

“Rules” of Good Form

An Incomplete List of Tips, Tricks and Advice for Successful Turning

BACKGROUND:

These “rules” are a collection of guidelines which I have encountered from other turners, books, videos, demonstrations and personal experience. I do not consider this list an exhaustive list. If you have other “rules” for good form, let me know and I’ll add them to the list. Joe Fleming

DEFINITIONS (selected from *dictionary.com*):

- **Form (from dictionary.com):**
 1. external appearance of a clearly defined area, as distinguished from color or material; configuration.
 2. the shape of a thing.
 7. the manner or style of arranging and coordinating parts for a pleasing or effective result.
 8. Fine Arts.
 - a. the organization, placement, or relationship of basic elements, as lines and colors in a painting or volumes and voids in a sculpture, so as to produce a coherent image; the formal structure of a work of art.
 - b. three-dimensional quality or volume, as of a represented object.
 - c. an object, or the appearance of an object, esp. as seen in nature.
 9. any assemblage of things of a similar kind constituting a component of a group.
 11. due or proper shape; orderly arrangement of parts; good order.
 12. Philosophy.
 - a. the structure, pattern, organization, or essential nature of anything.
 - b. structure or pattern as distinguished from matter.
 13. Logic. the abstract relations of terms in a proposition, and of propositions to one another.
- **Function:**
 1. the kind of action or activity proper to a person, thing, or institution; the purpose for which something is designed or exists; role.
- **Design:**
 1. to prepare the preliminary sketch or the plans for (a work to be executed), esp. to plan the form and structure of.
 2. to plan and fashion artistically or skillfully.
 3. to intend for a definite purpose.

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PHILOSOPHICAL RULES FOR BETTER FORM:

Rule 1 – Form follows function.

- What are the functions of a bowl? Of a vessel?
 - Contain items
 - Contain food
 - Arrange flowers
 - Look pleasing
 - Make the contents more appealing

Rule 2 – Good form is intentional – not accidental.

- Intentional design leads to better forms rather than just turning with no plan.

Rule 3 – Good forms comes with practice.

Rule 4 – Nature provides excellent forms and shapes to include in your piece.

Rule 5 - Existing art pieces provide excellent forms/shapes to include in your piece:

- Study other turners to develop an informed vocabulary.
- Study other artists (glass, ceramics, etc) to develop an informed vocabulary.

PLANNING RULES FOR BETTER FORM:

Rule 6 – “*Life is too short to turn ugly wood.*” – John Jordan

Rule 7 – Symmetry matters.

- Symmetry does not necessarily mean round
- Corollary: “*Balance high spots on rims of natural edge bowls.*” Mike Mahoney
- Grain orientation matters; especially with wet wood.
- Intentional lack of symmetry can be effective.

Rule 8 - Size of blank does not dictate form.

Rule 9 - Shape of blank does not dictate form.

Rule 10 - Cut you own wood.

- The best method to control the grain orientation, the defects, the bark and the figure is to cut the wood yourself. If someone else cuts the wood, be prepared to waste wood to get the best from the blank.

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TURNING RULES FOR BETTER FORM:

Rule 11 - Mounting method should not define form, especially foot.

Rule 12 - Leave crisp corners between form and waste wood.

- Tenons/waste wood are parallel to the bed.
- Make waste tenons the same size on both ends of the piece.
- Do not feather the join between waste wood and form.

Rule 13 - Look for the flats that define corners or points.

- Corollary: *“Look for the high spots.”* Don Derry

Rule 14 - Turn the final form – do not sand the final form.

- Improve your turning technique.
- Practice.
- End grain sands differently than side grain.
- Winter wood sands different than summer wood.

Rule 15 - Don’t rush your turning.

- Rushing leads to compromise and acceptance of less than perfect.

EVALUATION RULES FOR BETTER FORM:

Rule 16 - Upright viewing looks different than sideways viewing and improves accuracy of your viewing.

Rule 17 - Solid background behind your form both during turning and viewing will improve the accuracy of your perception.

