

The \$64,000 Question...Do I get Fixed-Tip Handpieces or Interchangeable Tips?

By Nedra Denison

A: This is one of the most commonly asked questions. I recommend & sell the Razertip fixed-tip pens (with few exceptions). For the most part, my advice is to use fixed-tip pens for the tip styles you will use a lot. Fixed-tip pens allow you to work with your fingers closer to the work surface giving you better control. If you are going to use Razertip's interchangeable tips you must use them with Razertip's BPH pen. The BPH pens are generally the coolest-operating pens available. If you have sensitive fingers or work at high heat settings you may find the BPH pens to be your best choice if you decide to use Interchangeable tips.

If you plan on using this pen (or other similar handpieces that accommodate Interchangeable tips & will be changing tips frequently it is a good idea to have at least 2 pens because changing tips on a hot pen is no fun. If you have 2 pens/handpieces you won't need to change tips as often. Personally, I think if you are going to do that you might as well just buy fixed-tip handpieces because most pyrographer's only use 3 tip styles for general burning. This information regarding the use of interchangeable tips applies to every brand of burner that offers the option of interchangeable tips.

One of the reasons I always recommend fixed tip over Interchangeable tips is that Fixed-tip pens perform better because they are soldered into the handpiece, so the tip is secure & will not loosen (like Interchangeable tips can) up while working with it plus you will get more even heat distribution. You will also notice more fluctuation in the heat as you have more connections between the burner to the tip (such as using an adaptor in addition to the cord & an interchangeable tip). My biggest pet peeve about them is that they are a pain in the neck to change & the tip is farther away from the grip so you don't have the control over the burn...I'll explain more about this below.

Before you read all the key factors below look at the photo. The 3-photo's starting from the left are: TRUEArt "hot pen" style handpiece with an interchangeable tip, the middle one is a Razertip BPH handpiece with an interchangeable tip & the one on the right is a Razertip fixed-tip handpiece. Notice that the grips are all lined up evenly so you can see the differences in the distance between the tip & your handpiece grip. This grip is where you will be holding the handpiece. You can see that both handpieces with interchangeable tips put your tip farther away from your grip but the TRUEArt puts your tip the farthest away. Overall, most brands using interchangeable tips on traditional handpieces (not "hot pens") will be about the same distance as the Razertip interchangeable tip on the BPH handpiece. The "hot pen" styles of handpieces such as TRUEArt, Colwood Olympiad & Burnmaster's will have the tip farther away from the grip.

You might ask what is the significance of how far the tip is from your grip. Well, when doing fine detail work most people prefer to have their hand closer to the tip. For one thing it is more comfortable for your hand & wrist, but it also gives you the ability to control the details of your burning better, especially when you are doing very fine detail work. It's kind of like putting a death grip on the handpiece but the bottom line is that you do have better control of your work. When I was testing the TRUEArt I found it very uncomfortable trying to do my shading because my wrist was at a bad angle to compensate for the distance of the tip from my grip. I also had difficulty keeping my strokes even because of my inability to control the movement. My wrist is more relaxed (which means it's less stressed) when my tip is closer to my grip on the handpiece.

In a nutshell...here's the key factors to consider between interchangeable tips vs fixed-tip handpieces:

1. Fixed-tip pens operate cooler than an interchangeable-tip pen. This is true for all brands, not just Razertip.
2. Fixed-tip pens conduct heat better & will give you more consistent burns
3. Interchangeable tips lose heat more than fixed tips.
4. Fixed-tip pens do not lose heat as fast pens with interchangeable & heat recovery is faster with fixed-tip pens. The bottom line is that you will have greater heat recovery, faster cooling & the handpiece will stay cooler in your hand with Fixed-Tip Pens.



5. Because the fixed-tips are welded into the handpiece, they provide better control for more precise burning.
6. If you are heavy handed or tend to use pressure you will find using fixed-tip handpieces work better, especially the HD(Heavy-Duty) version. Interchangeable tips (& standard handpieces) cannot take the punishment that the HD fixed-tip handpieces can.
7. Interchangeable-tips are designed primarily for intermittent or short-term use such as carvers using tips to enhance their carvings. They require regular maintenance to work effectively. Every 6-8 hours of use (or more if the pen is malfunctioning) the wire tip should be removed, cleaned with steel wool or Scotchbrite pads, bent at the back of each tip post, & re-inserted so they fit as snug as possible. If your pen is getting hot at the front, it's almost always from a loose or dirty tip connection.
8. Fixed-tip handpieces are much better for those who burn for longer periods of time.
9. Interchangeable tips are inconvenient to change...& you must wait until it cools down to change the tips! Fixed-tip handpieces just pop on & off quickly & you don't have to wait for the tip to cool.
10. A non-welded tip (interchangeable tip) can have bad intermittent conductive properties between the nichrome tip & the brass carrier. These conditions are high heat, electricity, & two dissimilar metal alloys (a very bad combination for preventing corrosion). Although some brands have friction fitted "brass to brass" connectors, they too will eventually suffer from corrosion, & eventually, have poor intermittent conductive properties.
11. Razertip interchangeable tips are changed by inserting the tip wires into screws & tightening them with a screw driver which can be a nuisance when you have momentum going on a wood burning project.
12. Some brands require that you use a special tool to pull them off or you have to use pliers & tweezers which can also be a nuisance.
13. The other consideration is that the most all interchangeable tip puts your hand farther away from the tip losing some control over the pen. If you're into fine detail you probably will want to hold your pen close to the tip & you can't do that with Interchangeable tips.
14. The last thing I remember from when I started burning is finding a place to put that hot tip (that particular brand I could remove it while it was hot) while it's still hot! With every brand of burner you usually have a pen holder so you have a safe place to put a hot pen until it cools. There is no such thing available for hot tips so you have to get creative or wait until it cools.
15. The only **PRO for interchangeable tips** is that they are cheaper but most people only use 3 tips styles for general burning so it's not a big investment.
16. The only **CON to the fixed-tip handpieces** are that they are more expensive than individual tips.

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