

Bookbinding & Paper Craft — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into bench practice. Each section maps to a course module and gives you exercises to build folding and sewing skill, worksheets to record grain, GSM, and station layouts for your own papers, and checklists to make square, lay-flat results repeatable. Work through it with your bone folder, awl, and paper in front of you, and keep your filled-in pages as a personal reference of what folds, sews, and sells.

Paper, Grain, and the Bookbinder's Toolkit

Test grain direction, log the papers and boards you own by GSM and grain, and confirm your kit and adhesives are ready before you fold anything.

Exercise: Grain-Test Your Paper Stash

Pick three different sheets you might use for a book. For each, run the bend test, then confirm with a wet-strip or tear test on a small scrap. Mark the grain direction with a light pencil arrow in a corner, then check whether the grain runs the long or short way relative to how you would fold it into a journal page.

- For each sheet, which direction did the bend test say was the grain, and did the wet-strip or tear test agree?

- If you folded each sheet into a journal page, would the grain run parallel to the spine as required, or would you need to cut it differently?

- Which sheet in your stash is wrong-grain for a book, and what could you use it for instead?

Worksheet: Paper and Board Selection Sheet

Before committing to a project, fill this out for each paper, cloth, and board you plan to use so you have a known set of materials instead of guesswork.

Material name and role (text, endpaper, cover, board)

GSM or board thickness (mm)

Grain direction (long or short)

Surface (smooth, toothy, coated, laid)

Ink or media it suits (fountain pen, pencil, print, paint)

Needs scoring before folding (yes or no)

Supplier and sheet or parent size

Your decision and reason

Checklist: Starter Kit and Workspace Checklist

- Real bone or Teflon folder on the bench
- Awl, bookbinding needle, and waxed linen thread ready
- Cork-backed metal ruler and a self-healing cutting mat
- Sharp craft knife or scalpel with a fresh blade
- PVA adhesive and, for reversible joins, wheat or rice starch paste
- Glue brush, waste sheets, and binder or bulldog clips
- Weights (clean wrapped bricks or heavy books) for pressing

Folding, Signatures, and the Pamphlet Stitch

Fold consistent signatures, sew a single-signature pamphlet, and decide which thin-book structure fits the page count you have in mind.

Exercise: Fold and Square a Set of Signatures

Cut six folios to a single page size with the grain parallel to the spine. Fold each individually, burnishing the crease from the center out with the bone folder, then nest them into two signatures of three folios each. Jog both signatures square at the head and spine and measure the fore-edge creep on the thicker one.

- How much did the inner folio push out past the outer one at the fore edge (the creep), in millimeters?

- Were both signatures the same finished size, and if not, where did the difference come from?

- How much would you need to trim at the fore edge to bring all pages to one clean line?

Exercise: Sew a Three-Hole Pamphlet

Take one signature, mark three stations (center plus one set in fifteen to twenty millimeters from each end), and pierce them on the fold with the awl. Sew the three-hole pamphlet stitch with waxed linen thread, tie the square knot straddling the long center stitch, and trim.

- Did the spine sit flat, or did it pucker, and was that a tension or a hole-size problem?

- Did your finishing knot straddle the long center stitch so the binding locked?

- What would you change in station placement or tension on the next pamphlet?

Worksheet: Thin-Book Structure Planner

For a booklet you want to make, fill this out to choose between a pamphlet, a saddle stitch, or a multi-pamphlet housing, and to confirm the page count works.

Project and intended use

Total page count (must divide by 4)

Paper GSM and whether it nests without bulging

Estimated fore-edge creep at that thickness

Chosen structure (pamphlet, saddle stitch, multi-pamphlet)

Number of sewing stations

Cover plan (self-cover wrap, separate cover, none)

Checklist: Clean Signature and Pamphlet Checklist

- [] Folios cut grain-long, parallel to the spine
- [] Each folio folded individually and burnished sharp
- [] Signatures nested three to six folios and jogged square
- [] Stations marked from the center out and pierced on the fold
- [] Thread cut about three times the spine height and waxed
- [] Tension even across all stations with no spine pucker
- [] Finishing knot straddles the long center stitch

Coptic Stitch: Journals That Open Flat

Punch one shared station template, sew a multi-signature Coptic journal that opens 360 degrees, and diagnose any loose or twisted spine.

Exercise: Make a Punching Template and Pierce Everything From It

Decide on a station count (three to five) for a Coptic journal. Make one marked template strip and use it to pierce every signature and to mark the matching holes on both cover boards, keeping board stations six to ten millimeters in from the spine edge. Pierce or pre-drill the boards so the needle passes without splitting them.

- How many stations did you choose, and why that number for this book?

- Did all signatures and both boards line up when you held them together?

