Kurt's clinic

Kurt Hertzog answers readers' questions

I've been enjoying attending our in-person club meetings after the long absence. I've been asked to deliver a demo for an upcoming meeting – any suggestions for a new demonstrator like myself?

Congratulations. You are on the path of sharing your expertise with your club members. This is one of the great advantages of being a turning club member. You'll have the opportunity to share as well as learn from the many others who will demo or convey valuable knowledge during the meetings, especially during the show-and-tell portion. I have some advice to share with you as you start this journey. I apologise in advance for my long-winded and very opinionated response. This is a topic that's near and dear to me and I have some specific points to share with you as a new demonstrator. I'll also use this opportunity to cover these for you and even more points for those farther down the demonstrator path. To new presenters, this column may feel like the fire hose version, but please don't feel overwhelmed. Just grasp and incorporate as many of the points as you can and add more as time goes on.

I trust you've been selected for a topic for which you are competent. You may need to bone up on some things, but you are recognised as being able to share that particular expertise with the group. To map out content, think through the key points you need to convey. The really key points should be able to be written on a 3x5 card. Illustrating those bullet points will make the audience grasp the topic with the basic understanding needed. With those few points listed, imagine the best and most memorable ways to ingrain those points into the group with your demo actions. Plan for those and you'll likely have more material than time. Be prepared to whittle if needed.
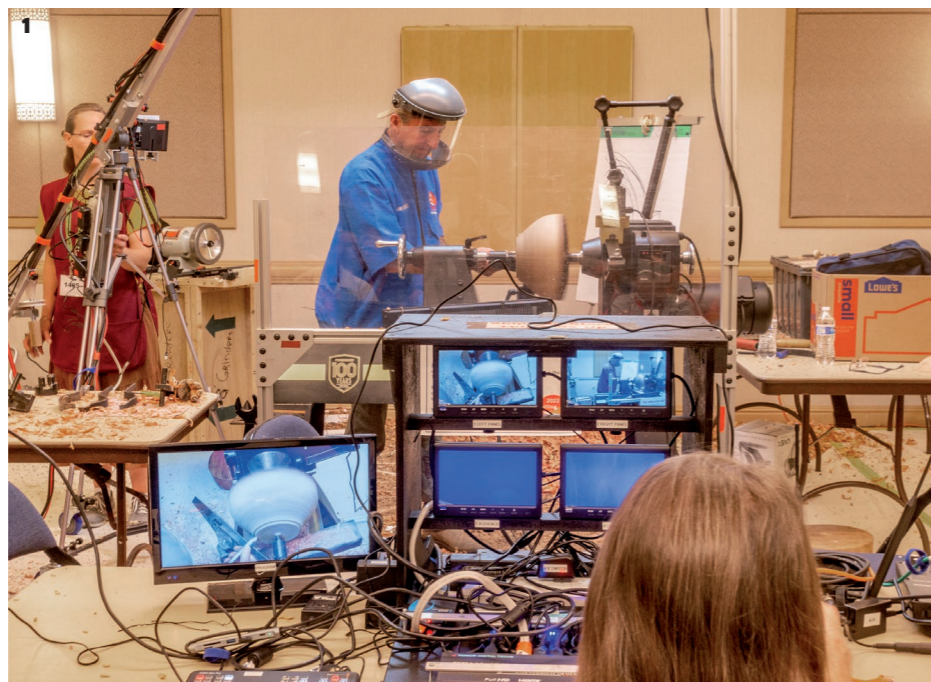
Be prepared

You need to prep with a few things in mind. Find out the time allotted for your demo. The scheduled time should be the key to your prep. You'll need to include sufficient material to be interesting, informative, and entertaining, yet be able to be absorbed by the audience. Too much content covered too quickly is just as frustrating as too little material that is dragged out ad nauseam. I think time is the most important aspect of your demo. Nothing is more frustrating than to be an attendee and have the demo run over time. Sometimes way over time. It doesn't matter what the run overtime reason was, whether equipment issues, many extra questions, or forgotten equipment that slowed things down. Know the start and end times. Stay within them unless explicitly instructed by the meeting leader to take additional time. Be certain that if you do get the request to continue over the allotted time that you know the amount of the extension. Stay within it.

