



BOOKBINDING

Tools and Resources

www.ecotonestudio.com

<https://alldaddynosugar.substack.com>

WELCOME TO *Bookbinding*

Bookbinding is a satisfy art form in that the end product is useful. It can be journaled in, sketched in, or read over and over and shared with friends. It's an art form that is created to be used and touched.



Investing in bookbinding tools can be as cheap or as expensive as you want it to be. All the “required” items can be purchased at used bookstores and art supply shops, your local art supply store, or reused paper/cardboard from your own recycling.

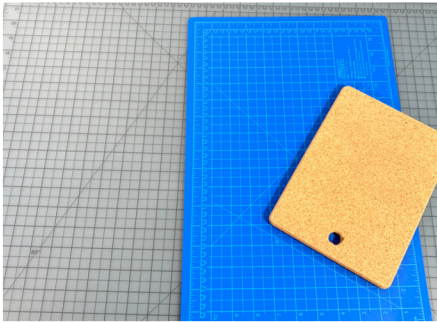
I've been a bookbinder for almost 2 years and still haven't invested in specialized bookbinding tools. I'm not setting out to make archival books, or restore old books and manuscripts, so I don't see a purpose in spending the extra money when what I use already works fine. When I'm trying out a new idea, I also tend to use very cheap materials until I feel comfortable with the structure and how to properly engineer it.

Truthfully, and I know none of us want's to hear this, but it's the truth, your first dozen or so books aren't going to be very good. For 1.5 years I would hang onto all of my failed books in a file box, that way, I could reference my mistakes, and also laugh at my ignorance and inexperience. It also served as a good comparison of where I was vs where I had started. Because your first books also won't be very good, you should consider using recycled/reclaimed materials and not investing too much into your tools. You can always upgrade later if your hobby becomes more serious.

TOOLS

What I Use

This guide is intended to help you get started with bookbinding and to share with you the tools that I've found to be useful.



Cutting Mats

I have a large 22"x34" mat that I use with my art knife/scalpel, and a separate 11"x17" mat for using my utility knife and punching holes. The utility knife and awl make holes in the mat that aren't healable and cause the mat to become bumpy, so I use a separate mat or cork board for that.

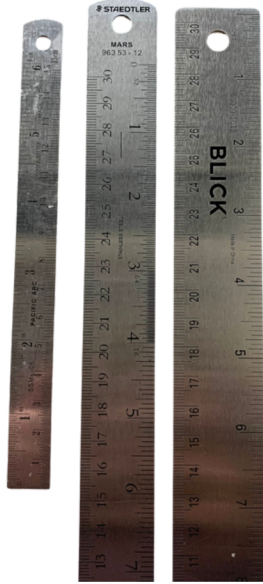


Art Knife & Utility Knife

The art knife is for cutting thin paper like cover paper or text paper for the signatures. The utility knife is for cutting book board or Davy boards since those are thicker and require more force. Make sure to grab a utility knife with snap-off sections so always have a sharp blade.

Pencil & Eraser

Bookbinding requires very precise measurement, but you also will want to be able to erase some of these marks from the final product. I prefer a 0.3-0.5mm mechanical pencil for more precise lines.



Metal Rulers

Similar to the cutting mats, I have multiple metal rules. The two 12" (30 cm) ones are used for measuring and cutting paper down to size. One of those is only used with the utility knife since I have a habit of accidentally cutting the ruler with that knife.

I also have a 6" (15 cm) metal rule that I use for cutting the corners off the cover paper as I'm gluing it to the book board.

Bone Folder

I recommend starting with a teflon folder since it's easier to get the glue off teflon as opposed to wood or bone. Also make sure to get one with a dull point at one end, and if you can, a flat edge at the other. I don't have a flat edge, but there are several times I wish I did as I'm folding and creasing paper.



Awl

You want to pick out an awl that doesn't have a continuously tapered point. If the diameter of the needle is constantly changing, then all of your holes will end up different sizes, so make sure to get one that's straight with only the point tapered. I went with a metal awl since I like to use a metal claw hammer to pound holes into thick book board. Yes, this is kind of unconventional, and technically I should be using a mallet, but I don't want to spend money on that.





Beeswax

I purchase these in 1 oz-4 oz blocks, and when the block becomes too cut up/crumbly from running the thread through it, I melt it down in the microwave and pour it into a new mold. A 1 oz block will last for a good amount of time if you do this.

Buying beeswax isn't necessary if you're purchasing waxed linen thread.



Needles

They make bookbinding needles with are blunt and have large eyes for easy threading. I choose to just buy embroidery or upholstery needles at my local craft store. They're sharp but the eyelets are larger, and you can also sometimes find curved needles there as well. I almost exclusively use a curved needle, even when I'm doing a pamphlet stitch.



Thread

I prefer to use embroidery floss since it comes in hundreds of colors and is inexpensive. If you use embroidery floss, make sure it's very well coated in beeswax to keep the treads from separating. The gold standard for bookbinding is linen thread, typical Irish linen. I've also used Hemp but it's very crumbly and can be messy.



