

Setting Jointer Knives



A Do you have a dial indicator I can use to set my jointer knives right? I'm having a hard time making sure they're flush with my outfeed table to guarantee straight joints.

Q Yes, we do have a dial indicator. At risk of costing us a big sale, however, we'll describe another effective way to check your knives very precisely.

Once the head bolts are snug, you can verify knife alignment with a tool no more sophisticated than a stick. Grab a piece of scrap stock and make yourself a calibration stick 1/2" x 3/4" x 6" to 8" long. Lick one 1/2" edge smooth, clean and straight with a sharp plane (often easiest with the plane clamped upside down in your vise, like a jointer—but don't shave your fingertips!) Set the stick, clean edge down, on the far side of your clean and polished outfeed table so one end reaches a little past top dead center of the cutterhead's arc. Mark a line on the stick's face where it crosses the edge



of the outfeed table. Rotate the cutterhead slowly so the knife passes beneath the stick. If the stick doesn't move, the knife is set too low. If the knife just brushes the stick, it's flush with the outfeed table—which is still a hair too low. Ideally, you want the knife to drag the stick about 1/8", more than a 1/16" but less than 1/4". This indicates the knife is a few thousandths proud, and your jointer will work just right, both now and as the knives wear toward dull. Move the setting stick to the near side of the outfeed table and make sure the knife drags the stick just the same amount to guarantee it's parallel to the outfeed table across its width.

If you prefer hard numbers, by all means get our Oneway Multi-Gauge dial indicator. It's a good one. If the simplicity of a mere piece of wood suits you, however, this time-honored old way of working will set you up just right.