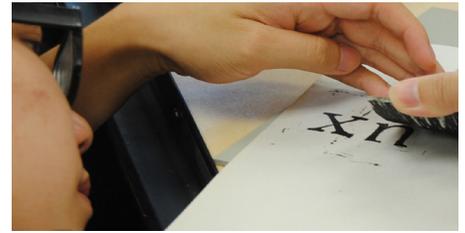


Carving and Printing Letter Stamps

The Lesson

We are going to conquer the mystery that is white space in typography (known also as kerning, tracking, and leading) by creating our own handmade letterpress set. In order to do this, we will literally carve our own letters out of soft eraser material and then have a few messy days of fun.

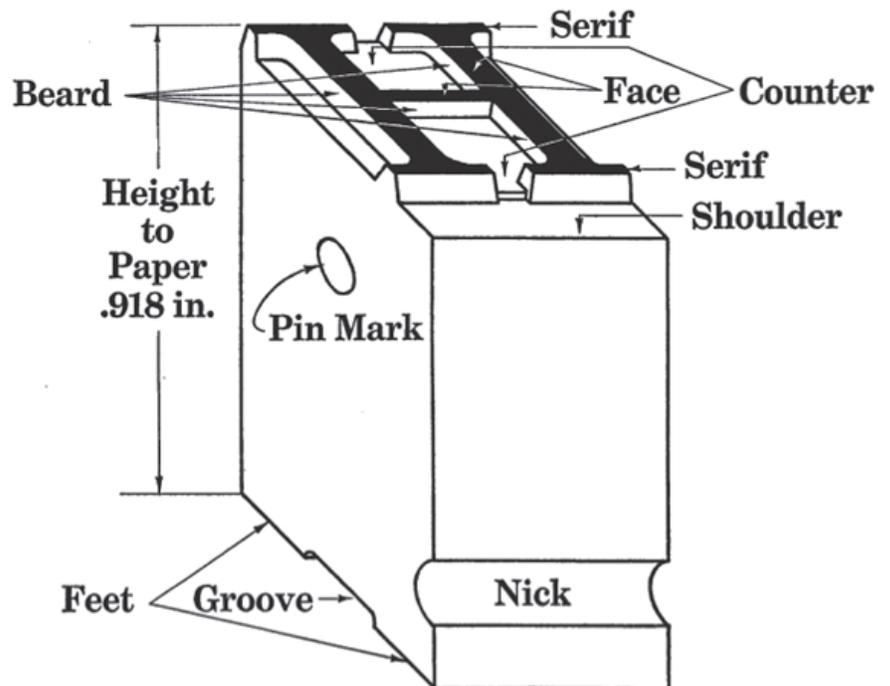


Letterpress: Typography's Glorious Origins

Letterpress printing is a relief printing process which uses raised metal type to imprint words and designs on a page.

Letterpress was perfected in the 1400s and was the primary form of printing and communication for more than 500 years. For centuries it was the primary method of publishing books, but over time it has evolved into an art form more than a standard printing practice. Basically, people used to carve whole big blocks for each page to be printed. This proved cumbersome and so a system was developed (first in Korea, in the 1200s) wherein each letter was carved on its own block and these were assembled over and over again as needed. This system of letterpress is where the conventions and vocabulary we use today originated, so we are going to learn the basics the way our predecessors did: by getting our hands inky!

PARTS OF A PRINTING TYPE

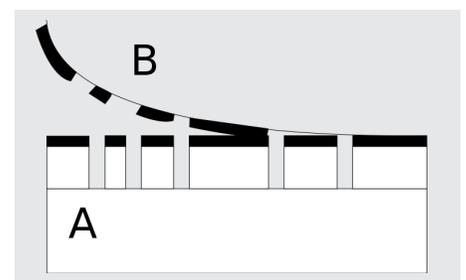


Wait, What is Printmaking?

Printmaking is when you make a durable plate of a composition or design (carved into wood, etched onto a sheet of metal, fixed onto a fabric mesh, etc) and then ink that plate up to produce exact copies of the original idea onto another surface, over and over. This technology made the accurate mass transmission of ideas and images possible, thereby enabling such events as the Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation. Heady stuff!