- Use a solid white or a solid black background during turning and off-lathe viewing to obtain the purist view of your piece. Foam core poster board works great for this.

Rule 18 - View your piece as if it is painted black and all the voids are filled.

- A solid colored piece that shows no grain, colors, defects, etc. will allow you to perceive the pure form of the piece.

Rule 19 - View your piece in a mirror.

- Viewing in a mirror gives you a different view and a different depth of view. Don Owens

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Adding Your Rules:

Rule 20

Rule 21

Rule 22

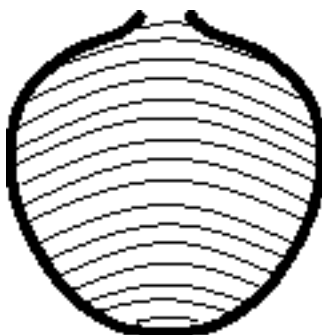
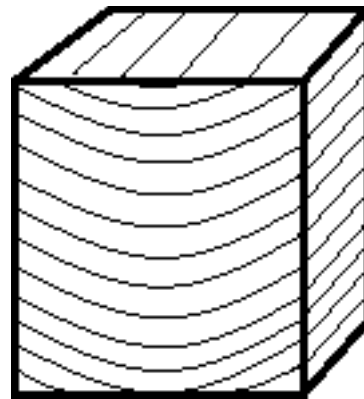
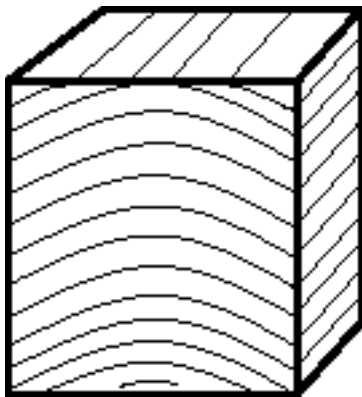
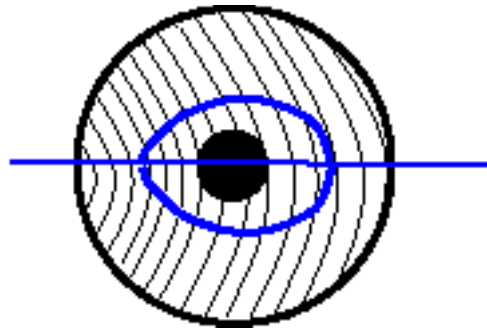
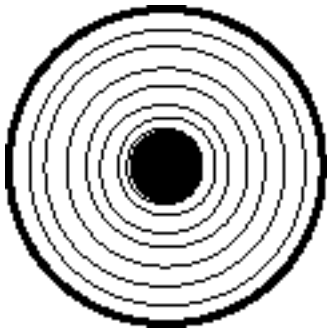
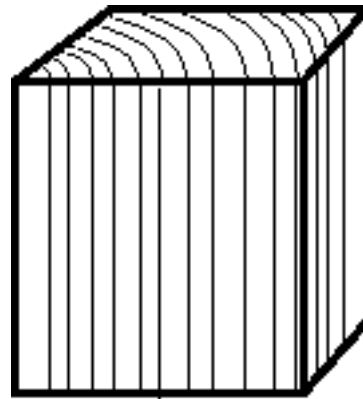
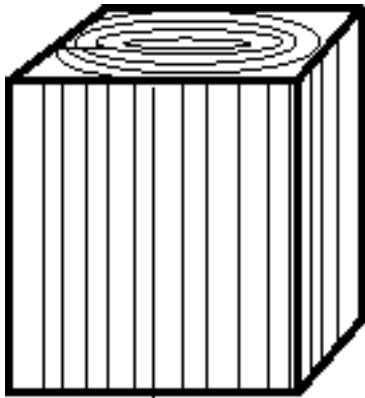
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Rule 24

