



Sewn On The Spine Journal

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Supply Handout

In this class I will show you how to make a hardcover journal with signatures that are sewn onto the spine. This type of book construction is perfect for visual artists who work with collage; like to include foldout pages; or have hand strength limitations which make it difficult to maintain tension while sewing textblock-type bindings.

There are two projects in this class. Students will select one of these projects for their first project. This will allow me to help them online (not in person) deal with issues that come up.)

Following that students will learn additional information to customize the book to any size and paper type they desire.

Students are asked to complete their chosen project without substituting materials—again so that I can help them learn the parameters of this structure. (So we are both talking about the same materials and how they act.)

The following project supply lists provide cut material sizes, so that you can buy sufficient quantity of each such material. DO NOT CUT ANY OF THIS MATERIAL until you have watched the project videos and torn down your text paper.

In the class videos I show you how to cut all your materials. I explain at which point you need to cut those materials. To avoid wastage it is crucial to wait until the appropriate point in the process to cut your materials.

When you register for class you are immediately able to view several videos which discuss the class and the SUPPLIES. This allows students to make useful purchases before the class starting date.



Above: Examples of various sewn on the spine books. See the project description after each title to understand which size and type of books will be made for that project.

Commonly Asked Questions about Substitutions of Materials

I ask that students not look for substitutions to materials when making their first project. This is again, so that we can remove the variables in the process, so that I know you can have success with what I'm using, and so that you are not frustrated by inferior materials.

Making a book involves using your most valuable asset—your time. If you use substandard materials it's a false economy. You end up with a book that isn't sound, and you have lost the time you used. You might also not understand the concepts necessary to make the structure well, because of problems the materials caused you.

Please be sure to make the first project you bind with the specified materials so that you learn all the lessons this class intends you to learn. Then you'll be in a position to improvise.

Here are just a few examples of what students have asked to use and why those substitutions won't work.

1. *I don't have anyone local who sells binder's board so I'm going to use mat board.*

This doesn't work because mat board doesn't have the dimensional strength of binder's board. When you hold open the book that is covered with mat board, even 12 ply mat board, the weight of the pages will push the covers

down. Gripping either cover to open or close the book puts further stress on the mat board even though it has been covered with fabric. Before you have filled the book you now have permanent creases in your book covers!

Mat board used on the spine for this structure can easily disintegrated under the sewing tension as you work.

Even with very small books I still use binder's board, just perhaps a lighter weight binder's board—it's really a matter of scale at that point. Very thick boards could look silly on a very tiny book, or make that book look very substantial. That's a matter of taste as to which thickness you use in that instance, but it should still be binder's board.

2. I'm a fabric artist and I have a ton of threads to use for sewing, I'll just use some cord I already have for my thread pattern.

Waxed Irish Linen Thread in the 3- to 5-ply range is the perfect thread for this structure—it is durable; the impregnated wax makes it easy to handle and unknot; it has MINIMAL STRETCH making it easy to sew and attain the proper tension; it is strong and durable and stands up to the wear and tear of lugging a book around in a pack so you have it to work in. It comes in a ton of colors. RoyalWoodLTD sells it at a reasonable cost if you can't find it locally.

If you use yarn, dental floss, or strings of various types you have to contend with stretching, fraying, and fuzzing. Some threading materials may actually cut up your cover holes. Thicker yarns and threads also enlarge the text paper holes. And many alternatives will not look very attractive.

For the sewings that we are doing in class I recommend either the 3- or 4- ply Waxed Irish Linen Thread.

If you are doing a sewing pattern that you want to have appear bulky you can use 5-ply but keep in mind that you may need to make your cover holes larger to accommodate multiple thread passthroughs at each hole. The thicker thread will also tear up your text paper holes.

3. I don't have PVA, I'll just use my Elmer's or generic white glue—wait I'll use glue stick!

PVA is a quality glue that will withstand the usage we are putting it up to. If you buy a quality PVA from a binding supply company like Talasonline you will know that your book will hold together over time. Elmer's and generic white glues were not set up to do that.

