

Parts of a knife

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ABSTRACT

This article names and illustrates the different parts of a blade and its handle, giving terms in both English and Indonesian.

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VERSION HISTORY

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Parts of a knife

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In this article¹ I describe the basic parts of a knife, providing terms in both English and, where known, Indonesian. Although I write ‘knife,’ these same terms can also be used to describe machetes, swords, and other kinds of bladed instruments. At its simplest, a knife (machete, etc.) can be divided between blade and handle. However, both blade and handle can be further divided into various subparts, which may be distinctly named in the language where you work.

Parts of the blade

I begin with the blade. The parts of a blade can be elaborated as follows.

1. blade of a knife (machete, etc.) = *bilah pisau (parang, dsb)*. This is the blade considered in its entirety. In Indonesian, *bilah* is also used as a counting term / classifier for knives and other long, flat objects (*kata penggolong bagi sesuatu yg tipis dan panjang*).
2. the sharp, cutting edge of a blade (knife, machete, etc.) = *mata pisau (parang, dsb), tepi bilah yg tajam dan bisa memotong*. In Indonesian, *mata* is also used as a counting term / classifier for objects with cutting edges (*kata penggolong bagi sesuatu yg bermata tajam*).
3. spine or back of a blade, the blunt edge opposite the cutting edge = *belakang atau punggung bilah pisau (parang, dsb), tepi bilah yg tumpul*. I have also seen the spine referred to in Indonesian as the *tulang punggung pisau*; presumably this expression was calqued from English.
4. flat of a blade, side of a blade = *sisi bilah pisau (parang, dsb)*. The two sides are parallel or nearly parallel to each other.
5. grind of a blade, the part of the blade which is thinned along its length and tapers to the cutting edge = *sudut mata pisau, asahan mata pisau (parang, dsb), bagian mata pisau (parang dsb) yg diasah*. You could also think of the ‘grind’ as the part which becomes shiny when a blade is sharpened. In English, this part of a blade is sometimes also referred to as the bevel.

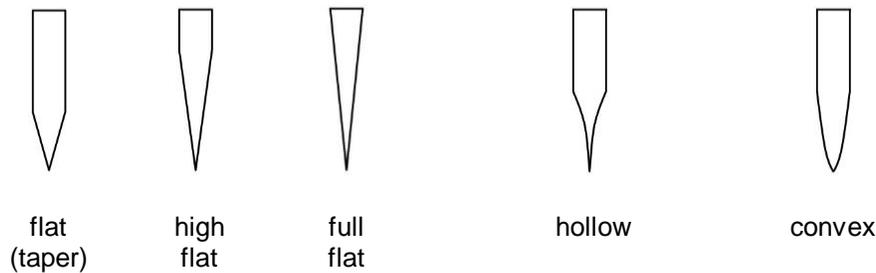
Most machetes that I’ve inspected have a flat grind, being neither convex nor concave. A flat grind is also the easiest to sharpen. Where there is a need to distinguish:

¹ The inception for this article was an email sent by Michael Martens in December 2006. I deeply appreciate his companionship into yet another area of semantic inquiry. I would also like to thank Berton Turnip for his assistance with some of the Indonesian definitions. Errors remaining in this paper are solely my responsibility.

(a) a flat grind, in English also called a taper or scandi grind, can be referred to as a *sudut bersudut-V*.

(b) a concave grind—usually not a good idea except for certain limited purposes, because the cutting edge will be weak—can be referred to as a ‘hollow grind’ or in Indonesian as a *sudut lekuk*.

(c) a convex grind can be referred to as a *sudut cembung*.



A further complication—not illustrated—is that most blades will have a secondary grind near the cutting edge, either by design or because it develops after repeated sharpening (with repeated sharpening, a flat grind will also tend to become slightly convex).

6. grind line of a blade, the line separating the flat of the blade from the grind = *pinggir sudut, garis antara asahan dan sisi mata pisau (parang, dsb)*. In English, this line can also be called the bevel shoulder.

7. point or tip of a blade (knife, machete, spear, etc.) = *ujung atau pucuk mata pisau (parang, tombak, dsb)*.

In English there is a specialized vocabulary for describing the profile of a blade, that is, the way that the blade comes to a point. For brevity, I list here only certain basic types.