There are simply three keys to a good demo. Preparation, preparation, and more preparation. Know what equipment you'll be using so you have all the jigs, fixtures, work-holding devices, special toolsrest, etc. that fit that specific lathe. If you can, use that lathe (or equivalent) while you prepare your demo. There are adapters for the various spindle

sizes and threads, but not having what you need when you demonstrate will cause a huge fail. Plan and prepare your demo much like the cooking shows on TV. You'll want to have every step mapped out so you can show and explain each important point then quickly move on. Much like preparing a food dish on TV, putting it in the oven, and taking out the already cooked example to continue. Nobody wants to watch you beat a dead horse by turning 19 successive beads, for example, or sanding through the entire grit range. Show each important technique, explain the key points, emphasise how to avoid any common pitfalls, and move to the next key point of your demonstration. You should have many different pieces partially completed to different levels so you can progress through the demo quickly without needing to fully complete any aspect that consumes a lot of time.

Plan for spare material. If you are demonstrating turning a finial, have additional finial blanks ready so if you have a catastrophic failure, you're not dead in the water. Simply explain what caused the failure, mount another blank, and continue. Problems during a demo are a learning experience for both the audience and the demonstrator. You'll often have problems during demos. Embrace them. Everyone has them. Pre-plan any aspects of your demo that can be eliminated if needed. Should something go awry and you need to shorten your content on the fly, already knowing what you'd drop is a good preparation tool.

Never sand, carve, hollow, paint or perform any long, boring, repetitive process. If you ever have to say, 'I know this is boring but...' you've already failed. If sanding or something long and repetitive is necessary, spend a few moments explaining how, why, with what, and any other pertinent details, and move to the next point. The next, priorly prepared piece should be sanded or whatever to the level needed and ready to illustrate your next step. Plan and create any visual aids and pass around items that support your key points. These pass-arounds, whether prepared ahead of time or pieces being done during the demo, should reinforce the key aspects of your presentation.

1 Always be working with your camera person. You are a team providing a demonstration to the audience
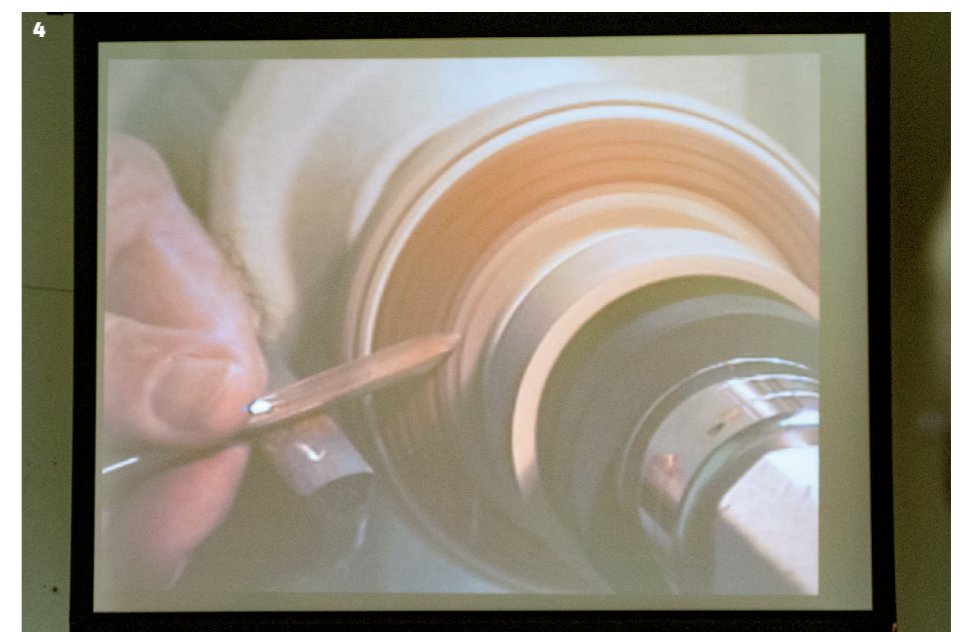
Question time

Before you start, explain to the audience your planned method of passing the demo pieces. For example, start in the front right, zig-zag up that side of the room, hop over the other side of the aisle at the very back of the room, and zig-zag back up to the front. If you don't explain that, or whatever method you wish, and have everyone's attention, you'll almost certainly have part of the room never getting the opportunity to see the pass-arounds. Someone will mess up the passing arrangements and that will short-change the rest of the audience. That, as well as those who will set the example pieces on an empty chair to again mess up things. Budget your time appropriately. You need to plan for questions and answers. You can field questions while you work but be cautious of getting off track, spending too much time without progressing through your planned steps, or going down a rabbit hole to bring someone without the needed background totally up to speed.

