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Vane Adhesion: Tips, Tricks, and Troubleshooting Part 2

By Daniel Grundman – Flex-Fletch

Part 2: Work area, cleaning, glue creep...

Work area

Be sure your work area (usually the TV room) is uncluttered and ready to go. This isn't rocket science but we do need to be prepared. You should have a small work surface such as a stable TV tray as well as all your fletching tools. Be sure you have a place to set the fletcher and finished arrows.

I'm going to use two different fletching jigs one straight Bitzenburger and a right helical Arizona EZ fletch. The Bitzenburger is a standard well-built fletching tool that has proven itself over the many years it has been on the market. The Arizona EZ fletch is a relative newcomer but has the ability to fletch three vanes at a time. [Place photos of both]

Cleaning the vane base

Place your vane in the jig. If the vane you are using is a no-clean vane you do not need to clean the base of the vane. However, there are those who believe cleaning every vane is the way to go, so if you like, you may clean the vane with your choice of solvent. I use acetone. Using this method, it should take only a couple of seconds to clean the vane base. Really. One swipe in each direction along the vane base and that's it.

Also used with much success is the Scotch-Brite method. Using a green or brown Scotch-Brite pad, scuff the base of the vane. With a back and forth motion the Scotch-Brite will roughen the base of the vane thus allowing the adhesive something more to hold onto.

A nice little tool to help clean your vanes is the nifty "Fletcher's Friend" vane holder cleaning tool from PatNorrisArchery.com or in his ebay store. This handy tool allows you to clean the bases of up to 12 vanes at a time.



Clean in a jar of soapy water. Using Dawn dishwashing liquid is a great way to clean vanes. This cleans the whole vane, not just the base. Fill a clean large mayonnaise jar with warm water and add a teaspoon of Dawn. Place your vanes in the jar, and shake for 30 seconds. Drain through a strainer pouring the soapy water into another clean jar. Rinse the vanes under running water and repeat the process. Be sure your final rinse is very thorough.



Fletching the arrow

The actual fletching of the arrow is always after the same result: a good uniform bond. This article isn't meant to teach how to fletch an arrow but to fix problems you might be having. But, with that said I would like to briefly describe what is involved.

Our goal is to affix the vane to the shaft securely. Period.

One reason for what appears to be improper adhesion is impatience; you must allow the relevant amount of time for the glue to set. In our world of 'faster is better' sometimes we forget, not all adhesives are quick. Most standard adhesives like Flex-Bond or Fletch-Tite need a few hours to set. A period of 24 hours is usually best to wait before shooting an arrow fletched with one of these solvent based adhesives.



Hydration trick for non-wrinkling fletch

One neat trick to help keep vanes from wrinkling due to humid weather is to soak them in a jar of water for a couple of hours prior to fletching your arrows. This allows the vane to absorb moisture and expand slightly so the finished product is not nearly as susceptible to wrinkling when it's hot and/or humid. Just be sure to dry the vanes first. You can do this as a matter of course if you like since it won't affect the vane during very dry weather.

Glue creep fix

Anyone who has fletched arrows probably knows the phenomenon I call the glue creep. After you've applied the glue, the glue in the tube begins to slowly creep out of the tip. This is due to the heat from your fingers transferring to the glue tube and creating increased pressure inside the tube, forcing the adhesive in the tip out. Here are two solutions I use to combat this.

1. Keep a small jar of water with a single ice cube in it next to you while you are fletching. If the glue starts to creep up the tip, just submerge the bottom of the tube into the water. The glue will magically retreat.
2. The second solution is to warm the entire tube prior to fletching. Insert Photo This will nullify any effect from the warmth of your fingers. I run the tube under warm water, not hot, for about 45 seconds in an upright position. Open the tube and make sure there is no glue in the tip before doing this.



Super glue storage tip

A good way to keep your CA based glue usable over a longer period is to put the entire bottle/tube in a jar with silica gel when storing it.

Nearly everything electronic is packaged with small packets of silica gel. The ones marked 'Do Not Eat'. Silica gel is a desiccant, (drying agent) and will help absorb the moisture that would normally be absorbed by the glue. Despite its name silica gel is a solid.

Save the packets and put them in a jar. Put the glue in the jar with the silica gel and seal it when storing it. Always keep the jar closed when not in use so as not to introduce any more moisture than necessary.

**Once saturated with water, the gel can be regenerated by heating to 150 °C (300 °F) for 1.5 hours per litre of gel. A good method is to spread out the packets on a cookie sheet and turn the oven up to about 250 °F for 45 minutes to an hour. This is a good compromise and will get about 90% of the moisture out of the gel.

That's it for Part 2; we'll get to more tips in Part 3: Double gluing, shaft prep and more.

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** From wikipedia.org