(a) normal point: back of the blade is straight, and the cutting edge curves upward

(b) trailing point: the back of the blade curves upward

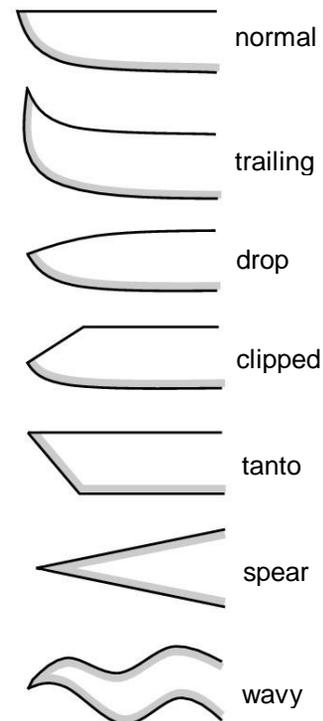
(c) drop point: the back of the blade curves downward

(d) clipped point; the back of the blade angles downward

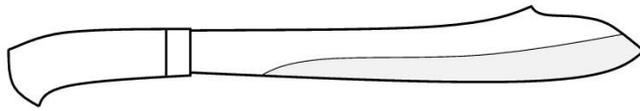
(e) tanto point: the cutting edge angles upward (can even be a 90° angle)

(f) spear point: symmetrical and double-edged

(g) wavy-bladed: double-edged blade with a wavy pattern (e.g. kris)

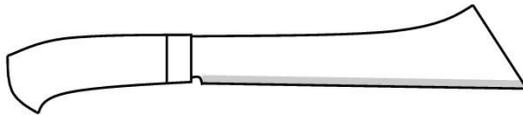


For other types of points, including combinations of the above, see the Wikipedia article “Blade”² (which lists twelve basic types) and the online guide “Knife Anatomy, Parts, Names, Components, Definitions, and Terms”³ which goes into even further detail.



machete with an upswept clipped drop point and reverse curve detail

8. belly of a blade, the curved part of the cutting edge of a blade behind the tip = *perut bilah*, *bagian mata pisau (parang, dsb) yg berbentuk melengkung*. Blades may range from having no belly at all (the cutting edge is completely straight) to having a deep belly.



machete with an upswept clipped point and a straight cutting edge (no belly)



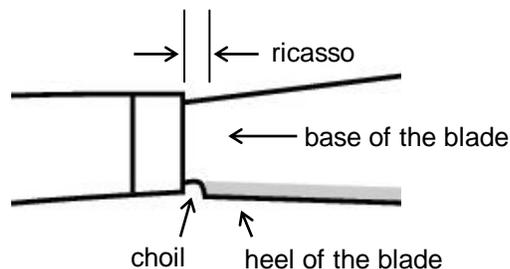
machete with a normal point and a deep belly

9. heel of a blade, the portion of the cutting edge lying closest to the handle = *tumit mata pisau (parang dsb)*, *bagian mata dekat hulu*. The heel is the portion of the cutting edge which is furthest from the point.

10. choil, the curve or angle in a knife (machete, etc.) blade between the cutting edge and the handle = *lengkungan atau sudut pd bilah pisau (parang, dsb) antara matanya dan hulu*. The choil is where the cutting edge begins. Some blades do not have a choil.

11. base of the blade next to the handle (opposite the point) = *pangkal bilah pisau (parang dsb)*, *bagian bilah dekat hulu*.

Some knives (machetes, etc.) have a short length of unsharpened blade just in front of the handle. In English this length of unsharpened blade is called the ricasso, or in Indonesian *bagian tumpul dekat gagang*.



² Wikipedia, s.v. “Blades,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blade> (accessed November 28, 2012).

³ Fischer, Jay. 2012. Knife Anatomy, Parts, Names, Components, Definitions, and Terms. *Jay Fisher – World Class Knifemaker*. The Jay Fisher Company, http://www.jayfisher.com/Knife_Anatomy_Parts_Names_Definitions.htm (accessed November 28, 2012).

12. fuller or cannellure, a groove on the surface of a blade that runs from the base of the blade to the tip = *alur yg memanjang dr pangkal sampai ujung bilah pedang*. This groove, which helps to limit lateral flexing of a blade, is more characteristic of longer blades such as swords.

