



Howto: Linoleum Block Printing

using water-based inks

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TOOLS & MATERIALS



wood-mounted linoleum blocks



linoleum cutters



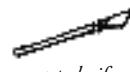
block-printing ink



ruler & pencil



masking tape



x-acto knife



inking plate

(or other non-porous and uniformly smooth surface)



palette knife

(or other equivalent tool from your kitchen)



barren

(or a large metal spoon from your kitchen)



paper

(card stock recommended)



brayer

All tools and raw materials are readily available from Utrecht.com, under "Relief Printmaking Supplies".

DESCRIPTION

Linoleum block printing is a very simple and accessible relief printing technique. It is a reductive process—material is removed in order to create the image. In this case, specialized cutters are used to gouge out portions of linoleum, very similar to woodcutting.

TIME

Varies—dependent on the number of layers in your design, amount of printmaking experience, and the number of prints you would like to make.

For a simple, one-color design, plan approximately 3-4 hours to go from your rough sketch to a finished print.

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1. Sketch your design.

Every print begins with a sketch. Take time to think about your subject matter—pick something you would enjoy working on, because it's going to take time to make it work as a linoleum block print!

Once you decide what you want your design to be, or go through a few initial sketches, you'll want to make a sketch that's proportional to the size of linoleum block you're cutting.

Keep two things in mind: the number and kind of colors you want to use, and that thin linework and small elements are difficult to cut. Make it simple!

In the design I'm using as an example, I've chosen to use blocks that are 4" x 6" in size, to print on a 5" x 7" greeting card, which will give me a nice quarter-inch margin all around my print.



In this design of the Virgin Mary and Christ child, I have chosen to use 5 colors, and laid out the basic idea of what I want it to look like in colored pencil.

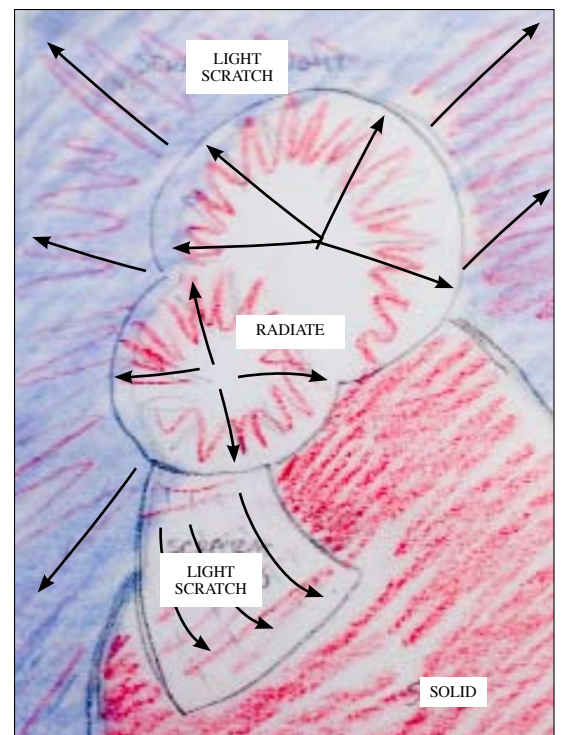
2. Divide your design into layers (if necessary).



At this stage, I take my original sketch and using layers of tracing paper to plan out the order of colors I want to print, and the methods of cutting I want to use for each area of each block.

As you can see above, the first layer in my design is blue, followed by red, yellow, gold, then black as the final layer.

To the right, you can see a close-up of how I plan my cutting methods. I make pencil marks to mimic the direction, thickness, and general effect I want, and label each accordingly.



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3. Cut one block for each layer of your design.



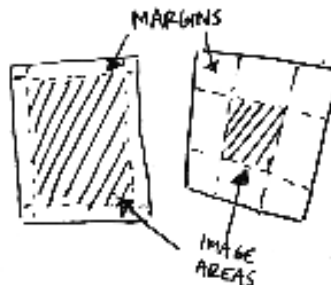
The most important thing to remember at this stage is that you are not only **removing the areas that you do not want to print**, but that **your design will be reversed** (or mirrored) on each linoleum block, as you see above.

This can be an arduous process! Be prepared to have linoleum shavings all over your workspace. Remember to work on a surface that you either don't care about or that you can protect easily-- linoleum cutters can easily gouge wood furniture, in addition to your own fingers.

Above, you can see how the planned layers I sketched out compare to the actual linoleum blocks (close-up at right).

4. Prepare your paper & printing template.

Have your paper trimmed to the size you like. Then, take a single sheet of your paper and draw guidelines with a ruler to indicate where your linoleum block should fall on the paper. You will use this template to help you align your paper during the printing process.



Use masking tape to secure your paper template to your work surface, and then tape your linoleum block securely in place on the paper template (see photo at right).

REMEMBER

You will make mistakes!

Have a few extra linoleum blocks on hand in case you want to re-cut one of the layers of your design. And plan on making at least a few extra copies of every design you print, just in case you drop your paper, or the ink doesn't hit as accurately as you'd like.



