

BALLERINA SPINNING TOP

Turn a Dancing Top



The ballerina spinning top offers a change of pace for top-makers.

With the addition of tiny arms, this top creates the illusion of a graceful ballerina dancing across the floor.

Turning the Body



Photo 1

To make the top, select a hardwood such as maple. Begin with a blank that measures about 4" × 2" × 2" (10cm × 5cm × 5cm). If the blank is square, I mount it straight into a four-jaw scroll chuck. No need to turn a tenon.

Using a roughing gouge or a spindle gouge, turn the blank into a cylinder (Photo 1). Then using a pencil, mark the cylinder with lines corresponding to the bottom of the ballerina's dress, her waist, her shoulders, neck, and head (Photo 2). After turning my first two tops, I discovered that it is easy to make the dancer too top-heavy and she won't spin satisfactorily. On my third design try, I opted to keep more weight in the bottom of the dancer.

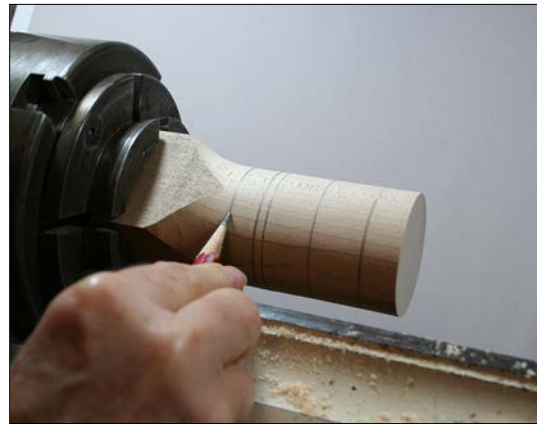


Photo 1



Photo 3

You don't need a sharp point, but rather, a slightly rounded point for her to "dance" on.

Use a spindle gouge to shape the legs of the ballerina. You don't need a sharp point, but rather, a slightly rounded point for her to "dance" on (Photo 3). Next, shape the dancer's tutu. Here is where I first went wrong. I removed wood from beneath her skirt, thus making the dancer top-heavy. Instead, turn a slightly concave curve at the bottom of the skirt toward her legs, then curve the top of the skirt toward the waistline. To reduce weight from the top portion, use the spindle gouge to give the dancer a small and delicate waist with a slight curve up to the shoulders (Photo 4).

To create the dancer's neck, I use a parting tool, then switch back to a spindle gouge to turn a round bead for her head (Photos 5 and 6). Feel free to create little hats that can be used as handles to spin the top, but be careful not to add too much weight up top. My ballerina is set to dancing by a twist of her little round head.



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6

**Photo 7**

Turning the Arms

Turning the two tiny arms can be challenging as both arms must be the same size. Begin with a blank that measures $1/2" \times 1/2" \times 3"$ ($12\text{mm} \times 12\text{mm} \times 7.5\text{cm}$). Insert the square blank into small jaws, pushing it in so that only about $1\ 1/2"$ (4cm) is exposed. This will help prevent vibration. Use a spindle gouge to turn the blank into a cylinder. Depending on the height of your finished top, the arm length will vary from about $3/4"$ to $1"$ (2cm to 2.5cm). Use a ruler and pencil to mark the overall arm length and the hand position (Photo 7).

**Photo 8****Photo 9**

Tiny holes must be drilled for the eye screws that will fasten the arms to the body. A skew can be used to create a small divot in the end of the arm blank. Then using a small drill bit that approximates the size of the eye screw, drill a hole the length of that eye screw (Photo 8). You are now ready to turn the arm using a spindle gouge. When you are satisfied with the shape, sand it and part it off with a skew (Photo 9).

Loosen the small jaws and extend the blank so that another $1\ 1/2"$ is exposed and proceed as with the first arm. Use calipers to make sure that the diameters of the two arms are equal.

Assembling the Parts

You are now ready to attach the arms to the body. Begin by placing a small pencil mark on each shoulder where the eye screws/arms will be attached (Photo 10). I usually just eyeball this. If you have a Dremel and Dremel drill press, it is quick work to use a tiny drill bit and drill the two holes (Photo 11). Otherwise, you can use a full-sized drill press. Next, use two pairs of needle-nosed pliers and

open the eyes on two eye screws. Dip each end of the eye screws into wood glue, medium cyanoacrylate (CA) glue, or epoxy, then screw them into the top end of the arms and into the body (Photo 12). Slip each of the two open eyes into the eye screws that have not been opened. Use the pliers to close the eyes (Photo 13).



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14

Your ballerina top is now completed, although you may choose to paint the top with acrylics, dyes, markers, or colored pencils (Photo 14). These are wonderful birthday and Christmas gifts for children. Have fun spinning!



Photo 15

~ Janice Levi
Groesbeck, Texas

I began turning wood about 14 years ago and like most new turners, I turned every type of wood and every type of shape that I could imagine. I then began to decorate those turnings. During the past three years, I have concentrated on turning wearable art—jewelry and purses. These tiny bits of wood provide endless opportunities for shape and style and enhancement. And the best part is, I can wear them!

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A man with short brown hair, smiling, is wearing a bright blue AAW smock. The smock has a black zipper, a pocket with a flap, and a name tag that says "Mark". He is sitting in front of a white machine with the "ONEWAY" logo. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.