

# Collage & Mixed Media — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into studio practice. Each section pairs with one course module and mixes hands-on exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists so you build real material judgment, not just notes. Work through it at your bench with scraps, adhesive, and your devices nearby; the editable templates give you a sourcing log, a piece-development planner, and a critique sheet you will reuse on every project.

## Foundations: Materials, Tools, and the Collage Mindset

Build your kit, learn to read material for permanence, and set up a sourcing and storage system before you make real work.

### Exercise: The Ten-Scrap Acidity Read

Gather ten different papers from around your home (magazine page, newspaper, kraft paper, receipt, book page, watercolor scrap, packaging, etc.). Without testing chemically, rank them most to least acidic using feel, smell, sheen, and what you know about the source. Then note which you would trust in archival work and which you would only use deliberately or seal first.

- Which three scraps do you predict will yellow or become brittle fastest, and why?  
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- Which two feel archival enough to use in work you intend to sell or frame?  
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- For one risky-but-beautiful scrap, how would you neutralize or embrace its impermanence?  
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### Worksheet: Core Kit Build Sheet

Plan your starter kit against a target budget of 60 to 90 US dollars. Fill in the tool you will buy or already own, what it is for, and its cost. Mark the two items where quality matters most (blade and cutting mat) so you do not under-spend on them.

Cutting mat — size and cost  
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Knife and blades — brand, blade count, cost  
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Metal ruler (cork-backed) — cost  
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Scissors (large + detail) — cost  
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Bone folder — cost  
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Dedicated adhesive brush — cost  
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Primary adhesive (PVA / gel medium / paste) — product and cost  
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Total spend vs budget

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### Checklist: Adhesive Matching Checklist

- I have an archival PVA (such as Lineco Neutral pH) for medium paper
- I have acrylic gel medium (matte and/or gloss) for mixed-media gluing and sealing
- I have a fully reversible option (wheat or rice starch paste) for work I may want to remove
- I have stopped using a glue stick for anything I intend to keep
- I match thin paper to diluted PVA or matte medium to avoid bleed-through
- I seal porous found paper before gluing so later wet media cannot lift it

### Checklist: Sourcing and Storage Setup

- I have at least three quality sources identified (thrift books, vintage magazines, maps, patterns)
- I rely on public-domain or self-made imagery for anything I sell or exhibit
- I sort scraps by color first, then by type (text, image, texture, pattern)
- I store paper flat and interleave acidic newsprint away from archival sheets
- I keep a labeled quarantine folder for fragile or browning material
- I photograph rare finds before cutting them

## Composition: Making Fragments Read as One Image

Practice value structure, focal points, grids, palette limits, and rhythm so a busy surface reads as one resolved image.

### Exercise: Two-Minute Notan Studies

Make two 10 by 10 centimeter studies using only black, white, and one grey paper, five minutes each. Aim for a clear dominant value mass, one supporting mass, and small accents, not an even scatter of mid-tones. Photograph each and convert to greyscale to confirm it still reads.

- In each study, where does the eye land first, and is that where you intended?
- Roughly what percentage is your dominant value versus supporting versus accent?
- Which study reads more clearly when squinted at, and what makes the difference?

### Worksheet: Composition Plan Worksheet

Plan one collage before touching glue. Choose an armature, place the focal point, and define the supporting elements and the rest area. Fill each field, then lay the piece out dry and photograph it before committing. Armature chosen (rule of thirds / column grid / centered)

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Focal element and why it dominates (contrast, color, recognizability)

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Focal placement (which intersection or zone)

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Three to five supporting elements and how they point to the focal point

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Planned area of visual rest

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Edge strategy (mix of torn vs cut, repeated at least three times)

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### Exercise: Three-Color, One-Motif Sprint

Build a complete small collage in 45 minutes limited to three colors and one motif repeated at least three times with slight variation in size or value. Add a single passage of contrasting texture near the focal point. Step back two meters to confirm the rhythm reads at a distance.

- Which palette type did you use (monochrome, analogous-plus-accent, complementary, neutral-dominant)?

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- How did you vary your repeated motif so it felt like rhythm rather than wallpaper?

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- What did the time limit force you to decide that open-ended work would have let you avoid?

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### Checklist: Pre-Glue Composition Check

- Squint test passes: clear light and dark masses, no grey mush
- There is one unmistakable focal point
- Palette is deliberately limited to a named scheme
- One motif, color, or texture repeats at least three times with variation
- There is at least one area of visual rest
- The whole layout is photographed dry before any adhesive is applied

### Analog Techniques: Layering, Adhesion, and Permanence

Drill substrate prep, archival gluing, image transfers, and finishing so your physical work stays flat, bonded, and protected.