Relief Printing

Relief printing is the oldest form of printmaking. The most common form of relief printing is woodcut. An ink drawing is made on a wood block, then the artist cuts away uninked areas, leaving inked areas raised. Printing ink is applied to the raised surface and a sheet of paper is laid on the block to take an impression by hand or a press. We will be printing using a soft, eraser-like material, but all of the principles of woodcut are the same.



The basic principle: whatever is tall enough to get inked on the block (A) will print onto the paper (B).

Equipment



BRAYER

Spreads ink evenly on your block



ERASER BLOCK

Flat, even surface for carving. Be sure to get the eraser material NOT linoleum which is too hard to carve safely.



RELIEF PRINTING INK

Water-based, otherwise you need special cleaning materials



KNIVES

We will be using linocut tools, specially made for carving linoleum, a popular surface.



PAPER

We will be using newsprint although rice paper is very popular



OUR HANDS

In order to press the paper to the ink, we will use our own hands.

Also needed: paper towels, tape, pencils, rulers, spray cleaner

Transferring Your Design & Inking Your Block



Transfer your image onto the block. *If you are doing this at home, be sure to flip the image or type so that it reads backwards.* Otherwise, your image will be flipped the wrong way when you print. I will give you letters that are flipped already for today's lesson.



Make your own transfer paper by rubbing pencil over the back of your flipped image. Tape that to your chunk of eraser and trace the image onto the block.

Once you have your image transferred, you can start carving away everything you do not want to print. See the carving instructions below for more details.



Using a brayer, spread out ink on a clean surface until you hear a sizzle, which indicates you have enough ink.

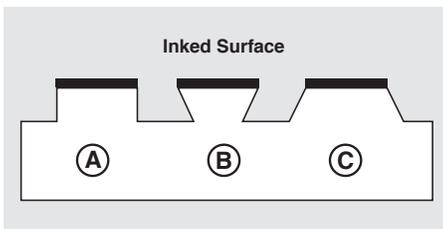


Clean away any residue before printing or you will end up with a messy print.



Spread the ink evenly over the carved surface of your block. If you have not carved carefully, you will see the ink covering the block around your intended line. Just carve the extra stuff away as needed.

A Word on Carving Your Block



Be sure to cut your block in a way that will keep the block from crumbling or flopping around. Look at the cross section above:

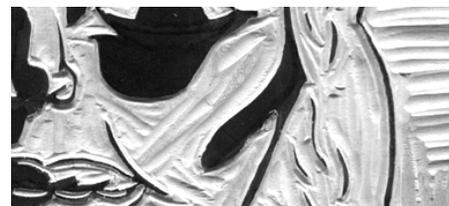
- If you carve so the material supporting your printable area (called the beard) is square, you may find that after a few prints, the prints get blurry because the beard gets wobbly under pressure.
- If you undercut the printing area, your printing will go badly almost immediately. The beard cannot support the surface at all.
- This is the ideal situation: the beard is slanting towards the surface, thereby giving you as much support as possible.

Also, there is no need to carve the block too deeply. Just carve about a third of the block away. If you carve too deeply, you weaken the block and it may crumble or fail in the midst of printing.

The linocut tools are **SHARP**, so please use the following method to reduce the possibility of getting cut.

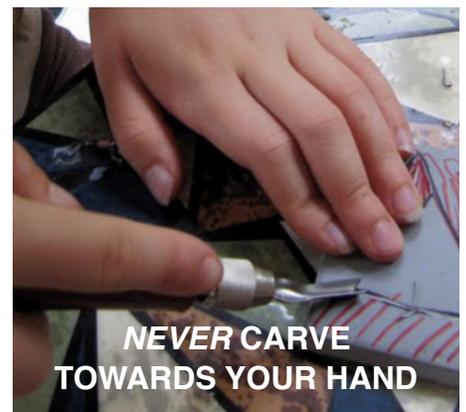


First off, using the smallest blade, gently carve around the outside of your intended line. That way you cut down the risk of carving away parts of the lines you want to print.



