

# Cake Decorating — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into deliberate practice. Each section matches a course module and asks you to assemble the right kit, level and stack a real cake square, mix and consistency-test buttercream, smooth to sharp edges, cover cleanly in fondant, and pipe borders and your first flowers. Work through it alongside actual cakes and you will finish able to level and fill a stable stack, dial buttercream to any task, smooth flat tops with crisp corners, drape fondant without tears, and pipe a shell border, a rosette top, and a buttercream rose, with logs so your good results repeat.

## Foundations: Tools, Levelling, and Filling

Assemble the kit that matters, then level, torte, and stack a cake square with a dam so it does not bulge or lean.

### Worksheet: Starter kit audit

Lay out everything you own for cake decorating and fill in what you have versus the beginner kit, so you buy only the gaps before you build. Prioritise the turntable and metal scraper over more tips.

Turntable on hand? (yes / no — most useful single tool)

---

---

Levelling method (wire leveller / long serrated knife / neither)

---

---

Offset palette knives owned (small / large)

---

---

Metal bench scraper and side smoother? (yes / no)

---

---

Piping bags and couplers (disposable 16 inch count)

---

---

Core tips owned (round / open star / closed star / 1M or 2D / leaf / petal)

---

---

Cake boards and dowels/straws on hand? (yes / no)

---

---

Gaps to buy before next cake

---

---

### Exercise: Level-and-torte drill

Bake and fully chill a cake, then practise levelling and torting. Set a wire leveller or rest a serrated knife flat at a set height, and saw the cake into a steady blade while turning it on the turntable. Save the scraps and check flatness by running a board across the cut.

- Did you cut cold? How clean was the cut and how much did it crumb compared with a warm cake?
- 
-

• When you ran a flat board or hand across the levelled top, did you feel a high side to shave, and did you correct it?

---

• When torting, did you mark the midline with toothpicks all round and keep the blade against them, and did the two layers come out even?

---

### Worksheet: Stack and fill record

Build one filled, stacked cake and record the numbers as you go, so a stable stack becomes repeatable rather than a one-off.

Cake size (diameter / number of layers)

---

First layer stuck to board with buttercream? (yes / no)

---

Filling used (jam / curd / ganache / buttercream)

---

Dam piped around each layer? (yes / no — needed for soft fillings)

---

Filling level with the dam, not mounded? (yes / no)

---

Stack checked vertical with ruler/level? (leaning / square)

---

Chilled before crumb coat? (minutes)

---

Notes / what to fix next time

---

---

### Checklist: Square-and-stable check

- Cakes baked ahead, cooled, wrapped, and chilled before cutting
- Domes levelled off flat; tops checked with a board across the cut
- Layers torted evenly with a toothpick-marked midline
- First layer glued to the board so it cannot slide
- Stiff buttercream dam piped around the rim of every soft-filled layer
- Filling kept level with the dam, not over-filled into a fat wedge
- Stack aligned into a straight vertical wall, no off-centre step
- Stacked cake chilled firm before crumb-coating

### Buttercream: Mixing and Smoothing

Mix the right buttercream, consistency-test it for each task, crumb-coat and chill, then smooth to a flat top and sharp edges.

### Exercise: Three-consistency drill

Make one batch of buttercream (American or Swiss meringue) and split it into three bowls. Adjust one to stiff (holds a sharp peak), one to medium (peak bends at the tip), one to thin (spreadable). Test each by piping a dam, a star, and spreading a smooth patch.

• Which liquid and how much did you add to thin it, and what firmed the stiff bowl (more icing sugar / a chill)?

---

• Did the stiff bowl hold a peak for a dam and a rose without folding over?

---

• Was the buttercream at room temperature and soft, or did too-cold stiffness tear and too-warm softness

slump your test shapes?

---

### Worksheet: Buttercream batch sheet

Record the buttercream you make so a recipe and its adjustments are repeatable, and note which consistency suited which job.

