

A supplement to *FineScale Modeler* magazine

# Workbench Tips

# 101 IDEAS

PROVEN  
WAYS TO BUILD  
BETTER MODELS!



**FineScale**  
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MAGAZINE

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# Workbench Tips 101 IDEAS



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# Workbench Tips 101 IDEAS

## Gonna wash that paint right out ...

No matter how much I washed or cleaned my brushes with thinner, they still didn't seem "good as new" – until I used shampoo! For every two brushes, I use one drop of shampoo. It sure helps me a lot.

– Jason Amigo

Quezon City, Philippines

## Easier-to-see filler

Baking soda can be used to instantly set super glue. The problem is, the result dries or hardens in a transparent form, making it hard to know if you have enough glue where you want it. It also makes it hard to know when you have sanded enough.

The solution? Dye your baking soda! You can use inkjet or technical pen ink to dye several batches of baking soda. You can make different colors this way, too. Let the colored piles of dyed baking soda dry overnight, then break up the clumps and store the baking soda in "ready service" containers of some sort – old 35mm film containers or sturdy airtight bags work well.

When you sprinkle some of the dyed baking soda onto liquid super glue, it will instantly harden in an opaque color. The chief benefits of having different colors are that you can see some colors better against

certain plastics or resins, and you can layer the colored baking soda to fill seams so you can see what you already sanded down and what has recently been added over the top of that. The colors will darken as they set; you may want to consider that when you dye your soda.

– Ward Shrake

Raton, N.M.

## Spotlight your models

Proper, protected display space for my completed projects is important. I used glass-fronted shelving in a hallway, but it was too dark to allow the models to be easily seen.

I found the perfect solution at my local hardware store: Sylvania "Dot-It" battery-powered LED lights. They run on AA batteries and are easily switched off and on. Adhesive-backing makes placement easy but permanent. I found that limiting, so, I installed a pair of wooden rails beneath the upper shelf, allowing me to move the lights as needed. That way, I can put a spotlight on the current new star in my collection!

– Don Allen

Seaford, Del.

## Add resin without super glue

I'm always nervous when I attach large resin parts to plastic, because super glue doesn't allow a lot of time to adjust the fit. For example, when it comes to fitting aftermarket resin engines to my plastic aircraft model, I'm afraid the super glue will set at just the wrong moment.

My solution, where appropriate, is to super glue the thinnest sheet styrene I have to the mating surface of the resin part. I cut it to the rough shape of the piece, then sand it to the contours of the part after it sets. This does add a small difference in size that I correct by sanding the other mating surface to account for the thickness of the plastic card used.

The result: Two styrene surfaces that I can attach with styrene cement, giving me plenty of time to adjust alignment and fit. I hope this works as well for you as it does for me.

– Mike Scullion

Barrie, Ontario, Canada

## Cleaning your files

Needle files don't work as well when they get dirty. To clean them, buy a tall, slender jar of olives (your choice), empty it (it's a tough job but somebody's got to do it), then fill the jar with lacquer thinner. Put your clogged needle file in the jar and close the lid. After an hour or so, remove the file and clean it off with a stiff brush. It will come clean easily and be ready for your next work session.

– Don Sproule

Lexington, Ky.

## Scanning instructions

I like to keep my instruction sheets pristine, so I scan them into a computer. I can isolate certain steps, allowing me to concentrate on a given area without distraction. I can also print out lightened pages, so I can make notes that stand out over the instructions.

– Charles Fox

Santa Monica, Calif.

## Making wire coils

To make accurately uniform wire coils, wrap wire around the threads of a screw or bolt, then slowly turn it to remove the coil. Partially removing the coil and continuing to wind will give you any length you need. Spray a little WD-40 on the screw first to make it easier to remove the coil.

– Bill Thibaut

Donaldsonville, La.

## Getting suspension square

I really enjoy building 1/72 scale armor – at least after the suspension is complete.

To help get over this hurdle without losing even more of my rapidly diminishing hair, I created a tool that makes aligning running-gear components quick and easy. I purchased a pair of inexpensive, adjustable combination squares at a local home center. (I chose the type with metal rules and poly-

## A new line for cutting

Instead of metal saws and knives, I use cotton thread to cut styrene and resin. This is a highly controlled and delicate method for opening doors, ailerons, rudders, slats, and many other fragile pieces that can be damaged easily.

I wrap the thread around two fingers – just like flossing teeth – and use a slow, deliberate sawing motion. The friction cuts through the plastic smoothly. From experience, working slowly yields better results. The friction does most of the work with a steady rocking and sawing motion. Too much pressure will break the thread, but this is remedied simply by rolling out another section of thread.

Cotton thread works much better than nylon thread. I don't recommend dental floss, as it is too slick and doesn't get a good "bite" into the material being cut. The chief benefits of this technique are the extremely fine cut and the small

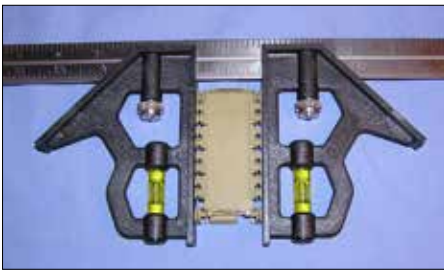


James uses heavy cotton thread to put tread pattern back on a resin tire. The pattern was lost through gluing, filling, and sanding.

amount of material that is removed; there is no need to replace lost material with putty or styrene.

– James Fullingim

Killeen, Texas



Paul built this simple jig, combining two adjustable combination squares on a single sliding ruler to align the multiple road wheels on armor models. It's an easy device to make and use.

carbonate heads.) I removed and reversed the head from one square and mounted it on the rule of the other. This created a jig that ensured two parallel bars at 90 degrees to the base line. Adjusting the space between the heads to the width of the vehicle, I can clamp the suspension parts squarely in place while the cement dries.

I've even found I can temporarily glue larger or oddly-shaped plates to the heads to accommodate special requirements. (Be careful to use a smooth, even layer of adhesive to maintain the alignment of the mating surfaces.) This modification allows adaptation of the fixture to other applications and scales.

– Paul Trimble  
South Bend, Ind.

### Straight dope Fokker painting

Some World War I Fokker aircraft featured doped fabric with streaked green, tan, and brown colors. While building a Dragon 1/48 scale Fokker Dr.I, I developed an easy way to paint the dope with an airbrush. I bought a couple of hair combs with thick, widely spaced teeth, taped them together for the appropriate spacing, then, holding the combs ¼" above the surface, airbrushed paint through the gaps. The result is subtle yet obvious.

– J.S. Kukla  
Homestead, Fla.

### Smart dull coat

I discovered this trick after my local hobby shop closed. I was about to clear-coat some decals but had no flat clear. I did have some white glue and water, though, which I mixed in an experiment to see if it would work as a substitute. It dries dead flat (and very quickly), is water-soluble, and, best of all, it is cheap. It worked very well, and now I use it for small areas, over small decals, or where the paint has been rubbed shiny in places it should not be.

– Jon Grafton  
Tulsa, Okla.

