

Coptic Binding Tips

- Notebook covers: I use 1/8" — 1/4" thick hardwoods. You can also use plywood, MDF (veneer/marquetry), or book board (painted or covered with decorative paper or cloth)
- Paper: I use 60lb weight sketchbook paper that is cut (or deckled/torn) to size. Height of finished paper is the height of the cover minus 1/4" — 1/2". Height should be parallel to the paper grain. Double the width of the cover then subtract 1/4" — 1/2" to determine the paper width.
- Cut a hole punch guide from paper or cardstock. Cut it 1.5—2 inches wide and the height of your paper. Fold the guide in half, length wise and mark on the fold 1/2" from the top and the bottom. Use the lines on notebook paper to mark the other guide holes. A total of 5—7 holes is typical for most notebooks. You will use this same guide later to drill or punch the holes in your notebook covers.
- Take 35—40 sheets of cut to size/deckled paper and divide into groups of approximately 5 sheets (each grouping is called a "signature"). Fold each signature in half along the paper grain. You can use the flat edge of a bone folder to help crease the paper.
- Take a phone book or thick catalog to use as a book cradle (opened about midway). Lay the opened signature in the "v" created by the book cradle. Lay the hole punch guide on top of the opened signature and using an awl or ice pick to punch holes at each mark on the guide. (The holes will be punched on the inside fold of each signature group).

- Use the same hole punch guide to drill or punch holes in the notebook covers. I use a drill press with 3/32" or 5/64" size drill bit. Holes should be 3/4"—1" away from the spine.
- Sand the covers (if using wood) and apply the finish. I use Danish oil followed by polishing with beeswax.
- You will bind the book with 3 or 4 ply waxed linen. You will need 3—4 yards (for a 6" x 5" book). You will also use a bookbinding needle. I suggest using a curved bookbinding needle for Coptic binding. (The tip of the needle should be somewhat dull—new needles may need to be dulled by rubbing the tip on sandpaper).
- The "kettle" stitch is used to join the covers to the first and last signature and to join the signatures together. It is sometimes helpful to use a thin flat object to separate the signatures when sliding the needle between them (use a basket making "weave rite," flat head screwdriver, or dull edge butter knife).
- Make sure to tighten your stitches by pulling the thread parallel to the spine (NOT perpendicular).
- When finished, the tip of a bone folder can be used to straighten the outside stitch line.
- Traditionally, a "colophon" is added to the last page of a handbound book—it states who made the book, the date and place it was made, and materials used.
- If the book wood covers become scratched with use, buff with bees wax (I like Howard Feed-N-Wax. It is a combination of beeswax and orange oil).

Source for supplies (all found online):

60 lb paper, binding needles, awl, bone folder = Amazon.com

Waxed linen = Royalwood Ltd (you can use other types of string/thread; however, waxed linen will last longer). I do not recommend using cheap “waxed thread” sold on the internet. “Waxed thread” is not the same thing as waxed linen.

Beeswax/orange oil: Found in the cleaning supplies section of most grocery stores

Hardwood for covers: Richard’s Craftwood in Clemons, NC

For a different Coptic binding technique, try the Sea Lemon Coptic Binding videos on YouTube.