### Exercise: Four-Adhesive Bonding Test

Glue four identical scraps to a prepared board using four different adhesives (PVA, gel medium, wheat paste, glue stick). Burnish each from the center out and weight them. After 24 hours, try to peel each and note bond strength, warping, and any shine or residue.

- Which adhesive held best for this paper weight, and which failed?

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- Did any sample cockle or leave a shiny halo, and what application change would fix it?

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- Which combination will you adopt as your default for medium paper?

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### Worksheet: Image-Transfer Log

Run a practice sheet of small transfers and record what happened so you can repeat success and avoid failures. Make at least four attempts before using a transfer in a real piece. Fill one row of fields per attempt. Transfer method (gel-medium / solvent / packing-tape)

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Print type used (laser/toner or inkjet)

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Image flipped for reversal? (yes/no)

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Cure time before rubbing

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Result (clean / smeared / ink lifted)

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One adjustment for next attempt

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## Exercise: Finish One Piece End to End

Take a composition all the way to a protected, presentable finish. Prepare the substrate, layer and burnish, integrate with at least one mixed-media unifying move (glaze, connecting line, or stitching), then apply an isolation coat, varnish, and present it. Photograph it in flat, even light.

- Which unifying move (glaze, mark, knock-back, stitching) did the most to tie the surface together?

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- Why does an isolation coat matter before varnishing, in your own words?

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- What would you change about your sealing or presentation next time?

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## Checklist: Permanence and Finishing Checklist

- Substrate sanded, gessoed (or taped down for paper) before building
- Porous found paper sealed before wet media touched it
- Every element burnished from the center out under a protective sheet
- Surface fully cured (48 to 72 hours) before varnishing
- Isolation coat applied before a removable varnish
- Work on paper hinged with archival tape and presented with acid-free mats or UV glazing

## Digital Collage and a Concept-Driven Practice

Composite non-destructively in Photoshop or Procreate, prepare archival prints, and develop, critique, and sustain a series.

## Exercise: Masks-and-Blend-Modes-Only Composite

Scan your own analog scraps at 600 dpi and build one digital collage on a 300 dpi canvas at final print size, using only layer masks and blend modes, with no erasing and no flattening. Name every layer. Export a flattened copy for sharing while keeping the layered master.

- Which blend mode (Multiply, Screen, Overlay) solved the most problems, and on what element?

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- Where did a layer mask let you reverse a decision you would have lost by erasing?

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- Why keep the layered master separate from the flattened export?

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## Worksheet: Archival Print Spec Sheet

Plan one fine-art print so the output matches the file. Fill in the specs, soft-proof against the paper profile, and order a single proof before any edition. Judge the proof under daylight, not a screen.

Final physical size and resolution (target 300 dpi)

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Printer / process (pigment inkjet giclee, e.g. Epson SureColor)

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Paper (acid-free cotton rag, e.g. Hahnemuhle Photo Rag)

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Color space (sRGB for screen / Adobe RGB for print)

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Proof ordered and reviewed in daylight? (yes/no)

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Edition size and number (e.g. 1 of 25)

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## Worksheet: Six-Piece Series Planner

Define a coherent body of work before building it. State the unifying thread, fix one constraint, and thumbnail all six pieces up front so the set holds together. Revisit this sheet as the series evolves.

One-sentence concept or question for the whole series

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Concept thread (theme running through every piece)

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Formal or process constraint that visually unites the set

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Thumbnail note for pieces 1 to 6

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Consistent size / palette / technique rule

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Where the finished series will be shown or submitted

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### Checklist: Critique and Portfolio Checklist

- I described the piece literally before judging it
- I checked value structure, focal point, palette, and edge variety against my intent
- I viewed it in greyscale and upside down to expose hidden weaknesses
- I identified the two changes most likely to strengthen it and made them
- I photographed every finished piece in consistent, even light
- I have six to twelve resolved works before calling the series complete

### Your Action Plan

1. Assemble your core kit and archival adhesives against a 60 to 90 dollar budget this week
2. Identify three reliable, copyright-clean sources and set up a color-then-type scrap library
3. Make two notan studies and one three-color, one-motif sprint to drill composition
4. Run a four-adhesive bonding test and adopt a default glue for medium paper
5. Practice at least four image transfers on a test sheet before using one in real work
6. Take one analog piece fully to isolation coat, varnish, and archival presentation
7. Build one digital collage from your own 600 dpi scans using only masks and blend modes
8. Soft-proof and order a single archival proof print at your intended size
9. Plan and thumbnail a six-piece series with one concept and one formal constraint
10. Run the describe-analyze-interpret-decide critique on every finished piece and photograph it for your portfolio









