

An Introduction to Bookbinding
Oxonmoot 2024
by Kai Janik

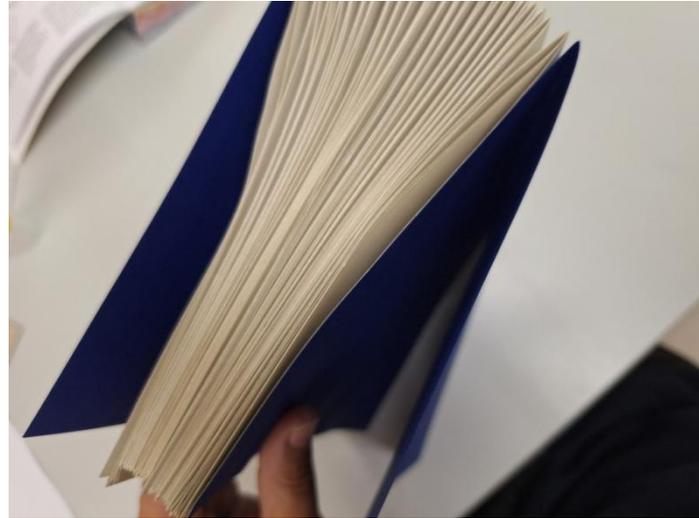
Materials:

- Sheets of paper for the book block (needs to be double size of the book pages, so A4 paper for A5 book)
- book end paper (2 sheets, double size of the book pages); alternative material: coloured paper
- strong thread (linen thread, bookbinding thread, etc.)
- bookbinding glue
- Mull; alternative: strong fabric that doesn't stretch
- Headband (optional, you can fold a bit of fabric in half and use it instead)
- thin cardboard strip for spine
- Strong cardboard, two pieces the size of the pages
+ 2mm on front, top and bottom
- Material for the cover (wallpaper, bookbinding fabric, leather...)

Tools:

- pencil
- strong needle
- sturdy surface to work on
- brush or paper scraps for spreading out glue
- weights or book press (you can place it under bricks or a cupboard for drying)
- scalpell, or scissors

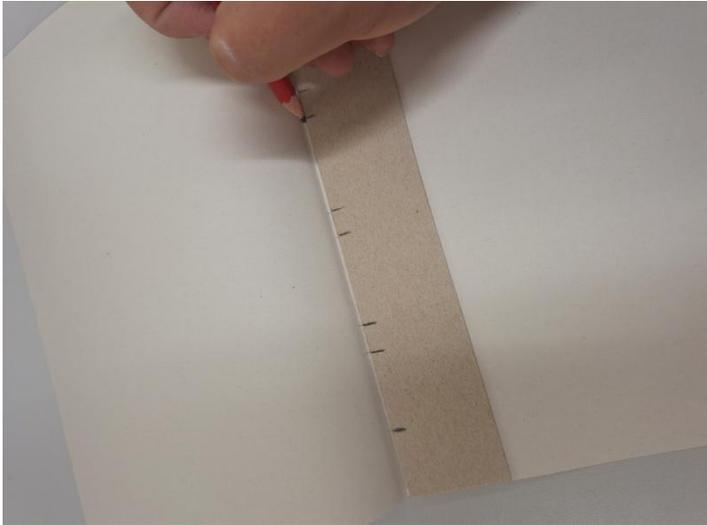
Making the block



Step 1:

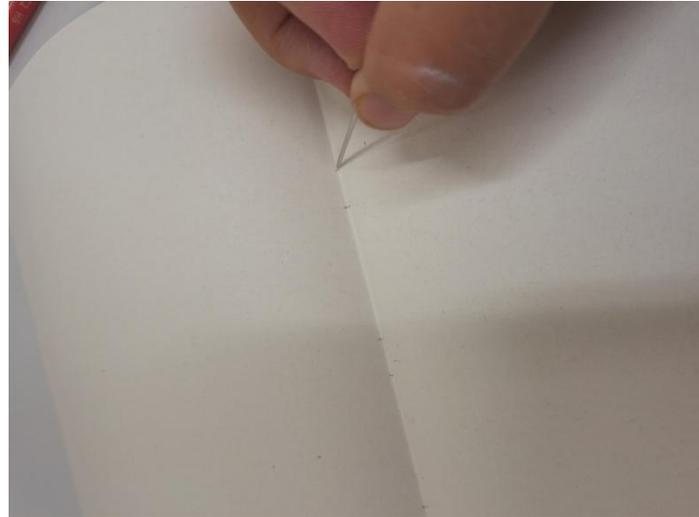
Fold the paper in half, sheet by sheet, working as precisely as you can. Also fold the book end paper in half. Make sure the folding line is crisp and the paper is lying flat after folding

Making the block



Step 2:

Use a ruler or prepare a custom measuring tool that marks where you will have to make holes into the paper. Be very precise about aligning it always in the same way so the holes will later align as well.



