Using the Film Splicer

There seems to be a recurring confusion about the use of Revis type film splicers. I have many requests each semester to repair splicers that aren’t broken, or to sharpen blades that don’t need sharpening. Because splicers look so simple, most people are surprised to learn that there’s actually a trick to using one properly. Here’s how: Don’t pound it. For some reason, no matter who is teaching film production, the students seem to think the way to cut is by slapping or pounding the cutting arm down onto the film super-quick. Not so. In fact, you stand a very good chance of damaging your film and the splicer when you do this. Cutting should be done with a slow and gentle movement. A splicer works like scissors. The top steel blade must meet the bottom steel blade in a shearing motion—exactly the way scissors do. How well a splicer works is more a function of how well the blades are aligned rather than how sharp they are. When you pound your cutting arm, you’re beating the arm and upper blade out of adjustment, which makes your splicer less effective with every cut. Gently press the cutting arm down, applying a slightly diagonal pressure, so that the two steel blades cut your film just like a pair of scissors. Practice this with some slug or other throwaway film until you can make consistently clean cuts. Razor blades are bad. If you’re using a basic splicing block, like those found on the rewind tables, then razor blades are OK, but NEVER use them on a Revis splicer. The brass piece next to the bottom blade is a pressure plate, which is designed to move when pressed. If you cut your film with a razor blade, you grind little bits of that brass plate. You can see evidence of this on some of our splicers, where the brass has been chewed up over time. The little shards of brass have to go somewhere when you cut them loose. Guess where they go… some of them go into the space between the pressure plate and the bottom blade, gumming up the works and rendering your splicer useless. The rest of them go onto your film, where they adhere and scratch, scratch, scratch. Is that really what you want for your film that you’ve spent so much time and money working on?

If you are having difficulty cutting splicing tape, use the razor arm. If that razor blade is not sharp, return the splicer to checkout so we can replace the razor blade.

If you’re having trouble with a splicer, see if you can exchange it for another one. Make sure to report your trouble to the checkout staff, or contact Derek Young at (512) 471-7990 or djy@mail.utexas.edu so we can make sure any problems are fixed.