Scissors

It's worth getting a pair of sharp scissors dedicated to cutting or trimming thread. You'll be doing a lot of that very soon and having a clean cut thread is always easier to thread through a needle.



Binder Clips

Binder clips do a lot of heavy lifting when you're trying to sew together signatures. Clipping signatures together, or to the cover, while sewing will save you from major frustration, and ensure everything is properly aligned. I typically fold a small piece of card stock between the clip and the book/signatures, so there aren't any dents in the pages.



Large Stack of Heavy Books

You need to press your signatures before sewing, and you'll need to press the covers after they're glued. A lot of bookbinders have fancy book presses, but I find them to be very small and limiting. Instead, I just use stacks of hardcover books. It works just as well, as long as the covers are flat and not embossed. You can pickup used books on bookbinding online or at your local used bookstore for pretty cheap.



(Paint) Brush

You'll need a brush for spreading the glue on the boards and paper. You can buy natural bristle brushes from bookbinding websites or you can stay cheap and get a plastic children's paintbrush. I put my recommendation in the materials section.



PVA Glue

PVA is Elmer's glue without the water. It's much thicker but dries clear and flexible, it's acid free, and doesn't yellow over time. You can find PVA at your local craft store. There are other, fancier bookbinding glues that use wheat paste, rice starch, and methyl cellulose, but it's not necessary to use these glues unless you're restoring old books or creating archival pieces. I've never mixed my own glue or used anything with wheat paste in it.

Don't use Elmer's glue. It's not sticky enough and your book will peel apart.



Scrap Paper

Paper you place under the cover or outer pages before applying glue. I typically just try to reuse covers from the paper pads or 32 lb printer paper, or whatever else is lying around. Make sure, if the paper isn't white, to test and see if the ink will come off when the glue is applied. You don't want to accidentally transfer ink from scrap paper onto your book.



Hammer

They make bookbinding needles with are blunt and have large eyes for easy threading. I choose to just buy embroidery or upholstery needles at my local craft store. They're sharp but the eyelets are larger, and you can also sometimes find curved needles there as well. I almost exclusively use a curved needle, even when I'm doing a pamphlet stitch.

Old Thick Magazine

I find it's easier to punch holes into my signatures when I place the signature into the crack of an old magazine. Open the magazine, place the signature inside it with pages open, align the punching template, and punch the holes.

You will punch through the spine a little, so make sure you're overtop of a cutting mat or cork board.



A lot of bookbinders use punching cradles, which function in the same way my magazine does, but they look nicer and last longer. I still can't justify spending that much money on a tool that only does one thing, so I'm just going to stick with my magazine for now. Also, punching cradles are large, and I have no idea where I'd store one of those things.

MATERIALS

What I Use

Book Board/ Davy Board



Book board is a type of thick but smooth cardboard that turns your soft cover books into hardbacks. Book board is made from 100% cotton and typically you can buy it from 0.6 mm and thinner. I use book board for smaller books (<6"x6") or as covers for my accordion books. Book board retains a lot of flexibility, so large pieces won't be very rigid and may be easily damaged.

Davy Board is a higher quality book board and typically runs thicker than book board. I usually get the 0.8 mm thickness and use that for larger books, or books I want to really reinforce the covers on. This is the standard I use for my large and small journals, as well as any sketchbooks made with handmade paper inside. It's a pain to hand cut Davy Board, so make sure your utility knife is sharp and you change the blade often.

Don't bother buying chipboard for bookbinding. It's about the same price as book board but much lower quality.

Outer Paper



I've covered books in dozens of materials ranging from very thin decorative paper to used gift bags. I've found that I prefer using card stock, scrapbooking paper, or pastel drawing paper like Mi-Tientes and Canson.

Thinner paper is very fiddly and bubbles a lot when you apply glue to it. If you aren't quick enough after gluing it to the book board, the bubbles become permanent. It's too much pressure for me, and I've messed up many expensive pieces of hand marbled paper this way. Thinner paper also wears very quickly at the edges and corners of the book, making it look damaged.

Scrapbooking paper doesn't have any of these problems, it comes in pads which are usually on sale, and there're so many great prints these days, it's hard to choose just one pad.

Bookcloth/Cork Fabric/Felt/Leather



Alternatively, you can also cover your book in bookcloth, cork fabric, and a whole lot of other materials.

Bookcloth will need to be glued to book board or Davey board. My favorite bookcloth is the Verona line since it comes in the best colors.

Cork fabric, felt, leather and other materials are great for creating soft coverings with exposed stitching. I've never used felt or leather but I have used cork fabric and vinyl. Both of these can be purchased at JoAnne Fabrics and Cork & Cloth has a large selection of colored and printed cork fabric.

Inner Paper

I would recommend starting with a cheap block of text weight printer paper for your first books. You can use a guideline generator to print grids or lines on it before you sew it into your book.

