



# The Instrument Whisperer's Most-Asked Questions

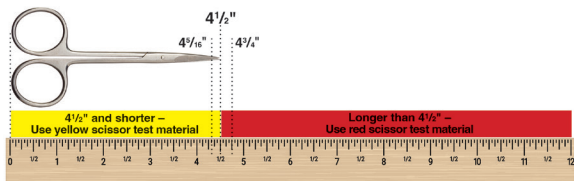


BY RICK SCHULTZ

I routinely receive questions from Sterile Processing (SP) professionals about various device-related topics. What follows are the questions I receive most frequently, along with my responses.

## Scissor Sharpness Testing with Yellow Material

**Q: When testing the sharpness of surgical scissors, how do you determine which test material to use, especially for a scissor that is exactly 4 ½" long?**



**A:** Great question. The correct test material is essential for maintaining instrument quality and preventing tissue damage during procedures. For scissors that are precisely 4 ½" in length, yellow scissor test material should be used. This material is designed to evaluate the performance of medium-length scissors and helps ensure that the cutting edges are sharp enough for clinical use. Red scissor test material should be used for scissors longer than 4 ½", and yellow scissor test material is also used for scissors shorter than 4 ½".

## Needle Holders with Cracks

**Q: If a needle holder cracks at the neck, should it be removed from service and sent out for repair?**

**A:** Any crack in a needle holder, especially at the neck, is a serious defect. The instrument should be removed from service immediately. A crack at the neck indicates structural failure that can't be fixed safely; therefore, the instrument should be discarded and replaced. It is important to note that any cracked instrument cannot be repaired.

## Cracks in Forceps

**Q: If a crack is found on a forcep during inspection, should it be sent out for repair?**

### Cracked Box Lock



**A:** No. As previously stated, the instrument cannot be repaired and must be removed from service and replaced.

## Correct Terminology of a Hemostat's Hinged Area

**Q: What is the hinged area on a hemostat called?**

**A:** The correct term is box lock. This is the area where the two shanks of the instrument are joined, and it is a common place for stress and wear to appear, and for hidden bioburden to accumulate. Regular inspection of the box lock ensures the instrument functions properly.

## Sharpening Kerrison Rongeurs

**Q: Should Kerrison rongeurs be sharpened three to four times a month?**

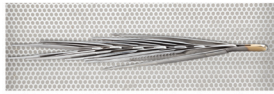


**A:** No, in most cases, that frequency would be excessive. The sharpening frequency should be based on usage or complaints. Quarterly sharpening is a good benchmark. Over-sharpening can reduce the instrument's lifespan. Use an index card to test sharpness.

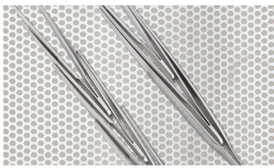


### Nesting Forceps

**Q: Is it acceptable to nest forceps together?**



Incorrect - Forceps wedged together causes damage.



Correct - Forceps loosely nested in two rows to prevent damage.

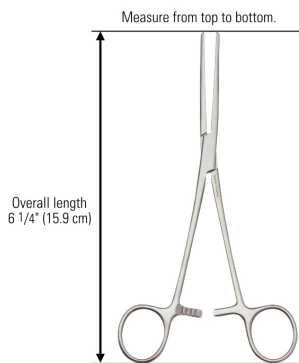


If the forceps stick together when lifted they have been wedged too tightly.

**A:** Never nest forceps in a forced manner. Wedging them tightly can damage the tips and tension of the forceps and cause misalignment. See the photos for correct and incorrect practices.

### Measuring Hemostats

**Q: When measuring a hemostat, should the rings be included?**



**A:** Yes, the full length of the hemostat, including the finger rings, should be measured. Instrument length refers to the overall dimension from the distal tip to the end of the rings.

### Cost of Instrument Repair: Onsite Versus Offsite

**Q: Is the cost for instrument repair the same whether it is performed onsite or offsite?**

**A:** The price should be negotiated to be the same. Repair companies often charge more when taking instruments offsite, but they should not do so.

### Single Versus Multiple Repair Technicians

**Q: Is it better to have a single repair technician or multiple?**

**A:** Multiple technicians, especially those with specialized skills, can enhance repair quality and efficiency. A single technician might be limited in scope or availability, whereas having multiple repair technicians can offer broader coverage, faster turnaround, and better value.

### Estimating the Length of Curved Metzenbaum Scissors

**Q: Is estimating the length of a curved Metzenbaum scissor acceptable?**

**A:** No, precise measurement is essential. Estimating can lead to errors in documentation, ordering, or tray setup. Use a measuring scale to determine the exact length from the tip to the end of the rings.

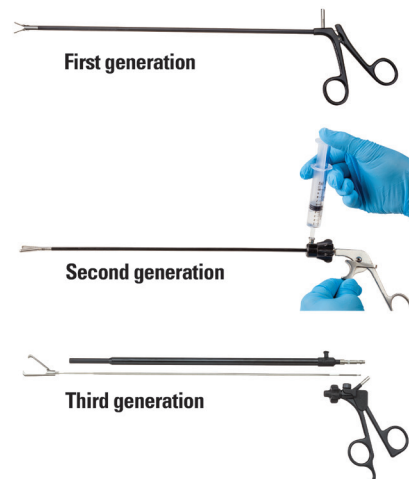
### Hemostat Jaw Misalignment

**Q: If the jaws of a hemostat are out of alignment, does that mean the instrument cannot be repaired and must be replaced?**

**A:** No. Minor misalignment of a hemostat's jaws is often repairable by a skilled repair technician. Realignment can be done using precision tools if the instrument's integrity and function are not compromised. If the misalignment is due to significant wear, cracking or warping of the box lock, however, replacement may be the safer option.

### Second-Generation Laparoscopic Instruments

**Q: Can second-generation laparoscopic instruments be disassembled entirely before cleaning?**





# HSPA

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**A:** No, second-generation laparoscopic instruments are designed to have flushing ports. Always refer to the manufacturer's instructions for use (IFU) to determine the cleaning procedure for each specific instrument.


#### Cleaning the Port on Laparoscopic Instruments

**Q: What is the purpose of the small port near the handle of some laparoscopic instruments?**

**A:** The port is specifically designed for cleaning the internal channels of the instrument. During reprocessing, sterile water or cleaning solutions are flushed through the instrument's shaft to remove blood, debris and bioburden. Proper use of this cleaning port is critical for ensuring the instrument is fully decontaminated before sterilization.

#### Lifespan of Pakistan-made instruments

**Q: Are all Pakistan-made instruments single-use only?**

**A:** No, some Pakistan-made instruments are designed with higher stainless steel quality, which are considered middle of the line and can easily last up to 12 months. 

#### SP Week Wisdom

Consider using the Q&As in this column and quizzes from previous "Instrument Whisperer" columns for educational, team-based games. SP leaders can also solicit questions from technicians ahead of SP Week and provide the correct answers and sources for the information during events.



**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 and 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.

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