

MAKE IT YOURSELF
LINO CUT PRINTMAKING



*Skill Development: Relief Carving
in Linoleum and Printmaking*

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#LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething

Skill Development: Relief Carving in Linoleum and Printmaking

Relief carving, otherwise known as “carving in relief,” is an ancient form of woodcarving where a design is carved into a flat piece of wood using specialized carving tools. Rather than the image itself being carved, sections of the background are carved away, revealing a pattern or picture in the pieces that remain untouched. It’s almost like drawing in reverse.

With this MIY kit, you will practice the art of relief carving on rubber and blocks. This technique is called linocut and is a simple yet highly satisfying skill that anyone can master. You will learn to utilize negative and positive space to create a one-of-a-kind design on a linoleum block that will then be used as a stamp. You will then use the stamp to print by hand onto greeting cards using water-soluble ink, adding another artistic element to the project.

Since linoleum has no grain, the base skills will be easier to learn with a linocut project than if you begin your relief carving journey using wood as your medium.

While the result for this project will be homemade personalized greeting cards, you will gain invaluable skills that can be applied to other types of carving projects.

Skill Level: Beginner to intermediate; ages 14+

Time to Complete: Take as long as you need; 4 or more hours, plus drying time.



CONTENTS

- 2 rubber lino blocks (one 2 3/4" × 4 1/2", one 4" × 5 1/2")
- 1 unmounted linoleum block (4" × 6")
- 2 Japanese #11 deep gouges (7.5mm and 4.5mm)
- 1 Japanese 60° parting tool (3mm)
- 1 right-hand Japanese detail skew chisel (7.5mm)
- Block printing ink, black, 37ml
- Block printing ink, white, 37ml
- 3 sheets of printmaking paper
- 2 sheets of tracing paper
- 2 sheets of graphite paper
- 1 bench hook/inking plate
- Soft rubber brayer
- 1 leather strop (4 1/2" × 1 1/2")
- Honing compound, 2 oz
- 6 folded cards with envelopes (4" × 6")
- 1 cotton rag
- Vinyl gloves
- 3 wooden scrapers
- High-friction guard tape
- 4B graphite pencil

Note: Components may not be exactly as shown, depending on supply.

Other items you will need (not included):

- Masking tape or binder clips
- Black permanent marker
- Ballpoint pen
- Soft brush
- A large, heavy hardcover book



Caution: The blades on your carving tools are sharp. Always carve away from your body, and keep your non-carving hand out of the way of the tool. Do not carve when you are tired. Since you will be using repetitive movements that might not be familiar to your hands, we encourage you to take several breaks along the way to give your hands and your eyes a rest. You will be focusing up close with a sharp tool, so listen to your body and take all proper precautions to ensure that you do not make any unnecessary slips.

DAY 1: COVERS STEPS 1 TO 5

1 SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

TIME TO COMPLETE: 5 TO 10 MINUTES

- a. Select a well-lit, clean, open work area. Your work surface (such as a kitchen table) should be flat and provide a comfortable height for carving, allowing you to sit in a relaxed position and look carefully at the work you are doing.

Tip: Have a lamp over your work surface or try to carve next to a window in direct sunlight so you can clearly see the details of what you are doing.

- b. Remove the contents of the kit from the box and set them aside nearby.
- c. Unfold the box and flatten it, using the cardboard to protect your work surface.
- d. Read all the instructions to familiarize yourself with how each product is to be used.

2 PRACTICE USING THE CARVING TOOLS

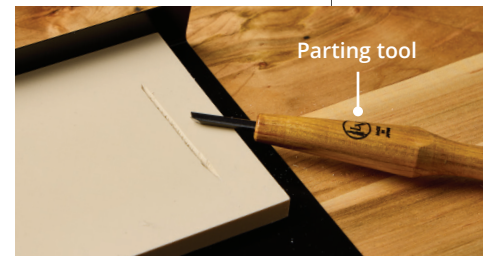
TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 TO 2 HOURS

Four Japanese carving tools are included – two deep gouges (4.5mm and 7.5mm), a right-hand skew chisel and a parting tool. Each has a specific purpose and creates different types of cuts, and you may find that you prefer using one over the others.



Note: In use, a sharper tool is a safer tool because a dull edge needs more force to cut, decreasing your control of the tool and increasing your chances of having the tool slip. It is essential to keep the carving tools sharp at all times, as this will make it easier for you to make cuts while avoiding slips and alleviating hand fatigue. While the Japanese carving tools in this kit come sharp, every time you cut into your block, they start to dull. A good rule of thumb is to sharpen them with the strop in this kit as soon as you notice they are not cutting through the block as easily as when you started. Refer to **Tool Care** to learn about sharpening.