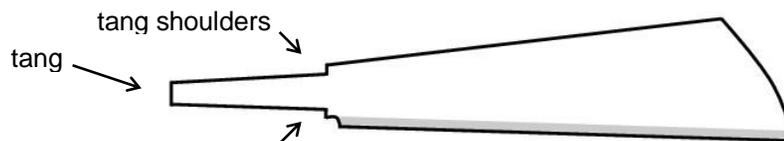
13. tang, the part of a blade which serves as the means of attachment, the tongue or prong of a blade which is buried in the handle = *puting bilah, lidah bilah, bagian pangkal pisau (parang, dsb) yg dibenamkan ke dl gagang, bagian ekor pd pangkal bilah yg dimasukkan pd gagang*. Tangs are of three principal types. In order of increasing strength:

(a) socketed tang, a tang that is shoved into a socket or hole in the handle, and held in place with epoxy and sometimes a pin or rivet which runs through the handle and the tang.

(b) hidden tang, a narrow tang which runs through the handle, usually with a threaded end that screws into the rear bolster (see below).

(c) full tang (*puting penuh*), a tang the same dimensions as the handle. When a knife has a full tang, you can see the edge of the tang all along the edge of the handle. In this case, the handle must necessarily consist of two pieces (called ‘handle scales’), since it is completely divided by the tang.

14. tang shoulder, the part of a blade where it broadens at the base of the tang = *punggung puting/lidah bilah pisau (parang dsb)*. The tang shoulders abut against the handle.



machete blade without handle, revealing the (socketed) tang and tang shoulders

15. pattern of wave-like veins, nerves or ‘flames’ on the surface of a blade, particularly the blade of a kris = *pamor, lukisan pd bilah keris dsb*. Striated patterns are achieved by layering different grades of iron and repeatedly hammering flat, folding, slicing and hammering again in a process called pattern welding.⁴ Formerly, these striations were considered an indication not only of the quality of a blade, but also of the blade’s spiritual power.

⁴ To view the process of pattern welding, see the YouTube video “Titisan Empu Gandring” at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&NR=1&v=IqsmDofV0Kc> (accessed 16 September 2012).

Parts of the handle

The following terms can be used to describe the handle.

16. handle, haft, hilt, the part by which a blade is held, made to accommodate the hand = *hulu, gagang (pisau, parang, dsb)*. This is the handle considered in its entirety. The Indonesian word *tangkai* can also refer to handles, but is more appropriately applied to the shafts of spears, lances, etc. The words *doran* (of Javanese provenance) and *garan* refer specifically to the slightly angled handles such as of hoes or similar tools.



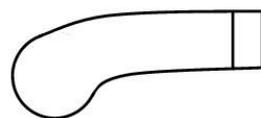
hoe handles (called *doran* or *garan* in Indonesian)

17. pins, rivets or screws used to affix the handle to a blade = *baut, keling, atau sekrup untuk memasang gagang pd bilah*.

18. grip of a handle, the part of the handle around which the fingers wrap = *tempat memegang hulu atau gagang*. This part is sometimes also called the belly of the handle.

19. rear or butt of a handle, the end of the handle opposite where the blade attaches = *pangkal hulu, pangkal gagang*. This part is sometimes also called the heel of the handle.

A decorative piece at the end of the handle can be called a pommel.⁵ Many pommels also have a functional purpose of keeping the handle from flying out of one's hand. A usual (and perhaps even prototypical) pommel consists of a rounded knob (*hiasan berbentuk bulat pd pangkal gagang*). Flared pommels (*hiasan berbentuk kipas pd pangkal gagang*) are also common in the Indonesian context.



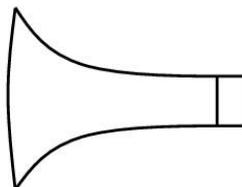
rounded pommel



no pommel



gently flared pommel



strongly flared pommel

⁵ The English term pommel also refers to the rounded knob on the front part of a western-style saddle.

