



How to Sharpen Pencils: A Practical and Theoretical Treatise on the Artisanal Craft of Pencil Sharpening for Writers, Artists, Contractors, Flange Turners, Anglesmiths, & Civil Servants

David Rees , John Hodgman (Introduction)

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A hilarious guide to the lost art of artisanal pencil sharpening

"...I am so thrilled David Rees is picking up the reins of the forgotten art of manual graphite-encased-in-wood point-crafting. I love my pencil!"

—AMY SEDARIS

"You may think that sharpening a pencil is easy, but David Rees makes it look hard, and that makes all the difference."

—JOHN HODGMAN

"Truly, my life before I was presented with correctly sharpened pencils by an artisan was a dull and ill-sharpened void. Learn from my mistakes."

—NEIL GAIMAN

Have you got the right kind of point on your pencil? Do you know how to achieve the perfect point for the kind of work you need out of that pencil?

Deep in New York's Hudson River Valley, craftsman David Rees—the world's number one #2 pencil sharpener—still practices the age-old art of manual pencil sharpening. In 2010, he began offering his artisanal service to the world, to the jubilation of artists, writers, draftsmen, and standardized test takers.

Now, Rees presents a book that is both a manifesto and a fully-illustrated walk-through of the many, many, many ways to sharpen a pencil. Including chapters on equipment, current practice, and modern technologies, it also points at new trends in sharpening, including "Celebrity Impression Pencil Sharpening (CIPS)," a warning about the "Psychological Risks Associated with Pencil Sharpening," and a survey of "Wines that tastes like pencils."

As Rees implores: "Sharpening pencils should be an activity that enriches the senses."

And if you think it's a joke, why don't you poke yourself with your newly sharpened pencil? Or better yet, don't—because it'll really hurt.

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Date : Published April 10th 2012 by Melville House (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9781612190402

Author : David Rees , John Hodgman (Introduction)

Format : Hardcover 224 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Humor, Comedy, How To

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From Reader Review How to Sharpen Pencils: A Practical and Theoretical Treatise on the Artisanal Craft of Pencil Sharpening for Writers, Artists, Contractors, Flange Turners, Anglesmiths, & Civil Servants for online ebook

MaggyGray says

Herrlich!

Für mich als absoluten Fan von Quatsch-Literatur eine köstliche kleine Flucht aus dem nervigen Alltag. Ich hatte ja keine Ahnung, wie pervers elektrische Spitzmaschinen sind, warum die fallengelassenen Rüschen bei Myladys Liebesspiel jedesmal zerbröseln sind, und wie man am besten einen kopflosen Reiter vermeidet. Gleich nach dem Lesen habe ich meine Bleistiftsammlung hervorgekramt (jawoll, ich bin ein Fan von Bleistiften aller Art!!) und habe mich daran gemacht, sie zu spitzen. Besser kann man ein Wochenende nicht verbringen.

Danke, Herr Rees!

Bryan Hall says

A straight-faced look at how to sharpen pencils, using a variety of different sharpeners (the machines), as well as a good bit of the philosophy of a pencil sharpener (the person). Unfortunately, a little *too* straight-faced. I'm all for ironic examinations of pedestrian subjects that pretend that they are wildly interesting, but when they're not you have to throw in a few more jokes. The first half of this book is the serious technical writing that it pretends to be, and shows that Rees truly cares about this and isn't just making a quick hipster joke book...but because of that, it's pretty boring. He lightens the mood in places, just not nearly enough. By the time he runs out of actual pencil-sharpening material, he starts making it ridiculous for the second half of the book with celebrity impression pencil sharpening, trick sharpening (behind the back, etc.), and more, but it's too little, too late.

I came in expecting to like this, having seen Rees perform some of it on-stage with John Hodgman and Wyatt Cenac, but it just didn't work for me nearly enough.

Ryan Chapman says

One of the smartest and funniest books to appear in recent memory, as brilliant a high-wire literary performance as any of the well-reviewed debut novels populating the *Times Book Review*. It's a testament to this book's originality that it escaped most review coverage, as *How to Sharpen Pencils* seems to operate completely outside of the publishing industry.

I kind of wish I were in grad school just so I could devote a month to studying the book. I'd pair it with another recent work, Mark Leyner's *The Sugar Frosted Nutsack*, for creating a new kind of structure for humor writing, one utterly current and fresh. Rees's conceit improbably holds up for most of the book, only to explode in the last chapter ("How to Sharpen Pencils With Your Mind") which simultaneously subverts and strengthens the entire endeavor.

Domashita Romero says

If you go into this book thinking, 'is this guy serious?' you will shortly have your question answered. He is very serious. This book contains very serious and real information about how to sharpen pencils. But it is also incredibly funny, and had me chuckling like a nerd on public transportation while I read it.

February Four says

Turn your brain off, and this is a fantastically written manual on how to sharpen pencils (with thoughts on mechanical pencils and electric sharpeners, as well as the pitfalls of being an artisanal pencil sharpener.)

Turn your brain on, and this is a fantastically written manual on how to sharpen pencils (with thoughts on mechanical pencils and electric sharpeners, as well as the pitfalls of being an artisanal pencil sharpener.)

Satire never had it so good. I LOVED IT.

