting the burr.

- Rest your knife at the bottom of the stone so that the blade edge is facing away from you just like in Step One.
- Set the blade at a 15-20° angle with the handle of the knife butted against the stone on the left hand side.



- Use the fingers of your right hand to hold the top of your knife blade (not the sharp edge) and help you keep the 15-20° angle consistent throughout this final knife stroke.

- **Keeping the 15-20° angle and using even pressure**, draw the blade (leading with the handle) up the stone towards the top left corner of the stone in a similar fashion as Step One, making sure you keep the small angle and the pressure even throughout the stroke.

The 15-20° angle is critical for getting a proper burr. If the angle is too large, you will curl too much of the blade, which will then make the blade feel dull when trying to scrape. If the burr is too pronounced on the blade, it will feel like you have to use a lot of pressure in order to remove any cane, or the cane will feel glassy under your knife when scraping. If you do this, repeat Step Two several times to remove the burr and then reset it with Step Three.

Check the sharpness of your knife by gently setting the blade on your thumbnail. It should just grab the nail with very little pressure. If it does, your knife is sharp. If it seems like it does not grab the nail unless you apply some pressure, **repeat the entire three-step process** using a little more pressure on each stroke as it moves across the stone.