The act of raising the burr during the early stages of sharpening a knife is a crucial moment, it is tangible evidence that sharpness looms, what you are doing is being done correctly and your hard work is about to pay off.

Your ability to actually feel the burr is a confidence building moment, it’s an enjoyable piece of the sharpening puzzle.

Sharpening side A of your knife, the burr will form on side B. Feel for it with your fingers. Switch sides when you can feel for the burr from heel to tip.
One of the problems with watching videos is that you may feel the need to use the same brand of water stones as your favourite YouTube sharpener uses. I have rarely used a water stone that I didn’t think could do the work.

If you are using a commonly known brand of stones like Knife Planet, Shapton, Naniwa or Gesshin, your water stones are not going to hinder your progress.

It is important to trust the stones you use but before you decide that they are the issue, make sure you have followed all the basic steps first.

My father, and his father, made chisels and other edged tools extremely sharp on old oil stones that I would not even think to use now, so believe me when I say that the stones are very likely good enough!
Grit choice is more important than brand. Personally, I work with a 3 grit combination:

- **Coarse** - 200 or 400 grit
- **Medium** - 1000 grit
- **Fine** - 3000 or 8000 grit

**Why?**
Because you should start sharpening a very dull knife on a 200 or 400 grit coarse stone. You will raise the burr on each side, then you will remove the burr using the same grit.

If the knife is not so dull, you can start directly on a Medium grit stone, like a 1000 grit.

After the burr is raised and removed, the refining process starts. You will use a fine or very fine stone, 3000 or 8000 grit for example.

This will allow you to end up with a **sharp and clean edge**.
If you’re looking for a good stone to start, we’ve created the ideal set to sharpen your knives and improve your technique at a very affordable price.

The set features:
- 400/1000 grit stone
- 3000/8000 grit stone
- Bamboo stone holder
- Coarse Flattening Stone

> Check it out on Amazon.com

The Knife Planet Sharpening Set is the result of over 4 years of teaching knife sharpening to students from all over the world.

We’ve always taught our students that it’s not necessary to spend a fortune or to collect many water stones in order to master the art of sharpening knives.

With 4 sharpening grits, you will be able to take care of very dull knives without problems.
#5

**DON'T LEARN ON CHEAP KNIVES**

Learning knife sharpening on cheap knives is a very bad idea.

**Why?**
the steel in very inexpensive knives are not conducive to hand sharpening, they are difficult to sharpen and will break down your confidence levels and have a negative impact on your ability to sharpen a knife.

Believe me, I sharpen thousands of knives every year and these are the knives I don’t look forward to taking on. This is not to imply that you should be learning on your handmade Fujiwara or Masakage, you can, but all I am suggesting is that you start with a decent knife, start with one of the ones you use every day.

If you are worried about scratching the blade, tape it up with painters tape and just leave the edge exposed. Even in my very early years of sharpening, I never damaged a knife from poor sharpening habits. Do not worry, just practice!
#6

SHARPENING ANGLES

If you're sharpening an average chef knife, the angle should be 20 deg per side, or as close to that as you can manage.

This is a very common angle as it is obtuse enough to support the softer steel and that angle will stand up relatively well under normal kitchen duty.

You can sharpen a soft knife at any angle by the way, you could sharpen it at 10 deg per side if you want, but you need to know that edge retention will suffer dramatically as that angle is just too acute for the steel, it will not stand up to normal use, it will feel extremely sharp but just for a short while.

Build your muscle memory at the 19-21 deg angle and keep them that way. Angles impact not only edge retention but performance. The Takamura and Fujiwara for example can support the more acute angles due to the quality of the steel used to create them.
Even the sharpest knife will get dull at some point. It’s natural. Your goal is to create edges that last for as much time as possible.

- **Be aware that it is going to get dull.** The dulling cycle has been set in motion so despite my best efforts and the person using its best efforts, the edge is failing as we speak. This period of failure over time is the edge retention period in question and a multitude of factors influence this period.

- **Use the right cutting board.** Don’t treat the knife like it is hammer and unbreakable.

- **Be vigilant despite the hectic pace and mindful of the edge.** Place it facing away from you when not in use.

- **Do not steel it if you are not going to do it properly.** Do it with focus and knowledge of what it is that you are trying to do. Forget what you see them do on TV.
If the chip is very minor, sharpen the knife as if the chip was not there, it will vanish during the sharpening process. If the chip is a little more significant and clearly visible this is what I do.

Using a coarse stone, 220 to 500 grit I hold the knife at almost 90 deg, more like 85 deg and using medium pressure I begin to grind the metal along the primary edge, I am sharpening but I am holding the knife basically as if I was using a chopping motion. My goal is to remove metal along the edge until that chip disappears, so I am constantly checking to make sure that I don’t overgrind here. I don’t want to remove more metal than I have to. Once I see the size of the chip decreasing I start lowering my angle until I am at the normal sharpening angle. Now I have a little work cut out for me as my previous actions made the knife dull.

I will now sharpen the knife using my normal process and technique.
Your water stones will dish in the middle with use and the coarse stones will dish more rapidly.

Maintain flatness to promote bevel consistency. It also just looks and feels much better. Nothing looks worse to me than a water stone that is clearly dished in the middle, it is sign of neglect, so stay on top of it. There are plenty of options out there, Stone Fixers, wet/dry 320 grit sandpaper...

I start my sharpening day by flattening my stone before I sharpen my first knife, I make sure it is flat by drawing a grid on the surface with a pencil and then using the Flattening Stone to remove the grid lines. I do this about every three knives and I do it with every stone. You don’t have to use a lot of pressure, it doesn’t take long if you do it regularly. You will find that your finishing stones will not dish nearly as quickly as the lower grit stones.
#10
MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

I recall a time I felt compelled to prove my worth by performing slicing miracles, slicing a tomato horizontally without holding the tomato, or a grape.