Diane says

I am eternally grateful to David Rees for, dare I say, penciling this book. I am known as the sole mechanical pencil sharpener aficionado at my school. Students delight in the opportunity to hand crank their pencils sharp at my wall mounted sharpener. I am very proud to declare that when the PTO gave every teacher a brand new electric sharpener that I didn't even let it in the room. I donated it to the teacher work room. The sledge hammer was a bit too harsh for my tastes. But the great news is that all the teachers know they can donate their dead electric sharpeners to me for my engineering students to demolish when they quit working. So all is well and relatively balanced in my pencil sharpening world.

David Rees - You make me think. You make me laugh. You make me wish that a few bits were a bit "cleaner" for my middle school classroom so I could put this book on my book shelf. I am emboldened to bring your book in for a teacher read aloud when I find the need to teach "how to write instructions." I'll avoid the naughty bits.

Joey Alison Sayers says

Considering I didn't even know that you could sharpen pencils (I had previously thrown them out when they were dull) this book was very helpful.

Jamie Bradway says

Consistently very funny, humor ranging from silly to profound. Rees actually has some valuable statements regarding craftsmanship that I could envision in cross-stitched samplers.

I am sickened by the number of mechanical pencils on my desk.

Martha? says

I didn't really find this humor book humorous. But now, as I begin to review, it suddenly sounds funny. The title does not lie. This is a book about how to sharpen pencils. Without any sarcasm, wit or puns, Rees goes through each painstaking step of sharpening pencils. He gives lists of equipment, safety precautions and detailed procedures for every type of pencil sharpening method ever considered. This is a glimpse into a compulsive mind and it is scary in there!

Taylor Fisher says

I approached this book with a bit of trepidation due to being a mechanical pencil man. By the time I had gotten to the advice on mechanical pencils presented I was already convinced to pick up the classical wooden pencils of my youth.

Tracey Baptiste says

As soon as I read about this book, I pre-ordered it for my Nook. A few days later it was on my device, and I started reading. The premise is great, but there's only so far you can stretch a joke. By the middle of the book I was completely bored, which is why it took me so long to finish it. It became treadmill reading, so I only got a few pages in at the gym, and there were lots of days I didn't bother to read it, and watched t.v. instead. I'm glad I didn't buy it in physical form. If you're really interested, borrow it from the library. It's not a keeper.

Snotchocheez says

I really needed a palate-cleanser, and David Rees (penner of the long-running on-line strip Get Your War On) truly delivered with this How-To pencil sharpening guide. What's so great about it is you're never quite sure just how serious to take Rees: is he *really* that obsessed over pencils and the art of sharpening them? Well, yeah, he just might be! Step-by-step instructions replete with author photos demonstrate exactly how to get your point on: from the appropriate finger- and arm-stretching pre-sharpening techniques, to the appropriate gear (be it a simple single-blade sharpener or a full-bore double-cylindrical wall mount hand crank), Rees has got you covered.

Electric sharpeners get short-shrift in this how-to, alas. As do mechanical pencils, obviously. But if you ever find the need to sharpen your #2 whilst standing under a waterfall, or entertain your cubicle-mates with Celebrity Pencil Sharpening impressions, this guide is invaluable!

James Williams says

There is a point in a middle-class existence where one looks around at all of the chintzy mass-produced garbage which so thoroughly fills our life and wonders -- desperately -- if there can't be something just a bit more refined. Something just a bit more real.

And so we turn to good whisk[e]ys and wines. Or we turn to German sports cars that we can't really afford. Or we build a woodshop in the garage and slowly drive ourselves mad chasing the craftsmanship that our grandfathers were unable to pass on to us through our ill-gotten haze of wasted Saturdays filled with nothing more than pop-rocks and cartoons.

One place that I have turned to fill this hole in my life is well-made writing instruments. There is much joy and humanity to be found in placing the tip of a fountain pen to a good sheet of paper or in turning a perfectly-crafted wooden pencil in a fine German single-blade sharpener. And it's this experience which is the subject of this book which is at the same time a reference book, a how-to guide, and a meditative spiritual tract.

Because sharpening a pencil is not just about moving as quickly as possible from "a yellow stick" to "a thing one can mark paper with". It is about that, true. The functionality of a well-sharpened pencil is key. But it's also about the texture of the paint under your fingertips. It's also about the heft of the pencil in your hand. It's also about the smell of the freshly released cedar as you slowly remove everything that isn't a sharpened pencil.

Sharpening a pencil is a full-sense task. And, as such, it is a task that should be taken up with the utmost care lest you waste another moment on this planet without actually *seeing* any of it.

While instructional, this book is also very funny with charts and footnotes lightening the mood on almost every page. I was particularly impressed with Chapter 11, "A Few Words About Mechanical Pencils". While I ultimately disagree with Mr. Rees' assessment of those tools, he made his argument passionately and persuasively.

I think it's also important to note the design of the physical book as well. It is a classic work that leans strongly on Futura. Every chapter heading, every sub-heading stands out as something worth remarking upon. I normally read electronic books but in this case, I highly recommend purchasing a paperback to hold in your hand. It is a worthwhile exercise and experience.

Ava says

HOW DO YOU WRITE OVER 200 PAGES OF PENCIL SHARPENING.

HOW.

Alison says

Seriously, if you're gonna do anything, do it with verve, intention, and the appropriate amount of pageantry.