Do your best to answer the question but if it is off topic or too extensive, defer the question to the end if time permits or have them take the question offline for another time. You can always begin your demo by asking the audience to hold questions to the end. This can be good or bad. Good in the sense that you can progress, stay on time, and field the questions at the end using the planned Q&A time. It can be bad because their question may highlight something you haven't explained at all or inadequately explained. I can't give you a good planning guide for time since it depends on your topic, how well it will be understood as you deliver it, and the makeup of the audience. Sometimes the audience ask virtually no questions and other times they are non-stop with them.

I suggest you plan about a third of your total time for the Q&A at the end or interspersed during the demo. That allows for some demo time slip and plenty of time for questions. Nobody will ever complain if you do a quality demo and finish a few minutes early.

Plan for problems

There will be no end to the complaints if you run way over and mess up the rest of meeting's timetable. Worse yet, if the meeting leader must stop your demo because of the excessive time consumed, you will have a partial demo delivered that will likely never get completed. For your prep prior to the demonstration, plan the key points and how you'll deliver them, anticipate the questions

2 Having your close-up photo spot arranged with your camera person will avoid them chasing your tool tip or whatever around in space. Waving in the air doesn't auto focus well **3** I suggest you plan some way to explain any answers to questions or emphasise key points. An easel, chalkboard, or white board work great **4** Plan ahead for key video shots. Get the lights, camera, and camera person ready for those important demo shots

you'll likely get, think through your answers to those, and plan for problems. You'll have them. If not now, somewhere down the road. The lathe belts will slip. The banjo fights you as you try to move it. The grinder is a different diameter than your grinder at home. Something will break.

Someone will have readjusted all the jigs or fixtures. An important circuit breaker will trip, and nobody will know where the power panel is, or it will be locked. Any of these or something else can happen. Be prepared to deal with it. You need to be able to rethink your demo on the fly. If time is lost and you need to make it up, know what section you'll hop over more quickly or leave out. With experience you'll automatically rethink your plan and modify it on the fly. Maintain the proper flow of time and content. Do not let folks with questions or the 'know-it-alls' hijack your programme. Maintain control even if you need to ask others to postpone their sidetracking questions or request those with their own answer to everything presented to plan for their own presentation later to cover their opinions. Use humour with caution. A bit of humour and light-heartedness is a very effective audience interface but use it sparingly and only if you are comfortable with it. A valuable and informative presentation need not be funny. Be in contact with the audience but you do not need to have them laughing to be connected.

To capsulise what I believe are the key points to a great demonstration... Always start on time and end on time. Always speak slowly, clearly, and loudly. Do not talk to the audience with your back turned to them. If you need to pick up something from the table behind you, stop talking until you've retrieved it and faced the audience again. Even equipped with a microphone, good practice is to address the audience face on. Rehearse or prep your helper/camera operator on what will be the best angles and lighting for the various aspects of your demo. Together, pick and use a close-up location for showing the work, tool grinds, or other parts of your demo requiring close-ups and good focus. I find putting a piece of tape on the end of the lathe so both you and your camera person will use that spot each time it's needed. It will be quick and efficient. Also helpful is a cloth, tissue, or other background for your close-up shots. The camera needs good contrast to be able to autofocus well.

Always repeat the question before you answer it. Be honest with your answers. If you don't know the answer to any question, admit it. If you BS your way through an answer, the more experienced will know and you'll cheapen your entire presentation in their eyes based on that situation. A way to seek out the answer would be to inquire of the audience or promise to research the answer and report back. Practise your demo prior and have all the gear sorted out and available. I find it is helpful to have access to a chalk or white board, easel, or other large visual method of explaining any answer with a drawing.

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Plan on your key points that need to be made and know what can be left out if needed. Learn and adopt techniques from other demonstrations you've seen, enjoyed, and learned from. Enjoy your first of what likely will be many chances to share your expertise with others. It is a very rewarding experience that I'm certain you will enjoy. The most important point is to relax and have fun. These are your friends who are rooting for you each step of the way. Don't get nervous about performing. Just relax and take an easy stroll through your demo with them.

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5 Without a camera person, plan on picking a good, well-lit, and easily seen spot to use each time you show a close-up **6** Small group demos are more personal and fun. They also are a great way to practise and lose the stage jitters that come with large groups