### Model dental hygiene

To reduce decal silvering, I always rub down flat paint on military aircraft with toothpaste and a soft cloth before I clear coat the model. The toothpaste is minimally abrasive – just enough to smooth the paint without removing the color. This smoother surface allows decals to lay flat, eliminating silvering.

– Jack Swint  
Brighton, Mich.

### Holographic periscope

Looking for something to portray periscope glass on my Tamiya 1/35 scale M113, I discovered holographic paper at a local craft store. It has an image that changes when viewed from different angles, there are different colors, and it is thin and self-adhesive. It's easy to cut to shape and glue in position.

For the inside, I used aircraft formation-light decals; they're about the right color of yellow to look like daylight coming through the periscope.

When I took it to my hobby club for show and tell, the other members were impressed with the results.

– Larry Andrews  
Manassas, Va.

### Tacky support

In recent years I've been indulging my nostalgic side by buying and building a number of classic model car kits from the 1960s and '70s, things I loved or lusted after as a kid. Often, the plastic in these old kits is brittle, extremely delicate, and almost impossible to remove from the sprues without breaking.

I recently hit on the idea of cushioning parts with poster putty. Using a sprue cutter, I remove the section of the parts tree holding the part to be removed, making sure to leave a lot of extra framing around the part. Then, I embed the part and some of the surrounding sprue in a good-sized glob of poster putty. This allows me to apply pressure directly to the part with an extra-sharp scalpel blade; the poster putty absorbs most of the pressure, and nine times out of 10 I can remove the part cleanly.

This method works equally well on modern kits.

– Jerry Hawhee  
Cantril, Iowa

### Coffee-cup unwarping

After opening Minicraft's 1/144 scale MD-80, I noticed that both lower wing sections were warped from mid-span to the

### Smoother drywall sanding

In the April 2007 *FineScale Modeler*, Chuck Bevill and Greg Gregg used a belt sander to smooth drywall for a diorama base. This is pretty messy and lacks fine control. Instead, use drywall sanding screens. They come in 120 and 220 grit; most measure 4" x 8". You can cut them to fit your orbital sander (use it with the sander off!) or wrap them around scrap drywall or wood for a sanding block. Or, if you plan to use the technique often, buy a sanding-screen holder. They come with a plane handle and are even available with a vacuum-cleaner hose attachment. I like this best of all, because it sucks up the dust as I sand. However, make sure your vacuum is HEPA-rated or you'll send the dust everywhere fast.

– Paul Mayer  
Steger, Ill.

wingtips. The plastic in these sections is very thin – .039" at mid-span to .018" at the tip! The usual way to correct warping is to soak the part in hot water, but I've messed up thin parts that way. So, I needed to find another method.

Ruminating on what to do, I poured myself a cup of coffee. That's when the light bulb came on. Holding one of the warped wings against the hot cup, I gently applied pressure against the bend and *voila!* the wing straightened. I taped it to my workbench to cool, then repeated the process with the opposite wing. In a minute I had fixed both parts. It's easy to do, and you get a cup of coffee or tea while you work.

– John Staworski  
Fort Walton Beach, Fla.

### Realistic tire colors

Flat black is not the most realistic color for rubber tires. I mix equal parts of flat and gloss black for a better color. For older tires, I use gloss dark gray instead of gloss black.

– Ken Lonewolf  
Charlotte, N.C.

### A new twist on cleaning

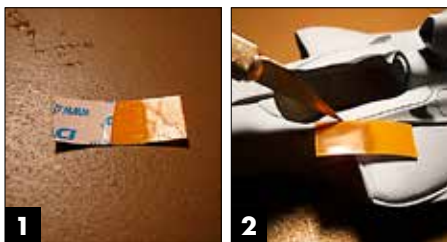
Save twist ties, the kind that come with loaves of bread – they make great airbrush cleaning tools. Peel the plastic back about ¼", leaving the wire to serve as a guide. As you push it through the airbrush, turn the tie – it cleans as it goes.

– Michael Canty  
Frankfort, Ky.

# Workbench Tips 101 IDEAS

## Scribing guide

One of the biggest problems and fears of any builder scribing panel lines is having the scriber slip. It makes more work and can destroy the piece you are working on. My solution is using thick, plastic label tape as a guide. I remove a section of backing to expose the adhesive, ensuring the tape won't move while I work. (Don't remove all of the backing; the adhesive is very strong.) I reuse a single piece of tape for several panels! A



The thick, plastic tape used in label makers is an ideal guide for panel line scribing: Expose part of the adhesive to hold the guide in place, 1, then run a scriber along the edge, 2.

little wax will remove any sticky residue left by the tape.  
– Chris Hara  
Rustburg, Va.

## Reflecting trouble

While working on a long-term project, I develop “nearsightedness” – I can't see the flaws anymore because I'm too close to the subject. To overcome this, I use a pocket mirror to look at the model. It's two-dimensional, and many of the problems I might have missed become plainly visible. I use this “effect” all the time, and it has helped me spot some embarrassing flaws before others see them.

– Jerry Geesaman  
Centreville, Md.

## Grid paper alignment

I use grid paper to get items like landing gear and wings lined up correctly on a build. Laying the parts on the sheet makes it easy to see that everything is in the right place, particularly if there is any play in the parts' locating pins.

– Tom Foti  
West Allis, Wis.

## Sharp(en)er groundwork

I have had good luck using pencil sharpener

shavings as ground cover on my dioramas. Using colored pencils in the sharpener gives you several shades of shavings. I use red, yellow, and orange for fall landscapes; various greens for spring and summer; and brown and black for winter. Blowing a mixture of salt and talcum powder across the groundwork gives winter colors a nice, frosty look.

– Richard Gaughen  
Plymouth, Mass.

## Adding rifling with lead foil

Very often, artillery kits – especially older ones – don't have rifling molded inside the barrel. I've developed an inexpensive, easy way to add this detail.

I place a straightedge at a 45-degree angle to the long side of a 2cm x 1cm rectangle of lead foil. Next, using the back side of a No. 11 hobby knife, I gently scribe a line in the foil. I add parallel grooves at scale width.

Then, I gently roll the foil around a brush handle with a diameter appropriate to the caliber of the barrel I'm detailing. I dry-fit it in the barrel, remove excess foil, and attach it with white glue. After I smooth the muzzle with fine sandpaper, the shine of each rifle and its natural twist is evident.

– Rodolfo Savoia  
Córdoba City, Argentina

## New glue great for clear parts

I've discovered a new product perfect for attaching clear parts: Power Pritt Gel (formerly Loctite Multi-Surface Adhesive Gel). It is an odorless, solvent- and PVC-free glue that sets in 15 seconds, according to its manufacturer.

Unlike the usual clear-part cements and white glues, this gel forms a firm bead along the surface to be glued. The gel holds the part in place right away. Excess wipes off easily, and the glue will not damage or haze clear plastic the way super glue can.

And, if I make a mistake, I've found I can break the seam and detach the part easily; the old glue scrapes off without leaving a residue. It's perfect for clear parts that have to stand on edge, such as World War I aircraft windscreens.

– Tom Taylor  
Zachary, Ky.

## Cheap rod alternative

Baling wire is an inexpensive alternative to precut brass rod or craft wire. Most hardware stores carry the wire in a variety of gauges. I buy it in bulk – 300' to 500' – and the cost works out to about a penny a foot.

## Pass the sand

Recently, I tried weathering with salt as described in a July 2003 *FineScale Modeler* article. The idea is, after base-coating a model, wet an area you want to appear chipped, sprinkle it with salt, and apply a top coat. When that's dry, rub away the salt to reveal the paint color underneath.

Two problems: One is scale; salt works well on large-scale models, but the grains look too big for 1/48 scale and smaller. Second, the partially dissolved salt leaves a residue on the model that affects the color.

So, I tried sand. I cleaned small amounts with water, then let the sand dry on cheese cloth. The process is the same as with salt: Wet the model, apply sand, paint, and rub away. I use different sands for different scales: Brick or silica sand is great for small scales; construction or playground sand is better for larger items.

Sand doesn't dissolve, so there's no residue to remove – and my wife doesn't go crazy looking for the salt.  
– Favian Scioscia  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

It's useful material and a great way to save a little money.

– Robert Foster  
Pensacola, Fla.

## Flying models?

Modern aircraft and vehicles sport a variety of colored wire. Finding just the right thing to represent different wires on a model can be a trial, as I discovered recently while wiring the engine on a 1/48 scale Hawker Hunter. Worn out trying to get it right, I took a break and turned to my other vice, tying flies for fishing. As I was wrapping a certain pattern I use for pike, the idea poked me in the finger. Fly-tying wire, available at any fly-fishing store, ranges in gauge from hair-thin to fairly thick, and comes in a rainbow of colors – perfect for replicating the myriad wiring found in modern vehicles.

– Brent Weaving  
Shakopee, Minn.

## Saline bottles help airbrusher

When I airbrush, I use lots of mineral spirits to thin paint and clean the brush. I like to have control over how much is dispensed and avoid drips (which always happen when I decant fluids). Empty contact-lens

saline bottles are perfect for dispensing controlled amounts of solvents cleanly. The cap allows single drops of liquid or a steady stream, and the large bottles hold ample amounts of liquid so they don't have to be refilled often. A safety note: Clearly label what is inside the bottle so nobody grabs the wrong one.

– Carlton Washburn  
Rolla, Mo.

**Drilling the perfect bomb line**

I've always found it challenging to duplicate the yellow stripe near the nose of Vietnam-era bombs. But I've discovered a better way to get them right. After painting the bombs olive drab, I carefully insert a bomb tail-first in the chuck of a variable-speed drill and gently tighten it. Using the slowest speed and a very fine brush, I apply yellow paint to the slowly rotating bomb. With a steady hand and practice, the resulting stripes resemble the markings on full-size bombs.

– John Maene  
Hawthorne, N.J.

**Unclogging super glue**

To unclog super-glue bottle tips, soak them overnight in a small container of acetone.

*Voila!* The tip is good as new.

– Peter Arakawa  
Edison, N.J.

**Paint by numbers?**

I don't get as much workbench time as I would like, so I try different things to be more efficient. To help save time, I label the parts tree with a silver marker to show what parts will be painted a particular color that night. That way, I don't have to search for the parts while I am painting and I don't miss any of the parts that need to be painted that color. When I'm finished, I paint over the silver markings to show I am done. I repeat for the next color, using the silver marker again.

– Gregory P. Tarris  
Allendale, N.J.

**Have cake and eat dust, too!**

There's nothing more annoying than dust ruining a nice paint job while it dries. I've found a great way to keep dust out: the plastic containers supermarkets sell cake in. The containers have a flat base with a clear, domed cover, and come in assorted shapes and sizes. I use contact cement to attach a sheet of aluminum foil to the base and trim it to fit; this aids in heat and light reflection. The cover snaps onto the base, so if your project sits for long periods of time and gets moved around a lot (as mine



Dust can bedevil even the best modeler, spoiling a spotless finish as it's drying. Andrew discovered that the plastic containers used to market cakes are the perfect dust cover.

usually do) you don't end up with lost or missing parts.

– Andrew Maffei  
Tehachapi, Calif.

**Placing windows with clay**

I had a problem attaching windows to my models: Every time I tried to glue one in place, it would shift and glue would get on the window. So I came up with this idea.

Put a small piece of gray modeling clay on the tip of a toothpick, press it on the center of the window, pick the window up, and glue it in place. Use another toothpick – this one without clay – to hold the window in place and keep from jostling it while you detach your clay-tipped toothpick.

– Michael Morrison  
Elk Grove Village, Ill.

**Drawing a bead on models**

Don't overlook the beading section of craft stores; I've found tools there that have modeling applications. For example, I just

picked up a set of four diamond-tipped bead reamers. Two of the reamers are long and tapered to a pinpoint, getting into tiny holes and reaming them. The other two reamers work more like countersinks. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Take a look next time you're passing a beading supply store.

– Eric Reintjes  
Palmdale, Calif.

**No-burn plastic heater**

An embossing gun is a great way to prepare plastic for bending without the risk of burning it. Scrapbookers use them to melt embossing beads. The gun is a tube-shaped device that delivers warm air in a slow-moving current. I've found it will heat plastic enough to soften it without melting it. These guns can be found with scrapbooking and rubber-stamping supplies at craft supply stores.

– Will Newton  
Austin, Texas

**Perfect decal placement**

Here's a tip for getting decals in the correct spot every time. Basically, you are going to be making a mask. Photocopy the decal instructions from the kit, enlarging them to the scale of the model. Then cut out the area of the decal on the plans, such as the wing along the edges. Next, cut out the area where the decal is indicated. Lay the copy on the model, aligning it with the edges. After that, all you have to do is put the decal on the model in the hole cut in the copy. Slide it into position below the hole and it will be in just the right spot.

– Mike Pabis  
Phoenix, Ariz.

**Unwanted CD cases are a workbench hit**

I keep a few discarded jewel cases (plastic containers for CDs and DVDs) on my workbench for a bunch of uses. After taking them apart – most of the time the hinges are broken anyway – I use the backs as trays for liquid glue, super glue, putty, and paint. They are also useful for holding small parts until I'm ready to glue them into position. I use the clear front half to hold decals while they are wet. These simple trays keep my workbench organized and clean. When I'm done, I simply toss the trays in the trash. They were headed that way to begin with – they just took a useful detour getting there.

– Steve Wellman  
Ellenton, Fla.



An unwanted compact disc case is music to Steve's ears; he can use the plastic tray as a palette for glues, putties, paint, decal solutions, and drying parts.

# Workbench Tips 101 IDEAS

## Add light, clean spraybooth

I coat the bottom and sides of my spray booth with self-adhesive white shelving paper. The paper is removable, helping to protect the spray booth interior from overspray, and the reflective white brightens the inside of the booth. I replace the paper twice a year; an \$8 roll will last about two years.

– Jesse Morgan  
Severn, Md.

## No-flat sanding sticks

Flex-I-Files are great tools for sanding curves like aircraft fuselages. But I've found that overenthusiastic or prolonged sanding can still produce an unwanted flat spot. To avoid this, I use sanding sponges available from hardware stores. They come in grits from coarse to very fine. I cut a thin strip from the sponge and super glue it to the non-sanding side of my Flex-I-File. This eliminates any chance of sanding something flat.

