

## Preparing Unmounted Linocut Blocks for Printing

Unmounted Linoleum has a natural texture and may have some light scratches or other small imperfections on the surface. Before you begin carving, it is a good idea to sand the block with wet/dry 220 grit sandpaper (usually black). This will remove any flaws and rough up the surface very slightly so the ink will adhere to it easily.

Wrap the sandpaper around a sanding block. Go over the linoleum slowly and carefully with a circular motion, keeping the block flat to the surface. Do not use too much pressure. Think of it as polishing the linoleum rather than sanding it. You can add a small amount of water to speed things up and increase the life of the sandpaper.

While it is not essential, you can also sand the finished carved block before proofing and printing. This step eliminates any pressure ridges or slightly raised edges around your cuts, which can otherwise show up in printing.

Linoleum is cut from a long roll. Because of this, they have a slight curve. Warming the blocks with a hair drier and then putting them under weight can eliminate this curve. If this does not work, place the linoleum on a flat surface. Place a

piece of natural, smooth fabric like a cotton dish towel over it and iron the linoleum with the iron set on low to medium heat until it is quite warm. Be very careful not to overheat the linoleum; it can melt. Once it is good and warm, place heavy weights like books on top of it. Wait until the linoleum is completely cool before removing the weights.

Warming linoleum also makes it easier to carve so keep that hair dryer, heating pad or an electric food warmer handy as you work.

You can also mount the block using wood glue to a stiff substrate to keep it flat and make it easier to handle. Use a stable, flat base. High quality MDF is inexpensive and works well. Solid-core 1/2" birch plywood is another choice. Use PVA glue like Elmer's wood glue and apply a good layer of it to the base. Place the linoleum on top and place it under a heavy weight while the glue dries to make sure the linoleum is evenly bonded to the base.

After printing, clean the blocks and store them flat in a dry place to prevent warping.



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