Step 3:

Make the holes where you have marked. Make sure to push the needle straight through, not at an angle. It will end up more even if you do it sheet by sheet, or if you have tools to secure the whole block in place so the pages cannot slip away and then hammer an awl through the whole block at once.

Making the block



Step 4:

Depending on thickness of paper, stack up to 3 of the pieces of paper and then fold.

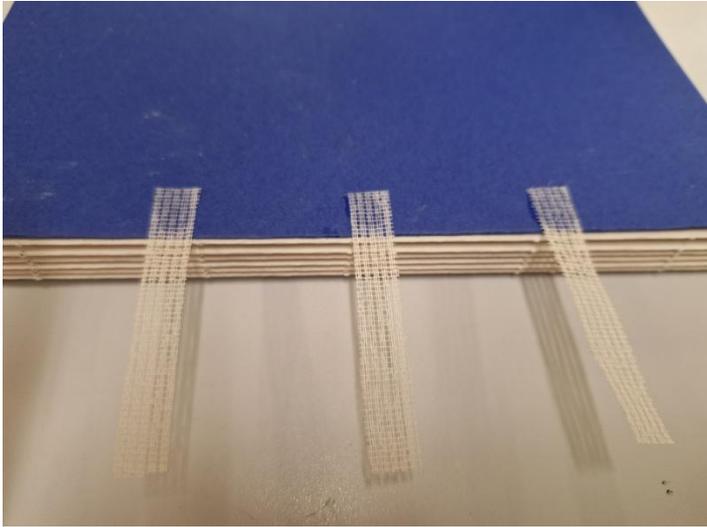
This is what the pages should look like after punching the holes and folding them again. You have little bundles of paper lying on top of each other now.



Step 5:

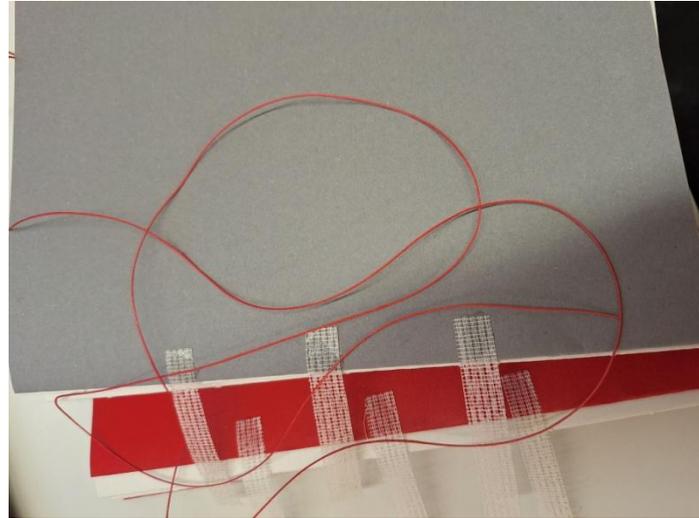
Glue the book end paper to the first and the last bundle of paper. Be careful to spread the glue evenly and not let it seep through the page. You can spread the glue over the page with a brush or with a small piece of paper or cardboard. You can use some waxed paper between the page you are working with and the rest of the bundle, so you do not accidentally glue them together. Place between weights or inside the book press until the glue has dried.

Making the block



Step 6:

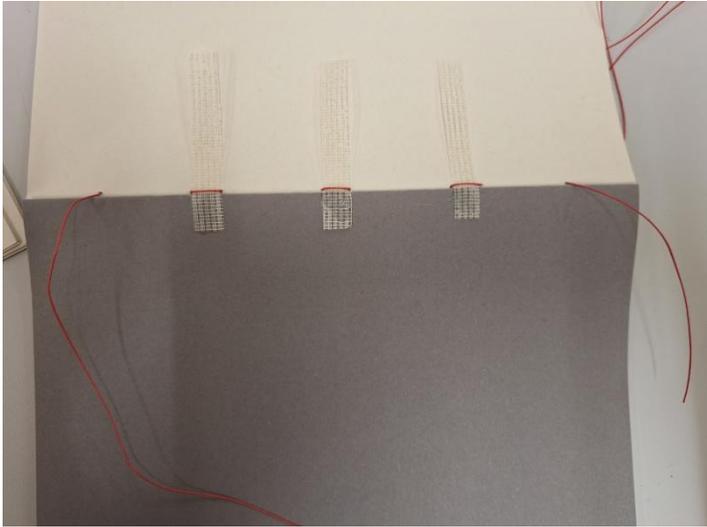
Cut small strips of the mull. They must fit into the smaller spaces you have marked. Glue them onto one side of the book end paper. Let dry.



Step 7:

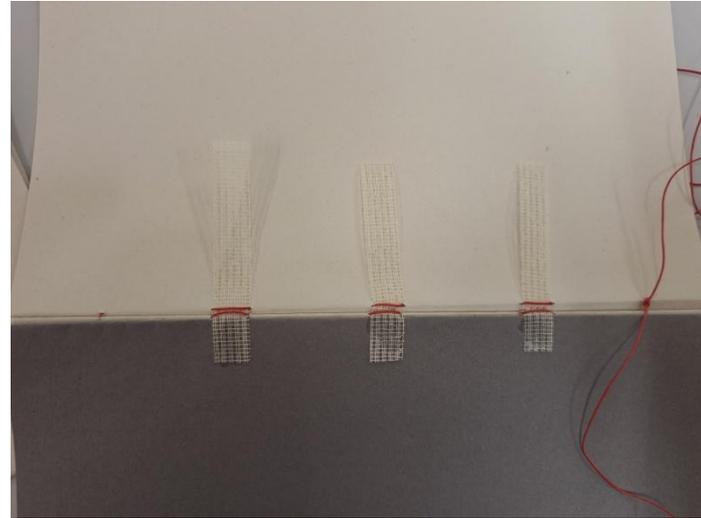
Cut the thread. It will run along the backside of each little bundle of pages, so you need to take the length of one page and then multiply with the number of bundles of pages you have.

Making the block



Step 8:

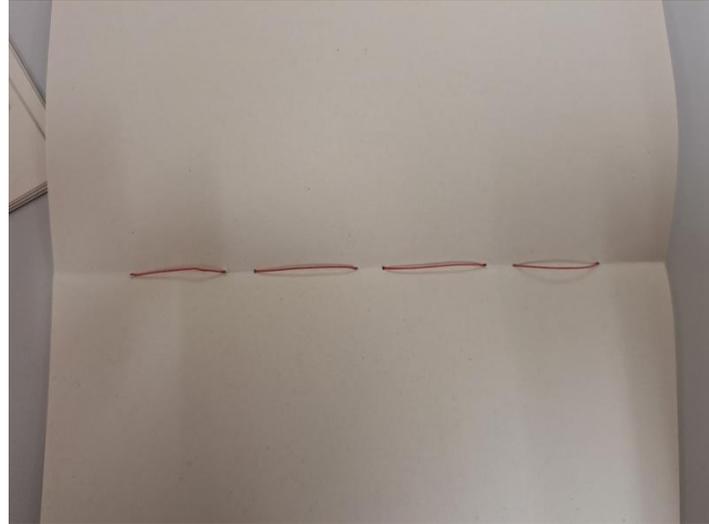
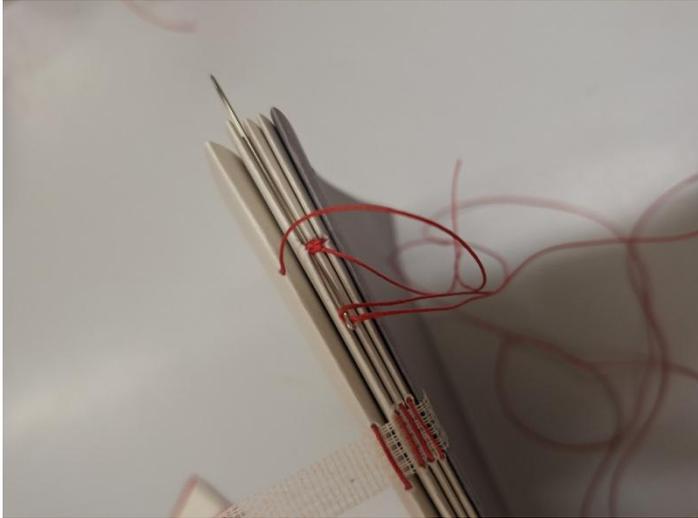
Start on either side and start sewing from the outside going in, then coming out again to go over the mull, and repeat.



