

Quick Guide to Carving a Wood Spirit

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This pamphlet is intended to provide a visual guide to carving a wood spirit using a defined technique. This guide can be seen as a companion to the videos listed below as it references the same steps and procedures. The material being carved should be cylindrical or at least the area being carved should assume rounded shape. A poplar, basswood or clean pine dowel ranging from one to two inches in diameter make a perfect carving medium and can be found at most home improvement stores. Most fairly straight sapling trunks and tree branches also make very good carving material. If sized correctly, saplings and branches can be turned into perfect walking sticks. The tools, material and equipment required in this practice exercise are:

- 1) A deep sweep gouge (8, 9, 10 or 11) from 3/16 to 1/4 inch depending on the diameter of the wood dowel, palm format tools are preferable, but mallet size gouges can also be used
- 2) A v tool 30-45 degrees from 3/16 to 1/4 inch depending on the diameter of the wood dowel, palm format tools are preferable, but mallet size v tools can also be used
- 3) A medium-sized detail carving knife
- 4) A pencil
- 5) A hard eraser
- 6) A small (12 inches or less) ruler
- 7) A carving glove to protect the off hand
- 8) Sharpening device of choice
- 9) A wooden dowel from 1 to 2 inches in diameter, at minimum 12 inches long. This should be soft wood; poplar, basswood or pine for example
- 10) A stable flat surface to rest the piece on while carving, preferably a bench hook or something to catch the top while carving.

Another learning suggestion is to use this guide along with the five-part wood spirit carving series by Terry Burnside that is posted on YouTube.

Part 1: Introduction - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ingocSgKlpA&t=7s>

Part 2: Setting the Face - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eOtpPPjx-Y&t=226s>

Part 3: Nose and Cheeks - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSgngEulFVk>

Part 4: Eyes and Brow - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF0z7XzaMOw&t=1s>

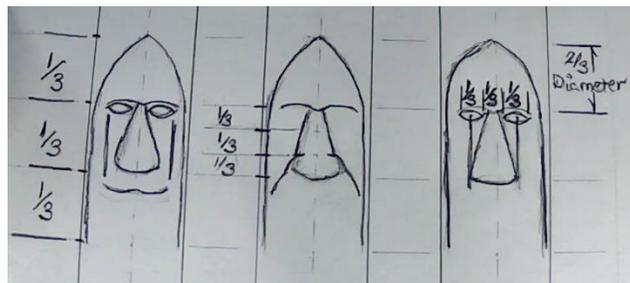
Part 5: Hair and Beard - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7S10RqOM6I&t=214s>

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Determining Proportions of the Face

The first step is to determine the necessary size and placement of the facial features based on the size (i.e., diameter) of the material to be carved. The steps required for this process are given below (diagram immediately below this list).

- 1) Measure the diameter of the stock and calculate approximately $2/3$ of that (e.g., $3/4$ is $2/3$ of $1\ 1/8$ or 1 is $2/3$ of $1\ 1/2$). This will be used as the unit of measure mentioned below to mark points on the stick that are used as reference for drawing features.
- 2) Draw a light center line from one end of the dowel downward several inches. This will be used to balance the facial features when carving.
- 3) Mark $1\ 1/2$ inch from end on the center line; this will be the middle of the hairline.
- 4) Measure and mark using the distance determined in step 1 above; this will be the level of the ridge above the eye sockets.
- 5) Measure and mark using the distance determined in step 1 above; this will be the bottom of the tip of the nose.
- 6) Measure and mark using the distance determined in step 1 above; this will be the chin.
- 7) Draw the hairline starting at the first mark.
- 8) Draw the ridge above the eye sockets, slightly curve the line up above the eye socket and down across the bridge of the nose.
- 9) Draw the nose from the bridge to the second mark on the stick; the bottom corners of the nose should be directly beneath the center of where the eyes will be carved.



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Carving Guide

The following photo is of a wood spirit carving study board. There are five carved sticks on the board that match the five stages of carving discussed in this guide. snapshots represent major progress points in the carving. The snapshots are taken from a carving study stick, and the textual carving instructions are an outline of the steps needed to reach these milestones.



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Step 1 - Creating a Carving Line Sketch on the Stick

The first snapshot below is a simple carving line drawing made on the stick to provide a guide for placement of features. The description of how the proportions for these features and this drawing were determined is given above.



This is what the cut line sketch should look like before carving begins at the end of step 1.