Note that reputable art supply companies will not sell you PVA that has to be shipped (typically by air) during the cold season, because freezing ruins PVA in its liquid state. **Therefore be sure to order PVA before summer turns to fall and temperatures drop OR after spring has arrived and temperatures are rising.**

Students who have been trained to use methyl cellulose alone, or in a 50/50 mix with PVA are welcome to do so. I only use straight PVA. I find that the drying time is sufficiently long for me. If you find that your glue is drying faster than you can work, using a mix of 50/50 might be useful to you. Get a plastic container that seals well and mix up a batch of 50/50 from which to draw your project

glue. Stir it frequently. I have seen this type of mix go off quickly when stored at MCBA by other teachers, so don't mix more than you'll use for a project.

4. I don't have any book cloth, gosh I looked and it's expensive. I'm just going to use fabric I already have.

This is a false economy of the worst kind. Book cloth is useful to us in binding because it has a paper backing. (There are some types of book cloth that don't have paper backings and are stabilized with resin impregnation—but I don't use any of those because I don't like the "feel" of them in my hand.)

The paper backing STABILIZES THE BOOK STRUCTURE across the hinges of the book, where there is the most use.

If you simply use ordinary fabric the hinges will be loose and sloppy, resulting in a weak and unattractive book.

The paper backing also PREVENTS GLUE from seeping through the weave of the fabric and staining your book cover.

For all these reasons it is important to spend the money to buy book cloth. Keep in mind that many vendors sell full yards that are not only 36 inches long, but as wide as the roll which can be 42 or more inches. This will break down to several books.

Additionally, after your first project is completed, you can consider using book cloth only on the spine and hinges of your structure, thus reducing the amount needed to something that is 10 or 12 inches tall and 6 inches or so wide—again, a lot of books can now be made from that yard of book cloth.

The Only Exception

If you are handy at gluing things and want something custom in your book cloth you can make your own paper backed book cloth. See my instructions on my blog. Enter "book cloth" in my blog's search engine and the second post on the list that comes up is "Making Book cloth: Applying a Paper Backing to Fabric."

Keep in mind that as you apply glue to the paper and then press the fabric to paper it is possible glue can seep through the weave of your fabric. Select tightly woven fabrics. Don't use excessive amounts of glue.

Realize that you'll need to buy lightweight but strong Japanese paper which can sometimes sell for as much as \$15 a sheet. This makes the price comparison between book binding cloth and custom paper-backed fabric a wash in cost, and a deficit in use of your time.

There are however times when it is useful to have an option for a certain project. And it is always fun to impose your design aesthetic onto your cover with custom book cloth. Think about printing your designs and illustrations onto fabric either on your home printer (if it has compatible inks and abilities to take fabric) or through one of the many vendors who now let you upload your designs and buy yardage.

5. *I've got plenty of old newspapers, why can't I use them instead of buying Newsprint?*

I encourage students to buy tablets of newsprint to use for waste paper (as shown in the videos) because there is no risk of ink transfer onto your book cloth.

Since the adoption of soy-based inks I have found that it is very easy to pick up ink smudges on book cloth from newspapers used as waste paper. I have also found that when you use your bone folder as shown in the videos across that paper it's easy for the bone folder to pick up ink stains and transfer those stains to your book cloth.

You're going to be spending your time (can't get that back) and using special materials (some of which are expensive) so I encourage you to buy the newsprint tablet (or bulk large sheets). It works out to be pennies per book.

6. *I don't have a book binding needle so I'll use my tapestry needle.*

A bookbinding needle is preferred because it typically has a less sharp tip that won't mar your paper or cover materials. (Some brands of bookbinding needles are sharp however.)

The main reason to use a bookbinding needle is that the EYE of the needle is very narrow and thin. This allows the needle and thread to pass multiple times through the same hole (which is often required by some sewing patterns) without splitting the thread or without widening the hole!

If you must use a regular needle pick one that has such an eye. And watch the sharpness. Put a bandage on your finger as soon as you feel a prick.

