

Introduction to Leather Tooling: Mastering the Cut and Relief

Materials Needed

- Small piece (6" x 6") of vegetable-tanned leather (4-6 oz suggested)
- Swivel knife with a sharp blade
- Leather mallet or maul
- Two basic stamping tools (Recommended: B801 Beveler and a P-Series Pear Shader)
- Sponge and small bowl of clean water (for 'casing' the leather)
- Tracing paper, stylus, and simple pattern (e.g., a simple leaf or scroll design)
- Sturdy, non-marring work surface (e.g., granite slab or tooling plate)

Phase 1: Introduction and Preparation (5 minutes)

Hook and Context

Think about the most impressive leatherwork you've ever seen—the deep, intricate designs that look three-dimensional. That effect is achieved through **tooling**, which is essentially carving and stamping damp leather. Today, we are going to master the two foundational steps: the critical swivel knife cut and the beveling technique that makes the design stand out.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this 30-minute session, you will be able to:

1. Properly case (dampen) vegetable-tanned leather for optimum tooling.
2. Execute a clean, consistent cut using the swivel knife.
3. Apply the Beveler tool to create 3D relief, making your cut line pop.

Success Criteria

You have successfully completed this lesson when your final practice piece shows a continuous, clean cut line that is clearly defined and elevated by the applied beveling technique.

The Prep: Casing the Leather

I Do (Instructor Modeling): The leather must be damp, but not soaking wet—we call this "casing." I will lightly wipe the back of the leather and then the front with a damp sponge until the leather darkens, but no water pools on the surface. We are looking for the "cool to the touch" effect. We must wait 30 seconds to allow the moisture to migrate evenly.

Phase 2: The Body - Content & Practice (18 minutes)

Activity 1: The Swivel Knife Cut (I Do / We Do)

I Do (Modeling the Technique - 5 minutes)

The swivel knife is your pencil. Hold it vertically, like a pen, resting the barrel between your index and middle finger. The goal is to cut *approximately half the depth* of the leather. Pressure comes from the shoulder, not just the wrist. I will demonstrate cutting a simple straight line and then a smooth curve, rotating the knife by moving my fingers on the barrel while keeping my elbow steady.

- *Key Tip:* Ensure the leather is face-up on your hard work surface. The surface absorbs the energy and ensures clean cuts.

We Do (Guided Practice - 5 minutes)

Step 1: Transfer the Pattern. Place your tracing paper pattern onto your cased leather. Use the stylus to trace the design firmly, transferring the lines onto the damp leather.

Step 2: Execute the Cut. Practice cutting the lines you transferred. Start and finish your cuts cleanly. Focus on keeping the knife straight up-and-down (perpendicular) to prevent uneven cuts. If the cutting becomes tough, dampen the leather again lightly.

- *Formative Assessment:* Walk around/observe the learner's grip and cut depth. Provide immediate feedback on rotating the barrel vs. rotating the wrist.

Activity 2: Creating Relief with the Beveler (I Do / We Do)

I Do (Modeling the Beveler - 4 minutes)

A cut line alone looks flat. We use the Beveler stamp to push the background down, making the design appear raised (creating **relief**). I will take the Beveler stamp (the one with the smooth, angled foot), place the edge directly against the cut line, and tap it repeatedly with the mallet, moving along the cut. The key is to keep the tool slightly angled away from the design.

- *Key Tip:* You must bevel **both sides** of the line to achieve a strong, defined look. Overlap your mallet strikes slightly to ensure a continuous texture.

We Do (Guided Practice - 4 minutes)

Apply the Beveler to the lines you just cut. Hold the tool firmly against the edge of the line, keeping the angled side pressed into the background. Use consistent, medium strikes with the mallet. The sound should be rhythmic. Stop and check your progress frequently to ensure uniform depth across the entire line.

Phase 3: Conclusion and Application (7 minutes)

The Next Step: Adding Texture and Depth (You Do)

We've used the Beveler to define the shape. Now, we will briefly introduce the Pear Shader to add

texture inside the shape.

Task: Take the Pear Shader tool (P-Series) and apply it gently inside a section of your cut and beveled shape. Observe how different pressure levels create different depths of texture.

- *Choice and Autonomy:* Decide whether you want a heavily textured interior or a smooth, subtle interior for your final symbol.

Recap and Reflection (3 minutes)

Review the core steps necessary for foundational tooling:

1. Casing (moisture control).
2. Cutting (swivel knife control and depth).
3. Beveling (creating 3D relief).

Learner Reflection: What was the most challenging part of controlling the swivel knife? Where could your beveling strikes be more consistent?

Summative Assessment and Extension

Assessment: Present your practice piece. The primary evaluation is on the consistency of the swivel knife cut and the clarity of the definition created by the beveler stamp.

Differentiation and Next Steps

- **Scaffolding (If struggling with Swivel Knife):** Practice cutting smooth, repeating arcs (like a scallop pattern) without attempting to follow a detailed pattern. This builds muscle memory for continuous movement.
- **Extension (If successful):** Research and practice 'figure carving' techniques, focusing on the use of stops and turnbacks in the cut line to create more dramatic effects at junctions.
- **Real-World Application:** The techniques practiced today are essential for personalizing items like key fobs, coasters, or custom patches for bags. Your next project could be designing and tooling a monogram.