

Adjustable lighting angle to aid smooth cuts

We all know that good lighting is important to good turning, but what does “good lighting” mean? Certainly lighting intensity is important, and color can have some interesting psychological effects. One of the most important factors, however, is angle. Think about it. If you look at a photo of the not-full moon, you will immediately notice that you can see mountains and craters along the terminator, while such features are much less evident in flatter light. To see texture, it's the shadows that are important. For maximum feature visibility, the light should be nearly perpendicular to the topography of interest.

Overhead shop lights can provide good overall ambient brightness, but they do not do a very good job of showing us what we really want to see – the ridges we are leaving behind in our “smooth” cuts. For that you want to add an adjustable light – one whose location can be moved around to different locations to highlight the cuts we are working on and the regions of difficulty or interest. For spindle work and for the areas near bowl rims, we want light right down the axis of the lathe. For the center of a bowl, we want light coming horizontally from the opposite side, to the greatest extent possible, given the shading from the wall of the bowl.

There are many types of modern lights that can be clamped on to a lathe, or stuck on by a magnet. They may have an adjustable, spring-loaded arm or just be completely flexible. Halogens pack a lot of punch from a small source. My intention here is not to recommend brands or suppliers -- that's what the Web is for. The point is that if all you have is overhead lighting, you should consider adding an additional, adjustable, augmenting light source that you can move around to suit your needs. There are good ones out there for the purpose – just take a look.

With proper lighting, you'll be surprised how your tool technique will improve, and your sanding needs will decrease.

Always use common sense. Things that work in one situation may not work in another.

Follow all Safety Rules. If it feels wrong, it probably is; stop and rethink.

*Your **Mileage May Vary***