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Step 2 - Initial Carving – Setting the Features

1. Carve hairline using knife and v tool, cut groove with v tool along hairline down to about the level of the eye sockets, then shave the area above the eye socket line upward toward this stop cut
2. Carve the eye sockets using the gouge, hollow out the area beneath the eye socket line and across the nose
3. Carve along the sides of the nose with the gouge to bring the nose out, go up to the eye socket and hollow out those areas also (just the eye sockets not the bridge)
4. Carve the bottom of the nose with the gouge to bring the nose out at the bottom, ensure that this groove meets the grooves going up the sides of the nose on both sides
5. Clean up the carving a little with the gouge or knife



This is the carving at the completion of step 2.

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Step 3 - Adding Detail to the Nose and Cheeks



A photo of the carving at the end of step 3

- 1) Mark the top of the wings of the nose and draw lines to the corners of the mouth. The starting point of this line is $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way down the nose. The photo of step 2 on page 5 shows these lines. The drawn lines will be carved to form the crease that defines the wings of the nose and the bottom fold of the cheeks.
- 2) Carve this line using the detail carving knife making sure to score a small notch at the points marked on the nose
- 3) Deepen this cut using the knife or v tool, this creates the line that runs from the nose toward the mouth and lies beneath the cheek
- 4) Make chip cuts at the bottom of the nose on each side of the nose using the detail knife, this brings out the nose at the bottom. Continue shaving away the upper lip area into the base of the nose. This brings the nose out further.
- 5) Cut the nostrils using the detail knife by placing the point at the bottom of the nose and rotating the knife in a circular motion, remove the small chips to form nostrils
- 6) Cut grooves at the wings of the nose on each side with the gouge, these should be cut starting on each side of the nose and running diagonally toward the notch cut earlier in the sides of the nose
- 7) Shave the nose to round it on each side with the detail carving knife, make sure the wings of the nose (bottom broad part) are slanted downward on the outside
- 8) The cheek area and the eye sockets will probably have sharp angles by this time with all of the wood removal, use the knife and gouge to smooth these out and reduce the height of the cheek areas
- 9) Clean up, deepen and accentuate where necessary with knife, gouge, or v tool as needed

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This is the carving at the end of step 3. The nose should be very close to completion.

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Step 4 - Adding Detail to the Eyes and Brow



- 1) Draw eyes in a football shape in the eye socket areas to indicate where they should be carved. See step 3 above on page 7.
- 2) Carve the eyes by making a stop cut directly over the drawn outlines with the detail knife and then using the v tool or knife to deepen the cut, the result should be an oval shaped dome.
- 3) Make chip cuts at the corner of each eye using the detail knife, forming iris and pupil
- 4) Cut in at the inside corners of the upper eye sockets to deepen the sockets at those points, use the detail knife and v tool for this
- 5) Draw curved eye socket lines beneath each eye. See the black curved lines beneath the eyes in the step 3 snapshot above on page 7.
- 6) Carve these eye socket extensions beneath the eyes using the gouge.
- 7) Shave above the eye socket line to create a brow ridge using the detail knife
- 8) Carve two frown lines at the bridge of the nose upward, angling out, using the v tool. See the straight red lines in the snapshot above.
- 9) Carve wrinkles across the forehead using the v tool. See the lines drawn in the forehead area in the step 3 snapshot above on page 7.
- 10) With a pencil, mark areas to carve on the sides of face to create hollows at cheek and temple
- 11) Carve out the hollows in the sides of the face where you marked with the pencil

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The carving should look like this at the end of step 4 with all of the face complete except the mouth, scalp and facial hair (draw in here to show placement).

NOTE – This illustration shows one of many possible looks for the wood spirit. Changes in facial hair, set of the eyebrows, scalp hair, direction of the eyes etc. can create striking differences in the appearance.

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Step 5 - Completing the Carving by Adding Hair, Beard and Mouth

- 1) Draw hair on head, and beard with a pencil as shown in the photo of step 4 above on page 9.
- 2) Carve hair on head down the sides of the face with V tool
- 3) Carve very fine hairs on the eyebrows with V tool
- 4) Carve the beard using the v tool, make sure that a few lines run from the nose to the end of the beard then add shorter hairs to fill in
- 5) Make a long chip cut in the upper center of the beard to hint at a mouth with the detail knife
- 6) Clean up the carving



The carving should look like this at the end of step 5. This is the finished carving.

NOTE – The carving could be sanded lightly or touched up to remove fuzzies or unwanted bits of wood. You may also want to finish it for appearance or protection with varnish, possibly a light stain wash. As mentioned above the face may be changed dramatically by eliminating the beard and carving a mouth, carving only a mustached, changing the slope of the brow ridges, redirecting the slant of the eyes etc. as shown in the snapshot below

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