The **parting tool** has a V-shaped blade that cuts fine lines with sharp, pointed ends. It is the most versatile tool in this kit, as you can easily adjust the thickness and the depth of your cuts depending on how much pressure you use and the angle of the blade as it enters the block. It is best suited for making thin outlines and adding texture and fine details to your design rather than carving out large sections of your block.



The **4.5mm and 7.5mm deep gouges** have a distinctly curved, U-shaped blade that can cut quite deeply into your block. They are useful for cutting wide, curved lines with a rounded end and clearing large sections of the block.



The **right-hand skew chisel** is a flat-edge tool that does not have a V- or U-shaped opening like the other tools in this kit. It is typically used for smoothing ridges in the negative areas that can fill with ink.

Tip: Hold the skew chisel flat against your block, angling the sharp, bevelled edge slightly downward and dragging it across the area you'd like smoothed out.



It is also used to clean up the outlines around your positive areas.



3 PRACTICE CARVING

TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 TO 3 HOURS

We recommend using the rubber blocks as testers to practice different carving techniques and to get a feel for how each tool carves. Don't worry about creating a cohesive design right now. Focus on cutting lines and simple shapes to get better acquainted with your tools and learn how each one works.

Tip: When it comes time to carve your final block, don't try to free-hand your design. Practice drawing it on paper until you have a design you are happy with and then transfer it to the block. See **Preparing Your Design** and **Transferring Your Design** for instructions.

- a. To increase your grip and protect against cuts and abrasions while you carve, wrap some high-friction guard tape around your fingers on your non-dominant hand.

Tip: Not all your cuts will be perfect, especially when you are starting out. Practice will lead to much improvement and allow you to develop muscle memory. If you encounter resistance when cutting, take a pause and don't try to force the section out, as this can lead to tearing and jagged, uneven cuts that can affect your design. It is all right to go back to a cut afterwards to clean up any pieces that are still connected to your block. Once you are confident with carving the different shapes and cuts, you can apply these techniques to your stamping block.

- b. Position the bench hook included in this kit directly in front of you, laying it flat on your work surface with one lip hanging over and flush with the edge of the table.
- c. Position your block on the bench hook with the top edge touching the back lip.



Note: There are several ways you can hold your tools when relief carving. The most common technique is to hold them using your dominant hand, gripping the top end of the tool under the blade between your thumb and index finger, with the butt end of the handle resting on your palm or the hollow between your thumb and index finger.

- d. Practice holding your tools to see what feels most comfortable.
- e. Place the tip of the index finger on your non-dominant hand on the top of the tool right before the blade, pressing down slightly to push the blade forward and guide your dominant hand as you carve. This will give you more control and prevent you from accidentally cutting into your non-dominant hand.



Caution: As you carve, make sure that your carving tool does not come in contact with the back lip of the bench hook.

- f. Practice carving straight, curved and wavy lines along with simple shapes like circles, stars, triangles and small dots, making sure you are carving away from your body and free hand and toward the back lip of the bench hook, turning the block when changing directions.



When using the parting tool and gouges, angle the bottom of the blade downward towards the block, with the opening facing up. Gently push the bottom of the blade into the block without applying too much pressure, and push the blade in the direction you want it to go as if you are drawing, carving only about half an inch at a time.

Tip: The U-shaped gouges work best for carving circles, curved lines and dots. When doing any type of rounded cut, hold your tool at 45° and push it into the linoleum, holding it steady as you rotate the block clockwise or counterclockwise.

- g. Vary the depth of the cuts and make your lines wider or narrower by raising and lowering your wrist as you carve. Aim for cuts that are 2mm to 3mm deep.

Tip: Cuts that are too shallow will fill with ink and not transfer the design correctly, but if you carve too deeply, you can tear the linoleum and encounter more resistance with your blade, making it difficult to create smooth cuts. Angling the opening of the blade upward and not downward into the block can help prevent you from cutting too deeply into the block.

Once you feel confident in your carving abilities, you can start sketching your design.