– Gautam Rao  
Commack, N.Y.

## Modeling hand-me-downs

Have you ever installed a resin cockpit in a state-of-the-art model? It sure looks good, doesn't it? But then what do you do with the "in-the-box" cockpit? It's a state-of-the-art kit, after all, so the cockpit looks pretty good.

Here's what I do: I use it as an "after-market" cockpit for a not so state-of-the-art model. Older models are usually accurate in shape and surface detail but often lack interior detail.

For example, you fit a Tamiya P-51D with a resin cockpit. Then you can use the Tamiya cockpit in an Otaki P-51D and dress up a Testors P-51D with the hand-me-down Otaki cockpit. (Just like when you were a kid and got a T-shirt from an older sibling!) Usually, some trimming is needed – but we are modelers!

True, this idea only works if you have several models of the same airplane in your stash. But who doesn't?

– Pablo Bauleo  
Fort Collins, Colo.

## Glass tabletop modeling

When a large glass table in my living room was damaged, I didn't have the heart to get

rid of the glass. Instead, I used it as the surface of my workbench. The glass is thick, tough, easy to clean, and I can put pictures, instructions, or anything else important under the glass so it's right there for reference whenever needed.

I also stapled a plastic apron from a science surplus store to the edge of the workbench. When I remember to wear it, small pieces fall into my lap, not on the floor. It also keeps my clothes clean and protected from a paint or thinner spill.

– Mike Danforth  
Milwaukee, Wis.

## Plastic tabletop modeling

When my parents were remodeling, they installed a countertop in my modeling area. Concerned about spilling, cutting, etc. on the nice, new counter, I cut a leftover piece of clear acrylic sheet (such as Plexiglas) to cover the counter. Small pieces of rubber at the corners prevent it from sliding.

Instructions, photos, and plans can be placed under the clear sheet so you can see them while you are working without worrying about getting glue or paint on them.

The entire work surface serves as a cutting board and mixing palette – and if it gets too gunked up, it's relatively inexpensive to purchase a new one from a local hardware store.

– Derick Zimmerman  
Bloomington, Minn.

## A scanner clearly

Anyone who uses a flatbed scanner to copy and enhance instruction sheets may get the reverse side of the sheet against their will. An easy fix: Cut a sheet of black construction paper to the size of the bed and lay it over the instructions.

The scanned image will be dark but is easily lightened with the scanner program's adjustments.

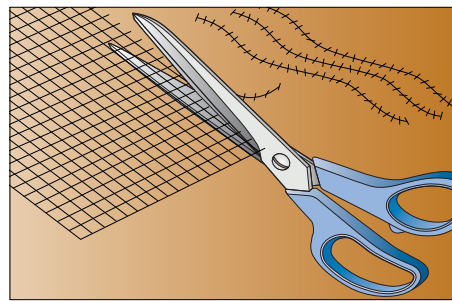
– David Erskine  
Metamora, Mich.

## Incense for tighter wiring

In *FineScale Modeler's* October 2007 article "Stretching sprue," Aaron Skinner used a glowing match to tighten stretched-sprue antennas or rigging. The extinguished matches don't provide an even heat, so you'll need a lot of matches for a model with several rigged lines.

Instead, I recommend using incense sticks (easily found at craft stores). These scented sticks light easily, hold a glowing ember, and heat up with little effort (just blow on the tip). The stick's length allows you to get into tight spots on the smallest of 1/72 scale models. Plus, they smell better. (I had been using cigarettes, but I stopped smoking several years ago.)

– Byron J. Wyss  
Fort Wayne, Ind.



Enlarged beyond scale for clarity, this drawing illustrates how Jake cuts screen-door mesh to make scale barbed wire. It's important to cut the strands apart evenly.

## From screen door to barbed wire

I've discovered a cheap way to make barbed wire: Buy a linear foot of the metal-wire mesh used for screen doors. Then, carefully cut the strands apart, bisecting the weaves as shown in the above illustration. You should end up with approximately 200 strands of 36"-long barbed wire lengths that are easy to paint or weather.

– Jake Hampton  
Citrus Heights, Calif.

## Don't blush, it's a brush

I love adding photoetched-metal details to my armor; I use it on all my models. But I've been plagued by one problem since I started using it: How to dust the model before painting without knocking off or bending those delicate parts.

A solution may be as close as the woman in your life and her makeup supplies – a blush brush. High-quality blush brushes have a large, round head with fine, soft bristles used for applying foundation and blush evenly.

These brushes work perfectly for removing dust without damaging thin parts. Look for them in the health-and-beauty department, or ask for a permanent loan next time someone you know is through with theirs.

– Jerry Geesaman  
Centreville, Md.

### Positive from negative

I use exposed print film (negatives) to simulate the cathode-ray tubes (CRTs) commonly found in modern aircraft cockpits. All I have to do is trim it to fit and glue it in place.

– Carlos Concepcion  
Fort Wayne, Ind.

### Chrome-stripping jelly

As *FineScale Modeler* Associate Editor Mark Hembree explained to Corey Forde in the April 2008 Questions & Answers column, it's always necessary to remove chrome from plated parts for glue to work. But scraping can damage parts, and it may be hard to get it all off some shapes.

Instead, I dip a small brush in a gelatinous rust remover, such as Naval Jelly, and apply it only to the area I want stripped. The jelly is a mild acid that will quickly strip off chrome plating, and the thick consistency keeps it in place just where you need it. Keep an eye on it until the plating is gone – usually just a couple minutes – then rinse it off with cold water.

This process will not damage the plastic and is just as precise as your application. For safety, be sure to wear eye protection and gloves.

– Bob Hemphill  
Leesville, La.

### Scaly modeling?

If you're looking for interesting diorama items, check out the lizard habitats at your local pet store. These terrarium items look like rock but are made from a sturdy foam that can be cut with a saw, and they usually feature nooks and crannies that can give a diorama character. I add foliage, sand, and dirt for added realism. Just be sure to wash the items with dish detergent to get rid of the oily film.

– Leo Limuaco  
Las Vegas, Nev.

### Weathering before decals

I build mostly 1/48 scale World War II aircraft. Recently, I've changed the stage in construction at which I add weathering pastels. Now, I apply them after the camouflage but before decaling and clear coats.

Most of the paints I use for military models are flats, a perfect base for applying pastels. After highlighting panel lines and adding sun fading and exhaust stains, I seal the pastels with clear gloss in preparation for decaling. When the decals are dry, I use the pastels on the decals to finish weathering, then seal the model with a final flat or semigloss clear coat.

By applying most of the weathering prior to decaling, I can try different techniques or effects. Mess-ups are easier to fix without decals being involved.

– Jonathan Prestidge  
Elizabethtown, Pa.

### Adding wood texture with stain

Instead of using decals or dry-brushing, I've developed a simple two-step method to produce realistic wood grain on plastic.

First, apply a base coat of flat tan or brown enamel, brushing in the direction of the wood grain. (The shade of brown you use helps determine the base color of the wood you are trying to replicate: For example, add a little yellow for pine and raw wood, or a little red for mahogany and darker woods.) You want ridges, so don't worry about a smooth finish; in fact, brushing as the paint dries will generate more texture.

