

Embossing and Debossing

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Embossing is the various processes by which parts of the surface of paper can be raised using a stencil, and object or a form. Debossing is the various processes by which recesses can be made in the paper by impressing a drawing implement or object (intaglio) into the paper. Both can be done on dry or wet paper. The following methods can be used to impart textural qualities and motifs to paper.

Dry Embossing with a Stencil:

Dry embossing requires the use of a stencil. These can be handmade from a lightweight cardboard such a shirt cardboard, plastic stencil material, heavy Yupo, plastic index dividers or Quilter's template. Cut the material to the needed size. Make a sketch on a piece of paper the same size. Transfer the image to the material. The thickness of the material determines how the stencil should be used: thick stencil material is used for wet embossing or with heavy paper; thin materials are used for dry embossing and thinner papers. Leave a connecting border around openings (a series of open stripes).

Commercial stencils made from brass, stainless steel or plastic can also be used. An Embossing Tool (a large ball stylus) is used to draw around the open edges of the stencil. All stencils can be combined to create complex images: work from the front image and add background textures around the central motif. Attach the stencil to a heavy paper with Scotch Repositionable Tape (blue label) or with Blue Painter's Tape making a small tab at one end of the tape for easier lifting. Regular tape can be used if some of the adhesive is removed by pressing it several times onto fabric.

Align the stencil and paper with a ruler if it is important to center the image on the paper. Turn stencil down on a light box or against a window to backlight the openings. Place a piece of waxed paper on top. The waxed paper will lubricate the ball of the stylus making the ball glide smoothly over the paper and prevent damage to the paper. A crochet hook or double ended knitting needle can be used as an embossing tool.

Trace around the openings with the largest ball. Press the ball into the edge of the stencil rather than straight down. Use light pressure for the first pass and then a second with increased pressure. This will gradually stretch the fibers in the paper and prevent unnecessary tears. Paper can also be conditioned by first running a finger over the stencil openings or the outside edge of the stencil.

For landscape or background lines create a series of interconnected stencils from plastic index card dividers. Draw the design and transfer to the plastic. Cut along the lines with scissors (easier on this material than an X-acto knife). Keep the original drawing stored with the stencil pieces for reference. Tape the top section on the paper and emboss around the section or along the bottom edge. Tape the next stencil in place and emboss: continue for each layer of the stencil. If a central motif is to be used, emboss that first and emboss the background around the image.

Color can be added to embossed designs but avoid wet applications as the embossing will relax when the paper is wet. If background color is desired, paint the paper prior to embossing with acrylics, watercolor or acrylic inks. Tint the embossed areas carefully with colored pencil, pastel pencils (CarboOthello), brush markers or paint markers.

Dry embossing is also quickly done with an embossing machine and embossing envelopes. Cuttlebug is a recommended machine (\$70): easy embossing results on painted papers.

Wet Embossing with Found Objects:

Wet embossing is done with wet or damp paper placed over dimensional objects and embossed from the back with a large plastic embossing tool. Texture or Embossing plates can be made by adhering objects to a hardboard backing for multiple uses. Or collect textural materials such as iron-on embellishments for fabric. Always use waxed paper over the paper to prevent damage during embossing. Texture plates made from cardboard should be sealed with acrylic varnish to prevent water damage. When cutting a cardboard stencil, cut carefully and use the cutouts to make an embossing plate for wet or dry embossing.

Thermal Embossing:

Thermal embossing requires a stamp (a foam pad under the paper makes a better stamped image); a pigment ink stamp pad; embossing powder; and a Heat or Embossing Gun (not a hairdryer). Embossing inks also come in pen form for drawing a design rather than stamping. Apply the ink and then sprinkle with embossing powder. Tap off excess and return to the jar. Heat the embossing powder with the gun until it melts and turns shiny (hold gun about 2-3 inches above the area and avoid burning the paper). There are a large number of colors and metallic powders for creating raised embossed images.

Rubber stamps can be used to impress images in air dry clay for assemblage designs.