Step 9:

Place the second layer on top and now continue sewing in the opposite direction – again going in from the outside, then coming out, over the mull, etc. when you reach the end, make sure to pull the thread tight (but not so tight you rip the paper!) and then tie a knot. You only need this knot in the first row.

Making the block

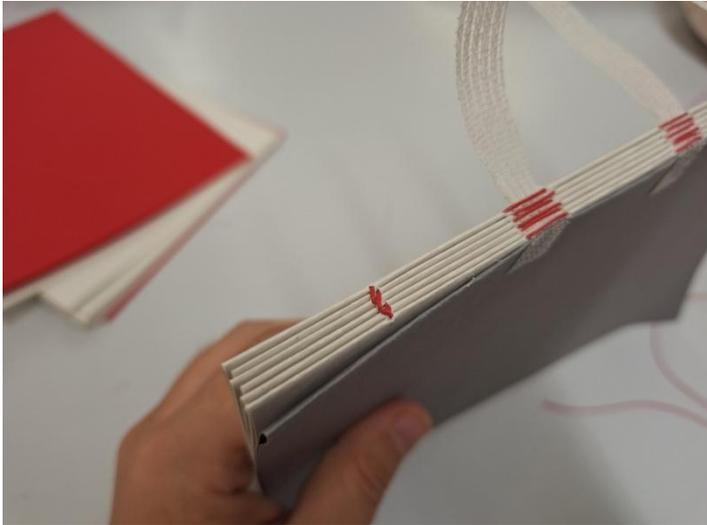


Step 10:

In the next rows you can always just go with the needle under the last stitch that connects this layer to the one below. Make sure you keep the thread pulled tight after each row.

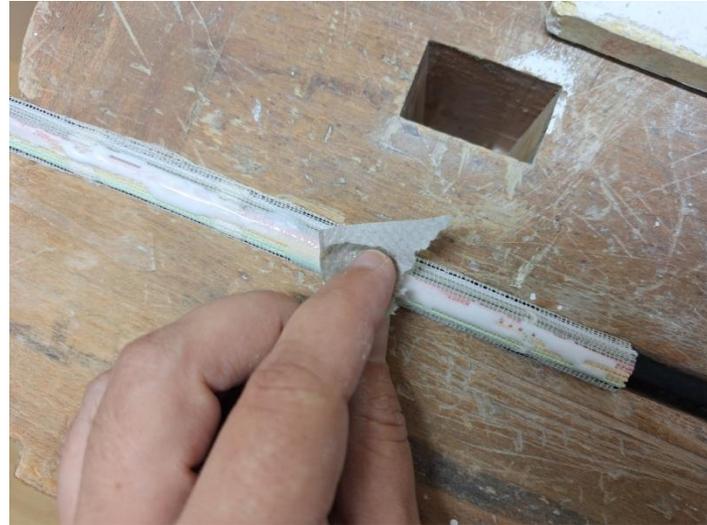
This is what the stitch should look like from the inside – only needs to be pulled tight.

Making the block



Step 11:

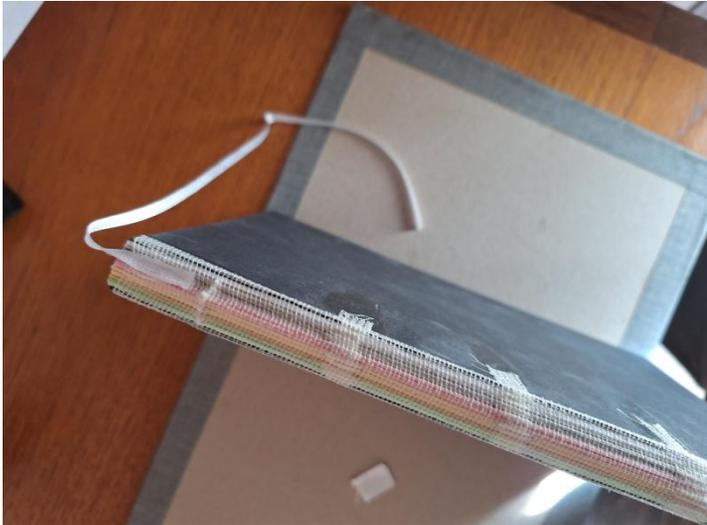
When you are done, go through the stitches on the side down a few rows and tie a knot. You do not need to cut any excess thread, it can be glued in in the next step. Only cut if there is a lot of thread left.