I no longer feel that way at all and in fact, I'm pretty tired of them; I skip over any that I see. It is indeed evidence of the skill of a sharpener and clearly the knives are sharp. My problem with them is that for a novice who becomes captivated by these, they can be misleading and lead to false expectations. **I am telling you that you don’t do be able to do this to have sharp knives**, these are not stepping stones that appear in your near future. These are the things that you can do when you’ve achieved your goals, you’re knives are sharper every time that you ever thought possible.

Manage your expectations, just try to make the knife a little sharper than it was when you started. **Focusing on the right technique is the most important thing to do.**
I could teach my wife the basics of sharpening a knife in 20 minutes, she could then create a video on YouTube and you may think she knows what she is talking about. There are so many sharpening videos out there that it is almost impossible to keep track of them!

Some are really good but many are not, not good at all and can lead set you up for failure if you take them seriously.

Check out Knife Planet Sharpening School, we’ve kept it simple and created easy to follow lessons to help you master knife sharpening from the ground up.

The key for you is to find useful resources and stick with them. But don’t watch too many, get the basics down if you need to, and then get to work on your own.

Instead of watching another video, sharpen a knife. Practice makes all the difference.
I use 4 pressure levels to make the most out of every water stone I use.

**P4** – Heaviest pressure, used only once to raise the burr on each side of the dull knife. As soon as the burr is formed you need to reduce your starting pressure by 50%.

**P3** – is a significant reduction in pressure, still on the same stone but remember, *you do not want to form another burr* so just be mindful of that, especially on those coarse stones. Your goal is coarse stone refinement, just cleaning the edge and you don’t need to spend much time at these level of pressure.

**P2** – Pressure is very light. This amount of pressure would not form a burr on a coarse stone.

**P1** – This is the least amount of pressure you can manage to maintain without dropping the knife. Heel to tip, softly. You’re refinishing.
We can build muscle memory to an impressive extent. And in collaboration with other skills and human abilities such as **patience, persistence**, and above all: **passion**. we can achieve a surprising degree of precision when we sharpen a knife.

Naturally there will be imperfections, we are not machines but those little imperfections may in fact create edges that surpass our expectations. As our experience grows and as we sharpen different knives, we adapt and manipulate the angle and pressure a minuscule amount to achieve what can be quite startling results.

I can honestly say that the sharpest knives that I have ever seen in my life were sharpened freehand. Knives beyond razor sharp.

**Practice, practice, practice!** You’ll soon be surprised of how natural sharpening motions will become. No more thinking, just sharpening.
A hone, or steel, is a rod shaped tool that is made of either steel or ceramic. The purpose of a hone is to keep a sharp knife sharp. It is not designed to sharpen a knife that is dull. We often hear the phrase, “Steel a knife”. It is simply a process of using a Hone. Honing a knife generally, does not involve the removal of metal. A honing rod simply repositions the fatigued metal back in place, making the knife sharp again.

You can do this to keep a knife sharp... until it’s not effective anymore and requires sharpening.

I cannot make a dull knife sharp again just with a Hone. When I sharpen a knife on a water stone, my goal is to remove metal, just the fatigued metal, the metal that is making the knife dull. This is the metal that has succumbed to the daily pressures of kitchen life and is now unable to remain where it was when the knife was new or just sharpened.
#15
THE SHARP CYCLE

1. Sharpening
Sharpen the knife on a Water Stones.

2. Honing
Maintain the edge of the knife and be diligent about it, use the hone at least once a week, every three to four days is better in the normal kitchen. You use the knife until you notice that it isn’t slicing food the way it was the last time it was used. The knife will tell you, this is the signal to hone your knife and you can continue to do this until that action is no longer making an improvement. There is nothing you can do with that hone when this point is reached.

3. Sharpening again
When I notice that my actions of honing with the rod appear to make no improvements, I STOP doing that and have it sharpened, I have that fatigued metal completely removed and I start the cycle again. So the cycle goes like this: **Sharpen, Hone, Hone, Hone, Hone, Hone, Sharpen, Hone, Hone, Hone, Hone, Hone, Sharpen...**
A **strop** is traditionally a leather strip used to either burnish (pushing into position) and/or maintain or sharpen an edge through abrasion. Leather strops are most commonly made from cow leather, but the term strop can be applied to just about anything that is used in the final stages of sharpening and maintaining that isn’t classified as a stone. It includes other leathers like kangaroo and horse, textiles, and other mediums. More modern stropping materials have seen nanocloth and microfibers enter the game. Each stropping medium effects an edge differently, usually in terms of aggressiveness.

On their own, **clean strops** pretty much only serve to reposition an edge and have no real abrasive action. The strop simply nudges the bent or rolled edge back into position with no abrasion. **Loaded strops** add abrasives to the surface of the strop. The abrasives remove metal at varying degrees depending on the type of abrasive, and are used to refresh, refine, polish.
At some point in a person's life, the desire to sharpen a knife takes root, especially for men. That methodical process that our elders and indeed our ancestors somehow thoroughly grasped out of necessity has filtered down through the ages and it still captures our thoughts.

KnifePlanet's goal is to encourage those interested in the art of sharpening to achieve the skill by slowing the learning process down so that we can stop at every stepping stone and take in all that there is to know. You don't need ten different leather strops laden with exotic sharpening sprays and pastes. Those items can come later; we are building the foundation and just need the essentials.

Thanks for subscribing to our email list. We'll do our best to help you master the art of sharpening knives.

Talk soon — KnifePlanet.net