STRETCHLEARN · WORKBOOK

Flower Arranging — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into hands-on practice. Each section matches a course module and asks you to set up real mechanics, condition stems and measure how long they last, plan colour and proportion deliberately, and build the classic shapes plus an ikebana design. Work through it alongside one real arrangement and you will finish with a planned, conditioned, well-proportioned piece in your chosen vessel, plus a record of mechanics, palettes, and care steps you can repeat.

Mechanics: Holding Flowers Where You Want Them

Choose the right anchoring method for your vessel and set up foam, a frog, a tape grid, or a wire cage so every stem stays where you place it.

Exercise: Match the mechanic to the vessel

Gather three different containers from around your home: one clear glass vase, one low wide bowl, and one tall opaque vase. For each, decide which of the four mechanics (foam, pin frog, tape grid, wire cage) you would use and why, then actually set up the chosen mechanic in each.

• Which mechanic did you choose for the clear glass vase, and why did you rule out foam there?

• For the low wide bowl, would foam or a pin frog give you better control of stems angling outward and downward?

• After setting up each mechanic, push one test stem in at an angle. Does it hold the angle, or slump? Note what you would change.

Worksheet: Vessel and mechanics plan

Record the vessel and mechanic for your real project so your setup matches the design you want to build.

Vessel: shape, height (cm), opening width (cm), clear or opaque

Design style intended (dome / one-sided triangle / hand-tie / ikebana / loose)

Mechanic chosen (foam / pin frog / tape grid / wire cage) and why

Will any stems angle down over the rim? Y/N (affects foam height above rim)

Foam-free goal? Y/N (frog, tape, or wire instead of foam)

Securing method (foam tape / floral fix under frog / rim strip / wire tucked in)

Water reservoir plan (foam sitting in water / vase filled / dish filled after frog fixed)

Checklist: Foam preparation check

[ ] Foam cut to fit the container while still dry, standing 2 to 3 cm above the rim
[ ] Float-soaked in food-treated water until it sank and darkened, never pushed under
[ ] No dry pockets: the block feels evenly heavy and saturated all through
[ ] Block wedged or taped so it cannot rock or float loose
[ ] Secured across the top with two strips of waterproof foam (anchor) tape onto the rim
[ ] Container topped up with food-treated water so the foam sits in a reservoir
[ ] Plan in place to top up the water every single day

Exercise: Build and test a tape grid and a wire cage

On a dry clear vase, lay a criss-cross grid of waterproof florist tape with cells about 2 to 3 cm wide and lock the ends with a rim strip. Separately, scrunch a piece of chicken wire into a ball and push it into an opaque vase. Add a few stems to each and compare how they hold.

• On the tape grid, do upright stems sit where you place them? What happens when you try to angle a stem out sharply?

• In the wire cage, can you angle stems out in every direction? This is why wire suits loose garden-style designs.

• Is the tape invisible enough in the glass, and is every cut wire end tucked down inside the rim so nothing shows or scratches?

Conditioning: Making Flowers Last

Process and hydrate stems the professional way, handle the flowers that break the rules, and prove to yourself that conditioning extends vase life.

Exercise: The conditioning vase-life test

Buy or cut two identical small bunches of the same flower. Condition one bunch fully (strip below the waterline, re-cut on a 45 degree slant, deep cool drink, clean food-treated water). Put the other straight into plain water unconditioned. Place both side by side and check them daily.

• On which day does the unconditioned bunch first start to wilt or droop, and how does the conditioned bunch compare that day?

• Which water clouded or smelled first? Connect that to the leaves left below the waterline.

• By the end, how many extra days did conditioning buy you? Write the number down so you trust the routine.

Worksheet: Conditioning station and processing log

Set up your conditioning station and record how you process each bunch, so every stem gets the same reliable treatment.

Bucket scrubbed clean and rinsed? Y/N

Water: cool and fresh, flower food dose used (per sachet)

Cutting tool: sharp clean knife or floral snips (not household scissors)? Y/N

For each bunch: lower leaves stripped below waterline? Y/N

For each bunch: re-cut 2 to 3 cm at 45 degrees, under water? Y/N

Special stems present (tulip / daffodil / hydrangea / woody / poppy) and treatment given

Deep drink: location (cool, dim) and hours before arranging

Checklist: Special-stem handling check

[ ] Daffodils and narcissi conditioned separately for several hours, then added without re-cutting
[ ] Tulips given a cool wrapped drink, and their continued growth and movement allowed for in the design
[ ] Hydrangeas and other thirsty heads revived by submerging the whole flower in cool water if wilted
[ ] Woody stems (lilac, viburnum) given a clean slant cut plus a short vertical split, never crushed
[ ] Bleeding stems (poppies, euphorbia) seared in flame or boiling water to seal the sap
[ ] Roses stripped of thorns and lower leaves without gouging the bark
[ ] No stem left sitting in air after cutting; all returned to water immediately

Exercise: Keep-it-alive maintenance run

Take any finished arrangement and run the maintenance routine on it for a week: change or top up the water every two days, re-cut stems a centimetre at each water change, remove dying stems, and keep it away from sun, heat, and fruit. Track what you do.

• Did the water stay clear longer with regular changes and stem re-cutting than it would have left alone?

• Which stem died first, and did pulling it out keep the rest fresher?

• Was the arrangement anywhere near a fruit bowl, radiator, or sunny window? Move it and note any improvement.

Colour, Texture, and Proportion

Plan a deliberate palette from the colour wheel, assign flowers to their roles, contrast textures, and size the design to its container.