Type (American / Swiss meringue / Italian meringue)

---

Butter quantity and temperature (soft / cold)

---

Sugar / meringue ratio used

---

Whites heated to ~70 C? (for meringue types: yes / no)

---

Beaten on low at the end to pop air bubbles? (yes / no)

---

Stiff / medium / thin adjustments made (liquid or sugar added)

---

Did it look curdled or soupy mid-mix, and did it come together?

---

Best use for this batch (dam / coat / piping / flowers)

---

### Checklist: Crumb-coat-and-chill check

- Medium, slightly soft buttercream used for the crumb coat
- Thin film pushed on and scraped back; cake allowed to show through
- Gaps between layers and at the base filled and sealed
- Sides scraped roughly flat on the turntable (rough level only)
- Cake chilled 15-30 min (or briefly frozen) until firm to a light touch
- Surface feels set and not sticky before the final coat
- Working in a cool kitchen so buttercream firms properly

### Exercise: Sharp-edge smoothing drill

On the chilled crumb coat, apply a generous final coat and smooth it: hold the bench scraper still and vertical and spin the turntable a full revolution. Leave a proud ridge at the top, then pull it inward with a clean spatula to form the corner. Chill and repeat; finish with a hot, dried scraper.

• Did you keep the scraper still and move the cake, or did you drag it around a stationary cake and get waves?

---

• Did leaving a raised ridge at the top and pulling it inward give you a crisp corner rather than a soft round?

---

• What did a hot-water-dipped, dried scraper or spatula do to the final surface on the last pass?

---

## Fondant: Covering a Cake Cleanly

Prepare a firm base and pliable paste, roll and drape an even sheet, smooth top-down without folds, then fix faults and add simple decoration.

### Checklist: Pre-cover readiness check

- ] Cake coated in buttercream or ganache and smoothed flat and sharp
- ] Coat chilled firm so it will not sag under the fondant
- ] Surface made tacky with a thin brush of water or piping gel (not wet)
- ] Fondant kneaded smooth and pliable; shortening or water added if cracking
- ] Work surface dusted lightly with icing sugar/cornflour, used sparingly
- ] Unused fondant kept tightly wrapped so it does not dry out
- ] Rolling pin and two fondant smoothers ready
- ] Sharp knife or pizza wheel ready to trim the base

### Exercise: Roll-drape-smooth drill

Roll fondant to an even 4 to 5 mm, sized to diameter plus twice the height plus a margin. Lift it on the rolling pin, drape over the cake, smooth the top first, then ease the sides down releasing folds, and trim the base. Prick any bubble and smooth it out.

- Was your sheet an even thickness, or did a thin patch tear and a thick patch look clumsy?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Did lifting on the pin (not bare hands) stop the sheet stretching and tearing?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Did you smooth the top before the sides and ease folds outward, or did a pleat set into the side?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Worksheet: Fondant fault diagnosis

After covering, audit the surface against the named faults so you know the cause and the fix for next time. Elephant skin / dry wrinkles? (cause: over-dusting or drying — fix noted)

\_\_\_\_\_

Edge or corner cracking? (cause: rolled too thin/dry — fix noted)

\_\_\_\_\_

Bulge above the base? (cause: filling not settled before covering)

\_\_\_\_\_

Trapped air bubbles? (pricked at an angle and smoothed out?)

\_\_\_\_\_

Pleats or folds on the side? (eased outward before pressing down?)

\_\_\_\_\_

Base trimmed clean? (knife / pizza wheel)

\_\_\_\_\_

Stored at cool room temperature, not the fridge? (yes / no)

### Exercise: Simple fondant decoration

Add one finishing element to the covered cake: a base band/ribbon, cut-out shapes, an embossed texture, or dusted shading. Attach pieces with a tiny dab of water or edible glue and let cut-outs firm before handling.