After the paint is touch-dry, liberally apply an oil-based wood stain, such as Minwax, with a stiff brush. Be sure to follow the grain of the wood, just as if you were staining real wood. After a couple minutes, the stain will begin to soak into the paint. Now, with a reasonably firm touch, press the brush into the paint and stain to create more small ridges and grain. The stain will settle in the valleys, leaving paint exposed on the ridges. Don't brush over it after this or you'll mix the paint and stain, defeating the purpose; let your eyes be your guide. As the piece dries, the ridges will level out and leave a flat surface with visible grain.

The color of the stain you use will affect the final color of the piece. The darker the stain as compared to the base coat, the greater the contrast. The combinations of base and stain colors are almost limitless, so you can create any type of wood you want.

The only drawback to this technique is that it takes a couple of days for the paint/stain mix to dry – patience is the watchword. Once dry, the piece will have a uniform gloss or semigloss that replicates varnished or polished wood. You can use an ultrafine-tip black permanent marker to create knots or to accentuate grain. And, you can overspray with a clear sealant, from flat to high gloss, to achieve the final finish you desire.

– Lance Bentley  
Cambridge, N.Y.

### Welding supplies a source for bits

In the "Questions & Answers" column of the December 2007 *FineScale Modeler*, Cody Riley mentioned he ordered a pinviser



In his quest for true grit, modeler David Horn took a healthy dose of his wife's advice and relabeled the compartments of a pill organizer according to sandpaper grade.

### Sanding grit du jour

When using sandpaper for my models, I cut the sheets into small, easy-to-use sections. The problem is figuring out what grit the squares are, because the sections are too small to show the printed number on the back.

My wife came to the rescue, suggesting I use one of those large weekly pill containers, the kind with a compartment for each day. I cut the front off the compartment and put a grit label on the inside of the lids. Now I know exactly where to find the grit I need!

– David Horn  
Tulsa, Okla.

that didn't come with any pins or bits. Here's another source: Go to a store that carries welding supplies and get a tip cleaner. It looks like a pinviser and comes with a bunch of small bits for cleaning cutting-torch and brazing tips. Mine cost about \$13. Some of the bits are very tiny, perfect for drilling small holes. They also sell a different type of tip cleaner comprising many small, round files. These are great for cleaning drilled holes and making gun barrels round.

– Christopher Holmes  
Hancock, Maine

### Don't cross the tubs!

I suspect the most common reason epoxy putties go bad is cross-contamination of the "A" and "B" parts during storage. I've read about storing the unused putty in a freezer or sealed container, but I've kept mine fresh without any special storage ideas.

My putty of choice is Aves Apoxie Sculpt. I keep it at my workbench, and I've had 3 pounds of it for as many years.

Here's what I do: I never dip straight



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from the tubs by hand, which prevents “B” residue on my hands from getting into the “A” container and vice-versa. I have two cheap, plastic-handled butter knives – one labeled A, the other B – and I use each knife only in its corresponding tub. I grab the putty from the tip of each knife for mixing in my hands. This way, the knives never come into contact with one another. The putty residue on each knife is still moist after all this time. Having never been cleaned, they are testimonial evidence in my cross-contamination argument.

I have similarly marked sets of knives for the other epoxy putties I use every now and then, and, like the Aves, they’re still moist and ready to go – and they’re even older.

Give this method a shot and you’ll find the life of your putties will be dramatically extended.

– Kenny Haverly  
Bardstown, Ky.

## Falling water? That’s a wrap!

This is the technique I use to create water-fall effects for a diorama:

First, I shape and paint the flat areas of water, such as the pool at the top and the “splash pool” at the bottom of the falls. I prefer doing this with an airbrush, but you may use whatever method you like.

While the paint is still wet, I loosely drape clear plastic wrap between the two pools. Once dry, the paint holds both ends of the plastic drape in place. If I plan to have rocks protrude through the falls, I poke them through the plastic now.

I airbrush the clear drape using various stripes of blue and white. Then I pour several thin layers of clear resin (I prefer Envirotex Pour-On Finish) over the draped plastic, allowing each coat to fall naturally and dry before placing the next coat. I add thin wisps of white cotton stretched from top to bottom to replicate foam spray, then coat with more resin. To finish, I airbrush and hand-paint details.

You can make both small and great waterfalls this way, and they all look wonderfully realistic!

– Keith Magee  
Plano, Texas

## Closed-circuit modeling

As I get older, it gets harder to see small parts such as 1/35 scale individual track

links. But I’ve developed a nifty solution.

I hooked my video camera up to the television set I keep next to my workbench and was rewarded with a 20” close-up of my work – a better view than I can get using magnifiers. It took a bit of practice looking away from my hands while working, but it sure helps.

– Thurman Wilson  
Bristol, Va.

## Wall-patch model base

For a quick and easy base for a figure, vignette, or even 1/48 scale vehicles, try a wall-patch disk. These are self-adhesive plastic disks used to prevent or cover damage caused by a doorknob hitting a wall. They are available in at least two sizes: just under 5” diameter and just over 3” diameter. They can be painted and have a pebble-grain finish, so washes or dry-brushing quickly bring out texture and detail. They can even be attached to a finished wooden base for a more formal look. You can find these disks at hardware and home improvement stores.

– Rob Blair  
Riverton, Utah

## Catching falling parts

To prevent losing parts when they inevitably fall off my table, I place a plastic water-heater pan under my workbench. (These large pans fit under water heaters as a guard

## The mask of foil

Aluminum kitchen foil is a useful masking medium that’s impermeable to most paint, flexible enough to mask complex curves, and rigid enough to hold its own shape.

I have often used foil to mask the lower hull and tracks of armored vehicles while airbrushing the upper hull. I can even slide a piece of foil under equipment stowed on a vehicle, making it easy to brush-paint all those shovels and jacks.

I use thin masking tape to hold the edge of the foil in place around the edges; the foil does its job without leaving adhesive residue, such as the sticky stuff masking tape can leave behind.

Finally, aluminum foil is relatively inexpensive – just a dollar or two buys a 75-square-foot roll, making it ideal for budget-conscious modelers.

– Shawn Merrell  
Austin, Texas

against leaks.) When a part goes AWOL, it lands in the pan and is easily found. These pans are available at hardware and home improvement stores.

– Nathan Pitts  
Fort Worth, Texas

## Pen mightier than a toothpick?

I use a calligraphy nib attached to aluminum tubing to apply Tenax or other liquid glue. Not only does the glue flow like ink out of the “pen,” but I can reach hard-to-get-at spots and put the glue exactly where I want it. Now, I keep a couple of different nibs at my desk. You can find them at specialty pen and stationery stores.

– Bob Browne  
Waterloo, Iowa

## Syringe paint saver

When I need to keep an important oil-paint mix handy, I store it in a 1cm<sup>3</sup> syringe with a lid. I have a favorite mix that has been in a syringe for almost two years and is still good.