7. *I don't have the text paper specified for either project so I'll just use what I have and tear it down anyway I want.*

Specific papers are indicated for each project because this controls variables and allows us clearer communication if you get into trouble with tearing and folding. Additionally these papers will give you a sense for the thickness of signatures needed going forward. You will need to be able to work out spacing between signatures with other papers in the future, but if you don't have the understanding these projects give you of how a certain paper works you've let yourself in for a lot of frustrating and expensive experiments.

One of the key things I teach in my classes is how to tear paper to size. I do this because I myself like to customize the size of my journals. But I also do it because I have found that so many students don't have the first idea of how to work with paper and are limited to making the same project they were taught 20 years ago over and over.

Get the paper I specify, work with it as I explain, learn what it can do, and then take all that knowledge and go forward able to work independently.

On Substituting Tools

I receive dozens of other requests for substitution all the time. The preceding are the most damaging to the project and to your ability to learn.

However there are tools that you will find suitable substitutes for. For instance you may just be able to get away with using a butter knife, or a credit card, or something else instead of a bone folder. If you're only going to make one book, by all means try it. I've made extraordinary books in the middle of nowhere, with none of my usual tools.

But if you're going to make more than one book (and you signed up for this class so let's hope so) why would you want to make a book without a bone folder? It will speed up the task, improve the result...

Think about all this when you make tool substitutions. Long ago I was unhappy with the traditional binding awls that were available. Their shafts went from needle tip to a thicker base. When punching you had to stop on instinct to the point where you wanted your hole size, or you'd have all sorts of varied hole sizes—something that will not look good on this type of structure where the sewing holes are on display on the spine.

Instead I looked around for other awls in other art media and found the clay tool that I use today from Kemper. I mention it in the supplies. Now there are binding supply companies who actually sell this exact tool for binding so it should be easy for you to find.

That's an example of understanding a task and finding a better tool.

I encourage you to do that.

Project A

Almost square, full cloth-covered boards, zig-zag stitch, Fabriano Artistico 140 lb. Watercolor paper.

Materials

Do NOT CUT materials until instructed to do so in the videos. Underlined numbers in supplies indicate grain direction.

See the supply video in class for visuals and explanations of these supplies.

3 sheets Fabriano Artistico 140 lb. Watercolor paper (Hot or Cold Press, student option) 22 x 30 inches

2 pieces binder's board (see Vendors section for weight information; I like to use .067 to .070), 8-1/4 x 8 inches

1 piece binder's board (for spine) 1 x 8 inches

1 piece book cloth, 20 x 10 inches

1 piece decorative paper for endsheets, 18 x 7-5/8 inches (we are using Canson Mi Tientes and exact trim is worked out later in the process.)

12 feet of 4-cord waxed linen

Awl

face cloth or cushion to protect awl point

Self healing cutting mat

X-Acto blade and holder

Metal ruler 18 inches long

Yardstick (wood or metal)

A graphite pencil

A WHITE Color pencil (if you're working with fabric that has a dark paper backing)

bone folder (I like to use one with a pointy end and a rounded end. Get one as flat as possible. It needs to lie flat on the table. Teflon bone folders are too thick to work for these projects.)

bookbinding needle (See note in "Substitutions" section.)

curved needle (most sewing or craft stores carry these)

PVA for gluing

glue brushes

scissors

foam roller (See the Vendors section.)

waste paper (copier bond paper)

newsprint (see note in "Substitutions")

wax paper (non-US students this **is not** parchment paper)

hardboard or melamine boards for weighting cover while it dries

weights (bricks, books, or other heavy items) for weighting covers

paper towels

small container for wet paper towel (I cut down a quart yogurt container so that is half as tall. You could also place this paper towel on a small plastic plate.)

plastic plate for dispensing glue

masking tape

If you don't have a board cutter to cut your binder's board you will need the following:

A Heavy Duty Cutting Blade

Optional: A heavy metal ruler with a central ridge to protect your hand is also useful when cutting binder's board.

Optional

An 18 inch long, 3 inch wide see-through sewing ruler (you'll see me use one in the videos for various purposes)

A metal triangle

Project B

A portrait orientation journal with decorative paper covered boards and a cloth covered spine; alternating bars stitch; three signatures of Strathmore 500 Series Mixed Media paper.

