

Printmaking — Linocut & Woodblock — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into studio practice. Each section pairs hands-on carving and printing exercises with planning worksheets and check-off lists so you move deliberately from a blank block to a documented edition. Use the templates to record colour recipes, registration plans, and your edition log — the habits that separate a one-off experiment from a repeatable practice.

Tools, Materials, and Setting Up to Print

Assemble your kit, prove your tools are sharp, and learn to see images as positive and negative shapes.

Exercise: The Sharpness Test and First Marks

Hone your V-tool and one U-gouge on a stone or wet-and-dry paper, strop them, then make a 'mark library' on a scrap lino offcut: carve a row of each cut and note how each tool behaves.

- Does your honed tool slice newsprint cleanly, or tear it? If it tears, what step did you skip — the inner burr or the strop?

- Carve a straight line, a tight curve, and a circle with the V-tool. Which felt hardest, and did rotating the block instead of your wrist help?

- Describe the difference in the channel left by the small V-tool versus the large U-gouge.

- How often did you need to re-hone before the tool started dragging?

Exercise: Think in Negative

Take a simple high-contrast photo (a leaf, a mug, a face in strong light). Using a black marker, fill in ONLY the areas that will print as solid ink, leaving white everything that will be carved away. Do not draw outlines — work in masses.

- Where were you tempted to draw a thin outline that the block could not actually hold?

- Did any 'white' area become an island surrounded by black that would need careful clearing?

- Squint at your result from across the room — does the image still read?

Worksheet: Studio Kit and Materials Audit

List what you own and what you still need before your first edition, with a rough cost for each gap. Block type and size (lino / shina ply / cherry / rubber)

Carving tools owned (sizes of V and U, chisel)

Sharpening setup (stone grits / strop / compound)

Ink type and brand (oil safe-wash / water-based)

Brayer width and durometer

Inking slab surface

Baren or spoon / press available

Papers on hand (name, gsm)

Bench hook / safety glove

Gaps to buy and estimated cost

Checklist: Ready-to-Carve Bench Setup

- Tools honed, stropped, and tested on newsprint
- Bench hook clamped or braced against the table edge
- Cut-resistant glove on the supporting hand
- Block warmed slightly if using lino
- Good raking light across the block surface
- Slab, brayer, and ink staged but clear of the carving area
- Reference image and mirrored design within sight

Designing and Carving the Block

Plan a print that respects the relief inversion, transfer it accurately, and carve it with control.

Worksheet: Image Plan and Colour-Layer Map

Plan one print before you touch a tool. If working in colour, fill one copy of the layer rows per colour, light to dark.

Working title

Black-line or white-line approach

Single block, multi-block, or reduction

Final block dimensions

Number of colours and order (lightest to darkest)

Layer 1 colour and what it covers

Layer 2 colour and what it covers

Layer 3 colour and what it covers

Keyline / outline layer (yes/no and colour)

Smallest carved white line width (mm) — confirm >1 mm in lino

Exercise: Mirror, Transfer, and Map

Mirror your design (flip digitally or trace and turn over), transfer it to the block by graphite or toner-transfer, ink the lines with permanent marker, then shade every area you will carve away in a contrasting colour.

- Did your design contain any text or directional element that the mirror affected? Confirm it now reads correctly reversed on the block.

- After mapping, are there any areas where you were unsure which side of a line to carve? Resolve them on paper first.

- Which transfer method did you use, and how crisp were the resulting lines?

Exercise: Outline-Then-Clear Carve

Carve your block in the disciplined order: V-trench just outside every kept line, then clear waste with U-gouges, then flatten floors with the chisel. Pull a rough proof before declaring it finished.

- Did the protective V-trench stop a clearing gouge from skidding into a good edge anywhere?

- When you proofed, what specks or islands appeared that you missed by eye?

- Where did you build tone with hatching or stippling, and did the mark spacing read as the value you intended?

Checklist: Pre-Proof Carving Check

- Every kept line outlined before bulk clearing
- Cleared areas carved to roughly 2–3 mm depth
- Floors of white areas flattened, no ridges or islands
- All crumbs and dust brushed off the block
- Tone areas carved with consistent, directional marks
- Design mirrored — text and direction confirmed correct
- A proof pulled before calling the block done

Inking and Printing

Roll an even ink film, build a registration system, and pull strong prints by hand or press.