Step 12:

Pull the mull on the other side until it's really tight, making sure all the layers of paper are sitting close together. If you leave gaps between the pages here, there will be gaps in the book later. Then glue the other side down as well. Place some paper on top for spilling prevention. Place in the press, cut a strip of mull to place on the spine and glue it down. You need more glue for this step than you might think. Let sit to dry.

Making the block



Step 5:

If you would like to add a ribbon or a headband, you should do so now. Add the ribbon first, make it a bit longer than you might want it in the end.



Step 6:

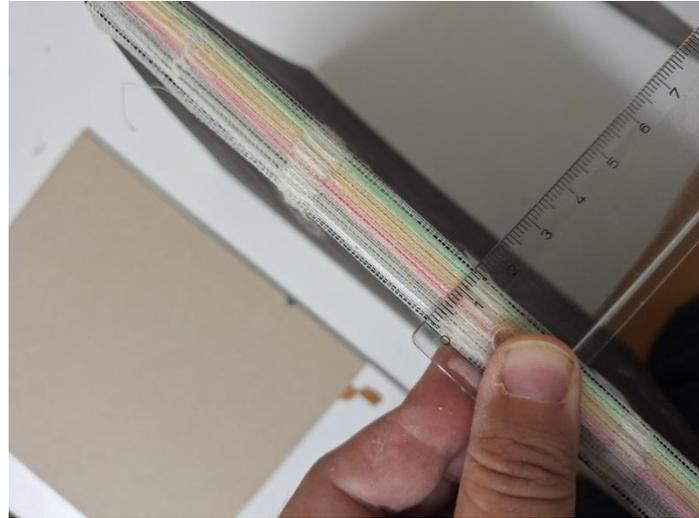
Glue on the headband.

Making the cover



Step 1:

Cut two pieces of cardboard. They need to be about 2mm wider than the pages on all sides except where the spine will be.



Step 2:

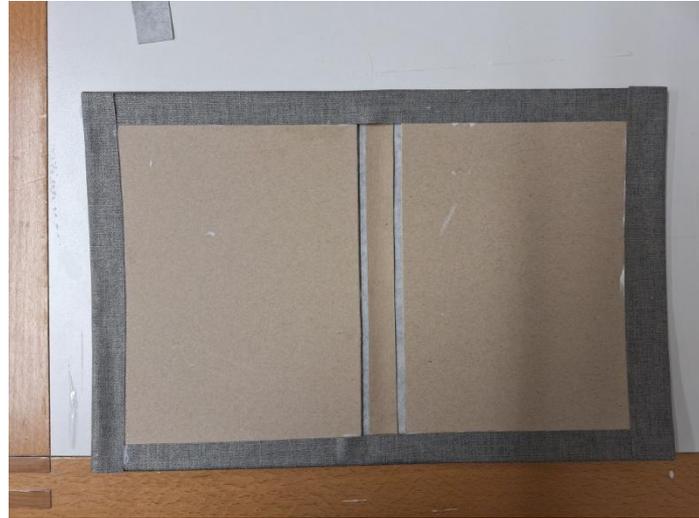
Cut a thinner piece of cardboard that is as wide as the block and as long as the book cover.

Making the cover



Step 3:

Place the three pieces on the back of the cover fabric. The fabric should be a bit larger than the cover itself, so it can be easily wrapped around and glued down. Be careful to leave enough space between the spine and the front and back cover. It needs to be a little wider than the cardboard is thick, so it can be comfortably turned.



Step 4:

Glue the cardboard bits into place. Make sure to spread the glue evenly. Then fold the cover fabric over and glue down as well. Place under weights or in press to dry.

Connecting block and cover



Step 7:

Make sure the book fits into the cover. It should sit right at the edge of the cardboard cover. Now the book end paper and the cover need to be glued together. I find it easiest to lie the book down like this, apply the glue to the book end paper, and then shut the cover on top. Turn around and repeat on other side. Make sure it sits right, small corrections can still be made at this point. **Do not glue the spine!** It needs to be flexible!



Step 8:

Place in the press or under weights. Make sure the spine sticks out and is not pressed. Then close it tightly and let sit for a few hours.

For questions, you can e-mail me:
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