



# Sharp Instruments Are Safe Instruments



Proper testing and sharpening schedules matter

BY RICK SCHULTZ

**S**harp instruments allow surgery to be performed with more precision and accuracy. In the Operating Room, the chief complaint about instruments is the lack of sharpness—and scissors are the instruments that dull most frequently. Remember, every scissor eventually becomes dull! This article addresses proper testing practices and provides guidance for sharpening frequency for scissors and Kerrison rongeurs.

## Scissors

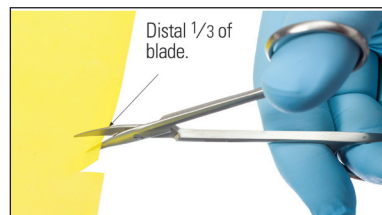
Sharpening frequency varies for different types of scissors:

- General scissors (Mayo, Metzenbaum): Two or three times per year
- Black-handled SuperCut scissors: Three to five times per year
- Laparoscopic scissors: Three or four times per year
- Micro/vascular scissors: Three or four times per year
- Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) scissors: Two to three times per year
- Ophthalmology scissors: Three or four times per year
- Podiatry scissors: Three or four times per year
- Bandage scissors: Once or twice per year
- Stitch scissors: Once or twice per year

To test scissors, the proper scissor test material (red or yellow) must be selected. The difference between the test materials is the thickness. Red is .008" thick and yellow is .006" thick.

The following scissors should be tested using **yellow** scissor test material:

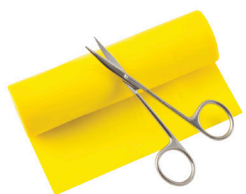
- 2 ½" to 4 ½" scissors
- 4 ½" to 6" micro scissors
- Spring handle micro scissors
- Laparoscopic scissors
- Micro bayonet scissors
- Cardiac scissors (Potts-Smith, Diethrich, Jacobson, Castroviejo)
- 4 1/2" Iris scissors
- 4 1/2" operating scissors
- 4 1/2" Metzenbaum scissors



## Scissor Testing Material



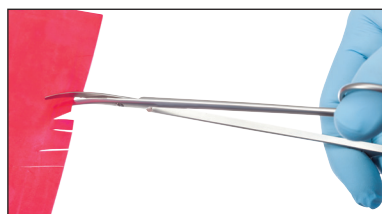
**Red Scissor Test Material**  
Used to test scissors longer than 4 ½" in overall length.



**Yellow Scissor Test Material**  
Used to test scissors 4 ½" and shorter in overall length.

The following scissors should be tested using **red** scissor test material:

- 5" to 12" scissors






## Rongeurs

Kerrison rongeurs need to be sharpened three to four times per year depending on the number of Kerrison rongeur sets and the number of surgical cases.

Kerrison rongeurs should have their sharpness tested on an index card or a single thickness of card stock. The instrument should take a clean bite through the card.

Bone rongeurs are also tested on an index card or piece of card stock. Each rongeur should bite cleanly through, without tearing or snagging. 



**RICK SCHULTZ**, the Instrument Whisperer™, is an author, inventor, lecturer, and the retired Chief Executive Officer of Spectrum Surgical Instruments Corp. He served as contributing editor of HSPA's *Central Service Technical Manual* (fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth editions). Schultz authored the textbooks

*Inspecting Surgical Instruments: An Illustrated Guide* and *The World of Surgical Instruments: The Definitive Inspection Textbook*, which was released in June 2018. In October 2021, Schultz published the veterinary medicine textbook *The World of Surgical Instruments for Animal Health*. Schultz was named HSPA's Educator of the Year in 2002 and the American Hospital Association Educator of the Year in 2006. In 2007, he was named by *Healthcare Purchasing News* as one of the 30 Most Influential People in Healthcare Sterile Processing. Schultz currently provides educational lectures to Sterile Processing professionals at HSPA's annual conferences and conducts Operating Room personnel lectures across the country.

## Q: Our repair vendor keeps lowering its prices every time a competitor submits pricing. Why might this be happening?

**A**: If the price reduction is based on a quarterly or yearly spend, the vendor is simply doing less work or not including instruments sent offsite. If you accept the price reduction, you should also request a credit on the past six to nine months of invoices, because the vendor was likely overcharging.

## Knowledge Is King

The Instrument Whisperer columns in the July/August and September/October issues of *PROCESS* featured the two-part "Knowledge Is King" quiz, developed to test instrument knowledge and earn participants a chance to win Instrument Whisperer™ Rick Schultz's book, *The World of Surgical Instruments*, or a set of Instrument Coaching Cards™. Each quiz contained 25 true/false questions.

All who completed and submitted the quiz for "Knowledge Is King—Part I" received Schultz's autographed book. Four participants scored perfectly on the quiz and received a certificate of recognition; the remaining participants received a note of appreciation and information about the question(s) they missed and the page number(s) where they could find the correct answers.

The results of "Knowledge Is King—Part II" will be published in the January/February 2023 issue. Thanks to all who participated and demonstrated their instrument knowledge!