

What Tools Do I Need To Get Started Making Calls?

By Brian Byers of Byers Custom Calls

This question gets asked quite frequently from folks wanting to get started making calls, and it is a really good question but it will have a vague answer because there are so many different ways to make different calls.

For starters, what ever call you want to make, you need to make sure that you are using the appropriate safety gear while making that call.

Eye protection is a must, and a face shield is better.

Long sleeves around a lathe needs to be prevented as well.

Some folks are allergic to some types of woods, so respiratory filters may be required .

All tools are dangerous, so ensure that you know how to properly run the tool that you are using. It is no fun when injuries occur. And besides, blood all over a nice piece of wood can ruin it.

There are lots of ways to make the same call, and while there are a few popular methods, there is more than one way to skin a cat, so it is very difficult to list all of the tools and methods used to make calls.

Most calls are made out of wood, some sort of a plastic, or horn/antlers. Often times, the calls are made out of a combination of various wood or materials. When just learning and starting out making calls, **practice on some inexpensive materials**. Free material is always the best to learn on. You will mess some things up during the learning process and that is fine, but it is easier on the pocketbook if you mess up an inexpensive material than a really expensive or rare material.

Each call that you make will be a learning experience.

Learn from your mistakes and strive to make the next call that you build better than the previous one.

Keep lots of notes of what worked and what didn't work. If you are struggling with an activity, that is what the forums are for. Take a few pictures of what you are struggling with, and make a forum post describing what you are having trouble with and also add the photo's in the forum post.

The first thing will be to get the raw material you are working with cut to proper size. This is usually done with a **saw**. It can be hand saw, a table saw, a band saw, a miter saw or other some other saw available to you. The particular saw will be dependent upon the original shape of the wood. For instance, a purchased dowel, 1 1/2" in diameter, that simply needs to be cut to length is much different

than starting with a 10" x 10" x 4' piece of material. You will need some kind of **measuring device**, like a metal tape measure, ruler or something of the sort. Another tool that comes in handy is a **caliper** for taking measurements. You will find out that some of the dimensions of your calls will be extremely critical to achieve the exact sound you are looking for. A good set of calipers that goes to 2 or 3 decimal places will be used quite frequently.

Once you have the call blank cut to the proper length and appropriate diameter, most calls will need a hole drilled in it at some point. This can be done with a hand held drill, drill press, or a lathe.

Standard jobber drill bits will get the job done 90+% of the time.

If you are using a drill or a drill press, a **small vise** to hold what you are drilling will come in handy as well. If you want to drill on the lathe, you will need some kind of a **4 jaw chuck** to hold the blank. This chuck will be used a lot in the process, and, by drilling on the lathe, can reduce the need for a drill press, but if drilling on the lathe, besides the 4 jaw chuck, you will also need a **Jacobs chuck** for the tail stock to hold the drill bit.

If you want to make a call that is round in shape, most people use a lathe to accomplish this. Along with a lathe, you will need some sort of chuck to secure the blank while it spins, and you will need turning chisels/tools to turn the blank to shape. Depending on what type of call you are going to make will determine what type of chuck you are going to use. **See the list below about things to consider when considering what type of chuck you will need.**

The basic types of lathe turning chisels/tools to start with will be a **round nose scraper, skew, parting tool, and a gouge.**

I started out with a ½" round nose scraper, ½" skew, ½" parting tool and a 3/8" gouge. I rarely use the gouge any more, and I have added a ¼" parting tool and a ¼" round nose scraper to the main turning tools I currently use. Once you turn a few items, you will get a feel for which tools that you will need to add to your collection, or which tools will start to collect dust by just laying around. Those tools will also need to be sharpened. You can sharpen them by hand, or the most common method, is by the use of a **grinder or table top disk/belt sander.**

Some other supplies that will be needed are sand paper and finishes. **A good sanding job will highlight a good finish.** Sanding from 100 grit to 600 grit will be necessary on most calls. You can sand to a finer grit with micro mesh if need be. There are a lot of finishes available that can be used. A lot of effort can be put into finishing a call, and a lot of effort can be made finding a good finish for the desired outcome you are wanting.

