

Guiding Principles

Making pottery is a motor skill as well as an art form. Don't think of yourself as an artist only, you are also an athlete performing complicated sets of movements to a tempo that only other potters can understand. Similar to an athlete, doing a warm up, making sure you are hydrated and fully focused really matter. Also, like an athlete, mastery is hard to come by but knowledge is easy and usually self apparent. We all "know" how to run a 5 minute mile, but few have practiced the basic human mechanics so that they can run so proficiently. Pottery is similar. When learning new forms, you almost never need to learn some new trick, you simply need to continue practicing. Practicing on a more frequent basis will give the best results. Remember that your first few attempts are part of your warm up, the real attempts come afterwards.

When working on new forms, it will be difficult but don't get discouraged. Focus on getting the appropriate height and width first. Then, focus on getting the form. Finally, focus on getting the same height, width and form but with less clay so that your piece isn't as heavy. This will require you to work on the exact same form over and over again for as long as your patience can hold out. Working on the same form gets boring, but push through that mental block and keep going.

Focus on slow steady hands and small throwing lines. When you watch professional potters you will often see these fast movements and big beautiful throwing lines. Throwing lines are the grooved spiral pattern running up and down the pot. These fast motions and big throwing lines are a luxury you can afford when you are highly skilled. When you are learning, you want tiny throwing lines that overlap each other. This will leave you with a smooth even surface and more even and stable walls.

Settle for good enough, don't push for perfection. As you are working with the clay, it is slowly absorbing water and becoming softer. Eventually the clay will become too soft to work with no matter how skilled you are.

It is always easier to do it better next time rather than fix this one. For example: A wobbly rim is the symptom of the clay being off center. You see the symptom, but the more deep rooted cause is that one half of your pot has a little more clay than the other half. You can slice that wobbly rim off and for a moment have an even rim, but as you pull the clay up, the half that has more clay is going to pull up faster than the other half and you will have a wobbly rim again. Fixing this problem is extremely difficult, so the best thing to do is bear with it and do a better job centering the next one.

90% of your problems are because the clay is not completely centered or was opened off center. Do everything you can to master these two steps. Go slowly and diligently so that you are not just adequate... you are mastering the process.