20. ferrule, a metal collar to prevent a handle from splitting or cracking where the blade is inserted = *sampak, yaitu simpai atau gelang-gelang yg terbuat dr logam (tanduk, dsb) yg dipasang pd gagang pisau (parang, tombak, dsb) supaya putingnya bilah jangan goyah*. Technically, the English term ferrule refers to a metal collar, whereas in the Indonesian context other materials may be used.

21. a pointed metal tip on the lower end of a spear or walking stick = *sepotong besi yg runcing yg dipasang pd ujung tangkai tombak atau tongkat bagian bawah*. The purpose of the tip is to keep the end of the shaft from splitting or wearing out (*maksudnya supaya ujung tangkai itu tidak cepat tumpul*). I have yet to encounter a specific term for this end piece in English or Indonesian, although one could possibly refer to it as a ‘ferrule’ or even a ‘closed ferrule’ in English.

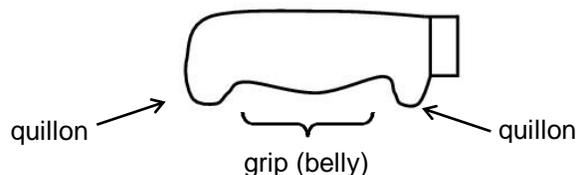
22. bolster = *penguat*. A bolster is a structural piece designed to reinforce the critical area where the blade joins the handle (front bolster), the rear part of the handle (rear bolster), or even the midsection of the handle (mid bolster). A bolster is typically heavier and stouter than a ferrule.

When a knife has a hidden tang (see above), the rear bolster also serves as point of attachment, allowing the tang to be screwed into place and thus tightening the entire handle.

23. guard, a piece fitted between the blade and the handle to keep the hand from slipping onto the blade = *pelindung jari pd gagang pisau (parang, dsb)*. The difference between a guard and a bolster is that a guard does not strengthen the knife in any way. On the other hand, some bolsters may incorporate a guard into their design. Three specific types of guards include:

(a) a cross guard, also called a cruciform hilt or quillons, is a bar placed at right angles to the blade where it joins the hilt.

(b) a quillon (singular) is a projection that stops the fingers from sliding forward (or backward) on the handle, in essence ‘locking’ one’s hand to the handle. A quillon can be considered a small version of a guard. A front quillon, located in front of the index finger, can be called a finger guard. A rear quillon, located behind the pinky finger, can be called a handle guard. A central quillon is a quillon that projects between two fingers when the handle is gripped. In Indonesian, a quillon can be referred to as a *penopang jari* or *topangan jari*.



(c) a knuckle guard is a cup-shaped piece or curved bar which extends from the guard to the pommel, designed to protect the user’s hand from the blow of an opponent’s

weapon (think of a pirate's cutlass, for example). The Indonesian term for knuckle guard is uncertain, although *pelindung buku jari* would be an acceptable calque.

24. finger grooves, depressions created in a knife's handle to accommodate fingers = *lekukan untuk jari pd gagang pisau (parang, dsb)*.
25. jimped thumb rest, crosshatching, notches or bumps on the spine of a blade where the thumb can grip = *tatakan jempol*.
26. hair decoration on the handle of a sword or the shaft of a spear = *cemara*,⁶ *secekak bulu kambing (rambut manusia, dsb) yg dipakai sbg rumbai-rumbai atau hiasan pd gagang pedang*. The decoration may be human hair, or it may be hair from a goat or other animal.



klewang sword from the Mekongga area of Southeast Sulawesi, with human scalp attached (illustration from Sarasin and Sarasin 1905:339)

Additional vocabulary

In this section I list some additional items which might fruitfully be elicited when investigating the named parts of a knife, machete or other bladed instrument. Although this list is incomplete, I hope it may serve as a springboard for eliciting additional terms in the language that you are researching.

sharp (of an edge) = *tajam*
 sharp (of a point) = *runcing, lancip*
 dull = *tumpul*
 chinked, jagged = *sumbing*
 broken = *gompal, patah*
 whet, hone = *mengasah*
 whetstone = *batu asahan*
 whittle to a sharp point = *meraut sampai runcing*

* * *

sheath, scabbard = *sarung*
 waistband (for sheath) = *ikat pinggang (untuk sarung)*
 strap a machete around one's waist = *mengikat / melekatkan parang di pinggang*