Exercise: Build two palettes from the wheel

Using a colour wheel (printed or on a phone), plan two different palettes for the same flowers: one harmonious (monochromatic or analogous) and one high-contrast (complementary). Pull stems to match each and lay them out side by side before arranging.

• For the harmonious palette, did you stay within one hue family or three neighbours, plus white and green?

• For the complementary palette, which two opposite colours did you pair, and does the contrast feel vibrant or clashing?

• Did you include a range of values (light to dark) within each scheme, or did it come out flat? Add a tint or a shade if needed.

Worksheet: Colour and role plan

Plan your palette and assign every flower to a functional role before you start building, so the design has both colour harmony and structure.

Scheme type (monochromatic / analogous / complementary / triadic)

Hues chosen (limit to two or three plus foliage)

Value range (palest to deepest in the palette)

Focal flowers (large, eye-catching) and colour

Line flowers (tall, spiky, trailing) and colour

Filler flowers (small, clustered) and colour

Foliage / greenery used to frame and bind

Warm vs cool balance (which colours advance, which recede)

Checklist: Texture, form, and proportion check

[ ] At least one flower in each role gathered (focal, line, filler, foliage)
[ ] Flower forms mixed: round, spike, and airy or star shapes all present
[ ] Texture contrasted: smooth against feathery, glossy against matte, fine against solid
[ ] Arrangement height set to roughly 1.5 to 1.75 times the container height or width
[ ] A clear focal point placed low and central where the eye lands
[ ] Visual weight kept low and central, lighter and airier material higher and to the edges
[ ] Some flowers recessed and others forward for front-to-back depth

Exercise: The squint-and-turn balance test

Stand back from your arrangement, squint hard so the detail blurs, and study the overall shape. Then turn an all-round design slowly (or view a one-sided design from the front) looking for holes, crossing stems, and orphaned blooms.

• When you squint, does one focal point clearly dominate, or does the design read as a flat, shapeless mass?

• Turning or facing the design, where are the holes or crossing stems, and which flower sticks out awkwardly?

• Is the design leaning, and does the visual weight feel grounded low and central or top-heavy? Note one fix and make it.

Building Arrangements and an Ikebana Intro

Build the foundational shapes (dome, hand-tie, one-sided triangle) and a simple three-line ikebana, putting mechanics, conditioning, and design together.

Exercise: Build a dome and a spiral hand-tie

Make a rounded dome in foam by setting foliage to a half-sphere outline and aiming every stem at the centre. Separately, build a hand-tied posy by laying each stem across the bunch at the same angle in the same direction, turning as you go, then tie and trim level so it stands.

• On the dome, did aiming each stem at the imaginary centre point keep the radiating lines clean, and does it look balanced from every side?

• On the hand-tie, did you keep every stem at the same diagonal angle and turn consistently, or did some go in straight and parallel?

• Does your trimmed hand-tie actually stand upright on its stem ends? If it flops, the spiral was not consistent enough.

Worksheet: One-sided triangle build plan

Plan the three outer points of a front-facing vertical triangle before you fill it, so the silhouette stays clean.

Container (footed bowl / compote) and foam height above rim

Apex stem: tallest line stem, height set to 1.5 to 1.75 times the container

Two base points: side line stems angled outward and down, width set

Front point: stem flowing forward over the rim to hide the mechanics

Focal flowers placed low and central, largest at the heart

Filler and foliage to fill inside the outline (no foam showing from the front)

Back left plainer (worked mainly from the front)? Y/N

Checklist: Ikebana moribana check

[ ] Kenzan (pin frog) fixed to the dry shallow dish with floral fix before adding water
[ ] Shin (heaven) line set tallest and near-upright, about 1.5 to 2 times the dish width plus depth
[ ] Soe (human) line about two-thirds of the shin, at a wider angle
[ ] Hikae (earth) line about one-third of the shin, low and angled forward to the viewer
[ ] Only a few supporting stems (jushi) added, never crowding the three main lines
[ ] The three lines form an irregular three-dimensional triangle, not a flat fan
[ ] Generous negative space left; stopped filling before the obvious gaps were closed

Exercise: The subtraction exercise

Take a finished Western-style arrangement (or a fresh small ikebana) and deliberately remove stems one at a time, stepping back after each, until every remaining stem is clearly visible and the spaces between them breathe. Notice when it starts to look more intentional rather than less.

• At what point did removing stems make the design look more deliberate instead of emptier?

• Which stems were doing real work (setting line, anchoring the focal point) and which were just filling space?

• How does the restraint you practised in ikebana change the way you would build your next Western arrangement?

Your Action Plan

1. Run the match-the-mechanic exercise on three vessels and choose the right anchoring method for your real project.
2. Set up your chosen mechanic correctly: float-soak foam, fix a frog to a dry dish, lay a tape grid, or scrunch a wire cage.
3. Scrub a bucket, mix flower food, and condition every bunch: strip below the waterline, re-cut on a slant, drink deep and cool.
4. Give any special stems (daffodil, tulip, hydrangea, woody, poppy) their own treatment before adding them to the bucket.
5. Plan a palette from the colour wheel (two or three hues plus foliage) and decide harmony or contrast on purpose.

6. Sort your conditioned stems into the four roles: focal, line, filler, and foliage, contrasting forms and textures.
7. Set the arrangement height to 1.5 to 1.75 times the container and place one clear focal point low and central.
8. Build a foundational shape: a centre-aimed dome, a spiral hand-tie that stands, or a three-point one-sided triangle.
9. Squint and turn (or face) the finished design to catch holes, crossing stems, leaning, and top-heaviness, then fix them.
10. Try a moribana ikebana with shin, soe, and hikae on a kenzan, then maintain every arrangement with clean water and no fruit nearby.