When you've got some consistency in binding, I would also recommend Rhodia paper, sketchbook, watercolor, and even handmade paper. I buy my handmade paper from Khadi (through Talas online) or Fabulous Fancy Pants. Most of the other paper I use I purchase in pads from Blick or Michaels. They typically run BOGO or BOGO 50% off sales every couple weeks, so wait for the sale.



Hollander's also sells lined, gridded, and blank signatures that are already cut, folded, and pressed. I bind most of my notebooks and journals using these.

Parchment Paper

You'll need parchment paper to stick between the cover and signatures after gluing, so they don't dry glued together and your book doesn't turn into a paper weight. I buy a roll of recycled parchment paper from Whole Foods, or the Reynolds cookie sheets, and pre rip/cut pieces so they're ready to use when I need them. These can be reused multiple times, so one roll lasts for a long time. I also put parchment paper between the books that I use as a press and my covers, so those two things don't get fused together.





PVA

I exclusively used Hollander's Standard PVA for years and just upgraded to the Jade 403. Their PVA is perfectly mixed and you can buy it for cheap in bulk. I also like that the containers are wide mouth and you don't need to squeeze it into a separate container.

Talas also looks like they have similar PVA to Hollander's.

Paint Brush



You wouldn't think there's a lot to say about such a simple tool, but I've got some opinions about this one.

Bookbinding websites sell large, rounded natural bristled brushes and you often see bookbinders using these to spread glue on the paper. I bought one and hated it. The natural fibers actually absorb more glue than you end up using, and the only way to get it out is to wash it down the drain. I noticed that I was wasting a lot of glue when I used these brushes, and PVA can be expensive.

I use a cheap, plastic ArtPOP! paint brush I purchased in a set of 5 for ~\$5. It's perfect and has held up fine for 2 years as long as I rinse it out properly immediately after I'm done with it. I would suggest you get one of these as well and skip the natural fiber brushes. If you're curious and want to upgrade later, by all means do it.

QUICK REFERENCE

Tool & Material Checklist

The list is setup based on increasing complexity of the structure you want to make. In each section, you will need the tools listed in that section plus the tools in all previous sections.

FOLDED BOOKS

-  Inner Paper - Lined/dot/text/watercolor/handmade
-  Outer Paper - For Cover or Endsheets
-  Metal Ruler
-  Pencil and Eraser
-  Craft Knife
-  Bone Folder
-  Heavy Books/Wrapped Bricks/Handmade Press

SEWN BOOKS

-  Awl
-  Bookbinding or Curved Needle
-  Thread - Linen or Cotton
-  Beeswax if your thread is unwaxed
-  Card stock, Decorative Paper, Cork Fabric, Leather...
-  Binder Clips
-  Scissors
-  Inner Paper - Text Paper, Rhodia, Sketchbook...

HARD COVER BOOKS

-  PVA Glue
-  Med to Large Plastic Paintbrush
-  Hammer
-  Extra Cutting Mat or Thick Piece of Cork
-  Scrap Paper
-  Wax Paper or Parchment Paper
-  Thick Magazine or Old Book
-  Utility Knife
-  Book Board/Davy Board

ADVANCED TOOLS/NICE TO HAVES

-  Punching Cradle
-  Book Weights
-  Guillotine Paper Cutter
-  Japanese Screw Punch

PURCHASE TOOLS/FIND HELP

Tools

- 01 **Hollander's**
A small independent store dedicated to the bookbinding arts.
- 02 **Talas**
Another small independent store dedicated to bookbinding.
- 03 **Fine Art Store/Rochester Art Supply**
A great source for decorative papers and basic tools.
- 04 **Blick Art**
They often have great sales on paper pads.
- 05 **Cork and Cloth**
This is where I get all my cork fabric from. Well, here and JoAnne's.
- 06 **Michaels/JoAnne Fabrics**
You can find most of the items in this packed at your local Michaels or JoAnne Fabrics.

Resources

- 01 **Creativebug**
They have several online classes on bookbinding, and it's where I first learned to make books.
- 02 **Making Handmade Books - Alisa Golden**
Has over 100 book structures with diagrams and easy to follow instructions.
- 03 **The Art of the Fold - Kyle & Warchol**
Books made using folded paper techniques.
- 04 **Skillshare**
Several classes by amazing bookbinders and artists.
- 05 **little book of Book Making - Charlotte Rivers**
Features book structures made by international artists, and has instructions in the back.
- 06 **1-2-& 3-Section Sewings Vol II - Keith Smith**
Shows step by step sewing patterns for exposed stitch bindings.

THANK YOU,

Kit (Rachell) Gestrich

I've been a bookbinder for 2 years and sell my handmade notebooks, journals, and sketchbooks online and at in-person markets. I focus on trying to create unique books with exposed stitching and embroidery, and on using sustainable, vegan materials like cork fabric.

For more on my work, visit my website or my Substack.



Thank you for downloading my free guide to bookbinding. To stay up to date with my classes, or other free resources, subscribe to my Substack or visit my Blog.



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Need some help or have a question? Send me an email:



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