– Marc van Megroot  
Lewedorp, Netherlands

## Rubber-band tie-downs

I use rubber bands to strap jerry cans, tarps, and other stowage on tanks or other vehicles. I paint a piece of appropriately thick rubber band, then attach one end to the model with a little super glue. After the glue dries, I pull the band across the stowed item and glue the other end in place.

– Ross Black  
Shelby, Ala.

## Annoying security tag no more

I found a great source for thin, shiny metal. When you buy a CD or DVD, there is usually a plastic security tag inside the case (often underneath the disc). Slice open the plastic and you’ll find several very thin sheets of metallic foil, sometimes with two different finishes. (Be careful getting them out.) I’ve used them for various metallic and mirrored finishes.

– Vance Crozier  
Rothesay, New Brunswick, Canada

## Flattening solder for belts

I use a round-handled hobby knife like a rolling pin to flatten small-gauge solder. It makes great seat belts and is very realistic once painted and installed. With practice, you can even thread photoetched-metal buckles with the stuff.

– Ryan Harden  
Gainesville, Fla.

### Sealing nose weight

Leery of using super glue to secure nose ballast, I tried GE XST Paintable Formula Silicon II, a household caulk. After adding the weight and the caulk (the applicator's long nozzle makes it easy to place), I leave it overnight to set. The weights stay put, and the product doesn't warp or attack the plastic.

– Dennis Rusinovich  
 Syosset, N.Y.

### Purr-fect details

Need a whip antenna? What material tapers to a fine point, comes in a variety of hues and lengths, can be painted, and costs nothing (providing you have access to a cat)?

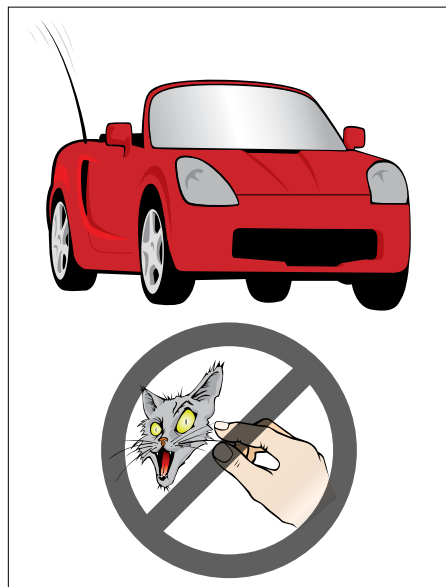
Cat whiskers.

They're great for armor, 1/24 scale cars and trucks, even ship models. All you need to do is drill a hole the size of the whisker's base, add a dab of super glue, and drop in the whisker. They can be trimmed to any length desired, and are so naturally tapered that I've found the last 1/2" works great on 1/700 scale ships.

A word of caution: Don't try to remove whiskers from cats. They generally don't like having them pulled out, and they'll express their displeasure in no uncertain way.

I have two felines at home, so I find whiskers on the floor and furniture all the time. I collect them and keep a supply at my hobby desk.

– Greg Solomon  
 Anchorage, Alaska



Pet whiskers are a perfect material to add antennas to models (top). Collect previously shed whiskers; do not go to the source (bottom).



Parafilm M is a great way to cover an airbrush cup to prevent sloshes and spills.

### Masking film seals airbrush cup

Parafilm M is one of those products that should be in every hobby room. Besides masking, I use it to seal my airbrush cup while painting. This has two advantages. First, it makes airbrush cleaning easier, as the paint does not dry inside the cup nearly as fast as when it's open to the outside air. Secondly, it reduces the rate at which thinners and solvents evaporate from your paint; thus, your thinner-to-paint ratio remains constant throughout your airbrushing session. You should prick the Parafilm with the tip of a hobby knife to prevent a vacuum from forming and to reduce paint flow while you work.

– Christopher Baltrinic  
 Toledo, Ohio

### The dog days of modeling

For many years, I have used my dog's dropped snout whiskers as whip antennas for aircraft or armor kits. The whisker has a natural curve to it and is thick at the follicle end, making it easy to dab with super glue. Dog whiskers look great on kits of different scales and eliminate the need to stretch sprue. Like their original mount, they are always lying around. Don't hurt your dog – and show your gratitude with a snack.

– Fred Zayas  
 Enterprise, Ala.

### Clear canopy and fresh breath

In the March 2008 *FineScale Modeler*, a reader asked how to remove super glue fogging from clear parts. Associate Editor Mark Hembree cited a reader who buffs out blemishes with rubbing alcohol. I haven't tried that, but I have used toothpaste – the regular paste, not a gel – and it also works well. I put a small dot on a cotton swab and rub it over the fogged area. Then I rinse the part in water and give it a final polish with a dry piece of old T-shirt.

– John Krebs  
 Adams, Wis.

### Starve the carpet monster

Are you tired of feeding the carpet monster? An old, oversize, button-down shirt makes a handy work apron. Originally, I draped it across my lap with the collar tucked against my waist, but I've found a string or belt threaded through the button-down collar helps if you get up often. Small parts land in my lap, and the long sleeves are good for cleaning brushes. It looks a bit silly, but so does crawling around on the

floor with a mini-vacuum and flashlight.

– Donn DeBoer  
 Grand Blanc, Mich.

### Son of starving carpet monster

To stop parts from falling on the floor, I wear an apron and Velcro the bottom of it to my workbench. It serves as a catch-all across my lap and to either side.

It's easy: Attach one side of a Velcro strip to the underside of your workbench about two inches from the edge. Then, sew the other half of the Velcro to the apron's hem. (You can also get iron-on Velcro at a craft or sewing store.) Don the apron, squeeze the Velcro together, and you're ready to model.

Attaching the apron at the bottom gives you plenty of slack. If you drop a part, pull back from your workbench and the catch-all will lift up and present the part.

– David Corvino  
 Summerville, S.C.

### Electrical-tape putty masks

I build "Star Trek" models, and when I use putty for gap- and window-filling or bodywork, the putty gets in places I'd rather it didn't. It is nearly impossible to remove all the putty from cracks and crevices.

My simple solution: Use premium electrical tape as a mask. I put the tape on either side of the area I want to fill, then sand the filler down until the black tape shows. Then, I peel away the tape and sand the putty flush with the model's surface.

Two important tips: Don't use 3M painter's or modeling-specific masking; they don't come off cleanly after they've been covered in putty. Use only premium

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electrical tape – it's more expensive but it stays put better than the cheap stuff and doesn't leave sticky residue.

– Shawn O'Halloran  
Las Vegas, Nev.

## On-track with straight pins

When assembling cast-metal track links, I use straight pins instead of the wire supplied with the tracks. Straight pins come in various lengths, diameters, and head sizes, so shop around to find exactly what you need. Simply cut the pins to length and insert them between the links. If you like, reduce the size of the head or file it flat for a more-realistic appearance.

– Jon Harrison  
Nekoosa, Wis.

## Painting is for the birds

I use feathers instead of fine paintbrushes. I have a few birds at home, and when they molt I pick up the feathers. If the end of the feather is good, I wipe it clean and dip it in paint. After the feather gets worn out or dirty, I throw it out and pick up a new one.

– Michael Grochola  
Bridgeview, Ill.