4 PREPARING YOUR DESIGN

TIME TO COMPLETE: 30 MINUTES TO 1 HOUR

If this is your first time doing linocut, choose a simple design without a lot of detail or shading. As you become more familiar with carving techniques and gain confidence in your abilities, you'll be able to try more ambitious, detailed designs. Keep in mind that when you carve your design into your block, you will be taking away material from the block to create your print, so it's more like erasing than drawing. When the ink is applied, it will only adhere to the areas that have not been carved, known as the positive areas. The areas that have been carved away are the negative areas and will appear as the white on your cards.

Note: Any negative areas that are not carved deeply enough will be inked and appear on your cards.

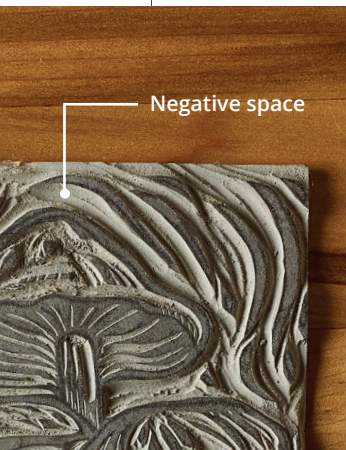
- a. Decide whether you want your project to be configured vertically or horizontally.
- b. Practice drawing different design options on paper, keeping your thinnest positive points about a half centimetre thick.

5 TRANSFERRING YOUR DESIGN

TIME TO COMPLETE: 10 TO 20 MINUTES

Once you have a design you are happy with, transfer it to your block using either graphite paper or tracing paper, both of which are included with this kit.

You might be wondering, which is the better option? When it comes to transferring your design, the method you use should come down to personal preference.



Graphite paper is a thin piece of paper coated with a layer of graphite that you place face down onto your block. When you trace your design onto the back side of the paper, the pressure from your pencil will cause the graphite to transfer to the block in those areas. This is the more popular method; however, a common challenge is that you cannot see the block through the opaque paper as you trace, which can make it difficult to see where your design is transferring onto your block and if it is straight or crooked.

With tracing paper, which is just an ultra-thin piece of white paper, you will not encounter this issue since it is semi-transparent; however, it does require a bit more effort than graphite paper to transfer your design to the block.

We will teach you how to transfer your design using both methods and encourage you to practice each method on a sheet of plain white paper to see which you prefer.

Note: *The image you carve onto your linocut block will be a mirror image of your design when it is printed. If you are incorporating numbers or letters into your design, they will need to be inverted on the block.*

To transfer your design using graphite paper:

- a. Place the paper with your design over one of the blocks with the image facing up, and position it where you want the design to appear on the block.

Note: *If transferring your design using graphite paper, make sure that your design is drawn backwards, as this is how it will appear on the block when transferred.*

- b. Tape one section of the paper to the block or use binder clips to hold it in place.
- c. Place the sheet of graphite paper between the block and your design with the graphite side facing down.
- d. Hold the top sheet of paper as flat as you can and start tracing the major outlines with a ballpoint pen. Apply enough pressure to ensure you are transferring your design onto the block.



- e. Gently lift a corner of the graphite paper and check if you can clearly see your design transferred onto your block.



Tip: It will be incredibly difficult to line up the graphite paper with the transferred design on your block once it has been fully removed. If you remove the graphite paper and find that the lines on your block are faint, you can trace over them using your pencil.

To transfer your design using tracing paper:

- a. Place the paper with your design on it on your work surface, making sure it is straight.

Note: If you decide to use tracing paper, your design does not need to be drawn backwards because you will put it drawing side down on the block to transfer it, causing it to be inverted.

- b. Take a piece of tracing paper and place it directly on top, taping both to your work surface.

Note: You should be able to see your design through the tracing paper. If you can't see it, you will need to go over your design again with a pen or permanent marker and apply more pressure.

- c. Use the included graphite pencil to trace your design onto the tracing paper.
- d. When done tracing, remove the tape and position your tracing paper, pencil side down, on top of your block, ensuring your design lines up with where you want it to appear on the block.
- e. Use the back of a spoon to burnish the tracing paper design, pushing firmly into the paper so the pencil transfers onto your block. You may need to go over it a few times so the design transfers clearly. Check your progress by carefully peeling up one side of the tracing paper to ensure it is transferring well.
- f. Remove the tracing paper.



6 CARVE YOUR DESIGN INTO THE LINOLEUM

TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 TO 3 HOURS, DEPENDING ON COMPLEXITY OF THE DESIGN

Note: Remember that all carved-out areas will be without ink, appearing as the white of the paper when you print your design. Anything that has not been carved will be inked on your paper. Create shallow cuts in varying lengths and directions to your background to add energy and interest to your print so that it doesn't transfer as one solid block of ink. If your design has a lot of negative space, carve in a direction that aligns with the subject so if some of your carving marks show, they add to the overall design.

