

PAPER : MEDIUM & METHODS



Get to know the artist's MEDIUM and METHODS. First, explore the MEDIUM of paper. Learn about various METHODS you can use to create functional and sculptural objects from paper. Learn the steps and different techniques artists use and use them at home.

MEDIUM

PAPER is a plant-based material traditionally made from the fibers of wood, cotton, or linen, but don't let its simplicity fool you! This humble material has traveled alongside us throughout human history, carrying our stories, ideas, and art. Before paper, ancient peoples relied on plant bark, animal skins, and clay tablets. It is one of the most versatile and accessible art materials available. It can be sculpted, folded, cut, and stitched, and paper surfaces can be embellished with writing, printmaking, embossing, drawing or painting. Some examples of paper-based media are described below, to help you gain a deeper understanding of this material.

WOOD-BASED PAPER ■ The most common variety of paper found in most places around the world, wood-based paper is made from the pulp of tree fibers and pressed into flat sheets. It is used for drawing, printing, books, and packaging, due to its affordability and its ease of use. This type of paper can be thin and smooth or thick and textured, making it useful for a variety of different purposes. It can become brittle and yellow over time, but remains a classic choice for everyday making and creating.

LINEN PAPER ■ Linen paper is made from flax fibers—the same material used to create linen fabric. It is durable and slightly textured, which works well for drawing, printing, and special documents. While it can yellow slightly over time, linen paper does not become brittle like wood-based paper. Some people prefer the soft golden tone that develops with age. Try it if you're curious—you may grow to love it too.

COTTON-BASED RAG PAPER ■ An artist's favorite, cotton-based rag paper is made from cotton fibers. It is flexible, long-lasting, and doesn't yellow over time. It absorbs water well and is resistant to tearing, making it perfect for watercolor, printmaking, and other long-lasting work.

VELLUM ■ Vellum is a smooth, translucent paper. Slightly see-through and somewhat mysterious in appearance, vellum was traditionally made from treated animal skin; however, most modern vellum is now made from plant-based materials. Since it diffuses the light that passes through it, it is especially useful for tracing and layered artwork.

MULBERRY PAPER (KOZO) ■ Beautifully delicate in appearance and made from fibers of the mulberry tree, mulberry paper is known for being lightweight, yet surprisingly strong. As it ages, it yellows very gradually into a graceful, warm tone over time. It can be torn into soft, feathery edges that remain durable enough to withstand printmaking, cut paper, and bookbinding processes.

METHODS

The methods described below offer some introductory-level techniques for working with paper:

RECYCLED PAPER MAKING ■ Turn yesterday's scraps into brand new art materials! Recycled paper can be made by soaking small pieces of paper scrap in water until the fibers soften. The soaked paper can be blended into pulp and spread in a thin layer across screening or mesh. Press out the excess water, let it dry, and voilà—new paper!



<https://youtu.be/vb74qMEBFrg>

FOLDING & FORMING ■ Experiment with cutting, slotting, and folding paper to transform flat sheets into playful forms. Use tape, glue, or a stapler to help hold the shape of your paper as you work. Try organic and free form structures or classic geometric forms like cylinders, cones, or cubes. A variety of paper shapes and construction methods like twisting, curling, or repeating and connecting forms can then be used to create your own sculptural arrangement.



<https://youtu.be/jr8LwiYuKLw>

CUT PAPER ■ Cut paper traditions are found throughout the world, originating most likely in China. Some of the best known traditions are *Papel Picado*, *Kiri-e*, and *Scherenschnitte*. *Papel Picado* is a perforated and punched paper technique developed in Mexico. *Kiri-e* is a technique found in Japan, and *Scherenschnitte* is a technique found throughout Germanic countries—both of which utilize precise and intricate cutting to create sophisticated silhouettes.

Try creating your own cut paper design by using scissors or a craft knife to slice patterns and shapes into a sheet of paper. Think about how the cut-away sections and the remaining paper create an image. Before cutting, try folding your paper in different ways to create mirrored or repeating shapes. When finished, place your pattern on a window or a different colored background to see how the design changes.



Hidde Van Duym, *Wester Isles Expedition*, 2007

COLLAGE ■ A collage can be created by arranging cut and torn pieces of different types and textures of paper into a design. The design can be abstract, pictorial, or a little of both. A great starting trick: collect four to nine pieces that share at least two things in common (same color family, similar texture, matching pattern). Layer, overlap, and shift them around until you reach an arrangement you like. Glue it all into place to complete the process.