Materials

Do NOT CUT materials until instructed to do so in the videos. Underlined numbers in supplies indicate grain direction.

See the supply video in class for visuals and explanations of these supplies.

3 sheets Strathmore 500 Series Mixed Media Paper
22 x 30 inches

2 pieces binder's board (see Vendors section for weight information; I like to use .067 to .070), 8-1/8" x 9-11/16 inches

1 piece binder's board (for spine) 3/4 x 9-11/16 inches

1 piece book cloth to cover the spine and hinges,
6 x 11-11/16 inches

2 pieces of decorative paper for the covers. (*These can be made or purchased. Suggestions are given in class pre-class videos available to registered students before class begins. You'll need papers that are durable, opaque [so board color doesn't show through], and something that folds around the book board corners well.*) 6-3/4 x 11-11/16 inches

1 piece Canson Mi Tientes to cut the paper endsheets,
17-1/2 x 9-5/16 inches

4-cord waxed linen that is 6 x the book height

Awl

face cloth or cushion to protect awl point

Self healing cutting mat

X-Acto blade and holder

Metal ruler 18 inches long

Yardstick (wood or metal)

A graphite Pencil

A WHITE Color pencil (if you're working with fabric that has a dark paper backing)

bone folder (I like to use one with a pointy end and a rounded end. Get one as flat as possible. It needs to lie flat on the table. Teflon bone folders are too thick to work for these projects.)

bookbinding needle (See note in "Substitutions" section.)

curved needle (most sewing or craft stores carry these)

PVA for gluing

glue brushes

scissors

foam roller (See the Vendors section.)
waste paper (copier bond paper)
newsprint (see note in “Substitutions”)
wax paper (non-US students this **is not** parchment paper)
hardboard or melamine boards for weighting cover while it dries
weights (bricks, books, or other heavy items) for weighting covers
paper towels
small container for wet paper towel (I cut down a quart yogurt container so that is half as tall. You could also place this paper towel on a small plastic plate.)
plastic plate for dispensing glue
masking tape

If you don't have a board cutter to cut your binder's board you will need the following:

A Heavy Duty Cutting Blade

Optional: A heavy metal ruler with a central ridge to protect your hand is also useful when cutting binder's board.

Optional

An 18 inch long, 3 inch wide see-through sewing ruler (you'll see me use one in the videos for various purposes)

A metal triangle

Vendors for Supplies

Book Cloth and Binding Tools

In Minneapolis/St. Paul I buy my binding supplies from either Wet Paint (a local independent art supply store located in St. Paul, MN) or MCBA (Minnesota Center for Book Arts). The latter has a small shop inside the center. It is best to go in person to MCBA as they have a limited range of some materials, such as book cloth, which changes constantly.

The prices at both those stores are great.

If you are interested in shopping online you can of course use Wet Paint (I find their website difficult to search on so I recommend that you call. They are happy to ship you stuff.)

Also online you can get all your binding needs at Talasonline.com.

I find Talas particularly useful for book cloth. They have a huge selection of Japanese book cloth (which I recommend for their beauty and ease of use). They also sell swatch books you can purchase to verify colors. They sell

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the cloth in FULL YARDS which is the most economical way to purchase. (They also carry PVA and tools.)

Some of my students have found Hollanders a great source to order from.

I'm sure there are additional sites where you can buy binding supplies. I would suggest you double check on Talas before you buy from sites with a small selection of materials as you might find a better price and selection on Talas.

Bulk Book Cloth Purchases

If you want to buy a certain color of book cloth in bulk (perhaps with a group of artists, or simply because you love a color so much you want to use it for everything) I recommend you contact Campbell-Logan Bindery, Inc. located in Fridley, MN.

Order a book cloth swatch binder from them. (At this writing it was \$25 and postage.) Then you'll have actual swatches to judge from when you place your order for **FIVE YARDS MINIMUM.**

They do not sell smaller amounts.

Elusive Purple Book Cloth

Many students look at photos of my books online over the years and ask me where I purchase the “lovely purple” book cloth that I use.

