Basic Tools for Model Railroading
From the Modeler's Aid Committee

This is intended as a recommended list of the basic or first tools needed in model railroading. You might find that you already own some of these, in one form or another. Others will need to be purchased. Most of them will be able to be used in many household tasks, which may require later purchasing duplicate tools for general use, while retaining key tools for your modeling use.

This list is highly subjective and not intended to be an all-inclusive listing. We have listed a "Starter Set" which is followed by suggestions of tools for later purchase. These do not have to be purchased all at one time but may and should be purchased as needed. The one rule on all tools is buy good ones, not cheap. Good tools will outlast you.

STARTER SET:

1. **Modeler's knife** The X-acto knives have been around for years, but I recommend the "soft grip" style as the grip is coated, which helps to keep the knife from slipping (which can result in a nasty cut), and the tension screw is on the opposite end as the blade. Also purchase a couple of packs of X-acto #11 blades (sharp point and the most used) and one pack of #18 chisel-point blades. Keep these in a separate box. I have several soft grip knives with a #11 blade in one and a chisel point in the other, plus a spare. I also have a small whetstone that I use to sharpen the blades as they dull quickly. I get months of use from one blade. The soft grip knives cost under $4.

2. **Small or miniature files** (Also called jeweler's files.) You will need a flat and round file for beginning. You can purchase a 5 or 6-file set, which offers more variety and still be under $15. X-acto has decent files, and all hobby shops carry them.

3. **Razor Saw with a fine tooth blade** X–acto and Zona make good ones.   The cost is $8 to $10.

4. **Glue** You will want a small bottle of **white glue**, a small bottle of **liquid plastic glue** and a tube of **super-glue**. The latter can glue your fingers together, but fingernail polish remover will dissolve it without damaging your skin.

5. **Flat-blade needle-nose pliers, with a cutter**. Make sure the two sides line up and close together. Most hardware stores and electrical stores have these. Check several of them and get a good pair. Expect to pay $12 to $14.

6. **Tweezers.** My personal preference, if I only had one, would be a flat-blade set. Be sure to get good ones, and test several to make sure the ends meet squarely. A set of five can be purchased for about $15.

7. **Paint Brushes.** I recommend a #0, #2 and #4 round tips for starters. Buy good ones that don't shed, and clean the brushes immediately after each use. They will last for years. Michael's and Hobby Lobby often have sales.

8. **Miniature screwdrivers**. These often come as a set of 6 screwdrivers in a case, four flat bladed ones and two Phillips head (#O and #1). A good set will cost between $15 and $20.

9. **Scale Rule.** The industry standard is the General #1251, a 12-inch rule that has N, HO, S, and O Scale markings. This is handy as a straightedge, measuring device and cutting guide. I also have a 6-inch scale rule (General #351) which I use far more than the 12 inch one. The 12-inch rule will cost about $10.

10. **NMRA Gauge.** This is a versatile tool as it is used to gauge track, check the gauge of wheels, coupler height, track clearances and the proper setting of switch points and frogs. Proper use will substantially reduce derailments. Cost: $10.

11. **Soldering Iron, 25 to 40 watts**. This is an easy tool to learn to use and essential for wiring track. You will find many other things that need to be soldered as well. You will need a small tube or jar of rosin soldering paste and some solder. Radio Shack has all of these, at a good price. So do hardware stores.

12. **Track Cleaning pad such as a Bright Boy.** All track needs regular cleaning for good running. The Walther's Bright Boy is excellent. Cost: $6.

OTHER USEFUL TOOLS

As you progress as a model railroader, you will find you want other tools. Attend monthly NMRA meetings, meet your fellow modelers, and ask them what are their favorite tools and why. Items such as a pin vise and small drill bits, small clamps, cutting pliers, or a machinist's square can be added in time.

For another list of basic tools see the *Model Railroader* article, "16 Cool Tools," by Jeff Wilson. It's available on-line at: http://www.trains.com/mrr/objects/pdf/wilson.pdf

Power Tools

The most commonly used power tool is a 3/8-inch electric drill. With drywall screws, standard-size drill bits, and a set of flat-blade and Phillips head (#2 is the most common) screwdriver bits, you can build a layout. A hand saw will suffice for cutting wood but a good hand-held electric jigsaw is a nice addition. Both of these tools greatly ease household tasks.

Another useful power tool is a hand-held rotary tool. (Dremel is a widely advertised brand.) A variety of accessories such as cutting, polishing, and grinding tools are available.

Some tools are expensive, so always ask whether you need this now or if it can be put off. For example, things like airbrushes are neat but costly. Ask to practice with a friend's (or see if he will let you paint your model with his brush) to learn about the different types and what is best for you.

SOURCES OF MODELER'S TOOLS

- Any local hobby shop
- William K. Walthers (see "Tools" section of catalog) on the web at www.walthers.com.
- Micro-Mark, The Small Tool Specialists on the web at www.micromark.com

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**This information compiled by Pat Homan
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Contact our Modelers Aid Department
Visit the Division 7 website www.cincy-div7.org and click on "Modelers Aid"

Interested in learning more about the hobby of Model Railroading?
Cincinnati Division 7 of the Mid-Central Region, National Model Railroad Association
Meets the 2nd Sunday of every month around the greater Cincinnati area.
For next meeting and program information, call **513-662-RAIL** or go to **www.cincy-div7.org**