

Some thoughts on the use of CA glue

Let's talk a little bit about CA. CA is our acronym for cyanoacrylate glue – you may call it “super glue”. CA is a turner's best friend. It's good for stopping cracks in drying blanks. It's good for attaching glue blocks to turning blanks that don't have enough thickness for a tenon (and assuming you don't want to use an expanding chuck). You saw Clif Poodry apply some with his finger to the spirit bottle joint he was turning at the last meeting. (I don't necessarily recommend that method.) If you have two things you want stuck together and ready to use immediately, this is your kind of glue. It works great for filling cracks or holes into which you've packed sawdust, coffee grounds, colored chalk, “brass” key filings, etc. Some people even use it as a finish on small items like pens. It's also good for fixing broken fingernails and closing cuts in your skin (again, FYI only, not a medical “recommendation”. I can't begin to go into all of the uses here.

You have to be really careful with the stuff because it is cured by moisture, among other things, and is exothermic (gives off heat when it cures). If a lot of it cures on your wet skin quickly, you can get a nasty burn. Don't Ask Me How I Know. Now listen to this part very carefully. The fumes can cause brain damage. This is nasty stuff. Use it only in a well-ventilated area or outside or get a respirator rated for such things. It is also insidious – particularly the “thin” kind. It will be all over you in a second, and you won't know how it happened. Again, DAMHIK! This stuff will glue your blanks to the workbench and your fingers to each other in a second – or to something else (like the glue bottle). If this should happen, don't panic and don't fight it. If you do, you'll just tear off your skin. Relax, count to ten, and take your time. Hopefully what you just glued yourself to is portable. In case it isn't, you should purchase and always have handy, and within reach, a “debonder”. You can buy it as such or just use acetone or fingernail polish remover, among other things.

With this brief introduction to the joys and woes of CA, let's get to the tips.

If you glue your fingers together, or to something else, just put the affected area in water and soak for a bit. The glue will slowly let go with no ill effects to you.

If you get CA specks on your eyeglasses, glass or plastic, don't worry – you can get it off. No solvents or scraping are necessary. Just soak your glasses in water overnight, and you should be able to rub the specks right off. I got this great tip from David Chung on the Wood Central forum: (www.woodcentral.com/cgi-bin/turning.pl?noframes;read=147981). For the record, it's a good idea to wear tight fitting safety glasses (the kind with the side shields) when messing with CA. Safety first. When you find specks of it on the *inside* of your normal glasses, you know it got too close.

The CA bottles say not to open the tops with a pin – they want you to cut or slice the top of the top off. That's because they figure you'll be squeezing the bottle while you're pushing the pin in and it'll squirt all over the place. And you'll use more that way. For me, cutting the tip off makes too large an opening. I happen to like a very small hole, particularly for thin CA, because

that's the only way you can control application. If you cut the top off, the thin CA runs all over the place as soon as you turn the bottle over. Not good. So I stick a big pin in it (one of those ones with the ball on the end; you could also use a very small nail) to make the small hole, but I don't squeeze the flat sides while doing it. Instead, I hold the oval-shaped bottle carefully but firmly by the long dimension. It won't squirt out that way because pressure in that direction actually makes the bottle bigger inside. Is that clear? I hope so, because you're going to hear it again below. Typical small bottles of CA have an oblong cross section. The long dimension is your friend. Flat sides are for making it come out. If you have a round bottle, ignore all this and find something else to read.

OK, you got it open and used it once; now what? Care and feeding of the container is extremely important. You must keep the tip open on the inside and clean on the outside (over which the cap slides). If not, you will pay the price; trust me. Use a tissue or paper towel every time to clean the outside. To keep the tip open you will want to give it a little squeeze (burp) after each use, into that tissue, to clear the glue that stays in the tip. Don't aim it at yourself or anything you don't want CA on when you do that! But wait! There's more. That works OK with thin CA, because it runs right back down into the bottle from the tip (if you've been keeping it clean). Not so with "medium" or "thick" CA, if you are using a small hole like I do. It's a Catch-22 situation. You have to squeeze the bottle to clear the end of the tip so it won't harden in there, but the entire tip is full of glue, and it doesn't look like it wants to go back into the bottle any time soon. What to do? Here's the really cool tip. All you have to do is give the bottle a gentle squeeze on the large dimension of the oval, and the glue will be sucked right back down into the bottle like magic. Try it! Then, you can give it a couple burps on the flat sides into a tissue to clear the tip for future use. Now that is worth the price you just paid to read this issue of YMMV. Enjoy.