



Dovetail Template



Function

A dovetail template assists in accurately marking out dovetails that are consistently the same. Most woodworkers make their own dovetail template.

Description

The dovetail template is held tight against the face and end of the joint, and the tails are marked on the face using the chosen ratio. There are four different ratios on the version shown above: 1:5; 1:6; 1:7 and 1:8. There are those who argue that it really doesn't matter what angle or ratio the dovetail is¹ and research apparently including scientific testing who appear to back this up². However, it needs to be noted that if the angle is too steep it may as well be a finger joint! I was taught to use 1:5 or 1:6 for softwood and 1:7 or 1:8 for hardwood, hence these ratios of the template. Ratio is used rather than degrees for dovetails, as they are more easily laid out using a try square and sliding bevel, whereas not all woodworkers have a protractor to hand. With a little care it is straightforward to make your own dovetail template, which is always best for the sake of consistency. Never mark out the pins with the template, but rather mark the pins with the cut tails, as this will ensure greater accuracy. This is especially true if the tail is cut slightly wrong, which really doesn't matter as long as the pins are cut accurately to fit the 'wrong' tails.

¹ [Dovetail Layout: What Ratio or Degree? | Popular Woodworking](#)

² [Does the Angle of the Dovetail Affect the Strength of the Joint \(rockler.com\)](#)



History

The dovetail is so named because it resembles the tail of a dove. There is evidence of dovetails in ancient Egypt, where they are used in furniture entombed with mummies. According to Harriet Chavasse, they were first used in English cabinet making around 1650³. During this time dovetails were generally equally spaced with the pins, however over the years that followed the cabinet maker made the pins progressively smaller and smaller, in a bid to demonstrate their fine skills. Some of the extreme examples of fine pins are only used for presentation purposes rather than functional. Whilst equally spaced tails and pins might form the strongest joint, slightly smaller pins, and even a variety of sizes, can prove aesthetically pleasing.



Health & Safety

n/a

³ [Dovetail joints in antique furniture \(antique-collecting.co.uk\)](http://antique-collecting.co.uk)