Using different shapes of cutting tools as well as varying your style and direction of cuts can produce excellent results. In this example of the third (yellow) layer, the linoleum block has been mirrored to match the artwork as it was planned and will appear finally.



REMEMBER

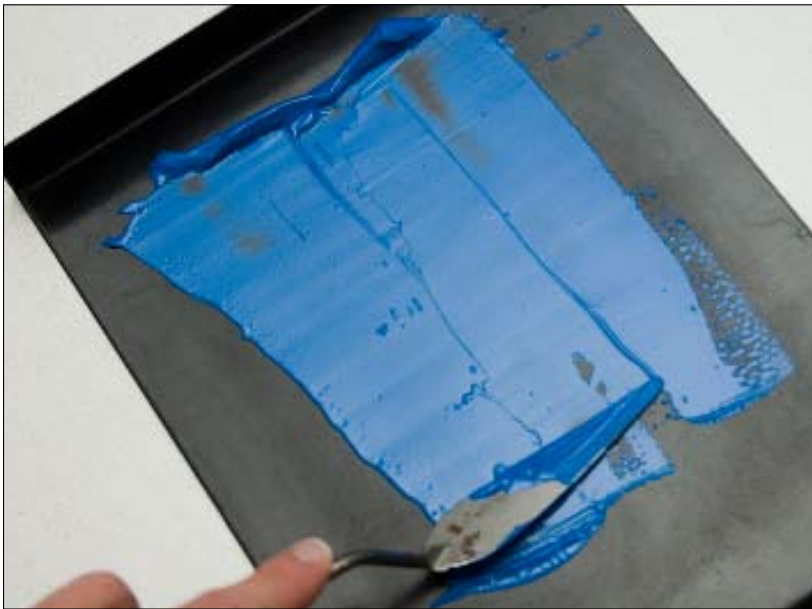
Choose absorbent but stiff paper.

You will need paper that can withstand multiple layers of ink and the motion of smoothing onto the block. I recommend at least 80- to 100-pound coverstock.

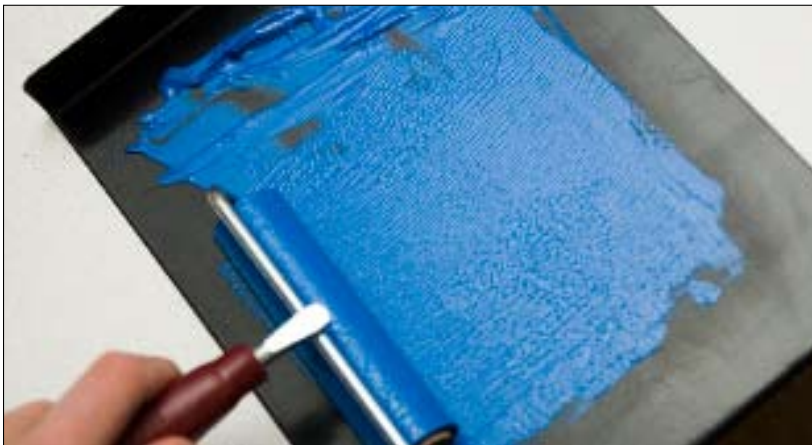
5. Prep your inking plate.



Squeeze generous amount of ink onto one end of inking plate



Spread ink evenly and thinly across plate using palette knife



Roll the brayer gently and smoothly across the thin layer of ink, coating the brayer evenly and completely.

REMEMBER

Every color of ink may behave differently.

Because the pigments used in each color are not chemically similar, you may have to adjust your printing technique slightly to accommodate a more watery ink, or allow more time to dry. Metallic inks are especially smelly, so use them in a ventilated area

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6. Ink your linoleum block.



Roll the brayer gently and smoothly across your linoleum block, coating it thoroughly with ink.

7. Make your print.

Align paper with template & lay it down firmly but gently.



REMEMBER

Play play play!

Experiment with overlapping colors, layer order, and even printing layers while the ink is still wet. Swirl colors together on the inking plate. Use color combinations that you think are ugly. Try a “reduction” print, where you use a single linoleum block for all your layers. With each layer in a reduction print, you progressively cut away more and more until you’re left with almost nothing at the end, and an entirely unique set of prints.

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Smooth paper with a barren or metal spoon, using a gentle circular motion.



Lift paper directly upwards & lay out to dry.



Repeat this process with each piece of paper until the first layer is finished. Allow each layer time to dry before inking a new block.

8. Clean and dry your tools!

Cleaning and drying your tools promptly with soap and water (for water-based block printing inks) immediately after finishing your work makes your life easier, and prolongs the life of your tools. Be kind to them!

REMEMBER

Keep your tools in shape!

Linoleum knives are just that--KNIVES. When dull, knives actually become more dangerous, because it's more of a struggle to cut through your material. Keep your knives sharp, and cut away from yourself. Also, brayers can, over time, become warped and therefore cease to pick up ink uniformly and effectively. Treat your tools nicely and they should treat you well!

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Example Design from Start to Finish

Each layer of my example design adds new dimension of texture to the overall feel of the print.



Compare each of these prints with their respective linoleum blocks:



And here, the finished product: a 5" x 7" greeting card with an A4 envelope:

