

DEVELOPING SCISSORING TECHNIQUE FOR PET GROOMING

BY BARBARA BIRD

Pet groomers come to the craft through many routes. Not all these routes have equal access to information about scissoring technique. This article will outline basic techniques and exercises for improving scissoring.

Dip and Snip - Are you guilty?

Many novice groomers use what I call the "Dip & Snip" technique of scissoring. Dipping is when you move in and out of the surface to be scissored. The groomer takes a cut and then pulls the shears away and then dips in for another cut. Snipping is using the top third of the scissor blades only. Are you guilty? Don't feel bad. Most of us start out with this technique until corrected. It is natural to dip and snip when you are being tentative and lack confidence.

Get a Grip - lose the index finger!

Uh oh! You picked up your grooming shears just as you always have done with other scissors and hooked your thumb in the bottom ring and your pointer or index finger in the top ring? Wrong! Bad! The scissor police will get you for that. First of all, no hooking. REST your thumb alongside the thumbnail in the lower ring. Don't stick it in up to the first joint. We are trying to create a "fulcrum" here. The fulcrum is the leverage point where you get the most control and balance for use of your tool with the least amount of effort. It's a good thing.

Instead of sticking your index finger through the top ring, place it along the shank of the shears. The shank is the lower part below the blades. Now you are starting to have some control. Place your ring finger in the upper ring, and rest your pinky on the loopy thing. It's called a finger rest. Get it? Place your middle finger gently below the index finger. There you go, the "proper" way to hold your shears!

There is another position which some of us find more comfortable. Place your middle finger in the top ring and rest the ring finger alongside the pinky which is in the finger rest. This is the grip that I often use. It is second-best, but acceptable. Most important is to get your index finger

out of the ring. Until you do that, you will be scissoring with a pinching action that will keep you snipping and dipping.

Twelve O'Clock and All is Well!

Hold your shears with the blades straight up in the 12 O'clock position. There you have it! This is the main position from which you will be doing most of your scissoring. The reason for scissoring up into the coat as much as possible is that the scissoring action moves the coat slightly forward and ahead of the shears. If you are scissoring downward, it is like slightly patting the coat down as you go. This requires more combing back up to get the finish you want.

Exercise One: Hold your shears straight up in the 12 O'Clock position. Using your thumb only, open and close your scissor blades to the "5 to 1" position. Work on getting the exact same time on the imaginary clock with every opening of the blades. Now go to the "10 to 2" position and do the same thing. The goal is consistency in your scissoring action. For most of your scissoring, you will be making cuts from the "10 to 2" position. In smaller areas, you will use the "5 to 1." Either way, you need to strengthen your thumb to do the work. Avoid pinching the blades together with the fingers and thumb. The point is to get full cuts using nearly all the length of the blades.

Exercise Two: Hold your shears in the 12 O'clock position and place your hand parallel to a wall. Practice opening and closing the blades while moving from right to left and back, but staying parallel to the wall at the exact distance. Now open and close your blades while rotating your wrist to the 3 pm position. Practice staying on a level plane and not dipping. Use light pressure with your index finger on the shank to maintain control of the positioning of the shears. Try stretching your reach from the 3 pm position all the way to 6 pm. Work the other way as well, from 12 to 9 and down to 6. This requires you to develop flexibility in your wrist. It is important to also work on your control and stay parallel to the wall.

Cuts per minute - the rpm's of your scissoring machine.

If you listen to competition groomers or Edward Scissorhands, their scissors are clicking faster than you can count. It sounds like a machine. It is not necessary to have the speed of a race car, you can settle for

cruising, as long as you get the motor going. You want even and consistent action of the scissor blades. This will help keep you from dipping the scissors in and out of the coat. By increasing the number of cuts over a given surface of coat, you will get a smoother finish. Find the cpm speed that works for you.

Exercise Three: Hold the shears in the 12 o'clock position and move from 12 to 3 o'clock while making long, even, cutting strokes. Work that thumb! Now count your strokes and try to get 10-15 cuts in while covering that area. Work on increasing the cpm as well as opening the shears the full length of the blades. That's It!

Good scissoring technique is a matter of (a) holding the shears correctly so as to create a solid fulcrum, (b) working the thumb to open and close the blades, (c) using nearly all the length of the blade (no snipping), (d) hand control to stay on a level plane (no dipping), (e) wrist flexibility, and (f) getting up to speed (cuts per minute). Now all you have to do is move away from the wall and on to the living, probably moving, target. Happy grooming!

Barbara Bird *has been grooming since 1971 in Tucson Arizona. She learned through an extended apprenticeship to Bill "Scissorhands" North, to whom she owes a lifetime debt and an inferiority complex. Writing this article has been helpful in focussing on her own technique development. Thanks for reading.*

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