- Did a fondant band, row of pearls, or border cleanly hide the trimmed base seam?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Did you attach cut-outs with a small dab (not a wet smear) so the colour did not bleed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If you embossed or dusted, did you let the surface firm first so the pattern or shading held?  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

## Piping and Simple Sugar Flowers

Control the bag and core tips, pipe clean borders and writing, then build a buttercream rose on a nail and a cupped gum-paste blossom.

### Exercise: Bag-control practice on paper

Fill a bag half full with medium buttercream, twist tight, and pipe rows of dots, lines, stars, and shells on baking paper. Scrape the buttercream back and repeat for ten minutes before touching a cake. Focus on steady pressure and a clean stop before lifting.

- Were your shapes even (steady pressure) or lumpy (jerky squeezing)?
- Did stopping the squeeze before lifting remove the tails, or were you leaving points?
- Which angle suited which shape (about 90 degrees for stars and dots, about 45 degrees for shells and lines)?

---

### Worksheet: Tip-to-decoration reference

Pipe a sample of each core tip and fill in what it produced and its best use, building your own quick reference so you reach for the right tip fast.

Round (2-5): shapes piped and best use

---

Open star (18/21): shapes piped and best use

---

Closed star (30s): shapes piped and best use

---

1M / 2D: shapes piped and best use

---

Leaf (352): shapes piped and best use

---

Petal (104): shapes piped and best use

---

Consistency that worked best for borders (stiff / medium / thin)

---

### Exercise: Shell border and rosette top

On a smoothed practice cake or a board, pipe a shell border around the base with a star tip (45 degrees, fan a head, taper to a tail, cover each tail with the next head) and cover a top edge to edge with rosettes (start centre, spiral out one turn, lift).

- Are your shells evenly sized with each head covering the previous tail, forming a clean rope?
- Did you keep the same angle, pressure, and spacing all the way round?
- Are the rosettes piped edge to edge so no gap shows, each a single clean spiral?

---

### Checklist: First-flowers check

- Buttercream rose built on a flower nail with a paper square and stiff buttercream
- Cone base piped, then centre bud, then rings of 3, 5, 7 petals
- Nail turned smoothly so each petal arcs and curves

- [ ] Finished rose chilled firm before lifting onto the cake
- [ ] Gum-paste blossom cut, then petal edges thinned and cupped with a ball tool
- [ ] Blossom dried in a curved former so it lifts, not flat like a sticker
- [ ] Centre added (dots / stamens) and flower dried firm before placing
- [ ] Leaves piped with a leaf tip beside a small flower cluster

## Your Action Plan

1. Assemble the kit from your audit, prioritising a turntable and metal bench scraper over more piping tips, plus a leveller, offset spatulas, bags, and five core tips.
2. Bake a day ahead, cool, wrap, and chill; then level the domes flat and torte into even layers, cutting cold and checking flatness with a board.
3. Stack square: glue the base layer to a board, pipe a stiff buttercream dam on each layer, fill level inside it, align the stack vertical, and chill firm.
4. Mix one buttercream and split it into stiff, medium, and thin, testing each by piping a dam, a star, and spreading a smooth patch.
5. Crumb-coat the chilled stack thinly, let the cake show through, then chill 15-30 minutes until firm to the touch.
6. Smooth the final coat by holding the scraper still and spinning the cake, leave a proud top ridge, and pull it inward to form a sharp corner; finish with a hot dried scraper.
7. To cover in fondant, smooth a firm ganache or buttercream base, knead the paste pliable, roll an even 4-5 mm sheet, lift on the pin, drape, smooth top-down, and trim the base.
8. Fix any fondant fault by its cause (dust less for elephant skin, roll thicker for cracks, settle filling for bulge) and hide the base seam with a band, pearls, or border.
9. Practise the piping bag on paper for ten minutes, then pipe a shell border around the base and a rosette-covered top with a star or 1M tip.
10. Build a buttercream rose on a flower nail and a cupped gum-paste blossom, dry them firm, add leaves, and arrange a small cluster on a finished cake; log every cake's recipe and result.