One last item worth discussing is a **toneboard jig**. The intended use of a toneboard jig is so that you can get repeatable toneboard slope shapes. Toneboard jigs are usually made out of a hardened tool steel, but homemade ones can be made out of wood, plastic, and unhardened steel.

Things to consider when making your tool purchases:

Buy what you can afford, but remember that you get what you pay for. The more expensive power tools will have tighter tolerances and a few more bells and whistles. The bells and whistles probably won't be needed for beginner level activities, but may come in handy a few years down the road.

Saws:

As was mentioned earlier, you can use a variety of saws. However, the one that you will probably find yourself going to more than the any other, due to its versatility, is the band saw. For the call maker, it doesn't need to be the huge throated saw, that has the ability to resaw a 12" piece of wood. You can get by with one that has a 10" throat and 4" resaw capability.

Lathes:

There are quite a few smaller hobby type lathes available. I won't recommend one brand over another. But I will recommend some things to look for when you are looking to purchase a lathe. For starters, there **are more accessories available for lathes with a Morse Taper #2 (MT2) versus a Morse Taper #1 (MT1)**. You can get MT1 to MT2 adapters, but each connection can introduce more runout of the chuck. Variable speed motors are nice on a lathe, but not a necessity. A bed extension is not needed; unless you want to turn some really long items like bats, flower vases, candle holders, etc.

Drill presses:

A longer throw will allow you to drill all the way through a longer call blank without having to raise the blank and possibly altering the centerline of the hole that is being drilled.

Lathe turning chisels/tools:

Higher quality steel does not get dull as fast, but it also costs quite a bit more money. And while you are learning, sometimes it is better to use less expensive tools, as they frequently get ground away while you are learning to sharpen them. The designation HSS will be on the better quality tools, representing a "high speed steel."

Turning tool sharpening:

This is the grinder, typically a slow speed grinder with a 1750 RPM speed. There are also jigs, from hand made to purchased, to assist in holding the lathe tool during sharpening. Some folks use equipment specifically designed for sharpening, like the Tormack.

Lathe chucks and mandrels:

There are quite a few styles of chucks available to hold your material blank to the headstock of the lathe. Consider how you want to turn the piece on the lathe, and then choose a chuck to secure the call blank accordingly. Some chucks grip from the outside, some grip from the inside, some chucks grip with friction, and some chucks grip a mandrel. There are quite a few styles of mandrels available as well, and each type has a certain function. There are a lot of different styles of chucks and mandrels. You can also make your own mandrels out of wood to try out a mandrel design before having a tool maker duplicate it out of steel. See our Mandral and Lathe Chuck Tutorial in this section for more info on this subject.

Sanders:

Many of the makers find a bench top disk/belt sander to be invaluable. Again, there are various levels in the price structure and most will suffice. Some have a 4" wide or 6" wide belt while others have a 1" wide belt. Each has its different applications, but most will do the job.

Finishing a call:

There are a multitude of different finishes that are available to use when putting the final touches on a call. Some people like glossy finishes, others like a more flat or semigloss finish. There is 1 general rule on finishes – there is no one finish that will work on all woods. Wood expands and contracts with temperature and moisture gradients. The purpose of a good finish is to slow down that process to where the wood does not move around as much, and to protect the wood.

Check out all of the tutorials posted here. There is a lot of reading about many different ways to make different types of calls. Reading through these tutorials will also show which types of tools were used and how they were applied in making a particular call. There are quite a few topics that are discussed regularly as well, and the search feature comes in handy in the forums if you are looking for see if a topic has been discussed before. It also never hurts to ask. We don't mind repeat questions because there are always new guys who want to know too. So ask away. There are quite a few folks that are always willing to help out.