

How to bind a book

Learn how to bind a book with this step-by-step format. The author, who perfected the process on his own, developed the procedure through trial and error.

Do you know that you can bind your own book? By referring to book binding I am not merely giving you instructions on how to put your written material together in a permanent form as say, pages in a ring binder, or driving a tin fastener through them. I mean how to bind a real book like the novel that you love to read, or that surprisingly sturdy romance pocketbook that you take with you everywhere. Now that kind of binding is technically referred to by publishers as "perfect binding."

I learned to bind my own book from hard experience. I had to self-publish my first book at a time when no publisher would make a deal with me yet. I hatched a deal with Amazon.com, the online book retailer, but they would not produce my books-I had to make all the copies myself and deliver them to their office. The deal was I get half of the price of every book sold, which was a not a pretty good deal, but, nonetheless a deal that a startup publisher like me would grab.

The next day I hopped to the nearest mall to have my book copies bound by a professional binder. When I realized, however, that the binding cost alone per copy would eat up half of my profits already, I backed out. I had no choice-I really had to bind my own book.

I surfed the net to find out if there were any tricks to self-binding--there weren't any (well, not until now)! One website laid out the basic principles of neatly binding a book, but that entailed buying an apparatus from the website owner at a cost and time frame of delivery that I could not take. So I started thinking and experimenting. What follows is a distillation of the steps I learned to perfectly bind a book-yes, you can achieve flawless, machine-precision book binding without investing in a binding machine.

To begin with, you wouldn't even need some heavy-duty glue. An all-purpose white glue that bonds fast which you can find at any ordinary office supplies shop will do. You see, the trick is not in the glue-it's how you use that glue!

Next, make sure the pages that you will bind are folded perfectly. Take a piece of ordinary coupon bond and fold this in half-cross-wise, not length-wise. The size should resemble a typical book. To make sure you fold the paper perfectly, don't taper off the middle until you have both ends of the paper exactly matched. If you don't do that, I can assure you, you will never achieve perfect binding. Some of the pages would protrude like sore thumb!

Once you have neatly folded and flattened all the book pages, put them all together on the table-one on top of each other, arranged exactly the way the pages in your book are supposed to look when read. Hold the book's top and bottom, and as you do, tap it's yet unbound outer spine on the table to make sure that all the pages line up perfectly.

That done, clip the middle part of the book with one hand, then replace the pressure with two metal clips, which, again can be pretty much any type (snap on or clip on) you can buy from a school supplies shop. After all, you will only need them temporarily. The idea is to hold the yet unbound book perfectly until you are ready to glue the spine (which is the back of the book, or in other words, the part to be glued or bound). Apply the clips strategically at the top and the bottom of the spine.

That done, get yourself at least two pieces of cotton swabs (yes, the ones you use for your ears). You have no idea how useful these are for the binding job at hand. On the table, put them on top of a tissue paper. Now, dip one end of the first cotton swab in the glue and apply the glue on the spine while carefully holding the book. Think as if you are doing a wall painting job. Make sure you cover the entire spine and that the "paint" is evenly applied. It doesn't have to be very thick as most likely your first attempt will be-but that's okay, as that will not affect the quality of your binding. Use the other end of your cotton swab to repeat the process if necessary.

The cotton swab is better than any glue applicator for this purpose because you can use it to wipe out any excess glue, too. The result is the most even application that you can achieve.

That was just the first coating. Here's how you do the final coating-that second cotton swab has a purpose! Position the book's spine at the edge of the table, then put a telephone directory on top of it. Make sure your book's spine is protruding outside of the edge of the table! Now you are ready to apply the second coating of the glue.

Do it the same way you did the first time, wiping off excess glue with the cotton swab to even out the application. By now, the glue earlier applied would have already begun to dry -giving your book that solid look which gives you that growing confidence that you're on the right track.

Your second glue application finished, leave the book alone to dry. Thirty minutes should be just fine. While you are waiting, make use of the time by working on the cover which in this case is a paperback stock. By now, from the way the book pages have bonded together-you can estimate with your eyes the width of the spine. Draw two vertical pencil lines on the inner part of the book cover-make sure the space in between is the exact width of the spine.

Then, with the help of sturdy ruler, fold the cover along the lines pretty much like you were a machine doing some flawless perforation (e.g., creating a permanent fold on the paper). Now it's time to apply glue to the space between the two lines of the book covr. There is really no need to apply too much. That done, pick up the book you left to dry out, and slide its spine snugly in between the covers.

If you did a pretty good fold or perforation job on the two lines of the cover, the book's spine should just fit perfectly into the space inside the cover. Again, leave the book (now with the cover attached) under your ever-

dependable telephone directory. An hour should be just enough to do the job, and you have yourself a perfectly bound book.