## Spackling Zimmerit

For realistic, easy-to-make Zimmerit, try Elmer's Redi-Spack acrylic latex spackle compound. I add a few drops of water to a

couple of spoonfuls, spread the spackle over the tank's hull with a razor blade or plastic knife, and sculpt the Zimmerit pattern with a flathead screwdriver. You could use a purpose-made comb, rake, or stamp, too.

– Robert Worley  
Modesto, Calif.

## Hot glue filler

Instead of filling hollow parts in vinyl kits with plaster or expanding foam, I use hot glue sticks. After heating, I pour the glue into the cavity; it instantly fills, and it's lightweight, too. Another advantage: If you have a misshapen part, fill the interior with glue; while it is hot, the vinyl will soften enough that you can bend it back to shape and hold it until the glue cools. The vinyl will hold the new shape after cooling.

– Brad Hair  
Broken Arrow, Okla.

## Pop tops for paint bottles

Whenever I free a stuck lid from a bottle of Testors paint, I replace it with a plastic cap from a soda bottle. They fit, they're easy to find and, if they get stuck, they come off easily under hot water. Plus, they aren't distorted by using vise grips on them.

– Matt Yesenczki  
Wheeling, W.Va.

## Long-term memory aid

If I set a project aside for weeks, I have a tough time remembering what colors I used the first time and matching them exactly. (I have dozens of grays and browns in my stash from four different manufacturers!) So, as I work on a model, I make a note on the instruction sheet of the paints used,

recording the brand, color, and number next to the color chart.

Now I always know which bottle of paint to use, no matter how long a hiatus I may have taken.

– Bill Michaels  
Acton, Mass.

## Handle by heat

To hold small or tricky, oddly shaped parts while painting, I melt one end of a length of sprue (a candle works well for that), then press the soft end against the back of the part and let it cool. After painting, I simply snap the part from the sprue and attach it to the model.

– Michael Paquette  
Augusta, Maine

## Put down with care

I hate putting a painted model down on my workbench while I'm working on it. No matter how careful I am, the paint gets damaged or picks something up.

The solution is simple: bubble wrap! With the bubble portion down (I like the wrap with smaller bubbles), I can lay the model down and do the work without fearing what I'll see when I pick it up.

– Michael Mendoza  
New Bedford, Mass.

## Removing air bubbles from under decals

There's nothing worse than discovering an air bubble under a decal after applying it. I use Tamiya and Vallejo acrylic paints, and I have a method that works well to get rid of bubbles.

First, I poke tiny holes in the air pocket with the tip of a very sharp hobby knife. (A fine needle will work as well).

Then, I dab acrylic thinner over the hole. The thinner gets sucked under the decal, dissolves the paint a little, and makes the hole disappear. Go easy, though: flooding the decal with thinner may cause it to shrivel.

I've also discovered that brushing thinner over the surface before adding a decal softens the paint underneath, better binding the decal to the surface. It really makes the marking look painted-on.

– Roger Jang  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

## Sharp(ie) window trim

I've discovered a new technique for adding the black rubber trim around window glass on model cars.

First, using a black Micron-brand ink pen, carefully follow the engraved lines

## Hold that part with floral foam

It can be tricky to figure out how to hold parts, especially smaller items, while you're painting them or while they're drying. My simple solution involves toothpicks, sticky tack, and floral foam.

I like sticky tack – an adhesive, clay-like substance designed to hold posters on walls – for bigger bits. I apply a small wad to the back of the part, then insert a toothpick, cotton swab stick, or clothespin to serve as a handle.

For tiny parts without a "back," such as gear-shift levers, I put a small drop of super glue on the bottom, then touch it to a toothpick soaked in accelerator. The thin, brittle glue is easy to snap apart when it's time to install the piece.

After painting, I push the toothpick or clothespin handle into a block of floral foam (available at art-supply and craft stores). The foam is soft enough to conform to the shape of the handle, but firm enough to support it, even with larger, heavier parts attached. If you use floral foam designed to absorb water, spritzing it will trap dust away from the model.

I even use the foam to hold parts in the spray booth during painting. When one side gets too holey, a 180-degree flip reveals a brand new piece!

– John Fincher  
Seattle, Wash.

around windows. After the line is drawn, I use a black Sharpie permanent marker and carefully fill in the trim. Then, I apply mist coats of clear gloss on the model to seal in the ink. The key is to slowly build up the overcoats; if you use too much, the ink will run.

The result is perfect trim around windows. It's the easiest, most controllable way I have found to do it.

– Steve Tischler  
Beaverton, Ore.

### Sharp(ie) detail painting

When it comes to painting fine lines, such as the markings on an aircraft carrier flight deck, my hands are way too shaky!

My daughter found a wonderful solution for this problem at her college book store: Sharpie Paint Markers. They're filled with either water- or oil-based paint and are available with four different tips ranging from fine to extra bold. The choice of colors is expansive, including black, silver, and even white.

I've used them over Model Master enamels and find they work great and are easy for me to control. So, if you're shaky like me, try one out.

They cost around \$3 each and are available at most office- and art-supply stores.  
– William Monk  
Pelahatchie, Miss.

### Paint filtering for good airbrushing

Tired of having your paint full of lumps or other impurities when airbrushing? Try this: Take the cap off a child's eardrop bottle and remove the tube and rubber bubble. Next, cut a 1½" square from an old pair of nylon hose and stretch it across the bottom of the lid. Use the dropper to wet the nylon with the appropriate thinner – this makes the paint flow through it better. Now it's easy to pour paint through the nylon and mix it with thinner to get the correct consistency for painting.

This has saved me a lot of frustration with blockages, making cleaning the airbrush easier. A small warning, though: Don't use your significant other's good nylons or you won't hear the end of it for some time!

– Kenneth Uffelman  
Fresno, Calif.

### Steel-wool shine

While cleaning off a little overspray on a Stuka, I tried OOO-grade steel wool. Using a light buffing motion, I achieved the finish that I wanted for the whole model; the surfaces looked like metal with flat



It took Aleksander only 20 minutes to mask this 1/48 scale Supermarine Spitfire using sticky-tack noodles and clear plastic. The secret is a very sharp knife.

### Sticky tack + clear plastic = easy mask

Masking complex camouflage can be difficult. But I've discovered a technique which is easy and almost fool-proof.

After airbrushing the first color, I use thin rolls of sticky tack (such as Blu-Tack) to outline the color separations, laying this "spaghetti" on the surface of the model and pressing just hard enough for it to stick. Then I take thin, clear plastic, such as the side of a sandwich bag, and stick it on the tack noodles.

Using a sharp knife, I cut the foil along the middle of the sticky tack, removing the sections to be painted. Because of the plastic's transparency, it is easy to cut exact shapes.

– Aleksander Gorski  
Łódź, Poland

paint on them. (I'm sure if I apply silver as a base coat, the rivets and raised panel lines will shine through a bit on my next project.) The decals went down as if they were on a coat of Pledge Future floor polish. It took about 10 minutes and allowed me to skip one cycle of airbrush cleanup and drying time. Note: Do this before you apply decals or you will destroy them! A refrigerator magnet instantly removes residual steel-wool threads and fuzz.

