

Leather Craft — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into bench practice. Each section maps to a course module and gives you exercises to build cutting and stitching skill, worksheets to record what actually happens with your leather, thread, and dye, and checklists to make clean, lasting results repeatable. Work through it with your knife, chisels, and a piece of veg-tan in front of you, and keep your filled-in pages as your personal pattern book and a record of which leathers, stitches, and finishes work.

Leather, Tools, and a Workable Bench

Choose the right hide weight and tannage, assemble a starter tool kit, and practice cutting and punching square, evenly spaced holes.

Exercise: Cut, Scribe, and Punch a Practice Coupon

Take a scrap of 3 to 4 oz veg-tan. Cut a clean 10 cm by 5 cm rectangle in light passes against a steel ruler, keeping the blade square. Scribe a stitch line 3.5 mm in from one long edge with a wing divider, then punch holes along it with a stitching chisel, placing the first tooth in the last hole each strike. Flip it over and judge the back. Repeat until every hole is square and the spacing never drifts.

- Did your cut stay straight and square, or did it wander or angle? What changed when you used lighter passes?

- Are the holes evenly spaced front and back, or did spacing drift where you repositioned the chisel?

- How square are the holes when you look at the back, and what fixed any slanting?

Worksheet: Leather Selection Sheet

Before buying or cutting for a project, fill this out for two candidate leathers you are comparing, then circle the one you will commit to.

Project (wallet interior, wallet exterior, belt, bag body, etc.)

Tannage (vegetable, chrome, oil/combination)

Weight range (oz) and thickness (mm)

Temper (firm / medium / soft)

Grade (full-grain / top-grain / other)

Tannery or brand and area of hide (back/bend, shoulder, belly)

Cost per square foot and square feet the project needs

Your decision and reason

Checklist: Starter Tool and Bench Checklist

- [] Sharp cutting blade (head knife or fresh snap-off) plus a working strop
- [] Self-healing mat, steel ruler, and a silver pen or awl for marking
- [] Stitching chisels or pricking irons (3.0 to 4.0 mm spacing) and a poly or granite punching board
- [] Two John James harness needles and braided polyester thread (Ritza 25 Tiger, 0.6 or 0.8 mm)
- [] Wing divider or stitching groover to scribe the stitch line
- [] Edge beveler, wood/canvas slicker, and Tokonole or gum tragacanth
- [] Poly or rawhide mallet (never a steel hammer on chisels)

The Saddle Stitch and Edge Finishing

Drill the two-needle saddle stitch until it is even and locked, then bevel, sand, and burnish edges to a glassy finish.

Exercise: Twelve-Stitch Saddle Stitch Drill

On your punched practice coupon, cut thread about four times the seam length, lock a needle on each end, and clamp the work in a stitching pony. Saddle-stitch the seam, casting the second needle on the SAME side of the first thread every single stitch. Aim for twelve identical stitches in a row. Finish with a backstitch through the last two to three holes, trim, and melt the tails.

- Did you cast the second needle on the same side every time, and how even did the stitches look front and back?

- Was your tension consistent, or were some stitches loose and baggy? What helped you even it out?

- Did the backstitch and melted tails hold when you tugged the seam, and could you pull any thread loose?

Worksheet: Stitch and Edge Practice Log

Complete one row each time you practice a seam or an edge so you can see your technique improving over sessions.

Date and what you practiced (seam / edge / both)

Leather weight and thread used (brand, size)

Chisel/iron spacing (mm) and stitch line distance from edge (mm)

Stitches that looked even vs uneven (and why)

Edge steps done (bevel / sand grit / burnish agent)

Edge result (raw / smooth / glassy)

One thing to fix next session

Checklist: Edge Burnishing Sequence Checklist

- Glue and trim any laminated layers flush before sanding
- Bevel both the top and bottom corners with an edge beveler
- Sand the edge with 400 grit, then 600 grit, until flat and even
- Apply Tokonole, gum tragacanth, or water sparingly (thin film only)
- Burnish briskly with a wood slicker, canvas, or denim until glassy
- For multi-layer edges, sand the glued stack as one piece, then burnish

Tooling, Dyeing, and Finishing

Case and tool a simple design, dye it evenly without blotching, then condition and seal so the finish lasts.

Exercise: Case, Stamp, and Dye a Test Tile

Wet a scrap of veg-tan, let it return toward its natural color until cool but no longer wet on the surface, and tool a simple bordered design with a swivel knife and a beveler. Once dry, dye it: dilute spirit dye about 50/50, apply with a wool dauber in overlapping circles, build light coats, let it dry, and buff hard. Note the casing feel and whether the dye went on evenly.

- How did you know the leather had reached the right casing point, and did your stamps hold a crisp impression?

