

# Leatherwork Fundamentals — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into bench time. Each section pairs with a course module and gives you leather-selection drills, cut and skive logs, stitching practice, and finishing checklists to run at your own table. Work through it with real veg-tan and tools in hand, and keep the templates open so your projects start from correct weights, sizes, and hole counts instead of guesses.

## Knowing Your Leather and Tools

Learn to read a hide, choose the right weight, and assemble a working kit before you cut anything.

### Exercise: Read a Hide and Map Its Zones

Get a side or shoulder of veg-tan (or photos of one in good light). Identify the grain and flesh sides, find the backbone, and mark with chalk where the firm back/butt, the stretchier belly, and any scars or thin spots are. Then decide which zone you would cut a belt from and which you would cut a lining from.

- Which way does the leather stretch more, along the backbone or across it, and how did you test it?  
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- Where are the worst blemishes, and how would you lay out parts to avoid them on show faces?  
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- Is this leather veg-tan or chrome-tan, and what told you (colour, firmness, smell, burnish test)?  
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### Worksheet: Weight-to-Use Planning Sheet

For each part of a project you want to make, write the job, then choose a weight in ounces and convert it to millimetres (oz times about 0.4). Confirm your choice against real stock with callipers before buying or cutting. Part / job (e.g. wallet shell, card pocket, belt strap)

Chosen weight (oz)

\_\_\_\_\_

Converted thickness (mm)

\_\_\_\_\_

Measured actual thickness (mm)

\_\_\_\_\_

Hide zone to cut from (back / shoulder / belly)

\_\_\_\_\_

Reason this weight suits the job

\_\_\_\_\_

### Checklist: Beginner Tool Kit Acquisition Checklist

- Self-healing cutting mat and heavy steel rule
- Rotary cutter and craft knife with spare blades
- Stitching chisels or pricking irons (3 to 4 mm pitch) and a poly maul
- Two harness needles and waxed thread
- Wing divider or stitching groover for the stitch line

- [ ] Edge beveller, sandpaper (400 to 1000 grit), and a burnishing tool
- [ ] Leather dye, dauber/sponge, finish/sealer, and conditioner

## Cutting and Skiving

Drill accurate cutting, controlled skiving, and clean hole-punching until they are repeatable.

### Exercise: Skive Practice on Scrap

On scrap from your project leather, practice three skives: a fold skive (thin an area to about half thickness), an overlap skive (taper an edge to near nothing), and a light edge bevel-skive. Fold and glue test pieces to feel the difference a skive makes versus an unskived edge.

- How long was your taper, and did a longer, gradual skive fold better than a short, steep one?

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- Did the unskived overlap bulk up at the seam compared with the skived one, and by how much?

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- Was your blade sharp enough to peel a clean shaving, or did it grab and tear?

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### Worksheet: Cut Accuracy Log

Cut several parts against a rule at marked sizes. Measure each finished part and record the deviation from target and whether the cut edge is square through the thickness. Note your best and worst so you can see consistency improve.

Part name

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Target width x length (mm)

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Actual measured (mm)

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Deviation (+/- mm)

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Edge square through thickness (yes/no)

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Tool used (rotary / knife / strap cutter)

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Note on cause of any error

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### Checklist: Before-You-Stitch Punching Checklist

- [ ] Parts glued with tacked contact cement and pressed flat, no lifted edges
- [ ] Stitch line scribed 3 to 4 mm from the edge with divider or groover
- [ ] Punching on a poly board, not steel, to protect chisel tips
- [ ] Chisels held vertical for consistent slanted holes through all layers
- [ ] Leading prong set in the last hole to keep even pitch
- [ ] Hole layout checked dry so the row ends cleanly at corners and ends

## The Saddle Stitch and Edge Finishing

Build a clean, consistent saddle stitch and finish raw edges to a smooth, hard burnish.

### Exercise: Stitch a Practice Seam

Glue and punch a short two-layer scrap, then saddle-stitch the full row, keeping the same needle leading and even tension. Back-stitch two to three holes at the start and finish, lock off, and trim. Inspect both faces for an even diagonal.

