Trimming a cat's claws every two to three weeks is an important part of maintaining your pet's health. Not only does a quick trim protect you, your pet and your family, it can also save your sofa, curtains and other furniture. Luckily, most groomers and veterinary clinics offer nail trimming services, so the owner doesn’t have to do it; however, this comes at an extra expense and some cats are even more stressed out by getting their nails professionally done instead of by someone they already trust in their home. If the idea of trimming a cat's claws has you biting your nails, know that all it takes is some patience and a bit of practice to sharpen your skills.

Staying on the cutting edge
There are plenty of tools available to trim a cat's claws. Use the one that works best for you and your pet. Some people prefer a special pair of scissors modified to hold a cat's claw in place or choose pliers-like clippers or those with a sliding "guillotine" blade. But it is okay to use human nail clippers. Whatever your tool, be sure the blade remains sharp. The blunt pressure from dull blades may hurt an animal and cause a nail to split or bleed. It would be a good idea to have some styptic powder on hand to stop the bleeding in case you need it, but if you don’t have any, you can also use cornstarch, baking powder, flour, baby powder, etc. Just put a little bit on a tissue and press it into the tip of the bleeding nail until it stops.

Hold hands (er, paws)
If you approach a cat with a sharp object in one hand while trying to grab a paw with the other, odds are you'll come up empty-handed. Because cats' temperaments and dispositions vary greatly, there is no "perfect" way to handle a cat while trimming their claws. Some cats do well with no restraint at all, but most cats need to be held firmly but gently to make sure that no one gets hurt. If you're trying to cut your cat's nails by yourself, try resting the cat in the crook of one arm while holding one paw with the other hand. Or, place the animal on a table and lift one paw at a time. You may even be able to convince a particularly sociable cat to lie back in your lap. If you've got a helper, now’s their time to shine: ask them to hold the cat while you clip the nails, or just ask them to scratch your cat's favorite spot or offer up a distracting treat.

Taking a little off the top
Now that you're in position and the cat's in position, put the claw in the right position too. Take a paw in your hand and use your thumb and pointer finger to gently press down on the top and bottom of the paw on the joint just behind the claw. This will cause the claw to extend so you can quickly but carefully snip off the sharp tip and no more. Don't get too close to the pink part of the nail called "the quick," where blood vessels and nerve endings lie. Just like the pink part of a human fingernail, the quick is very sensitive; cutting into this area will likely cause bleeding and pain. Don't continue if they’re too upset, but keep an eye on them to make sure the bleeding stops. It's common to only cut the front claws, but take a look at the rear claws just in case they've gotten too long, especially if their sharp tips hurt you when your cat leaps on or off your lap. Since most cats fuss more about having their rear claws clipped, start with the front claws.

One at a time
If you aren't able to trim all 10 nails at once, don't worry. Few cats remain patient for more than a few minutes, so take what you can get, praise your pet for cooperating, perhaps give them a little treat, and then be on the lookout for the next opportunity—maybe even a catnap—to cut things down to size.

