



From Good to Great

Reminders and Insights from the Instrument Whisperer™



BY RICK SCHULTZ

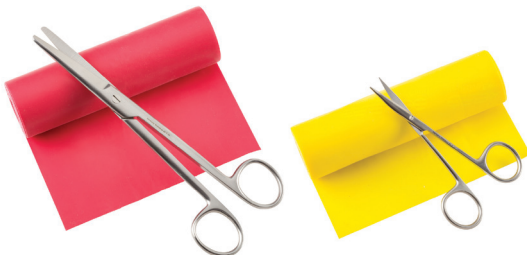
Sterile Processing (SP) educators strive to train technicians consistently and coach them to improve how they handle instrument sets; however, one of the most crucial training components is often overlooked: the instrument back-up board. The board is vital in supporting day-to-day operations and should be part of every new employee's onboarding process.

I recommend the following back-up board training tasks for new employees to facilitate hands-on learning:

- Test all scissors for sharpness.
- Inspect needle holder jaws for thread wear.
- Remove economy-grade and Pakistan-made instruments from the board.
- Examine all hemostats for cracks, particularly in the hinge (box lock) area.
- Inspect all springs and ensure their smooth function.
- Check all other instruments for proper performance.

Scissor testing basics

It is important to remember that every scissor eventually becomes dull, so they should be tested weekly. Red and yellow scissor testing materials are the industry standard. Red test material should be used for scissors LONGER than 4½ inches, and yellow test material should be used for scissors 4½ inches or SHORTER. See **Figure 1**.



Red Test Material
Used to test scissors longer than 4½" in overall length.

Yellow Test Material
Used to test scissors 4½" and shorter in overall length.

Figure 1

Remember also that some scissors require more frequent sharpening. Black-handled SuperCut scissors, for example, have a knife edge and must be sharpened quarterly (see **Figure 2**). On the other hand, gold-handled scissors stay sharper longer due to their tungsten carbide blades. Scissors with gold rings have tungsten carbide blades that cannot be replaced when worn down, so sharpening only when necessary is essential. They should be tested before being sent out for sharpening.

Diagram of a black handled scissor

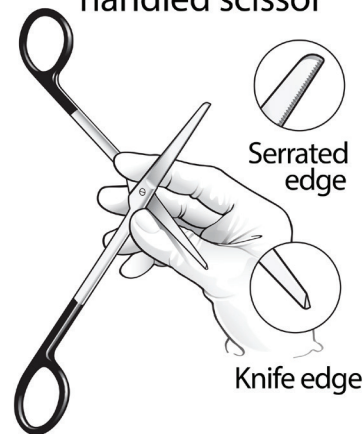


Figure 2

Serrated scissors can be sharpened, but only by experienced technicians. Improper sharpening by inexperienced hands can damage the instruments.

Needle holders require daily checks.

Every needle holder wears out, and the device's jaws should be inspected for wear daily. Like gold-handled scissors, gold rings on needle holder handles signify tungsten carbide jaws. These are more durable and can be replaced when worn. See **Figures 3 and 4**.

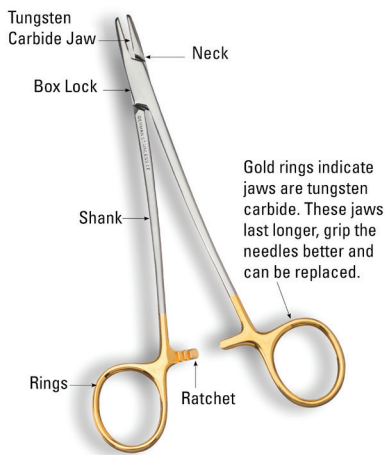


Figure 3



Figure 5

Proper names and sizes for hemostats should always be used (see Figure 6)



Mayo Hegar, Tungsten Carbide

Figure 4

Hemostats: Details matter

It is critical to remember that hemostats crack at the box lock (the hinge area), so regular inspection is essential.

Cracked Box Lock



Some hemostats appear similar but must never be confused or interchanged. Kelly and Crile hemostats, for example, are both 5½" but different (see Figure 5).

Name	Length
Hartman Mosquito	3½"
Halsted Mosquito	5"
Kelly	5½"
Crile	5½", 6¼"
Rochester Pean	5½", 6 ¼", 7 ¼", 8", 9", 10"
Ochsner (Kocher)	6½", 7 ¼", 8", 9", 10"

Figure 6

Tissue versus dressing forceps: Know the difference

To differentiate between tissue and dressing forceps, remember that **"T is for teeth"** and **"T is for tissue."** Tissue forceps always have teeth; dressing forceps do not have teeth. See Figure 7.



Figure 7