Once you get the outline of your printable area carved, use increasingly larger tools to clear away the excess. Be very careful when you get close to your printable area, or try to carve away from it. If you press too hard, your hand can slip and you end up carving into your desired surface.

DANGER!!!



Safety

Carve away from your hand! I cannot say this enough! You will cut yourself otherwise. The eraser material is so soft you do not need to press hard, but if your hand slips, the blade will cut you!

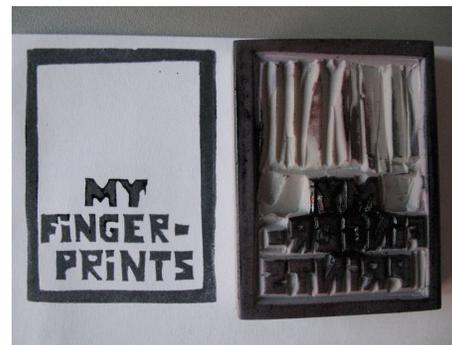
Printing Your Work



Gently place your inked stamp face down onto the paper, being careful not to get ink on your hands. Press straight down with both hands, making sure to apply even pressure to your stamp.



Pull the stamp away from the paper carefully, and you have your first print!



Check your printed image for any mistakes or extra printing areas. Recarve as needed to make your print look as nice as possible.

Printmaking Resources

As designers and media managers, you absolutely need to experience the basic forms of printing in as visceral a way as possible. The best way to do that is to study printmaking techniques whenever you can. Although many of these techniques have been relegated to the field of fine arts as they have been replaced with newer ones, we need to keep these older, hands-on methods alive. They are our heritage, our DNA. Learning from whence our disciplines originated will only make us stronger practitioners. Plus, you can make really lovely stuff you'd never have made otherwise. Here are several local resources for you to explore—there are several print shops in our area which I hope to use for field trips when possible.

City Tech Printmaking Club (Starting Spring 2014!)

Professor Clarke will be putting up signs for the CTPC this semester. We will have workshops, meetings, and voluntary field trips as much as possible, depending on what money we can scrape together.



openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/printmakingclub

Printmaking Classes

You may also be able to rent studio time at these places, so check their websites for more details.

Lower East Side Printshop

306 West 37th Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10018
212 673 5390 | www.printshop.org

The Center for Book Arts

28 West 27th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10001
212 481 0295 | www.centerforbookarts.org

Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop

323 West 39th Street 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10018
646 416 6226 | www.efanyc.org/rbpmw

The Arm Letterpress

281 North 7th Street, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, NY
www.thearmnyc.com

The Gowanus Studio Space

166 7th Street, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY, 11215
www.gowanusstudio.org

General Printmaking Supplies

New York Central Art Supplies

62 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10003
212 473 7705 | Orders: 800 950 6111

Utrecht Brooklyn (there are many locations)

536 Myrtle Ave, Brooklyn 11205-2606
718 789 0308 | www.utrechtart.com

Pearl Paint

308 Canal St, New York, NY 10013
212 431 7932 | pearlpaint.com

Graphic Chemical (not local, but great)

732 North Yale Avenue, Villa Park, IL 60181:
630 832 6004 | 800 465 7382
www.graphicchemical.com

Local Print Shops of Note

Jessica Hische actually built an excellent site for finding great print shops: www.inkerlinker.com

Kayrock Screeprinting (by appointment only)

1205 Manhattan Ave Unit 1-4-1, Brooklyn, NY 11222 |
718 963 2020 | www.kayrock.org

Swayspace (Letterpress)

232 Third Street, E104, Brooklyn, NY 11215
718 596 3520 | www.swayspace.com

Rolling Press (Digital)

15 Denton Place, Park Slope
Brooklyn, New York 11215
718 625 6800 | www.rollingpress.com

Sesame Letterpress & Design (Letterpress)

55 Washington Street #608, Brooklyn, NY 11201
347 768 8177 | www.sesameletterpress.com

Heartfish Press (Letterpress)

50 Bridge Street, Brooklyn NY 11201
347 457 6957 | www.heartfishpress.com

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