Rule 25

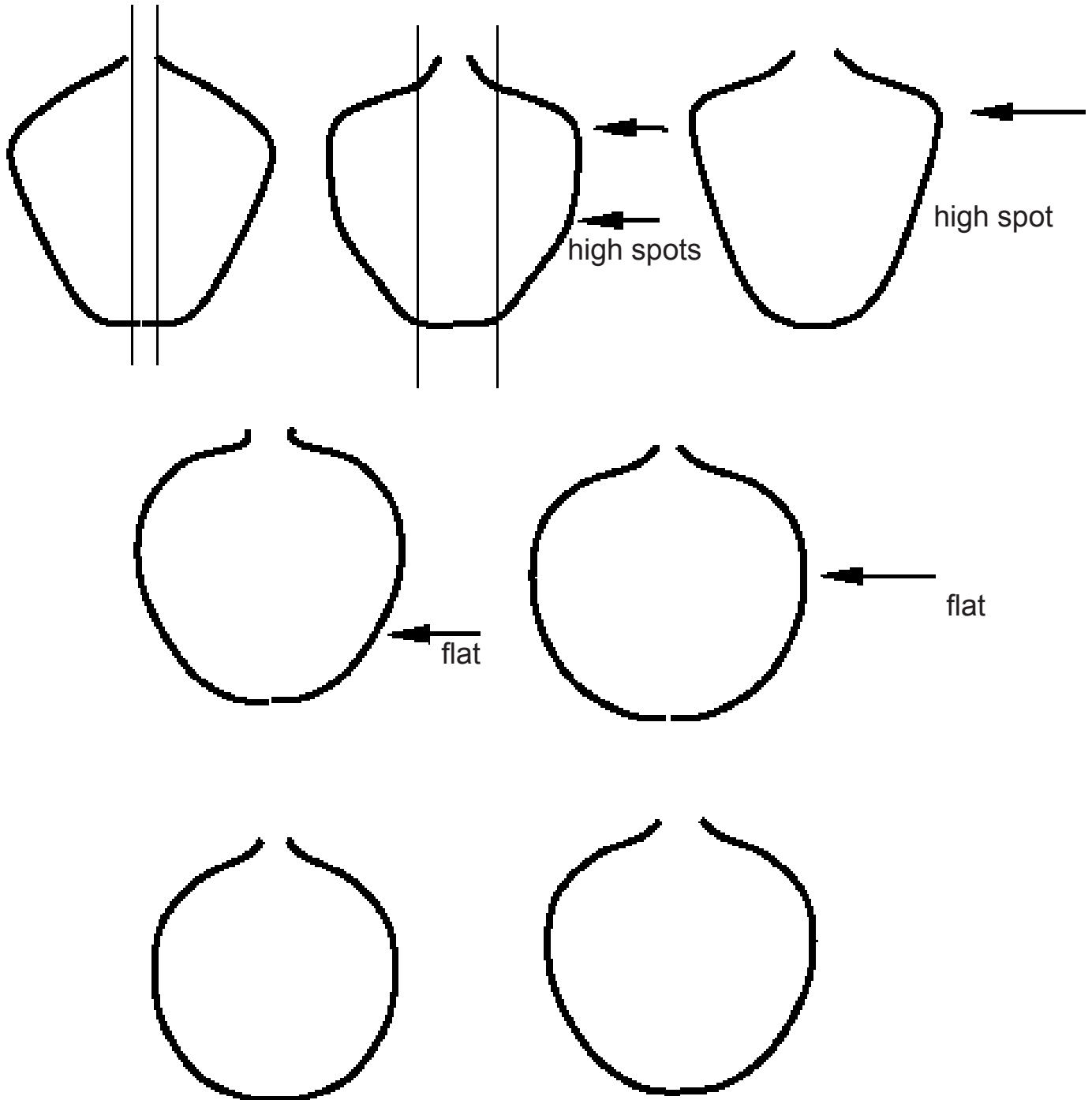
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References:

[The Aesthetics and Properties of Wood](#), John Jordan (video)

[Hollow Turning](#), John Jordan (video)

[Turned Bowl Design](#), Richard Raffan

[Turning Green Wood](#), Michael O'Donnell