- Did the dye go on evenly or streak/blotch, and what happened when you diluted it and used light coats?

- After buffing, did color still rub off on a clean cloth, and how dark did the final shade settle?

Worksheet: Dye and Finish Recipe Sheet

Record your full finishing stack for each color so you can reproduce it exactly across a batch of pieces. Leather and tannage the recipe is for

Dye brand, color, and type (spirit / water / antique)

Dilution ratio and number of coats

Application method (dauber / dip / airbrush) and any pre-dampening

Conditioner used and amount (neatsfoot / balm)

Sealer/topcoat and coats (resolene 50/50, Tan-Kote, carnauba, wax)

Final color after equalizing (note vs the test scrap)

Cracked at a hard fold? (yes/no) and any fix

Checklist: Dye and Finish Safety and Quality Checklist

- Tested dye on identical scrap before the real piece
- Wore nitrile gloves and worked in a ventilated space
- Diluted spirit dye and built light, overlapping coats (no heavy single pass)
- Buffed hard after drying so pigment does not crock onto clothing
- Conditioned before sealing and let the color equalize about a day

[] Sealed in 2 to 3 thin coats, buffing between, and bend-tested for cracking

Building a Wallet and a Bag

Assemble a bifold wallet in the right sequence, set hardware and build a small bag, then cost and price your work honestly.

Exercise: Build a Bifold Wallet in Sequence

Using a proven bifold pattern, cut all pieces in the right weights (2 to 3 oz interior, 3 to 4 oz exterior). Finish and burnish every edge that will become inaccessible, dye hidden faces, then glue card pockets only along the seam allowance. Punch through the glued layers, saddle-stitch each seam and lock it, then assemble the body and burnish the final outside edge.

- Which edges did you have to finish before assembly because you could not reach them later?

- How did you manage bulk at the spine (thin leather, skiving, gluing only the seam allowance), and did the wallet fold cleanly?

- Where did the wallet still look amateur (pocket alignment, edges, stitch evenness), and what will you change next build?

Worksheet: Project Build Planner

Plan any project before cutting good leather by filling this out so the order of operations is set in advance.
Project name and finished dimensions

Pieces list with leather weight for each

Hardware needed (rivets, snaps line size, buckles, D-rings)

Edges/faces to finish BEFORE assembly

Glue points (seam allowance only) and skive areas

Stitch order (which seams, in what sequence)

Total leather (sq ft) and estimated build time (hours)

Worksheet: Pricing and Costing Sheet

Complete the costing math for a finished piece so your price covers materials, your time, overhead, and a real margin.

Item name and size

Leather cost (sq ft used x cost per sq ft)

Thread, hardware, dye, and finish cost

Build time (hours) and your hourly rate

Labor cost (hours x rate)

Overhead share (tool wear, failed pieces, packaging, fees)

Base cost (materials + labor + overhead)

Wholesale price (base x markup) and retail (roughly 2x wholesale)

Checklist: Hardware and Ready-to-Sell Checklist

- Hardware set on flat panels where possible, with correct hole sizes and the right anvil
- Every load-bearing point (strap anchors, D-ring tabs, flap fold) reinforced
- All set hardware pull-tested before final assembly
- Every edge beveled, sanded, and burnished (or cleanly edge-painted)
- Stitching even and every seam backstitched and locked
- Sharp product photos taken with edges and stitching in focus
- Price covers leather, thread, hardware, finish, time, overhead, and margin

Your Action Plan

1. Buy one shoulder of 4 to 5 oz natural veg-tan plus a starter kit: a sharp knife, chisels (3.5 mm), two harness needles, Tiger thread, a wing divider, an edge beveler, and a slicker.
2. Cut, scribe, and punch practice coupons until your cuts are square and your hole spacing never drifts.
3. Drill the saddle stitch on scrap until you can lay down twelve identical stitches and lock the ends with a backstitch and melted tails.
4. Practice the edge sequence (bevel, sand 400 then 600, burnish with Tokonole) until a scrap edge turns glassy.
5. Case a scrap and tool a simple bordered design with a swivel knife and beveler to learn the moisture window.
6. Dye a test tile with diluted spirit dye in light overlapping coats, buff it hard, then condition and seal it and bend-test for cracking.
7. Build a bifold wallet in the correct sequence, finishing every hidden edge first and managing bulk at the spine.
8. Set rivets and snaps on scrap, pull-testing each, then build a simple lined pouch or small bag with a strap and closure.
9. Cost a finished piece fully with the pricing sheet so materials, your hours, overhead, and margin are all covered.
10. Photograph your best pieces with edges and stitching in focus, keep dated practice pieces to track progress, and list or show your work where handmade is valued.