- Where did any misalignment creep in, and how will the shared template prevent it next time?

Exercise: Sew a Short Coptic Journal

Attach the first signature to a covered board, then add at least four more signatures, forming a chain link at each station by looping under the stitch of the signature below. Keep tension firm and even, sew the last signature into the second board, and tie off inside.

- Does the finished book flop fully open and lie flat at any page?

- Is the chain even along the spine, or are there loose or tight spots that reveal uneven tension?

- Did the signatures stay flush at the head and tail as the book grew?

Worksheet: Coptic Project Specification Sheet

Plan a Coptic journal before you cut a single board so the boards, signatures, and thread all match. Finished page size (width by height, mm)

Number of signatures and folios per signature

Board thickness and cover material

Board size including the square overhang on three sides

Number of sewing stations and distance from spine edge

Thread weight, color, and length per needle

Extras (ribbon marker, beads, two-color thread)

Checklist: Coptic Spine Troubleshooting Checklist

- Loose, gappy chain: snug every link as you sew; you cannot tighten after tying off
- Twisting or leaning spine: confirm all stations came from one shared template
- Thread cutting into folds: ease tension and pierce cleaner, slightly larger stations
- Sections not flush at head and tail: jog each square before sewing it in
- Cover bowing: cut boards grain-long and press covered boards flat before piercing
- Boards covered, dried under weight, and pierced before any sewing

Japanese Binding, Case Making, and Finishing

Stab-bind loose sheets, build and case in a hardcover with correct squares and joints, then square, trim, finish, and price a book to sell.

Exercise: Sew a Four-Hole Japanese Stab Binding

Stack loose sheets and front and back cover boards or heavy cover sheets, clamp them square, and mark four holes ten to fifteen millimeters in from the spine. Drill straight through the stack and sew the four-hole yotsume toji pattern so every hole is wrapped on the spine and the end holes wrap the head and tail edges. Tie off and tuck the knot into a hole.

- Did every hole end up wrapped on the spine, and the end holes on the top and bottom edges, per the pattern rule?

- How large an inner margin did you leave so the binding did not swallow your content?

- Did the thread sit crisply in the drilled channels, and what tension change would improve it?

Exercise: Build a Case and Case In a Text Block

Cut two boards grain-long with a two-millimeter square on three sides and a spine strip, set the joint gaps to roughly board thickness plus one to two millimeters, and cover the case in one piece. Center a sewn text block in the case, glue down the endpapers, work the cover into the joints with the bone folder, and press the book overnight with wax paper inside the covers.

- Are the squares even on the head, tail, and fore edge after casing in?

- Does the cover open cleanly at the joint, or is the hinge too tight or too loose?

- Did pressing keep the covers flat, or did anything bow as the glue dried?

Worksheet: Finishing and Defect Log

After finishing a book, record the defects you saw and the fix, so the same mistake does not repeat on the next one.

Book and binding type

Defect observed (will not lie flat, warped cover, wrinkled cover, cracked fold, crooked block)

Most likely cause (grain, glue amount, pressing, scoring, tension)

Fix applied or planned

Edge treatment used (deckle, sanded, painted, gilt)

Finishing extras (ribbon, headbands, custom endpaper)

Result and whether it is sale-ready

Checklist: Sale-Ready Book Checklist

- Book lies flat or opens to its structure's full extent
- Corners square and edges even at head, tail, and fore edge
- Cover flat, with no warp, bubbles, or wrinkles
- Spine and joints crisp and flexing cleanly
- Edge treatment and any ribbon or headbands finished
- Priced to cover materials, time, and margin
- Photographed both closed and open to show the binding

Your Action Plan

1. Grain-test every paper and board you own, mark each with a pencil arrow, and log it in the Paper and Board Selection Sheet.
2. Assemble the starter kit (bone folder, awl, needle, waxed linen thread, cork-backed ruler, knife, cutting mat, PVA, paste, weights).
3. Fold a set of consistent signatures from one template and measure the fore-edge creep so you know your trim allowance.
4. Sew a three-hole pamphlet, then a five-hole saddle stitch, focusing on square stations and even tension.
5. Make one shared punching template and use it to pierce every signature and both boards for a Coptic journal.
6. Sew a Coptic journal of five or more signatures, forming a chain link at each station and locking both boards in.
7. Cover and finish the Coptic boards, then troubleshoot any loose or twisted spine against the checklist.
8. Stab-bind a stack of loose sheets in the four-hole Japanese pattern for a quick album or zine.
9. Build a case with correct squares and joints and case in a sewn text block, then press it overnight under weight.
10. Square, trim, and finish a book, log any defects and fixes, price it with the keystone formula, and photograph it open and closed.