I purchased that cloth through Talas HOWEVER, for the past several years it has no longer been available. It was discontinued by the manufacturer. It was explained to me by a local bindery that the dyes used in that fabric were judged to be an environmental hazard to the water in Japan so it was discontinued.

I have found NO REPLACEMENT for that color.

Which is very sad because it went with EVERYTHING I did when it came to making my own decorative paper.

But as I often remind my students—things change, companies stop making favorite products. We have to always be alert to this, find new sources and new favorites, and be grateful that we have had a chance to work with the now defunct products.

The Mohair Purple I purchased years ago was in the 341-## line available from Campbell Logan. (These “Mohair” fabrics are also available from Talas, but I they list their book cloth in the Japanese section as a picture grid, so I can't quickly refer you to them there, you'll have to click on colors you like.

Anyway, that fabric line has a lovely red, a dark and light green, a teal, two blues, and a black. (There may be additional colors not carried by my regular vendors.) They wear well. I highly recommend them.

I also recommend the 541-XX line at C-L (and elsewhere). There is a pronounced thread line in the 541 line that is quite lovely. They also wear exceptionally well.

541-89 is the substitute purple now made. It is a true purple, looking like a mixture of French Ultramarine Blue and Quin Magenta, and in this line has a pronounced thread line in the fabric. I don't know who else carries this particular color so you would have to commit to a five

yard minimum. (One of the reasons I'm no longer using purple for my books.)

I recommend that you avoid BROCADE book cloths for your first book. These are often "thicker" and more difficult to work with when you smooth the cloth over the edge of your cover boards.

Binder's Board

I like to use binder's board and not Davey board. Davey board is more difficult to cut, so for home binders who are working without a board sheers it can be difficult to work with it. Also, if you've taken my Simple Round Back Spine class you'll know that I often enjoy cutting label "windows" for my books. This is much more difficult to do with Davey board. But both projects in this class can be made with Davey board if you elect to use it. Just be sure to get a similar weight to what I'm using. (After your first project book you can also decide to go up or down in weight depending on the way the result matches your aesthetic.

For all my books, except large albums I use binder's board with a thickness of .068 or .070 to .080 (which is about 1/16 to 1/12 inch thickness). The lightweight board I use depends on what is available from the vendors I use. I tend to go with what is at MCBA because I buy a lot of board for projects, rent the board sheers and cut it all down at one time. Currently their lightweight board is 0.70.

For albums I will use the thicker weight of .098 (about 1/10" thick).

If you are cutting your boards by hand I strongly recommend that you go with something in the thinner range I list above. That will be ideal for the structure we are making, in the size we are making it.

Keep in mind too that you will have to punch holes in your spine board and the thicker boards will make that punching more difficult.

It is possible that you could take the finest drill bit and drill through your spine holes with the template in position. (Be sure to start on the fabric-outside and drill in so anything rough gets pushed in.) I can only say it's possible because I have not tried that. I routinely use a motorized hand drill for my paper Japanese spine bindings and that works great—but the addition of fabric covering might cause factors I'm unaware of.

If you would like to test out drilling your spine holes with an electric hand drill I would recommend that you cover a piece of board that is wider than the spine with cloth (so you have something to grab onto). Attach the template, position the spine on a block of waste wood that you'll be drilling through the cover into. Be sure to have that positioned on a worktable where drill marks aren't going to be a disaster, perhaps use an old self healing mat as extra protection on the table. Your drilling set up should be stable so you don't slip and your materials don't slip.

Practice will then show you how neat the holes come out and whether it's worth trying that method.

I have some students who have asked me if they could punch their spine holes with a Japanese punch.

I have never seen them do this successfully. They either don't have a small enough punch size and the resultant holes are too large and look empty when the thread pattern is complete; or they have a dull punch and it doesn't go through cleanly leaving things looking messy; or they don't have the arm strength to give the punch the necessary wallop to go through.