- Did the diagonal slant the same way down the whole row, and what happened when needle order slipped?
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- Was your tension consistent, or were some stitches loose and loopy?
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- Did your back-stitch hold when you tugged the end, and were the tails hidden and trimmed?
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### Worksheet: Thread and Stitch Setup Card

Before each seam, record your thread plan and chisel pitch so your stitching is repeatable. Estimate thread at roughly seam length times four. Fill this in for at least three different seams.

Seam length (mm)

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Thread length cut (mm)

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Thread type (waxed poly / linen) and size

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Chisel pitch (mm) / stitches per inch

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Needle leading order (e.g. right first, left behind)

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Back-stitch holes at each end (count)

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### Checklist: Edge Finishing Checklist

- Both edge corners beveled with a beveller sized to the leather
- Edge sanded smooth and flush through 400, 600, then 1000 grit
- Stacked layers sanded until they read as one solid edge
- Edge dampened with water or burnishing agent (gum trag / saddle soap)
- Edge burnished briskly until smooth, dark, and glassy
- Edge sealed with wax or paint if a harder, water-resistant finish is wanted

## Dyeing, Conditioning, and Your First Projects

Colour and protect your leather, then build a wallet and a belt from a real plan.

### Exercise: Dye Test on Same-Hide Scrap

Test your dye on scrap from the same hide before any real part. Apply two to three thin coats in overlapping motions, keeping a wet edge, and buff between coats. Then apply a sealer to half and leave half unsealed, and rub both with a white cloth to test for crocking (rub-off).

- How did the colour deepen from one coat to three, and where did overlaps or dry edges leave lines?
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- Did the sealed half rub off less onto the cloth than the unsealed half?
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- Did the dye dry the leather, and did a light conditioning restore suppleness?
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## Worksheet: Card Wallet Build Plan

Plan your bifold card wallet before cutting. Fill in each part with its weight and finished size, confirm the pockets are thin enough to keep the stack slim, and note the build order. Use the cut-list template to lay parts out.

Part (shell / pocket 1 / pocket 2 / pocket 3)

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Weight (oz)

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Finished size (mm)

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Skive needed (fold / overlap / none)

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Stitch line distance from edge (mm)

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Finish order step (dye / glue / stitch / burnish)

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### Checklist: Belt Build Checklist

- Strap cut along the backbone from 8 to 10 oz, parallel-sided, sized to a known-good belt
- Billet end shaped and buckle slot punched to fit the buckle bar
- Adjustment holes marked evenly (about 1 in apart) and centred on the fit hole
- Strap dyed and finished, both long edges beveled, sanded, and burnished
- Buckle end folded through buckle, glued, marked, and saddle-stitched with back-stitch
- Keeper loop added, belt conditioned, and finish sealed

### Your Action Plan

1. Assemble the starter kit (mat, rule, knives, chisels, needles, waxed thread, beveller, sandpaper, burnisher, dye, finish, conditioner) plus two weights of veg-tan: a thin 2 to 4 oz for small goods and a firm 8 to 10 oz for a belt.
2. Read your hide, map its zones, and practice cutting straight, square parts against a rule until deviations stay within about 1 mm.
3. Practice skiving on scrap until you can taper a fold and an overlap cleanly.
4. Glue, scribe a stitch line, and punch holes on a poly board, checking the layout ends cleanly.
5. Stitch practice seams until the saddle-stitch diagonal is even and your tension is consistent, with secure back-stitched ends.
6. Bevel, sand, and burnish scrap edges until you can produce a smooth, hard, glassy line.
7. Dye-test on same-hide scrap, then seal and condition, confirming the colour does not crock.
8. Build the bifold card wallet end to end: cut, skive, finish inner faces, glue, saddle-stitch the pockets, and burnish the edges.
9. Cut, finish, and stitch the belt, focusing on dead-even edges and evenly spaced holes.
10. Review your cut log and stitch cards, note your weakest skill, and repeat that drill before starting a sellable piece.







