

Nib types

Some variable temperature machines like the Razortip have a variety of different nibs or detachable pens. Others like the Ironcore only have a permanent handle with the option of changing or shaping the nichrome wire. There are three main types of nib for either variable temperature machines or solid point which are:

The Writing Nib

The Writing nib is the one that looks like a piece of tightly bent wire. It is essential to the burning kit because it's one of the few nibs we can push and pull. This makes it ideal for forming circles, wavy lines writing our names, drawing fat lines and filling in small areas of tone, like the eye of an animal. You can also use it to stipple, do pointillism work, cross hatch and a heap of other applications. This is the standard nib which comes with the Ironcore machine and is suitable for all work.

The Skew

The Skew is formed like a little knife. The shape isn't relevant to this discussion though...the blade is. What the Skew does is cuts as it burns, making a sharp, more consistent line. I don't use this nib very much as I find it can carve or catch in the timber. Suitable for open grain timbers where inconsistent burns are likely. Is useful, however, for very fine or small work. Really only best used by drawing the pen towards oneself like a knife.

Shading Nib

The Shader can also come in a variety of shapes, but the main principle is to have a nib that is wide, flat and smooth so you can burn larger broad strokes of tone. The Shader can be used in a mass of ways but some of the most common are: shading, gradual tones, portrait work, sketching and colouring in broad areas, like when lettering signs. This is also another nib I haven't used much but am experimenting and can appreciate its uses.

Cleaning the nibs

I have always used a fine grit sandpaper to clean my nib but have always held the issue of sanding away the nib itself. I have recently discovered that denim may be another option, especially for manufactured nibs like the Razortip that have the potential to wear quickly with sandpaper cleaning.

Nichrome wire

The wire used in pyrography is specially designed to conduct electricity to allow nibs to get the heat required to therefore burn. Other wires aren't suitable as they don't conduct the electricity and therefore heat for burning.

Generally there are 3 guages of nichrome wire used in pyrography. The standard wire size that comes with a purchased machine is usually the maximum required as anything larger won't fit into the connectors. Finer wires can be used for more intricate work but will wear faster and have the risk of bend when working. Depending on the machine, it can also be difficult getting the finer gauge wire to contact with the connectors which then can require folding over the ends to create enough width and increased chance for conduction.

Nichrome wire nibs can be made at home with a solid surface of metal and a hammer. Pliers can be use to twist and pull the wire into a desired shape and is even easier when the machine is turned on and the wire hot. Smooth curves on a shader nib can be achieved with a fine dremel type tool or even fine sandpaper. Branding nibs can also be made with some experimentation for repeating pattern and some solid nib machines come with a small assortment of shapes and designs.

Solid nib machines use either a rod of stainless steel or, more commonly brass but because brass is quite soft, any continuous rubbing or use can cause the nib to blunt. A fine grit sand paper can be used to reshape a suitable point.