If you feel confident in using such punches on your fabric covered board, I recommend that you make a practice board as described about. Be sure to place your cover FACE UP on a protective surface like a self-healing mat before punching. Please also note that if you're doing a lot of this you may end up damaging your self-healing mat. I did a project with a lot of eyelets and the required punching and hammering put dents all over a self-healing mat. They were of sufficient depth that it was impossible to cut a straight line of fabric or paper on that mat—the blade would catch in the "divots" and go off from straight. You may want to designate an old self-healing mat as your punching and drilling surface.

On the supply page in the classroom I will add clickable links to various vendors who have binders board that you can choose from that would be useful for these projects.

Decorative Cover Paper

I've already said that you need something durable, opaque, and easy to fold around the binder's board. I want to suggest that you stay away from any decorative papers that have plant inclusions in them.

There are lovely papers from Japan and India that I can think of right now which have plant inclusions like leaves and petals.

I find these difficult for students to use. A stiff stem or bulky portion of a petal always seems to fall exactly at the point where you need to ease that paper over the edge of a board and then immediately ease it over another edge onto the back of the board.

To use papers with inclusions on a cover board requires that you buy much more of that paper than you think you need (so you can recut if you get into trouble). It also means that you will need to fancy cut the piece that you can use—that means you may use a center piece from a large decorative sheet, and the rest might not be suitable for any use you are currently facing. That's a lot of waste, given the cost of these sheets.

Also problematic are some of the stunning papers with debossing or embossed designs on them. When gluing these papers to your cover board the action of burnishing the paper to the board will flatten the debossed and embossed designs making you wonder why you spent so much for a sheet that's now without impact.

Lastly Tyvek has been used by book artists for several decades now. I have even taught book structures using it. Well, I'm sorry to say that the maker of this product has changed their line and the Tyvek best suited to how I make

books is no longer made. Additionally I have found that the books I made with the “good” Tyvek (which accepted media treatments and glue) has not shown good adherence over the years. I strongly advise against it.

I encourage you to find other options and avoid the frustration.

Waxed Irish Linen

You can purchase Waxed Irish Linen at many craft, bead-ing, book binding, and art supply stores. The color selection is typically limited and the ply variety available is also limited.

I purchase 90 percent of my Waxed Irish Linen online from RoyalwoodLTD.com.

They have a huge selection of color and ply; and great prices.

For our projects I recommend 3- or 4-ply thread in the color of your choosing. My personal preference for this structure is for 4-ply because it looks “full” on the spine. Do not use a thread with a thicker ply as we’ll discuss in class.

Thread color choice is up to the student. There is a section of class where for each project I walk through my design considerations when choosing book cloth, decorative paper, endsheet paper, and thread COLORS.

Keep these elements in mind as you choose thread colors.

While I will use lighter colors against dark fabrics I tend to avoid white, cream, very light yellow (I prefer golden rod vibrant yellow), very light green, very light blue, very light beige, and any neon colors.

By “very light” I mean colors that are basically one step up from white they are so pale.

Those light colors may wear just as well as the darker colors, but they pick up and show every bit of dust and lint that you find in the environments you will be working in with your book.

Foam Rollers

Past students seem to have the most trouble understanding which foam roller they need. When you register for class you will be able to see videos and discussions of what I use.

If you are purchasing in advance of registration know that I purchase foam Rollers from eNasco.com

Specifically I purchase the Pacon Foam rollers, product #9724344 for \$9.90 for TWELVE.

Yes I have to take them to class for students to use when I do in-person classes, but I also glue a lot of things. These last for a LONG time, lots of jobs each, if you wash them as instructed in class.

Alternately if you don’t feel you need what might be a life-time supply of foam rollers eNasco has the Pacon Foam Brush and Rollers set of 40. Product #9728353 for \$15.10. This set includes 10 EACH of this roller style, and 10 each of 3 different sizes of foam brush (useful for journal painting, applying gesso, and other craft stuff).

NO OTHER FOAM ROLLER WORKS LIKE THIS ONE. You can try out others, but seriously I haven’t found anything else that works this well.

Note: Please do NOT USE any rollers you’ve previously used for PAINT. They are impossible to completely clear of paint. Some paints will mix with your glue during the rolling on, and may seep through papers or book cloth. Just don’t do it. Remember your time is your most valuable asset. Give your project a fighting chance.