– Sgt. Jonathan A. Wimsatt  
Kaiserslautern, Germany

### One slick mask

Fuel-tank tips and other circles on pointed or conical parts can be masked easily using Teflon tape, also known as plumber's thread-seal tape. The thin, pliable material can be stretched to make circles on nose cones, props, and other shapes. It's a cheap,

effective solution to a difficult problem.

– Rod Barnett  
Fort Collins, Colo.

### Perfect airbrush cleaner

In my local pharmacy, I noticed Compact Interdental brushes from Oral-B; they are excellent for cleaning out my airbrush. They have a very small, pivoting bottle-brush head, come in packs of two, are inexpensive, and reusable. They appear resistant to most thinners and paints; lacquer and enamel thinners have not affected them at all. They may also be useful for cleaning dust out of panel lines.

– Richard Smith  
Leopold, Victoria, Australia

### Clean baby, clean airbrush, clean air

Recently my wife emptied a plastic container of baby wipes (any brand should work) and was about to discard it. I noticed that the top, with its soft-plastic, star-shaped opening, is just big enough to insert the nozzle of an airbrush. The body of the container is waterproof and resistant to solvents and paint. Using this container to spray cleaning blasts of solvents helps me clean my airbrush without releasing atomized solvents into the environment.

– P.J. Theodor  
North Port, Fla.

### Get the lead out

Next time you're at the dentist, ask about the lead foil that comes in X-ray film packages. Each piece is 3cm x 4cm (1 ¼" x 1 ⅝"), and 40 of them make a stack 2.5mm (0.1") thick that weighs around 28 grams (1 oz.). Individual pieces of the foil can be bur-nished, bent, embossed, cut with scissors, painted, and attached with super glue to make clothing, tarps, flags, sheet metal, and all sorts of things in all the popular scales.

You can also use pieces to weight aircraft noses: Just fill available cavities (pun intended, I'm a dentist) by packing the foil in with a brush handle. Dentists save the stuff to recycle, so it shouldn't be a big deal to get a handful for an adequate supply until your next checkup.

– Jay Zvolanek  
Downers Grove, Ill.

### Contact-paper masking

Masking aircraft canopies can make or break a model. After trying different methods and materials, I've settled on clear contact paper – the kind used for covering books – as the perfect tool.

I cut off the amount needed for each

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section of the canopy, peel away the backing, and stick it in place. Then, I carefully cut around the canopy frame (easy to do with the clear material) and ensure no edges are sticking up. Once the canopy is painted, I lift the edge and peel it off.

– Russell Moore

Mount Isa, Queensland, Australia

## Lint-roller lost-part recovery

It seems no matter how hard I try to avoid it, I always drop at least one part on the floor during a build. Some of the parts are quite small and quickly bounce out of sight. I've wasted a lot of precious modeling time on all fours, rubbing my hand slowly across the floor hoping to feel the elusive part.

Then I hit upon the idea of using a disposable lint roller – the kind with peel-off tacky sheets, used to remove fuzz from clothes or furniture. Lint rollers are available in the laundry- or cleaning-supply sections of most grocery stores. When I roll the lint remover across the floor, it quickly picks up the stray item.

– Todd Brown

Chippewa Lake, Ohio

## Quick meal yields handy washing tub for parts

I've discovered a nice bonus in Healthy Choice Café Steamers frozen meals – a cool tray for washing parts.

The two-part tray features a main bowl and a lift-out inner basket that is vented to allow the food to cook. After filling the

bowl about halfway with warm soapy water, I put the parts in the basket and the basket in the bowl. The vents allow water to cover the parts, but the parts can't easily slip through the holes. Pick up the basket, let the soapy water run out, then rinse the parts in the basket under the faucet.

The bowls can be used for parts washing, paint stripping, and there are lots of other possibilities. The meals cost less than \$3 each at my local grocery store.

– Rich Dula

Jackson, Mich.



**Healthy Choice Café Steamers come in a two-part cooking bowl that is perfect for washing and rinsing parts to remove oils and mold-release agents from parts. Rich used one here to wash the components of a resin spaceship.**

## New uses for old floppies

Instead of throwing out antiquated 3.5" diskettes from a bygone era of computer media, I've found them to be a source for a lot of good scratchbuilding materials.

Once the diskette is dismantled, the case provides pliable plastic that can be cut to various shapes. In addition, there is a protective fabric cover for the magnetic disc inside the case which can be easily separated and utilized for a number of things, such as the fabric lining inside early helicopters like the UH-1.

– Robert Bettinger

Albuquerque, N.M.

## Easy epoxy mixer/applicator

Mixing epoxy? Deposit equal parts of hardener and resin in one corner of a plastic sandwich bag. Squeeze the excess air out of the bag, then twist the corner to seal the section with the epoxy mixture. Knead the mixture between your thumb and index finger until you feel it getting warm. Snip off a small corner of the bag and you have an applicator that works just like a pastry bag used for cake decorating.

– William Albertson

Burchville, Mich.

## Shave and a clean model

Getting rid of dust on models without damaging delicate detail can be difficult.

Try a shaving brush – yes, the thing you use to give your mug a hot lather before the blade! After the brush has been used for a bit, the bristles get nice and soft and they flow through very tiny parts without breaking them. The only thing they catch is the dust! Of course, you still have to be gentle, but the dust will go, not the details you have worked so hard to capture.

One word of warning: Never be tempted to use it wet – only nice and dry.

– Stephen Cave

East Barre, Vt.

## Alcohol and Mr. Surfacer = smooth

Mr. Surfacer is a great product for filling seams, especially in hard-to-reach places. Simply apply Mr. Surfacer with a small brush or toothpick. Wait a bit, then gently rub the area with cotton swabs dipped in 91 percent isopropyl alcohol. The alcohol will dissolve the top layer of Mr. Surfacer. Then, you can simply wipe it away. If the filler has been dry a while, be patient; the alcohol may take a few moments to dissolve it. On especially tough seams, I usually need to apply it a couple of times.

– Scott Espin

Reno, Nev.

## A seal of approval for details

In the ongoing search for suitable and inexpensive materials for use in model detailing, consider the safety seal that covers the mouths of some vitamin and pill bottles. These “punch-through” seals consist of plastic sheet bonded to a layer of very thin metallic foil. This laminate is thicker than kitchen-grade foil and strong enough to be cut into very narrow strips and other delicate shapes that won't tear. Like foil, the laminate is flexible and retains its shape once formed.

– Paul Marose

Juneau, Wis.

## Cutting mat protector

To save my self-healing cutting mat from blobs of super glue, cement, and paint, I tape a piece of wax paper to the surface. When the wax paper is sliced, glued and painted up, I tear it off and replace with a fresh piece.

– Sean Davis

Metaline Falls, Wash.

## Flower power detailing

In my short career in the flower business, I discovered a great modeling tool: floral tape.

Used to wrap stems for corsages and the like, this waterproof tape is available in a rainbow of colors. It's glossy on the roll, but stretch it and the finish goes flat. I've used floral tape for ropes, tie downs, and straps. I've also upholstered seats, covered floors, wrapped gun barrels and roll cages, and even shredded it for camouflage. Most of the models I've built have floral tape on or in them.

– Paul Montagnon

Cheshire, Conn.

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