

The Speed of Response

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The speed at which one is required to respond in various forms of a) long-distance communication, and b) woodworking.

I have been thinking about the various forms of long-distance **communication** that are in common use, such as email, telephone, and snail mail, and in particular the length of time each gives one to respond to what the other person says. With traditional *postal correspondence* one has ample response time — months if so wished — and this I think gives letters a distinctly ‘thought about’ tone. The same is true, to a lesser extent, with *email*: although it is easy to quickly rap out a reply to someone and send it without really thinking, there is still the *opportunity* for leisurely consideration of what you want to say, over perhaps a couple of days. This is not true with the *telephone* — it is at the extreme end of this ‘speed of response’ continuum and necessitates a faster and less considered reply than even a face to face conversation. Silence just doesn’t work on the ‘phone, and can’t play the important role of reflection and consideration that it does in all other forms of long-distance communication — including postal and electronic mail.

There is a parallel between this increasing response time in communication and the time that one has when working with **wood** to respond to the tools, materials and workshop environment. Take the saw as an example: a *portable circular saw* can give you very little time indeed to change your grip, stance or in some other way avoid being hurt — its a bit like a ‘phone; a *table saw* is more forgiving because the table, blade, fence(s) and work-piece are all (hopefully) fixed in their positions or trajectories and are therefore more predictable, but there is still the opportunity for rashness and accidents — similar to email one might say; the *handsaw* is the slowest of the saws and as such gives the user much more time to respond to the work-piece moving, or an unseen knot that puts the saw off a bit, or any of a thousand other things that necessitate a response to the timber or tools — I would liken using a handsaw to sitting down and spending an hour or so writing a letter, knowing that far from being a ‘waste’ of time it is just *more* time spent being close to a dear friend.