- a. Place your block down on your work surface.
- b. Start by outlining the delicate positive areas with the skew chisel, if you plan to carve away around them. Go slowly and work through the most difficult parts of the image, removing only small pieces of material at a time. If you make a mistake, you can alter your design around it.

Note: Linoleum is a denser material than rubber, so carving the linoleum block will feel different compared to the rubber tester blocks. You may feel like you have less control with your tool and will need to apply more pressure when carving so that your cuts aren't too shallow.

- c. As you carve your block, adjust the direction, length and frequency of your lines to create different textures, as this will create visual interest.

Tip: Use the skew chisel or the side of one of the gouges to gently flatten any ridges in the carved-out areas for a smoother, cleaner look.



Tip: If you make a mistake and accidentally cut into an area you didn't want carved, stop cutting and push the linoleum back down into the block and continue with your design. Keep in mind that a faint line may appear on your cards when you print. If you have already completed your cut, use it as an opportunity to get creative and find a way to incorporate it into your design.



- d. When you are done carving your design and are happy with how it looks, tidy up your workspace and put away your carving tools, your bench hook and your blocks.

END OF DAY 1

DAY 2: COVERS STEPS 7 TO 12

7 SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE FOR PRINTING

TIME TO COMPLETE: 5 TO 10 MINUTES

Tip: If the cards you are using are larger than your block, you may find it helpful to prepare a registration sheet that outlines where you want your design to appear on the cards. You can easily find instructions for this by searching online.

- a. Make sure your work surface is clean and tidy and that there are no residual pieces of rubber or linoleum left over from day 1.
- b. Brush your block with a soft brush or wipe it down with a clean rag to get rid of any residue or leftover bits of linoleum.

Tip: If you want to remove any leftover pencil lines on your block, you can do so by rubbing it down with a rag and some rubbing alcohol.

8 ROLLING OUT THE INK

TIME TO COMPLETE: 5 TO 10 MINUTES

Note: Two shades of ink are included in this kit – black and white. Because the cards we've included are white, you will need to use the black ink as your base color. The white can be mixed with the black to create a custom shade of gray or be used to create illusions and shadows on your print. It can also be used for other projects if you are printing on colored paper.

- a. To prevent ink from staining your hands, put on the vinyl gloves.
- b. Using the bench hook you used for carving, squeeze out roughly a quarter-size amount of ink and spread it in a line that is the same length as the roller on your brayer.



- c. Use the brayer to roll out your ink from top to bottom and side to side, starting around 1/4" from the edges of the bench hook.

Tip: *It's important to have just the right amount of ink on your bench hook, as too much ink will fill in any fine lines in your carved block. With too little ink, your print will come out too light or appear granular.*

- d. The rolled-out ink should look even and velvety in texture and make a soft hissing sound as you roll your brayer across your bench hook. If it looks very textured or sounds very wet and loud when rolling, you have too much ink.
- e. If you think you have too much ink, use a wooden scraper to remove some from the bench hook, transfer it to a piece of scrap paper and set it aside. You can reuse it later if needed.
- f. Remove gloves and wash your hands before handling your paper.

Tip: *When you aren't using it, leave the back of your brayer resting on the back lip of the bench hook to prevent ink from transferring to your work surface.*



9 MAKING A TEST PRINT

TIME TO COMPLETE: 10 TO 15 MINUTES

Note: *The ink will not always transfer perfectly to your cards, and you may notice some texture and inconsistencies when printing. Try not to feel discouraged by this. Each print you do will look a bit different, and that is okay. It's a sign that your prints were done by hand, making them all the more special.*

- a. Roll your brayer on your bench hook so the entire roller is evenly coated with a thin layer of ink.
- b. Gently roll the brayer on your carved block, applying ink in multiple directions. Repeat this step as many times as necessary until your design is clearly inked.

Tip: If for some reason ink is not transferring from your brayer to any positive areas, you can use a small brush or a cotton swab to apply ink directly to these areas.

The ink layer should look shiny and wet but not fill in the lines.

Tip: Do not apply too much pressure when you roll the ink onto your block, as doing so can compress the block and cause negative areas to fill with ink. If ink fills in any of the negative spaces, gently wipe it away using a rag or a cotton swab before printing.



