In theory, using a shooting board is pretty simple. You just hold the workpiece with one hand and slide the plane forward with the other hand. The shooting board guides the plane to trim the end of the workpiece. But getting good results does take a little skill and good technique. And there are a few tips that can also help.

You can use any size bench plane with this shooting board. You can use a block plane for small parts, as in the photo above. But you might also want to try using a larger plane, like a #5. The extra mass of a heavier plane helps to keep it moving forward on the shooting board for a smoother cut.

**Check Your Plane.**
Before using your shooting board, you might want to give your hand plane a quick once-over. First, check to make sure the blade is sharp. Cutting across end grain or a miter is tough work, so having a sharp blade is a must.

Second, check to see if the sides of the plane are square with the bottom (photo at left). If the bottom and sides are just a little out of square, you can easily compensate for this by adjusting the blade sideways until it is square with the side. (Use the lateral adjustment lever just underneath the blade to make this adjustment.)

**Setup.** Once your plane is ready, the next step is to clamp the shooting board in a vise. The important thing is that it's held securely so it won't move.

Now position the fence base and make sure the locking pin is fully seated to lock it in place. Then, adjust the sliding fence so the
end of the fence face is about ½” behind the edge of the rabbet that the plane will ride in. The fence that isn’t in use should be slid back so it’s well out of the way.

Relief Area. The very first time you use the shooting board, the blade of the hand plane will cut a small, shallow relief along the edge of the rabbet. You can see this in detail ‘a’ at the bottom of the previous page.

The relief is necessary to create clearance for the plane blade. So before setting a workpiece on the shooting board, set your plane to a pass along the entire length of the rabbet to form the relief. Once that’s completed, you’re ready to start planing an actual workpiece.

Shooting a Miter. To use the shooting board, hold the plane tight against the edge of the rabbet. The toe of the plane should be just past the end of the fence. To see what I mean, take a look at the Setup drawing on the previous page. Then, slide the workpiece along the fence until it butts up against the bottom of the plane (detail ‘b,’ previous page).

Now while holding the workpiece firmly in place, slide the plane forward to take a fine shaving and then take a pass along the entire length of the rabbet (drawing at upper right). Before making the next pass, just draw the plane back and slide the workpiece forward until it contacts the toe of the plane again. Take as many passes as necessary to trim the workpiece to its final size.

Try to make each cut in one continuous sweep, rather than short, choppy strokes. (Here’s where the weight and mass of a larger plane come into play.) And to help the blade slice through the wood more easily, you can dampen the end grain (photo above). The result is a much cleaner cut.

Different Angles. One of the nice features of the shooting board in Issue No. 113 is that it can be used for just about any angle. For example, to shave a hair off the square end of a workpiece, simply reposition the fence base and the sliding fence (left photo below). Sometimes you may need to work at an angle other than 45°. To do this, simply lift up the locking pin, set the adjustable fence to the desired angle, and then lock it into place, as in the right photo below. (You can use a bevel gauge to accurately set the angle.) Finally, trim the workpiece just like before.

Square an End. With the fence set perpendicular to the edge of the shooting board, you can quickly square up the end of a workpiece. Other Angles. By disengaging the locking pin, you can adjust the fence for any angle. Simply tighten the locking knob and you’re ready to plane.

Smooth Cutting. Dampening the end grain with mineral spirits makes it easier for the plane to slice through the wood.