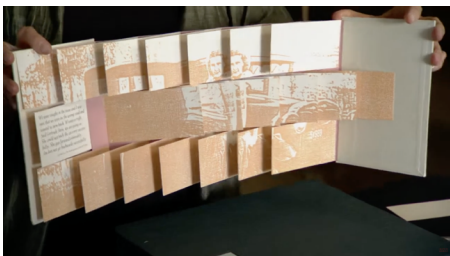
PAPER ENGINEERING ■ Have you ever thought about the hidden superpowers of paper? Pop-up books that explode with dimensionality and sculptures that move through three-dimensional space can be created with basic paper engineering techniques. From a simple, flat sheet to a standing, springing, or leaping surprise, paper artists can transform this ordinary material into dynamic, moving creations with some strategically planned folding, scoring, layering, and connecting.



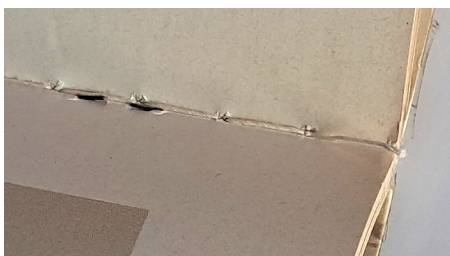
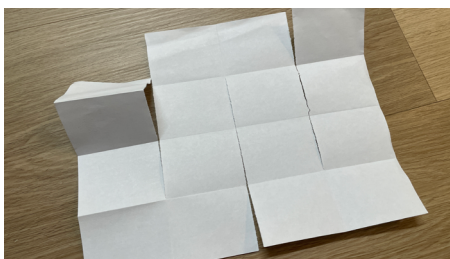
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<https://youtu.be/LEQpo-iHSb4>



Try building a pop-up greeting card, a tab connected to a hidden surprise, a spring, or movable layers. Can it stand on its own? How might it move? Does it open or close in more than one way? Can it be flipped or reversed? Open it, close it, flip it around — does it look completely different from a new angle? Keep folding, scoring, layering, and connecting to see what can happen!

PAPIER-MÂCHÉ ■ Papier mâché—French for “chewed paper”—has been used across cultures and over time to create all sorts of sculptural forms, from festival masks and ceremonial objects to theater props. A basic approach uses torn strips of paper dipped in an adhesive water mixture, such as flour + water, diluted glue, or commercially prepared art paste or wheat paste.

To get started, dip a strip, wipe off the excess with fingertips, and drape over a base form like a balloon, crumpled foil bent into a desired shape, or a prepared mold. Cover the surface of the form with overlapping layers to create a sculptural sheet. Then, build up the walls of your sculpture in several layers, to add strength. Once dry, finish the work with paint or folded and formed paper pieces!

BOOKMAKING ■ From a single folded sheet to carefully stitched spines, there are endless ways to create a handmade book. Start with a simple internet search for do-it-yourself bookmaking. As you explore possibilities, determine what kind of paper you'll use and how you'll bind or bring together the pages. Some possible approaches are described below, but feel free to find and explore other options too!

- **ACCORDION FOLD** ■ A simple and immediately gratifying approach, begin with a long strip of paper, and fold page-sized sections back and forth, using a zigzag pattern. This creates a chain of connected pages that can be viewed one at a time or opened all at once to reveal an entire panoramic sequence.
- **SNAKE FOLD** ■ A playful, glue-free approach, snake fold books feel like a moving puzzle. Beginning with a large, rectangular sheet of paper, fold the paper in half lengthwise, then again, until long narrow sections are created. Fold in half widthwise next, in the same manner, until you get a grid of rectangular page sections. Make several carefully placed tears or cuts along strategic fold lines, to create a continuous, winding, snakelike pathway of page sections. Then, fold the paper back and forth along the creases, in an accordion pattern, to form the pages of the book.
- **SADDLE STITCH** ■ This approach requires a needle, thread, and craftsmanship. Create a stack of folded pages, line up the spines, and sew through the fold along the spine, using thread or string. This is one of the oldest bookbinding techniques, used for centuries to create sturdy, beautiful, handmade books.