Exercise: Find the Right Ink Film

Roll out ink on the slab and adjust it until you hear the soft hiss and see an orange-peel texture. Pull three test prints: one deliberately under-inked, one correct, one deliberately over-inked. Keep all three labelled.

- Describe the sound and look of the slab at the correct film versus too much ink.

- What happened to your finest carved lines in the over-inked pull?

- How many overlapping passes from how many directions gave you even block coverage?

Worksheet: Registration Plan

Choose and document a registration system before printing any colour, then test it on scrap.

Registration method (kento / pin / L-jig / hinge-tab)

Block location reference (corner, edges)

Paper location reference (corner, edge, holes)

Trapping or keyline strategy to hide drift

Test-sheet result (in register? drift in mm?)

Adjustment made before printing good paper

Exercise: Hand-Print a Short Run

Print five sheets by baren or spoon, re-charging the brayer identically each time. Before lifting each sheet, peel back one corner in register to check coverage and rub more where grey.

- How consistent were the five prints? Which variable drifted — ink, pressure, or placement?
 - On solids versus fine lines, how did you vary your rubbing pressure?
 - Which pulls would you accept into an edition, and why did you reject the others?
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Checklist: Printing-Session Routine

- Ink modified to correct tack and film confirmed by hiss/texture
- Enough ink mixed for the whole run plus spares
- Registration system tested on scrap and locked
- Brayer re-charged with the same passes per print
- Coverage checked by lifting a corner before each full lift
- Pressure routine kept identical sheet to sheet
- Prints set to dry without smudging the margins

Editioning, Troubleshooting, and Finishing

Pull a documented edition, fix faults at their source, and present and preserve the work.

Exercise: Pull and Sign an Edition

Decide a small edition size (e.g. 10), print 20–30 percent extra, select against a BAT proof, then pencil-sign and number the accepted prints in the bottom margin.

- How many sheets did you spoil before hitting consistent quality, and was it within your spare allowance?
 - Did you compare each pull to the BAT or to the previous print? Why does that distinction matter?
 - How many artist's proofs did you keep, and is that under 10 percent of the edition?
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Worksheet: Fault Diagnosis Log

For each fault you meet, record the symptom, the variable you suspect (ink film, pressure, or block), and the fix you applied.

Symptom observed (patchy / slurred / specks / ghost / white gap)

Suspected cause (ink / pressure / block / registration / paper)

Fix applied

Result after the fix

Note to prevent it next time

Checklist: Clean-Up and Archive

- Usable ink scraped and reclaimed before washing
- Slab, brayer, and block cleaned (oil + soap, or water)
- Brayer stood or hung off its roller to avoid a flat spot
- Tools dried and lightly oiled against rust
- Prints fully cured and flattened under blotter and boards
- Edition record written (title, size, paper, inks, proofs)
- Prints interleaved with glassine in an archival box
- Block cancelled if the edition is permanently closed

Exercise: Present One Finished Print

Window-mat or float-mount one finished print on acid-free board, hinged at the top only, and photograph it straight-on in even light for your portfolio.

- Did you choose to cover or reveal the deckle edge, and why?
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- Is the print hinged so it can move, rather than glued flat?
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- What price or value would you assign, given the edition size and the time it took?
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Your Action Plan

1. Buy or confirm your starter kit: one mounted lino block, a V-tool and two U-gouges, a sharpening stone and strop, safe-wash oil ink, a soft brayer, a slab, a baren, and a few sheets of smooth printmaking paper.
2. Hone and strop every tool and prove sharpness on newsprint before carving anything.
3. Design one image in pure positive/negative masses, then mirror it and transfer it to the block.
4. Map the block: ink the kept lines and shade every area to be carved away.
5. Carve outline-first, then clear and flatten, and pull a rough proof to find missed specks.
6. Mix enough ink for the whole run, roll to the correct hissing orange-peel film, and test on scrap.
7. Build and test a registration system before printing any colour onto good paper.
8. Print 20–30 percent more sheets than your edition size, selecting against a BAT proof.
9. Pencil-sign and number the edition, keeping artist's proofs under 10 percent.
10. Clean up properly, log and archive the edition, flatten and present one print, and cancel the block if the edition is closed.