- c. Pick up a piece of printmaking paper with two hands and hold it flat over the block. Try to position it so the block prints right in the center of the paper.
- d. Carefully place the paper down onto the block. Once the paper is on the block, do not move it, as this will smudge the ink.
- e. Take a heavy hardcover book and place it on top of the paper, applying pressure with your hands to help the design transfer.
- f. After about one minute, check your print by removing the book and carefully peeling back a corner of the paper. If the ink looks too light, place the corner down, put the book back on the paper and continue applying pressure.
- g. When you are confident that your design has been transferred, remove the book and gently lift the paper off the block. Put the paper somewhere safe to allow the ink to dry.



10 PRINTING ONTO CARDSTOCK

TIME TO COMPLETE: 5 TO 10 MINUTES PER CARD

- a. If you are happy with how your test print turned out, continue the printing process using your cards.

Tip: *The cards should be roughly the same size as your block. Make sure that the card is perfectly aligned overtop of the block as you print to ensure the entire design is transferred.*

- b. Complete as many cards as you like, re-inking your block after each print.
- c. Lay your cards flat along with your block to dry overnight without anything touching them.
- d. When done printing, wash your hands to get rid of any ink residue.
- e. Take a moment to admire your work and start giving the cards out to family and friends.

11 CLEANING YOUR TOOLS

TIME TO COMPLETE: 5 TO 10 MINUTES

Don't forget to clean the tools once your prints are completed, as this will help to preserve the quality of the tools and enable you to reuse them for future linocut projects.

- a. Start by scraping any extra ink left on your bench hook using a wooden scraper and transferring it to scrap paper before throwing it away.

Note: *If there is a lot of leftover ink, you can transfer it from your bench hook to a piece of waxed paper or aluminum foil, folding it over and taping it shut to make a sealed packet so you can reuse it later.*

- b. Rinse your block, brayer and bench hook under a tap to remove the ink. To remove any residual ink, wet a rag with warm, soapy water and wipe everything down.
- c. Dry them with a clean, dry rag and store them in a safe, dry place until you're ready to use them again.

END OF DAY 2

TOOL CARE

The key to efficient and safe linoleum carving is having a sharp blade at all times. While the tools in this kit should already be sharp when you get them, each time they pass through the linoleum, it effectively dulls the blades. You'll know your tools need to be sharpened if they begin to slip while carving.

Rub a thin layer of the honing compound onto the rough (suede) side of the leather strop. Set the leather strop on a flat surface and hold it down firmly with your non-dominant hand. Grip the handle of the tool in your dominant hand and lay the bevel of the blade as flat as possible on the leather strop.

For the skew chisel, pull the knife across the strop, using trailing strokes towards you, then away, giving each side of the blade an equal number of passes against the strop (five to ten passes per side), making sure to keep the bevel as flat as possible against the strop to avoid slicing the leather.

For the V-shaped parting tool, pull the blade along the strop toward your body once on each side, keeping the angle of the bevel on the end of the tool as best you can to sharpen the outside edges of the tool. Do not push and pull the tool back and forth. If you see a piece of metal shaving (this is called a burr) on the inside of your tool while sharpening, fold the leather or use the edge with honing compound on it to brush the burr away. Repeat this pulling motion until the blade is sharp.

For the U-shaped gouges, start on one outer edge, angling the tool and applying pressure as you rotate it right to left or left to right as you pull the tool toward you. Repeat this motion as necessary and remove any burrs.

Rub a thin layer of the honing compound onto the smooth side of the leather and repeat the sharpening process using this side.



You will need to do this approximately every 30 minutes to one hour of straight carving to ensure that your tool does not get too dull. You will soon get a feel for how often you should do this.

Store the tools on their sides with the plastic covers over the blades to avoid chips and to protect your hands from cuts.

Note: *Once you've completed this project, don't forget to sign your initials on the back or in the bottom corner of your work. Signing your work is a simple yet meaningful way to take ownership of your hard work and proudly express to everyone who receives your cards that "I made this."*



CREATED BY LEE VALLEY. MADE BY ME.

The tools and some of the supplies included in this kit are reusable. Now that you have completed your first linocut project, we hope you will be inspired to keep practicing your skills and use the tools you've acquired to create other types of custom prints.

Have your "look what I made" moment. Share your journey and your completed project. Tell us about your experience. Tag #LVMadeByMe #LVLetsDoSomething



MK116 Linocut Printmaking

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