

Avoiding Problems

When rubbing out a finish, there are a couple things to watch for that can save a lot of time and trouble. It is important to make sure your finish is fully cured. A soft finish will not rub to a uniform sheen and will shrink in coming weeks.

A common problem when rubbing finishes is rubbing through the finish on the edges. This is best avoided when preparing the raw wood for a finish. Lightly sand the edges of the wood with 150 or 180-grit sandpaper to remove the sharpness by rounding them over slightly. While applying each coat of finish, spray all around the wood's perimeter before spraying the entire surface. This builds more finish near the edges so you'll be less likely to sand or rub through later. As you sand between coats, lightly sand the edges with one or two light strokes using 320 or 400-grit sandpaper.

When sanding or rubbing with the grain near the edges, use your fingers as a guide to keep from rubbing over the edges.

A second common problem is how to create a uniform sheen over a large surface, especially making the two or three inches in from the edges match the middle. Here are some tips.

Use fresh rubbing materials to finish up the rubbing sequence and keep the same pressure from the beginning to the end of each rubbing stroke. Use one hand over the other as a pressure and steering guide for your rubbing. Let your rubbing strokes swipe past the end of the wood rather than change direction and start back the other way. Just be careful not to rub too hard over the edge and rub through the finish.

Rub the surface near the edges with short strokes right up to the edge and then blend the whole surface with long straight strokes going with the grain from one end to the other. Rub with the palm of your hand, not your fingers.

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**Piano Technicians Guild
49th Annual Convention &
Technical Institute**

June 21-25, 2006 Rochester, New York

Finish Rubbing Workshop

with

Kevin E. Hancock

Washington, DC Chapter, PTG



Rubbing a Finish

When rubbing a finish, you're basically applying fine scratches into the surface of the finish in a sequence from coarser to finer grits until you achieve the gloss (or "sheen") you're after. There are many tools, techniques, and materials that can be used to achieve similar results. Equipment like inline sanders are available and assist tremendously in rubbing large surfaces like piano lids.

The first abrasive is used to remove the imperfections in the surface of the dried coating. This includes dust nibs, overspray, and shrinkage of the coating. Choose a grit that will effectively and efficiently remove the imperfections without leaving scratches that will be hard to remove with the next finer grit abrasive.

Begin by sanding the finish perfectly flat, starting with 500 or 600 grit finishing sandpaper. Wet/dry aluminum oxide or the 3M gold 216U sandpaper are good choices. Completely remove all gloss from the surface until it is dead flat and shows no signs of grain shrinkage. A sanding block of cork or rubber is good for aiding in this step. Do not sand with your fingers pressing on the paper as this will leave non uniform streaks in the finish. The palm of your hand is OK to use as a sandpaper backer.

With the surface completely flat, move up to the next finer grit and sand the coarser scratches until they disappear. You need to pay attention to the areas you have sanded as it might be hard to see the difference between the coarser scratches and the next finer grit. Thoroughly sand, being careful to not weigh too hard on the edges to avoid rubbing through to the raw wood.

If the intended final sheen is going to be satin, 600 is an adequate grit to prepare for steel wool. If a glossier sheen is desired, continue to sand the 600 scratches thoroughly with 800-1200 grit. When the surface is uniform, rub with medium 00 steel wool to remove the scratches from the previous grit. You will now see the final finish coming to life. Dampen the wool with water and lubricant to make the rubbing easier and more uniform. With the surface uniform at this grit, move onto the finer wool with lubricant and water. This grit will leave the a very nice semi gloss sheen. If the final surface has any coarse or dull areas, one of the earlier grit sequences was not completed correctly. Go back and repeat the earlier stages to remove the dull area and repeat the final steps.

Clean the surface with furniture polish and enjoy the look and feel of a quality rubbed surface.