

Safety Topic of the Month

X-Acto and Utility Knife Work Practices

The tricky part of using X-acto knives and utility knives is to avoid cutting yourself. These simple tools are frequently misused and many emergency room visits result.

1. Rest the piece being cut on a firm hard surface, never on your lap or in the palm of your left hand.
2. If you must hold the piece in your hand, protect that hand with a Kevlar fiber glove to protect from slashing and stabbing.
3. Always work with a sharp knife.
 - Keep the blade covered when not in use or when in storage. This will protect both you and the sharpness of the cutting edge.
 - Always have extra blades on hand. You will typically need them in the middle of the night.
 - Preserve your blade's sharpness by cutting on soft, sacrificial surfaces, like plywood, chipboard or vinyl cutting mats, never on the hard melamine work table surfaces.
4. On thick or resistant material, cut with multiple passes or switch from an X-acto knife to the heavier duty utility knife.

Remember: the more force you use pushing the knife, the less control you have over the cut. Rather than applying excessive force to your knife, maybe you should cut your material with a saw?

5. Use the red safe cutting straight edge to guide your cuts. These are located in studios throughout the college, and they provide a metal barrier to protect the hand that steadies the straight edge.
6. When cutting along any straight edge, take care that the knife blade remains parallel to the straight edge for the entire length of the cut. This is not a natural motion; the hand would prefer to travel in an arc. If the knife is allowed to tilt towards the straight edge, it will travel up over the edge of the straight edge and cut your left hand.
7. Discarded/used blades are just as dangerous as blades in use. These blades should be disposed of in the special blade disposal cans attached to each of the recycling modules in the college.
8. When working with X-Acto and Utility knives, do not rush and do not perform the task when distracted.