

A clay vessel — Project information

Evaluation

- **Clay skills:** the strength, balance, and surface finish of your clay vessel
- **Quality of carving:** the complexity, quality, fullness, and craft of the patterns and line drawing on your vessel.
- **Daily clean-up habits:** cleaning your table and floor so it is clean and streak-free.

Procedure

1. **Inspire yourself.** Take a look at student examples from previous years. Take a look at cool patterns and line drawings so that you can decide what kind of surface decoration you are going to do.
2. **Coil build a small vessel to build your skills.** This is to help you work out the bugs so that you know how to improve things on your actual clay vessel. Use about 25% of your clay.
3. **Decide on a form** (three dimensional shape) to create.
4. **Build the base of your vessel.** This should be thicker: about 10 mm thick. Do not smooth this yet.
5. **Build the rough shape of your form.** Coil building will work for most ideas. Keep it rough. You want the walls of your vessel to be 6-9 mm thick in most places.
6. **Blend the surface.** Blend the peaks of the coils into the valleys. As much as possible, do this without pinching. If your clay becomes less than 6 mm thick, add clay to that area.
7. **Paddle!** Use a wooden spoon to strengthen and smooth the outside. Use your fingers to smooth the inside.
8. **Smooth the surface.** Use clay tools to get rid of the bumps and lumps, and then use knives and ribs to get a very smooth finish.
9. **Add white slip.** Use a brush to paint white clay onto the surface of your vessel. You may need two coats, but you probably should not do three. When it is no longer sticky, you can start carving your patterns and line drawings.
10. **Carve away!** Use something sharp like a pencil to carve out your patterns and line drawings. Don't worry - the graphite burns off in the kiln. Remember to carve your name on it!
11. **Let your project dry.** Your vessel needs to be completely dry before going into the kiln or there is a chance of it exploding.

Advice — Working with clay

Clay dust is hazardous. It can collect in your lungs, causing silicosis, which cuts off your ability to get oxygen from the air. This is extremely unlikely to become a problem just from taking art class, but it could be a problem for people who work with clay for a long time. Each student is expected to clean their desks and the floor at the end of each day, leaving surfaces streak free.

You might want to use gloves. Gloves can be a pain, but if clay dries out your skin or you hate the feeling of it on your skin, then feel free to wear gloves. (Drapak's note: I wear gloves - I love clay, but the feel of it drying on my skin drives me nuts!)

Control clay moisture. Much of being skilled with clay is about whether or not your clay becomes too dry or too wet. Keeping the clay the right humidity at the right time is essential for good results.

Never add water. You might think that it will help remove cracks and smooth the surface, but it simply turns the surface into mud.

Always wrap your clay at the end of class. It also helps to flick water into the bag before tying it up. Just one day unwrapped can be enough to destroy your project. You cannot add water to make dry clay wet, and wet clay does not stick to dry clay.

Do not overwork the clay. The more you handle the clay, the more it dries out and becomes unworkable.

It needs to be smoother than you think. Use knives, clay tools, and ribs to smooth things. The lumps and bumps show up much more after your clay leaves the kiln.

Carve just enough to change colour. You don't have to carve very deeply, and you don't really need special tools: a sharpened pencil does the trick. If colour does not change, carve more deeply. If you make a mistake fix it by adding more slip.

Add bandages over cracks. Just add a patch of soft clay over top of it and smooth it into the surface. Never add water: it will cause the cracks to expand.

Once it's gone it's gone. Don't expect extra clay if you wreck things. See if there are other students who have clay left over.