⁶ The Indonesian term *cemara* is the same word as in *pohon cemara*, the horsetail pine or casuarina tree (*Casuarina* spp.).

slip (a knife, dagger, kris, etc.) into one's belt at one's waist or back = *menyengkelitkan, menyisipkan (pisau, golok, kris, dsb) pd pinggang atau bagian belakang tubuh*
 unsheathe, draw (a sword, kris, etc.) from its sheath = *menghunus, mencabut (pedang, kris, dsb) dr sarungnya*
 sheathe (a sword, kris, etc.) = *menyarungkan (pedang, kris, dsb)*

* * *

slice (cut with a back-and-forth sawing motion) = *mengiris*
 slice thinly = *mengiris tipis-tipis, menyayat*
 cut, chop = *memotong*
 chop finely, mince = *memotong-motong kecil, mencincang, merajang*
 lay out flat (paper, cloth, banana leaf, etc.) and cut against a hard surface
 = *meletakkan rata (kertas, kain, daun pisang, dsb) dan memotong dng pisau*
 cut transversely (at right angles to the long axis) = *memotong melintang*
 cut longitudinally (along the length of something), cut or split into two symmetrical halves = *memotong memanjang, membelah*
 stab, thrust, plunge (with knife, spear, etc.) = *menikam, menghunjam (dng pisau, tombak, dsb)*
 slash, hack (cut with a sweeping motion) = *menetak*⁷
 cleave, cut through in one stroke = *menetak dng tepat, sekali tetak*
 wound = *melukai*
 a stab wound = *luka tikam*
 a slash wound = *luka tetak*
 go headhunting, take heads (for ritual purposes) = *mengayau*
 behead, decapitate (human, chicken, etc.) = *memenggal kepala (manusia, ayam, dsb)*
 slash the throat = *menggorok*
 slaughter an animal by slashing its throat = *menyembelih, menggorok (binatang)*
 butcher an animal (cut up into pieces) = *menyembelih, memotong (binatang)*
 scale (a fish) = *menyisik (ikan)*
 slice open, slit open (e.g. fish's belly, in order to gut it) = *meretas (misl perut ikan)*⁸
 score (e.g. fish before grilling) = *mengerat, membuat keratan pd (misl sisi badan ikan sebelum dibakar)*
 clear (land) by cutting growth = *membabat, merambahi*
 clear a path, open up a path = *merambah jalanan, meretas jalanan*
 cut grass, cut one's lawn = *memaras rumput halaman*
 trim, prune (tree, bush, etc.) = *memangkas (pohon, tanaman, dsb)*
 pollard, cut the top and branches off of a tree (to stimulate new growth)
 = *memotong puncak dan cabang pohon (supaya tumbuh tunas yg baru)*
 coppice, cut at ground level (to stimulate new growth) = *memotong rata dng tanah (supaya tumbuh tunas yg baru)*

⁷ Stem *tetak*, onomatopoetic with the chopping sound 'tak, tak, tak...' Note also *memakuk* 'hack (with axe, hoe, pickax, etc.).'

⁸ Note also *menyilet* 'cut, slit (especially with a razor).'

girdle, cut away the bark in a ring around the base of a tree (to kill it) = *menguliti / mengupas selingkarat kulit kayu pd pangkal pohon (maksudnya supaya pohon mati)*

notch, cut a notch in = *menakik, membuat takik atau gubang*

fell (trees) = *menebang (pohon)*

cut stalks of rice using a rice harvest knife = *memotong tangkai padi dng ani-ani*

carve, engrave = *melukis, mengukir*⁹

strike with the back of a blade = *memukul dng punggung bilah parang*

strike with the flat of a blade = *memukul dng sisi bilah parang*

I hope this article has alerted you to possible areas for further lexicographical inquiry, and that it will help you to write more accurate definitions. A companion article that discusses various kinds of bladed tools and weapons in the Indonesian context is currently under construction, but I imagine it will be some time before I have collected the needed pictures (and the permissions to use them!).

References

Sarasin, Paul; and Fritz Sarasin. 1905. *Reisen in Celebes, ausgeführt in den Jahren 1893–1896 und 1902–1903*, vol. 1. Wiesbaden: C.W. Kreidel.

⁹ Note also *memahat* ‘carve (wood, stone) with a chisel.’